

**THE FEW
AND
THE MANY**

***A COMMENTARY
ON THE REVELATION***

by Russell H. Collins

FOREWORD

From April 1909 to March 1944, a monthly journal entitled "The New Covenant Advocate and Kingdom Herald" was published in Melbourne, Australia. Ernest Hennings, ably assisted by his wife, Rose, was the editor of this journal until his death on 3 February, 1939. Rose Hennings continued with the work of publishing the journal until March 1944, when the weight of years forced her to cease this work.

In August 1938, the first of a series of articles on the Revelation was published, and Ernest Hennings wrote that he intended to publish the work serially in the New Covenant Advocate with a view to the preparation and publishing of a connected explanation in book form of the whole of the Revelation. Ernest Hennings wrote, *"about this projected book and the time when it will appear we have had more inquiries than about any other thing. Some advance orders for the proposed book with money have also been sent to us"*.

Sadly, Ernest Hennings died in February 1939 when only five of the planned articles had been published. Rose Hennings continued with the publication of the articles until October 1941, the final article taking us to comments on Revelation 22:19, almost to the end of the book.

A further note appeared in the New Covenant Advocate of May 1940, where it is written *"we are nearing the time when by the favour of God we trust the articles which have appeared in the N.C.A. will be ready in book form."* Sadly, this intention was never fulfilled in spite of a number of attempts by brethren over the years, and money bequeathed to the New Covenant Fellowship to support the work of publishing Biblical exposition and comment.

Ernest Hennings intended to give the proposed book on the Revelation the title "The Few and the Many". I am using this same title in memory of and as a tribute to the work of Ernest and Rose Hennings.

I believe the term “Few” was intended to refer to the sealed servants of God, the Gospel Age Church, numbering one hundred and forty-four thousand (Revelation 7:4), while the “Many” would refer to the whole human race other than the Gospel Age Church. The blessings and promises to the “few” and to the “many” will be discussed in the appropriate places in the course of the commentary.

It has been my intention for some years to prepare a verse-by-verse commentary on the Revelation. I have participated in three full group studies of the book, and have made extensive use of the notes and comments of Ernest and Rose Hennings, as well as the notes of the Revelation study made in more recent times at the Essendon class.

Other works and commentaries on the Revelation have also proved very helpful, even when at times I did not agree with their interpretations.

Most of the comments and explanations offered are not original with me, but some comments are my own. The whole work is offered to Bible students for their consideration and contemplation. The book of the Revelation is prophetic, highly figurative and symbolic. Explanations offered in this commentary are not given dogmatically, but in a spirit of as much assurance as seems wise in view of the contexts of the passages under discussion and what seems relevant in secular and ecclesiastical history.

Because the visions given to John are often difficult to understand and interpret, some Christian people have turned from them and not sought to understand them. It is my belief that God has given us a record of these visions, and wishes us to understand their meaning as time passes and the prophetic visions are understood and fulfilled. Though in times past God did not gratify desires to know and understand to any considerable extent because the due time had not yet come, He never expressed disapproval of such desires. On the contrary, He called the inquiring Daniel “*greatly beloved*” and answered Daniel’s inquiry so far as was consistent with the progress and timing of the divine plan (Daniel 10:11, 12; 12:9).

God's children in Jesus Christ are urged to show an interest in God's plans, search the Scriptures, and have regard for *the "sure word of prophecy."* God's children should be prepared to wait and be ready to discern dispensational truth as the time comes for fulfilment (John 5:39; 2 Peter 1:19).

It is not expected that all readers will be in full agreement with the understandings offered in this commentary. It is intended that readers will be moved to consider and contemplate the remarkable visions given by God to Jesus Christ and recorded by John the Apostle, and will always follow Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians: "*but test everything; hold fast what is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; RSV).

Russell Collins.

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INTRODUCTION TO AND PURPOSE OF THE REVELATION

The last book of the Bible is called "The Revelation", or simply, as in the NIV, "Revelation". The name is derived from the first word of the Greek text of the book "apokalupsis", which, according to Dr. Strong, means "disclosure" (Strong's reference 602). We may understand from the title that the purpose of the book is to disclose or reveal information to believers in Jesus Christ and consequently in God through Him.

The KJV translators headed the book "The Revelation of St. John the Divine." This is not correct because verse 1 of the first chapter tells us that God gave the Revelation to Jesus Christ, and also made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who recorded the visions and information revealed to him. The RSV heads the book "The Revelation to John".

There are no serious doubts that John, who recorded the Revelation, is John the Apostle. The date of writing is given by the great majority of critics as AD 95-97, when, under the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian, John was banished to the island of Patmos because of his testimony as a believer in Jesus Christ. The year of recording the Revelation is thought by many scholars to be AD96.

The general purpose of the book was to reveal to the church information concerning events and developments future from the time the book was written. The fact that the book is a book of prophecy is indicated in the words *"to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass"* (Revelation 1:1). This opening verse shows that God had some things to disclose, to reveal to His Son, Jesus Christ, and that this disclosure was to be passed on to Jesus' disciples for their information and encouragement.

SYSTEMS OF INTERPRETATION

There are four main systems of apocalyptic interpretation based mainly on chapters 6 to 19 inclusive of the Revelation. The four systems are generally known as:

1. the Preterist,
2. the Futurist or Post-millennial
3. the Idealist, and
4. the Historic.

1. The Preterist

The teaching of those who hold to this system of interpretation is that the visions and events recorded in the Revelation have occurred in the past, that is, in the early years of the Gospel Age. Preterist teaching applies the visions of the Revelation mainly to the overthrow of Jerusalem and the fall of Pagan Rome, and other events long since past.

The views of the preterists are not sustained by the opening verse of the Revelation, which tells us that God wishes *"to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass"*. The Revelation was written towards the end of the first century in the years 95 to 97. This means that the fall of Jerusalem could not be the fulfilment of any of the prophecies in the book because the overthrow of Jerusalem occurred nearly thirty years before John wrote the Revelation.

Certainly events such as the fall of Pagan Rome were future from John's day, and there are good reasons to think that some references are made to Pagan Rome in the Revelation. But the main thrust of the book is prophetic. It foretells events and developments that pertain to and affect the Church of believers in the Gospel Age and beyond, and the visions of the book should not be restricted to the early years of the Gospel Age.

2. The Futurist or Post-Millennial

This system of interpretation is sometimes referred to as the Catholic system, because it was first taught in its present form by Ribera, a Jesuit priest of Salamanca. In 1585 Ribera published a commentary on Revelation, denying the application of the prophecies concerning the Antichrist to the existing Church of Rome. He was followed by a nephew of Pope Marcellus II, Cardinal Bellarmine, who was born in Tuscany in 1542, and died in 1621.

Bellarmino was a man of great learning, and one of the most powerful defenders of Popery that the Roman Catholic Church ever produced. Like Ribera, Bellarmine taught that the Antichrist would be one particular man, that he would be a Jew, that he would be preceded by the reappearance of Enoch and Elijah, that he would rebuild the Jewish temple at Jerusalem, compel circumcision, abolish the Christian sacraments, abolish every other form of religion, would clearly deny Christ, would be received by the Jews as their Messiah, would pretend to be God, would make a literal image speak, would feign himself dead, then rise again, would conquer the whole world, Christian, Mohammedan and heathen, and would accomplish all this in the space of three and a half years. Bellarmine insisted that the prophecies of Daniel, Paul and John, with reference to the Antichrist, the Beast, and the man of sin, had no application whatever to the Papal power.

The Historic interpretation was, of course, rejected with intense and bitter scorn by the Futurists and the great religious system denounced by it as Babylon, and the power branded by it as the Antichrist; and the Historic interpretation is still opposed by all who uphold the Futurist interpretation.

3. The Idealist

This view considers the book to be a pictorial unfolding of great principles in constant conflict without reference to actual events. If this is the case, the words *"show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass"* of Revelation 1:1, and the blessing promised to those who read and hear *"the words of this prophecy"* (Revelation 1:3), have no specific meaning if the book is not prophetic, because prophecy is history foretold. It will be shown in these notes that the book foretells major events and developments during the Gospel Age. The Revelation is not a book of abstract generalisations.

4. The Historic

Bible students agree that Bible prophecy is history foretold. The book of the Revelation claims to be a book of prophecy no less than five times:

1:3 *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand."*

2:7 *"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."*

22:1 *"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."*

22:18 *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:"*

22:19 *"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."*

As we consider the prophecies in the book, we should bear in mind the words of our Lord Jesus, *"And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe"* (John 14:29). These words of our Lord should alert us to be watchful of times, seasons and events to help us understand prophecies when their fulfilment takes place.

The Historical interpretation given by the long line of Christian confessors from early in the Gospel Age and continued by the Reformers during the Reformation and subsequent periods down to our own time, is well attested by research.

(a) Early Church Fathers

From Irenaeus (c130-c200), a disciple of Polycarp (c69-c155), who in turn was a disciple of John the Apostle, to Chrysostom (c347-407) and Jerome (c342-420), there was very general agreement on the following matters, which may well be the key to interpretation of the Revelation.

1. The "little horn" of Daniel 7, the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2, and the "beast" of Revelation 13 were to rule from Rome. These prophecies referred to one and the same power, the Antichrist.
2. The hindrance to Antichrist's full development and rule, mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, was the pagan Roman power personified by the emperor reigning in the city of Rome.
3. The ten-horned dragon and the ten-horned beast of Revelation 12,13 and 17, as well as the fourth beast seen by Daniel in his vision recorded in Daniel chapter 7, were symbolic representations of aspects of the pagan Roman Empire.

4. The ten horns on the beast seen by John and on the fourth beast seen by Daniel, correspond to the ten toes on the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted by Daniel. All refer to a division of the Roman Empire into ten kingdoms at a time future from John's day.

5. When the breaking up of the Roman Empire into ten kingdoms would occur, the predicted Antichrist would begin to rule.

It is a remarkable fact that the great majority of noted expositors throughout the Gospel Age are agreed in these matters. Hippolytus (170-235), a disciple of Irenaeus, held that the Babylon of the Apocalypse meant Rome. Tertullian (c.160-220), wrote, 'Babylon in our own John is a figure of the city of Rome, as being equally proud of her sway over the saints'.

Augustine (354-430), the greatest of the Latin Church fathers, and a respected thinker in the realm of Philosophy, wrote, in his monumental work 'The City of God', 'Rome, the second Babylon, and the daughter of the first, to which it pleased God to subject the world, and bring it all into one sovereignty is now founded.'

It was generally believed as far back as the middle of the second century that the fall of pagan Rome was near, and therefore the rise of Antichrist was close at hand. Justin Martyr (c100-c165), who suffered death as a Christian, in his 'Dialogue with Trypho' (chapter 33) wrote, 'He whom Daniel foretells would have dominion for a "time, times and a half" is already even at the door about to speak blasphemous and daring things against the Most High'.

Cyprian (c200-258) in his work "Exhortation to Martyrdom" wrote, 'Since the hateful time of Antichrist is already beginning to draw near, I would collect from the sacred Scriptures some exhortations for preparing and strengthening the minds of the brethren, whereby I might animate the soldiers of Christ, for the heavenly and spiritual contest'.

Victorinus wrote an exposition of the Revelation towards the close of the third century. As far as we know, this is the earliest commentary in existence on the whole book. Victorinus interprets the Rider on the white horse, under the first of the seven seals, to have reference to the victories of the Gospel in the first century.

Victorinus's commentary involves the Historical interpretation of the entire book of the Revelation.

Chrysostom (c347-407), in his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, makes an interesting and very valuable comment on what Paul referred to as the "let" or hindrance to the revealing of the "*man of sin*".

'One may naturally inquire, What is that which withholdeth - and after that why Paul expresses himself so obscurely..."he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." That is, when the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come; and naturally, for as long as the fear of this Empire lasts, no one will readily exalt himself; but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavour to seize upon the government, both of men and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans, so will this be by Antichrist, and he by Christ.'

Chrysostom then gives a reason why the Apostle Paul was so reserved in mentioning in his letter what the hindrance was. Paul told the Thessalonians he knew what it was, and reminded them that he told them when he was with them. In giving the Apostle's reason for his reserve, Chrysostom writes, 'Because he (St.Paul) says this of the Roman Empire, he naturally only glanced at it and spoke covertly, for he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities and useless dangers, for if he had said that after a little while the Roman Empire would be dissolved, they would now immediately overwhelm him as a pestilent person, and (also) all the faithful as living and warring to this end (for the overthrow of the Empire).'

Tertullian (c160-c220) informs us that the Christian Church prayed for the emperors of Rome and for the stability of the Empire, because they knew 'that a mighty shock impending over the whole earth....was only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman Empire.'

Another whose writings clearly indicate the nature of Apocalyptic interpretation up to the beginning of the fourth century is Origen (c185-c254). Origen, in his book defending Christianity against the pagan writer Celsus, writes, 'Paul speaks of him who is called Antichrist, describing, though with a certain reserve, both

the manner and time and cause of his coming ... The prophecy also regarding Antichrist is stated in the book of Daniel, and is fitted to make an intelligent and candid reader admire the words as truly Divine, and prophetic, for in them are mentioned the things relating to the coming Kingdom, beginning with the time of Daniel to the destruction of the world.'

There was a universal agreement among the early Church Fathers concerning the general idea of the Antichrist. There were differences in some details, these differences arising chiefly from the notion that the Antichrist would in some way be Jewish as well as Roman, and would be an individual man. They had no conception, nor could they have had any conception of the true nature and length of the tremendous apostasy which was to come from within the Christian Church. They were not inspired prophets and could not foresee that the true Church was to remain for some nineteen centuries in the wilderness, and pass through prolonged and bitter persecution under a succession of nominally Christian but apostate rulers, who filled the place of the former Caesars, and emulated the Caesars' anti-Christian deeds.

It was about thirty years before the birth of Chrysostom that the last cruel persecution of the Church by the pagan government ended. It was at this point in history (314 AD) that the Roman government was changed from pagan to Christian (so-called), when the Emperor Constantine professed Christianity and made it the official religion of the Roman Empire.

The persecutions of Pagan Rome had the effect, to a great extent, of holding all Christians together. It is true that many errors in doctrine had crept into the Church, but on the whole the Church was loyal to Christ. In Constantine's day, church and state became united, and worldliness and error soon engulfed, and, like a flood, swept away the simple, pure religion of Christ. It was in this era of the Gospel Age that many true Christians began to separate from ceremonial ostentation and the appearance of profession without sincere commitment. True and sincere Christians continued to separate themselves and turn away from formality and ritual until the overthrow of the Imperial government and the official recognition of the Bishop of Rome as the religious ruler of Christendom occurred in 539 AD.

(b) The Era of Papal Ascendancy

From AD 539 onward until the Protestant Reformation, the true and loyal followers of Christ were regarded by the established

Church as heretics. These true followers of Christ, as the records of history show, interpreted the visions of the Revelation as having their fulfilment in the great apostate Church system known as the Papacy. Roman Catholic writers during this period, however, generally applied the visions of the Revelation to Pagan Rome, but there were some who remained within the Papal system who applied the visions of the Revelation as covering the history of the Gospel Age until the consummation. Among these were Primasius, who lived in the middle of the sixth century AD; the Venerable Bede, who lived in England at the close of the seventh century AD; Ambrose Anspert, who lived in the middle of the eighth century AD; and Andreas who was a bishop of the Church in Caesarea also in the eighth century AD. All of the above-named interpreted the Revelation as covering the whole period of the Gospel Age, hence they were of the Historic school of interpretation.

The period in which these expositors wrote was marked by the Papacy's gradual attainment of temporal dominion over the kingdoms of Western Rome. At the beginning of the eleventh century all the kingdoms of Europe were submitting to Papal control, and indeed giving voluntary support to the Papacy, and were being employed by the Papacy to persecute the saints of God even unto death. At this time some writers began to recognise in the Papacy the long-predicted Antichrist, although there were still numbers of faithful and devoted believers who remained within the Papal system.

Two notions contributed strongly to prevent sincere believers recognising in the developing Papal power the predicted "man of sin." Firstly, sincere Christians imagined that, as the Eastern Empire of Rome still continued, the "let" or hindrance to the manifestation of the Antichrist still remained. They overlooked the fact that the Antichrist of prophecy is linked with Western Rome, not Eastern Constantinople, and with the fall of the Western Empire and the apostasy of the Western Church.

Secondly, sincere Christians spiritualised and explained away a great deal of prophecy, and supposed they were living in the millennium promised in Scripture, and that the Antichrist would not be manifested until the brief outbreak of rebellion and evil at the close of the Scriptural millennium. These two notions had fatal consequences. While these interpreters, in common with the majority of Christians at that period were looking for the revealing of the "man of sin" in the distant future, he stole

unperceived and unrecognised into their midst and usurped the place of Christ over His unwatchful flock.

Just before 1000 AD Gherbert of Rheims said of the Pope that he was 'Antichrist sitting in the temple of God'. In the eleventh century Berenger stated that the Roman See was 'not the Apostolic seat, but the seat of Satan'.

During this whole period of Papal ascendancy there were little companies of believers, separated from centres of civilisation, who saw clearly in the succession of Popes the Antichrist of Revelation. The Waldensian Christians claimed that their ancestors left the nominal Church in the days of Constantine in the fourth century, but the Waldensians do not feature in history until about the twelfth century. They were true Protestants long before the Reformation, and suffered terrible persecutions at the hands of Rome. One of their pastors, Leger by name, wrote a history of the Waldensians. Included in his book is the Waldensian 'Treatise on Antichrist' written in 1120 AD, which treatise brands the Roman Church as the harlot of Babylon, and the Papacy as the 'man of sin' and the Antichrist.

Another body of Christians known as the Albigenses lived in the south of France in Provence and Catalonia. They were a civilised and highly educated people. In the year 1208 AD they are mentioned in history as undergoing terrible persecution at the instigation of the Papacy. The Italian historian, Sismondi, wrote a history of the Albigenses in which he relates how these Christians, along with the Waldensians, regarded the Church of Rome as having perverted Christianity, and maintained that it was the Papacy that was designated in the Revelation as the whore of Babylon. Rome, of course, could not tolerate such testimony, and at this period in history began its terrible campaigns to exterminate heretics. Prophecies relating to these campaigns are recorded in Daniel 7:21 and Revelation 13:7.

The name John Huss is well known to every student of Christian history. He lived in the early part of the fifteenth century, over one hundred years before the Protestant Reformation. This is what he wrote concerning the Revelation: 'The more circumspect ye ought to be, for that Antichrist laboreth the more to trouble you. ... Know ye well, beloved, that Antichrist being stirred up against you deviseth divers persecutions'. He also wrote in a letter to the Lord John de Chum, 'By your letter which I received yesterday I understand first, how the malignant strumpet whereof

mention is made in the Apocalypse, is detected, and shall be more detected; with which strumpet the kings of the earth do commit fornication, ... sliding back from the truth and consenting to the lies of Antichrist, John Huss was martyred by Rome as a Christian confessor.

John Wycliffe lived in the fourteenth century and testified fearlessly against the abominations and errors of the Church of Rome. He translated the Scriptures into English and interpreted the Revelation just as the Waldensians did. He wrote a special treatise called 'The Mirror of Antichrist'. From Wycliffe sprang the English Lollards, whose understanding of the Revelation was the same as Wycliffe's. One of the Lollards, Lord Cobham, was brought before King Henry the Fifth and admonished to submit himself to the Pope as an obedient child. This was Lord Cobham's testimony: 'As touching the Pope and his spirituality, I owe them neither suit nor service, for as much as I know him by the Scriptures to be the great Antichrist, the son of perdition, the open adversary of God, and an abomination standing in the holy place'. This faithful confessor was condemned to death as a heretic.

(c) The Protestant Reformation

Just before the period of the Reformation, the terrible persecutions of Rome against the confessors of primitive, evangelical Christianity had caused the entire cessation of public testimony against Papal apostasy. The application of the prophetic visions of the Revelation to the Papal system played a very important part in bringing about the Protestant Reformation. But the application of prophecy was not the sole agency in bringing about the Reformation; the doctrinal and practical truths of Scripture also motivated and guided the actions of the Reformers.

The Reformers opposed the Church of Rome which they saw as condemned alike by the doctrines, the precepts and the prophecies of the Word of God. It is difficult to say which of the three features of Scripture weighed the most heavily with them, but it is reasonable to say that the Reformation was greatly energised and guided by the prophecies in the Word of God.

All the Reformers were agreed that Rome was the Babylon of the Revelation and the Papal pontiff the "*man of sin.*" The command "*Come out of her my people*" (Revelation 18:4) was used by the Reformers to urge all true Christians within the Papal system to

separate themselves from it. To the Reformers, separation from Rome meant separation from the Antichrist.

In the year 1520, three years after he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg, Luther wrote, 'I have not much doubt but the Pope is the real Antichrist'. In the same year in a treatise titled 'The Babylonish Captivity of the Church', Luther called the Papacy 'The kingdom of Babylon'. When he received the Papal bull of excommunication, Luther again wrote, 'At last the Roman bull is come ... I treat it with contempt. You see that the expressed doctrines of Christ Himself are here condemned. I feel myself now more at liberty, being assured that the popedom is anti-Christian and the seat of Satan.'

In December of the same year Luther published two tracts in reply to the Papal bull, one of which was called 'Martin Luther Against the Execrable Bull of Antichrist'. It was with such protests that the Reformation really gained impetus. In reference to Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Luther comments as follows 'Is not this to sit in the temple of God, to profess himself to be ruler in the whole Church? What is the temple of God? Is it stones and wood? Did not Paul say, 'The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are'? To sit - what is it but to reign, to teach and to judge? Who from the beginning of the Church has dared to call himself master of the whole Church but the pope?' In another of his writings he says that when Daniel 'saw the terrible wild beast which had ten horns which by the consent of all is the Roman Empire, he also beheld another small horn come up in the middle of them. This is the Papal power, which rose up in the middle of the Roman Empire'.

The Helvetic Confession, drawn up by the Reformers of Switzerland in 1536, contains an article condemning the Papacy as Antichrist. The same sentiment is true of the Smalkald Confession, adopted by Luther's followers in 1537.

The English Reformers such as Tyndale, Bradford, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, Jewel and many others, believed the Pope to be the predicted Antichrist of the Revelation.

John Calvin (1509-64) in a letter to the Emperor, Charles the Fifth, writes, 'I deny that See to be apostolical, wherein nought is seen but shocking apostasy. I deny him to be the Vicar of Christ who in furiously persecuting the Gospel demonstrates by his conduct that he is Antichrist.'

John Knox (c.1513-1572) the great Scottish Reformer, wrote a history of the Reformation. On the title page is a summary of its contents, which reads as follows: 'The manner, and by what persons, the light of Christ's Gospel has been manifested into this realm, after that horrible and universal defection from the truth which has come by the means of that Roman Antichrist'. John Knox also wrote, in reply to Dean Annan, a Romanist, 'For as for your Roman Church, as it is now corrupted, ... I no more doubt that it is the synagogue of Satan, and the head thereof called the Pope to be the man of sin of whom the Apostle speaketh ...'.

Many Bible students are convinced that the correct understanding of the Revelation is along historical lines. There may not be agreement with some or all of the explanations and interpretations offered in subsequent chapters of these notes, but failure to agree is understandable in view of the many figures and symbols used throughout the book. The reader must be prepared to consider the explanations and interpretations offered, and reach understandings for himself or herself.

REASONS FOR THE STUDY OF REVELATION

(i) A Worthwhile Study

Why should we study such a book as the Revelation? Would not our time be better spent helping others and leading people to Christ? Each of us must answer such questions personally and individually in accordance with the Christian commitment we each maintain. The Lord knows our hearts and minds, and will judge us righteously.

Evangelism is important, but so too is individual growth in grace and knowledge. The Scripture tells us that knowledge is important, being one of the attributes the believer is exhorted to add to his or her Christian character (2 Peter 1:5, 8; 3:18; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9).

A divine blessing is promised in chapter 1 verse 3 to those who study this inspired book. An understanding of many of the passages in the Revelation is not always immediately clear to the reader because of the symbolic and figurative language used, but this difficulty is not in itself a sufficient reason for believers to neglect to study the book and benefit from the information and instruction contained in it. Believers will not gain a blessing from "*the words of this prophecy*" if they give the inspired "words" no attention.

The study of the Revelation should be approached with a desire to learn, and in a spirit of humility, as well as with a willingness to consider and examine explanations offered and viewpoints advanced. Special care is to be taken not to "add to" or "take away from" the words of the prophecy (Revelation 22:18,19). God's guidance and blessing should always be sought in prayer.

The ultimate aim of a study of this wonderful book should be to glorify God, honour His Son, and gain instruction and comfort from the messages of hope and inspiration which the book contains.

(ii) God's Care For His People

From the remotest times God has cared for His people. The Apostle informs us in the first two verses of his letter to the Hebrews that *"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds"* (literally "ages") (NKJV). God has continued to care for His people since His Son left His disciples on earth and ascended into heaven.

God instructed the early church through His living witnesses, the disciples and apostles. These early evangelists were strengthened and aided by visions and revelations as seemed good to the Heavenly Father. He has also promised and given to His believing people the Holy Spirit as comforter and guide.

In addition, early Christians had access to the Old Testament writings, and subsequently the written words of the disciples, apostles and evangelists, who were guided and inspired by the Spirit in their written messages as they had been in their preaching.

The Lord Jesus while on earth prayed to the Father, *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). In whatever manner it has been passed on, whether spoken or written, God's word of truth has been the great sanctifying power, setting apart His people for His holy purpose in the midst of the evil that is in the world (John 17:14-16).

Our heavenly Father was interested in the development and sanctification of His church, and is actively engaged in the selection of the members who will make up His Church in Christ Jesus. Peter declared this at the council in Jerusalem. After

referring to the status of converted Jews, James reminded them that Peter said *"how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name"* (Acts 15:14).

God has continued His care for His people through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Just before His ascension, Jesus blessed His disciples, gave them their commission as witnesses, that is, testifiers, and assured them with the words, *"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age"*. So, although He cannot be seen or heard by us with our natural sight and hearing, He has continued to love us and care for us. He comforts and sustains all who take up their individual crosses to follow Him. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus cares for His flock (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-51; John 10:1-18, 27-29; 16:22-33; 17:13-21).

(iii) Further Considerations

It is contended in these notes that the best understanding of the Revelation is along historical lines, and that many of the figures and symbols in the book refer to historical events and developments during the Gospel Age, particularly events and developments that had reference to and often closely concerned true believers, that is, those who are striving in their lifetimes to serve God through Jesus Christ and in doing so to belong to Christ's church, the church that is being "taken out" of earth's peoples during this age.

I will next summarise and consider a number of the most significant historical events of the Christian era, some of which I believe are symbolised in the chapters of the Revelation. Biblical prophecy is history foretold, therefore we are justified in studying secular and ecclesiastical history to assist us to reach an understanding of the inspired book.

(iv) The Key to the Apocalypse

Some Christians believe that the key to unlock the meaning of the visions has not yet been given, and that at some future time this key will be received by a specially chosen one, after which the visions of the Revelation will be so clearly expounded that no one will be left in doubt about their meaning.

There is no pressing need to refute this view in detail because it is well known by Bible students that such a procedure is contrary to all God's methods of making known the meaning of His Word. Believers are told to *"search the Scriptures"* and rightly divide the Word of Truth. The primary key to Scripture is Scripture itself.

The understanding of the meaning of symbolic prophecy lies in Divine interpretation, and such is given to us in the Old Testament in the book of Daniel, and in two important visions of the Revelation itself. The book of Daniel contains several outlines of the history of the world's great empires. Fortunately many of the visions given to Daniel are divinely interpreted. The prophecies recorded in Daniel begin with Daniel's day and reach without any gaps to the establishment of the Kingdom of God over the whole world.

The iron legs of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2) and the fourth beast of Daniel's vision (Daniel 7) are not identified for us, but there is general agreement among Christian (non-Papal) expositors that the symbols refer to the great Roman Empire in both its pagan and papal forms. It was this fourth world empire, that of Rome in its pagan form, that was ruling the world when John recorded the Revelation. It was this Roman government, under the Emperor Domitian, that banished John to the lonely island of Patmos.

There is also general agreement among Bible Students that this fourth or Roman Empire is one of the main subjects of the visions of Revelation. Three entire chapters are devoted to it, the twelfth, thirteenth and seventeenth, and it is referred to in at least ten other chapters. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that all the events in Revelation belong to that order of things, that dispensation and course of history predicted in the vision of the fourth beast of Daniel 7, namely the Roman Empire.

The book of Revelation contains visions that take up the history foretold by Daniel, as well as filling in many important details of that history, the history of God's servants in their relation to the world government of Rome in its undivided but more particularly in its divided state. The divided state of Rome is symbolised by the ten toes on Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 2), the ten horns on the head of the beast of Daniel's vision (Daniel 7), and the ten horns of the beast of the Apocalypse (Revelation 12, 13 and 17).

It seems reasonable that all the visions of Revelation can be properly understood as fitting into the outline given by Daniel, and constitute a great symbolic revelation concerning the course and succession of the events and developments of the Gospel Age.

Sincere Christians who were contemporaries of John the Apostle, as well as others who succeeded him in the early centuries, interpreted the *"ten horns"* on the fourth beast of Daniel 7 as having reference to the governments into which the Western Roman Empire would be divided in connection with the overthrow of the imperial power of Rome, and also that the *"little horn"* of Daniel 7, that arose from among the ten, represented the "Antichrist", and still further, that the "beast" of Revelation 13 and 17 was identical with the *"little horn"* of Daniel 7 and the *"man of sin"* of 2 Thessalonians 2.

(v) Two Visions Interpreted

The close connection between the visions of the Roman Empire in the book of Daniel and in the Revelation provides us with evidence of the correctness of the Historical interpretation and the incorrectness of the Futurist, Preterist and Idealist interpretations. But what is more important, and more convincing, is that we have Divine explanations of two of the important visions of Revelation that compel us to apply these visions to events which began early in the Gospel Age, and cover the whole course of history from John's day to the end of the Gospel Age and beyond.

The first of these is the explanation in Revelation 1 by Christ Himself of the visions of *"one like unto the Son of man"* in the midst of *"seven candlesticks"* (more correctly "lampstands" as in the NIV, RSV and REB). The second is the explanation of the revealing angel in Revelation 17, involving five distinct matters that clearly link the vision of the ten-horned, seven-headed beast and the harlot woman seated upon it with five of the most prominent features of the past history of the Church. These visions and their interpretations will be closely examined in the course of detailed progressive comments on the divinely-inspired book.

SUMMARY

The conclusion to be drawn from the two Divine interpretations, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, is that they establish the Christian character of the Revelation, and confine the fulfilment of its prophecies, to a great extent, to the events of past history. All that remain to be fulfilled of the visions of Revelation are those that relate to the destruction of the false religious systems, the destruction of the governments of earth, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The careful student, tracing the visions and symbols recorded by John, cannot avoid the conclusion that the Revelation of Jesus Christ was especially designed to portray in symbols the history of the falling away of the Christian Church from the faith, and its culmination in a great counterfeit system which would blind and deceive many millions of people. The careful student would also discern in the visions of Revelation the history of the comparatively few faithful, consecrated ones as they came into contact with political and ecclesiastical powers, and endeavoured to hold and proclaim the Word of Truth in the midst of the surrounding ignorance and darkness fostered and maintained by apostate Christianity.

There is no book in the whole Bible that reveals so much of the Divine overruling of the events of history, both good and evil, for the Church's growth and development in grace and knowledge. There has been a gradual and progressive understanding of the visions of Revelation as history has disclosed them, but it was not until these closing times of the Gospel Age that a coherent account of the general scope of the Revelation could be given. The truth of the Divine Plan of human salvation became so perverted and distorted by the fallen church systems, that God's plan could not be known and understood until the errors of the systems were exposed, and the truth revealed.

The remarkable prophetic visions of Revelation were given for the guidance, assistance and protection of the whole Church through the long, dark centuries of her witness to the truth of the Gospel. The visions have proved to be a mighty power in the history of the true Church, and the same visions have helped to preserve the faith of sincere believers in times of peril and widespread apostasy. The knowledge and understanding of some of the visions have had the effect of generating great reform movements, particularly the great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and onwards. The visions have also inspired confessors and supported martyrs in the cause of Christ, some of whom sealed their faithfulness at the stake, while others suffered terrible deaths in other ways. A knowledge of these prophetic visions has largely been instrumental in breaking the chains of priestcraft, superstition and tyranny, and bringing many sincere and devout people out of spiritual bondage.

The book of the Revelation is Christ's last recorded message to the Church. *"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches"* (Revelation 22:16). *"He that hath*

an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."
(Revelation 2:19)

ORGANISATION

These notes are organised under twenty major headings. The headings are shown below with the relevant chapters and verses from Revelation. The comments and interpretations are offered for the consideration of all who read them, and are not intended to be a final or exclusive commentary on the divinely-inspired words.

The interpretation of symbols conform as closely as possible to interpretations provided for us in the Scriptures, such as those in Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 8; the explanation of the parable of the ewe lamb in 2 Samuel 12:1-14; and the interpretation of as many of the Lord Jesus' parables and similitudes that are recorded for us.

1. Prologue 1:1 - 3
2. Introduction 1:4 - 11
3. The Lord Jesus Among the Lampstands 1:12 - 20
4. Messages to Seven Churches 2:1 - 3:22
5. The Vision of the Glory of God 4:1- 5:14
6. The Seven Seals 6:1 - 8:1
7. The Seven Trumpets 8:2 - 11:18
8. The Woman and the Man Child 11:19 - 14:5
9. Three Angels and Their Messages 14:6 - 20
10. The Last Seven Plagues 15:1 - 16:21
11. The Judgment of Great Babylon 17:1 - 18
12. Babylon The Great Is Fallen 18:1 - 19:4
13. A Voice Out Of The Throne 19:5 - 10
14. The Armies In Heaven 19:11 - 21
15. The Dragon Bound 20:1 - 3
16. The Destruction of Satan and Death 20:4 - 15
17. A Great Voice From The Throne 21:1 - 8
18. The City Descends 21:9 - 22:9
19. Final Commands and Exhortations of Jesus 22:10 - 16
20. Closing Warning and Benediction 22:17 - 21

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

REVELATION 1:1 - 3

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

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

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

1:1 It seems highly probable that John gave the book its title "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*" after he had seen all the visions and recorded them. In these introductory words we have the convincing statement that the book is a Divine prophecy given by God to Jesus Christ, and that it is for His servants, the members of Christ's Church, for their benefit, instruction and guidance.

The Apostle did not write the title that appears in the King James Version "The Revelation of St. John the Divine". On the contrary, John claims no credit for the Revelation, for it was not his. The Revelation was given to Jesus Christ by God the Father and recorded by John. John was the writer who "*bare record*" of all that he saw and heard.

The Emphatic Diaglott in verse 1 conveys a wrong idea in its translation of the words "*the things it is necessary to have done speedily*" instead of "*things which must shortly come to pass*" as in the KJV. The impression given by the Diaglott rendering is that all the developments and events predicted in the book will occur "speedily" that is quickly, in a great hurry. Modern versions such as the NIV, RSV and REB translate "shortly" as "soon", which is in agreement with the KJV rendering that the events and developments prophesied in the Revelation would begin to happen in the near future from John's day. The issue is one of time, not speed or rapid sequence of action.

We should keep in mind that "shortly" or "soon" should be understood from the Divine standpoint. With God one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day (2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4).

Many prophecies in the Revelation are understood to have been fulfilled, but now, towards the close of the Gospel Age, nearly two thousand years since John recorded the Revelation, Satan is still free and has not been bound as promised in Revelation 20:1-3, nor has the Kingdom of God been set up in power over all the earth with all the blessings promised in the Old and New Testaments and outlined in Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

The various revelations are conveyed to John in symbols. *"And he sent and signified it"*, that is, revealed it by signs or symbols, *"by His angel unto His servant John"*. To signify is to show or make known by signs and symbols. The Revelation is therefore a book of symbols given to John in a series of visions. Our task is to understand and interpret the symbols. They are drawn from nearly every aspect of life. We have the sun, moon and stars in the celestial sphere, and the earth, sea, rivers, earthquakes, volcanoes and electrical storms in the terrestrial sphere. We have a pure, chaste woman representing the true Church, and an impure harlot representing the false Church. Strange and unnatural beasts are also among the most prominent of the symbols used.

There are certain guidelines that should govern the correct interpretation of these symbols.

- Firstly, we should study the objects or personified figures used as symbols. When the sun is used as a symbol, we need to study the relationship of the sun to earth's peoples and the physical universe. When an earthquake is used symbolically, we need to understand the effects of earthquakes on the earth and its inhabitants.
- Secondly we must bear in mind that the fulfilment of the symbol must be sought in another aspect of life from that in which it appears.
- Thirdly, the majority of the symbols of the Revelation are used and explained in the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament prophecies, such as the book of Daniel.
- Fourthly, the various objects or personified figures used as symbols are not always used to describe the same things. For example, waters sometimes mean peoples, and at other times Gospel truths and blessings, as we shall see.

The symbolic pictures of the Revelation were not given for the world to understand, nor even for those who are sympathetic to Christianity, but who are not committed believers.

The symbolic pictures were given to show unto God's servants "*things which must shortly come to pass*". Every statement in the book that has any bearing on this point shows that it is addressed to Christ's servants, the Church, (Revelation 22:6,16) just as the New Testament epistles were all addressed to the "*saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus*" or to the Church in this or that locality.

Who were Christ's servants at the time John saw the visions? There can be only one answer, those who were serving Christ at that time from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles who had become Christ's committed followers, and who had received and confessed Him as their Saviour and Lord.

The fact that the Lord Jesus sent to John an angel to signify, that is, to show by signs and symbols, the things to be revealed, indicates the dignity and authority of our Lord's position in having the holy angels at His command, confirming Hebrews 1:4-6 and 1 Peter 3:22 that, at our Lord's ascension to God's right hand, all the angels of God were made subject to Him.

1:2 John "*bare record*". The Greek word here is the verb form of the noun rendered "testimony" in this verse and in verse 9 of this first chapter. John in the Revelation has given written testimony to all the things which Jesus Christ revealed to him by the words spoken and visions given to him by the angel.

The verse certifies that the book John is commanded to write is "*the word of God*" and the "*testimony of Jesus Christ*". These words indicate to us the importance and Divine authority of the book.

1:3 A blessing is promised to all who read and *hear "the words of this prophecy"*, and *who "keep those things which are written therein"*. The word "prophecy" nowadays is used mainly in the sense of foretelling future events and developments, but in Scripture it is also used in the sense of teaching and preaching publicly. The book of Revelation is a prophecy in both of these senses.

It foretells events future from John's day and contains also teaching, exhortation and explanation applicable and appropriate to all God's people throughout the whole period of time covered by its visions. To read and hear "*the words of this prophecy*" would mean to take the time and trouble to research and

understand the book of the Revelation by means of personal and private endeavour, by study and discussion with other believers, and by evaluating expositions of the book as they are offered in sermons and in writing.

To "keep" the things that are written in the prophecy is used in the sense firstly of keeping Christ's commands, that is, carrying them out as best we are able, and secondly paying close attention to the prophecies, exhortations and instructions, retaining them in our hearts and minds and growing in grace and knowledge in our Christian walk.

The Prologue concludes with the words "*for the time is at hand*". The same words are repeated in Revelation 22:10. The events and developments prophesied were "at hand", strongly suggesting that they would begin to come to pass during the lives of those to whom John delivered the testimony. John was given directions to write "*the things which are*" as well as "*the things which shall be hereafter*". (Revelation 1:19). Writing about the things which were in evidence in John's day would enable the readers and hearers at that time to recognise and understand important facts and developments occurring in their own time, and be able to discern events and developments that were still future from their day.

The words of the Prologue should counteract the notion sometimes put forward that the Revelation was not intended to be understood and therefore not worth bothering about. The basic purpose of these notes is to offer a detailed and consistent understanding of the book, which contains the final recorded words of the Lord Jesus to His Church.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION REVELATION 1:4 - 11

The Introduction consists of two parts. The first part is a greeting (verses 4 to 8) with mention of some important features revealed in the record of the visions to follow; while the second part (verses 9 to 11) explains the circumstances under which John received the visions. The Introduction is an inspired preface which conveys John's thoughts as he prepared himself to receive and record the strange, startling and truly remarkable visions given to him.

PART 1 - A GREETING AND MESSAGE

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

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

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

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

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

A Message of Grace and Peace

1:4 John greets *"the seven churches which are in Asia"*. These are the seven churches ("congregations" as in the Diaglott or "assemblies" as in Young's literal translation and Rotherham's translation) specifically addressed in chapters 2 and 3. The messages to the seven churches, as we will endeavour to show, are prophetic of the development and progress of the Church throughout the Gospel Age.

"Asia" in this verse does not mean the continent of Asia, but a Roman province known in John's day as Asia Minor. Nowadays the same area is the country of Turkey. There were more than seven churches or congregations in Asia Minor when John

recorded his message, but seven were especially chosen to represent prophetically the complete church both true and false during various periods throughout the Gospel Age, as will be discussed in the comments on chapters 2 and 3.

The greetings come firstly from God, "*Him which is, and which was, and which is to come*" (or "cometh" - RV, "is coming" - Young's literal translation, Rotherham's translation, and the Emphatic Diaglott), from "*the seven spirits which are before His throne,*" and from Jesus Christ. The "*seven spirits*" are not here identified for us, but are mentioned in chapter 5 verse 6 in connection with the Lord Jesus as "*the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*". It seems from the "*seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God*" (chapter 4 verse 5) that the "*seven spirits*" are a symbolic representation of God's Holy Spirit.

The number seven is the largest single number divisible only by itself and one, and features in many visions throughout the Revelation. There are seven lampstands in the vision of chapter 1; seven churches in Asia (chapters 2 and 3); seven lamps of fire (chapter 4); *the "Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God"* (chapter 5); seven seals (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8); seven angels with seven trumpets (chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11); seven thunders (chapter 10); seven heads of the beast (chapters 13 and 17); seven angels and seven plagues (chapters 15 and 16); and seven mountains and seven kings (chapter 17).

Bible students are generally agreed that seven is a symbol of completeness, so that the seven Spirits before the throne, being symbolic of God's Holy Spirit, are representative of God's complete care of His people wherever they may be.

The Firstborn From The Dead

1:5 Jesus Christ is identified as "*the faithful witness,*" the first to be raised from death to eternal life, and the Ruler of all earthly kings and rulers, as the Scriptures clearly testify (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:24; Colossians 1:18; Philippians 2: 9-11; Revelation 19:16).

In the English language "witness" means one who has seen, as an eye-witness; one who testifies as in a court of law; and in ordinary everyday life one who testifies concerning one's faith or convictions on religious matters or on any other matter.

Our Lord Jesus while on earth was the faithful witness or testifier of His Father (John 3:11-16; 31-33; 7:16-18; 8:26-29; Matthew 11:25-27). Now in heaven Jesus is still the faithful witness. In Revelation 3:14 He is called "*the faithful and true witness*". Whatever is said by our Lord Jesus may be trusted and depended upon absolutely.

The Lord Jesus has the honour and distinction of having been the firstborn from the dead to eternal life. In the times of the Old Testament and the New, a few persons were raised from the dead, but their lives were still only of temporary duration, and the persons raised to life eventually died again (1 Kings 17:17-24; Hebrews 11:35; Matthew 9:18, 23-26; Luke 7:12-16; John 11:11-14; 38-45; 12:1 Acts 9:36-41).

The Prince of the Kings of the Earth

Jesus was the first to be raised to everlasting life. (Colossians 1:18; Acts 2:24; 13:20; Philippians 2:8-11; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20; 1 Peter 1:3,4,21). Jesus is now, since His resurrection, "*the prince of the kings of the earth*". The title "prince" is customarily given to a son of a royal family. The term is also used to express superiority, and it was in this sense that the translators of the King James Version of the Bible addressed King James of England. Their words were, 'To the most high and mighty Prince James, by the grace of God, king of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith'. The translators desired that their work 'may receive approbation and patronage from so learned and judicious a Prince as your highness is ...'.

In our verse, this title, applied to our Lord, means first in rank or power, the Greek word being "archon" (Strong's reference 758). The RV, RSV and NIV all translate "archon" as "ruler". And indeed the Lord Jesus is "*Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*" (Ephesians 1:21). God's purpose is that every knee shall bow to His Son. (Philippians 2:9-11) Although our Lord Jesus is established in this exalted position, the fact is not recognised by people in general. However, the Revelation, the "disclosure", reveals Jesus as the mighty King of kings and Lord of lords, Who will conquer and bring to nought all opposition to His rulership (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:11-15; 5:12,13).

The Lord Jesus is "*prince of the kings of the earth*" also in the sense of being superior, that is, the finest and best of all. Of all

kings and rulers the earth has had, and may have, Jesus Christ is "*the prince*", the greatest and the best of them all. People in general do not realise this, but they will in God's due time in the age to come, when Christ, the true light, will enlighten all for whom He died (John 1:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-6).

Salvation in Jesus Christ

Jesus' saving power is also mentioned in our verse, reminding the readers that Jesus is the One Who loves His children so much that He gave His life and shed His blood so that all may be forgiven and reconciled to God, and by this means gain eternal life by faith in Him and His shed blood.

The blood of Christ as the only means for taking away sin was foretold by the Old Testament prophets and foreshadowed in the Law Covenant, for "*without shedding of blood is no remission*" (Zechariah 13:1; Daniel 9:24-26; Isaiah 53:4-10; Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:12-22; 10:1-18). The same Apostle John, to whom was granted the visions and messages of the Revelation, wrote in his first epistle, "*the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:6-9).

1:6 In the few words of this verse, John records prophetically the successful conclusion of the work of the Gospel Age. The RSV reads, "*and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father*". The RV, NIV, Rotherham's translation, the Amplified Bible and the Syriac New Testament all have closely similar wording. As shown in the vision of Revelation 20:4 and 6, and alluded to in other visions, the formation of a kingdom of priests is meant. This formation of a kingdom of priests was dependent, by God's gracious provision, on the Lord Jesus' love and sacrifice, and the complete taking away of our sins in His own blood, as we have read in verse 5.

Revelation 20:4 and 6 and 1 Peter 1:9 inform us that the overcomers of the Gospel Age are to constitute a royal priesthood, that is, a ruling governmental authority which also exercises a priestly function. In the Jewish Age royalty and priesthood were kept separate. In the Gospel Age the Church of Jesus Christ being chosen by God has no royalty, nor do members perform any priestly duties other than to call attention to Jesus the Lamb of God as the One Who offered the only atoning sacrifice for all. But when the overcomers are raised from death and are seated with Christ in His throne (Revelation 3:21), then they will also be priests under Jesus Christ, the great

High Priest of the order of Melchisedec (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5: 6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21). Our Lord Jesus, the High Priest of the Melchisedec order, occupies this office by the gift of His Heavenly Father.

The significance of this is explained by the Apostle in Hebrews 5:1-10 and 7:1-28. In making members of His Church a *"kingdom of priests,"* the Lord Jesus has done so *"unto God and his Father"*. Therefore, as the Lord Jesus is King and High Priest unto God by God's grace and appointment, it is proper and appropriate that the Gospel Age Church as a kingdom of priests should also be dedicated to God, Whom believers are privileged to call their God and Father (Matthew 6:9; John 20:17, Romans 8:14-18).

The glory of the Lord Jesus in His office as King and High Priest after the order of Melchisedec is not limited to the Gospel dispensation. John writes in our verse, *"to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."* Similar words of praise are also to be found in Revelation 5:13. Believers may join this ascription of praise now in the realisation that the Lord's gracious service to all people will continue throughout this Gospel Age and throughout the Age to come, the Kingdom Age, which is to last one thousand years (Revelation 20:4,6).

A Note On Melchisedec

The "order of Melchisedec" requires some brief explanatory comments. In Genesis 14:18-20 Melchisedec (sometimes spelt Melchisedek) is described as king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. Melchisedec met Abram in the Valley of Shaveh, brought out bread and wine, blessed Abram, and received tithes from him. [At this time the faithful patriarch was called Abram. When Abram was ninety-nine years of age, the Lord appeared to him and said, *"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee."* (Genesis 17:5)].

Other places in which Melchisedec is mentioned are Psalm 110:4, where Christ is described as a priest forever *"after the order of Melchisedec,"* and Hebrews chapters 5, 6 and 7, where the two passages from Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 are quoted, and the relationship of Melchisedec to our Lord is discussed at length.

In the Scripture it is written that the paths of Melchisedec and Abraham cross for a short time. Melchisedec is identified as a person of higher spiritual rank even than Abraham, *the "friend of God."*(James 2:28). Melchisedec then disappears from the record as suddenly as he came in, and is not mentioned in the sacred writings again for a thousand years.

The "order" of Melchisedec seems to mean "likeness in official dignity of being both king and priest." Melchisedec and Jesus occupied the two offices. Jesus continues and remains as King and High Priest, as the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1, 9:11, 25; 10:21.

The subject of Melchisedec and his relationship to Jesus is an intriguing one, requiring considerably more exposition than is desirable here. For a full and detailed exposition, readers are invited to consult our book 'Comparisons and Contrasts', chapter 7, pages 102 to 117.

1:7 In this verse John refers somewhat indirectly to the great work of the Kingdom Age, which will be established by the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ to take up His great power to reign and extend His Kingdom over all the earth (Revelation 11:15-17).

As we consider the visions of this remarkable book, we will find that frequently the same symbolic language is used as was used in revealing the future to the prophet Daniel. The resemblance between many of the visions given to Daniel and those given to John is so marked as to lead readers to the conclusion that the Lord used similar symbols for specific and identifiable purposes. The angel explained to Daniel the meaning of the beasts, horns, and many other symbols used in the prophecies given to Daniel. When, therefore, the same or closely similar beasts and images occur in the Revelation, we have a key with which to open to our understanding the meaning of the symbols used, and we have also a guide to the interpretation of any variations in the symbolism.

Jesus Christ Comes With Clouds

Verse 7 is an example of the use of symbols previously made evident to us in the prophecies of Daniel. John writes, "*Behold, he cometh with clouds*". A more exact translation is "*... with the clouds*", as rendered in the RV, RSV, NIV, the Emphatic Diaglott, Rotherham's translation, Young's literal translation, and the

Amplified Bible. It would appear that the inspired Apostle wishes to remind us specifically of the clouds mentioned in Daniel 7:13, in which it is recorded that *"one like the (or, a) Son of man came with the clouds of heaven"*.

The context in Daniel 7 is a vision of God's judgment of earthly governments and rulers, the establishment of God's Kingdom (Daniel 7:9-14), and the divinely given interpretation (Daniel 7: 16-27).

Daniel 7:7 and 8 describe a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, with ten horns, and another *"little horn"* with *"eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things"* which *"came up among"* the ten horns. Then we are shown by the vision of verses 9 to 11 that God Himself, represented by the *"Ancient of days"* sets in operation a judgment which will accomplish the complete destruction of the fourth beast and the *"little horn"* which developed from it. Daniel's attention was arrested by the fact that, even while God's judgment was in progress, the "horn" continued to speak "great words".

As we have seen, Jesus Christ is God's appointed King and Ruler, and the vision in Daniel represents Him as *"coming with the clouds of heaven"* to *"the Ancient of days"* to receive His commission to deal with the Beast until its complete destruction is accomplished. This commission and dominion given to Jesus Christ is outlined in Daniel 7:

¹³*I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man (or more accurately, "a Son of man"), came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.*

¹⁴*And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*

There are four beasts mentioned in Daniel 7. The four beasts represent four world empires (verse 17), and the vision of verses 13 and 14 reveals to us that the destruction of the fourth world empire will not leave the human race without a ruler. God has provided a successor to the fourth world empire, that Successor being One bringing in an empire or kingdom of a very different kind from the previous four world empires. The previous world

empires were symbolised by beasts, aptly picturing the cruel, oppressive and predatory nature of these empires.

One "*like a Son of man*" may be understood to represent the humane and liberating character of the divinely-appointed new Kingdom and its King.

The vision of "*one like a Son of man*" coming "*with the clouds of heaven*" fittingly represents the overthrow of earthly power by the Lord Jesus, and His arrival in state to exercise the power given to Him by God. He comes as God's King, not as an earthly ruler arising from tumult and upheaval among earth's peoples. He comes with Divine patronage, received with honour and escorted in the vision by attendants to the Father's throne to receive His commission. His commission is twofold: to execute judgment and destruction of the beast, and to establish His own world empire as King of kings and Lord of lords. Daniel 7:25 and 26 gives us a time for the judgment to commence: at the conclusion of the "*time, times and the dividing of time*". The significance of this time prophecy is discussed in the books 'Daniel the Prophet' by E.C. and R.B. Hennings, and in my book 'Notes on the Book of Daniel'.

The judgment of the fourth beast was to be gradual: "*to consume and to destroy it unto the end*" (verse 26). In the carrying out of this judgment, covering many years, the Lord Jesus clears the way for the manifestation and the establishment of the new and righteous Kingdom of God.

Every Eye Shall See Him

John's statement concerning the Lord Jesus, "*Behold, he cometh with the clouds*" may with confidence be taken as an identification of Him with the divinely appointed Ruler seen by Daniel in his vision (Daniel 7:13,14).

When visions such as those seen by Daniel and John are given by God, their interpretation, unless explained by divine messengers, may vary with individual believers. Some see the clouds as literal, physical clouds as we see them in the sky, and some also believe that the Lord Jesus will appear to human view when the time comes for His revealing to the world with the clouds that we see day by day. There is no doubt that the Lord could so appear if He wished in a form that humans could see, and satellite television could enable such an appearance to be seen in every part of the globe.

While the sincerity and devotion of believers who hold the literal understanding mentioned above are not in dispute, and no adverse criticism or judgment of them is made or intended, it is maintained in these notes that the visions seen by Daniel and John are figurative in their significance and application. The “*clouds of heaven*”, the “*fiery flame*”, the “*fiery stream*” and the “*beasts*” of Daniel 7 are figurative, and the angel’s interpretation shows their symbolic character, and being symbols, they need to be interpreted. John’s inspired words, “*Behold, he cometh with the clouds*” are all the more significant when we read the angel’s explanation of Daniel’s vision. The formal giving to Jesus Christ of the Kingdom was the equivalent of setting up the Kingdom “*under the whole heaven*”, the purpose being, as stated in the vision of Daniel 7, “*that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him*” (Daniel 7:14).

An important result of the setting up of the Kingdom is that “*every eye shall see him*”. It is understandable that some believers take this direct statement literally, that is, that human beings will see Jesus with their natural sight. It seems, however, more in keeping with the symbolic nature of John’s visions, and with other Scriptures, that the words are to be understood figuratively. The Lord Jesus said, “*... the world seeth me no more, but ye see me*” (John 14:19).

The English word ‘see’ and the Greek equivalents ‘*theoreo*’ (Strong 2334) in John 14:19, and ‘*optanomai*’ (Strong 3700) in our verse 7, sometimes refer to natural sight or looking at objects with our natural eyesight, and sometimes mean mental sight or understanding with our minds. We often use ‘see’ in the sense of ‘understand’ or ‘perceive’ in such expressions as, “Do you see what I mean?” or “I can’t see how this problem can be solved,” or “We don’t see it your way”. Three New Testament instances of the use of ‘see’ in the symbolic sense of ‘understand’ or ‘perceive’ are:

Romans 15:21, “*But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand*”.

Hebrews 2:9, “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man*”.

Ephesians 1:18, *“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”*.

It seems correct to say that the peoples of the world will not see Christ with their natural sight, but they will see Him with the eyes of their understanding when they realise that He is taking an active part in the removal of this present order of things and in the setting up of the Kingdom of God. Faithful believers are the only ones who will see the Lord Jesus in His glorified estate because they will be changed into His likeness (1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Philippians 2:9,10; Hebrews 1:3.)

There is a difficulty also in our verse 7 if we take the words *“every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him”* in a literal sense, because such an understanding would mean that the resurrection of the dead will have taken place before the Lord Jesus has returned.

The “clouds” of Daniel 7:13 and our verse 7 symbolise trouble or obscurity or perhaps both. Clouds are visible collections of water droplets or ice particles in the atmosphere, and often mean unsettled weather conditions or storms to come. In foggy conditions on the ground or in aircraft, clouds can completely obscure visibility. Clouds are thus fitting symbols of troubles and obscurity associated with the Lord’s return. But troubles and obscurity will pass away, as the Scriptures tell us, and be succeeded by an era of great light and blessing to all nations and all families of the earth.

All Kindreds of the Earth Shall Wail

The RSV reads in our verse 7, *“all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”*; and the NIV reads *“all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him”*; the REB reads *“all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse”*; while the Diaglott reads *“all tribes of the land shall mourn over him”*. The Greek word for ‘wail’ is ‘kopto’, and is defined by Dr. Strong as ‘to beat the breast in grief’ (Strong 2875), and is translated by ‘mourn, lament, (be)wail’.

Verse 7 concludes, *“Even so, Amen.”* This appears to express approval of the wailing or mourning of earth’s peoples. Why should they wail and mourn? The verse answers this question for us. People will wail and mourn *“because of him”* or *“on account of him”*, because they will see Him as they have never

seen Him before, the great Deliverer Who has come to call them to repentance and bless them. They will realise their sinful state of heart and mind, their thoughts, their evil words and actions, and their general unworthiness to receive God's blessings. Their understanding will be opened to see all Jesus has done for them in all their unworthiness. They will learn how He ransomed them by His death, purchased the whole human race by His sacrifice, and shed His blood so that all may be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Even those who "*pierced him*" nearly two thousand years ago will realise in the resurrection that they pierced the hands, feet and side of the Son of God, and will lament profoundly their ignorance and the suffering they caused Him Who was sacrificed for them. In the resurrection those who took part in the tumult and were among the rabble that cried, "Crucify him!", along with the Roman soldiery, will mourn and wail. Subsequently, however, they will be glad to hear of their deliverance and their opportunity to live forever under the new arrangement and new Covenant which God and Jesus have prepared for them.

To the women of Jerusalem "*which also bewailed and lamented him*" on His way to the cross, Jesus said, "*Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children*" (Luke 23:28). Sorrow and suffering awaited the people of Jerusalem when Jesus spoke these words, but in our verse there is no reproof, because in the time when this prophecy is fulfilled, only deliverance and blessing lie ahead for all of earth's millions.

1:8 This verse is the signature, as it were, to the Introduction, in which God places His hand and seal on the contents of the Revelation. "*I am Alpha and Omega saith the Lord God: which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*".

The three most ancient Greek manuscripts omit the words "the beginning and the ending", and have "the Lord God" instead of simply "the Lord".

God is indeed "*from everlasting to everlasting*" (Psalm 90:2). He is the Supreme being, the Great First Cause, the Creator of all things. He is self-existent: "*which is*" in the present; "*which was*" in the past; and "*which is to come*" indicating God's continuing existence without end. God is the Almighty One. He was Almighty when He made the earth and placed Adam and Eve on

it. He was Almighty when He took action to frustrate Satan's scheme to capture the race for his own sinful ends. God pronounced and exacted the penalty of death, depriving people of their power to continue to serve Satan, and depriving Satan of his power over people by thus taking them from his grasp. God is Almighty in carrying through His plan of salvation, even to the gift of His beloved Son to save every human being who believes and will believe in God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Instead of "*which is to come*" as in the KJV and many other versions, the Diaglott, Rotherham's translation, Young's literal translation and the RV margin have "*who is coming*.. This would mean that God Himself is coming as the ultimate ruler of the universe, and is acceptable as an alternative understanding. It carries us through to the end of the Kingdom Age.

At the end of the thousand year Kingdom Age, when all God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ and His Church, Christ will hand over the Kingdom to God. That will be God's "coming"; coming to take over the Kingdom so that He (God) may be "*all in all*" or "*everything to everyone*" as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Then the Lord Jehovah of hosts, the Lord strong and mighty, will enter in through the raised and uplifted gates and the everlasting doors (Psalm 24:1-10). He will be gladly acknowledged and worshipped by all who have responded to the enlightenment and blessings of that righteous age. They will serve Him with gratitude and praise to all eternity. God will finally have triumphed over Satan and evil, not by force of arms and unrelenting oppression, but by love and the continuing permission to all to exercise their free will, to serve and worship Him with thankful hearts for all He has done for them.

And so it is that the first part of the Introduction to Revelation (verses 4 to 8) indicates the successful outcome of God's plan of salvation, and invites us to study the details and historical bearings of the things foreseen and foretold, those which relate to the past before our day, those which relate to the present time, and those which pertain to the future. Like a panorama, all is placed before us, and blessed are they who hear, and they who keep the things that are written in this inspired prophecy (Revelation 1:3).

PART 2 – JOHN RECEIVES THE VISIONS

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

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

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

A Preliminary Explanation

The first vision to be given to John is of the glory of Christ. Before this vision is described to us, John gives us a brief explanation as to how, when and where the visions were given to him; as well as some indication of the circumstances in which he was placed when he received the divinely-given visions.

1:9 John describes himself as one with all the faithful and suffering brethren, their brother and companion in tribulation, and one with them in their hope of the Kingdom, and in the exercise of the patience that they had all witnessed in Jesus Christ. John displays true humility as Jesus did. John had leaned on Jesus' bosom, and no doubt Jesus' words had sunk deeply into his heart (John 13:23, 25).

John was probably the youngest of the twelve apostles, and was amongst the first ones chosen. By the providence of God he had lived to be well advanced in years. He was a living link between the Lord Jesus' ministry and the period later in the first century when the Church members were deprived of the presence of the apostles, and had to look to the writings the apostles had left for guidance in the troubled years of the early Church.

John was the last of the apostles and was chosen to commit to writing that final great series of visions by which God's people might be helped in tribulation and have their faith strengthened. The help and strength derive from the knowledge that God foresees everything, is able to overrule all opposition and will make all things work together for good to those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.

The overcomers will receive their reward, and nothing can prevent this (Matthew 19:27-29; Romans 8:16-18, 28; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

The island of Patmos is described by Smith's Bible Dictionary as 'one of the Sporades', "in that part of the Aegean which is called the Icarian Sea. It must have been conspicuous on the right when Paul was sailing from Samos to Cos (Acts 20:15; 21:1). The aspect of the island is peculiarly rugged and bare. Such scene of banishment for John in the reign of Domitian is quite in harmony with what we read of the custom of the period. Patmos is divided into two nearly equal parts, a northern and a southern, by a very narrow isthmus, where, on the east side, are the harbour and the town."

On Patmos there were quarries worked by prison labour. John was exiled there but, being an old man, would not have been capable of heavy manual work. The Romans had established a fortress on Patmos. Patmos is completely surrounded by water, which made it a prison while allowing the prisoners considerable freedom of movement where such was permitted.

John's statement that he was in Patmos *"for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ"* leads us to believe that God permitted John's exile to a place where, under Roman protection. John had the freedom to receive and record the visions to be later committed to faithful brethren for the edification of Christian believers.

In the Spirit

1:10 In what way was John *"in the Spirit"*? The meaning is deeper than the possession of the Spirit which has been granted to all believers from Pentecost onward, referred to in Ephesians 1:13. Our Lord's words concerning David the King and Prophet provide the answer for us in Matthew 22:

⁴³*He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,*

⁴⁴*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

⁴⁵*If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*

David could not from his own mind have produced this wonderful prophecy concerning Christ the Son of God Who was at the same time the Son of David when He referred to these prophetic words. Only the power of the Holy Spirit of God could have

inspired David's words. The Apostle Peter explains that *"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21).

The power of the Holy Spirit which enabled David to write the words quoted above, also enabled the prophets to hear before they spoke, as was the case with Jeremiah when he was given messages to convey to the people (Jeremiah 18:1,2; 19:1-13). And so it was with John. He had first to see the visions and hear the messages before he could record them. The power of the Holy Spirit enabled John to remember the visions and messages so that he could record them accurately. In other words, John was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Day

Because Sunday, the first day of the week, is sometimes referred to as "the Lord's day", many people think that these words refer to a Sunday. There are a number of references to *"the first day of the week"* in the New Testament, but in no case is it described as *"the Lord's day"* (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

The use of the possessive case in *"the Lord's day"* simply means that the day pertains to the Lord. The expression *"the Lord's day"* occurs only in our verse. The words *"the day of the Lord"* appear a number of times in the Scriptures. There is no difference in meaning between the two expressions. They are two ways of saying the same thing, and may be used interchangeably.

In the Bible *"the day of the Lord"* often refers to a period of time because of some action God takes either to punish or bless. In Joel's prophecy, for example, *"the day of the Lord"* mentioned in Joel 2:1 referred to the time when God would deal with the people of Judah because they had not kept His commandments. This time came when the land was invaded by the Chaldeans, *"a great people and a strong"* (Joel 2: 1,2). Joel 2:31 refers to *"a great and terrible day of the Lord"*. "Terrible" in the KJV conveys a wrong impression. The Septuagint uses "glorious" instead of "terrible", and Peter, referring to Joel's prophecy, describes the day as *"the great and notable day of the Lord"*.

The "day" is surely the period of the Gospel and the Kingdom Ages in which *"whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* The Apostle Peter showed that the beginning of the

fulfilment of that “*day of the Lord*” occurred on the day of Pentecost.

Other New Testament references to “*the day of the Lord*” indicate that the end of the Gospel Age is meant. A period of time is set apart by God in which the whole world, the whole social order, is to be dealt with, preparatory to the setting up of a completely new order under Christ. The events of this “*day of the Lord*” are described in 2 Peter 3.

When the Apostle Paul informed the Athenians in Acts 17:31 that God had appointed a “*day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*”, he referred not to a twenty-four hour day but to a period of time, such as “*the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens*” (Genesis 2:4).

The divinely-appointed “day” of Acts 17:31 covers both the Gospel and Kingdom Ages, for during both parts of this long day, the Lord Jesus will “*judge the world in righteousness.*” This pre-arranged day started in the time of the Apostle as is indicated, “*... God ... now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day ...*” (Acts 17:30,31). Further, we are told in 1 Peter 4:17 that judgment begins with the members of Christ’s Church. Judgment, that is, instruction in righteousness, is to continue throughout the Kingdom Age as well (2 Peter 3:13). Since the prophecies of the book of Revelation relate to both parts of this long day, it could well be that it is the period meant in the expression “*the Lord’s day*” in our verse.

Be that as it may, there is no evidence to show that the Lord’s day of our verse refers to the first day of the week or even the Jewish Sabbath. Indeed, there appears to be no reason why this “day” should not simply refer to the “day” or period of time in which John received and wrote the Revelation by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. We are not told how long that period was, but it seems probable that it was longer than a twenty-four hour day. Daniel was exhausted by the visions given to him, and received strength because of his weakness (Daniel 10:7, 8). The effect on the Apostle John was probably the same, especially in view of the fact that he was about ninety years of age or perhaps a little older.

God appoints times for His works to be accomplished. Romans 5:6, “*... in due time Christ died for the ungodly*”. Before God appointed a time for the Lord Jesus to be informed, even He, the

Son, did not know the thing the Heavenly Father would subsequently reveal to Him. *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father”* (Mark 13:32).

A Great Voice

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John was enabled to hear behind him *“a great voice, as of a trumpet”* and to receive the message from the Lord recorded in Revelation 1:11 before as yet he saw anything. The voice sounded behind him, so that he had to turn to see who it was who spoke (verse 12). The great voice behind him was as much a part of the “vision” as the things he saw, as were the explanations of verses 17 to 20 and the messages recorded in chapters 2 and 3.

The *“great voice”* is likened to the sound of a trumpet. In Old Testament times the trumpet was used to draw attention by its clear, dominant tone (Leviticus 25:8, 9 – the Jubilee trumpet; 2 Samuel 20:2; Joshua 6:1-20 – the fall of Jericho). The expression *“as of a trumpet”* would refer to the commanding and compelling clarity, distinctness and audibility of the voice that spoke.

1:11 It should be noted that the words, *“I am Alpha and Omega, the first and last”* as well as the words *“which are in Asia”* are not to be found in the three most ancient manuscripts, and are therefore not part of the original Greek text. The expression *“I am Alpha and Omega”* is, however, properly part of verse 8 where it refers to the Lord God Almighty. The omission of the clause *“which are in Asia”* is of no real consequence, since the seven churches named were located in Asia, or more correctly, Asia Minor. The clause is, however, used authentically in verse 4.

The words *“I am the first and the last”* are included in verse 17, and form a part of the description of the Lord Jesus recorded in verses 17 and 18. These words will be considered when they are examined more closely.

The verse is a prelude to the first vision of the book of Revelation. The vision refers to *“one like the Son of Man”* who is seen *“in the midst of the seven candlesticks (or lampstands..”* The One Who is thus described is the Lord Jesus Christ because He says of Himself, *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore”* (Revelation 1:18).

Such a description could apply to no-one else because the Lord Jesus is the only One Who had both died and been raised from death and then made alive for evermore. The first vision given to John then was of our Lord Jesus Christ, and describes in symbolic language the great glory that is His since His resurrection.

A time of crisis could have arisen in the Church when the twelve apostles died. Perhaps also a later crisis could have arisen when the younger generation of guides and teachers, men like Timothy and Titus, who had been taught and trained by the apostles, also passed into death. It is true, of course, that a divinely authorized pattern had been set for the continuation of leadership in the Church in that overseers of congregations such as Timothy were exhorted to commit the Gospel *message* “*to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5-9).

But what trials and difficulties would be encountered by these pastors and teachers, and those in later generations who endeavoured to carry out their responsibility? What would become of the Church? Would the Lord still care? Notwithstanding the departure of the Lord after His resurrection (John 14:2; Acts 1:9), notwithstanding the death of the apostles and their immediate successors, and despite the growth of apostasy, the vision of the lampstands, as well as the messages to the churches, were an assurance to future believers that the Lord continued to care for and watch over the Church which He founded and was building (Matthew 16:18).

The vision of the Lord in the midst of the seven golden lampstands forms a fitting prelude to the messages to the churches recorded in chapters 2 and 3. Some of the specific descriptions of the Lord given in the vision are repeated in the messages to the churches. Indeed, it is essential to keep in mind the details of the vision when studying these messages.

CHAPTER 3

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AMONG THE LAMPSTANDS REVELATION 1:12 - 20

¹²*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1:12 The fact that John's attention was first called in this initial vision by hearing a voice behind him, suggests that the beginning of the Revelation was not at that point in time, nor in some future time, but that the things to be revealed had already commenced in the past. Evidence for this understanding is the taking of the book or sealed scroll by Christ from the Heavenly Father recorded in Revelation 5:5-8.

This vision is symbolic of that which took place after Jesus' resurrection more than half a century before John saw the vision, namely Jesus receiving in advance the full knowledge concerning the history of the witnessing, suffering and persecuting of the Church, as well as His commission to carry out the plans and purposes of His Heavenly Father.

John *"turned to see the voice"* and saw seven golden candlesticks (or more accurately, lampstands).

1:13-16 Some commentators have understood that what John saw was an actual appearance of Christ in His glorified estate. This seems unlikely because human eyesight cannot see spirit beings, and John himself wrote that *"it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2). The Apostle Paul also wrote of the Lord Jesus as the One *"Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see"* (1 Timothy 6:16).

What John saw was a vision of the Lord Jesus. A vision is not a material or physical reality, but something designed to picture and symbolise the reality. This is true whether visions come, as with Daniel, in the form of *"visions of his head upon his bed"* (Daniel 7:1) or whether they come in broad daylight as in the transfiguration, which Jesus declared was a vision (Matthew 17:9). We ought not to regard the word picture of verses 13 to 16 as a portrait of our Lord in glory, because the representation is symbolic. When overcomers will see the Lord Jesus in glory He will not look as here described. Nevertheless this symbolic picture has valuable lessons for us.

The principal and most important symbols of this vision are the seven golden lampstands, One like a Son of Man standing in the midst of them, and seven stars in His right hand. Fortunately these symbols are divinely interpreted for us by the "voice" that spoke to John. The interpretation is recorded in verse 20. Other features and details of the vision are left for us, the readers, to interpret.

The expression *"Son of Man"* is used by the prophet Daniel in his book, chapter 7 verse 13, and used by the Lord Jesus when speaking of himself, as we learn from frequent references in the Gospels. This seems sufficient evidence to show that the One in the vision symbolised Christ. The Lord Jesus *"clothed with a garment down to the foot"* could mean that Christ's glory was confined to Him alone, and the golden girdle could signify truth in all its glory and nobility and also perhaps righteousness, because the golden girdle is positioned in the vision as a breastplate, which signifies righteousness in Isaiah 59:17 and Ephesians 6:14.

"His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow" symbolise Christ's purity, wisdom, splendour and glory. *"His eyes as a flame of fire"* tell us in symbol that our Master is all-seeing, and is not deceived by the outward appearance, and that He can read every thought and intent of the heart.

"His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" symbolise the trying and severe nature of our Saviour's earthly walk, in which He learned *"obedience by the things which He suffered"* (Hebrews 5:8). The word translated "brass" in the King James Version should be "copper" (Strong 5474), because brass, being an alloy of copper and zinc, was unknown in early New Testament times.

"His voice as the sound of many waters" indicates the majestic and awe-inspiring nature of the voice. When we are close to great waterfalls such as Niagara, we are conscious of the almost deafening sound made by the falling, rushing water. A voice similar to such a sound would be a most impressive one, commanding attention and respect. Previously in verse 10 the Lord Jesus' voice was likened to the sound of a trumpet. There is no conflict here, two different symbols being used to convey the same impression, that of a clear, distinct, plainly audible and commanding voice, inspiring awe in its hearer, John, and in us, John's readers.

The *"seven stars"* in Jesus' right hand are interpreted for us in verse 20, and further comments will be made on the symbolism of this verse a little further on.

The vision of *"a sharp two-edged sword"* proceeding *"out of his mouth"* should further convince us that the description of our Lord in these verses is a symbolic one. The Apostle Paul writes of *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17), and tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that the word of God is *"quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," ... "and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"*. The two-edged sword is symbolic of the Word of God, the Word of truth, cutting asunder sins, lies and deceptions in both the secular and the religious spheres, and penetrating through the cloak and veil of hypocrisy and whatever may appear on the surface to cover and conceal falsehood and evil beneath. Isaiah 49:2 contains a prophecy referring to Christ, which says, *"And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword"*.

"His countenance as the sun shineth in his strength" pictures the glory and majesty of Christ's appearance. The Apostle Paul writes: *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (2 Corinthians 4:6). The full splendour of the sun is here used to represent the brilliance and radiance of the countenance of Christ.

1:17 John now describes the first effects on him of seeing the vision: *"And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead"*. This can be understood to mean that John was completely overwhelmed, and lost consciousness. John probably did not immediately recognise Who was represented in the vision, because the personage in the vision probably did not look at all like the One he was accustomed to seeing and talking with more than fifty years earlier. But the Lord *"laid his right hand"* upon John, and said to him, *"Fear not"*. The words are those of comfort, peace and love, because as we know *"God is love:"* (1 John 4:8) and *"perfect love casteth out fear ... He that feareth is not made perfect in love"*. (1 John 4:18). John would be reassured and encouraged, and be prepared to receive calmly the vision given to him.

The expression *"I am the first and the last"* is here referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the context shows. The Lord Jesus is *"the firstborn of every creature"* (Colossians 1:15); *"the beginning of the creation of God"* (Revelation 3:14); and He is also *"the firstborn from the dead"* (Colossians 1:18), *"the first-fruits of them that slept."* (1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23) He is the "first" in both of these senses, the first to be created by God, and the first to be raised from death to everlasting life.

But in what sense is He the "last"? Jesus is the "last" in that the whole Kingdom of God involving the redemption and blessing of all nations and all families of the earth is entirely dependent on Him. He is the only avenue of access to the Heavenly Father. Salvation to life eternal begins and ends with Him. It is Jesus Who will accomplish the final salvation of all earth's peoples and the reconstitution of the world and its government, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Jesus is also the "last" in that no-one can go beyond Him in searching for truth, light and life. Jesus said of Himself *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

No human leader or philosopher has ever made such an all-embracing and authoritative claim.

1:18 *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen."* These words would identify the One John saw in the vision as the Lord Jesus Christ, for to no-one else could these words apply. John knew Jesus had been put to death, and that He was raised from the dead by His Father, God. The words identifying the Lord Jesus in the vision were surely designed to put John's fears to rest.

Jesus has *"the keys of hell and of death"*. The possession of keys gives to the possessor the power to unlock and open. "Hell" and "death" have closely related meanings. "Hell" (Greek "hades") does not signify a place of fiery torment, but simply "the grave", the state or condition of all people whose lives have ended. "Death" is called an enemy in Scripture (Jeremiah 31:16; 1 Corinthians 15:26) and means the state or condition of non-existence and knowing nothing, the opposite of life and activity of mind and body.

Jesus has the power and also the authority to unlock and open the grave, and call forth all who have been and remain imprisoned in the state of death, for He has all power in heaven and earth given to Him by God (Matthew 28:18), including power and authority over death and the grave. (John 5:25-29) This means that Jesus has the power and authority to liberate all from the prison-house of death, those who are already there, and those still living who have not yet gone into the grave, but who are under the death sentence, so that all may be ultimately delivered from the dominion and prison of sin and death into the full liberty of the children of God, into righteousness and everlasting life (Romans 8:21).

1:19 John was instructed to *"write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"*. The KJV translators omitted the word "therefore" in this verse. There seems to be no reason or excuse for this omission. The beginning of the verse should read: *"Write therefore the things ..."*.

The commentator and expositor, Dr. Barnes, in his 'Notes on Revelation', very ably explains these words as signifying the division of the Revelation into three parts:

"1 Write the things which thou hast seen. An account of the vision which thou hast had.

"2 And the things that are. Give an account of those things which thou hast seen as designed to represent the condition of the seven Churches. He had seen not only the Saviour, but he had seen seven lampstands, and seven stars in the hand of the Saviour, and he is now commanded to record the meaning of these symbols as referring to things then actually existing in the seven Churches. This interpretation is demanded by verse 20.

"3 And the things which shall be hereafter. The Greek phrase rendered hereafter, means "after these things", that is, he was to make a correct representation of the things which then were, and then to record what would occur "after these things": to wit, of the images, symbols, and truths, which would be disclosed to him after what he had already seen. The expression refers to future times. He does not say for how long a time; but the revelations which were to be made referred to events which were to occur beyond those which were then taking place. Nothing can be argued from the use of this language in regard to the length of time embraced in the Revelation - whether it extended only for a few years, or whether it embraced all coming time. The more natural interpretation, however, would seem to be that it would stretch far into the future years, and that it was designed to give at least an outline of what would be the character of the future in general."

The same writer has eloquently summed up the first chapter of the Revelation in these words:

'Such is the sublime vision under which this book opens; such the solemn commission which the penman of the book received. No more appropriate introduction to what is contained in the book could be imagined; no more appropriate circumstances for making such a sublime revelation could have existed. To the most beloved of the Apostles - now the only surviving one of the number; to him who had been a faithful laborer for a period not far from sixty years after the death of the Lord Jesus, who had been the bosom friend of the Saviour when in the flesh, who had seen Him in the mount of transfiguration, who had seen Him die, and who had seen Him ascend to heaven; to him who had lived while the Church was founded, and while it had spread into all lands; and to him who was now suffering persecution on account of the Saviour and His Cause, it was appropriate that such

communications should be made. In a lonely island; far away from the abodes of men; surrounded by the ocean, and amid barren rocks; on the day consecrated to the purposes of sacred repose, and the holy duties of religion - the day observed in commemoration of the resurrection of his Lord, it was most fit that the Redeemer should appear to the 'beloved disciple' in the last Revelation which He was ever to make to mankind. No more appropriate time or circumstance could be conceived for disclosing, by a series of sublime visions, what would occur in future times - for sketching out the history of the Church to the consummation of all things.'

THE SEVEN STARS AND THE SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS

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

1:20 The Lord Jesus speaks of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands as a "mystery" or secret, and in explaining their meaning He shows that they are symbols, and also that His relationship to them is a symbolic one.

The "*angels*" or messengers of the seven churches are evidently pastors and teachers whose commission is to spread the light of God's truth in the circle and area that surrounds them, while the lampstands each represent a Church of Jesus Christ supporting the pastors and teachers in the work of guiding and assisting the various assemblies and congregations for which they take responsibility. The understanding seems to be that the Lord Jesus upholds and directs such pastors and teachers, and watches over and cares for each Church in accordance with the faith and loyalty to Him of all pastors and teachers and all believing members.

The primary application of the lampstands and stars to seven congregations or churches existing in John's time would seem to be the basis of the interpretation to be followed. The number seven, as has been previously contended, denotes completeness, and seems to signify that the seven churches named in chapter one verse eleven were selected as representatives of the complete Church existing at that time.

As there were many more than seven assemblies and congregations in existence when John was commanded to write,

it does not seem reasonable to suppose that the seven messages recorded by John were intended for the seven Churches alone. The many other Churches existing in John's day would also need the exhortations, reproofs and encouragements contained in the messages.

By the time John wrote his messages, the Churches or congregations to which he wrote would certainly have contained both "wheat", true committed Christians, and "tares", mere professors without sincere commitment. This fact is revealed both from history and from the contents of the messages themselves. The "lampstands", therefore, would symbolise these Churches or assemblies as a whole, containing both committed and uncommitted members.

The whole vision of the lampstands describes the condition of all Churches or congregations since John's time.

THE SEVEN MESSAGES

There are also many reasons for concluding that while the messages were given to the seven Churches named, and were applicable to them, these messages nevertheless should properly have a still wider application to the whole Church of Jesus Christ, the number seven representing completeness, and the order of the messages representing different epochs in the history of the Church. Thus the Church at Ephesus would represent the condition of the whole Church at the time of John's writing, while the Church at Laodicea would represent the Church in our day, towards the end of the Gospel Age. The other Churches would correspondingly represent different intermediate epochs between John's day and ours.

As the history of the Christian Church has unfolded, light has increased, and believers can see more and more clearly that the seven messages to the Churches apply to all the Church throughout the entire Gospel Age. This application is plainly implied in the words of the Saviour addressed to each Church, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"*. These words are repeated seven times, and in each instance reference is made to all the Churches (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Not to understand the matter in this way would be to deprive the Church throughout the Age of the most edifying exhortations and warnings to the Church to be found in all the books of Scripture.

It is contended, therefore, that the exhortations, the warnings, the rebukes, the encouragements, and the promises contained in the messages apply in the following special ways:

1. To the seven particular Churches and their pastors and teachers existing at the time John wrote;
2. To all the Churches and their pastors and teachers of John's day scattered throughout the Roman Empire;
3. To the individuals belonging to all of these Churches;
4. To local Churches existing in every generation since John's day;
5. To individuals in the Churches existing in every generation since John's day;
6. In a prophetic sense they all apply to seven distinct periods or epochs of the Church since John's day;
7. In a very special sense to the period in which we find ourselves as Christians in the world today.

Each message consists of seven distinct parts:

1. An address: "*Unto the angel (messenger) ... write*";
2. Mention of one or more of the attributes of the speaker, Christ; a different one for each particular Church;
3. An assertion of Christ's complete knowledge of the sphere, duties and activities of the persons or Churches addressed;
4. A description of the state of each Church, and such words of praise and promise, or censure and admonition as each Church needed;
5. A reference by Christ to His promised return and the nature of it as far as the persons described are concerned;
6. A universal command to hear what is said to all the Churches;
7. A special promise to the ultimate victor or overcomer.

In the last four Churches, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, the order of succession of these seven divisions is different from the first three, Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos, and the call to "hear" the messages in the last four is placed after the promise to the "overcomer"; but in each message the seven divisions summarised above may be distinguished.

These seven divisions in each of the seven messages show that there is a fullness, a completeness about the whole, which in turn indicates that in their significance and application, the seven

messages ought not to be confined to the few particular Churches specifically addressed.

THE MESSAGES APPLY TO SEVEN DISTINCT EPOCHS

From the world's standpoint the Churches existing in John's day were of little importance. They were lightly esteemed or even despised by the people of the world in general. However neglected, despised or persecuted these Churches were, we see by these special messages of the Saviour to them that, imperfect as they were, they were considered of more importance in heaven than any organisation on earth, and had the first and chief place of all this world's organisations in the Saviour's love and esteem, as well as in the love and esteem of the Heavenly Father.

The fact of the very wide and general application of the rebukes, the warnings, the dangers and the evils pointed out, as well as the special words of comfort and promise to the overcomers to all generations of the Church's history, both individually and collectively, indicates the correctness of the extension of the messages to the Gospel Age Church throughout its history.

Furthermore, the facts of history themselves show beyond reasonable doubt that the peculiar characteristics as described which belong to each of these Churches fit exactly seven distinct, successive epochs of the history of the Gospel Age Church in the order mentioned. This fact confirms and establishes the prophetic character of the messages themselves.

The messages reveal to us the moral and spiritual condition of these primitive Churches. From the fact that they were founded by the Apostles, we might naturally assume that they would be perfect patterns and models of excellence, that they would be pure in morals and free from evils, false doctrines, and the defections we find later in the Church's history. However, as we examine the messages, we find that those early congregations were very much like the Churches that have existed in every generation since the time of the early Church.

There was as much to censure as there was to commend. There were loyal and true children of God, whose affections were centered on things above and whose citizenship was in heaven; but there were many whose love for Christ had lost its fervour, some whose affections were set on worldly things, others who had a name to live up to but were dead to a real knowledge and

example of the saving power of Christ; and still others who were proud, boastful, claiming to be rich and increased with goods, yet were so blind to spiritual riches that they are represented by the Saviour as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

With five of the Churches out of the seven, the Saviour finds serious fault. In one of these five, Laodicea, He finds nothing whatever to commend; and two alone, Smyrna and Philadelphia, are not especially reproved by the Saviour, though even these two find themselves in contact with elements which He severely condemns.

As we view these seven messages as descriptive of the entire Church, we find in them this item of fact that the Church, as pronounced upon by Christ Himself, is a mixed society, embracing inter-minglings of good and evil from beginning to end. Even in its first and purest periods, the Church was intermixed with elements that should not have pertained to it or have been associated with it. There was Judas among the Apostles, Ananias, Sapphira and Simon Magus among the Church's first converts, and Demas and Diotrophes among its first public servants.

As long as the Church continues in this world, Christ will have His Antichrist, and the temple of God its man of sin. Anyone who sets out to find a perfect congregation or church in which there are no unworthy elements and no blemishes will have a hopeless search. Satan, the arch-enemy of God, will see to it that his evil influence will infiltrate every gathering of the children of God to a greater or lesser degree.

The Saviour Himself has taught us that in the Gospel field, wheat and tares are to be found; that it is forbidden to pluck up the bad, lest the good also be damaged; and that both are to "*grow together until the harvest*", which marks the end period of the Gospel Age and the bringing to a close this present evil order of things.

CHAPTER 4

MESSAGES TO SEVEN CHURCHES REVELATION 2:1 - 3:22

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO EPHESUS

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

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

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

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

⁵*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

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

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

2:1 The Church at Ephesus was the first of the seven to be addressed by the Master. In His message to this Church, the Saviour is announced as the One Who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

2:2-4 Then, addressing the Church and its messenger, He describes the condition of this Church. These words are addressed to the angel or pastor of the Church at Ephesus, and through the pastor to the Church. Who will hear and heed the message? The Saviour Himself answers this question seven times in similar words to each of the seven churches: "*Let him who has an ear, hear what the Spirit says unto the churches (or congregations)*" (Revelation 2:7). The one who hears and gives heed to the message is the individual overcomer, the one who gives heed faithfully, and finally is chosen to inherit the promises and become one of the joint-heirs with Christ in the heavenly Kingdom.

The commendable characteristics found in Ephesus are works, labour, endurance, opposition to evil, faithfulness and firmness in discipline, cheerfulness in bearing burdens and a hatred of deeds and practices which Christ also hates. In spite of all these good qualities, the Church is given the solemn charge by the Saviour, "*Thou hast left thy first love*". What is meant by this most serious charge?

Ephesus was the first church addressed, and, as its name (meaning first or desirable) indicates, it possessed qualities and attributes that were indeed desirable. The church of Ephesus laboured and was patient and could not tolerate evil, yet it was Ephesus who was charged by the Saviour of leaving its first love. What is meant by "first love"? Is it love for the truth, love of proclaiming it, love for the work of service to others and evangelism, love of the Christian way of life? It seems that none of these is meant, because Ephesus did not fail in any of them.

The truth of the gospel was given to the Christians of Ephesus to develop in them a true and deep love of the Lord Jesus, to enable them to gain a close personal acquaintance with Christ Himself as an ever-present Saviour, Friend, Counsellor and Guide. "First love" is surely something beyond the love of the truth, love for the brethren, and the desire for service in connection with spreading the gospel message. It is love for the Lord Jesus Himself, love for what He has done for us, and love for His own sinless personality and character which mirror the Divine attributes. This is the highest form of love, and finds in Jesus its full and complete satisfaction. It finds expression in our desire and aim to please Him Who first loved us (1 John 4:19), and "*whom having not seen we love*" (1 Peter 1:8). All other forms and degrees of love are subservient to this, our "first love", that is, the most important love believers should gain and hold fast.

The loss of first love is the basis of all the regrettable developments in the mournful story of the decline and fall of the Church as prophesied in the Revelation. To leave one's first love in human relationships is to lose the closeness and higher emotional reaches of a loving union, and to open the way to immorality, insecurity and unsatisfying desires and practices. For the Church to leave her first love, Jesus Christ, is to open the way for apostasy and false doctrine to develop and flourish.

The danger of losing our first love is a very real one. We can allow the allurements and enticements of this world to distract us from obedience to the Lord Jesus' commands, and dull our spiritual perception. So also can trials and difficulties in our lives. The remedy for such distractions in the battlefield of the world is to resist the temptations and devices of the evil one, Satan, keep the gratitude and service to the Lord uppermost in our minds, and pray rather than faint or bewail our lot.

The test of first love is the complete satisfaction of the heart by the person or the object that is loved. We have all experienced the power of some new thing to take possession of our minds for a time. Love of the Lord Jesus takes possession of our hearts and minds, and should remain as our first love forever, because love for Him means we also love God Who sent Jesus into the world to redeem us and open the way for us and all people to life eternal. Only love for the Lord Jesus can bring us complete and lasting satisfaction of heart and mind.

I Will Remove Thy Lampstand

2:5 *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of his place, except thou repent."* These words of the Saviour are applicable not only to Ephesus but to all individuals and congregations who have acted as Ephesus did. Did Ephesus, the local Church of John's day, repent? History does not tell us, but we do know that later generations departed further and further away from the Saviour and drifted into apostasy. The lampstand was evidently removed.

The Deeds of the Nicolaitans

One special evil is mentioned by the Saviour as existing in Ephesus. His words are: *"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate"* (Revelation 2:6). The meaning of Nicolaitan, according to Dr. Strong, is "victorious over the people", being derived from the name Nikolaos, a heretic (reference numbers 3531 and 3532).

2:6 There is general agreement among Bible expositors concerning the nature of Nicolaitanism. It was a practice that started in Ephesus, and became a feature of doctrine in Pergamos, the third church to receive a message from Christ: *"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate"* (Revelation 2:15).

The two occurrences of the word "Nicolaitans" in Revelation 2:6 and 15 are the only occurrences in the Bible.

The "*doctrine of the Nicolaitans*" seems to be the theory and practice of lordship or headship in the Church. We know from Scripture as well as from church historians that hardly was the Church founded than it began to be troubled with the lordly pretensions and doings of arrogant men who set themselves over and above the body of believers, and claimed superiority and authority in clear contravention of the common priesthood that all believers possess.

Nicolaitanism became generally effective after the pagan persecutions ceased in 314 AD, and reached its fullest embodiment in Popery. It has been perpetuated in the Papal system and remains to this day, near the close of the Gospel Age, in that system and in High-Churchism.

The contention and strife in the early Church as to who should be greatest, existed among many of the patriarchs and fathers of the prominent churches. At ecclesiastical councils there were bitter fights for supremacy. The patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople and Rome were the most prominent. The first two dropped out of the conflict, but the strife continued for several hundred years between Constantinople and Rome. The strife was settled only by a division of the Church: the Eastern or Greek Church accepted as its head the Patriarch of Constantinople, while the Western or Papal Church acknowledged the Bishop of Rome or Pope as its head.

The word "Pope" is derived from the Latin and Old English word "papa" meaning "father". Many true followers of the Lord Jesus in the various churches denounced this disobedience of His command to "*call no man father*" (Matthew 23:9). These devout followers, of course, received the promised persecution mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 3:12. This class of believers in Pergamos is commended by the Lord under the symbol of "*Antipas my faithful martyr*" (Revelation 2:13). In Greek "anti" means "against" and "papas" signifies "father". In this stage of the development of the Christian Church those who became popular received the commendation and acceptance of the Church hierarchy. Such acceptance was not endorsed by the Lord Jesus, and as such would not endure, in contrast to the promise made to overcomers that their positions of honour and blessing are rewards eternal in heaven.

Nicolaitanism was only in its infancy when mentioned in the message to Ephesus, and, as has been said already, became a doctrine in Pergamos. The evil of Nicolaitanism has always existed in the Church since shortly after its establishment. Every reform movement in the Church since the apostles' day, every effort to return to simplicity of doctrine, church organisation and methods of service has in the course of time resulted in sectarianism and has left the faithful few in isolation. Nicolaitanism, that is, lording it over God's heritage, idolising messengers and human organisations, is responsible for these most regrettable outcomes.

Even today, as we move towards the close of the Gospel Age, we are still witnessing Nicolaitanism at work. We must all heed our Saviour's warnings, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"* (Revelation 2:7) and *"Take heed, that no man deceive you"* (Matthew 24:4). The worship of fallible men, of imperfect human systems, making idols of them and allowing them to occupy the place that Christ and Christ alone should occupy, has always been Satan's method of taking away the liberty that is in Christ Jesus, and thus marring the fellowship and the unity of what should be *"the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15).

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, reminds the sheep through His Word that they were called by Him out of bondage into liberty (John 8:31, 32). Jesus' Word reminds them that their Christian fellowship and unity are based on their relationship to Him as members of His Church, for all such are partakers of the one spirit, all are called in one hope of their calling to experience the one baptism into Christ and to trust in the one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

But in view of the dangers of Nicolaitanism, how should we regard brethren who strive to minister to the spiritual needs of believers? The Scriptures should, as always, be our guide. The Apostle wrote, *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Hebrews 13:7,8; RSV). Those we should look to and regard are those who have the glory of the Lord as the only object of their service to the saints. The Apostle further tells us, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1), and reminds us to be *"followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (Hebrews 6:12).

There is a marked difference between giving worship and homage to leaders on a personal level, and giving appreciation and love to them for their efforts to follow the Lord Jesus' commands. To give undue honour to a leader is to demonstrate, even perhaps unconsciously, a spirit of man-worship. But, on the other hand, to show appreciation for service rendered in a spirit of humility by a leader is to heed the Apostle's exhortation, *"Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account"* (Hebrews 13:17; RSV).

2:7 However we may be sure that there were individuals who heeded the words, *"let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"* and will inherit the promise given by the Saviour to the overcomer, *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God"*.

What does this promise mean? The paradise of God is surely a reference to God's promised kingdom, in which our earth will become a paradise of righteousness and peace to be occupied by the resurrected millions in the age to come. Our Lord refers to this paradise in language which identifies it with the first paradise in Eden saying, *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God"*. All but one of the trees in Eden were trees of life. In the midst of the garden, as we know, was a forbidden tree, the eating of its forbidden fruit bringing sin and death upon Adam and Eve and the whole human race.

That tree in the midst of paradise was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and our Lord's promise is that the overcomers of this present age shall have full liberty to partake of that which was prefigured by the tree of knowledge under the most joyful and satisfactory conditions, when the knowledge then gained will be of benefit and not bring a curse. It is this same paradise of the future on this earth that our Lord referred to when He said to the suffering and penitent thief, *"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). This paradise is the *"new heavens and a new earth"* declared by Peter in 2 Peter 3:13.

But, as contended earlier, the message of Christ to Ephesus is not restricted to the Church at Ephesus in John's day, but relates to the period or epoch in history that seems to be described by it. In regard to this, many expositors who apply the seven messages

to the churches to seven periods of church history are agreed that the message to Ephesus describes the condition of the Christian Church at approximately 100 AD, at which time the first of the seven historical periods was nearing its close.

The Ephesian period was a period of warmth and love and labour for Christ, dating directly from the Apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the beginning of undue exaltation of the clergy and church offices.

The "stars" in the right hand of the symbolic figure representing Christ in the vision are the messengers of the Churches. They may be understood to refer to:

- (1) the bishops or pastors of the seven Churches addressed in the vision;
- (2) all the bishops and pastors of all the churches in John's day; and
- (3) all the bishops and pastors of all the churches existing in the different periods or epochs of the Church's history.

From a study of Church history it would seem that at different periods, Christ has called different men, special men, to declare or emphasise truths that had been neglected, hidden, lost sight of, or truths due to be understood only at special epochs of the Gospel Age. As each of the exponents proclaimed such truths, light and understanding of the Scriptures gradually increased until the great truths such as salvation as a gift from God, justification by faith, the Plan of the Ages, the New Covenant, the Kingdom of God and the promised return of Jesus Christ came to be known and understood once again.

At this period of the Gospel Age, believers should still be aware of the spirit of Nicolaitanism, in that some leaders and Bible expositors are accorded positions of such regard and esteem that all matters of doctrine and interpretation are presumed to be settled by reference to their writings. The Scriptures are the sole rule by which all spiritual and moral issues must be settled. While various expositors may be helpful and worthy of study, we must strive to think for ourselves and not depend on them for our understanding.

We must do as Paul exhorts us, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:12,13.).

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO SMYRNA

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

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

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

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

The name "Smyrna" signifies myrrh, and is so translated in Matthew 2:11; Mark 15:23; and John 19:39. It is the name of an aromatic sap of a thorny tree, and has a rather pleasant but bitter taste. It was one of the ingredients of the holy ointment (Exodus 30:23), and was used by the ancients in the embalming of the dead. The use of myrrh for sacred purposes, and its association with death and ideas relating to resurrection, seems to suggest it as symbolic of something pleasing to God.

2:8 Smyrna was a Church persecuted to death, a Church of bitter suffering, but yet agreeable and precious to the Lord. The words of the Saviour "*which was dead and is alive*" seem intended to be a reminder to the Church of His own sufferings, death and resurrection, making the hope of sharing in the promised first resurrection reassuring and sustaining.

2:9 There are no complaints or rebukes in the message to Smyrna and its "angel" or messenger, and the only words of praise are "*but thou art rich*". There is contained in the message the allegation that there were some in the Church who were of the "*synagogue of Satan*", thus showing that they, like Ephesus, were tried by false teaching.

The Period of Persecution

In the prophetic application of the seven messages, Smyrna depicts the period of Pagan Roman persecution during the second and third centuries. A study of history shows that the message to Smyrna fits this period, which lasted from the persecution by Domitian, (Roman Emperor from AD81 to 96), which persecution was already in progress when John saw his visions, until the reign of Constantine some two centuries later.

The wide-spread power of Pagan Rome, when used against Christianity, left little room for escape to believers who confessed the name of Christ.

The Saviour mentions that He is fully aware of the persecutions and trials of His faithful followers. His words are, "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty*". These words imply that Smyrna was a poor church as far as worldly goods were concerned, and was continually attacked and persecuted. Such a church could hardly be expected to accomplish much in spreading the Gospel. All that could be looked for in this Church would be steadfastness and loyalty to the Lord, and the development of spiritual graces, the true riches. The Lord Jesus commends the believers of the Smyrna period for their richness in spiritual graces in the face of their worldly poverty.

2:10 From the prophetic standpoint, the message singles out one particular, special period of persecution during this period. This is referred to in the words, "*The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days*". According to these words, Smyrna was to have a period of tribulation lasting ten prophetic days, that is, ten years (Ezekiel 4:6, "*I have appointed thee each day for a year*" and Numbers 14:34, "*each day for a year*"). Nearly all Biblical commentators agree in applying this prophecy to the persecutions that raged most fearfully during the ten years from the decree of Diocletian in 303 AD to the Edict of Milan by Constantine in 313 AD.

Those who have read the history of this period can grasp the significance of the words, "*that ye may be tried*". Some of the most sublime acts of Christian endurance that the world has ever seen took place during the Smyrna period of the Church. The call to the believers was for faithfulness unto death, and the promise was that the overcomers "*shall not be hurt of the second death*", and will receive the "*crown of life*", surely joint-heirship with Christ in the heavenly places.

It is a curious fact of history that one of the pagan emperors of the second century, Marcus Aurelius (121 - 180 AD), although highly respected and even exalted for his wisdom and virtue by secular writers, was unjustly and unjustifiably prejudiced against Christians and Christianity. The ecclesiastical historian, Mosheim, writes of him in these terms:

"It is not in his conduct toward the Christians that we must look for the reasons of these pompous encomiums; for, here the clemency and justice of that emperor suffer a strange eclipse ... Without examining impartially their cause, he lent an easy and attentive ear to the most virulent insinuations of their enemies, especially to the malignant calumnies of the (heathen) philosophers, who accused them of the most horrid crimes ... So that, if we except that of Nero, there was no reign under which the Christians were more injuriously and cruelly treated, than under that of the wise and virtuous (?) Marcus Aurelius ... This emperor issued against the Christians, whom he regarded as a vain, obstinate, and vicious set of men, edicts, which upon the whole, were very unjust ... in consequence of these imperial edicts, the judges and magistrates received the accusations which even slaves and the vilest of the perjured rabble brought against the followers of Jesus; and the Christians were put to the most cruel tortures and were condemned to meet death in the most barbarous forms, notwithstanding their perfect innocence, and their persevering and solemn denial of the horrid crimes laid to their charge. The imperial edicts were so positive and express against inflicting punishment upon such of the Christians as were guilty of no crime, that the corrupt judges, who, through motives of interest or popularity, desired their destruction, were obliged to suborn false accusers to charge them with actions that might bring them within the reach of the laws. Hence many fell victims to cruel superstition and popular fury, seconded by the corruption of a wicked magistracy, and the connivance of a prince (Marcus Aurelius), who, with respect to one set of men, forgot those principles of justice and clemency which directed his conduct toward all others. Among these victims, there were many men of illustrious piety, and some of eminent learning and abilities, such as the holy and venerable Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Justin Martyr, so deservedly renowned for his erudition and philosophy." (J.L. Mosheim: An Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1, pp.80,81.)

The footstep followers of the Lord Jesus encountered many and terrible trials during the period from John's day, about 100 AD to the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. The last ten years of this period, as already said, constituted the "ten days" of tribulation mentioned in this message to Smyrna.

2:10 The words of the Master, "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer, ... Be thou faithful unto death*", were in the possession of Christ's suffering ones during those trying

years, and it was customary to have those messages read in the Churches. We should realise and understand that the Saviour did not promise His followers exemption from suffering. His followers understood, and today they still understand, that to follow in His footsteps, and to testify of Him will bring suffering and persecution to a greater or lesser degree.

The words of the Master, *"Be thou faithful unto death"*, meant to the Smyrna Church literal martyrdom. To all sincere Christians, whether suffering martyrdom or not, the same injunction and the same promise of a *"crown of life"* are applicable. Faithfulness to Christ until death, no matter how and when death may come, will bring the *"crown of life"*, joint-heirship with Jesus Christ in the heavenly places. The overcomer is one who by faith realises the sustaining power of Christ and the gospel at all times, under all conditions, in all circumstances, whether in times of persecution or otherwise, and who will not compromise his or her principles when opposed or persecuted, even though the taking of a stand for Christ may be in the face of death.

The promise of a heavenly inheritance was all that was necessary to sustain the suffering believers of Smyrna in their severe trials. The same promise should also sustain us and make the burdens of our life tolerable, knowing that when our time comes, when we reach the end of our earthly journey, life eternal beyond the grave, in the heavenly places, awaits us, and that beyond the grave we shall never again fear death in any form, and no power can threaten or harm us ever again.

The Synagogue of Satan

2:9 Persecution unto death was not the only trial that the believers of the Smyrna period had to endure. Christ says *"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan"*. The title "Jews" should be understood as the Apostle Paul indicates in Romans 2:

²⁸*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:*

²⁹*But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

The people of natural Israel after Christ's death and resurrection were no longer God's chosen people. In the new dispensation, the Gospel Age, God is selecting or *"taking out"* *"a people for His name"*, a people consisting of a remnant of Christian converts

from the Jewish nation, combined with believing Gentiles. Together they make up the Israel of God of Galatians 6:16. This new Israel is a spiritual people, a people of faith, not a people of fleshly descent.

Those who "*say they are Jews and are not*" would seem to apply to the large numbers who began to identify themselves with the Christian profession, but who were really false professors and hypocrites, "*tares*" growing among the "*wheat*" of true believers in the Smyrna period. Such false professors claimed to be Christians but were not, and were instrumental in bringing about decline in Christian worship, leading to apostasy and emphasis on forms and ceremonies rather than sincere worship with heart and mind.

Such developments led to the growth of a priestly hierarchy as necessary mediators between God and His professed people. The outcome of this growth was a teaching and practice that, if it were possible, would rob God's people of their place and standing with God in Jesus Christ, the One and Only Mediator between God and all people. This teaching, as well as the practice of a priestly class of mediators, has caused true Christianity and true Christian experience to be hidden from vast numbers of professing Christians and from the world. In this also we can observe a triumph of Satan, who has been a powerful influence in establishing in the Christian Church a form of godliness which lacks the power true godliness should have.

The title "*synagogue of Satan*" describes concisely the gradual change that took place in the outward manifestation of Christianity in the second and third centuries, a change which has continued from then until our time. The word "synagogue" means "an assemblage of persons" (Strong's reference 4864), and can mean also the meeting place. Synagogue is a Jewish word designating an assembly of Jews under the old dispensation. "Church" or "Ecclesia" (Strong's reference 1577) is a Christian word, and denotes an assembly of "called out" ones belonging to the Body or Church of Jesus Christ.

The "*synagogue of Satan*" therefore in the Smyrna period would seem to imply the development and the establishment in the Church of certain forces and influences corresponding in character and results to the Judaizing teachers of Paul's day, who sought to bring Christians under bondage to the Law and to

forms and ceremonies, and thus perverting the Christian faith, robbing it of its true emphasis and the power of godliness.

It was in this period of Church history that the second step was taken in the direction of apostasy. The first step had been taken in the Ephesus period, that of Nicolaitanism, the exaltation of and submission to earthly leaders who really led people away from acknowledging the true Leader and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and causing the Church to drift away from Him, and thus be rebuked for leaving its first love.

The second step taken in Smyrna was the introduction of set forms and ceremonies that gradually took the place of simple worship that was common in the little assemblies of the Apostles' day. The formalities and ritual over time led to a religion of ceremonies, penances, fasts, masses, formal prayers, vigils, monasticism and bodily affliction, and it came to be alleged and taught that observance of such teachings and practices would secure salvation. These formal religious teachings and practices developed very rapidly in the next, the Pergamos period, and reached their fullest development in Thyatira, the fourth period of Church history.

2:11 The Saviour concludes the message to Smyrna with the usual exhortation, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"*. This is an indication to us that the message applies not only to the Smyrna period but to all times. The very last words are, *"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death"*. The Diaglott renders this passage, "The Conqueror shall not be injured by the Second Death". The meaning seems to be that those who are overcomers in this Gospel Age, having successfully made their calling and election sure and remaining faithful unto death, will then be made free by God's mercy and grace from all liability to failure and from all liability to the Second Death penalty. They will have "put on" immortality and incorruptibility, and be beyond the power of death and therefore incapable of being hurt or injured by the Second Death.

Thus, in the message to Smyrna, we see depicted in prophecy the era of martyrdom under Pagan Rome, during which era faithfulness unto death was abundantly shown by Christ's true followers, a witness and testimony, resistance unto blood, all of which will be rewarded in His due time by the Lord God, the Righteous Judge.

The Smyrna period was also marked with further developments of defection on the part of some, a defection which resulted in perversion of the faith, and in departure from the holy and primitive simplicity of Church order and practice instituted by our Lord and His chosen Apostles. The defection thus begun in Smyrna has led in our day, towards the close of the Gospel Age, to the system and practice of Clericalism, that is, the power of the clergy over ordinary people, and the influence of the clergy in political and secular government.

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO PERGAMOS

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:12 The name "Pergamos" signifies "fortified" or "height", suggesting that the Church addressed is established in a fortified or high position. The name well describes the condition of the Church in Pergamos, as well as the Church in that period of history which followed Constantine's Edict of Milan in AD313.

The Saviour's words to Pergamos indicate the fortified and high position, as far as the world is concerned, of the Pergamos Church, "*I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is ...*". Satan is described as "*the god of this world*" in 2 Corinthians 4:4, so we can reasonably assume that the Pergamos Church became associated with the world and worldly aspirations.

There have been some interesting suggestions by writers on the Revelation concerning the significance of the word "Pergamos". F.W. Grant in his book 'The Revelation of Christ' writes: 'It is remarkable that the word "Pergamos" has a double significance. In the plural form, it is used for the 'citadel of a town', while it is at least near akin to pergos, 'a tower'. Again, divide it into two words into which it naturally separates, and you have per, 'although'" a participle which 'usually serves to call attention to something which is objected to' (Liddell & Scott), and gamos, 'marriage', Pergamos - 'a marriage though'. It was indeed by the marriage of the Church and the world that the 'city and tower' of (symbolic) Babylon the Great was raised; and such are the times we are now to contemplate (in this message of Christ).'

Joseph Seiss in his 'Lectures on Apocalypse' comments that 'contemporaneous with the flowering of Nicolaitanism was another influential and characterizing feature manifested in the Church, of which the name Pergamos itself is significant - a certain marriage with worldly power, which the Saviour pronounces as adulterous, idolatrous, and Balaamitic ... Its development is located in the period immediately succeeding the Pagan persecutions (the days of Constantine the Great, and of the emperors succeeding), when the Church, according to all historians, sacred and secular, did consent to one of the most marked and marvellous alliances that has occurred in all its history. We know that there was then formed a union between the Church and the empire, which the fall of that empire hardly dissolved, and which has been perpetuated in the union of church and state in the greater part of Christendom, down to this very hour. It was an alliance cried up at the time, and by many since, as the realization of the Millennium itself, and the great consummating victory of the cross. But Christ here gives His verdict upon it, pronouncing it an idolatrous uncleanness; Israel joining himself to Baal-peor; a fearful and disastrous compromise of Christianity with the world, which disfigured and debauched the Church.'

Another eminent Christian writer, A.J. Gordon, in his work 'Ecce Venit' describes this period in Church history: 'When the Church under Constantine became enthroned in the world, she began to be dethroned from her seat "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." For then did she forget her high calling, and became enamoured of earthly rule and dominion. This, let us not forget, was the fatal temptation through which the Church lost her primitive purity, and brought upon herself all manner of dishonour

and apostasy. What a tender, prophetic warning of such temptation is contained in that saying of Paul to the Corinthian Christians: *"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."* (2 Corinthians 11:2) In the world, but not of it, the Church, the Bride of Christ, was to await the return of her betrothed Husband from heaven, that, arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; which is the righteousness of saints, she might be presented to Him a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. If, during the time of her espousal, Satan could only alienate her affections by getting her enamoured with the kings of the earth, so that she should accept their dowries instead of her heavenly inheritance, and put on their royal purple instead of her virgin white, his triumph would be assured. And this is literally what he did.'

The temptation to which the professed Church succumbed, namely worldly honour and praise, was the same temptation made by Satan to the Lord Jesus; *"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me"* (Matthew 4:8,9; RSV). This was the alluring prize set before our Lord by Satan. But Jesus resisted and rejected Satan's beguiling temptation, saying, *"Be gone Satan! for it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve"* (Matthew 4:10; RSV).

The Lord Jesus knew that God would give Him the very prize that Satan offered. The Psalmist had written centuries before, *"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"* (Psalm 2:8,9). *"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"* (Psalm 110:1).

The subtlety of Satan's temptation lay in the prospect that Jesus would gain dominion over the world by a simple act of worship, and would not have to suffer the rejection, humiliation and anguish of His trial, public mockery, scourging and final crucifixion. But Jesus remained true and obedient to His

Heavenly Father's will, saying to Satan that God and God alone was to be worshipped.

God's will was that Jesus should first suffer and then reign. Jesus had to die and shed His blood to ransom and redeem the human race. If He had succumbed to Satan's temptation He would have sinned, and we human beings would all be lost without a Ransomer and Redeemer. But our Saviour was true to His Heavenly Father, true to His Church, and true to His human creation by suffering and laying down His life. The second or "last Adam" resisted and rejected for ever the temptation of the old serpent.

Pergamos Yields to Fatal Temptation

The Church, which had come through the terrible sufferings of the Smyrna period, was now to have another trial, not so violent and physically threatening, but severe nevertheless. This trial consisted in a test of loyalty to her Divine Master in an era when persecution and threats of death by violent means had ceased.

The Church in these earlier times held to the belief that the Lord Jesus' return to earth was near. The historian, Edward Gibbon, referred to the effect that the belief in Christ's second advent had upon His followers for two centuries in these words: "It was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians, who lived in expectation of that moment when the globe itself and all the various races of mankind should tremble at the appearance of the Divine Judge."

The terrible persecutions which the Christians endured in the long period from Domitian to Diocletian had the effect of keeping alive the hope of the second advent. The constant threat to life on earth made the prospect of heavenly inheritance more longed for and dear to Christ's devoted followers.

But to some, the hope of the Lord's second advent had begun to fade, and in the years when persecutions ceased, many of the true followers of the Lord were, at least for a time, deceived by the arch-enemy, Satan. When the political controversies and wars in the Roman Empire were settled, and Constantine ascended the throne, the new trial of peaceful conditions was encountered. Constantine, influenced greatly by worldly policies and considerations, became the patron of the professed Church of Christ, and sent forth an imperial decree that all persecution should cease. The followers of Christ, those who were true and

those who professed without sincere commitment enjoyed the cessation of persecution. The chief test to the Church was the way in which members would respond to imperial patronage, having borne the test of imperial persecution. It would seem that those who remained true to the Lord and were rich in spiritual graces, and who resisted the temptation of worldly honour and lordship over God's people, would constitute the overcomers of the Pergamos period.

A great change in Christianity took place in this period. The prospect of heavenly citizenship was gradually replaced by an emphasis on earthly desires and worldly ritualistic and ceremonial practices, derived to a large extent from pagan practices. Spiritual worship was replaced by carnal superstitions. Satan, who had tempted the Church into accepting earthly honours and lordship, now seduced the Church into mixing pagan ritual and ceremonial with simple and spiritual services.

We should always remember and appreciate that paganism is really demonism. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils"* (1 Corinthians 10:20). Little by little the elements of paganism began to mingle with the worship of Christ; holy water, candles, wafers, images, processions, the worship of saints and relics as well as worship of the cross itself and the image of the crucifix; all of which had their origins in the practices of devil-worship.

2:13 Although the Church as a whole yielded to Satan's subtle temptations, there was still preserved a faithful company who were not deceived and not misled. This faithful company is referred to and addressed by the Saviour under the symbol of *"Antipas my faithful martyr who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth"*.

In Greek "anti" means "against", and "papas" means "father". The true followers of Jesus bore witness against this disobedience to Jesus' command *"Call no man father"* (Matthew 23:9). It was during this period of Church history that the Church gradually merged into the Papacy. A prominent feature of the Papacy is that of enforcing celibacy on the clergy, declaring them to be married to the Church, and teaching all its adherents to call the members of the clergy "father".

The Sin of Balaam in Pergamos

2:14 *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."*

The meaning of Balaam according to Dr. Strong is "not of the people, that is, a foreigner" (Hebrew 1109) and "symbolic of a false teacher" (Greek 903).

Balaam seems to have been at one time a prophet, at least outwardly near to the Lord. His true character is revealed by Jude in his description of some teachers of his time, so early in the Gospel Age, of whom he writes, they *"ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward"*. (Jude 11). Balaam, it seems, was a prophet who forsook his rightful duties. He instructed King Balak how to tempt Israel to sin, and brought about what he could not himself accomplish. Balaam's sin was that for payment he consulted with the enemies of Israel, the Moabites, and advised their king Balak to draw the Israelites into forbidden friendships as well as adulterous and idolatrous alliances, the result of which was that *"twenty-four thousand were destroyed"* (Numbers 25:9). The event is recorded in Numbers 22:23, 24; and 31:16.

The sin of Balaam evidently refers to the acts of professing Christian teachers and clerics who advised union of the Church with the State, and a mingling of God's professed people in worldly gatherings, feasts and pleasures.

As far as individual believers are concerned, they may be drawn away for a time by fleshly desires and weaknesses from heavenly and spiritual devotion, and subsequently may be delivered and brought back by repentance and seeking pardon from the Lord. But it is a fact revealed by history that a church, which has in similar fashion departed from spiritual values, never recovers. There may be reform movements from time to time, but these are always more or less partial. The Church as a whole in the age of Constantine fell away to the world, and there has never since been a full recovery.

The Christian's call and duty is to be separate from the world and worldliness. It is difficult to define worldliness and draw a line to mark where worldliness begins. The Apostle John gives us some guidance here. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not*

in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John 2:15,16).

As the Christian walks close to the Lord, and enjoys fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ, he or she soon senses what is worldly, and the sensibilities of his or her inner spiritual mind discern what is worldly and what is not. The Christian must live and move in the world, but must not be of the world, that is, the Christian must not follow or desire worldly pursuits such as those mentioned in 1 John 2:16. John also tells us how we can overcome the world and be victorious over worldly desires and temptations. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4).*

The matter of the Christian's call and duty to separate himself or herself from the world is well illustrated in Pharaoh's four subtle objections to the complete deliverance of God's ancient people from the land of Egypt. Pharaoh's first objection is expressed in his words to Moses, *"Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land"* (Exodus 8:25). The object of Pharaoh's proposal, no doubt instigated by Satan, was to hinder full obedience to the Lord's command to separate entirely from Egypt and its evil, idolatrous influences. Moses' reply to Pharaoh was, *"It is not meet to do so; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as he shall command us"* (Exodus 8:26,27).

If we think of the Israelites' separation from Egypt as an illustration of the Christian's separation from this *"present evil world"* (Galatians 1:4), we may think of the Israelites' *"three days' journey into the wilderness"* as our Christian journey from the world's temptations and allurements to a life of faith separate from sin and worldliness as we walk in newness of life.

Pharaoh modified his first objection to Israel's departure in his second proposal. *"I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away"* (Exodus 8:28). This indicates that if Pharaoh could not keep the Israelites in Egypt, he would at least keep them near it, so that he might influence them and bring them back again. In this may be discerned the danger to Christians of seeming to

leave the world then returning to it again. Such a return to the world would do serious damage to the cause of Christ, and would place the salvation of any believer, seeming to prefer earthly to heavenly things, in serious jeopardy.

The third objection of Pharaoh was to the Israelites taking their children with them (Exodus 10:9-11). We may draw a lesson from this that we, who are of the Israel of God, should strive to bring up our children in *"the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4) encouraging them to stay with us in the Christian walk.

Pharaoh's fourth objection was to the Israelites taking their flocks and herds. Moses' reply to Pharaoh's final attempt to cause the Lord's people to compromise may be taken as an illustration of our consecration. The Lord requires us to devote ourselves to Him, and all that we possess. Moses said, *"Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind"* (Exodus 10: 25-27). It is only when God's people take their stand for Christ by faith that they come to understand the claims consecration makes on them. Moses' words *"We know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither"* seem to illustrate that we do not fully comprehend God's claim on us, or our responsibility, until we have figuratively gone *"three days' journey into the wilderness"*. Only then do we know that *"we are not our own; we are bought with a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

2:15, 16 Nicolaitanism was defined and discussed in the message to Ephesus. In the Ephesus message it is called *"the deeds of the Nicolaitans"*, and was seen by the Ephesians to be an evil, hated by the Saviour. In comments on that period, Nicolaitanism was seen as a tendency toward lordship in the Church, separating the Lord's people into two classes, the clergy and the laity. In Smyrna the tendency developed under the title *"synagogue of Satan"*, and in Pergamos Nicolaitanism had become a doctrine, namely clericalism, the lordship of the clergy, and spiritual fornication, that is, the participation of the clergy in secular and political affairs.

The Hidden Manna and the White Stone

2:17 The conditions in which those in Pergamos found themselves still exist in our day. The exhortations, the warnings and the promises applicable to them, are applicable also to us today. Christ's promise to those in Pergamos is twofold. *"To him*

that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

The manna that fell in the wilderness, which provided food for Israel, prefigured the Lord Jesus. He said to the Jews, "*Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*" (John 6: 49-51). The Lord Jesus is our spiritual food. He has died for us and lives for us at God's right hand.

The "*white stone*" on the other hand, speaks of the close relationship that exists between Christ and the individual believer. In ancient times, the Greeks and the Romans had a custom of noting and perpetuating friendship by means of a white stone. The stone was cut in half and each person wrote his name on the flat surface, then the parts or halves were exchanged. The production of either half was sufficient to gain friendly aid, even from the descendants of those who first divided the stone. A similar custom was sometimes observed by kings, who would break a white stone in half, one half of which he would retain, and the other part would be given to an ambassador. The ambassador's part could be sent to the king at any time and would ensure aid. Thus the divided stone became a mark of identification.

Revelation 2:17 seems to refer to this ancient custom. The white stone signifies a precious token of the Lord's love, and the new name written on the stone suggests the name of the Bridegroom. The figure indicates the special relationship between the King of Kings and the individual believer. The overcomers are not to be recognised only as a class, but each will have the personal favour of the Lord. Of this no-one will know save himself or herself and the King. The mark of identification seems to be the sealing of the Holy Spirit, by which the Lord identifies the overcomers.

The manna eaten in the wilderness, then, represents Christ Himself and our understanding and appreciation of what He has done for us and what He is to us; while the white stone is a figure of His gracious acknowledgment of us now and in the time to come.

It is significant to notice, however, that the promise of the text is the "*hidden manna*". The hidden manna was that placed by God's command in the Ark of the Covenant and carried into the promised land, so that subsequent generations might be reminded of the bread miraculously provided by God to feed the Israelites in the barren wilderness. This hidden manna was not eaten, but the Lord promises the overcomer that he shall eat of it. To eat of the hidden manna would seem to mean to partake of Christ, the "*bread of life*" (John 6:48) and thus gain immortality and incorruptibility through faith in Him and God Who sent Him to die for us.

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO THYATIRA

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

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

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

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

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

²³*And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:18 The symbolic description "*These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire*", seems to indicate the all-seeing eyes of the Lord Jesus, Who is able to see

beneath the surface, and discern the true nature of the Church of Thyatira. His feet *"like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace"* (Revelation 1:15) seems to refer to the path of fiery and demanding trials in which the Lord Jesus walked in obedience to His Heavenly Father.

The Lord Jesus' obedience to His Father, even to the death of the cross, qualified Him to receive all that the Father had promised Him, and enabled Him to sit in judgment on all peoples of the earth. *"The Father ... hath committed all judgment unto the Son"* (John 5:22), and severe judgment on the Church of Thyatira is about to be made according to the prophetic vision.

When the message to Thyatira is considered from the prophetic standpoint, the period of application is the period following that of Pergamos, when the professed Church enjoyed the patronage of the professed Christian emperors from 313 AD until 539 AD, in which year the Bishop of Rome was declared superior to all other bishops in the Christian Church, and the Papacy was set up.

By means of the doctrines of Nicolaitanism (lordship over the people), and Balaamism (world affiliation), which characterised those times, all kinds of corrupting elements were introduced, and the professed Church merged into complete apostasy. Richard Trench, in his work entitled "The Seven Epistles of Asia Minor", writes: "For such Protestant expositors as see the Papacy in the scarlet woman of Babylon, the Jezebel of Thyatira appears exactly at the right time, coincides with the Papacy at its height, yet at the same time, with judgment at the door, in the great revolt (the sixteenth century Reformation) which was even then preparing."

The Reign of the Worldly Church

2:19-21 The Thyatira period of Church history is fittingly referred to by some writers as the period of the reign of the world-church, thus distinguishing it from the previous Pergamos period in which the Church was progressively uniting with the world.

The most fitting event to mark the beginning of the Thyatira period would seem to have occurred in the year 539 AD, when, by a decree of Justinian, the Roman Emperor residing at Constantinople, the Bishop of Rome was made head of all the Churches of Christendom.

In the Pergamos period, the Roman Emperor was made president of the Church councils and confirmer of their decrees and creeds, thus bringing the community of saints into conjunction with the world, the throne of Satan. Pagan ideas and practices were transferred to Christian worship, heathen rites and ceremonies became admixed with Christian services and worship, the most notable being the simplicity of the Lord's Supper superseded and replaced by the formularies of the mass. The professed Bride of Christ was transformed by union with the heathen world into a queenly adulteress, the mother of harlots, as we shall see in Revelation 17 and onwards.

In all recorded history, there is not another character which so fittingly represents the Papal system in its nature, works and worship as Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. Jezebel of the Old Testament was a heathen married to a Jew, and such is the character of the Papal system in its main elements: Paganism united with what ought to be the true Israel, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Jezebel is described as calling herself a prophetess teaching God's servants, and is also described as having children, who, alike with her, are unsatisfactory to Christ.

The Book of Revelation in chapter 2, verses 20 to 25, and chapter 18 verse 7, pictures Queen Jezebel as representing a great religious system of the Gospel Age which did great violence to the truth. Ahab, King of Israel, represents earthly governments, while his wife, Jezebel, represents a false Christian Church system married to earthly governments. As Ahab represents worldly governments which claimed for centuries to be Christ's Kingdom, so Jezebel pictures a false church system which, instead of maintaining its purity as the virgin Bride of Christ, became married or united to worldly governments. As the prophets of Baal were under the care of Queen Jezebel and under the patronage of King Ahab (1 Kings chapters 16 to 22), so the priests and the religious representatives of the church systems during the Gospel Age have been the obedient servants of the great false institutions pictured by Ahab and Jezebel.

The chief evil mentioned concerning the Jezebel of Thyatira, and the prime cause of all the other evils mentioned, is that Jezebel "*calleth herself a prophetess*". The Papal Church still claims and professes, although not so openly or vociferously these days, to be the only infallible teacher of God's truth. The Papacy claims to hold to the Scriptures as well as to be their sole true interpreter,

and in so doing also claims to be able to override them or add to them as it may see fit.

Rome has been open and frank in these claims, and has not attempted to conceal or dilute them. None of the Lord's people, however, need be deceived or led astray. Rome, the Papacy, is condemned in the strongest terms by the very Scriptures she claims to uphold. She is called "*the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth*" (Revelation 17:5), and it is said that by her "*sorceries were all nations deceived*" (Revelation 18:23), and that she caused all that dwelt upon the earth to "*worship him (the Papal beast) whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb*" (Revelation 13:8).

The Lord's people need to be aware of Rome's unscriptural teachings and practices, many of which still exist in Protestantism, and not be deceived or led astray by them. These teachings and practices, often in modified forms, may be accepted and even endorsed unconsciously by the Lord's people, or even set aside and ignored, if the Lord's people drift into complacency and allow their minds to become clouded, and fail to "*test everything; hold fast what is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; RSV). Wherever the teaching of a church, of a religious organisation, of a creed or creeds, of a man or woman (other than the inspired writers), is maintained as authoritative and binding on believers in Christ, even here the origin may be the voice of Jezebel, the woman who called herself a prophetess, leading people away from "*the simplicity that is in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

The Scriptures, the Word of God, must be the source from which every matter must be decided and settled for the committed Christian. Creeds and the writings of fallible human beings take away from recourse to Scripture, and become themselves the only source of appeal. Defects and errors in creeds and writings are maintained as thoroughly as whatever truth is in them, so that the Scripture is displaced from its rightful position of supremacy over human thought and conduct. Sincere, committed Christians understand that in the acknowledgment of the supremacy of creeds and fallible writings, human opinion is substituted for Divine instruction and guidance. Creeds and fallible human treatises do not admit the processes of testing and examination. They must simply be received without question.

But Scripture, the Word of God, submits to any and every test in the assurance that the more complete the test, the more the Scripture will be seen to substantiate its claim to be the truth from God Himself.

It was the departure from the Scriptures, losing sight of the Word of God, that caused the professed Church of God to succumb to all the evils symbolised in the words *"to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols"*. These evils began in Pergamos then developed and eventually prevailed in Thyatira to such an extent that the professed Church became apostate. The Word of God was still honoured in Pergamos, and had its faithful witnesses who testified against Nicolaitanism and Balaamism. But in Thyatira, under the influence of the symbolic Jezebel, the Word of God became neglected and submerged under false teachings and unauthorised practices.

Thou Sufferest That Woman Jezebel

It is Jezebel's teaching and doctrine that prevails in Thyatira, the period of Church history that lasted from 539 AD until the Protestant Reformation began in earnest in 1517 AD. During these centuries of apostasy there were here and there believers in the true doctrine. These believers, including the symbolic angel or messenger of Thyatira, seemed unwilling or unable to testify and witness against Jezebel as they ought to have done, because we read of the Saviour saying to these, *"I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols"*.

Concerning the small, despised, humble, local assemblies of believers such as the Waldensians, the Albigenses and the Anabaptists, we should keep in mind that they are singled out in the Thyatira message, and that neither the Jezebel system nor her adherents are included among them. By understanding this, we can better appreciate the Lord's testimony concerning what He found commendable in them. We know very little of the quiet and hidden lives of many, who, in the days of Roman arrogance, pride and tyranny, walked humbly and in secret with God through Jesus Christ. It is comforting and reassuring to know that, in the day of His appearing, He will openly acknowledge them as His own. They are not forgotten, those who were dishonoured by an apostate Church, and who remain nameless to us, their *"works, and love, and service, and faith, and patience"* are remembered

by God, and those humble and patient believers who endured and remained faithful until death will be rewarded in God's due time.

Here we may see the significance of the words in 2:19 *"and thy works; and the last to be more than the first"*. The first works would be the maintaining of faith and devotion to the Lord in the face of hostility and persecution unto death; while the last works, which are *"more than the first"*, would be the works promised to overcomers, works of the future, living and reigning with Christ for the blessing of all the families of the earth (Revelation 20:4).

When we study the history of the dark days of Thyatira, we are able to discover a growth in courage of the patient believers during those centuries. As light increased and significant discoveries were made, such as the printing press, people here and there began to see the errors and apostasy of Rome, and began to take a bolder and more public stand against it. The seeds of the Protestant Reformation began to be sown, and gradually the testimony against Rome and separation from her became more evident. The spirit and action of separation is very significant, because we see in this the Lord's rebuke of His saints, their tolerance of the woman Jezebel without making any protest against her teachings.

The professing Church during these long centuries was hopelessly apostate, and it would seem vain and useless for the Lord's true believers to testify against its false claims. Nevertheless some did so testify, and it was the giving of such testimony in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, that the great Protestant Reformation had its beginnings. It is true that only the simple foundation truths of the Gospel were proclaimed, but these had to be brought to light to lay the basis for later and deeper truths to be re-discovered; and the facts of history show that wherever these great foundation truths were proclaimed, God raised up noble defenders who rallied around the truths and those who proclaimed them.

From the historical and prophetic standpoint, we see in the seven messages to the Churches that there has been a steady decline on the part of professed Christianity, and in the period represented by Thyatira, apostasy is reached. From this lamentable condition, as history informs us, every effort towards reformation has been only partially successful. The sixteenth century Reformation accomplished wonders in releasing

individuals and indeed whole nations from Papal bondage, but even this failed to restore simple, basic Christianity. The movement has eventually resulted in many Protestant sects, which are now so influenced by evolutionary theory, immortality inherent in the individual, Trinitarian doctrine, Higher Criticism and preoccupation with social activities that the life-giving truths of the Scriptures are not to be found there.

In Thyatira our eyes are not looking more toward the past but toward the future. There is no more the call to repentance and doing the first works, the word is now *"I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not"*. The word "space", according to Dr. Strong (reference 5550) means "a space of time", by extension "an opportunity" and by implication "a delay". The time or opportunity to repent is indefinite, but the fact that "she repented not" reveals to us that the opportunity of repentance has passed, and only judgment remains.

2:22 We next have described in strong and rather startling symbolic language the threatened judgment on Jezebel and her children. *"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins (minds RSV and NIV) and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."*

Applying this language symbolically, which seems the only proper way, the "bed" would not be a bed of ease and rest but a bed of sickness and pain. The harlot's bed of ease and a bed of sickness which usually follows are thus contrasted. The same contrast is brought out in the vision of the final destruction of the Jezebel system called in Revelation 17 *"Babylon the Great. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her"* (Revelation 18:7). Those who committed fornication with her, those who imbibed her spirit of selfish ambition and worldliness, those who supported her claim of being the only divinely-appointed channel of truth, will meet the same punishment and will suffer the bitter disappointment and distress of the judgment on Babylon, which judgment will culminate in her complete destruction.

2:23 The expression *"I will kill her children with death"* signifies that all systems that have endorsed the spirit and doctrines of the "mother" will suffer with her in the plagues that describe her

troubles, ending in the seventh plague under which her destruction is complete (Revelation 16,17 and 18). *"And all the Churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins (minds) and hearts."* These words seem to apply not only to Thyatira but to the Church as a whole throughout the Gospel Age. They may be understood to mean that the time will come at the end of the Gospel Age when members of the true Church of Jesus Christ will see the wisdom of God and His justice in the judgments that will fall on apostate Christianity.

Who Have Not Known The Depths Of Satan

2:24 The Diaglott reading of verse 24 seems preferable to that of the King James Version. *"But I say to you, - to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who knew not the depths of the Adversary, (as they say;) I lay on you no other burden."* In these words the Lord addresses all who had escaped the contaminating influence of Jezebel's doctrines. These believers had not known or experienced the "deep things" (RSV) of Satan. They remained loyal to Christ as their Head, and had not yielded their consciences to man-made creeds or fallible teachers.

The words following, *"I will put upon you none other burden but that which ye have, hold fast till I come"* seem to convey the thought that the spiritual strength of the Lord's people at this time was sufficient only to enable them to hold fast to the true doctrine of Christ, which Jezebel's teachings had almost buried out of sight. Any believers who dared to raise their voices in opposition to Jezebel's doctrines and practices were either threatened and terrified into silence, or tortured and finally killed. Some of the visions that John saw later portray the sufferings and martyrdom of God's saints of this period.

2:2, 27 *"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father."* This promise to the overcomer seems to be given to remind the Lord's people that Jezebel's rule, which was claimed by Rome to be the reign of Christ, was a usurpation, and that when He should establish God's Kingdom in power, the overcomers would take up their promised inheritance and assist Him in judging the nations in righteousness and preparing them for eternal life.

2:28 *"And I will give him the morning star."* The "morning star" is one of the symbolic names given to Christ in Revelation 22:16: *"I am ... the bright and morning star."* In the natural world the morning star precedes the day and the sunrise. The promise of the morning star suggests that the overcomers who have died before Christ's promised return will be raised by Him before His appearing to the world and before He appears as the *"Sun of righteousness ... with healing in His beams"*. (Malachi 4:2). Before the later stage of Christ's second advent, the overcomers will all be with Him to bring to the world righteous judgment, peace and happiness (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:23). Those who are given the Morning Star, Christ, will be given to possess and enjoy the closest union and fellowship with Him, with all that this signifies of glory and blessing throughout the countless ages to come.

2:29 In this message to Thyatira, and in the three messages to follow, the Saviour makes a change in the position of the admonition: *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"*. In the three previous messages, the admonition is placed before the promise to the overcomer; while in this message and the three that follow, the admonition follows the promise to the overcomer. There may be good reasons for this change of position of the admonition.

In the first three messages, the Spirit is speaking from within the Church, while in the last four, the Spirit is now outside the professing Church, and the admonition applies both to the Church and the world in general. The apostasy and worldliness of the Church have become so great as to make true Christians as exceptional in the Church as in the world. The Church as a whole has become so blended with the world that a separation needs to be made between it and Christ's true people, just as a separation needs to be made between Christ's true people and the world. In all the messages in which the Spirit's admonition follows the promise to the overcomer, the great body of the Church is treated as apostate and spiritually corrupt, so that at the end, in the final message to Laodicea, the announcement is made that Christ will disown it and cast it from Him.

The Decline of the Established Church

Jesus Christ successively alters His attitude to the Church as a whole, revealing His growing displeasure and coming judgment. He required Ephesus to repent of its decline in love, saying simply that He *"will come"*. He exhorted those in Pergamos to

repent of their worse defections by the sterner announcement, "*Otherwise I am coming to thee quickly*". He gives those in Thyatira a more fearful picture of judgment, declaring that He will bring great tribulation upon Jezebel and her adulterous companions, and slay her children with death. He threatens those in Sardis with His coming upon them unexpectedly at a time of supposed security. To those in Philadelphia who are liars and false teachers He says He will humble them and bring upon those settled in the world an hour of trial that will also come upon the world itself, and that He is coming quickly. Finally, with reference to those in Laodicea, He represents Himself as standing at the door making His final appeal, and about to reject them utterly.

It is a sad but true history that the Christian Church, pure and excellent as it was in its beginning, has experienced a gradual and ever-increasing decline and decay, first in one direction, then in another, until it has become completely apostate. Such a situation is neither understood nor realised by the world at large. The charitable works, the missionary activities, the social policies and the co-operation of the congregations, the pleasant buildings and surroundings of many churches, seem to blind many people to the situation that the Church as a whole lacks spiritual qualities and graces. The professed Church is in process of conversion to the world, instead of the world being in process of conversion to Christ.

The condition of the present-day Christian Church will be further discussed in the message to Laodicea, and in the judgment on Great Babylon as recorded in chapters 17,18 and 19.

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO SARDIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are differences of opinion among expositors and commentators concerning the derivation and meaning of Sardis. Dr. Strong comments simply that it is a word of uncertain derivation. Joseph Seiss in his work "Lectures on the Apocalypse" gives various meanings suggested by a number of authors, as well as a very interesting comment combining these meanings in one single picture as suggesting the various features of the Sardis Church as described by Christ:

"The name is variously derived. Some connect it with the precious stone called sarda, which was found about Sardis, and sometimes used as an amulet (charm) to drive away fear, give boldness, inspire cheerfulness, sharpen wit, and protect against witchcraft or sorcery. Others have derived it from the Hebrew, and have assigned it the significance of remnant, or an escaped few. Ebrard finds for it an etymological derivation, denoting something new, or renewed. These several explanations, though different, are not antagonistic, as applied to the condition of a church. They can be very well combined in one picture. Courage and boldness imply great conflict and danger. In a great conquest, many would be vanquished, but a remnant would escape."

It is true that those of this period who had escaped from Jezebel's false teaching, that is, the false doctrines of the Papacy, were only *"a few names...which have not defiled their garments"*. They were few in number, a small remnant. Christ calls them "worthy", and promises that each faithful believer will be *"clothed in white raiment"*, and that He *"will not blot out his name out of the book of life"*, but *"will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels"*.

Up to this period in history and prophecy, there has been little difficulty in fixing the period of history which is represented by each of the seven messages. Ephesus applied to the Apostolic age, Smyrna applied to the period of pagan Rome's persecution of the saints, from the persecution by Domitian in John's day until the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, Pergamos applied to the period in which the Papacy developed and grew until the Bishop of Rome

was made superior to all other bishops in 539 AD, while Thyatira applied to the long period of Papal dominion, which lasted until the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

We should keep in mind that the conditions prevailing in each of the periods mentioned did not suddenly cease when each period came to an end, but continued to exist to a greater or less degree in Christendom, and are still observable today.

Thus we see that the conditions in Thyatira, representing the conditions existing in the period of Papal persecutions, did not cease before or even at the sixteenth-century Reformation. Some of the most severe Papal persecutions occurred years after the Reformation began, the persecution of the Huguenots in France, for example, continued until 1787. The Papacy lost a significant measure of its power after its "deadly wound" of the Reformation, but still continued to exercise authority over the saints, and to *"wear out the saints of the most High"* (Daniel 7:25), until the end of the *"time, times and an half"* (Daniel 7:25; 12:7), that end occurring in 1799 AD with the Pope a prisoner of Napoleon. Even in our day, the Papacy still exerts a more powerful influence in religious matters over a larger number of earth's peoples than all the other professing Christian organisations combined.

So it is that each new period of the Gospel Age has its beginning while the conditions prevailing in the preceding periods are still in operation, the one exception being that of the pagan Roman persecution (the Smyrna period) which ceased shortly after Constantine ascended the throne.

The Dark Days Of Sardis

3:1 The words of the Lord Jesus to Sardis, both the local church and the church of prophecy, describe a most unfortunate condition prevailing in a professing Christian Church. The Church is described as having *"a name that thou livest, and art dead"*. These words indicate that the Sardis Church exerted no influence in the lives of most of its members, and was not proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. There were *"a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;"* but these few were powerless to revive the Church or improve its sorry situation.

These words to Sardis are those of Him *"that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars"*. These words may be taken

to mean that Jesus possesses the full measure of Divine power, seven being a symbol of completeness, and will use whatever measure of this power that may be necessary to enable the selection of His true servants to continue, and not be allowed to lapse or go by default. The "*seven stars*", as we are told in Revelation 1:20, are "*the angels (messengers) of the seven churches*". The angel or messenger, whoever he may have been in Sardis, was evidently unable to exert any noticeable influence in the Church itself or on the world outside.

The words Christ uses seem to indicate to us that the Sardis Church as a whole, and the people of the world at large, would be ignorant of the truth of the Gospel message. The few true, committed disciples of Christ in Sardis would no doubt be discouraged and disheartened, and would lack that spirit of evangelism to bring new life to the dead Church.

The few of the Lord's true saints, who had fruitlessly protested against Jezebel's doctrines and blasphemous claims, became scattered and ceased for a time to bear witness to the Gospel. They were "*worn out*" (Daniel 7:25) by a long series of savage persecutions, the object of which was to exterminate them and thus silence the voice of protest against Rome, the Jezebel system. The historian, Mosheim, in his "Ecclesiastical History" Volume 2, pages 2 to 5, portrays for us the conditions existing during the Sardis period:

"About the commencement of this century (sixteenth), the Roman pontiffs lived in the utmost tranquillity; nor had they, as things appeared to be situated, the least reason to apprehend any opposition to their pretensions, or rebellion against their authority; since those dreadful commotions, which had been excited in the preceding ages by the Waldenses, Albigenses, and Beghards, and more recently by the Bohemians, were entirely suppressed, and had yielded to the united powers of counsel and the sword;....none had the courage to strike at the root of the evil, to attack the Papal jurisdiction and statutes, which were absurdly, yet artfully, sanctified by the title of canon-law, or to call in question the ancient and most pernicious opinion that Christ had established a viceregent at Rome, clothed with His supreme and unlimited authority. Entrenched within these strongholds, the pontiffs looked upon their own authority and the peace of the church (?) as beyond the reach of danger, and treated with indifference the threats and invectives of their enemies. Armed, with power to punish, and abundantly furnished with the means of

rewarding in the most alluring manner, they were ready on every commotion, to crush the obstinate, and to gain over the mercenary to their cause."

Another church historian, Joseph Milner, in his work "Church History" wrote that, in 1514, though the Name of Christ was professed throughout Europe, nothing existed that could properly be called evangelical. All the true confessors of Christ, worn out by a long series of persecutions, were silenced. The Roman Church believed that every heretic had been exterminated.

This was not in fact true, because some true believers were silenced but not exterminated, just as in the times of Jezebel of the Old Testament there were *"seven thousand"* known to God who did not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). The Lord God *"knoweth them that are His"* (2 Timothy 2:19), and true believers were, and are, known to Him. However, so far as any collective public testimony was concerned, Christ's faithful and true witnesses were reduced to silence.

The Lateran Council in 1514 congratulated itself that Rome was no longer troubled with heresies. A challenge was issued for anyone who denied Rome's claims to come forward, but none responded. One of the speakers at that Lateran Council then said from the rostrum, addressing Pope Leo X, *"Jam nemo reclamat, nullus obsistit,"* meaning "There is an end of resistance to the Papal rule, and religious opposers resist no more". Further it was said, "The whole body of Christendom is now seen to be subjected to its head, that is, to thee" (Leo X).

But there were *"a few names"* left in Sardis, and to these, under the guidance of the Master, we are indebted for the preservation of the faith. Although they were silenced for a time, the spirit of truth remained with them, and was soon taken up by Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Reuchlin and others, and a new era of preaching and reformation began.

3:2 The words, *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain,"* seem to be addressed to the few disheartened ministers and secret disciples of those times; *"the things which remain"* having reference to the true devotion that still existed and remained in that period, later to emerge and come into prominence in the Protestant Reformation.

Spiritual Sickness and Death

The Master further exhorts those in Sardis to *"strengthen the things ... that are ready to die"*. There are times in the experience of churches and individuals that spiritual life has greatly waned, and only a spark seems to remain. Those who remain spiritually-minded would be expected by the Lord to strive to re-ignite the flame of spiritual life. But, as is often the case, the majority of messengers and pastors are not spiritually-minded, and remind us of the statement *"like people, like priest"* (Hosea 4:9), meaning that if the pastors and leaders are not spiritually-minded, neither will the people be.

"For I have not found thy works perfect before God". The Diaglott rendering of these words is better: *"For I have not found thy works fully performed in the presence of my God"*. It seems that these words and those that follow are addressed to the messenger and the *"few names left"*. It is true that no-one could or can claim perfection in performing the works required of believers into Jesus Christ, but it is also true that believers can become slack and neglect tasks and duties, especially in times of persecution or times of complacency when spiritual decline begins to occur in the Church. The works not fully performed in Sardis may have been individual and collective witnessing, which is certainly more difficult when the Lord's people are threatened with severe persecution.

3:3 The Saviour next exhorts His faithful few in the words, *"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard"*. We are not told exactly what the believers in Sardis were exhorted to remember. It may be that the Lord's followers were asked to remember the time when they first came to know Christ as their Saviour and Lord, to remember how they came into favour with God, and who it was who helped them in making such an important decision, and their joy in knowing they had become children of God. In the period represented by Sardis, when the Gospel message was so distorted and obscured, and true believers were hunted down and treated like criminals, such remembrances as a decision for Christ would be most treasured and would be a strengthening influence to the Lord's true people.

"And hold fast and repent", the Lord Jesus further exhorts. "Repent", according to Dr. Strong (reference 3340), has the meaning of "reconsider", "think afterwards". Believers in Sardis had already repented of their past lives and sins, so that the meaning is evidently that they should hold fast the truths that they

had learnt, and be truly sorry for any lack of zeal or activity they may have had in the Lord's service, and engage again actively in witnessing to the truth of the Gospel message of God's free gift of salvation.

If, however, the believers in Sardis would not pay full and close attention to His words, the Lord gives warning of the result. *"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee"*. These words remind us of Paul's words to the Thessalonians, *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"* (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

In these words lie the reason for placing the Sardis period from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 and ending in 1799 which marked the end of the prophesied length (1260 years) of Papal dominion. At this time, as taught and proclaimed by Ernest Henninges in his book "Daniel the Prophet", chapters 11 and 12, the Lord Jesus began to exercise the power given to Him by God as recorded in Matthew 28:18. The basis of this understanding is found in Daniel 11:45 and 12:1, where Michael is understood to refer to Jesus Christ.

In keeping with this thought, the Lord's return is understood to begin secretly, unknown to the world at large, but known to a few faithful believers. The Lord's second advent is said to begin with a period of His presence (Greek, *parousia*) which continues until His appearing and revealing to the world (Greek: *epiphaneia*).

The teaching of the "parousia" or presence of the Lord Jesus is well known throughout the Bible Student fraternity, but not universally accepted. Each of us must *"test everything. Hold on to the good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21; NIV). The warnings to Sardis certainly apply to us today.

Walking in White Clothing

3:4 The Lord Jesus next addresses the Sardis Church, referring especially to the overcomers. *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."*

The "few names" refer to the faithful few who had kept themselves free from the corruption that prevailed in the Sardis period of the Church. The words teach that there were a few believers who were not contaminated with world affiliation, with

the false claim of Jezebel to be a prophetess, and with her corrupt teachings. These few were like people clothed in white who were able to keep their white clothes clean when the clothes of the majority of professing Christians were soiled with false teachings. The words *"And they shall walk with me in white"* seems to refer to a future reward, although the gracious provision of justification by faith could also refer to and include the Christian's present experience.

3:5 This seems to be evident from the words that follow, *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment."* White is usually understood to be a symbol of purity and innocence, and is appropriately applied to the condition or state of believing saints. Whoever overcomes the world and resists the temptations of Satan will be given this promised reward, that of being with the Lord Jesus in His Kingdom, having righteousness as a gracious possession and attribute, and no longer imputed.

The assurance given to such overcomers is that their names will never be removed from *"the book of life"*. *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

Overcoming is a gradual work, progressing throughout our Christian course from the time of belief until our life ends. Overcoming is accomplished by faith. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."* (1 John 5:4). We need to maintain our faith and we need Christ's help to continue to follow Him and walk in His ways. We need to ask God's forgiveness daily to maintain our walk in newness of life, and maintain our state of imputed righteousness which God freely gives to us. This imputed or reckoned righteousness, our justification by faith, is the reality which is symbolised by the white clothing.

It is apparent from Jesus' words to the Church in Sardis that to be clothed in white robes is also a reward given to the overcomer who finishes his or her life's course successfully. The trial and judgment by God of the believer are completed at death. The reward will be given at the time of Christ's appearing, or shortly before it, as Paul writes: *"the dead in Christ shall rise first"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The Apostle Paul also tells us that the overcomers will be given a new body. *"We shall be changed"* and *"bear the image of the heavenly"* (1 Corinthians 15:49, 51, 52). The Apostle John also tells us that we are *"the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2). The new body will be without sin and without blemish of any kind, because it will be *"our house which is from heaven"* (2 Corinthians 5:2). We will be given righteousness and will possess it, and will no longer need to have righteousness imputed to us.

The overcomer whose name is not blotted out of the book of life tells us that the Lord takes account of each one who receives Christ as His Saviour, and strives continually to live in obedience to Him. The figure symbolises that God through Jesus Christ records in His infinite memory, the names of His believers who are candidates running for the heavenly prize, namely, joint-heirship with Jesus Christ and eternal life in the heavenly places. To have the Lord Jesus confess our names before His Father and before His angels is a wonderful privilege for which we all should continue to strive.

3:6 *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"* are words addressed to individuals. The Church of Jesus Christ is not composed of Churches but of members, united by the Spirit which unites all under Christ the Head. The Churches or assemblies are local gatherings of Christians who meet together to find fellowship and build one another up in the most holy faith. Each of these gatherings is the Church in that place, and each gathering is neither superior nor inferior to any other. Neither the place nor the building have any bearing on God's promises to the Gospel Age Church. The promises are made to the people, the men and women who believe and have faith in God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must keep in mind the difference between profession and possession. The majority in Sardis professed Christ, but they did not truly know Him or acknowledge that they belonged to Him as His disciples. Only a *"few names"* understood the false teachings that prevailed at that time, and remained overcomers by faith in God through the only Way, Jesus Christ.

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Message of Brotherly Love

In this message there are no words of reproof or rebuke, but there are words of warning. The prophetic message seems to describe a movement in the midst of professing but apostate Christianity, having for its object a revival or restoration to the conditions and circumstances of the early church.

The name Philadelphia means "brotherly love", an attribute highly commended by the Lord Jesus and His inspired writers, particularly John the Apostle. When He was about to leave His disciples, Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*" (John 13:34). Jesus further emphasised the importance of this new commandment by telling His disciples that obedience to it was absolutely necessary in order to abide in His love. "*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love ... This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:10-13).

The importance of the Philadelphian spirit is further emphasised by the fact that its possession gives positive evidence that the possessor has passed from the condemnation that is on the world in general, and has entered into the new spiritual life of the heavenly brotherhood and become a child of God, a member of the Divine family, a member of the New Creation. The Apostle John wrote, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"* (1 John 3:14).

The measure of this love is the love that Christ Himself showed for His disciples, as John recorded for us, *"By this we have known love, because He laid down His life on our behalf; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (1 John 3:16; Diaglott). The showing forth of this love is the greatest possible evidence that we can give to the world that we are His disciples, as the Lord Jesus said, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:35).

The most prominent feature of the very early Church was that of brotherly love, as Luke records in Acts 4: 32 to 35; *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."*

This same spirit was manifest in the Second Advent movement of the nineteenth century, a movement that occurred within the prophecy of the Philadelphian period. It seems that certain actions in the nineteenth century did not meet with the Lord's approval at the time because of the way in which believers were disappointed and scattered. It seems that many believing people placed too heavy a reliance on the interpretation of time prophecies in the Scriptures, and, with the best of intentions, expected the Lord Jesus to return at a time and in a manner that conformed to their understanding. The spirit of brotherly love was in evidence, but mistakes and misunderstandings of God's Word led to disappointment and loss.

Time of the Message

Some expositors of the Revelation place the beginning of the Philadelphian period at the time of the Protestant Reformation, which began with Martin Luther in 1517. Times and dates of the seven prophetic messages, however, are not rigid and inflexibly set. The seven periods have distinctive characteristics, and each merges over time into the next. While acknowledging the ideas and reasons of other writers on the Revelation, it seems that the beginning of the Philadelphian period is better placed at the close of the 1,260 prophetic years of Papal dominion, as prophesied in Daniel 7:25.

There are two main reasons for this suggested timing. The first is that in the message to Sardis the Lord Jesus says, *"I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee"* (Revelation 3:3). These words are written after the message of Paul to the Thessalonians, when he told them that *"the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"* (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

The Lord's coming unexpectedly, *"as a thief in the night"* is associated in the minds of many Bible students with the tremendous upsurge of interest in the Lord's return that took place in the nineteenth century. Many Bible students believe that the Lord Jesus returned to commence the exercise of His Divinely granted power at some time after the fulfilment in 1799 of Daniel's prophecy, and began His "parousia", or presence, unknown to the world, but known to His believing people. It should be noted that many Bible students think differently about the Lord's "parousia", but the fact remains that a great and relatively sudden interest in the Lord's return began early in the nineteenth century, and continued until well into that remarkable period of time.

The second main reason for the timing of the Philadelphian period is the relatively sudden increase of the availability and distribution of the Scriptures, and the re-discovery of vital spiritual truths that had been lost to the world in general, and buried under a mountain of Papal error, ritual, and ceremonial trappings. Very early in the nineteenth century, the Bible Societies were founded and began their activities. A marvellous array of Scriptural truths, hidden from Christendom as a whole for centuries, came to light in the nineteenth century. The main ones are:

The Plan of the Ages
The Three Worlds
The Ransom
The Kingdom
The New Covenant
Justification by Faith
Joint Heirship
The Second Advent
The Truth about Death and The Second Death

In placing the beginning of the Philadelphian period at the end of Papal dominion in 1799, we look back on the great work of the Protestant reformers, the healing of the "*deadly wound*" fulfilled in the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation, and the subsequent regrettable lapse in zeal and activity of the Protestant Reformers and their successors.

True and False Claims

We notice first of all that the names and titles of Christ are the names and titles presumptuously assumed by the Popes who had been claiming to rule in Christ's stead. The exercise of these false claims deceived the world and hid the true Gospel from sight for centuries, so that a new beginning was necessary. The basis for this new beginning was laid by the Protestant reformers, but it was not until the founding of the Bible societies early in the nineteenth century that diligent and independent study of the Scriptures became widespread, and the Scriptures became readily available to everyone who desired them. Thus the false and blasphemous claims of the Papacy were exposed for all to see.

3:7 The words of Christ, "*These things saith He that is holy, He that is true,*" are in the original more an expression of title than of qualities possessed by Christ, though both meanings seem to be intended. Moffatt's translation of these words is very helpful: "*These are the words of the True Holy One*". Only God and the Lord Jesus can rightly assume this title, yet Popes claim and are addressed by the title, "Your Holiness", a false and indeed blasphemous claim made by any fallen human being, whether that person be Pope, King, Queen, President, Prime Minister, or merely an ordinary person.

The words, "*He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth*" are also a reminder of the false claims of the Papacy. A reference seems to

be made in this statement by the "True Holy One" to the Papal claim that it was fulfilling the prophecies of Christ's millennial reign. Christ was and is the only rightful heir to David's throne, and He (Christ) is represented in this message as possessing the key, that is, the power to open and the authority to occupy that throne. In God's due time Christ will exercise this authority and reign.

The Papacy, however, lays claim to the power and authority that is exclusively Christ's. In the Dark Ages, a bishop at the fifth Lateran Council in Rome said to the Pope, "On thee, most blessed Leo, we have fixed our hopes as the Saviour that was to come." These words are quoted by A.J.Gordon in his work, "Ecce Venit". This writer continues as follows: "In his sovereign vicar, Christ has already appeared, and is already ruling, says Rome. 'In the person of Pius IX, Jesus reigns on earth, exclaims Cardinal Manning (in 1871) 'and He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.' "

These "*very great things*" (Daniel 7:20) were spoken at the very time when the last vestige of temporal power was taken from the Pope, resulting in his confinement to Vatican City.

It is well known that the Papacy claims to have the power to consign people to what they call the torments of hell, as well as to open the door to heaven. In other words, the salvation and damnation of the human race are claimed to be in its power. In 1860, the noted English expositor, H.G. Guinness, wrote the following:

"It is difficult in this nineteenth century to credit the records which reveal the unbounded power of the Pope during the Dark Ages, and the nature and extent of the claims he asserted to the reverence and subjection of mankind. If kings and emperors yielded him abject homage, the common people regarded him as a deity. His dogmas were received as oracles, his bulls and sentences were to them the voice of God. The Sicilian ambassadors prostrated themselves before Pope Martin, with the thrice-repeated cry, 'Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.' The people think of the Pope as the one God that has power over all things, in earth and in heaven, said Gerston. The fifth Lateran Council subscribed, just before the Reformation, a decree which declared that 'as there was but one body of the church, so there was but one head, viz. Christ's vicar, and that it was essential to the salvation of every human being to be subject

to the Roman Pontiff.' Every spiritual, as well as every ecclesiastical office of Christ, was arrogated to himself by the 'man of sin' .

"If Christ was the universal Shepherd of souls, was not he, the Pope, the same? If Christ was the door of the sheep, was not he the door? If Christ was the truth, was not he the depository, source, and oracular expounder of the truth, authoritative, infallible, independent of Scripture, and even against it? If Christ was the Holy One, was not he the same, and did not the title, His Holiness, distinctively and alone belong to him? If Christ was the husband of the Church, was not he the same? With the marriage ring in the ceremonial of his inauguration, he signified it; and with his great voice in his Canon law and Papal bulls he proclaimed it to the world. The power of the keys of Christ's Church and Kingdom, given him, extended into the invisible world. He opened with them, and who might shut? He shut, and who might open? ... The souls in purgatory and the angels in heaven were subject to him; and it was even his prerogative to add to the celestial choir; by his canonizing edicts he elevated whom he pleased of the dead to form part of heaven's hierarchy, and became objects of adoration to men."

Considering the presumptuous and blasphemous character of the Papacy's claims to these titles and powers, and the great extent to which they were received and accepted in Christendom, it would seem the reference to them and the application of them by Christ to Himself are for the purpose of severely rebuking those who made these preposterous claims, as well as calling the attention of His own people to the rightful and exclusive titles and powers of Christ.

The Open Door

3:8 The expression, "*I have set before thee an open door*", is evidently intended to indicate that at this time Christ would give His faithful believers the opportunity to bear witness to the truth, and would give them His approval and protection. In preceding centuries, bearing witness to the truth brought persecution, torture by the Inquisition, imprisonment or death or both, so that we now can appreciate the significance of the words, "*Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it*".

The time had come in God's plan of salvation when truth, which had been covered and concealed for centuries, should be

proclaimed, and a clear testimony given to the Lord's people, to the ruling powers, and indeed to the whole world.

Keeping Christ's Word

The message of the Saviour continues, *"For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my name"*. Compared with the hosts of the world in general, the comparatively few believers at the beginning of the nineteenth century had only *"a little strength"*, but they knew that they had had truth revealed to them by the reformers, and they trusted in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus could say, *Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name"*.

This was true throughout the Philadelphian period of those who sought to recover and proclaim the true doctrine of Christ and give it again to the world. *"A little strength"* is evidently one of the essential characteristics of the spirit of Philadelphia, for *"God hath chosen the weak things to confound the mighty, and base things of the world, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29).

No Denial of Christ's Name

The significance of the expression that those in Philadelphia had not denied Christ's name, may have a double application. The words may, in the first instance, have applied to the primitive Church in Philadelphia in John's day, and may have referred to some particular persecution . It may be that believers of the early Philadelphian Church were summoned before civil magistrates and required to renounce the Name of Christ and to disown Him in a public manner.

In the second instance, as applied to the Philadelphian period of church history, it would seem that those addressed were a small number of devoted people in the midst of large numbers professing Christ, but not really committed to Him. The small number would constitute those who had not denied Jesus' Name.

The "Name" of Christ may also indicate the different offices He fills in the great work of salvation. The angel said to Joseph, the husband of Mary, *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21). Matthew further records that *"They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). Jeremiah, prophesying of the Lord Jesus, writes, *"And this is his name*

whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6). Isaiah also records the wonderful prophecy, *"His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6).

The meaning of the "Name" of Christ in the foregoing references would seem to be that Christ was recognised by His true believers as the only One worthy of such names and titles, and the only One Who could fulfil the requirements demanded by such names and titles.

The Synagogue of Satan and Alleged Jews

3:9 *"Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."*

The matter of who and what are those who called themselves Jews, but were of the synagogue of Satan, has already been considered in the message to Smyrna. It will be sufficient to note here that the expression "*synagogue of Satan*" refers to the same group of people which Satan had used in earlier centuries of the Gospel Age to endeavour to bring about the downfall of the already declining Church. Judaism, with its formalities and ceremonies, accomplished God's purpose in foreshadowing the spiritual realities of true Christianity, and was abolished by God when it had achieved its purpose.

The system known as "*Babylon the Great*" in Revelation 17:5 is in reality a large-scale counterpart of Judaism, and has usurped the place of the common priesthood of believers, and has substituted for the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and the salvation found only in Him, its own perversions of the Gospel message, in particular the sacrifice of the mass, by which it is claimed that Christ is sacrificed afresh and sins are forgiven when mass is celebrated.

The many daughter systems that were formed after the break with Rome in the Reformation have continued to embrace to a greater or lesser extent, many of the basic errors and teachings of Rome. It is principally with this extensive but divided sectarian Protestantism that faithful believers have to contend in witnessing to the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Worship Before Thy Feet

The words, *"I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee,"* carry us forward to the time when the Philadelphians, as well as the overcomers who have lived in all epochs of the Church's history, will enter upon their reward of joint-heirship in the heavenly Kingdom. The nominal and apostate church members who have in past centuries despised, maligned, treated cruelly and persecuted the true believers, will then be required to pay homage to them, and come to terms with the truth that those formerly despised and ill-treated were beloved of God.

The Apostle Peter seems to have this thought in mind when he wrote, *"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"* (1 Peter 2:12).

The Hour of Trial

3:10 *"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."*

The word rendered "temptation" should be "trial" or "testing" (Strong's reference: 3986). The hour of trial that is stated to come upon all the world seems to refer to the great time of trouble which is prophesied to come about at the close of the Gospel Age.

In view of the world-wide catastrophes of the twentieth century, two world wars, the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear war and terrorism on a world scale, the wholesale massacre of millions of people in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America, and the armed conflicts and struggles associated with these campaigns of genocide, it seems undeniable that we are even now living in this great time of trouble. This time of trouble is described as one in which men's hearts fail them for fear of what is coming on the earth, in connection with which the whole present order of things will be shaken and eventually overthrown (Luke 21:26).

We who find ourselves in these times that began in Philadelphia are indeed in the "hour of trial". It is our task to continue in faith and brotherly love as the hour of trial continues into the final era of the Gospel Age, the era of Laodicea.

The Miller Movement

During the period of Philadelphia, as the Scriptures became more widely distributed and studied, there came the teaching and announcement that the time of Christ's Second Advent was near.

The teaching and proclamation of Christ's return began about 1829, in fulfilment, it is contended, of Daniel's prophecy of the 1,290 days, recorded in Daniel 12:11. William Miller taught that the Lord would return in 1844, and a literal burning of the earth and its peoples would take place. The failure of these expectations proved the incorrectness of the understandings and teachings, and the disappointment at the failure caused some to return to the Word, acknowledging their mistake, while others became sceptical and turned from the Word. William Miller died in 1849.

The time and manner of the Lord's return are subjects of continuing study and discussion among believers. Many Bible students reject the teaching of the destruction of the literal earth and its people by fire or nuclear holocaust, preferring the understanding that it is the social order that is to be destroyed, and earth's peoples are to be resurrected and preserved to live again on the earth in the Kingdom of God. These joyful understandings of the holy Scriptures will not be further considered here, but are discussed in other publications such as the booklet entitled "The New Era" available free on request.

Charles Russell wrote the following words in 1915, and there seems no cause to disagree with them: "As a consequence of the great Church leaders' discarding the Bible, particularly the prophecies, the people know very little about the Bible. Of course, their faith could not be much greater than their knowledge.

"As a result, the work of the Miller movement was a sort of separation, as between those who kept the Word of God with patience and those who lost their faith in His Word. This persistent, patient faith of the true saints of God is what we think is referred to here by keeping 'the word of My patience.' The general hour of temptation (referred to in the Philadelphia message), therefore, would not come upon them, but upon those who came after them - the Laodicean Church. The Philadelphia Church, which had patiently passed through so severe a trial of their faith, would not be subjected to the later test.

"The hour of temptation' has come upon us now. This hour of temptation has been the Harvest time. In many respects it has tested the Lord's people, and has proved who are faithful to the Word of God and who are not faithful to it. Hence the majority of the professing Christians of the world - probably more than three-fourths - have lost all faith in the Bible, and have fallen into the various false and delusive theories of our day - Evolution, Higher Criticism, Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritism, New Thought, etc. They have fallen from faith, from loyalty to the Lord's Word. They are not able to stand in this 'evil day'."

Further Trials and Testings of God's People

Since the words quoted above were written, other tests have come upon the people of God, such as the conflict between serving the state by taking up arms and suffering imprisonment and punishment by refusal to do so; resisting the allurements and enticements of worldly affluence and the so-called "good life", rejection of pervasive teachings advanced by the New Age Movement and other Satanic teachings and practices, the worship of technology as evidenced in video and television programs and in computers which, despite their many advantages and uses, give access to pornography and portrayal of much else that is evil and contrary to God's will.

The test that must finally come to us all is that of holding fast and not permitting any human teacher or system to come into our hearts and take the place of the Master. Loyalty to Christ and His message is indeed the test; and faithfulness to Him will mean that a sufficient measure of His spirit will be given and will be revealed in the life of every true believer, and will result in the Philadelphian spirit of brotherly love being in evidence among believing brethren.

Behold I Come Quickly

3:11 *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."* It is of reassuring yet solemn significance that the Lord Jesus in His message to Philadelphia announces that His promised return is near at hand. These words seem to say that at this period of the Gospel Age, the period of Philadelphia, there will be only a comparatively short time until the Lord Jesus is revealed to the peoples of the earth, at which time He will gather all the faithful to Himself and establish His Kingdom in fulfilment of the many Divine promises.

Philadelphia, in the succession of the seven messages, is located between Sardis and Laodicea, both of which represent conditions then existing in the ecclesiastical systems of Romanism and Protestantism. Philadelphia seems to highlight the spirit of love of the brethren which came about as many people began to understand and appreciate the truths of Scripture, and began to study God's Word and separate themselves from false doctrine and ecclesiastical systems and creeds, and began to gather together in a spirit of oneness with the Father, with the Lord Jesus, acknowledging one faith, one baptism and one body of true believers united by one Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Need to Hold Fast

Though the Saviour in His message to Philadelphia expresses pleasing commendation, we ought not to think there were no unfavourable conditions with which the Church had to contend and which they were required to overcome.

In the message there is special emphasis given to the need to hold fast to the spirit of brotherly love. This is the great and supreme test, because it means loyalty to Christ. It does not mean loyalty to a system, to an organisation, to a human agent or messenger, but to Christ Himself and to God through Him. The Apostle John writes, *"If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also"* (1 John 4:20, 21).

Holding fast also means loyalty to the Word of God, the Scriptures, which are able to make us *"wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). *"Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"* is written in the message to Philadelphia. As we have seen, holding fast means remaining loyal to Christ in the Philadelphian spirit of love for the brethren. Therefore *"Let brotherly love continue"* (Hebrews 13:1).

3:12 *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."*

"A pillar in the temple" - This is a cheering and encouraging promise to the believer. The Temple is surely the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the body of believers who are being called out of all people of the earth during this Gospel Age, as the Apostle Paul writes, *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are"* (1 Corinthians 3: 16,17).

A pillar, when used figuratively, signifies strength. Paul writes in Galatians 2:9 of James, Cephas and John, *"who seemed to be pillars,"* and describes the Church of God as *"the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15). The Philadelphian has *"a little strength"*, but with God's mercy and grace becomes a pillar of strength in association with other believers in brotherly love, and will remain as part of God's Temple, and never more go out of it. What seems to be meant here is that once we and all true believers attain the promised High Calling, our happiness will be secure forever. We will never be in peril or in danger of falling into temptation, no persuasive or artful foe will ever deceive us, Satan will never be able to alienate us or cause us to stumble, and, above all, we will never die. The joy and peace of the bright heavenly world will be ours, and ours for evermore.

"The name of my God" - The allusion here seems to be that, as names of distinguished or honoured persons are inscribed on pillars or columns, in recognition of devotion and service to a country or cause, God's recognition would be given to the believer to give evidence to everyone that God knows and acknowledges the believer as His own. The believer would be honoured, and the honour conferred on him or her would be as great as if God's name were inscribed on the believer in some conspicuous manner.

"The name of the city of my God" - This indicates that the believer is a citizen of God's city, New Jerusalem, which is symbolic of God's new and righteous order to be established on the terms and conditions of the New Covenant, the only arrangement that can forever take away sin and its consequence, death. The idea seems to be that in this world, wherever he or she may go, or live, he or she will behave and live as a citizen of that righteous order, and will, in a spiritual sense, enjoy the rights and privileges of every citizen of that heavenly city. More will be said of this in the discussion of the twenty-first chapter of Revelation.

"Which cometh down out of heaven from my God." - This representation must surely be figurative, though the meaning is plain. The New Jerusalem is symbolic of the Kingdom of God, which has its origin in Heaven, and is then subsequently established on earth. The Kingdom comes from God, it is His intention and purpose to establish it in righteousness on the earth with Jesus Christ as His appointed King over that Kingdom. The comparison of God's glorious Kingdom with a beautiful city having its origin with God in heaven and subsequently being established on earth, seems to be all that is implied and intended by these words.

"And I will write upon him my new name." - The new name is surely the Name of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The Church is Jesus' bride and figuratively takes His Name, as a bride takes the name of her husband. The marriage relationship is the closest of all human relationships, and is used to picture the close relationship between Christ and His Church. Jesus figuratively writes His Name on the believer, signifying that he or she belongs to Him, and is therefore entitled to all the promised rewards and privileges that God in His mercy and grace has reserved for them that love Him through Jesus Christ.

The Closing Exhortation

3:13 The Philadelphian message closes with the seven-times repeated injunction: *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches"*. We should note that while Christ speaks these words, the hearer is exhorted to give heed to *"what the Spirit saith"*. It seems from this exhortation that some measure of God's Holy Spirit is needed to understand and heed Christ's messages to the Churches. The Holy Spirit is promised to faithful believers to help and guide them. (Acts 2:18, Luke 11:13) Only those who have a measure of God's Holy Spirit will understand what Christ has said to the Churches. The person of the world and the casual reader will not understand the messages (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Spirit of God as it dwells in believers is not the spirit of contention or strife, nor does it manifest itself in weird and unintelligible displays, but, as the Apostle Paul tells us, is the spirit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self control, against which there is no law (Galatians 5:22, 23).

CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO LAODICEA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Church of the Last Times

With the message to the angel of the Church of Laodicea we come to the close of these solemn epistles of Christ to His professed Church. It is generally agreed in the Bible Student Movement that the seven messages of Christ to His Church represent seven periods of the Gospel Age, and that the Church of Laodicea represents the closing period of that Age.

The application to our times of the message to Laodicea was already recognised during the nineteenth century. Joseph Seiss, in a series of lectures on the Revelation given in 1865 wrote as follows:

"There is yet one other phase (of Church history). Shall I say that it is yet future, or that we have already entered it? Here are still some whom Christ loves, mostly suffering ones, under the rebukes and chastenings of their gracious Lord. (Ver. 19). But the body of Christendom is quite apostate, with Christ outside, and knocking for admission into His own professed Church .. Can

any man scrutinize narrowly the professed Church of our day, and say that we have not reached the Laodicean age? Is it not the voice of this Christendom of ours which says, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"? And is it not equally the fact that this selfsame Christendom of ours is "the wretched, and the pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked"? (Ver.17). Did the "Mene, Mene, tekel upharsin" of Belshazzar's palace better fit the ancient heathen, than this modern Christian Babylon? Men talk of it as destined to glorious triumph. They proclaim it commissioned of God to convert the world. They point to its onward march as about to take possession of the race for Christ and heaven. But the "Amen" hath spoken, "the faithful and true Witness" hath given His words: I am about to spue it out of My mouth."

As was commented earlier, we may not for the most part be positive in fixing an exact date for the beginning and end of each of the seven prophetic periods, and this seems to be especially true of the last, the Laodicean period. We may be certain about basic doctrinal features, but we cannot be so certain about time prophecies, for time is not so definitely stated in the Scriptures as are the basic doctrines. Believers are still walking by faith and not by sight. We can, however, observe events as they occur, and be able to see in them, or some of them, apparent fulfilment of important Scriptural prophecies.

A Second Decline In Christianity

Laodicea seems to represent what we see all around us in the ecclesiastical sphere - the apostasy of Protestant Christianity. Laodicea seems to depict the failure of Christendom a second time. The first time was the failure of Roman Christianity before the Reformation, necessitating sweeping reform and virtually a new beginning. Protestantism, as we know, originated in and came from Romanism, while the conditions described in the message to Philadelphia came from Protestantism.

Later visions of the Revelation that apply to the closing period of the Gospel Age, and therefore to Laodicea, depict a general falling of stars, that is, ecclesiastical leaders and teachers, from heavenly to earthly things, from spiritual to material issues, and the shaking of the powers of the heavens, that is, the ecclesiastical systems. Laodicea and its messenger seem to represent the culmination of this falling and shaking. Both the clergy (stars) and the people (lampstands) have fallen from grace spiritually and are found wanting.

There are of course notable exceptions in both of these classes, but the general picture is one of lukewarmness and lack of spirituality.

The seven "stars" or messengers of the vision of Christ among the lampstands apply in each case to a ministering class of teachers rather than to individuals, and Christ's words of commendation or reproof apply to the stars as well as to the Churches. The "stars", the messengers or leaders of individual congregations, are responsible for truthful leadership and guidance, while the congregations are responsible for support of the leaders, and attention to their exhortations and teachings. Such a relationship makes for harmony and unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3), but does not remove from believers the necessity to examine all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and work out for themselves their own salvation (Philippians 2:12).

Christ Rebukes the Ministry of Laodicea

A careful examination of the message to Laodicea reveals that the whole picture is one of an apostate condition, rejected by the Lord. The rejection is that of a whole ministry and laity, that is, the whole system of Protestant Christendom. The emphasis is on Protestantism, because Protestantism should be standing for the fundamental truths of Scripture, the re-discovery of which brought about the break with Rome and the establishment of the Protestant movement.

Rome still teaches and practises fundamental errors such as the Mass, the Trinity, the worship of Mary and saints, immortality of the soul, hell and purgatory as places of suffering, the confessional, to mention only some of the Papacy's most serious errors and practices. Rome continues, as it always has, with its erroneous teachings and practices, while Protestantism, in more recent times, has lost the zeal and energy of the early reformers, and continues to hold many serious errors of the Papacy, and is by and large content with concentration on social and political issues, and the construction and furnishing of extensive modern churches and premises.

In the Church of Laodicea the "stars" or messengers of the Church as well as the people are no longer recognised by the Lord as His representatives. They are about to be rejected, cast off from favour. The Lord Jesus' words are, *"Unto the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans write ... I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I will spue thee out of my mouth"*.

The Significance of the Name

The seventh and final message of Christ is addressed to the "*church of the Laodiceans*", rather than the Church in Laodicea, as the Churches in former messages were addressed. It seems as if the understanding of the Church as an elect company, separate from the world, has faded from view, and the world has now been permitted to intrude upon and divert the thinking and allegiance of the majority of Church members.

The derivation of the word Laodicea supports this thought. Joseph Seiss makes the following comment on the significance of the word "Laodiceans": "It is Laodicean, i.e. conformed to the popular judgment and will - the extreme opposite of Nicolaitan. Instead of a Church of domineering clericals, it is the Church of the domineering mob, in which nothing may be safely preached, except that which the people are pleased to hear - in which the teachings of the pulpit are fashioned to the tastes of the pew, and the feelings of the individual override the enactments of legitimate authority."

We learn from history that the name Laodicea was given by Antiochus II to the city where the last of the seven Churches was located. Antiochus II enlarged the city and named it in honour of his wife Laodice. Laodicea is a combination of two words, "laos" meaning "people" (Strong 2992), and "dike" meaning "right, justice, judgment" (Strong 1349). The meanings "people's right" and "judgment of the people" seem to fit the general conditions existing in Protestant Christianity today. People now have ready access to the Bible, and a copy of the sacred Scriptures is to be found in many homes today. People therefore have free and unfettered opportunity to read the Bible and learn from it the truths that will bring them freedom and everlasting life. But it is a fact that the majority of people are ignorant of the content and teachings of the Bible. Their ignorance is largely a willing ignorance, a delegation of their responsibility to read the Bible and learn for themselves.

People, by and large, transfer their individual responsibility to church leaders who do not proclaim the truths of the Bible. Many church leaders accept without question the materialistic and worldly proclamations of many scientists who deny God's word by teaching and supporting the theory of evolution with its rejection of creation and its basis in random chance events. Large numbers of people are turned away from the Bible because of such rejection of and opposition to its message of truth.

Over the last four centuries, the ecclesiastical yoke and tyranny of Rome have been broken by the work of the reformers, and the Scriptures have now become available to everyone. But the great truths of Scripture, hidden for centuries, are at the present time submerged and lost in worldliness, social and political issues, and materialistic scientific theories about the origin of the world and the human race. Although the evolutionary teachings are theory and unproven, they are paraded and proclaimed as fact, and many people, as has been said, are deceived and led away from the Word of God.

In considering the message to Laodicea it seems impossible to separate political from ecclesiastical conditions because the world and the Church are so closely allied. One meaning of "Laodicea", as stated above, is "people's right", and this meaning has become the watchword of the times in both political and ecclesiastical matters. The masses of the people are rising up as never before and claiming their so-called rights in political and ecclesiastical spheres.

As far as believers are concerned, Christ is the Master, not the clergy nor the people. We all belong to Him. Those who minister and those to whom ministry is given are all servants of Christ. Those who minister are servants, but not servants who are out merely to please people. The Apostle Paul wrote *"Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men"* (1 Corinthians 7:23); and also, *"If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10). Christ's service, on the part of all, is true and equal freedom in Him. Believers belong to Christ and to God through Him. We are His people, His servants, and should not be concerned with questions of so-called rights before Him.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Laodicea

There are special identifying characteristics, pointed out by the Saviour, which distinguish the Laodicean message from all the others, and describe vividly the condition of Protestant Christianity today, both clergy and laity.

3:14 *"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."*

The meaning of "amen" is "firm, trustworthy, surely, so be it" (Strong 281). The Lord announcing Himself as the Amen signifies that He is true, and ever dependable in word and action. The expression *"the faithful and true witness"* gives further

emphasis to the title "*Amen*" and signifies that Jesus is a true witness for God, and will not approve of anything of which the Lord God would not approve.

The title "*the beginning of the creation of God*" is most significant. The word translated "beginning" is the Greek word "arche" (Strong 746) meaning "commencement", from "archomai" (Strong 756) "to commence (in order of time)", and "archo" (Strong 759) a primary verb meaning "to be first". This means that the Lord Jesus was the first and only direct creation of God the Father. Paul gives us the same message in Colossians 1:15, telling us that Jesus is "*the firstborn of all creation*" (RV). The suggestion that the word "Arche" should be translated "beginner" is not allowable. "Arche" means commencement in time, rank or order and does not refer to activity at all. As an illustration we know that the letter "A" is the beginning of our alphabet, it is not the beginner.

Dr. Albert Barnes in his "Notes on Revelation" declares that the word "arche" properly denotes primacy in time as well as primacy in rank. Dr. Barnes applies the meaning to primacy in rank, and there is no reason to dispute this alternative understanding. He writes as follows:

"He is 'the beginning of the creation of God', in the sense that He is the head or prince of the creation; that is, that He presides over it so far as the purposes of redemption are to be accomplished, and so far as necessary for those purposes. This is:

(a) in accordance with the meaning of the word, Luke 12:11 (where the word beginning is translated magistrates); 20:20 (where the word beginning is translated power), et al ut supra, (and in other places as above); and

(b) in accordance with the uniform statements respecting the Redeemer, that 'all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth' (Matthew 28:18); that God has 'given Him power over all flesh' (John 17:2); that all things are 'put under His feet' (Hebrews 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:27); that He is exalted over all things (Ephesians 1:20-22). Having this rank, it was proper that He should speak with authority to the (messenger, pastor and) Church at Laodicea."

Lukewarmness

3:15 Jesus continued to address the Church of the Laodiceans in the words, *"I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot"*. The words "cold" and "hot" are used figuratively. "Cold" implies a condition in which there was no pretence of religion, while "hot" implies the very opposite: a state of warmth and fervent zeal in the love and service of Christ. The state or condition which Jesus reproves is that of profession without warm-hearted love and service. He uses the word "lukewarm" in the next verse, verse 16.

The Lord Jesus says, *"I would thou wert cold or hot"*. Evidently a cold state is preferable to Christ than a lukewarm one. The reason seems to be that a cold, non-professing state is more honest, and without concealment or pretence. But a lukewarm state would be one of indifference and failure to live up to the profession of Christianity, a condition of insincerity and even hypocrisy.

It would be neither proper nor correct to say that all who profess Christ in the Laodicean period are insincere or hypocritical, although from the facts and evidences available, the number of such must be considerable.

There are varying degrees of professing Christianity in Christendom. Some people have considerable Christian knowledge and therefore greater responsibility, while many are deceived by false doctrines and prominence of social issues. There would be many who are sincere, but who have never come to understand the requirements of discipleship, and have not gained a deep love of Christ and become zealous in serving Him.

3:16 Nevertheless the general condition described by the Master is that of lukewarmness, profession without true love and devotion, and all people in this condition are rejected by the Lord. The condition of lukewarmness is an indecisive condition, a state of being divided between Christ and the world, not willing to give up pretension and claim to the heavenly, yet clinging close to the earthly; not wishing to deny the name of Christ, yet having too much love for the world to take a firm and honest stand for Christ. There is an appearance of Christianity but little of life to correspond with Christ's requirements; there is much profession but very little faith.

Failures of the Laodiceans

3:17 In Jesus' words "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked*" we see a spirit of pride and boastfulness in the Laodicean period.

It would not be profitable or acceptable to sit in judgment or give specific details of failures in the Laodicean Church. Some observations may, however, be in order. Evidences of pride and boastfulness may be seen in the eagerness of Christian religious leaders and organisations to provide statistics and advertise their activities. Meetings and conferences are convened for these purposes rather than for ministering the Word of God to the people. A great amount of attention is given to the externals of Christian life and to gaining the approval and even applause of the world. Great churches have been built, many with luxurious appointments and facilities, agreeable preachers are paid to speak in them, excellent music is to be heard in them, while many of Christendom's church organisations sponsor and endow institutions and charities, and have many missionaries in the field. These properties and attributes combine to make the Laodiceans think they are rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing.

The Laodiceans claim to be rich, but their riches are not the true riches of spiritual truth. Many churches rejoice in their wealth of numbers. But how many attenders are begotten by the good word of the Kingdom of God? How many know anything at all about God's Kingdom? With such serious errors as the Trinity, a basic doctrine, how many truly understand and believe in Jesus as their Ransomer and Deliverer from sin and death?

Our Lord's words, "*Thou art wretched*", do not denote that those being rebuked are actually conscious of their condition. The words refer to the condition itself, rather than the consciousness of it. The word "miserable" as here used means in a pitiable state rather than an awareness of such a condition.

The word "poor" surely refers to the spiritual state of the Laodiceans. They lack the graces which are the fruit of Christ's spirit. They are "blind", blind to their true condition, blind to the signs of the times, blind to what constitutes true Christianity, and blind to the fact that judgment is soon to come.

They are represented also as "naked", void of the understanding of imputed righteousness, which comes by faith in Jesus as Ransomer and in His blood shed for the remission of sins for all people for all time.

Truly, the god of this world has blinded the Laodiceans' perception of God's character and His plan of salvation, and is leading the Laodiceans further and further from God's Word of Truth. The clergy, by and large, with their teachings of Higher Criticism and Evolution, are denuding Laodicea, making her naked, leading her away from Christ and causing her to trust, not in Christ's sacrifice and precious blood, but in an evolutionary process which needs no Saviour, which denies an atonement for sin or even such a thing as sin which needs atonement; and claims that humanity has ground for pride in its own progress, which will be quite sufficient, with the aid of science and technology, to bring to humankind every desired blessing without any Saviour, and without God's Kingdom for which Jesus taught us always to pray and which God has promised in His Word.

3:18 *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."*

Gold, at that time the most valuable of metals, is used in Scripture to symbolise the most valuable of heavenly, spiritual things. It is reasonable to think that gold is symbolic of the true religion of Jesus Christ, which makes the possessor of it rich indeed, rich in spiritual riches, such as forgiveness of sins, peace with God as His children in Christ Jesus His Son, the granting and receiving of a measure of the Holy Spirit, and a knowledge of God's Kingdom and the blessing of all the families of the earth.

"White raiment" signifies *"the righteousness of saints"* (Revelation 19:8), the righteousness which is imputed to believers in Jesus Christ to make them acceptable to God (Romans 4:20-25; James 2:20-24). We are none of us righteous (Romans 3:10, 23), but God is pleased to consider us righteous and deal with us as if we were righteous and without sin. The *"white raiment"* enables us to be clothed with righteousness so that the shame of our sin is hidden by the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see".

Eyesalve is an ointment for weak or infected eyes or both, and the thought is that if the Laodiceans truly turned to Christ, He would give them the power to see and understand spiritual things such as God's love and plan of salvation in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

3:19 *"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten"*. These words are addressed to Christ's own followers, and not to the rejected Laodiceans. These words are harmonious with the Apostle's words in Hebrews 12:6: *"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"*. We all know we need the Lord's correction from time to time when we are inclined to drift or go astray. Such correction, in whatever form it may take, is evidence of His love for us, and should be accepted with meekness and willingness to obey His will at all times.

The following words *"Be zealous therefore, and repent"* seem also to be addressed to Christ's true followers who may be influenced by the lukewarmness of Laodicea, and tempted by the world to follow its ways.

The Saviour at the Door

3:20 *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock"* is of course figurative of the nearness of the Lord's appearing. The "knock" may well symbolise the opening of the Scriptures and the prophecies which speak of the Lord's return.

The understanding of the Lord Jesus' "parousia" or presence as a period of time in which the Lord Jesus will be present but unseen by the world at large will not be discussed here. It will be sufficient to say that in this last era of the Gospel Age, the Lord's true people will have an understanding of Scriptural prophecy, and will open their hearts to the Lord and receive Him as their Saviour. The Lord will then come into that person's heart and will be close to him or her, symbolised by coming into one's home as a guest and sharing hospitality.

The figurative knock and the promises in connection with it are personal and individual. Each of us should ask: "Have I heard our Saviour's knock? Have I opened the door of my heart? Have I invited the Lord to honour me so as to come and dine with my loved ones in the Lord and with me?"

3:21 *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."*

The message is that Christ is given a Kingdom by God, His Heavenly Father. This is in harmony with all that the Scriptures say about Christ's future work in relation to the human family.

"I appoint unto you a Kingdom, even as my Father hath appointed unto me" (Luke 22:29).

"Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones ..." (Matthew 19:28).

"When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, And before Him shall be gathered all nations...." (Matthew 25:31 and 32).

"And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4).

These and many more passages teach the truth of Christ's Kingship and the Church's privileged position of reigning with Him. Christ's Kingdom, given to Him by God, is to be over this earth and its people. All who have lived on the earth as Adam's descendants will, after the resurrection, come under this dominion. The object will be to restore as many of them who will be obedient and faithful to righteousness and everlasting life in an earthly paradise. This most wonderful promise of God has largely been obscured and lost by false doctrines of the immortality of the soul and erroneous notions concerning the state of the dead and everlasting punishment.

Promises to Overcomers

The promise to the Laodicean overcomers is not for them alone. All overcomers throughout the Gospel Age will share in the promised reward, as the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:8. The promises to the overcomers in each of the seven prophetic periods belong to all alike, even as the conditions described in each of the seven letters have to be overcome by all alike.

The first promise to Ephesus refers to a partaking of the fruit of the "tree of knowledge" of good and evil, which was forbidden to Adam. This is secured by cherishing and holding fast to their "first love" for the Master and His truth. All overcomers will receive of this reward.

The second promise to Smyrna proclaims a victory over adversities, persecutions and afflictions by faithfully testifying to the Christian faith under the most trying of conditions. The reward promised is the "crown of life" and immunity from death forever. This will be the reward of all who prove faithful unto death.

The third promise, that given to Pergamos, is the gift of the "white stone", the assurance of Christ's acceptance and approval, and the "hidden manna", the Divine incorruptible nature as a reward for faithfulness in following the Master and separating from worldliness and worldly patronage and friendship.

The fourth, that to Thyatira, promises authority and rulership over the nations under Christ in the future instead of the worldly authority of Jezebel and Papal rulership.

The fifth promise, recorded under the message to Sardis, gives the assurance that the overcomer's name will not be erased from the book of life, and each will walk with Jesus in white as a reward for keeping garments undefiled in the midst of spiritual laxity and deadness.

The sixth promise, that made to Philadelphia, is to take part in the New Jerusalem government, as well as to be made a pillar in the Temple of God, that is, the Gospel Age Church, because of faithfully manifesting and maintaining the spirit of brotherly love, and holding fast to the Word of His patience.

The seventh, the promise to Laodicea, describes sharing in a dominion. No higher honour could be imagined as a result of persevering in separation from the lukewarmness and apostasy of Laodicean conditions.

These seven promises, when taken together, describe privileges, blessings and honours which our *"eyes have not seen, nor our ears heard, nor has it entered into our hearts the things God has prepared for them that love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

These seven promises give us the most complete description to be found in the Scriptures of the good things God has prepared for His people who love Him.

3:22 *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."*

CHAPTER 5

THE VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD

REVELATION 4:1 - 5:14

THE TIMING AND APPLICATION OF THE VISIONS GIVEN TO JOHN

The striking and remarkable vision of the Lord Jesus among the lampstands has been completed. The messages to the seven Churches, with commendations of the true believers, reproofs of the idle and apathetic, warnings to the unfaithful, and promises of glory to the overcomers, have all been given.

The messages to the seven Churches have been understood prophetically, and have brought us through the whole length of the Gospel Age to the very end of it when the Master returns, knocking figuratively at the door of the Laodicean Church, with a promise of a wonderful blessing to anyone in Laodicea who will hear His knock and open the door. This is to be taken individually. Each believer who understands the prophecy, and opens the door of his or her heart, is promised the blessing that the Lord Jesus will come and dine with the believing one, a symbolic representation of a close personal relationship.

The Lord Jesus has always been with His faithful ones, but the promise to those in Laodicea is special in point of time. The message to Laodicea, as has been discussed, is prophetic of the end period of the Gospel Age, the period in which the Lord's promised return is to take place. In this period there is widespread apathy, described as lukewarmness in the prophetic passage, with the result that only comparatively few believers are seeking to understand the Scriptures relating to the Lord's return, and so great numbers of Christians do not hear the Lord's figurative knock at their door, and do not realise their time of opportunity.

But now another vision, more splendid and glorious than the first, and covering a greater range of time, is to be shown to John. But before the glories of the new vision begin to be revealed, a very significant question arises from the words of Revelation 4:1

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

- 4:1 The question that arises is in two parts:
1. what is meant by "*after this*"; and
 2. what time is meant by "*hereafter*"?

The answer to the first part of the question refers only to the fact that the visions given to John were given consecutively, one after another. The fulfilment of the visions, as will be explained, will not necessarily follow the order in which the visions were given.

The second part of the question concerns the word "hereafter", and has to do with the fulfilment of the visions yet to be shown to John. The Diaglott, in both the word for word translation and the smooth reading has "*after these things*"; the NIV and RSV have "*after this*", the Living Bible, Phillip's Modern English Version, the Jerusalem Bible and the Amplified Bible have "*in the future*".

The meaning seems to be that the vision of Chapter 4 and the visions to follow are visions of events and developments that were future in John's day, and although the visions are given one after the other, the fulfilment of them, as we will endeavour to show, is not necessarily consecutive. The visions to be given to John are visions of events and developments in the Gospel Age and the Kingdom Age, and each vision focuses on a particular aspect or event that was future from John's day.

The reasons for the understanding of the time and application of each of John's visions will be given as the commentary develops and proceeds.

THE THRONE AND FOUR AND TWENTY SEATS

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

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

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

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

4:2 The phrase "*in the spirit*" was also used in Revelation 1:10, and has the same meaning there and here, of being under the

inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. In this inspired state, John would be able to see and accurately describe all that was shown in the visions given to him. The significance of this second mention of being "*in the spirit*" may well be that there was an interval of time between the visions already given to him. John was an old man, and it is reasonable to assume that the Lord allowed John time to recover from the effect on him of each vision or series of visions.

In the spirit John saw a throne in heaven and one seated on it. We do not need to think that John was temporarily changed into a spirit being so that he could see God on His throne. What John saw was a vision of God's glory, not the Creator as He is in His heaven in the spirit realm. John is telling us simply that he continued to be under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit.

4:3 Only the most general description of God is given, "*like a jasper and sardine stone*". The precious stones mentioned in Scripture are not readily identified with present-day names of precious stones. From the description of the jasper in Revelation 21:11 as "*most precious*" and "*clear as crystal*", the jasper would seem to correspond to the diamond. The sardine stone in its most valuable forms is a bright red. The "*rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald*" adds to the glory of the vision, and may also be understood as a symbol of God's faithfulness (Genesis 9:12-17; Ezekiel 1:28).

4:4 The word for "seats" in this verse is the plural form of the word translated "throne" in verses 2 and 3 and also in this verse. The English word "throne" is derived directly from the Greek word "thronos" (Strong 2362). John saw twenty-four thrones arranged around the central throne, and each of the twenty-four thrones was occupied by an elder clothed in white with a crown of gold on his head.

Twenty-four elders are not referred to as such anywhere in the Bible other than in the book of Revelation, either as earthly human beings or as featuring in visions. The twenty-four elders in the verse being now considered are part of a vision given to John, so it is reasonable to assume that the elders have a symbolic significance and meaning.

Fortunately an indication of the meaning is given to us in Revelation 7:11-17. In Revelation 7:9 and 10 John has recorded the vision given to him of the great multitude, after which the elders are mentioned again in verse 11, and one of them asked

John, "*What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?*". John replied to the elder saying, "*Sir, thou knowest*". The elder then answered his own question by quotations and allusions from various books of Scripture, such as Isaiah 1:18, 49:10, 25:8; Zechariah 3:3-5; Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:7; Jeremiah 51:25; Exodus 7:17,19; John 10:11,14 and Psalm 23:1, 2. In the elder's answer we may reasonably conclude that the twenty-four elders symbolise the Divine Word of the Old and New Testaments.

The elders' white clothing symbolises righteousness (Revelation 19:8), while their golden crowns and their thrones symbolise their divinely-given authority to rule.

The twenty-four elders symbolise the writings rather than the writers of the Old and New Testaments. If all the Old Testament writers of all the Psalms and some of the books were known for certain, they might number thirty or perhaps more; while the New Testament writers are eight in number. The total number of the writers is therefore considerably more than twenty-four. Moreover, the inspired writers, whatever their number, acknowledged that the words they were inspired to speak and write were superior to the writers who wrote them. The inspired words were greater than, and ruled over those who wrote them.

The choice of the number twenty-four may have some connection with the basis of God's purpose in choosing national Israel, rejecting the nation because of unbelief, and establishing a new Israel, often referred to as "spiritual" Israel. The foundation of national Israel consisted of the twelve tribes, having their origin in the twelve sons of Jacob, while the foundation of the new Israel consists of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. In any case, the symbolism refers to the sacred Scriptures in their entirety, the number twenty-four does not affect the meaning of the symbol.

4:5 The "*lightnings and thunderings and voices*" coming from the throne could well symbolise flashes of illumination and enlightenment of people's minds, agitations resulting from increased knowledge and enlightenment, and voices of command as recorded in the Scriptures. The seven lamps representing the seven Spirits of God symbolise the Holy Spirit in completeness.

THE SEA OF GLASS AND FOUR LIVING ONES

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

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

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

4:6 The "sea of glass" should not be understood as a large lake or body of water of glassy smoothness and clearness, but rather an article of furniture reminiscent of the lavers in the tabernacle and temples of the Law Covenant era. Before the tabernacle in the wilderness was a large laver or basin filled with water for the use of the priests, enabling them to wash their hands and feet as they approached the altar of sacrifice in the court or the Divine Presence in the tabernacle. In the furnishings of Solomon's temple the laver became "a molten sea" with ten additional lavers (Exodus 30:17-21; 1 Kings 7:23-29). In the vision seen by John the sea of glass would seem to signify the necessity for purity of heart and mind in those who would approach the Divine Presence (Psalm 24:3-6; Habakkuk 1:13).

The word translated "beasts" in the KJV is better rendered as "living creatures" as in the NIV and RSV, or better still as "living ones", being the literal rendering. Visions similar to the four "living ones" seen by John were granted to Ezekiel (chapters 1 to 10), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-7). At the gate of Eden, after Adam and Eve were cast out, the Cherubim and a flaming sword guarded the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). In the tabernacle and afterwards in the temple were two golden images of cherubim over the mercy seat where the Divine presence was located. The significance and meaning of "living ones" and the cherubim in the various Scriptures mentioned are thoroughly discussed and explained in chapter 15 of the book "Comparisons and Contrasts" by E.C.Henningses. The symbolism of the "living ones" is that of Divine Providence.

4:7 The resemblance of the first living creature to a lion indicates the majesty and power of Divine Providence; the second, like a calf (or ox) the patience of Divine Providence; the third, with a face as a man, the intelligence and thoughtfulness of

Divine Providence; while the fourth, like a flying eagle, represents the swiftness and directness of Divine Providence. All of these attributes of Divine Providence are seen, either separately or together, when God's providential care is in action on behalf of God's people.

Through Moses God said to the children of Israel, *"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself"* (Exodus 19:4). Later in Revelation 12:14, John wrote, *"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness"*. Therefore in both the Old and New Testaments, illustrations are given of Divine Providence, as represented in the fourth living creature, acting swiftly and directly on behalf of God's people, bringing them in each case into the wilderness, either literally or in a situation of isolation from distraction, so that they might be closer to God.

Besides such instances as these as recorded in Scripture, every child of God has had his or her own individual experiences of Divine Providence in action in life, helping and sustaining in times of stress and trial, and enabling the believer to endure and gain the victory that comes through faith (1 John 5:4). Believers also have the assurance *"that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

4.8 Each of the four living creatures had six *wings* *"full of eyes within"* in addition to being *"full of eyes before and behind"* as seen in verse 6. And so it is with Divine Providence. Everything is seen, nothing is missed; even the very hairs of the heads of God's people are numbered (Luke 12:7). Nothing in each believer's experience is too small to be noticed, no fact, even a national exodus from an unwilling country, too great for Divine Providence to accomplish. Moreover, the exodus from Egypt was a small matter compared with the prospects graciously offered to the Christian believer (Luke 12:22-32, 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Thus Divine Providence demonstrates the holiness of Him Who is its Source, and Whose perfection is the pattern for His people. *"Be ye holy; for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:16). Without ceasing, the living creatures proclaim the holiness of the Lord God Almighty.

ALL CREATION IS FOR GOD'S PLEASURE

⁹*And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,*

¹⁰*The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*

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

4:9, 10 The twenty-four elders are in full agreement with the four living creatures in the worship and praise of God. The elders also acknowledge their submission and loyalty by falling down before God and casting their crowns before Him. Divine Providence and the Divine Word are thus seen as giving glory, honour and thanks to God Who is the Source of all things.

4.11 God is worthy to receive glory, honour, praise and power because He has created all things. Before any living being and anything was created He must have been alone in space and time. There was no-one to consult, and no-one to offer advice. He was under no obligation to create any being or anything. He could have remained alone, and there would have been none to question His decision. But He chose not to remain alone. He chose to create. Therefore, as our verse tells us, it is true that for His pleasure, or by His will, as the RV, NIV and RSV render the phrase, all things "*are and were created*".

All angels, all people and indeed all things owe their existence to God, as does also the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord Jesus was ever thankful and submissive to God in His earthly ministry, as He has always been in ages past and continues to be in the heavenly places. The Lord Jesus now has all power in heaven and earth, but this has been given to Him by God, and when all God's purposes for the earth and the human race will have been accomplished, Jesus will return all power and authority to God, His Heavenly Father (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:28).

Believers who have come to know God through Jesus Christ, should join with the worship, praise and honour given to God by the Divine Word and Divine Providence, being and remaining ever thankful that they were created and remain in existence by His grace and for His pleasure. For He is love, He is ever loving and kind, He is ever holy, indeed thrice holy is His glorious Name (1 John 4:8).

NO MAN WAS FOUND WORTHY

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

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

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

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

5:1 The "book" mentioned in each of the first four verses of chapter 5 should be "scroll". In the time when the Revelation was written, books as we know them did not exist. The scroll was written "*within and on the backside*". This would mean that the scroll was fully covered with writing. "*Sealed with seven seals*" would mean completely sealed, with the written contents secured from access while the seals remained unopened. Some of Daniel's prophecies were commanded to be sealed until the time of the end, so that their messages could not be understood in Daniel's time, nor for many centuries after Daniel was inspired to write them. Even then only "*the wise*" would understand them (Daniel 12:4,9 and 10). "*The wise*" are those who believe in God and come to Him through Jesus Christ in repentance and humility, and who study the Scriptures to gain wisdom and understanding with the help of God's Holy Spirit.

5:2, 3 The "*strong angel*" is not named, therefore probably not intended to be identified. The effect as well as the intention of the proclamation by the angel was to demonstrate that no one "*in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth*" was worthy to open the scroll and read its contents. The KJV translation "man" in verses 4 and 5 should be "one", because there was no being, angelic or human, who possessed the worthiness to open the scroll and reveal its contents. Even among all people who had passed into death, those who were "*under the earth*", no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll.

5:4 This lack of worthiness must have been very grievous to John, because we are told that he "*wept much*". But, as we will see, God intended that the scroll would be unsealed and its contents made known, and knew that there was one Being, mighty in righteousness and obedience to Him, Who alone had the worthiness to open the scroll and reveal its contents. And so it was that John's sorrow was soon to be replaced by assurance and comfort.

THE LAMB IS WORTHY

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

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

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

5:5 One of the twenty-four elders speaks words of comfort to John. The elder tells John to "*Weep not*", because there is One Who is worthy. The elder then uses references and expressions from the Scriptures to identify the One found worthy: "*the Lion of the tribe of Juda*" (Genesis 49:9, 10) and "*the Root of David*" (Isaiah 11:1,10). The elder assures John that this One has "prevailed" and demonstrated His worthiness to unseal and open the scroll. The elder's acknowledgement of and reference to the Scriptures harmonise with the interpretation suggested in verse 4 of the previous chapter, namely that the four and twenty elders represent the Divine Word of the Old and New Testaments.

5:6 Then John saw a Lamb, a Lamb such as had never been seen in prophetic vision or in nature . It was "*a Lamb as it had been slain "standing" in the midst of the elders*". The Lamb appeared as having been slain, but was alive and standing in the vision. The Lamb John saw had seven horns and seven eyes. Seven is usually understood in prophecy to represent completeness, so seven horns would represent complete power. The seven eyes are explained as "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth". The "seven eyes" of the Lamb are "*the eyes of the Lord ... in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15:3). The Scripture phrases used by the elder and the description of the Lamb restored to life again are sufficient to identify the Lamb as the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, Who had said of Himself in the message to Laodicea, "*even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne*" (Revelation 3:21). The Lamb has "prevailed" or overcome, and John sees Him "*in the midst of the throne*".

5:7 Having demonstrated His worthiness, the Lamb takes the scroll "*out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne*". This action is the same as that spoken of in Revelation 1:1, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him*".

The Revelation must have been given to the Lord Jesus before John recorded the visions in AD 96, the time when the Lord Jesus *"sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John."* Consideration of these things helps us to understand the scope of the word "hereafter" in Revelation 4:1. The word does not refer to time after the Laodicean period of the Gospel Age Church, that is, at the close of the Gospel Age, but to time beginning shortly after, or perhaps a little before, the giving of the visions to John. The visions of Revelation chapters 4 and 5 set the scene preceding the further visions which foretell the experiences of God's people as contained in the prophecies within the sealed scroll.

These early visions set the scene for the interpretations offered in these notes. The Revelation consists of a series of visions which repeatedly portray differing events and developments of the Gospel and Kingdom Ages which concern God's people, both His committed people through Jesus Christ, and those who acknowledge Him but are not truly committed. This understanding of the broad outlines of the Revelation has been acknowledged, at least in part, by many who have tried to interpret the Revelation as a prophecy of consecutive events without repetitions.

The interpretation which holds that the visions and prophecies of Revelation must be understood as fulfilled consecutively cannot be sustained when we reach chapters 11 and 12. The events associated with the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15-18 clearly refer to Kingdom Age activities and to the finalising of God's gracious plan of redemption. It is equally clear that chapter 12 cannot be understood as referring to time following the finalising of the work of redemption. Chapter 12, as we will see, should be understood as going back in time to present another vision of differing events and developments during the time that was previously covered in earlier prophecies.

The understanding and belief put forward in these notes mean that visions and prophecies repeatedly go back in time to present new visions prophesying events and developments that are different from those which were previously given, though the same periods of time are often covered. **In other words, throughout the book, different aspects and events of the same periods of time are presented to the reader, and are a feature of the Revelation prophecies.**

This going back to portray other visions of periods and events already dealt with is done several times in the Revelation. It would seem that the various details fall more readily into their place within the whole book if this principle is recognised and followed.

THE OVATION TO THE LAMB

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

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

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

¹¹*And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;* ¹²*Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

5:8 The taking of the scroll by the Lamb is the signal for a general and wonderful ovation. The symbolism of Divine Providence represented by the four living creatures, and the Divine Word represented by the twenty-four elders acknowledge and testify to the worthiness of the Lamb and the reason for His worthiness.

There are also harps in the vision. The harp in early times was the most highly-developed musical instrument known to the human race, and could be played to produce harmonious sounds, pleasing to the ear. The symbolism may be understood as the harmonious agreement of all the created beings and instrumentalities in giving praise and honour to the Lamb.

The "vials" should be "bowls" and the "odours" should be "incense", as in the Diaglott, RSV and NIV. The golden bowls full of incense are, we are told, the prayers of saints. The meaning of the symbolism is that the Divine Word has authorised and indeed exhorted all believers to pray, and has many recorded instances of prayers offered to God. In other words Divine Providence and the Divine Word encourage prayers to be offered to God.

The Lord's people have long prayed to know of the progress of the Divine Plan of salvation, and to know how much longer the prevalence of evil would be permitted to endure. There is no reproof in the Scriptures of such prayers. In the parable of the importunate widow in Luke 18:1-8, believers are encouraged to maintain their interest and their faith and continue to pray without ceasing and not faint (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 1:1). The Lord's saints would be greatly interested in the information contained in the sealed scroll, hence their participation by their prayers in this acclamation to the Lamb.

5:9, 10 They sang a new song proclaiming the reason for the Lamb's worthiness: *"for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed"*. The word "us" is omitted in the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, and omitted in the RV and Diaglott. Worthiness as far as members of the Adamic race are concerned is usually determined by faith in God through Jesus Christ and obedience to Divine requirements.

In the case of the Lord Jesus, He was without sin and never failed in faith and obedience. His worthiness stems from the fact that He was slain, and His death was the ransom or purchase price of the whole human race. Moreover He shed His sinless blood for the remission of sin, all sin, in the past, present and future, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). Here the central and basic fact of redemption is stated, as it was in Revelation 1:5. This fact is stated many times in Scripture as the main reason for the exaltation of our Lord to the highest possible position in the universe, the right hand of God. Two or three of such references will suffice for the present - Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20.

The song that was sung was a new song. It could not have been sung before the Lamb of God had actually been slain as the price of redemption, and His worthiness forever established and declared.

The King James Version translation of the latter part of verse 9 and of verse 10 gives the impression that the living ones and the twenty-four elders were singing a song that applied to themselves. Because of this translation, some commentators have understood the living ones and the elders to be a representation of the Gospel Age Church in glory. But the most ancient manuscripts, the Sinaitic and the Vatican, the RV, NIV

and RSV do not support the use of the pronouns as found in the KJV. The Diaglott renders the passage accurately; " *Because thou wast killed, and didst redeem to God, with thy blood, out of every Tribe, and Tongue, and People, and Nation; and thou didst make them to our God a Royalty and a Priesthood, and they shall reign on the earth*".

The new song was certainly, at least in part, about the Gospel Age Church and the High Calling; but it was not at all about the living ones and elders.

5:11,12 On earth there have often been great gatherings of people in many countries for a variety of reasons, but earth has never seen or heard anything approaching the vision that John saw and heard. The number of angels "*round about the throne*" and the living ones and the elders was "*ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*". The word translated "ten thousand" is "myriad", which means "ten thousand", and in the text the word is in the plural, "myriads of myriads". Ten thousand times ten thousand amounts to one hundred million. The plural would make the number twice as great and probably more. Then when "*thousands of thousands*" are added, each one thousand times one thousand amounting to one million, the number John saw must have been very great.

Perhaps what is meant is that the whole population of heaven was present to acclaim the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain to receive all that the Father had promised and given Him, namely, all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 1:4-6).

Believers also should praise Him, the Lord Jesus, with heart and voice, the One Who purchased them unto God and gave them a kingdom and a priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

A GENERAL ACCLAMATION

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

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

5:13 An acclamation even more wonderful than the ovation to the Lamb is now seen and heard. All the heavenly host are joined by every creature *"on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea"*. Those *"under the earth"* and *"in the sea"* must mean those who have gone into death awaiting the resurrection. We must therefore conclude that this part of John's vision will not be fulfilled until the resurrection of all the dead, small and great will have taken place.

Then, when the fulfilment of this general acclamation takes place, there will be such a general tribute of praise and glory to God and to Jesus Christ as has never occurred before, indeed has never been possible before while Satan and sin hold the human race under their evil dominion.

5:14 To this general acclamation of God and His Son Jesus Christ, the four living ones say "Amen", and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the Father and the Son.

The final seven words of this verse are omitted by the three most ancient manuscripts, also by the RV, NIV, RSV, and the Diaglott, so that the verse should read, *"And the four living ones said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped"*.

CHAPTER 6

THE LAMB OPENS THE SEVEN SEALS REVELATION 6:1 - 8:1

Everything is now in readiness, and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, is about to open the seals, one by one, revealing information which God, the One occupying the rainbow-circled throne, had hitherto kept in His own power, as Jesus had said in Acts 1:7.

On our part we should take note that whatever is revealed as the seals are opened will be in signs and symbols, as indicated in Revelation 1:1 and 2. *"....And he (Jesus Christ) sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw".*

John has recorded the signs and visions that he saw, and it is our task and indeed our Christian duty to endeavour to understand them. Some of the signs will almost explain themselves; some will be understandable because of their allusions and references to other parts of the Scriptures; while some will not be so easy and will require some knowledge of recorded history for their interpretation.

THE FIRST SEAL

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

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

6:1 John saw the Lamb open one of the seals, and heard one of the living ones say in a voice like thunder, "Come.. The KJV has "*I heard, as it were the noise of thunder*", but other versions, the RV, RSV, NIV, the Diaglott, Young's literal translation and Rotherham's translation all have the living one speaking in a voice like thunder. It would seem that the first living one, the one "*like a lion*" is meant here, because in verses 3, 5 and 7 the ordinal numbers are used: second, third and fourth, referring to the other three living ones.

In nature the lion can be said to have a voice like thunder, which seems to fit the picture of the majesty and power of Divine Providence. The words "and see" are omitted by the Alexandrine manuscript, but are found in the Sinaitic. The RV and all modern translations, as well as the Diaglott, omit the words "and see" and have simply "Come".

6:2 John saw a white horse and a rider seated on the horse. The horse and rider together may be understood to symbolise movement and activity. The horse was white, signifying righteousness and purity. The rider possessed a bow, and a crown was given to him which indicates royalty and kingly power.

In the days when these words were written, the bow was a weapon with the longest range then known. Arrows could be propelled for quite long distances by an experienced archer with a first-class bow. Nothing is said about arrows in this verse, but it is reasonable to include them because a bow without arrows would be useless to a rider going "*forth conquering, and to conquer*".

What is the significance of the bow and arrows in this vision? In the New Testament the word "bow" is found only in this verse. In the Old Testament the word "bow" is used many times, but only a few times, as in Isaiah 7:24, are arrows mentioned. For thousands of years, before the invention and use of gunpowder, archers in armies of war were not called bow-and-arrow-men, but simply bowmen, as in Jeremiah 4:29. Some other references are Genesis 48:22; Joshua 24:12; 2 Samuel 1: 18,22; 2 Kings 6:22; 2 Chronicles 17:17; Psalm 44:6; and Jeremiah 9:3. When Hagar feared death from thirst for herself and Ishmael her son, she left Ishmael "*under one of the shrubs*", and went "*a good way off, as it were a bowshot*" (Genesis 21:16).

The word "arrow" is not found in the New Testament, so we must look to the Old Testament to help us understand the symbolic meaning. In the Old Testament, arrows often stand for words, as in Psalm 64:2-8, where arrows are said to be "*bitter words*", and also in Proverbs 25:18, 26:18 and 19, and Jeremiah 9:8, in which references we are told that arrows are symbols of words spoken by evil persons.

The sign that John saw of the rider on the white horse may be reasonably understood as the Gospel of Jesus Christ going forth in purity at the beginning of the Gospel Age. The inspired

apostles and disciples spoke and worked with authority, and the apostles were able to pass on to other believers the gift of prophecy, that is, proclaiming the Gospel message in public, speaking words of life and truth to all who would listen. The Gospel *"went forth conquering and to conquer"*. Its influence in Jerusalem was immediate and considerable, and the word of life quickly spread to other parts of Palestine and beyond. The Book of Acts tells us something of the Gospel's early progress (Acts 2: 4-11, 41; 4:4, 33, 5:14; 6:7; 8:26-39; and 21:18-20).

The words of life in the Gospel message had an unprecedented impact in Jerusalem and Palestine. Hostile Jews spoke of Paul and his helpers as those *"that have turned the world upside down"*, and deliberately misinterpreted the kingly authority given to Jesus by falsely accusing the Gospel messengers of doing things *"contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus"* (Acts 17:6,7).

But the white horse and its kingly rider did not long remain going forth in purity.

THE SECOND SEAL

³*And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.*

⁴*And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*

The conquering aspect of the pure Gospel did not continue for very long. Even while the inspired Apostles and disciples were preaching and active, there were contradictors, blasphemers, as well as pretenders, whose insidious activities made it necessary for the Apostles to warn and exhort the brethren to *"earnestly contend"*, that is, struggle (Strong 1864) *"for the faith once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3; 2 Corinthians 11:3,4, 13-15).

The Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to *"feed the Church of God,"* knowing beforehand that *"grievous wolves"* would *"enter in"* among the Church members, *"not sparing the flock."* (Acts 20:28, 29).

While there remained on earth the inspired apostles and disciples, as well as those who had received the miraculous gifts of the Spirit and were exercising them, the pure gospel message

could still be heard. But when all the Apostles and those who had received the miraculous gifts had finished their earthly courses, believers had to continue as best they could with the help of the written word and the influence of the Holy Spirit without its miraculous manifestations, in such measure as God saw fit to give.

But many did not continue faithfully and well. As Paul warned the Ephesian elders: *"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:30). So instead of carrying on to spiritual victory, many were carried away to spiritual loss and defeat.

6:3 When the second seal was opened, the second living one, the one like a calf or an ox, called to John to come. Again the words "and see" should be omitted as noted under 6:1. There is no mention of royalty or a voice like thunder here. The symbol is of the patience of God's Providence, and this would be directed to the assistance of God's true people in their learning and practice of patience, for they would have a great need of it in the troubled times soon to come.

6:4 Another horse *"that was red"* now appears in the vision. The whiteness of purity has gone, and the redness of bloodshed and persecution have come.

The word "power" is in italics in the King James Version, indicating that it is a word supplied by the KJV translators. Sometimes words not in the original manuscript are supplied to make sense for the readers, and sometimes this practice is good and helpful, but not always.

In this verse the use of the word "power" gives the impression that some authorisation or permission was given to the rider of the red horse, whereas such is not the case. No permit or authority was given to the rider of the red horse. The Diaglott has *"and to the one sitting on him was it given to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill each other"*. The RV has a similar translation, but other later versions are not so helpful. The meaning seems to be that the rider on the red horse had the ability *"to take peace from the earth"*, and he did so. God allowed this development to take place, but did not authorise the rider on the red horse to act as he did.

The symbolism of the second seal prophesies the persecution, bloodshed and strife to come among and upon the professed people of God. Arguments, recriminations and persecutions took place within the Church, in addition to the severe persecutions of Christians by the heathen Roman emperors.

Within the Church, the arguments were mostly about the nature and body of Jesus Christ in His pre-human estate, then while He was on earth, and subsequently in His resurrected state. There were also arguments about Jesus' relationship to His Heavenly Father in all of those three aspects of Jesus' existence.

The persecutions under the Roman emperors continued virtually unabated, culminating in the "ten days", that is, ten years of "tribulation" mentioned in Revelation 2:10. The persecution of the Christians, however, ended abruptly in 314 AD.

In 314 AD the Roman Emperor Constantine announced his conversion to Christianity and decreed that Christianity should be the religion of the empire. Political persecution of Christians ceased, but internal strife among professing Christians became even more fierce and tumultuous, so that peace was indeed taken from the earth, that is, the social order of the time. Constantine feared that the stability of the empire was in jeopardy. He therefore used his imperial authority to summon 318 bishops to a general council at Nicea in 325 AD to clarify and lay down what was to be acknowledged as the acceptable Christian doctrine on the disputed subjects, and thus secure the peace of the empire. From this council issued the Nicene creed, which led on to the Athanasian statement of what had to be believed in order to gain salvation.

The emperor's support of the Nicene creed, because it was the finding of the council (though it is believed he preferred non-Trinitarian teachings), marked the beginning of the giving of the "great sword" to the rider on the red horse. At this period in history the bishops had in some places a measure of local authority in secular affairs, comparable in some respects to that of a modern magistrate in the court system. But when Christianity became the religion of the empire by imperial decree, the power of the bishops and clergy was greatly increased, particularly of those who acknowledged and submitted to the dictates of the Nicene creed.

After Constantine's death, there were some emperors who favoured the teachings of Arius (teachings denying the Trinity), and persecutions of the Trinitarian Athanasius and his followers took place. But over time, the influence of the emperors favoured the creeds of Nicea and Athanasius, and these teachings prevailed.

The Christian movement, now symbolised by the red horse, had taken peace from the social earth and had endangered the stability of the Roman empire by its fierce controversies and internal persecutions.

Christianity had become a combination of church and state. It was the state religion, and had the "great sword". Its grip of the great sword increased with the years and became centred in Rome. In 455 AD the emperor Valentinian III decreed that the bishop of Rome should have jurisdiction over all the bishops of the Western Roman Empire, and in the same century, following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the bishop of Rome became a secular as well as an ecclesiastical ruler.

In AD 529 the emperor Justinian decreed that the bishop of Rome should have jurisdiction over all bishops everywhere, and in 539 AD this decree was confirmed and established, and all bishops, including the bishop of Constantinople (who did not like the terms of the decree), submitted to it.

These events and developments were a very great trial to true believers in those times, who knew from the Scriptures that God's people were not to seek political power in the present age, and who had to endure persecution for speaking against Church teaching and practice at that time. True believers then had great need of patient endurance, one of the attributes of Divine Providence as represented by the second living one. But worse, much worse, was still to come.

THE THIRD SEAL

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

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

6:5 The third living one *"had a face as a man"* (Revelation 4:7). The faithful people of God would have great need of the Divine attribute of intelligence to discern and separate the truth of Scripture from the many and grievous errors of Christendom at that period in history.

The black horse well represents the darkness of the time generally known as the "dark ages", in which the mental darkness of ignorance and superstition and the darkness of the moral and spiritual conditions in Christendom prevailed. Details of this time may be found and read in the many church histories available.

Not content with the *"great sword"* of verse 4, the Papacy in this dark period, by the bull (a formal Papal document) *Unam Sanctum* of Pope Boniface VIII (1228-1303), claimed the two swords, temporal and spiritual, emphasizing the supremacy of the Papacy in both realms. According to J.L. Mosheim in his monumental "Ecclesiastical History", Pope Boniface asserted that Jesus Christ "had subjected the whole human race to the authority of the Roman pontiff, and that all who dared to dispute it were to be deemed heretics, and excluded from all possibility of salvation."

The *"pair of balances"* in the hand of the rider of the black horse would seem to be prophetic of the hard times, which would at that time be experienced in the social order, in which things, both temporal and spiritual, would be weighed out frugally and carefully.

6:6 The KJV has *"And I heard a voice ..."*. Other versions are not quite so direct. The RV has *"... as it were a voice"*; the NIV has *"what sounded like a voice"*, while the RSV has *"what seemed to be a voice"*. The voice John heard came from the midst of the living ones. As the living ones were *"round about the throne"* (Revelation 4:6), the voice would seem to have come from the throne itself, indicating that God, the One seated on the throne, was concerned to see that His people should not be tried above that which they were able to bear, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13. But times were allowed to become very difficult.

The voice said, *"A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny"*.

The Diaglott reading keeps closely to the Greek: "*A choenix of wheat for a denarius, and three choenices of barley for a denarius*". A choenix (Strong 5518) was about one quart or 1.13 litres of wheat, and according to the Variorum footnote was one day's ration of meal or grain for a person. The Variorum also tells us that a denarius was "the ordinary day's wage of a labourer, which would usually buy eight quarts (about nine litres) of wheat". So the labourer, under the conditions mentioned, would need all his wages to buy his ration of grain. There would be no money for other kinds of food and the necessities of life such as clothing and shelter, and no money to provide for his family. In other words famine conditions would be in evidence.

No doubt conditions were very hard in those dark times, and famines did occur from time to time. But it would seem that spiritual rather than natural food is meant in the prophetic vision. The vision is intended to show the spiritual difficulties with which God's people would have to contend in the period of time covered by the vision of the black horse. Bibles were scarce and very expensive. Few people could read, and those who could were prevented and even forbidden by the Papacy to read the Holy Scriptures.

The secular powers usually aided the Papacy in the discouragement and prevention of Bible reading. However, in 1538 Henry VIII of England, after he had thrown off the Papal yoke, ordered that every parish church in England should provide a copy of the Bible to be kept securely chained at some convenient place in the church, so that all who could might come in and read it. Only few people could read, but there were usually one or two in a parish who could read while others listened. This was a momentous act for good by King Henry VIII. May the Lord count it for good to him.

The "*oil and the wine*" were not to be hurt. Although spiritual food was scarce and difficult to obtain, the Lord's people could still have His Holy Spirit dwelling within them, and joy in their hearts in spite of the difficulties of the time. The oil and the wine could therefore well symbolise the Holy Spirit and the inner joy experienced by all of God's faithful people. Oil is used a number of times in Scripture as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The oil is of course anointing oil, a pleasant and fragrant substance used in the anointing of kings and honoured guests at banquets in Biblical times.

The anointing of the Lord Jesus with God's Holy Spirit is prophesied in Psalm 45:7; *"Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"*. We know that these words apply to the Lord Jesus because Paul tells us so in Hebrews 1:8 and 9. *"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"*.

Isaiah also prophesies of the Lord Jesus' ministry when he writes in chapter 61 verse 1, *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me ..."*. Jesus Himself read from this prophecy and applied it to Himself in Luke 4:18-21, saying, *"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears"*.

Believers in God through the Lord Jesus are promised the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus said this, as recorded in Luke 11:13; *"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"*.

The Apostle John, writing to believers in the early church said in his first letter; *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him"* (1 John 2: 20 and 27; NIV).

The NIV footnotes have the helpful comment that the Spirit the believers had received would teach them how to distinguish between truth and error. The Spirit may use human teachers to accomplish this, as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-14. We today should not expect the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit as they occurred in the early church, but that same Spirit is promised to us to help us in our Christian life, and will do so as God, Who knows His children, sees and provides for His children's needs.

Wine is often associated with pleasure and merry-making, and is a fitting symbol of joy. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 104:15 that *"wine maketh glad the heart of man"*, while the writer of Ecclesiastes says, *"Drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works"* (9:7), and also, *"wine maketh merry"*

(10:19). The message is symbolic, and represents the inner joy that a Christian possesses in the knowledge that the Lord God as a loving Father knows him or her because of faith in Him through Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus said, "*Your joy no man taketh from you*" (John 16:22). Believers are assured that they will be comforted in their desires and efforts to turn from evil and error, knowing that "*the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his*" (2 Timothy 2:19). As the Lord Jesus said to those of this period which was symbolised by Thyatira "*I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come*" (Revelation 2: 24, 25).

THE FOURTH SEAL

⁷*And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.*

⁸*And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*

6:7 When the fourth seal was opened, the fourth living one, the one "*like a flying eagle*" called to John to "Come". As in verses 1,3 and 5, the words "and see" are omitted by many ancient manuscripts and by the RV, NIV and RSV. Divine Providence manifested in the swiftness, directness and long-range vision of a flying eagle would greatly help the Lord's faithful people in the distressing times to come during the era symbolised by the fourth seal.

6:8 John saw "*a pale horse*". The word translated "pale" is "chloros", which means "green". The colour green is a healthy colour in the vegetable kingdom, but an unhealthy colour in the animal kingdom. Therefore the translation of chloros as "pale", though not strictly accurate, is acceptable because Christendom as a whole, was in a very unhealthy state in the period symbolised as an era under the influence of the pale horse. The period in question is that in which the Papal inquisitions were able to operate freely throughout the Western world.

Although the Papacy was so dominant in the previous period symbolised by the "*black horse*", opposition to Papal power and influence was manifest from time to time. Philip the Fair (1268-1314) of France was particularly outspoken and defiant, as also

was his chancellor, William de Nogaret, "the most intrepid and inveterate enemy the popes ever had before Luther "according to J.L. Mosheim. In 1303 Philip gave to de Nogaret the task of drawing up "an accusation against the Pope (Boniface VIII), in which he publicly charged the Pope with heresy, simony, and other vices and crimes, demanding at the same time the convocation of an ecumenical council for the speedy deposition of such an execrable pontiff" (Mosheim). Philip "soon convinced Europe that it was possible to set bounds to the overgrown arrogance of the bishop of Rome, although many crowned heads had attempted it without success" (Mosheim).

In the twelfth century appeared groups of devout and courageous believers such as the Anabaptists, Waldensians and Albigenses. They were denounced by the Papacy as heretics, but they deserve to be remembered as true reformers who preached and lived according to the best light available to them. They endured terrible persecution by the Inquisition, a Papal organisation established to search for and stamp out all who were considered heretics. Further information may be gained from the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", pages 120 and 121.

The power of granting indulgences was first assumed by Roman Catholic bishops in the twelfth century. An indulgence is a document remitting the temporal punishment still due to sin after sin has been forgiven. This unscriptural practice brought great sums of money to the Roman Church. The Popes quickly realised what a gold mine the sale of indulgences was, and promptly limited the power of the bishops, and virtually monopolised the traffic. The public selling of indulgences was an important cause of the Protestant Reformation.

From the fifth century the doctrine of Purgatory was adopted from heathendom as a teaching of the Church. This teaching became a great success in the tenth century, bringing vast sums of money to the Church.

The discussion so far of opening the fourth seal gives some indication that Christendom in the time of the "pale horse" was very unhealthy both morally and spiritually. Christendom's own rotten state was causing decay.

But the Papacy thought it had a remedy. It would exterminate all opposition, and to do so set up three Inquisitions, the Episcopal, Papal and Spanish, to search and destroy all opposition. The

Inquisitions were set up successively, but once set up, they functioned concurrently. The activity of the Inquisitions was a great and terrible feature of the period of the pale horse and its rider, Death.

"And power was given unto them..." as we are told in this verse. The power or authority of the pale horse and its rider would certainly not be from God, but from the Papacy.

"The fourth part of the earth" is impossible to understand if we consider the earth to be the physical earth or the social earth divided into four equal parts. The expression is, however, understandable if the earth, both physical and social, is considered in four portions not exactly equal to one another in respect of area and population. The four portions could reasonably be thought of as follows:

1. The territory formerly known as the Western Roman Empire inhabited by Roman Catholics, Protestants and some Jews. History informs us that in the year 800 AD Charlemagne was crowned by the Pope as Emperor of this territory, which became known as the "Holy Roman Empire" and remained with this title for one thousand years;
2. The territory in South-eastern Europe, formerly known as the Eastern Roman Empire, with which may be considered Russia, inhabited by Orthodox Catholics and Jews, and some Mohammedans;
3. North Africa, Turkey, Arabia and other parts of Asia, inhabited mainly by Mohammedans;
4. The remainder of the earth, inhabited by heathen peoples.

Over the first of the above four portions, the Papacy gave authority to the so-called "Holy Inquisition" "to kill with sword and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth". In both the spiritual and the physical sense, the Inquisition sought to exterminate all opposition to the Papacy. Physical tortures were used to obtain recantation from the victims and to secure their allegiance to the Papacy. The justification offered for such abominable practices was that the victim's soul could be saved from the eternal flames and tortures of hell, so that the physical suffering would result in the soul's salvation.

Not everyone could be individually examined and dealt with by capture and torture. Other means to deal with opposition were employed. Rulers such as Philip the Fair of France and John Lackland of England were excommunicated. The whole of England in the reign of King John was for a time laid under a Papal interdict. A Papal interdict is a form of punishment in which the people are prohibited from participating in sacred acts, and prohibited from exercising privileges and functions within the Church. In such ways the Papacy used its "sword" and brought about "hunger" and "death" over individuals and nations in its effort to exterminate all opposition.

By such measures as the Counter Reformation, as outlined on pages 262 and 263 of the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", the Papacy brought confusing and disruptive teachings to the attention of many who were favourably inclined toward the Protestant Reformation, and thus in a spiritual sense "killed" many by diverting them from the true path of salvation and directing their allegiance once more to Rome.

But when all measures failed to accomplish the desired end, when neither the Papal "sword" nor the "famine" of interdict prohibiting all church functions except the baptism of infants, nor the unscriptural and deadly teachings of the Counter Reformation, prevailed to accomplish the extermination of all opposition, the Papacy resorted to *"the beasts of the earth"*, a symbol of the secular power. That is to say, those who would not recant, but remained firm even under the fearful tortures of the Inquisition chamber, were delivered to the political powers as unfit to be allowed to live, and the political powers dutifully put to death those who were designated by the Papacy as obstinate heretics.

In the Scriptures secular governments and powers are at times described as "beasts". The most notable examples are found in the seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel. The *"beasts of the earth"* must not be confused with the "living ones" (wrongly translated "beasts" in the KJV) encountered in chapters four, five, six, seven, fourteen, fifteen and nineteen of the Revelation.

The four instrumentalities mentioned above - sword, hunger (famine), death (physical and spiritual) and beasts of the earth (secular powers) were used by the Papacy to exterminate all opposition, but were only partly successful. While the majority of the victims of the Inquisition were martyrs for Jesus Christ and

their faith in Him, some of the Inquisition's victims were those who incurred the displeasure of the Inquisition for some reason - any reason would do - and so had to suffer. A number brought the Inquisition's wrath upon them because they had too much wealth, so they were "framed", that is, falsely accused, and they were imprisoned or killed and their wealth was confiscated. Many Jews came within this category of victims.

We should remember with gratitude and thankfulness those victims who endured to the end in those dark days, because they believed in God through Jesus Christ and rejected the false doctrines of the Papacy. They remain as examples to us of faithful brethren who resisted unto blood and went to their deaths in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection, and the blessings of the heavenly inheritance and the Kingdom of God.

THE FIFTH SEAL

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

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

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

6:9 What is meant by "under the altar"? John saw under the altar "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." The souls John saw were the martyrs who had been unjustly killed because of their faithfulness to the word of God and for their witness to their faith. Their slaying called for vengeance, not forgiveness.

These considerations indicate that the "altar" is not for the worship of God but for the purpose of criminal killing and murder of the martyrs who faithfully testified to the truth of the Gospel message. It is the altar of the Papacy's vanity, ambition, pride and lust for power; and the souls under it are the martyrs killed by the actions of the "pale horse" and its rider, Death.

Although this "altar" was not a literal piece of furniture, it is pictured as being on the earth where the Papacy has had its existence and desire to rule. The souls "*under the altar*" may therefore also be thought of as "under the earth", a phrase used several times in Scripture to refer to those who have died.

6:10 Although the "souls" had been killed, "*they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*". The souls represented dead people who could not actually speak or cry out, nor even think or know anything (Ecclesiastes 9: 5,10; Psalm 146:4). But these martyrs cried out inaudibly to God for vengeance, just as Abel's blood is described as crying out to God from the ground for vengeance against Cain (Genesis 4:10).

"*How long, O Lord ?*" is the cry of the slain martyrs. Several times in the book of Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture is mentioned the purpose of God to take vengeance upon "*them that dwell on the earth*" who have misused and killed His people. The faithful ones are commanded not to try to avenge the wrongs done to them, and to leave the vengeance to God, Who has promised to repay (Romans 12:19-21; Revelation 18:24; 19:2).

6:11 The white robes given to every one of the martyrs symbolise the righteousness imputed to them by God, and their acceptance by Him as His children and heirs, joint-heirs with Christ. But they were told to "*rest yet a little season*". There were still some of their brethren to be martyred, as they were; and, until this was accomplished, vengeance on their account must wait.

PRELUDE TO THE SIXTH SEAL

The events described under the first five seals bring us through several centuries of the Gospel Age to the "*great earthquake*" of Revelation 6:12. The "*great earthquake*" is a symbol of that great social, political and ecclesiastical upheaval known as the French Revolution, which began in 1789. It was the beginning of the promised avenging of the martyrs.

The French Revolution

The French people, after many decades of oppression and misery, rose up in rebellion against the despotism and extravagance of royalty, and against the tyranny of organised religion, which for them meant the Roman Catholic Church; and for a time cast off both.

The Revolution began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille, a prison in Paris for dissenters and opponents of the monarchy and the aristocracy, as well as any who spoke against the whole political and economic system. It passed through several disorderly and violent stages with a vast amount of bloodshed, until the rioting, surging mobs were finally subdued by the military in the streets of Paris in 1795, but it remains one of the most significant social and political events of the Gospel Age.

Its effect on the ecclesiastical realm was also particularly important and enduring. The French Revolution is symbolised, we believe, under the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17; in the great earthquake of Revelation 11:13 and under the first plague of Revelation 16:1,2. The impact of the upheaval caused by the French Revolution is also seen by its effect on other events and developments within the social order.

Causes of the Revolution

The main cause of the horrifying outbreak was the discontent and distress which prevailed in the mass of the population of France towards the end of the eighteenth century. Some of the reasons for this discontent and distress can be readily seen in the previous history of France.

In the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) enormous sums of money were required to support his gorgeous court and his palaces, to provide for his vast building schemes, and to maintain his armies in the field in almost continuous wars. To raise the vast sums of money needed, such heavy taxes were laid upon the peasants, farmers and merchants, that whole classes of the population were brought to the brink of ruin and starvation. Yet even when the very last cent had been seized for the king's treasury, the expenses could not be met, and large sums of money had to be borrowed every year. This meant that in future years the expenditure would be increased by the interest due on the huge debt, and more money still had to be borrowed. This system continued throughout the reign of Louis XV (1715-1774), for instead of reducing the debt, he increased the costliness of his court, and plunged recklessly into every European war.

Thus the unfortunate Louis XVI (1774-1793), while striving to reduce the extravagance of the court, found he was saddled with an enormous debt, and was compelled to keep all taxation at the highest level. This meant of course that thousands of his subjects continued to live in misery and starvation.

Moreover the French nobility in those times possessed rights and privileges which were vexatious to the people and ruinous to the country. The wealthy nobles paid no taxes whatever, and all the crushing burden of taxation was borne by the people least able to pay. Whenever a noble required work done on his estates, he could obtain free labour from all peasants of the neighbourhood as if they were his slaves.

Furthermore the nobles showed little or no care or sympathy for the people in their distress. At their country houses the nobles kept vast flocks of pigeons which ate the peasants' corn. To children who struggled to feed themselves by digging with their fingers for roots of plants, they offered neither charity nor pity. It was no wonder that, as time went on, the people, driven to desperation, began to think of rising against oppression and bad government.

We need to remember that no governmental body representing the people such as our Parliament, had met in France for nearly two hundred years. There was no authority in eighteenth-century France to consider the welfare of the people and investigate their grievances. The common people began to realise that, except by the use of force, they had no hope of ever ridding themselves of oppressive laws and unfair regulations, of lightening the burden of taxation which was grinding them into abject poverty and starvation, and of controlling a wasteful and heartless government. The feelings of the suffering people became so pent up that an explosion was inevitable.

Great French writers such as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Rousseau (1712-1778) had for many years been stirring the people by their attacks on the extravagance of the rich and the injustice of the government. They argued that no person should have privileges or rights over other people merely by reason of birth; they demanded that all people should have equal shares in the government, and they wrote of a coming golden age in which all would be free and equal, and oppression and poverty would be no more.

A Ray Of Hope

In May 1789, when the people's desperation was at its height, a ray of hope appeared. King Louis XVI summoned the States-General, that is, the Parliament of France, after so many years of the Parliament's inactivity. Some of the members of Parliament adopted as their motto the words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity",

believing that all the ills of France would be healed if the French people were allowed to create a new government to address their grievances and sufferings and bring about a fairer and more just society.

But the States-General were called together by Louis XVI for no such purpose. The members were ordered to find some way of paying off the massive debt and of increasing the revenue of the government. When they met, the members wished to discuss the grievances of the people, but were told that the king's treasury must be filled, and that it was their duty to provide for the extravagance of the court by devising still further taxation. But before they had met many times, they resolved to proceed instead with the making of laws and regulations for the reform of the country, to abolish the privileges of the nobles, and to lighten the burdens on the common people. At first the king, who, it is fair to say, wished his people well, took their side, and promised to grant the reforms that they desired. But his queen, Marie Antoinette, sided with the nobles, most of whom were too haughty to give way to the despised lower classes. The nobles prevailed on the king to collect troops near Paris in case disorder should arise.

The People's Hopes Dashed

Meanwhile the poor of Paris were hoping that the immediate result of the meeting of the States-General would be the lightening of taxes and the cheapening of food, which was then at famine prices. But when the people saw the States-General assembly beginning an interminable series of debates, and troops gathering around them, they accused the king and assembly of treachery, broke into wild disorder pillaging bakeries, taverns and gun shops, and murdering all government officials who showed themselves. In the midst of all this disorder the king could not make up his mind to give the order that the troops should fire upon the people, so their presence only enraged the people without frightening them.

The Revolution Begins

So it happened that on July 14, 1789, a report was spread that the governor of the Bastille, a strong fortress and prison in the centre of Paris, had been ordered to load his guns and turn them on the city and the people. The people as a mob marched on the Bastille, took it by storm, murdered the defending soldiers and jailers and released the prisoners. This rising in Paris was soon followed by other risings all over France. The country houses of

the nobles were burnt, and many terrible crimes committed in the name of liberty. When the king finally resolved to use the army to check the disorder, it was too late. The troops refused to fire on the people, who had persuaded the troops to turn upon their officers. Whole regiments mutinied, and had to be disbanded.

But all this violence and disorder in no way improved the condition of the country. The assembly of the States-General continued to talk and debate, while the king remained indecisive and failed to show leadership. On October 5 a great crowd of rioters marched to Versailles, the royal residence and centre of the extravagant court life, to show themselves to the king and to demand that something should be done for them. They spent the night outside the palace drinking and eating the flesh of some horses that they had slaughtered.

In the morning the rioters attacked the palace and killed some of the guards. The attack was repulsed, but the people refused to return to Paris unless the king accompanied them, for, they said, where the king was, there bread would be plentiful. Refusal of the people's demand would have sparked more rioting and bloodshed, so the people returned to Paris with the king and queen as their prisoners and the heads of the slaughtered guards as their trophies.

The Monarchy Overthrown

From that time until their execution, the king and the royal family were closely watched prisoners, and the government continued in constant fear of further riots, for the people had discovered their power. The newly-formed Assembly which replaced the States-General, dared not discuss laws that were not acceptable to the people. Mob orators and journalists urged the people not to trust the king, and urged them to further acts of violence. A few sensible men saw that no real reforms could be made while mob rule continued, but no-one took any action to put an end to the disorder.

In 1791, Louis XVI was persuaded by the queen and nobles to appeal to foreign countries for help, a fatal mistake. On 21 June 1791, the king and queen managed to escape from Paris at midnight disguised as servants, and fled towards the German border. They were recognised, however, near Varennes, when only a few miles from safety, and were forced to return.

Defence of France Against Invasion

Hitherto the Revolution had been a movement towards reform, but now became an attack upon the king, whose only hope lay in foreign interference. Many of the French nobles had fled from the country to seek aid abroad, and in 1792 an army of Prussians and Austrians marched into France. This event was the signal for the most terrible outbreaks of the Revolution. Rather than submit to foreign interference, the people of Paris and other large towns and cities determined to raise troops and defy Europe. In many cities and towns recruits were enrolled into regiments and were trained and commanded by men of the old royalist army, who, when the call to defend their country came, submitted again to army discipline. In all, some 750,000 men were raised in this way and were despatched against the foreign invaders. The money for equipment and support was provided by the suppression of the Church, whose lands and property, together with those of the nobles, were seized and sold. The passage through Paris of bodies of these troops was often the cause of riots.

On 10 August 1792, 600 men from Marseilles, singing the "Marseillaise", afterwards adopted as the song of the Revolution, joined in a riot in front of the Tuileries, the palace in which the king was held prisoner, and an attack was made on it. Its defenders, the king's Swiss guard, his only faithful troops, offered such a strong resistance that they were on the point of driving back the rioters, when the king, in a mistaken desire to stop the bloodshed, ordered them to retire. The guard withdrew as ordered, but were pursued by the rioters and almost all were slaughtered. The king and queen fled for refuge to the hall of the Assembly, and were imprisoned in a gloomy tower from which they did not emerge until their trial and execution.

The Reign of Terror

Amid such scenes of disorder, there arose a few determined and violent men, who resolved that the ideals of Liberty and Equality should be attained whatever the cost, and who showed great devotion and energy in organising the defence of the country.

The first to come to the fore was Danton, a strange, fierce man who showed astonishing ability to bend the wild mob of Paris to his will. The sources of his power and influence were his popularity with the crowd, his conspicuous honesty and his patriotic courage. He saw that if the foreign invaders were successful, they would soon be joined by large numbers of

Frenchmen who were disgusted by the excesses of the mob, and whose sympathies still lay with the king. If France was to be saved from a royalist rising, said Danton, and from a return to the evils of the former regime, something more than occasional outbreaks of mob fury was necessary. Chosen assistants must go to work systematically to arrest and imprison all who were in any way suspected of favouring the king and his supporters. The Assembly must prevent civil war and disorder by striking terror in the hearts of their opponents. "To defeat our enemies, gentlemen," Danton said, "and to save the cause of Liberty in France, we must make up for our lack of numbers by our boldness."

In this policy of terror he was supported by Marat, a popular journalist of the day, who had made himself notorious by his violent denunciation of the king. Marat wrote:

"Where is the prison large enough to contain the upper classes? The grave is the only prison. Your armies are of no avail. Give me two hundred men armed with daggers, and with them I will revolutionise France."

During August, 1792, a house-to-house visit was arranged in Paris, and all who had been connected with the court, or on whom a shadow of suspicion rested, were seized. In this way the prisons were filled to overflowing.

Suddenly, on September 2, false reports reached Paris that the defending armies had been defeated, and the invaders were advancing to besiege the city. Guns were fired and alarm bells were rung. In the crowded streets the cry arose, "To the prisons. Let not a single enemy remain to rejoice in our defeat." Bands of assassins, rushed from prison to prison, drove out the prisoners and killed them with swords, axes and pikes until more than one thousand people had perished.

During the next few months, the French people obeyed the orders of the self-appointed dictators in Paris, who had formed themselves into a committee with unlimited power, known as the "Committee of Public Safety". The members met to discuss their plans in an informal debating society known as the "Jacobin Club". Some districts, such as La Vendee in Brittany, rose in rebellion in support of the king and the Church, but the Committee of Public Safety withdrew troops from the frontiers and wreaked a terrible vengeance on the rebels.

In Paris all who were "suspected", or who resisted the will of Danton and Marat, were arrested and went through a form of trial before a tribunal of Danton's choosing. Most were condemned to die by the guillotine. In January 1793 the king was brought to trial, and in October the queen also. Both were executed on the charge of conspiring with the enemies of France. Still the vengeance of the people remained unsatisfied, and all who in any way attempted to put a stop to the bloodshed, themselves fell victims.

Marat paid for his ruthless cruelty by death at the hands of a young woman, Charlotte Corday, horrified by Marat's wickedness. Soon after it was Danton's turn. Up to this time one of Danton's principal supporters had been Robespierre, a treacherous and cruel schemer. Robespierre turned against Danton, accusing him of wishing to stop the "Reign of Terror." The tribunal refused to hear Danton's defence, or remember what he had done for the Revolution, and he was dragged to the guillotine shouting that his accusers would soon follow him. He was right, for Robespierre, who took his place, aroused the jealousy and fear of all by his ambition to be their master, and within a few months he too was guillotined.

The End of the Revolution

But eventually there were signs that the madness was nearly spent, and the governing power passed into the hands of more moderate men who formed what was called the "Directory."

Outbreaks of revolutionary fury still occurred from time to time, but now it was realised that the worst excesses of civil disorder could be prevented by calling out trained troops. During the progress of the war with the invading nations, an army had been formed, which in discipline and devotion to its officers, has rarely been equalled. On 22 September 1795, the last of the great riots took place, but now the mob, bent on destroying the Directory, found itself faced by some five thousand seasoned troops led by a determined young officer named Napoleon Bonaparte. Only a few minutes elapsed before well-aimed volleys of grapeshot and musketry scattered the rioters, and showed them that they were no longer the masters of France.

The French Revolution ended, not in the Liberty and Equality which had been its goals, but in the rule of a single soldier, Napoleon Bonaparte.

THE SIXTH SEAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

6:12,13 In Revelation 6:9-11 the blood of the martyrs who had been killed because of their faithfulness to *"the word of God, and for the testimony which they held"* called for vengeance. *"It was said unto them, that they should rest yet a little season ..."*. The *"little season"* of waiting for the vengeance to begin was not long. When the sixth seal was opened *"there was a great earthquake"*. The word "earthquake" is a translation of the Greek word "seismos" which means simply "a commotion", and is derived from the Greek verb "seio" which means "to rock, to agitate" (Strong 4578 and 4579). The word "seismos" is also used of the shaking of the earth and heaven in Hebrews 12:26. In Revelation 6:12 the shaking also affects both heaven and earth, and the effect on the heavenly bodies is first described.

In the physical world, an earthquake has no effect on the natural astronomical heavens. We therefore understand that the "earth" and "heaven" in such references as Hebrews 12:26 and Revelation 6:12-13, refer to the social order and the governmental arrangements, respectively.

After 1795 the government of France was more orderly, and attention turned to external enemies, which included almost all the countries of Europe. The royalties and ecclesiastics throughout Europe were deeply concerned about what had happened in France, and were apprehensive and fearful that similar uprisings could occur in their countries against them. The European powers, Italy, Spain, Prussia and Austria, took military

action against France, intending to subdue it and demonstrate that the old established order was the only one fit to continue.

But the French Government, known as the Directory, had a military genius in their service. Napoleon Bonaparte, who as a young artillery officer had subdued the Revolutionary mob with musketry and "a whiff of grapeshot" in 1795, was placed in command of the armies of France. Instead of remaining stationary in defence of France, Napoleon carried the war into the countries of his opponents with great success. Wherever the French armies went they spread among the various peoples the three concepts - Liberty, Equality, Fraternity - which had been the slogan, though not often the method, of the French revolutionaries.

So for more than twenty years, the opposition of the European countries to the French Revolution was precisely the reason for the Revolution's principles being the more disseminated among the peoples, thus nullifying the efforts of the European countries to protect their peoples from the influence of the Revolution. The opposing governments wished to maintain their own thrones, governments and institutions, including the Papal Church, but the time had come in God's plan for the great shaking to continue.

Napoleon was finally conquered at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and the French monarchy was restored. But the events of the previous twenty years, arising out of the French Revolution, were to continue to have repercussions in later generations, in the uprisings of 1848 in Europe, and also in Australia with the Eureka Stockade in 1854, and in the loss to the Papacy of the last of its earthly territories in 1871.

The first effects that John saw, as described in verses 12 and 13, were upon the sun, moon and stars. This description corresponds exactly to that given by our Lord in Matthew 24:29, in which the events there described are timed to occur immediately after the tribulation upon the Lord's saints. This time of tribulation began with the setting up of the Papacy in 539, and concluded at the time prophesied in Daniel 7:25 (1,260 years), that is in 1799, when the Papacy was humiliated by Napoleon's taking the Pope as a prisoner to France, followed in turn by the same indignity imposed by Napoleon on the imprisoned Pope's next successor. The symbolic significance is that the "sun", the Papacy as represented by the Pope, the chief light of the ecclesiastical heavens, was blackened and its light obscured.

The "moon", the reflection of the sun, is surely Protestantism with its retention of many serious Papal errors. It "*became as blood*" probably means that it lost its influence and became as though it were dead, figuratively as though it was drained of its life-blood. Higher Criticism began to undermine respect for the Bible as God's inspired Word, and secular teachings such as the theory of evolution began to divert people's minds from the truth of God's creative power and their need for a Saviour to deliver them from sin and death.

The "*stars of heaven*", that is, prominent religious teachers, fell to "earth" because of the shaking. The shaking revealed that prominent religious teachers were more interested in secular things, such as politics and the preservation of the social order, whereas the Lord's people are told to look for a new order of things, a righteous order, and to pray for the coming of that new order, the Kingdom of God (2 Peter 3:13; Matthew 6:10).

6:14 The King James Version's use of the word "departed" in this verse gives the impression that the "heaven" disappeared from view. But the meaning is better expressed by "*was separated from its place*" as in the Diaglott, or, as in the Syriac New Testament, "*And the heavens separated*". At the time to which the vision refers, the present "heaven" of rulership over people's minds was not completely removed, as it will be in God's due time, but was simply moved from its accustomed place by the shaking.

This was a demonstration that the "heaven", the rulership over people's minds, was shakeable. It will be removed as stated in Hebrews 12:27. "*As a scroll which is rolled together*" is an apt and picturesque image. While the scroll is in process of being rolled together it can still be seen, but when the rolling together is complete, the scroll is put away out of sight. So the symbolic "heaven" will eventually disappear.

"And every mountain and island were moved out of their places." In the Scriptures a mountain often symbolises a kingdom. Islands in the natural world are really mountains surrounded and mostly covered by water, so "islands" may be understood as small kingdoms. The great shaking that began with the French Revolution wrenched all the political institutions of France and Western Christendom out of their accustomed places, thus foreshadowing that they, being shakeable, are destined for ultimate removal.

But when the sixth seal was opened, John saw the mountains and islands only moved to some extent; he saw them moved, but not removed. Their removal is to come later, but in the meantime the "mountains" still have a part to play.

6:15-17 We can perhaps imagine vaguely what would happen in people's minds by such an earthquake in the natural world as would move all mountains and islands out of their places. From the highest governmental authority to the humblest citizen, there would be indescribable confusion and terror, and all would be seeking places of refuge.

So in the political and social "earth", the effect produced in people's minds by the French Revolution and its aftermath was consternation and terror, and people sought refuges in the "dens" and "rocks" of the mountains, that is in the institutions and organisations which were part of the earthly kingdoms in which they lived.

The people sought protection from the effects of the shaking, and sought also to be hidden *"from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"*. From rulers on thrones to the humblest citizens in hovels, all were terrified by the French Revolution and its consequences.

It seems unlikely that the people in the eighteenth century realised that Divine judgment had brought about the great shaking. Some may have realised that God was visiting them for their sins, as intimated in verse 17, and if so they were very foolish to suppose that their institutions and organisations would hide them from the wrath of God and the Lamb.

Nothing can prevent the destruction of this order of things, political, social, commercial and ecclesiastical, by the wrath of God and the Lamb. Any who seek protection in the institutions and organisations of the doomed kingdoms and governments only bring upon themselves greater distress as they become involved in the deterioration and fate of earthly kingdoms and dominions. As time goes on the "shaking" becomes greater and more severe, *"upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken"* (Luke 21:25, 26).

"And who shall be able to stand?" is the cry. The answer is found in the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 21: 33 to 36; "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Comments on the seventh seal will not immediately follow because, before the seventh seal is opened, some very important visions are given to John. The main intervening visions are those of the sealed servants of God and the great multitude.

THE SEALED SERVANTS OF GOD

John has faithfully described what he has seen so far; six seals have been opened one by one. And now, still under the opening of the sixth seal, John is to have a further vision of events to occur under this seal.

In English the word "seal" can be either a verb or a noun. In Greek, "seal" as a verb is "sphragizo" and means, according to Dr. Strong (reference 4972), "to stamp (with a signet or private mark) for security or preservation (literally or figuratively); by implication to keep secret, to attest." As a noun the Greek word for "seal" is "sphragis", and is defined by Dr. Strong (reference 4973) as "a signet (as fencing in or protecting from misappropriation); by implication the stamp impressed (as a mark of privacy, or genuineness), literally or figuratively."

Outside the book of Revelation the word "seal" in its various forms occurs in the New Testament only in Matthew 27:66; John 3:33; 6:27; Romans 4:11; 15:28; 1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; and 2 Timothy 2:19. In the Revelation the word "seal" occurs more frequently than all the other New Testament books..

The Apostle John has witnessed the opening of six of the seven seals that God had caused to be placed on a scroll to keep its contents hidden. John is now to see the seal of God impressed upon certain persons as a mark of identification that they are His bondservants, members of His Israel, called not from one nation only, but from all nations and peoples.

THE FOUR ANGELS AND THE FOUR WINDS

Revelation 7:

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

²*And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,*

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

7:1 The clause "*after these things I saw*" means no more than that the vision about to be described was seen by John after he had seen the previous visions. It does not necessarily mean that the fulfilment of what John is about to describe comes after the fulfilment of previous visions.

John saw "*four angels standing on the four corners of the earth.*" The natural earth is not meant here, but rather the symbol of the social earth or order of things.

The "*four corners*" are literally four angles or quarters (Strong 1137), and signify the four divisions of the social order: ecclesiastical, political, commercial (or economic) and social. From these four quarters emanate teachings, commands, arguments and philosophies, "*winds of doctrine*" as Paul calls them in Ephesians 4:14. These four "winds" have blown continually for thousands of years, ever since people were divided into tribes and nations by the confusion of their speech at the tower of Babel. But they have not as yet blown together with such violence as to have caused permanent damage to the present social order.

These "winds" could cause great damage if all four were to blow violently together, but John sees the four winds being held so that they are prevented from unleashing such destructive power. Therefore, neither the earth (the social order), nor the sea (restless humanity), nor the trees (prominent individuals) could be "hurt" at this stage.

7:2 John "*saw another angel ascending from the east*" that is, from the direction of the sunrise, from the rising of the light of the Gospel. This angel had "*the seal of the living God*", and so would speak with the greatest authority, his words being the equivalent

of Divine commands. The four angels had the power to hurt the "earth" and the "sea", that is, the social order and the masses of humanity. But the angel with the seal calls to the four *"with a loud voice"* not to do so until a certain work is finished.

7:3 The four winds are to be restrained *"till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads"*. When this sealing work would be completed, the four winds would be unleashed to destroy the institutions of the social earth and blow them away *"like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, so that no place was found for them"* (Daniel 2:35).

Meaning and Significance of the Sealing

What is meant by the sealing? When did it begin? Who are the ones to be sealed? These questions are answered in Ephesians 1:13 and 14: *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise; Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.;* and Ephesians 4:30: *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."*

The seal is God's Holy Spirit. The sealed ones are those who believe into Jesus Christ. The sealing began at the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was first given to believers, and has continued from that time (John 7:39; Acts 2).

The significance of the seal of God being *impressed "in their foreheads"* is that the mind, that is, the spirit of the mind, is changed and made new in the servants of God, so that their lives and aspirations are changed from worldly to spiritual ambitions. The Apostle Paul describes the process in Ephesians and Romans.

Ephesians 4: 17 to 24; *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to*

the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Romans 12:2; *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

Everyone of these servants of God, sealed with His Holy Spirit, is a "new creature" in Christ. In Christ these servants are God's "workmanship", created "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10) The sealed servants of God must, for the remainder of their lives on earth, continue faithful during whatever trials and tests that may befall them. If they continue faithful they are promised no less than joint-heirship with the Lord Jesus Christ, to be glorified with Him and reign with Him in God's righteous Kingdom (Romans 8:17,18; Revelation 3:21; 14:1).

Much is said in the New Testament about the High Calling of the servants of God (Philippians 3:14), the requirements of the Calling, and the reward promised to the faithful, "*the one hope of your calling*" (Ephesians 4:4). This subject is too extensive to be discussed here, but a thorough discussion may be found in an article written by Ernest Hennings in the book "The Unshakeable Kingdom." The article is titled "That Better Thing", and is to be found on pages 45 to 55 of that book.

THE NUMBER OF THE SEALED SERVANTS

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

⁵*Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.*

⁶*Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.*

⁷*Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.*

⁸*Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.*

Omission of the Tribe of Dan

In the list of the twelve tribes quoted above, the tribe of Dan is omitted. A possible reason for this omission is the generally evil, idolatrous and treacherous conduct of the members of this tribe as recorded in the Old Testament, beginning with Jacob's death-bed prediction recorded in Genesis 49:17. Some activities of the tribe of Dan are to be found in Judges 18:1-31. It is true, of course, that all tribes of Israel were idolatrous at times, but Dan seems to have been more persistently so than the others. This may be the reason why none of the 144,000 sealed ones are apportioned to Dan. Although Dan is omitted, there are still twelve tribes. Joseph is divided into two, one in his own name instead of that of his son Ephraim, and the other in the name of his other son, Manasses.

Significant Questions

In Revelation 5:9, 10 it is written of the Lamb of God: *"for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth"* (RV and the most ancient manuscripts). In Revelation 14:1 we are told of the Lamb standing *"on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having the Father's name written in their foreheads"*.

* Why is it said in Revelation 5:9 and 10 that those who constitute the kingdom of priests are from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, whereas in Revelation 7:4 to 8 the sealed ones are only the 144,000 of the twelve tribes of Israel, and in Revelation 14:1 the 144,000 sealed ones are the only ones seen standing with the Lamb on Mount Sion, having the Father's name written in their foreheads?

* Is the number 144,000 to be understood literally?

* Where do the kingdom of priests from among other nations come in?

These are very important questions which we should strive to answer truthfully from the Scriptures.

Responses to These Questions

After the children of Israel had been delivered from slavery in ancient Egypt, they came in the third month (Sivan) to the wilderness of Sinai, and there they camped before the mount.

The Lord then said to them through Moses in Exodus 19: 4 to 6; *"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."*

Through their elders, the people of all twelve tribes of Israel agreed to these words of the Lord, and on the third day after the words were spoken, the Lord came down upon Mt. Sinai in an awe-inspiring demonstration of fire and smoke, thunders, lightnings, an earthquake, and the sound of a trumpet, and announced in a voice audible to the people the opening words of the covenant He was about to make with them. These words have become known as the ten commandments (Exodus 19:7-25; 20: 1-23).

In the whole of this covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel, there was provision for only one tribe, Levi, to serve as priests. There was no provision for any of the tribes to be kings. God was to be their King, and His law their rule of life.

However, it so happened that after some 500 years had passed, the children of Israel demanded a king, so that they might be like the surrounding nations. Through Samuel, the Lord warned the people of the demands a king would make of them, and how a king would oppress them, but they paid no heed and were not dissuaded from their evil desire. So it came to pass that the Lord gave them a king, even though this meant that the nation had in fact rejected Him as their King (1 Samuel 8:1-22; 121-25).

Under the terms of the Law Covenant it was not possible for the whole nation to become a kingdom of priests, because the Law Covenant provided that only one tribe, the tribe of Levi, should be priests, and no tribe at all should be kings. These facts show us that the promise to the children of Israel that they should be a kingdom of priests was not to be fulfilled under the Law Covenant.

The purpose of the Law Covenant was to prepare the children of Israel, if they would obey God and keep His covenant with them, to receive their promised Messiah when He should come. As the Apostle Paul explains, the Law Covenant was to be a

schoolmaster, a pedagogue, to lead them to Christ, their promised Messiah (Galatians 3:24).

Therefore when Jesus Christ came to His own, the people of Israel, His message was, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospe.* (Mark 1:15). The time had come for the fulfilment of Exodus 19:5 and 6. But the people of Israel were not prepared to receive either their Messiah or the fulfilment of the original promise. Centuries of experience under the Law Covenant, centuries of disobedience and idolatry combined with wrong and worldly expectations of their Messiah, led to the nation's rejection of Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said, their hearts were hardened; their eyes and ears were closed to the good tidings (Matthew 13:10-17).

Only a small number responded to Jesus' call during His earthly ministry. During the three and a half years following Pentecost, only a few thousand more believed. At the end of three and a half years the total may have been seven or eight thousand believers from among the children of Israel. Up to that time the nation of Israel had had the exclusive hearing of the gospel message.

According to the prophecy of Daniel 9:24 to 27, the time of exclusive favour to Israel finished at the close of three and a half years after the Lord's death. More detailed comments on this prophecy are made in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel" pages 151 and 152. Israel as a nation did not accept Jesus or His message of salvation from the Law and from sin and death itself. Their time of special and exclusive favour was over. What would the Lord God do? Had God cast off His people whom He had foreknown?

The Apostle Paul deals with this question in Romans 11. He tells us that God did not cast away His people which He foreknew. God would not allow the hardheartedness of the children of Israel and their failure to repent and believe through Jesus Christ, to deprive Him of His kingdom of priests. He determined to have both His Israel and His kingdom of priests, not of one tribe only, but of all twelve tribes.

The Apostle further explains in Romans 11 how God has been operating to save His Israel. Under the figure of an olive tree he illustrates the Israel of God. At the beginning of Christ's ministry, the individual members of Israel were members by fleshly

descent. They were in the figure of the olive tree "*natural branche..*" But when the matter of their faith in God through His Son came into question, many of the "*natural branches*", that is, individual members of the nation, proved unsuitable for God's purposes, and had to be removed from the olive tree. This removal of branches made the tree unsymmetrical and incomplete. In order to remedy this, branches were taken, says the Apostle, from wild olive trees, and contrary to nature were grafted into the good olive tree.

In the illustration, the natural branches removed represent unbelieving children of Israel according to the flesh. The wild olive branches grafted in represent Gentile believers in Jesus Christ who come to God through Him by faith. They stand by faith, as the Apostle writes (Romans 11:20). The Apostle also writes that the branches, representing the Gentiles grafted in from wild olive trees should not despise or look down on the natural branches which were removed, because God is able to graft in the natural branches again, that is, reinstate individual members of the nation of Israel, if they repent and believe.

In order to warn Gentile believers against any notions of superiority or conceit, the Apostle reminds them that they stand by faith, and if they become complacent and lose their faith, they also will be "*cut off*" (Romans 11:20-22).

The Apostle further reveals that "*blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in*" (Romans 11:25) The tree, the Israel of God, must have its full complement of branches, a number of which will be branches from wild olive trees, that is, individual members from the Gentiles.

When Gentiles come into the figurative olive tree, they come into "*the Israel of God*" (Galatians 6:16). They are not proselytes coming under the Law Covenant, but members of that kingdom of priests originally mentioned in Exodus 19:6. That promise, as we have seen, could not be fulfilled while the Law Covenant was in force because only one tribe, Levi, could be priests, and no provision was made for any tribe to be kings.

The promise of the nation of Israel becoming a kingdom of priests was conditional upon obedience and keeping the Law Covenant (Exodus 19:5). The children of Israel did neither, and forfeited the promises and blessings held out to them. The promises and

blessings forfeited by natural Israel were reserved by God for His new Israel, that is, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle makes this clear in 1 Peter 2:9, "*Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*". The believers in Jesus Christ - the Jew first, and then the Gentile - are the heirs of that wonderful promise recorded in Exodus 19: 5 and 6. To the remnant of believing Jews have been added believing Gentiles. In this way the symmetry of the figurative olive tree (representing the Israel of God) has been preserved.

"And so all Israel shall be saved" declared the Apostle in Romans 11:26. These words have been frequently misunderstood. The Greek word "houto", translated by "so" means "in this way" or "in this manner" (Strong 3779), and tells us *how*, not *when* "*all Israel shall be saved*". By bringing in enough Gentiles (represented by branches from wild olive trees) to fill up the vacancies caused by the cutting out of unbelieving Jews (represented by natural branches), God saves His Israel and preserves its unity and symmetry, as symbolised by the olive tree. The Gentiles who have been brought in have been added to the number of believing Jews to become heirs together of the kingdom and priesthood originally promised, on condition of their obedience, to the twelve tribes of natural Israel.

According to Revelation 7:4-8 it would seem that all the "branches" that are in the completed "tree", whether originally "natural" or "wild", are counted as members of the twelve tribes, an equal number to each tribe. The suggested explanation is that this shows God's impartiality and His determination to have a symmetrical and fully rounded out Israel, His holy nation, His kingdom of priests.

By means of this apt illustration of the olive tree, the Apostle shows how the Lamb has made redeemed persons of every nation to be kings and priests according to Revelation 5:9 and 10, and yet, according to Revelation 7:4-8, they are all members of the twelve tribes.

It is important to note in this connection that the Emphatic Diaglott, a version of the New Testament which is often helpful to Bible students, has the English word "then" as a translation of the Greek word "houto" in Romans 11:26 in both the interlineal and smooth reading versions. This is a serious error. The Apostle is not saying that then all Israel will be saved as though that would be the next and also a separate event after the coming in of the

fullness of the Gentiles. The Apostle is saying that "so all Israel shall be saved", that is, in this manner, by bringing in Gentiles to fill the positions made vacant by the rejection of unbelieving Jews, and so making God's Israel symmetrical and complete. The Greek word "houto" occurs in two other places in Romans 11 - verses 5 and 31 - and in both these verses the Diaglott correctly translates "houto" by "even so", and the contexts show that "houto" cannot mean "then".

A further important question concerns the number 144,000 of sealed ones of the twelve tribes of Israel standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1). **Is the number 144,000 to be understood literally?** As far as we can understand, the number is to be taken literally, as are all numbers in Revelation and elsewhere in the Scriptures. Things numbered may sometimes be symbolic, as for example, a day in some contexts may be fulfilled as a year, but the number remains as stated.

The 144,000 sealed ones are called to the greatest and highest inheritance that the Heavenly Father has graciously bestowed: joint-heirship with Jesus Christ. The comparatively small number is of God's choosing, and only one dispensation, the Gospel Age, is decreed by the Lord God for the giving out of the invitation to a heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

Believers at this time in God's Plan of Salvation are so favoured as to be living in this dispensation of the Gospel and should resolve by every honourable means to make sure of their calling and election with the assistance of God's mercy and grace (2 Peter 1:10).

It is our contention that the number of the sealed ones, kings and priests unto God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, is as stated, 144,000, and that the vision describing them in Revelation 7:1-8 covers the whole of the Gospel Age. The number is in harmony with the "little flock" mentioned by the Lord Jesus when speaking of His believers in Luke 12:32.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

The comparatively small number of 144,000 is not the sum total of those of the human race who will gain salvation. John records the vision he saw, still under the sixth seal, in Revelation 7:

⁹*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,*

stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7:9 John writes, "*After this I beheld*". This expression in itself signifies only that John saw one vision after another. Nothing is indicated concerning the order of fulfilment of the visions. Evidence of the time of fulfilment of this vision will be given as our discussion continues.

"*Lo, a great multitude, which no man could number*", is what John saw in the vision. The previous vision in chapter 7 had to do with a definite but relatively small number, 144,000. The earlier vision recorded in Revelation 5:11 had "*the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*", an extremely large number. The present vision tells of a "*great multitude*", the exact number not being stated or revealed to us.

This great multitude was "*of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*". They "*stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands*". As was suggested in earlier contexts in Revelation, the throne does not symbolise an article of furniture, but rather the ruling power of the Almighty. The expression "*stood before the throne*"

indicates that the great multitude was subject to the rulership and dominion of God and the Lamb. Righteousness and purity are symbolised by the white robes, and victory by the palms in their hands (Psalm 92:12,13).

7:10 They "cried" (more exactly "cry" as in the Diaglott) with a loud voice acknowledging that their salvation comes from God and the Lamb. This great multitude consists of saved ones, rescued from their former unsaved condition. Their "cry" is surely a continual acknowledgment of their salvation, and praise to God and the Lamb that this undeserved grace has been freely granted to them.

7:11,12 All the angels join in praise and worship to God, combining with the cry of praise for salvation made by the great multitude. The worship and praise to God is said to continue "*for ever and ever. Amen*". The Greek original is "eis tous aionas ton aionon", which means literally "for the ages of the ages". Sometimes these words have a limited meaning, and sometimes they are used concerning times and things which are endless. The context in which the words appear must guide us. In the context now being considered, the praise of God is involved, so we must understand that the praise of God will never come to an end, therefore the words "eis tous aionas ton aionon" must signify endless time.

7:13,14 (first part) John was keenly interested in all that was being shown to him, but he was simply being shown the visions, and would need help if asked to explain them. Therefore, when one of the twenty-four elders asked John to identify the great multitude and to say where they came from, he answered wisely, "*Sir, thou knowest*".

7:14 (second part) "*These are they which came out of great tribulation*" said the elder at the beginning of his explanation to John. The original Greek reads, "the tribulation the great", both words being emphatic in the Diaglott text, showing that the KJV rendering "*out of great tribulation*" is too general and indefinite to be an accurate rendering. The RV, RSV and the NIV all *have* "*the great tribulation*" which is more accurate.

Can this great tribulation be recognised and located in time? The description given in the Greek "the tribulation the great" indicates that it must be the greatest tribulation ever suffered by humanity.

No localised tribulation, however long enduring, and no shortlived tribulation, however widespread, will suffice as an explanation. There have been many periods of tribulation at various times in history, and as the Gospel Age closes there is to be a general time of trouble, the like of which has not been known since there was a nation; but even that will not be comprehensive enough in respect of time or the number of people involved to fit the description of "*the tribulation the great*".

Even the 1260 years of the tribulation of God's people at the hands of the Papacy during the Gospel Age will not meet this case, because those who suffered for Christ's sake and remained faithful in that tribulation are numbered among the 144,000 which are separate from the great multitude (Daniel 7:25; Matthew 24: 15-22).

There is, however, one great tribulation that has afflicted all members of the human race from first to last. No descendant of Adam and Eve has escaped it. That tribulation is the trouble afflicting all people because of sin and the resultant consequence of death, which is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). The Apostle also writes, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

The first disobedience in Eden has brought upon the human race all the aches and pains suffered because of bodily decay; all the strife, turmoil and violence suffered on account of mental and moral degeneracy, which also often aggravates physical decay; all of which have to do with the universal distress that has afflicted humanity without ceasing since the transgression in Eden. It is therefore contended that the trouble involving the human race since the Adam's transgression and the condemnation of all to death is "*the tribulation the great*".

In the blood of the Lamb this great multitude have washed their robes and made them white. This would mean that they have recognised and accepted, each and everyone for themselves, the death of Jesus Christ as the offering for their sins. Because of this belief and understanding they have been justified and cleansed, and eventually they have been granted everlasting salvation and everlasting life.

7:15 The great multitude are "*before the throne of God*", that is, they are willing subjects of the rulership and dominion of God and the Lamb. God is pleased to recognise them as His dutiful and loving subjects, and is pleased to be served by them. The word

"serve" is translated from the Greek "latreuo" and means, according to Strong's Concordance (reference 3000), "to minister (to God), i.e. render religious homage".

They will worship God "*day and night*", that is, continually, in His temple. The temple of God is not now a material building in Jerusalem or anywhere else on earth, but is that form of worship which alone is acceptable to Him since the death of Christ on Calvary; namely sincere worship in spirit and in truth offered through Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6; 5: 20-24).

Earlier it was said (Revelation 4:4,10; 5:8,14) that the four and twenty elders symbolise the inspired writings of the Old and New Testaments. The elder who speaks in chapter seven gives further evidence to support this understanding. Let us compare the remainder of the elder's answer to John with some passages from the inspired word.

The Elder

15..... and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell (i.e. "tabernacle") among them.

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

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

The Writings

And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain (Isaiah 4:6) Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, ... (Revelation 21:3)

They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: (Isaiah 49:10)

... They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. ... for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of waters shall he guide them. (Isaiah 49:9, 10)

... He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; ... (Isaiah 25:6-9; see also Revelation 21:4)

By considering the contexts of the above quotations, we can learn much concerning the composition of the great multitude of Revelation 7:9-17, as well as *"the great tribulation"* out of which they have come, and the time of their coming out.

In Isaiah 49:6 to 12 we are told that the blest ones who will neither hunger nor thirst any more have been prisoners in darkness, and that the Chosen One of the Lord God will bring them out of their prison. The Chosen One is of course the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is to be *"for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth"* (Isaiah 49:6). In the Gospel Age a beginning has been made (Acts 13:47). In this connection a most interesting detail is, *"Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim (China)"* (Isaiah 49:12).

In Isaiah 25:6 to 9 it is stated that the Lord of hosts will make *"unto all people"* a great feast in His *"mountain"*, that is, in His Kingdom. In this kingdom God will destroy *"the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory"*. This tells us that all nations have been in the great tribulation of sin and pain which has brought them down into death, and that the Lord will bring them out of the grave in His Kingdom in the age to come. In God's righteous kingdom the nations will receive of His mercy and bounty, and will be glad and rejoice in the salvation offered to them. The life offered to the great multitude will be life on earth, referred to by Ezekiel as their *"former estate"* as human beings (Ezekiel 16:44-63).

By now it is plain that the great multitude of Revelation 7 is made up of all peoples, and nations and tongues; that they have all been involved in the great tribulation of sin and suffering resulting in death; that they are all to be brought out of the prison of death to learn of God's love for them as revealed in the gift of His only begotten Son. By believing in and accepting Christ's sacrifice they will become righteous human beings, a spiritual fact symbolised by the washing of their robes to make them white in the blood of the Lamb. This faith that the nations will gain will enable them to rejoice in their salvation, ascribe their victory to God and to Jesus, and worship God continually in the manner acceptable to Him.

We should not suppose that the great multitude includes every individual member of the human race since Adam. The text

guards against this by saying “a *great multitude of* (Greek “ek” – Strong 1537 meaning “out of”) *all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues*” (Revelation 7:9). This use of “ek” (out of) gives us an indication that not every single human being will be included in the great multitude of saved ones. But the vision we are considering does not say any more about this matter. There are direct statements on this subject in later chapters.

The opening of the sixth seal has been indeed a revelation, having shown us much about the Gospel and the Kingdom Ages and the operation of the Divine Plan of Salvation in both ages. We have seen some aspects of God’s determination to gather a small number of true and sincere believers during the Gospel Age to become joint heirs with Jesus Christ in His heavenly inheritance, and also to bless with salvation and an earthly inheritance a great multitude in the Kingdom Age. But more is to come.

THE SEVENTH SEAL

Revelation 8:

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

That is all that is said of the opening of the seventh seal. Does this mean that we also should maintain silence about the seventh seal? There is nothing to say that we are forbidden from offering any comments, so it may be possible to say something helpful.

8:1 The six seals contained visions pertaining to the Gospel and Kingdom Ages, and within the sixth seal there was a vision in the nature of an interlude, giving a view of the Gospel Age work of the sealing of the bondservants of God in their foreheads (Revelation 7:1-8). In view of the extent of the visions, it may be understood that the opening of the seventh seal is connected with time and circumstances at or near the end of the Kingdom Age, which is to be a most important period, described in Revelation 20:3 as “a *little season*”. As we will see, in that “*little season*” Satan is to be released from the prison in which he has been bound for a thousand years, and will be permitted to tempt the dwellers on earth who have by this time experienced the blessings of God’s righteous Kingdom.

The “*silence in heaven*” may be understood to mean the non-interference on the part of God, the Lord Jesus, the joint heirs and the ruling ancient worthies for a time to await the results of

Satan's attempts at deception of the earthly citizens of God's Kingdom. The time *"about the space of half an hour"* seems to be the same as the *"little season"* of Revelation 20:3, but no indication is given of the length or duration of these two prophetic statements of the same period of time.

It may well be that the Lord has left this period of time unknown to us because He does not wish to give definite information in advance about when the Kingdom Age work will be complete. So let us be thankful and content for the wondrous things the Lord God and the Lamb have revealed to us in the opening of the seven seals contained in the scroll given by God to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only One in all creation worthy to open the scroll and the seven seals.

CHAPTER 7

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS REVELATION 8:2 - 11:18

PRELIMINARY EVENTS

We have seen in the vision of the seven seals, as they were opened one by one, that our attention has been drawn to momentous events in the history of God's people since the gospel was first preached by Jesus Christ. The vision covered by the opening of the seals included the great results of the Divine plan for the salvation of "*whosoever will*" of the human race, taking us through both the Gospel and Kingdom Ages.

The next series of signs seen by John recorded in Revelation 8 will consist of seven trumpets. The trumpets will direct our attention to some of the great events of the Gospel and Kingdom Ages with considerable reference to military activities in connection with religion.

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

³*And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*

⁴*And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.*

⁵*And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*

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

8:2 "*And I saw*" refers only to the fact that one vision followed another in John's sight. The order of fulfilment of the visions is not necessarily the same as the order in which the visions were given to John.

John saw "*the seven angels which stood before God*". What John saw was a vision given to him by the angel who was showing him these signs. He did not see actual angelic beings but simply the appearance of angels in his mind as the vision was

given to him. John further says that *"to them were given seven trumpets"*. The seven trumpets were also signs or visions, and not realities.

The seventh trumpet, which is the last, has to do with the return of Christ and God's kingdom on earth, and with the glorious outcome of the Divine plan for the salvation of the human race (Revelation 11:15-18). If this is the case, and evidence in support will be brought forward as the study continues, then the first six trumpets must sound earlier, that is, during the Gospel Age. And so they have done, as we will see.

The trumpets in question are part of the visions given to John. Not one of the trumpets has been heard by the natural ear. Some Christians believe that the seventh trumpet will be audible and will be heard by human beings on earth. We do not believe this expectation to be correct.

Certainly in the Jewish Age trumpets were sounded to mark notable occasions such as the New Year and the Day of Atonement, to call the people together, and as an alarm for war (Numbers 10:1-10). But such soundings were real and actual, and not visions.

To the seven angels were given seven trumpets, the sounding of which, one by one, would mark notable epochs in the experience of Christians and Christendom generally in the centuries to follow the giving of the visions to John. But before any of the seven angels could sound their trumpets, a preliminary activity had to be accomplished.

8:3,4 John saw that *"another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer"*. A censer is a vessel for priestly use, as indicated in 2 Chronicles 26:16-19. Therefore what John now saw was a vision of an angel about to perform a priestly function. To this angel was given *"much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne"*. Under the Mosaic Law, the duty and privilege of offering incense upon the golden altar within the tabernacle, and later the temple, belonged to the High Priest (Leviticus 16:12,13; Exodus 30:34-38). But the vision shown to John did not have to do with the Jewish High Priest, rather it had to do with the eternal High Priest who fulfils His office in heaven itself, in the very presence of God.

In all creation there is only One Who is authorised to stand between God and "*all saints*", and figuratively to add incense to their prayers to make them acceptable to God. That One is our slain, risen and glorified Jesus Christ. He Himself said that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and that no-one could come to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). Peter testified of the Lord Jesus that "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:14). Paul said that there is only one Mediator between God and men, and that Mediator is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:4-6). And to the Hebrews the apostle wrote that there is but one High Priest, Jesus Christ, and that He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:20-26).

The angel that John saw in this vision is therefore a symbol of the Lord Jesus at work in His high priestly office.

It may be thought inappropriate to speak of our Lord Jesus as an angel or messenger. The Scriptures, however, speak of Him as such. In the Old Testament Jesus is referred to as "*the messenger of the covenant*", meaning the new covenant (Malachi 3:1). In the New Testament the Lord Jesus at His second advent is said to come "*with the voice of the archangel*", indicating that He speaks with all authority as Chief Messenger from God (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And John saw that the smoke of the incense ascended before God with the prayers of the saints, meaning that believers' prayers are acceptable to God if such prayers are offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

8:5,6 The Angel in the vision fills the censer with fire of the altar, as the High Priest under the Mosaic Law was required to do in a natural and literal sense, and casts it "*into the earth*". The KJV translation "into" seems to be the best rendering of the Greek preposition "eis". The Diaglott and most modern versions render "eis" as "on" or "upon", suggesting that the censer filled with fire was thrown down from the sky or some lofty height upon the surface of the earth. This does not seem appropriate, as we shall endeavour to show.

The censer filled with fire may be understood to symbolise the Mediatorship of our Lord Jesus Christ between God and all people, and especially the recognition of that Mediatorship. The casting of the censer "*into the earth*", that is, the social order, which occurred early in the Gospel Age, symbolises the

preaching, by order of Jesus Christ, of Him as the One Mediator and High Priest, calling upon all persons in the social order to recognise Jesus in these offices, and reject other forms of worship. The Apostle Paul said he had been chosen to preach the one and only God and the one and only Mediator between God and all people. Paul had been "*ordained a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity*". Other apostles and brethren delivered the same teaching (1 Timothy 2:7).

The result of this preaching was extraordinary. In the vision "*there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake (seismos - shaking)*". In the fulfilment of the prophetic words, the preaching in the social order that there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, produced voices of argument, debate and discussion; flashes of illumination in the "air", that is, the minds of people, civil demonstrations and outbreaks of agitation and community disorder; and a shaking of the social "earth" as well as of the ecclesiastical "heaven", such as it was.

The preaching of this great truth went first to the Jews (Romans 1:16). The Jews agreed with the preaching of one God, for they believed that already, but most of them remained believers in Moses as their mediator between God and themselves, which indeed Moses had been by divine authority under the Law Covenant (Galatians 3:19).

The Law Covenant was limited in its scope and its duration, and could not bring about salvation and life to its adherents. God had promised to abolish this old covenant and make a new covenant which would make salvation and life attainable to everyone, as the Scriptures show (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Deuteronomy 18:15; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:1-4; Galatians 3:24,25).

The Jews were, and still are to this day, indisposed to relinquish Moses and recognise Jesus as the one Mediator between God and men. It was, and still is, impossible for God to continue to recognise the Law Covenant because it had been abolished and superseded by the New Covenant with Jesus Christ as its Mediator. Because of these facts, the Jewish polity was severely shaken, shaken out of existence and will never be restored (Hebrews 10:14-22; 12:18-29).

As far as the Gentiles were concerned, the effect of the Gospel message on them was to create great disturbances among the

worshippers of the mythological gods of Rome, Greece and Egypt, and later of Scandinavia, so much so that these false gods were threatened and to a large extent shaken from their positions as recognised divinities. An important example is the public uproar caused in Ephesus and the surrounding district by the preaching of the gospel to the people. Those who were idol worshippers and the craftsmen who profited by the sale of idols, images and silver shrines connected with the pagan goddess, Diana, were instrumental in stirring up confusion and riotous behaviour among the people of the city (Acts 19:1-41).

THE FIRST TRUMPET

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

We should remember that the translators of the King James Version did not have the three most ancient manuscripts - the Sinaitic, Alexandrine and Vatican - available to them. The translators of the Revised Version had the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts available to them, and in following these two manuscripts they have rendered Revelation 8:7 as follows:

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

The RV margin has *"into the earth"* instead of *"upon the earth,"* and inserts the words *"and the third part of the earth was burnt up"* in keeping with the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts. Modern versions such as the RSV and NIV also insert these words.

The casting of the fire-filled censer into the earth or social order was a divinely arranged preliminary to the sounding of the seven trumpets, so that we would expect that the events and occurrences under the soundings of the trumpets would be associated with or continuations from the conditions prevailing under the casting of the censer into the earth.

The comments on the first four trumpets will concern themselves with spiritual rather than political experiences of God's people, because the teaching of the Mediatorship of the Lord Jesus Christ, was, and is, a fundamental spiritual truth symbolised by

the angel's casting the fire-filled censer, an action of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, into the social order.

8:7 Into the social "earth" came this dreadful mixture of hail - hard-hitting teachings of truth, fire-destructive persecution, and blood-death. These came into the social order after the destruction of the Jewish polity, and city and temple.

While the Jewish arrangements remained, the heathen idolaters for the most part appeared to regard the Christians as a sect of the Jewish religion, and, except in Ephesus, paid little attention to them, allowing the Jews to do the persecuting of the Christians. The heathen authorities thought that it was simply a matter of differences of opinion between two Jewish sects (Acts 18:12-17), and seldom interfered.

But when the Jewish polity disappeared, and the Jewish persecuting power was almost extinguished, the Roman authorities began to take more notice of the Christians, who continued their activities against idolatry, and made considerable progress against the worship of them that were not gods (Acts 19:22; Galatians 4:8).

Unable to contradict and refute the Christians with reason and argument, some of the Roman emperors ordered persecutions to death, and they had many Christians killed by wild beasts in the arenas at Rome and elsewhere. The Christians would not worship the images of heathen gods, and refused to bring offerings to their altars. This was particularly the case after deceased emperors were deified, and their images were placed with those of the mythological gods such as Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury and Venus and were required to be worshipped.

As was seen earlier in Revelation 2:10, there was a particularly ferocious persecution carried on for ten years in an attempt to exterminate the Christians. This persecution did not succeed in physically exterminating them, and ceased when Constantine came to the throne, announced his conversion to the Christian faith, and decreed that from that time on Christianity would be the religion of the empire. Following the accession of Constantine and the relief from heathen persecution, Christians began to persecute one another because of doctrinal differences until Constantine convoked the first General Council of Christian bishops to be held at Nicea in 325 AD.

Meanwhile also, while denouncing idolatry, Christians had been adapting and accepting some of the philosophical teachings of the heathen, such as the immortality of the soul, torment after death, and a tri-une God. The latter doctrine led to the adoption of the Trinity as a teaching that must be believed in order to gain salvation.

The Revelator writes, "*and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up*". As with the statement of Revelation 6:8 ("*the fourth part of the earth*"), the statement in our verse is not understandable if exactly equal areas of the physical earth or exactly equal divisions of the social order have to be considered. If we consider the social "earth" in three parts, not necessarily equal to one another, some progress towards understanding may be made.

It is therefore suggested that "*the third part of the earth*" which was "*burnt up*" was that part of the social order under the rule of the Roman empire of the east and west, Christian, at least in name, since 314 AD. The other two parts not "*burnt up*" were the Jews, who kept themselves apart on religious issues, and the heathen.

It is further suggested that "*the third part of trees*" which was "*burnt up*" consisted of prominent religious teachers and leaders in the Roman empire of east and west, nominally Christian since 314 AD. The other two parts of trees not "*burnt up*" were the religious teachers of the Jews and those of the heathen.

Before 314 AD persecution from paganism had killed some Christian bishops physically, while paganism had killed many bishops spiritually in leading them to incorporate heathen philosophical notions as part of their Christian teaching.

"*All green grass*" that was "*burnt up*" may be understood to mean all persons who were not leaders but followers of Christianity and accepting of whatever teachings they were expected to believe.

Whatever damage may have been brought upon the third part of the "earth", the third part of "trees" and the whole of the "green grass" by the "hail" and "fire" of earlier times, the Council of Nicea completed the "burning up" of all of them. From the Council of Nicea went forth the creed that "burnt up" the Roman part of the social "earth" as far as religious life and liberty and progress in

the truth were concerned, because the Nicene creed became the official belief of the Roman empire, enforceable by law on all inhabitants of that "third" of the "earth" and pronouncing a curse on all dissenters.

The Christian bishops who agreed to that creed were "burnt up" completely, in that they bound themselves to teach nothing contrary to the Nicene creed, and thus also bound themselves not to follow any further light and truth that may subsequently be discovered.

Most people everywhere who humbly desired to lead upright god-fearing lives were "burnt up" as a result of the proceedings of the Council of Nicea, because they were required to seek after the deity described in the creed instead of after the true God through Jesus Christ as written and recorded in the Scriptures. Most of the people described as "green grass" had to depend on the bishops and clergy for religious information and instruction, and could have known only such as was contained in the Nicene formula.

The "hail" and "fire" under the first trumpet wrought great spiritual havoc and desolation, climaxing in the imperially authorised Nicene creed, the legalising of that creed, and the branding of all dissenters as law-breakers. The whole effect was to bring about religious confusion and conflict that was to last for many centuries.

THE SECOND TRUMPET

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

⁹And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

8:8,9 In the figurative language of Scripture, a "mountain" usually symbolises a kingdom, either the kingdom of God or a kingdom of men, as has already been noted in the discussion of Revelation 6:14-16. The "sea" usually symbolises the masses of humanity, often restless, and sometimes furiously raging.

The "*great mountain burning with fire*" which "*was cast into the sea*" represents the fall of the Western Roman Empire, burning with the fire of military invasion and destruction, and falling into the "sea" of turmoil and disorder of its subjects. The casting

down of Western Rome was accomplished over a period of many years by a series of military invasions.

In 400 AD, Alaric (c350-410) king of the Visigoths, over-ran Italy and sacked Rome. In the year 450 AD, Attila (c406-453) king of the Huns, invaded the Western Roman Empire and threatened Rome. Genseric (c406-477), king of the Vandals, pillaged Rome in 455 AD and deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last of the Western Roman emperors. Odoacer (?-493) a Germanic warrior, destroyed the Western Roman empire and became the first barbarian king of Italy from 476 to 493 AD.

So it was that *the "great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea,"* and very important results followed.

John writes, *"and the third part of the sea became blood"*, meaning that portion of people subject to Western Rome became unwholesome and even poisonous to the former empire and no longer supported it. The three parts of the sea may be understood as consisting of the people of:

- (1) the Western Roman Empire;
- (2) the Eastern Roman empire; and
- (3) the remainder of the world.

The *"third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died"* may be understood to refer also to the people subject to the Western Roman empire who "died" to the authority of that empire, that is, the people no longer recognised the authority of that empire and no longer considered themselves subject to its laws and requirements.

The *"third part of the ships"* seems to symbolise the arrangements and facilities by which rulers and merchants traded within and with the "sea", that is the masses of people within the Western Roman empire. The trade and commerce in this third part of the world's people was destroyed by the invasions and the military activities of the pillaging barbarians.

THE THIRD TRUMPET

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

¹¹*And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*

8:10,11 Rivers and fountains of waters in Scripture are often understood to symbolise truth, as we see, for example in Psalm 46:4, "*a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God*". If the waters of truth are kept pure, they will refresh and sustain God's people. But if the rivers and fountains of waters become contaminated, the results to those drinking from them can be seriously harmful.

In the period of time during which the Western Roman empire declined and fell, a "*great star*" symbolising a conspicuous religious teacher, is seen to fall from "*heaven*". The "*great star*" called Wormwood, is a symbol of the Papacy, which fell from the ecclesiastical heaven burning like a lamp, or "*torch*" as the RV, RSV and NIV all render the word. A torch would certainly be brighter than the lamps of John's day.

The three parts in these verses pertain to the rivers and fountains of waters, not the masses of people as was the case under the symbolism of the previous trumpet. The three parts of "*rivers*" and "*fountains of waters*" would seem to consist of:

- (1) Christendom;
- (2) Judaism; and
- (3) heathendom
with its multiplicity of pagan gods,
goddesses, idols and images.

The "*third part*" of the rivers and fountains of waters affected by the "*great star*" was the truth as understood within Christendom. The Papacy corrupted the truth of the gospel with such false teachings as the mass, the Trinity, the alleged existence of a fiery hell and purgatory, the worship of saints, images and so-called relics, the immortality of the soul, and the worship of the Virgin Mary. The lamentable result was that many people "*died*" as far as living the Christian life and gaining salvation were concerned; that is, the simple saving truth of the gospel message was lost to them and had no effect on them because they were unaware of it. The waters of truth became tainted with "*wormwood*", a figure derived from a bitter plant, a fitting symbol of the false doctrines which corrupted the truth of the gospel and made the lives of people bitter, so that great masses of humble, simple and ordinary people were figuratively "*killed*".

"Wormwood" in Scripture is generally used in a metaphorical sense, as in Deuteronomy 29:18, where it is said of the idolatrous Israelites, "*Lest there be among you a root that beareth*

wormwood". The end of a strange woman whose lips "*drop as an honeycomb*" and whose "*mouth is smoother than oil*", is said in Proverbs 5:3 and 4 to be as "*bitter as wormwood*". In Jeremiah 9:15, 23:13, and Lamentations 3:15, 19, wormwood is symbolic of bitter calamity and sorrow; while unrighteous judges are said to "*turn judgment to wormwood*" in Amos 5:7.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET

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

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

8:12 When the Western Roman empire fell in 476 AD, the period of European history known as the Dark Ages began. The period was characterised by the decay of civilisation, and lasted until the Renaissance, the revival of learning and art in the fourteenth century, a period lasting some eight hundred years.

The sounding of the fourth trumpet introduces an era of darkening, which, in addition to the contamination of the sources of Scriptural truth under the third trumpet, made life very difficult for those godly people who desired to obey the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus Christ and His faithful apostles and disciples.

All those who were leading lights, or should have been such, in the ecclesiastical heavens, whoever and whatever they might be - popes, patriarchs, bishops, prelates of every rank - were darkened. They were, as John records, darkened by one third of their maximum light, leaving two-thirds remaining. The meaning seems to be an overall diminishing of the light of the gospel, and the beginning of greater darkness, both mental and spiritual, which was yet to come. Darkness and confusion increased, as we will see in considering the epochs covered by the subsequent three trumpets.

John writes further, "*the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise*". This seems not to refer to the length of time of shining, as though the sun and moon shone for only two-thirds of their usual times, but rather that day and night were at only

two-thirds of their usual brightness. The whole idea seems to be a reduction of light intensity.

8:13 However difficult the four trumpet epochs already considered have been, those yet to come are to be so much worse that a special loud cry is made about them. The cry is made not by an "angel", as in the KJV, but by an "eagle", as in the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, and so translated in the RV, RSV and NIV.

When John was given the vision in about 96 AD, the fulfilment lay some centuries future from his day. When the fulfilment was due, John's prophetic words were on record to be read by those who had access to them in the ecclesiastical "heaven" such as it was in the sixth century AD. The ordinary people of the social "earth" and the masses who constituted the "sea" did not have access to John's inspired prophetic words at their time of fulfilment, but those in the ecclesiastical "heaven" had access to them, and John's recorded words in this verse constituted the eagle's cry in "*the midst of heaven*", that is, the ecclesiastical heaven.

It is most likely that John's words were well enough known by the hierarchy and clergy of the time, but were not understood as having an application then or soon. As for the ordinary people and the masses of humanity, it is most unlikely that they heard the cry of the eagle or even knew that there was such a cry. It is a fact that the latter part of the sixth century AD and the early part of the seventh were less difficult for Christians in respect of persecution than earlier centuries had been. It might therefore be expected that the "*loud voice*" of the eagle had little or no effect on people generally, or even upon those who heard it or should have heard it.

THE FIFTH TRUMPET

Revelation 9:

¹*And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.*

²*And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.*

³*And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*

⁴*And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.*

⁵*And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.*

⁶*And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.*

⁷*And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.*

⁸*And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.*

⁹*And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.*

¹⁰*And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.*

¹¹*And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.*

¹²*One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*

Background Information

Thus was foretold the rise of Mahomet and Mohammedanism, and the progress and some of the results of the Saracen conquests. The prophet is known under the names of Mahomet, Mohammed and Muhammed; while the religion he founded is known also under the various titles of Mahometanism, Mohammedanism, Muhammedanism and Islam. The followers of Mahomet are also known variously as Mahometan, Mohammedan, Muhammedan, Moslem, Muslim and Saracen.

Mahomet was born in Mecca, Arabia, of the illustrious tribe of Koreish in 569 AD. His father died when Mahomet was only two months old, and his mother died when he was six years old. Mahomet was brought up by nurses and relatives, principally by an uncle who was the guardian of the 'caaba' or sacred temple of Mecca. Mahomet grew up in an atmosphere of tradition and religious rites and ceremonies. His uncle was a trader, owning two caravans, and sometimes took Mahomet with him on his journeys. Mahomet was thus brought into contact with the outside world, and gained considerable knowledge of Christianity and other religions.

In the normal course of events, Mahomet would have succeeded his uncle as guardian of the caaba, and in that position would have been the most honoured citizen in the area. The superstitions associated with the native forms of worship in Arabia, which were a mixture of Sabean and Magian religions, were distressing to Mahomet, and what he had heard and seen of the Christian religion did not please him, so at the age of forty he began his career as reformer and prophet.

Mahomet believed in and began to teach that there is one God, Allah. The superstitions of the religions of Arabia, and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the worship of saints and martyrs and the virgin Mary, the use of images and other errors of faith and practice seemed to him to need correction. Acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ does not seem to have appealed to Mahomet, though he did use some of Christ's teachings in his own system of faith.

For twelve years Mahomet preached reform in his own city of Mecca, after having received, as he claimed, revelations from heaven. His wife was his first convert, but other converts were few. He was, however, zealous and persistent, and being a man of wealth and influence he was tolerated for a time. But he lost his means and was compelled to flee from Mecca to Medina, where he already had a few converts. The year of Mahomet's flight, known as the Hegira, was 622 AD, which date is the beginning of the Moslem calendar. During these years, away from Mecca, Mahomet may be said to have been a 'star', that is, a religious teacher.

The Fallen Star

9:1,2 John in his vision saw a star which fell from "*heaven*". The RV and RSV have "*fallen*", while the NIV has "*that had fallen*". The 'star' is evidently a symbol of Mahomet, who changed his activities of reform from spiritual preaching and teaching to more earthly and secular activities, in particular, warfare and conquest.

The rivalry of the numerous small tribes into which the Arabs were divided was not conducive to the propagation of a universal religion. Mahomet's teaching reconciled some of the families and tribes, but others were not amenable to preaching in and of itself. Hence the proposition that the faith of Islam be propagated by the sword. Mahomet is thus symbolised as using the "key", that is, having the power to open "*the pit of the abyss*" (RV and Diaglott) or "*the shaft of the abyss*" (NIV). The KJV and the RSV retain the

word 'bottomless' in these verses, and have the rendering 'bottomless pit', but there is no word in the text corresponding to 'bottomless'. The 'pit of the abyss' may be understood to symbolise the obscurity of the Arabian deserts from which most of Mahomet's warriors were drawn, and their remoteness from the civilised Roman world. The 'smoke' that arose 'out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace' seems to symbolise the ignorance, cruelty and fanaticism of the Arabs, all of which combined to obscure what was good in Mahomet's teachings, and darkened and closed the minds of all who came under the influence of the marauding Arabs.

The 'pit' in these verses should not be thought of as meaning 'hades' or 'gehenna', and the erroneous teachings of hell fire and eternal torment should not be considered as featuring here. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the symbolic meaning of the visions of Revelation will be maintained, and the symbols of 'fire' and 'lake of fire' for example, will be seen to symbolise destruction, and not everlasting torment.

The smoke that was as the smoke of a great furnace was of great volume and very black. The 'sun' that was darkened was the great 'light' of that time, Papal Rome; while the 'air' that was also darkened was a symbol of the minds of people generally.

9:3 Out of the smoke came "locusts", the most destructive of insects, fitly representing the characteristics of Mahomet's followers. The allusion to "scorpions" and "stings in their tails" will be considered in the discussion of verses 5 and 10. In the natural world locusts do not have stings in their tails as do scorpions.

The "power" given to the symbolic locusts derived mainly from Mahomet's teaching of predestination as a "message from heaven." This teaching declared:

- (1) that no-one could be injured or die except by the will of Allah;
- (2) that nothing that anyone did or did not do could alter fate; and
- (3) that whoever died on the field of battle was immediately transported to all the delights of paradise, which delights were held to be mainly of a sensual kind.

This teaching is clearly fatalism, and has been cultivated in the minds of warriors by other notable leaders, both before and since Mahomet's time, particularly Napoleon, because nothing gives

greater zeal and intrepidity in warfare than the belief that one cannot die until one's time has come. This doctrine of fatalism is not found in Scripture, and is not a teaching of Jesus Christ.

But when this fatalistic teaching was added to the fanaticism of Mahomet's followers, they became transformed into almost irresistible armies. With the cry, "There is but one God, Allah, and Mahomet is his prophet", Mahomet's followers carried all before them. The sword took the place of persuasion and argument, and conquered peoples were given the choice of conversion or death.

Mahomet besieged and captured Mecca, his birthplace, and by touching the so-called sacred stone wall of the caaba, he made that place the centre of the world for Moslems, and made Mecca the sacred city, a pilgrimage to which became a work of merit in his followers. Mahomet died in 632 AD, the eleventh year of the Hegira, at the age of sixty-three.

Mahomet claimed to have received the Koran, the scriptures of the Moslems, from Allah through the angel Gabriel. No collection of these sayings were (was) made until after Mahomet's death, when they were gathered from the memories of his followers and from scattered writings. Uthman (? – 656 AD), the third caliph to rule after the death of Mahomet, established a commission of scholars, who collected the revelations of Mahomet to produce the definitive version of the Koran. Even so, the Koran consists of disconnected precepts, exhortations, threats and laws, and it is not clear how much is directly attributable to Mahomet and how much is apocryphal.

The Saracen Campaigns

9:4 Mahomet was succeeded by Abu Beker in 632 AD. Abu Beker promptly issued a call to all the faithful to take Syria out of the hands of the 'infidels', as all non-Mohammedans were called. The address Abu Beker gave to his troops assembled at Medina is recorded by Edward Gibbon.

Abu Beker said: "Remember that you are always in the presence of God, on the verge of death, in the assurance of judgment, and the hope of paradise: avoid injustice and oppression; consult your brethren, and study to preserve the love and confidence of your troops. When you fight the battles of the Lord, acquit yourselves like men, without turning your backs; but let not your victory be stained with the blood of women or children. Destroy

no palm trees, nor burn any fields of corn. Cut down no fruit trees, nor do any mischief to cattle, only such as you kill to eat. As you go on you will find some religious persons who live retired in monasteries, and propose to themselves to serve God that way; let them alone, and neither kill them nor destroy their monasteries; and you will find another sort of people that belong to the synagogue of Satan, who have shaven crowns; be sure to cleave their skulls, and give them no quarter till they either turn Mahometans or pay tribute.” (Gibbon, Edward; *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Folio Society, Volume VI, pages 296 and 297).

If this verse 4 were to be taken literally, these orders to Moslem troops might seem to be a literal fulfilment. But the ‘locusts’ were symbolic. In the natural world, locusts ravage green vegetation and crops, and are never flesh eaters. Locusts never attack people directly, but the symbolic locusts were to be a scourge upon people, *people “which have not the seal of God in their foreheads”*. This is surely a reference to the sealing described in chapter 7, verses 1 to 8. If we are correct in locating our verse in the seventh century AD, this reference to the sealing indicates that the sealing was in progress then and was continuing. The sealing is still continuing in our day, and is not restricted either to the early or late periods of the Gospel Age, as some commentators believe.

The command to the “locusts” not to “*hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads*” seems to be intended to show that the “locusts” are symbols of the Saracens who imposed their rule on their conquered peoples, and harmed only those who would not obey them, pay tribute, and convert to Islam.

9:5,6 All Saracen campaigns were undertaken in the name of Allah and righteousness, and, to destroy infidels who would not embrace the faith, was considered to be the most effectual means of destroying the works of the devil. The terms of acceptance for the conquered ones seemed easy – merely to accept Mahomet as the true prophet of the one God Allah and pay tribute. The tribute demanded in material terms was heavy, and included all the gold and silver and other treasures of the conquered peoples and the churches.

This requirement to convert and also pay tribute seems to be the meaning of the symbolic description in verse 10 that the locusts had *"stings in their tails"* as scorpions have. The symbolic locusts also had power to *"torment"* those over whom they secured dominion, so much so that the conquered peoples would desire to change their condition but would be unable to do so. This seems to be the meaning symbolically expressed as seeking death and not finding it, desiring to die, but *"death shall flee from them"*. The torment was to continue *"five months"*, which at the rate of a year for each prophetic day (Ezekiel 4:6) amounted to one hundred and fifty years. More will be said of this in the comments on verse 10.

9:7-9 Commentators who interpret this passage literally or semi-literally see in the golden crowns the Arab turban, and in the faces of men, and hair as the hair of women, they see the Arabian style of beard and hair. One of the favourite exclamations of a Muslim is "by the beard of the prophet", indicating a favourable regard for the beard among Muslims. In the sound of *"many horses running to battle"*, the same commentators see a reference to the Arabian horse, an animal well known for its superior qualities.

But it is contended in these comments that the visions given to John are symbols, and that the symbols need to be understood as representations. John writes, *"on their heads were as it were crowns like gold"*. A crown of gold would symbolise authority and rulership, and the Saracens claimed to rule in the name of Allah, but their claim was false, as indicated by the description *"crowns like gold"*, not crowns of gold, and the expression meaning "resembling" or "like", but not genuine and pure golden *"as it were"*, crowns.

"And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron". The breastplates would represent the uncompromising nature and protective power of the Mohammedan faith, unlike the Christian's breastplate which, as Paul writes in Ephesians 6:14, represents righteousness. The faces of men and the hair of women seem to symbolise the dual nature of Mahomet and his followers generally, fierce and uncompromising in attack, fanatical and fearless in battle, but luxuriant in ease. The combination of womanly gentleness and masculine strength is found in the Koran, which contains fine exhortations to self-denial and virtue in some chapters, but vehement denunciation and reproach in others.

The teeth “*as the teeth of lions*” symbolise ferocity. The wings of the symbolic locusts represent swift flight or rapid conquest. Their sound “*as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle*” signifies the fear that the progress of the Mohammedan conquerors aroused in the people they conquered. The notion of many powerful wings continuously in motion accentuates the overall impression of fierce and rapid subjugation of large geographical areas.

Edward Gibbon writes: “In the ten years of the administration of Omar (one of the immediate successors of Mahomet), the Saracens reduced to his obedience thirty-six thousand cities or castles, destroyed four thousand churches or temples of unbelievers, and edified (erected) fourteen hundred mosques for the exercise of the religion of Mahomet. One hundred years after his flight from Mecca, the arms and the reign of his successors extended from the Indian to the Atlantic ocean.” (Gibbon, Edward “The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”, Folio Society, Volume VI, page 286.)

9:10 In this verse there is a further allusion to the period of “*five months*”. The previous reference, as we saw, was in verse 5. If this prophecy of five months, or one hundred and fifty years at the rate of a day for a year (Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), is simply a repetition of the first allusion in verse 5, one hundred and fifty years of Saracen prosperity are predicted. But if the two prophetic periods of five months are to be added together, then three hundred years are indicated.

There is something to be said for each of the two interpretations, as the following table shows.

AD	
609 - 612	Beginning of Mohammedanism
622	The Hegira
632	Death of Mahomet
633	Bozra captured
634	Damascus captured
635	Heliopolis and Emesa captured
636	Battle of Yermuck, after which the Roman armies no longer appeared in the field, and the Saracens might go where they would in Syria
637	Jerusalem captured
638	Antioch captured
669 - 675	Constantinople besieged but not captured

- 709 Patriarchate of Alexandria (Egypt) falls to the Saracens, and they pursue their victorious way across North Africa
- 714 Spain conquered by the Saracens
- 732 The victory of Charles Martel (the 'Hammer', c688 - 741 AD) at a seven day long battle between Poitiers and Tours in France, checked the further advance of the Saracens towards Rome
- 762 Baghdad founded, and the Caliphate established – 150 years from AD 612
- 823 Saracens conquer Sicily and Crete
- 936 Caliphate of Baghdad falls – Radhi the thirty-ninth successor of Mahomet, being the last who deserved the title of 'Commander of the Faithful'. This was 300 years after the battle of Yermuck, when the conquest of Syria was completed.

“Mohammedanism carried within itself the seeds of its own decay”, wrote Washington Irving in his ‘Life of Mahomet’, page 63. The very doctrine of fatalistic predestination which made the Moslem fighting men such a formidable foe, became a weakness when he undertook to govern the conquered lands and provinces, for every adverse experience was also considered to be the will of Allah to which he must bow.

9:11 The “*king*” over the “*locusts*” was Mahomet. Although his career as a “prophet” lasted only about twenty years, and his military career only ten years of those twenty, his is the name that commands the reverence of all the Mohammedan sects, of which there are several.

His symbolic names, Abaddon in the Hebrew and Apollyon in the Greek, both words meaning ‘a destroyer’, is most appropriate, for Mohammedanism destroyed not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense. It destroyed the faith of many, and prevented the development of the faith of others in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in that sacrifice offered by Him on Calvary for the sins of the whole world, by which, and only by which, is salvation made possible.

9:12 Christendom suffered immensely under the “*woe*” of the fifth Trumpet, but was not sufficiently affected by the experiences to cause it to mend its ways. So two more “*woes*” were to come.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET

¹³*And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,*

¹⁴*Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.*

¹⁵*And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.*

¹⁶*And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.*

¹⁷*And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.*

¹⁸*By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.*

¹⁹*For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.*

²⁰*And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:*

²¹*Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.*

In the vision of the events to occur in the era of the sixth trumpet, John was shown the second of the two major troubles to be brought upon Christendom by the Moslem invasions. As we have seen, the first of these troubles originated in Arabia, south-east of Rome. The second, to be considered now, originated among Moslems further east and north in Asia. These two troubles were briefly referred to in Daniel 11:40, where it is said that the king of the south and also the king of the north should make war against "him", that is, Papal Rome. No details were revealed to Daniel.

The details were reserved by the Lord to be made known in the prophetic visions given to John. Even so, some five or six centuries were to elapse before the prophetic visions were fulfilled. Apart from the brief reference in Daniel 11:40, the Moslem conquests and activities do not seem to be mentioned in the Old Testament prophecies.

9:13,14 As soon as the sixth angel had sounded, John heard a voice from *"the golden altar which is before God"* giving a command to the sixth angel. The golden altar was mentioned in Revelation 8:3 as the altar on which the high-priestly angel offered incense with the prayers of all saints, and from which He took fire to fill the censer which He cast into the earth, thus conducting a prelude to the sounding of the seven trumpets. The reference to a voice coming from the golden altar would seem to indicate that all these matters are subjects of Divine overruling, the Lord using the warring dispositions of the tribes and nations to bring about their mutual punishment and eventual destruction.

9:15 The command given to the sixth angel was that he should loose *"the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates"*. It would appear that these four angels or emissaries were to come against Christendom because of its idolatry and malpractices. As we learn from history, the four angels or emissaries would have to be the four successive movements of the Turkish peoples under four great leaders, all of which contributed to the formation and extension of the Turkish empire.

The four movements and leaders were as follows:

1. The Seljukian Turks under Seljuk (c900 ...);
2. The Moguls and Tartars under Genghis Khan (c1162-1227);
3. The Ottoman Turks under Othman and his successors (1258 – c1683);
4. The Tartars under Tamerlane (1333 - 1404).

Concerning these migrations and invasions, Edward Gibbon writes: "The rise and progress of the Ottomans, the present sovereigns of Constantinople, are connected with the most important scenes in modern history; but they are founded on a previous knowledge of the great eruptions of the Moguls and Tartars, whose rapid progress may be compared with the primitive convulsions of nature, which have agitated and altered the surface of the globe." (Edward Gibbon, "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,": Volume VII, page 115).

THE GREAT RIVER EUPHRATES

The Revelation, as we have seen, is a book of many symbols, and it seems that *"the great river Euphrates"* is just as much a symbol as the *"four angels"* bound at the river. The RV, RSV and NIV all have *"bound at the great river Euphrates"* rather than bound "in" the great river as the KJV has. The river Euphrates

appears elsewhere in the Revelation, so it is important to ascertain its symbolic meaning and significance.

In an endeavour to understand the meaning of the symbolic Euphrates, it will be helpful to consider first the history of the literal and natural Euphrates river. In Biblical and secular history, the Euphrates was central to an ancient civilisation, on which the city of Babylon, the capital of the Babylonian empire, was situated. The river, as an avenue of commerce and a source of water for irrigation, was one of the main sources of Babylon's wealth.

The empire of ancient Babylon, the first of the great world empires pictured in Daniel 2, was denounced by the prophets of Israel for its pride and for taking into captivity the people of God.

The literal Euphrates was closely associated with literal Babylon, and this fact guides us to an understanding of the Euphrates as used symbolically in the Revelation in association with symbolic Babylon. Babylon is not mentioned in Revelation 9, but is mentioned in chapters 14, 16, 17 and 18, where it is used as a symbol of the apostate Christian church. The great mystic Babylon in Revelation 17 "*sitteth upon many waters,*" and these waters are said to mean "*peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues*" (Revelation 17:1, 5, 15).

As the natural Euphrates supported literal Babylon, so the symbolic Euphrates (peoples and nations) supports symbolic Babylon, the religious system by which the whole world has been intoxicated, deceived and exploited in so many ways. The whole system is doomed and will fall, just as literal Babylon fell. The means of the fall of symbolic Babylon is the diversion and drying up of its life-giving waters, that is, the people and nations that support it, just as literal Babylon fell to the besieging armies of the Medes and Persians as they diverted the waters of the natural Euphrates river, and gained access to the city along the dry river bed. We will consider these matters more fully in the discussions of Revelation 14, 16, 17 and 18.

It is suggested that "*the great river Euphrates*" of our verse 14 should be understood in harmony with its use in Revelation 16 and in similar contexts, by association, in Revelation 14, 17 and 18, where its influence is implied, but the name is not used. The symbolic Euphrates may be reasonably understood as representing the peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues which

have supported Rome and protected her from the assaults of her rivals and enemies. At this great river of peoples of all nations the "*four angels*" were bound until the command came for their loosing.

THE FOUR ANGELS

Some commentators who understand the "*four angels*" as referring to the Turkish invasions and conquests, believe that the "*Euphrates*" is to be understood literally because the Turkish movements originated east of the natural Euphrates river, and that river lay between them and their objective, Constantinople, the rich capital of the Eastern Roman Empire; and ultimately Rome in Italy.

But when considering the drying up of the Euphrates, the same commentators move to a symbolic understanding, namely that the Euphrates becomes a symbol of the Turkish empire. This understanding does not fit the Scriptural picture because it is symbolic Babylon that falls because of the drying up of the peoples that support it. The Turkish Empire has been a great scourge to Rome for centuries, but the decline of Turkish power has no connection with the fall and final days of Rome, the end being brought about by the diversion and desertion of the peoples that supported it. The Turkish campaigns and conquests are foretold briefly in Daniel and in more detail in Revelation, but are symbolised by the "*four angels*" and not by the Euphrates river.

9:15 The four angels or emissaries had been prepared for a certain hour, and day, and month, and year, and could not be loosed until the appointed time had come; and neither could they be held back when that time had arrived. As history shows, not all four angels were loosed at the same moment. There was a certain hour when the first of them was loosed, and the others followed in their due course.

The translation in the KJV is unfortunately faulty here, and has caused some commentators to suppose that "*an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year*" should be added together and interpreted in years at the rate of a day for a year, as stated in Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:34. The later versions make it clear that the definite article "the" belongs to the word "hour", and is so translated in the RSV and Phillips MEV, while the NIV and Today's English Version have "this very hour". This indicates that

the prophecy does not refer to a period of time but to a previously determined point of time in the Divine arrangement.

We must now briefly consider the "*four angels*".

1. The Seljukian Turks

The origins of the Seljukian Turks are for the most part unknown. What is known is that in the last years of the tenth century they crossed the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers from Turkestan under their leader, Seljuk, embraced the Mohammedan religion, and gained great power in Persia (now Iran).

In 1070 Malek Shah, the great grandnephew of Seljuk, subdued Syria and captured Jerusalem. In 1071 the grandnephew of Seljuk, Alp Arslan, defeated the Roman Emperor, Romanus IV. Malek Shah was Alp Arslan's son.

The Reverend A.K .Hore in his "Students' History of the Greek Church", page 238, comments as follows: "For 300 years Jerusalem had been subject to the Mohammedan Caliphs of Bagdad, who regarded it as in sanctity second only to Mecca, and allowed Christian pilgrims to visit, unmolested, the Holy Sepulchre. A reasonable tax was imposed, in return for which food and accomodation were supplied to them on the road, and a comfortable hospice greeted them on their arrival. Under the Seljuks all was changed, and a system of persecution ensued."

Malek Shah also established his dominion over the hordes of Turkestan, so that his empire extended from Syria and Arabia on the west to Cashgar, a Tartar kingdom on the borders of China. By 1081 the Turks had captured Nicea, where the Council had been held in 325 AD. In 1095 the Eastern Emperor Alexius appealed to the Christians of the West for aid to prevent and repel further advances by the Turks.

Then followed the several Crusades from 1096 to 1271, which for some two hundred years kept the Turks more or less in check.

The Turkish rule in Asia Minor (now Turkey) might have fallen into decay had it not been for the campaigns of Saladin (1137-93) who took Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1189.

2. The Moguls and Tartars

The second angel was "*loosed*" in 1206 AD when the Moguls invaded the domain of the Saracens in Asia, and swarmed across the steppes into what is now known as Russia in Europe.

The term "mogul" is thought by some historians to be a contraction of "mongol" derived from "mongu" a name used by the Chinese to apply to some tribes on their western border. Gibbon considers the terms "mogul" and "tartar" to have been derived from Mogul Khan and Tartar Khan, two of the descendants of Genghis or Zingis Khan, the one signifying the ruling khan and the other a subordinate khan. The meaning of "Khan" is a supreme ruler of Asiatic peoples of Tartar origin. The title Genghis or Zingis means "the most great"; so the title Genghis Khan means the greatest of rulers, or ruler of rulers, equivalent to the title of "emperor" in Western kingdoms.

The religion of Genghis Khan, leader of the Moguls, was simple. He believed in the power of God and in the power of his own sword, and to that extent was in harmony with Mahomet. Genghis Khan made his own laws, and was tolerant of all faiths. Among his followers were Christians, Mahommedans and pagans, but his sons and successors mostly embraced Islam, either by choice or compulsion.

The historian, W.R.Morfill, comments as follows on the Mongols in Europe: "Their original home was in southeastern Siberia. From thence they carried on their expeditions for plunder and destruction over the centre of Asia and the east of Europe. They first became prominent in the year 1206, when they conferred the title of Dchingis Khan (i.e. Khan of Khans) on Temud Shin, the son of a Khan. It was under this chief, who has earned such a terrible fame in history, that they began to make themselves the terror of their neighbours. Towards the end of the thirteenth century their empire reached its widest limits, extending from the wall of China to the frontier of Poland, and from India to Siberia.

"In 1224 the Russians suffered a complete defeat at the hands of these marauders on the banks of the river Kalka, close to where it discharged itself into the Sea of Azov. But it was not till the year 1238 that the Mongols made any serious impression on Russian territory; in this year they destroyed Bolgari, the capital of the Finnish Bulgarians on the Volga, and after having defeated the army of Suzdal at Kolomna on the Oka, they burnt Moscow,

Suzdal and Yaroslavl." (W.R. Morfill, "The Story of Russia" pages 38 and 39.)

From 1228 to 1462 the Russians paid tribute to the Mongols, and for many years afterward the Russians were obliged to maintain frontier defences against the Mongols, and send expeditions against their stronghold in the Crimea.

In 1571 the Mongols made another attack on Russia with an army of 100,000 men. They encountered small resistance and soon reached Moscow, which they burnt completely.

Under Batou, a nephew of Genghis Khan, Poland was penetrated as far as the borders of Germany. Of all the cities and fortresses of Hungary, only three survived the Mongol and Tartar invasion. After besieging Neustadt in Austria, and devastating Serbia, Bosnia and Bulgaria, Batou returned to the Volga. Had he wished, he might have marched on Vienna, Constantinople or Venice, but he was apparently satisfied for the time being.

The matter of greatest interest to Christian students is that all of these campaigns and conquests amounted to a scourge on Christendom, not only of the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, but also on the Western Churches of Austria and Poland.

On the other hand, the influence of Cuzan, the Khan of Persia, served as a check on the Turks of Asia, maintained a measure of peace and tranquility in that region, and deferred an invasion of Europe across the Dardanelles. The death of Cazan and the subsequent decline of the Mongols, so Gibbon writes, gave "free scope to the rise and progress of the Ottoman empire."

3. The Ottoman Turks

The "*third angel*" loosed was that power which reconstituted the dominion of the Seljukian Turks, and made it for centuries one of the greatest empires in extent and power of all the great empires this world has seen: the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

The Mongol and Tartar invasion caused Mohammedan families to move westward. Among the Mohammedan family groups forced to move was that of Oghuz, of which Ertoghrul was the head. When Ertoghrul witnessed a battle between some Tartars and the forces of the Seljukian Sultan of Iconium, he observed that the Tartars were gaining the upper hand. Ertoghrul and his

men intervened on the side of the Sultan and turned probable defeat into victory. The Sultan rewarded Ertoghrol with a grant of land for himself and the four hundred families that represented his tribe in the Roman province of Bithynia, close to the important city of Brusa. This marked the beginning of the Ottoman empire, for in 1258 a son was born to Ertoghrol named Othman, from whom the Othmanlis or Ottomans took their name.

Othman expanded the territory originally granted to the Turkish families. The Seljuks faded from history at the close of the thirteenth century, and this cleared the way for the expansion of the Ottomans. Othman's son, Orchan, besieged and conquered Nicea and gained control as far as the Bosphorus. By 1361 Murad I had occupied Thrace (excepting Constantinople and its environs), and established his capital at Adrianople. By 1375 he had occupied Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria. In Asia he gained the greater part of the Seljukian dominions in the east by purchase and by the marriage of his son Bajazet (or Bayezid). Bajazet was successful in subduing Hungary in 1396-98, and thus reached the summit of his power.

At this stage in history the "*fourth angel*" appears, interrupting for a time the exploits of the "*third angel*".

4. The Mongols and Tartars under Tamerlane (or Timur)

The Moguls and Tartars had been kept in check by the peoples supporting the Roman empire, particularly those of the Eastern Roman empire. It may seem strange that the Turks of Western Asia and enemies of Rome could be thought of as supporters of Rome. The situation was one of convenience for the Turks. The Turkish Sultans at various times entered into treaties with the Emperors of Eastern Rome, because the Turkish forces were not yet capable of capturing Constantinople, and made a virtue of necessity by entering into alliances with Eastern Rome.

Tamerlane was hindered in his progress toward Constantinople by the Turkish presence in Asia. The Turkish dominions in Asia would need to be overrun and conquered before Tamerlane could reach Constantinople, so the Turkish peoples constituted for a time a defence of the city and of Europe. A further consideration is that the Turkish advance in Europe was postponed while Tamerlane was checked in his mad career. Constantinople had been besieged for six years by Bajazet, and probably would have fallen then but for the arrival of Tamerlane, who called off the besiegers.

Tamerlane was of the Turkish race, born near Samarkand in 1333. He invaded Persia, Tartary and India, and in 1400 conquered a portion of Syria. His further progress was stopped by the Mamelukes of Egypt. In 1402 Bajazet and Tamerlane met on the field of Angora. Bajazet was defeated and made prisoner. In his book "Story of Turkey" on page 73, S. Lane-Poole writes: "The history of the Ottomans seemed to have suddenly come to an end. Seldom has the world seen so complete, so terrible a catastrophe as the fall of Bajezid from the summit of power to the shame of a chained captive."

Tamerlane devastated the country more like a raider than an intending ruler, but at the same time appointed headmen or beys over the conquered tribes, from whom tribute was exacted. After four and a half years he returned east to invade China. He exacted tribute from both Greeks and Turks, but generously permitted the sons of Bajazet to retain the provinces which they had ruled under their father. Thus was the possibility created for the re-establishment of the Ottoman power, and several generations of capable rulers of the house of Othman succeeded in recovering lost possessions, and in extending the empire well beyond its previous boundaries.

Tamerlane's clemency to the sons of Bajazet may have been dictated by his religion, for he himself was a Moslem, and recognised the Turkish rulers as bearing the sword for Mahomet. But his career in general, and the careers of the Seljukian and Ottoman Turks, as well as the Mohammedans of Egypt, show that Mohammedan rulers did not allow their religion to interfere with their political ambitions.

Only a lack of ships prevented Tamerlane from capturing Constantinople. He tried to hire them from the Christians, hoping that the Christians would join him against the Turks. He also offered to enter into an alliance with the Turks against the Christians in exchange for the use of their ships. But neither Turk nor Christian would aid him.

Further History of the Ottomans

In 1326 Orkhan and his brother Alauddin re-organised the government and formed troops of Jannissaries (new soldiers) composed of youths captured in the wars or bought as slaves. For centuries these troops formed the mainstay of the throne, and assured the personal safety of the ruler. These Jannissaries were the main defenders of the Sultans, but became in the end a source of danger to the state, and were suppressed in 1826 by Sultan Mahmud II.

Constantinople was besieged in 1395, and again in 1422. It fell on 29 May 1453, and with its fall the Eastern Roman empire came to an end. The ancient Christian church of St.Sophia was made a Mohammedan mosque, and Constantinople became the capital of the Turkish empire. All former Turkish possessions were gathered in, tributary states were made subject, and before the close of the fifteenth century, Bosnia, Serbia and Albania were subdued, Syria and Croatia overrun, Otranto in southern Italy captured and held for many years, and Rome itself was threatened. A terrible devastation of Poland took place, and a great naval victory was gained over the Venetians.

During the sixteenth century, Sultan Selim I acquired Egypt and Syria, and had himself consecrated at Cairo by the Caliph as head of the Mohammedan faith. Suleiman the Magnificent (1496-1566) extended the Turkish dominion to its widest, and in 1529 besieged Vienna with an army of 250,000. The siege was not successful, and, although further conquests were made in the Mediterranean, the decline of the Turkish empire began. Vienna was again besieged, but was delivered by the timely arrival in 1683 of the great Polish leader, John Sobieski (1624-1696). It is well documented in history that the Turks were gradually pushed back from the Crimea and the Balkan states, and in our time we see them entirely out of Europe except for Constantinople (Istanbul) and its environs.

A fact to be noted is that in 1475 the region of the Crimea, long held by the Tartars, became subject to the Turks.

The Turks were originally wild sons of the eastern deserts, but they absorbed much of the Saracen civilisation which they found in the conquered countries of Persia and western Asia. Their contact with Europe also had a civilising effect. Many wives of the Sultans were Europeans, and many women and girls of all nationalities captured in battle on European soil became wives of Turks of all classes, so that Turks today are a well-mixed people.

It should be noted that the Turkish people have organised and carried out persecution of the Armenians, and many atrocities have been committed against the Armenians dating back to the First World War of 1914-18. This demonstrates that human nature can be "civilised" without being purified or sanctified, as Christian believers should be by faith in Jesus Christ.

COMMENTS ON THE SYMBOLISM

9:16 Having considered the *"four angels"* and identified them by reference to history and the context in which they appear, and having described briefly some of their exploits, we will endeavour to understand the meaning of the symbols used in connection with the *"four angels"*.

"The number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand" or *"two myriads of myriads"* as in the Diaglott. This would amount to two hundred million as in the NIV, Today's English Version, the NEB, Phillips Modern English Version, and the L.B. The RSV and the Jerusalem Bible have *"twice ten thousand times ten thousand"*, which amounts to the same total number of horsemen.

The victorious Mongol, Tartar and Turkish armies consisted of immense numbers of cavalry, and as the time of the *"four angels"* extended over some five centuries, the number of their personnel may very well have been as stated. But the whole vision is symbolic of widespread conquest, a horse being a symbol of war, and many horses of conquest. It is a fact of history that the capture of Constantinople was not accomplished by horses and horsemen, but by a siege, then an infantry assault assisted by a few cannon hurling large rocks, and also small ships carrying parties of assault troops.

The Children of Israel were not to trust in *"horses"*. The Lord God said through Isaiah, *"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord"* (Isaiah 31:11). The Lord was telling Israel not to go to war or make an alliance with Egypt. The Israelites disobeyed, made war and conspired with Egypt, and were consequently punished.

The vast number of the armies in the vision indicates the importance of the events, as well as the resources and wealth of the warring peoples. The two hundred million "horsemen" represent extensive conquests and the onslaught of virtually irresistible forces.

9:17 John reminds us that the horses he saw were part of the vision. They were of course symbolic, and had *heads "as the heads of lions"*. The lion in Scripture usually represents a powerful and aggressive empire. Two great empires of ancient

times, Assyria and Babylon, are described as two "lions" which tore and destroyed the helpless "sheep", Israel (Jeremiah 2:15; 50:17).

The first of four beasts seen by Daniel in one of his visions was *"like a lion"*. The lion represented Babylon, the most despotic of the four world empires permitted by God to rule until His Kingdom is set up (Daniel 7:4). The lions' heads on the horses would seem to represent the despotic nature of the empires to be established as a result of the conquests of the *"four angels"*.

Out of the mouths of the lions' heads on the horses *"issued fire and smoke and brimstone."* Brimstone is of course sulphur, a non-metallic element which burns with a blue flame and a suffocating smell. The symbolism seems to be the destructive and tyrannical actions of the Turks. The cruelty of the Turks struck fear in the hearts and minds of the conquered peoples. Selim I (1470-1520), for example, ordered the killing of seventy thousand Turks who had embraced the teachings of the Persian Shiahs, a sect of Mohammedanism, and is aptly called Selim the Grim.

Thus we see that religious issues are included in the symbolism of *"fire and smoke and brimstone"*. Selim 1 became Caliph as well as Sultan, and so was both religious and political head of the Ottoman empire. He was the defender of the Mohammedan faith and of the teachings of Mohammedanism generally, and had the power of life and death over his subjects. *The "fire and smoke and brimstone"* well symbolise the obscuring and confusing policies of the government, the edicts of the Caliph-Sultan, and the teachings of Mohammedanism generally, reminding us of the smoke which came out of the abyss when Mahomet first announced his claim to be God's only true prophet on earth. (Revelation 8:1,2).

The teachings proclaimed under Selim 1 in his spiritual capacity as Caliph, that is, successor of Mahomet, were that all faithful and obedient Mohammedans were sure of Paradise, while all "infidels" were certain of endless torment. In fairness to some individual Sultans, it must be said that they were fair-minded and just, and that they tolerated Christians living in their dominions. But others made conversion to Islam the condition on which their lives were spared. So it may be said that Christians who became Mohammedans were "killed" as Christians, but their physical lives were spared.

The horsemen in the vision had "*breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone*". Modern translations make it clear that the breastplates were coloured fiery red, and blue as sapphire and yellow as sulphur. We saw when considering Revelation 9:9 that the Christian's breastplate signifies righteousness (Ephesians 6:14). The Christian is righteous in God's sight because of faith, and he or she has this spiritual protection granted by God, as a warrior has the physical protection of his armour.

The breastplates of the warriors in the vision correspond to the lions' heads of the horses and the issue from their mouths. The fiery red represents trouble and destruction, the "jacinth" or deep blue or purple stone represents royalty or the claim to it, while the "brimstone" represents the completeness of the destruction brought about by the "horsemen".

9:18,19 The "*horses*" in the vision had, in addition to their lions' heads, "*tails like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hur..*" In nature, the most to be feared from a horse is its kick. With these symbolic "horses", the thing to be feared was their tails, which were like serpents, presumably able to move like serpents, strike and hurt their victims.

This seems to symbolise the evils following the establishment of the rule of the "*four angels*", particularly the Turkish. Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, the Seljukian and Ottoman Turks all followed the same pattern of placing conquered tribes, cities and districts under rulers called "khans" or "beys", whose duties were to collect tribute for their superiors, and provide soldiers in time of war, which was nearly all the time.

The system gave rise to many abuses. The good of the people was not sought by many khans and beys, rather the enrichment of themselves. Productive regions became desolate, largely because agriculture was discouraged by heavy taxation. Farmers remained poor and produced little, rather than see their harvests lost to them because of heavy and unjust taxation. Thus people were hurt politically and economically by the "*four angels*".

But people under Turkish rule have been hurt morally and spiritually as well. The whole idea of a religion propagated by the sword, of might as the determinant of right, and of themselves as the only people worthy of God's favour has permeated their

thoughts and actions. On no other ground can their repeated massacres of Christians be accounted for.

In another respect they had been hurt, and this is perhaps the most serious of all. In receiving a false religion and holding fanatically to it, they have for centuries been deprived of enlightenment concerning the true salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, Who died for them to open the way for forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. No other man could do this or could have done it.

Where the symbolic "*horse*" has been in occupation and subsequently driven out, a bad influence has been left. We see it from history in Christian Europe. The Turks, and before them the Saracens, in carrying out Mahomet's teaching and example to propagate their religion by the sword, and demonstrating success by the building up of mighty empires, set an example which Christian Patriarchs and Popes were not slow to follow. In addition, the sword in the hand of Mohammedan fanatics placed before Christians the temptation to defend themselves with the sword instead of suffering martyrdom. The next step, to take the sword against the Turk, and drive him out, seemed to follow naturally. And the last step of all, to propagate Christianity by the sword, followed in due course, as we see in the methods of the Spanish conquistadors, who sailed to the newly-discovered Americas, sword in hand, to carry the Roman Catholic faith to the pagan Indians, Aztecs and Incas, and bring back to Spain as much silver and gold as they could.

THE THIRD PART OF MEN KILLED

During the dominance of the "*four angels*", mankind could be thought of as divided into three parts:

1. The Eastern Roman Empire with its capital at Constantinople;
2. The former Western Roman Empire, known since 800 AD as the Holy Roman Empire with its capital at Vienna in Austria. The title "Holy Roman Empire" was discarded in 1806;
3. All tribes and nations not included in the above two parts.

The greatest success of the "*four angels*" in both political and religious matters was with Part 1 of the three divisions of humanity as they were in that period. In this division the Turks "killed" large numbers of people politically and religiously, and a great many physically as well. In Part 2 the success of the "*four*

angels" was negligible. Some portions were overrun, but there was no substantial conquest, and neither Rome nor Vienna was captured, although Vienna was several times besieged. In Part 3 the "*four angels*" made many converts to Mohammedanism, but they never overthrew Zoroastrianism in Persia, Buddhism and Hinduism in India, Confucianism in China or Shintoism in Japan; nor did they obtain political control in any of these great countries except for a time in Persia. But in Part 1 the "*four angels*" "*killed*" and "*hurt*" in every sense of the words.

9:20,21 The inhabitants which constituted Parts 2 and 3 witnessed the dire effects accomplished by the "*four angels*" in Part 1, but did not repent of the evil practices so vividly described in these two verses. They continued with their unscriptural practices and their spiritual wickedness.

The reference to "*idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone and of wood, which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk*", seems to refer to relics, images and statues venerated by the Papacy and worshipped as though they were living, sentient beings. This kind of activity misrepresents the true worship of God through Jesus Christ, and is really worship instigated by Satan under the guise of an angel of light (1 Corinthians 10:19,20; 2 Corinthians 11:14).

The evils mentioned are representative of spiritual errors and improprieties, of which Papal Rome was manifestly guilty in its teachings, practices and influence over millions of gullible, unsuspecting people.

If the inhabitants of Parts 2 and 3 would not learn from the scourge of the "*four angels*", they would have to learn in some other way by bitter experience. The Lord will see to it that these people will be dealt with in His time and in His own way, as we will see in the course of further discussion.

THE ANGEL AND THE LITTLE SCROLL

Revelation 10:

¹*And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:*

²*And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,*

³*And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.*

⁴*And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.*

⁵*And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,*

⁶*And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:*

⁷*But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*

Consideration of the visions of the six trumpets has brought us to the end of the fifteenth century. The troubles brought upon Christendom because of wrongdoings have been many and great. But how have God's faithful people fared? Apart from the allusion by inference in Revelation 9:4 to the sealed ones, that is, those who have the seal of God in their foreheads, which seal is the Holy Spirit of God, nothing has been said directly about true and faithful believers in Jesus Christ since the vision preceding the first trumpet. What effects have the events and developments so far had on them? The vision about to be considered will give us some information.

10:1 When considering the vision of the Lord among the lampstands, sending messages to the seven churches symbolised by the lampstands in the first three chapters of the Revelation, we saw the constant presence and dealings of the Lord with His true believers. This presence and oversight were and are in fulfilment of His promise, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). The visions associated with the trumpets have so far said nothing of these things, their purpose being to foretell other matters.

But now there is shown to John a vision of "*another mighty angel*". This angel was not one of those bound at the river Euphrates, neither did he fall from heaven. John saw *him* "*come down from heaven*", indicating intention and purpose. This mighty angel was "*clothed with a cloud*", which would seem to indicate some measure of obscurity. But His face was as the sun, and His feet as pillars of fire. These details point back to chapter one, verses fourteen and fifteen, where John's vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded. There it is written

that *"his eyes were as a flame of fire: And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burnt in a furnace"*.

The similarity of the two descriptions lead us to understand that both apply to the same angelic being. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the *"mighty angel"* of our verse is a vision representing the Lord Jesus Christ. This understanding is strengthened by the other detail *"a rainbow was upon his head"*, referring, it seems, to the rainbow featuring in the vision of the grand throne in Revelation 4:3, and, with the other details of the description which identify this *"mighty angel"* as *"the faithful and true witness"* (Revelation 3:14), the Son of God.

The vision of the mighty angel coming down from heaven does not apply to our Lord's second advent, but to His providential dealings with His church, and His presence and dealings with His people throughout the Gospel Age. In His message to Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7), the Lord Jesus said that if they did not repent, *"I will come unto thee quickly"* (verse 5). He could not be referring to His second advent which is associated with events at the end period of the Gospel Age, as Ephesus was the first of the seven churches to be addressed, and symbolised conditions in the church in the early years of the Gospel Age. In the verse under consideration, the time is much later than the Ephesus era, but still some centuries short of the end of the age.

10:2 The *"little scroll"* was open, not sealed, so it seems appropriate to interpret the symbol as referring to the Scriptures. At this period in the Gospel Age, the Word of God was made available and understandable to a much greater extent than had been possible up to the period of this prophecy. This fact points to the Protestant Reformation, that great religious movement which called into question and actively protested against the errors, false doctrines and unscriptural practices of the Papacy. The Lord Jesus was surely active among His people in influencing and setting in motion this great reform movement, the first significant development in the decline leading to the final overthrow of the Papal system, which in our day is still future.

But why *"his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth"*? Why not the other way round? Why not one foot on the sea and the other on the earth without any distinction between right and left? If we take the earth and the sea as we have understood their symbolic meanings previously, it seems that the intention was to show that the *"right"* or more favourable effect of

the Reformation was to be on the "sea", the masses of humanity; and such indeed was the case. The angel's left foot on the "earth" seems to indicate that His symbolic stance brought about changes to the social order which followed and were largely attributable to the whole Reformation movement.

10:3,4 The Reformation was indeed a loud cry, "as when a lion roareth". It was heard throughout Christendom and beyond. "And when he had cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices." John was "about to write" what he had heard, but was forbidden to do so. Therefore we do not know what the seven thunders said. However, this much may tentatively be said, that thunder would symbolise agitation of the air, that is, people's minds, and seven indicates completeness, so that seven thunders could mean complete agitation of all people's minds. Had such an agitation been permitted to occur, the social order would surely have been destroyed. But the Lord's time for the destruction of the present order of things had not come, therefore what the seven thunders said was not to be recorded.

10:5,6 With his right hand raised, the mighty angel swore "by him that liveth for ever and ever ... swallowed up in eternity", as though time would cease to exist. The RV suggests that "delay" should be used instead of time, and the Diaglott suggests the rendering "the time shall be no longer delayed". These renderings are not very helpful in that they intimate that the seventh trumpet might be expected to sound very soon, whereas the remainder of chapter ten shows that considerable work has to be done before the seventh trumpet sounds. The meaning will become clear as we continue to consider the context.

10:7 "The mystery (or "secret" as in the Diaglott) of God should be finished" in this verse refers to the gathering out from the Jews first, then subsequently (and mostly) from the Gentiles of the Church, the people for His name, who are to become joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:14-18; Ephesians 3:1-9). This "mystery (or secret) of God" began among the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and was subsequently made known to the Gentiles when Peter delivered the Gospel message to Cornelius, as recorded in Acts chapter ten. The "mystery" ("secret") will be finished and the opportunity to participate in it will be closed "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound", or as in the RV, "when he is about to sound". This was "according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets" (RV rendering).

Those who will be included in the "mystery" or "secret" are the sealed ones considered earlier in Revelation 7:1-8. The declaration of the mighty angel reminds us of the assurance given in the vision of the souls under the altar, to whom it was said that they must wait a certain time before their martyred lives would be avenged (Revelation 6:9-11). Similarly, the mighty angel gives assurance about the time of completion of the Gospel age church.

In saying *"that there should be time no longer"*, the mighty angel means simply that time would not go beyond the sounding of the seventh trumpet before the *"mystery of God should be finished"*.

The clause in question *"there should be time no longer"* is in Greek "chronos ouketi estai." Chronos means time, and many English words are derived from chronos, such as chronology and chronometer. But chronos has also a secondary meaning of "delay", and some translators favour "delay" in this clause.

The word "ouketi" is a compound word consisting of "ouk" meaning "no" or "not", and "eti" meaning "yet" or "still". The word "ouketi" means simply "not yet", but has a secondary meaning of "no longer".

The word "estai" means simply "shall be".

Translators have used differing combinations of the primary and secondary meanings, and have confused the intended meaning. The KJV has *"there should be time no longer"*, the RV suggests "delay" instead of "time", while the Diaglott has *"the time shall be no longer delayed"*. The LB, Today's English Version, the NIV, Phillip's Modern English Version, the RSV and the NEB all have *"no more delay"*. The Jerusalem Bible has *"The time of waiting is over"* which is clearly taking a liberty with the Greek text.

By keeping to the primary meanings of the Greek words, translators would have produced a version literally correct, simple and easily understandable in relation to the context immediately following: *"Time not yet shall be: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel ... the mystery of God should be finished"*. In other words the mystery or secret of God would be finished by the time the seventh angel began to sound.

These good tidings had been declared by the Lord God to His servants the prophets. The Old Testament prophets had been

inspired to foretell some of these things, but it was also revealed that the things prophesied by them were not for themselves, but for the people of God of a later time, even for His people during the Gospel age (1 Peter 1:10-12).

It seems therefore that the "*prophets*" in our verse are to be understood as the New Testament prophets, this being also indicated in Ephesians 3:5 and 6, where the Apostle shows that the "mystery" (or "secret"), particularly that portion of it referring to the Gentiles being invited to participate in the High Calling, was not made known in former ages, "*as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*".

JOHN EATS THE LITTLE SCROLL

⁸*And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.*

⁹*And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.*

¹⁰*And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.*

¹¹*And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.*

10:8-11 John now takes an active part in the vision. The voice that spoke to him from heaven commands John to take the little scroll which is open in the hand of the "*mighty angel*". John goes to the angel in the vision and asks for the scroll. It is given to him, and the angel commands John to eat the scroll, telling John that the scroll will be sweet to taste but bitter to digest. John eats the scroll and finds it as the angel has told him. Then "they" (RV, Phillips MEV, NEB), that is, the mighty angel and the voice from heaven, tell John that he must prophesy again "*about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings*" (Today's EV, NIV, Phillips MEV. RSV, Jerusalem Bible and the LB).

In taking part in the vision, John himself becomes one of the signs so numerous in the book of Revelation, as was made known in chapter one verse one, that signs would be given to show and depict the prophecies that would follow. John in the vision may be understood to symbolise faithful preachers of God's Word during the time of the Protestant Reformation and subsequently. But before the faithful preachers could give out

the Word, they must "eat" it, as John ate the little scroll. To "eat" the Word would mean to read it, understand it and make it their very own and part of their very being.

Two of the Old Testament prophets had experiences with eating the words of God.

Jeremiah wrote in chapter 15:15 and 16: *"O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts."*

The experience of Ezekiel was almost a forecast of John as a sign in the vision. Ezekiel wrote in chapter 3:1 to 4: *"Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it. (RSV and NIV reading). Then did I eat it: and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them."*

Ezekiel was informed that the house of Israel, then in captivity, was *"most rebellious"* (Ezekiel 2:7). Therefore Ezekiel was not to expect a favourable reception of the words which he had "eaten", but he nevertheless was to deliver the words as God's message to that people.

The words in Psalms 19:9 and 10: and 119 are relevant in this connection: *"The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."*

Psalm 119:103: *"How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea sweeter than honey to my mouth!"*

John in the vision was not told how his message from God *"about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings"* would be received. He was, however, told that he must prophecy *"again"*, which seems to indicate that former prophesying, that is, preaching as well as foretelling, had been lost or neglected, or

perhaps under restriction or limitation, as was the case in the Dark Ages. Such preaching and foretelling was now to be revived.

The sweetness as well as the bitterness of the truth of justification by faith was clearly manifest in Reformation times in the experiences of those who were symbolised by John in the vision. Only a few outstanding names of those times can be mentioned. John Huss (1369-1415) of Bohemia, burned as a heretic; John Wycliff (1324? - 1384) of England, who with a number of assistants, made the first translation of the entire Bible into English; William Tyndale (1484-1536) of England, who made a later and better English translation, and was burned at the stake; Martin Luther (1483-1546) of Germany, who in 1517 nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg, was excommunicated by Pope Leo X in 1520, and proscribed by the Diet (or Council) of Worms in 1521. Luther translated the Bible into German. The above-mentioned names are but a few of the many reformers and co-workers in England, Germany, Switzerland and other countries in Reformation times.

Martin Luther, for example, found the Word bitter as well as sweet in his experiences. He rejoiced in the wonderful truth of justification by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary, and in the forgiveness of sins freely available by the merit of Jesus' blood without the intervention of earthly priests or deceased saints supposedly in heaven. Luther preached these truths with great power, desiring also and endeavouring to bring about a return to the simplicity of the early Church, in which all were brethren and Christ was Master.

One of the great and bitter disappointments of Luther's life was that the peasants and others whom he liberated from Papal bondage were unable to maintain simple services and study groups, but quarrelled among themselves, and permitted teachers of unscriptural doctrines and practices to come among them and lead them astray from the truth of the gospel. Finally, Luther's adherents reverted to the unscriptural position of union between Church and State, which subsequently developed into the established Lutheran religion of Germany and Scandinavia.

Some of the German peasants thought also that the Christian teaching "all ye are brethren" should be applied to political and social relationships as well as to the congregations and gatherings of believers. A notable outcome of this idea was the

Peasants' War of 1525, an uprising which endeavoured to overthrow feudalism and serfdom. The Lord did not command His people to undertake this task, nor did Luther. Through His inspired apostles and prophets, the Lord commanded His people not to interfere with political and social conditions, unjust and painful though they might often be, but rather to endure them and live peaceably, knowing that the Lord has promised that He will create a new order of things. God's people should therefore leave it to Him to fulfil His promise in His own way and in His own time. They, God's people, in the meantime should show their interest and faith in God's promised Kingdom by praying "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*", as the Lord Jesus directed (1 Corinthians 7:20-22; Colossians 3:22-25; 4:1; 1 Peter 2:18-20; 2 Peter 3:13,14; Isaiah 65:17-25; Matthew 6:10).

In other Reformation countries the Word proved to be both sweet and bitter, so that the Reformation, although a considerable blow to the Papacy, was only a "*little help*" to God's people, as Daniel said it would be in chapter 11, verses 34 and 35.

MEASURING TEMPLE, ALTAR AND WORSHIPPERS

Revelation 11:

¹And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

²But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

11:1 The words "*and the angel stood*" are omitted by the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, and are also omitted by modern translations.

John continues to take an active part in the vision, and is given a reed or "*measuring rod*" as rendered in the NIV, Phillips MEV, the Jerusalem Bible, the RSV and the NEB. and told to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship in connection with them.

What is meant by the temple? When the visions were given to John on Patmos in 96 AD (or close to that time), the temple at Jerusalem had been a ruin for some twenty six years. The altar was gone, and no-one could bring sacrifices or worship there. But the time represented in the vision in which John was participating was the sixteenth century and onward, and the

temple and altar were still in ruins. They remain in ruins to this day, and will never be restored, because the Law Covenant form of worship, centred on the temple and the altar, has been done away. The New Covenant form of worship through Jesus Christ as the only Sacrifice for sin, and the only Mediator, is now the only acceptable way of approach to God (Acts 4:12; Hebrews 10:5-25).

The *"temple"* which John was to *"measure"* during and following the times of the Protestant Reformation, was the worship of God as it was in those times. John in the vision may be understood as representing faithful believers in God through Jesus Christ.

After the death of the inspired apostles in the first century AD, many strange ideas were adopted into the Christian religion, mostly from pagan philosophies and worship of idols and pagan gods. At the council of Nicea in 325 AD, some of these ideas were formulated into a creed which became the official belief of Christian Rome, legally enforceable on all citizens and inhabitants of the Roman empire. As time went on, more ideas and practices were introduced, and the contentions of philosophers caused confusion and uncertainty in the minds of those who desired to worship God in spirit and in truth according to the instruction of the Lord Jesus recorded in John 4:21-24; and 14:6. Hence the command to John to rise and measure. This *"measuring"* is the right course of action for truth-seekers at any time. Believers are told *"Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves"*, *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"* (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Much measuring was done by believers in Reformation times, and has been done since. As a result, many departures *"from the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:3) have been found in Roman Catholic forms of worship. Indeed we can see that the minds of the great majority of Christian people were so led away from the truth of the Gospel, that the task of putting things right in Christendom proved to be more than could be accomplished by the *"little help"* (Daniel 11:34,35) of the Protestant Reformation.

Measuring the altar represents examination of the doctrine of atonement. In the Jewish temple, the great altar in the court was the place where many sacrifices for sins were offered. Jesus Christ is the One Sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world, offered to God according to the terms of the New

Covenant, by which God can be merciful to our unrighteousness, and remember our sins no more. The "*measuring rod*" is the Scripture, and God's people are to measure everything presented to them on the subject of the atonement (and indeed all subjects) by the measuring rod of the Scriptures. Whatever does not conform to the measure must be rejected (1 John 2:1,2; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

The worshippers were also to be measured. Believers must "*measure*" one another to ensure that false doctrines and practices do not arise. "Measuring" does not mean judging or condemning, but simply talking and listening to one another in our studies and social occasions, and building one another up in the Christian faith. We are exhorted to do so in 1 John 4:1. The "measuring rod" is the Word of God, and all believers and teachings must conform to God's Word to be approved of God. Each one of us must measure himself or herself with that "measuring rod", and where necessary make changes, however difficult and painful, so as to "measure up" to God's requirements as set out for us in the Scriptures.

11:2 The court outside the temple was not to be measured because it was given to the Gentiles or peoples of other nations. It is not here a matter of distinguishing between Jew and Gentile, the distinction now is between those of faith in Jesus Christ and those not of faith in Him. In the temple at Jerusalem, a large court was provided in which Gentiles might draw near to God if they wished to do so.

The vision teaches us that during the Gospel Age, provision is made only for those who draw near to God by faith in Jesus Christ, and the vast majority of mankind, the various nations, are left in ignorance of Jesus and hence without faith acceptable to God. Therefore the outer court was to be left out because the nations during the Gospel Age are not being dealt with in regard to salvation, except that a people for God's name is being taken out from them. More will be discussed later concerning the nations.

The "*holy city*" in this verse, as in chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation, symbolises government under the New Covenant. Similar symbolism is used in Galatians 4:21-26 with the allegory of Sarah and Hagar. The "*holy city*" may be understood also to represent the people associated with or living under the terms of the New Covenant which is represented by the "city", for the

notion of a city includes the people living in it. Therefore, when John was told that the *"holy city"* would be trodden under foot by the nations for *"forty and two months"* it was meant that the New Covenant terms for forgiveness of sins would be ignored and even despised by the nations who heard or might have heard of these terms. It was also meant that the people of the *"holy city"* or New Covenant, the Gospel Age faithful believers, would also be trodden under foot.

The period of *"forty and two months"* is described in other terms in Revelation 12:6 and 14 and in Daniel 7:25. In Daniel 7:25 the same period is described as *"a time and times and the dividing of time"*, in Revelation 12:6 as *"a thousand two hundred and threescore days,"* and in Revelation 12:14 as *"a time, and times, and half a time"*. In Revelation 13:5 the same period is described as in our verse as *"forty and two months"*.

This same period is stated prophetically in three different ways: forty-two months, one thousand two hundred and sixty days, and *"a time, times and half a time"* (as well as the dividing of time). The months are to be understood as symbolic months of thirty days each, forty-two of such months amounting to one thousand two hundred and sixty days. These simple calculations enable us to understand that a "time" signifies twelve months of thirty days each, amounting to three hundred and sixty prophetic days. The period mentioned in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14 is therefore:

a time:	360
times:	720
and half a time	
(or the dividing of time):	<u>180</u>
totalling	1260 prophetic days.

The *"forty and two months"* and the *"times"* and the 1,260 *"days"* are symbolic and are not fulfilled as ordinary twenty-four hour days. Each prophetic day, however, is fulfilled as an ordinary year, in accordance with the principle laid down in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5 and 6. The time period prophesied is therefore 1,260 calendar years.

It is of interest to note that in Scripture a "time" is never called a year. When years are spoken of other words are used, as in Revelation 9:15 and 20:2-7 (excluding verse 5). The word translated "time" and "times" in Revelation 12:14 is the Greek word "kairos" which is defined in Strong's Concordance as "an occasion, that is, set or proper time", and is sometimes translated

as "season", but never "year". The usual Greek word for "year" is "eniautos", and is so translated at every occurrence in the New Testament. In Revelation 20 the word translated "years" is "etos", a primitive word also meaning "year", and never otherwise translated.

Bible students are in general agreement that this long period of one thousand two hundred and sixty years began when Papal power was established in 539 AD and ended in 1799 when the Pope was taken prisoner by Napoleon Bonaparte and carried away to France. The prophecy relating to these dates is discussed more fully in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", pages 81 and 82.

A quotation of Daniel 7:25 will suffice to confirm that the period in question is closely associated with the history and experience of the Lord's people living under the terms of the New Covenant during the Gospel Age, and with their oppression by the "nations", largely at the instigation and direction of the Papacy. The angel said to Daniel in chapter 7:25: "*And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.*"

It cannot be seriously doubted that this is a prophetic description of the Papacy's ferocity against the Lord's saints, and its presumption of superiority over the teachings and declarations of the Word of God, and changing times and laws expressed in the written Word by inspiration of God. No institution but the Papacy has ever undertaken such ferocious persecution of God's saints, or spoken such great words against the Most High as has the Papacy.

There are several time prophecies in the Scriptures, but this one of the "*time and times and the dividing of time*" or "*forty and two months*" or "*one thousand two hundred and threescore days*" of the Papacy's arrogant supremacy, is mentioned more frequently than any of the other time prophecies. The prophecy next most frequently mentioned is that of the "*thousand years*" in Revelation 20:2-7.

The 1260 prophetic days were recorded by the prophet Daniel more than a thousand years before they began, and by John on Patmos more than four hundred years before they were due to

begin. The prophetic period during its currency was recognised by many faithful believers and students such as Sir Isaac Newton in England (1642-1727). And now, more than two hundred years after its termination, the 1260-year period is still a profitable subject for consideration.

THE TWO WITNESSES

³*And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*

⁴*These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*

11:3,4 Who or what are the two witnesses? In Zechariah 4:14 the two are described as *"the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth"*. This explanation is very helpful, for it points to -

- (1) the written witness of the Scriptures; and
- (2) the living, speaking witness of faithful believers in the Gospel Age, in other words the true Church of Jesus Christ;

for these two and no others are anointed with the Holy Spirit.

(1) The Old Testament Scriptures were inspired, as Peter tells us; *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:2).

The divine authority of the New Testament is associated with that of the Old Testament, again verified by Peter: *"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles"* (2 Peter 3:2 NIV, RSV and NEB except that the two latter versions have "predictions" instead of "words."). The translation of this verse by Westcott and Hort from the original Greek text is helpful here. *"I want you to recall what was foretold by the holy Prophets, as well as the Command of our Lord and Saviour, given to you through the Apostles who brought you the Message."*

(2) The anointing of the Church with the Holy Spirit is revealed by the events on the day of Pentecost in the temple at Jerusalem, and later in the house of Cornelius (Acts chapters 2 and 10). John also writes, *"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you ..."* (1 John 2:27).

So we see that the Word and the Church have the Holy Spirit, and are therefore identifiable as the two anointed ones "*standing before the Lord of the earth*". Both the Word and the Church are the Lord's witnesses.

Jesus said, "*and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8), and Peter said in the house of Cornelius, "*To him give all the prophets witness*" (Acts 10:43). The believers in the Church of Jesus Christ are the living, speaking witnesses of God, and the Word recorded by inspired prophets and apostles is the written witness of God.

Both the Word and the Church have been witnesses for the Lord from Pentecost onward. The Word of the Old Testament had already witnessed for God centuries before Pentecost and the establishment of the Church. Then after Pentecost the inspired apostles and disciples added the writings which make up the New Testament to witness alongside the Old Testament writings for the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church as the living, speaking witness for God must always be in subjection to the written Word and must never attempt to override it, as written in Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Jeremiah 26:2 and Revelation 22:18, 19. The united witness of the Word and the Church began centuries before the "*thousand two hundred and threescore days*" began, and has not ceased even though the 1260 years of prophecy have passed. But their witness during the 1260 years was marked by their being "*clothed in sackcloth*", garments of affliction.

During these years, the Word could not speak freely because it was for the most part in Greek and Latin, languages unknown to the people, and the manuscript copies were kept in monasteries and secure places not generally accessible. The invention of printing was a most significant development towards making the Scriptures more accessible, but the Papacy did all it could to prevent printed copies of the Scriptures reaching the people.

The witness of the true Church was also restricted by the ferocious persecutions on the part of the Papacy during the 1260 years, so that the two witnesses experienced great difficulties and restrictions during those terrible years, now happily past.

Three Significant Errors Examined

The vision under consideration declares that the two witnesses "*shall prophesy*" during all of the 1,260 years of Papal supremacy. This indicates that Scriptural truth had not completely died out, although the Papacy did all it could to stamp out and obliterate the great fundamental truths of the Scriptures such as justification by faith in Jesus Christ and in God through Him. There were here and there faithful believers who recognised the serious errors of Papal doctrine and practice, and who strove to teach and maintain the simplicity and directness of the Gospel message.

Papal Rome claimed to possess and proclaim the truth about spiritual and religious matters, and still makes this claim. But the two witnesses prophesied "*in sackcloth,*" whereas the Church of Rome abounded in material wealth and splendour, and said "*in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow*" (Revelation 18:7). The truths of the Scripture, insofar as they were known and understood by faithful believers during the 1,260 years of Papal supremacy, were neither known nor understood by the Papacy.

A third important error is the claim by some who say that the Holy Spirit was lost for a time and subsequently discovered again. Such a claim ignores the olive trees which would supply oil continually for the lampstands, signifying the availability of the Holy Spirit to faithful believers all the time. The symbols in this vision are the same as those of the vision of the two olive trees and a golden lampstand in Zechariah 4.

In Zechariah 4:6 the angel explains the vision by saying "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts*". The meaning and significance of the vision is that the Lord will continue to supply the Holy Spirit to all sincere and faithful believers, and will not permit it to be lost or taken away, as the Lord Jesus said, "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*" (Luke 11:13).

The Holy Spirit of God accounts for the power of the two witnesses as shown from time to time during the years of their testimony in the midst of persecution and afflictions. The power of the two witnesses accounts for the Protestant Reformation which erupted as a flame of fire, as the Revelator describes it.

THE POWER OF THE WITNESSES

⁵*And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.*

⁶*These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.*

11:5 The fire and killing in this verse are not physical or literal. The written Word contains God's condemnation of sin and His purpose to destroy it "*by the fire of his jealousy*" (Zephaniah 1:18), as literal fire kills and destroys people, livestock and property. God's denunciations of evil, whether read from the written Word or spoken by faithful believers, have power to destroy evil in the lives of those who hear and become obedient to God through Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures and sincere believers also have power by what is written under inspiration, and what is spoken and explained from God's Word, to put to silence those who would strive to contradict or refute them. Thus the opposers of the light and truth of God's Word are "killed", that is, rendered powerless to continue with their opposition.

In the period of the Protestant Reformation and surrounding times, those who were refuted but remained unheeding and enraged, sought to extinguish the lights of the two lampstands by Bible burning and burnings of believers at the stake. But during the 1,260 years no amount of burnings could destroy all Bibles or exterminate all members of the true Church.

11:6 The two witnesses had power to shut heaven, in that God's blessing was withheld from those who rejected the testimony of the two witnesses. Many people found that the supposed truth that they held, symbolised by "waters", turned to "blood", that is, became unfit to drink and retain. And so it was that many who were awakened by the light that became available, believed and rejoiced in it, and turned away from the false teachings and practices they formerly accepted.

The symbols used here remind us of the plagues brought about by God on ancient Egypt, and the power given through Elijah to withhold the rain, both eventualities being punishments inflicted on unheeding people because of hardness of heart.

THE TWO WITNESSES KILLED

⁷*And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.*

⁸*And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.*

⁹*And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.*

¹⁰*And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.*

11:7 The "*bottomless pit*" in this verse is rendered "*the abyss*" in the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible, Today's EV and the NEB.

Daniel 12:7 is relevant and helpful to our understanding here. *"And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished."*

"When they shall have finished their testimony" would therefore be at the close of the 1,260 years of prophesying in sackcloth, that is the year 1799, in accordance with previous explanatory comments.

Then *"the beast ... shall overcome them, and kill them"*. To "kill" does not mean physical killing, as though all copies of the Scriptures and all faithful believers were exterminated. The killing of the two witnesses means that their testimony was nullified and virtually extinguished as far as Western civilisation was concerned. This part of the world was where the Papacy was most influential, and where the two witnesses had done most of their prophesying during the 1,260 years.

The two witnesses were not killed by a sudden blow or action by the Papacy. The "*great mountain*" of Revelation 8: 8 and 9 was not "*cast into the sea*" in a moment. The action covered some three-quarters of a century. Similarly the two witnesses were "overcome" and "killed" at the end of the 1,260 years by a process or "war" that had been continuing for a considerable

period of time. The RV reading of the latter part of Daniel 12:7 is helpful here: *"and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished"*.

The scattering or breaking in pieces of the power of the holy people was achieved by the Papacy by means of the movement known as the "Counter Reformation". The achievement was brought about to some extent by force, as by the activities of the Inquisition; but more by cajolery and flattery. The following words from Daniel give us some indication of the operations of the Counter Reformation.

Daniel 8:24 *"And he shall destroy (margin "corrupt") the mighty ones and the holy people"* (RV rendering). Daniel 11:34 - After saying that God's people would be *"holpen with a little help"* by the Protestant Reformation, Daniel writes *"but many shall join themselves unto them with flatteries"*. Then Daniel 12:7 quoted above, shows the result at the end of the 1,260 years in 1799. Thus were the two witnesses "killed".

11:8 Thus the Papacy made a supreme effort against the two witnesses. It endeavoured to exterminate the Word of God and the people of God, whose light was a constant reproof to it and to its support of the corrupt system of feudalism, particularly in France. The French Revolution was the response to these methods of the suppression of the basic rights of people by the Church, the Aristocracy and the State. And it was in France, the "street" or literally "broad place" or "public square" of the "great city" of Romanism as it then was, that the bodies of the two witnesses lay exposed to contempt and ridicule.

But in other Western countries, including Britain, the two witnesses were also discredited and their influence almost nullified by formalism which largely replaced true piety. About this time also Thomas Paine (1737-1809) published his book, "The Age of Reason" in which he sought to discredit Christianity with its basis in revelation and the miraculous.

The "great city" is spiritually *"called Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord (of the two witnesses) was crucified"*. The Lord Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem in Palestine, which is not Egypt, and at the time of the crucifixion, Sodom had been a ruin for more than two thousand years. It seems clear, therefore, that the

"spiritual" names of that "great city" are references to characteristics in which it resembles Sodom and Egypt.

At the time of our Lord's crucifixion, Palestine was subject to Pagan Rome. Pagan Rome became Christian Rome, and Christian Rome became Papal Rome. But the characteristics of the three remained the same throughout their times of existence: haughty and abominable in God's sight. Pagan Rome oversaw our Lord's crucifixion, and Papal Rome "killed" the two witnesses, the Word and the true Church, and maintains and teaches that in the Papal Mass our Lord is sacrificed anew every day, wherever there is a Roman Catholic Church with an officiating priest.

11:9,10 Many, not only in France, were glad to believe that the two witnesses would no more torment them. The Lord's true people, now thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the world, remained so for *"three days and an half"*, that is, three and a half years, on the basis of a day for a year. (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4: 5,6) *"From among the peoples and kindreds and tongues and nations"* many exulted over their *"bodies"* in the *"public square"*, and would not even give them the respect of a burial, rejoicing and making merry in being relieved of the presence and activity of these two troublesome ones. In France particularly, the light of God was extinguished, and "Reason" symbolised by a harlot, was carried through the streets in public procession as their "goddess".

THE STANDING UP OF THE TWO WITNESSES

¹¹*And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.*

¹²*And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.*

11:11,12 In verse 11 the word *"the"* before *"three days and an half"* appears in the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible, the RSV and the NEB. The *"Spirit of life"* is rendered *"a life-giving breath"* in Today's EV, *"a breath of life"* in the NIV and the RSV, and *"the breath of life"* in the NEB. The Jerusalem Bible has *"God breathed life into them"*.

The two witnesses were revived. Their revival symbolises the new lease of life experienced by Gospel preaching and missionary activity in the early nineteenth century. The *"three*

days and an half" of prophecy, that is, three and a half years, reached from the end of 1799 to part-way into 1803. In the following year was begun the formation of Bible Societies for the spreading abroad of the printed Bible without note or comment. The first of these was the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, followed soon after by similar societies in America, France, Germany, Holland and other countries.

The despised witnesses were exalted to *"heaven"*, that is, they were given renewed influence in spiritual matters in the ecclesiastical "heaven". The Word of God and the people of God were again recognised as lights in the world, as our Lord and the Apostle Paul said they should be (Matthew 5:14; Philipians 2:15).

The Papacy was much annoyed by the energy of the Bible societies in carrying out their work. *"Great fear fell upon them"*, so much so that in 1816 Pope Pius VII issued a bull (a formal sealed Papal document), in which he called these societies a pestilence, and prohibited the use of Bibles "printed by heretics". In 1825 Pope Leo XII issued another bull against Bible societies.

But the work continued. Fresh light was cast on important doctrines, greater interest began to be shown by Christians in prophetic subjects, and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ began to be preached as the hope of God's people. In his comments on the Revelation, E.C. Henniges mentioned a book in his possession which was published in 1835 and titled "Extracts on Prophecy, chiefly the Approaching Advent and Kingdom of Christ". This book contained fifty-five extracts from sermons and articles by various ministers and laymen of that time belonging to various Church denominations, showing the interest being aroused even then in the great subjects of Christ's promised return and the Kingdom of God.

At the present time we now realise that some of the ideas expressed in the book mentioned above, and other ideas expressed by writers and preachers of that earlier time, were sometimes rather speculative and sometimes unscriptural. But we must be thankful for the labours of those early pioneers, and thankful also for the greater light now available in the form of new and revised translations of the Scriptures and the great number of scholarly Biblical commentaries.

In our day the testimony of the *"two witnesses"* is still being given. The *"olive trees"* still supply such measure of God's Holy Spirit as is necessary to discern and proclaim the truth of the Scriptures, and encourage believers to shed abroad the light from the *"lampstands"*. And still the *"fire"* issues from the two witnesses, to condemn evil of all kinds.

The condemnation of worldliness and conduct contrary to Scripture may be clearly seen and spoken. But other attitudes and words are more subtle and deceptive, such as the claims and teachings of higher criticism, and teachings which tell people that they must have liberty to develop in their own way, do their own thing, listen to "the inner voice" and "follow their dream". Such teachings and attitudes ignore human weaknesses and the possibility of the mind and heart to be deceived, and play right into the hands of Satan, who is the arch-enemy of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those of us who are striving to be part of the living witness of the true Church must testify in harmony with the other witness, God's Word, and in accordance with the Holy Spirit supplied by God through Jesus Christ. The testimony of the Scriptures and the denunciation of sin and worldliness are a "torment" to evil-doers now, just as they were in Reformation times. Those of us who sincerely believe in God through Jesus Christ must not view these matters lightly or dismiss them. We who are of the light must reprove the works of darkness and not be deceived or led astray by them.

The function of light is still to reprove darkness. If we should become complacent and apathetic and drift along with the world and its allurements, we may find that the "fire" of Revelation 11:5 will devour us as it has devoured others in the past. We must never allow ourselves to be condemned as unworthy, as was the servant in the parable who knew his Lord's will but *"did it not"* (Luke 12:47).

We who are striving to be genuinely the Lord's must always remember that we are *"light"*, *"light in the Lord"* as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians. We are of course not light of ourselves, but light as long as we remain in the Lord. And being *"light"* by God's grace, we must *"walk as children of light"* (Ephesians 5:8).

A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

¹³*And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

¹⁴*The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.*

11:13 *"And the same hour"*, that is, while all this relating to the close of the testimony of the two witnesses, their being killed, standing up again and ascending to heaven was taking place, *"was there a great earthquake"*. The earthquake was the great shaking of Europe brought about by the French Revolution, which began in 1789, and by the subsequent Napoleonic wars, which lasted until 1815 when Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. France, *"the tenth part of the city"*, fell. For more detailed comments on the ten parts of the "city" please see the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel" pages 14,15, 72 and 73. The "Franks", one of the "ten parts" of the Roman "city", signify the kingdom of France. Never before had Europe experienced such a shaking.

Many more than 7000 lives were lost in the French Revolution and the wars that followed. However, the literal reading is not *"men"*, but *"names of men"*. For this reason it seems likely that the meaning is that seven thousand family names, probably aristocratic, were wiped out, either by death or by confiscation of great estates, or by both together, because of the great shaking. In any case there seems to be no known means of verifying the numbers.

Being *"affrighted"*, the remainder paid more attention to religious worship, probably by formal and ritualistic church services, and in these ways gave glory to God in thankfulness for relief from revolutionary upheaval and the Napoleonic wars.

11:14 *"The second woe is past."* All of the foregoing has occurred under the sounding of the sixth trumpet. The sounding began when the order came at about the close of the tenth century to loose the four angels, and ended in the nineteenth century, a period of some 800 years. The whole series of events was a severe experience for Christendom, both ecclesiastical and political.

The experience of Christendom during these eight centuries, however, was not war continually. Early in the sixteenth century the Papacy was feeling quite comfortable in the assurance that all opposition had been silenced by conversion, persecution, or by death, and that no enemy remained. But in a short time, opposition to the Papacy was more violent than ever when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg church.

Another woe is to come "*quickly*". This third one will be the last of the three woes predicted in association with the sounding of the last three of the seven trumpets in Revelation 8:13. The last woe will surpass the other two woes in its effects on Christendom, as will be seen.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

¹⁵*And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

¹⁶*And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,*

¹⁷*Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

¹⁸*And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*

The Kingdom of Our Lord

11:15 Instead of "*kingdoms*" as in the KJV, the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts have "*The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ.*" This rendering is also followed in the RV, NIV, RSV and the Jerusalem Bible.

The sounding of the seventh and final trumpet brings with it the third and last of the three woes upon Christendom. The first and second woes were very distressing to Christendom, but this final woe will remove Christendom in all its aspects, political and ecclesiastical, from the scene.

As already commented in Revelation 9:20 and 21, Christendom was not moved by the first and second woes to repent of its idolatry and unscriptural practices. Under the third and final woe, there will be no question of Christendom repenting and saving its influence and position. Christendom has no intention of repenting, as we will see in visions still to be considered. Therefore Christendom is doomed to complete destruction.

The first announcement in connection with the sounding of the seventh trumpet consists of *"great voices in heaven"* saying, *"The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever"*.

The announcement concerns the kingdom of the world, not, as the KJV has, the kingdoms of this world. The Lord God and His King, Jesus Christ, will not take over the kingdoms or political institutions of this world. To do that would be to preserve and maintain present political institutions, which the Lord has no intention of doing.

According to the reading of the text in the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, the Lord God and His Christ will take over the rulership of the world - the whole world. They will depose Satan and destroy his rulership as *the "god of this world"* as recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:4. The rule of God's kingdom will be known and felt worldwide, and His will shall be done in earth as it is done in heaven. Whether God's rule will be accomplished throughout the world in a matter of weeks and months, or whether it will be accomplished more gradually over a number of years, we are not told.

"And he shall reign". To Whom does *"he"* refer? The reference is undoubtedly to the Lord God Almighty, the One Who occupies the grand throne. But God has given all power in heaven and earth to His Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:18), Who is God's King set upon His holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6) . Jesus Christ, as God's King, will see to it that all God's promises are fulfilled and that all things are accomplished according to God's will. So, although under the reign of Jesus Christ, the kingdom is to be understood as God's kingdom.

In due time, as the Apostle tells us in 1 Corinthians 15: 27 and 28, Jesus Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God, and God will rule directly over His kingdom on earth as well as in heaven.

It seems appropriate to grasp an understanding of this heavenly situation by reference to Pharaoh and Joseph in ancient Egypt.

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou : Thou shalt be over mine house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. ... And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do." (Genesis 41: 39 to 41; 55).

Pharaoh delegated all authority and power in Egypt to Joseph. When the people appealed to Pharaoh, he did not exercise his overall power and authority, but sent the people to Joseph, commanding them to obey all Joseph's instructions.

Similarly, our Heavenly Father has delegated all power and authority in heaven and in earth to the Lord Jesus Christ, and will not exercise His supreme power and authority until the Lord Jesus has finished His appointed work and returned His delegated power and authority to the Lord God, to the end that God may be *"all in all"*, or as the RSV renders the phrase, *"everything to everyone"*.

"For ever and ever". As we saw when considering Revelation 7:12, the phrase is a translation of the Greek words "eis tous aionas ton aionon", which mean literally "for (or unto) the ages of the ages". The expression sometimes has a meaning limited in time, and sometimes means times and situations that are endless.

The context must determine the intended meaning. The expression has been seen in connection with earlier visions (1:6; 4:9,10; 5:13; 7:12; and 10:6), and in each of these, endlessness is meant, as it is here in 11:15. The expression must signify endlessness in our verse, because there will never be a time when God Almighty will cease to reign.

11:16,17 *"The four and twenty elders"* - the divinely-inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments - are seen in the vision seated on *"thrones"*, as rendered in the RV, Today's EV, the NIV, Phillips MEV, the RSV and the NEB. The Jerusalem Bible has *"enthroned"* rather than *"on their thrones"*. The four

and twenty elders humble themselves before God and render praise and worship that the time has at last come when the Lord God Almighty has taken to Himself His great power and has begun to reign.

The Word of God frequently mentions and expounds this most wonderful topic of the kingdom of God on earth, and its testimony throughout, from Genesis to Revelation, is the same, namely, that Divine authority shall be restored in earth in the manner and at the time that God has decreed and arranged.

The fact that the words "*and art to come*" are omitted from the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts and all modern versions, in no way diminishes God's promises throughout the Scripture for a reconstituted earth and the blessings of all nations and all families of the earth.

11:18 An immense program has been arranged for accomplishment during the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The program under the sixth trumpet lasted about eight hundred years. The program under the seventh trumpet will be even longer. When considering the details of the enormous program under the seventh trumpet, we should keep in mind the following relevant passages of Scripture with their contexts.

Matthew 24:31 – *“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”.*

1 Corinthians 15:52 – *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”*

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 – *“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 – *“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”*

Hebrews 11:39,40 – *“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”*

But even when we compare these verses with our verse 18, it is still unlikely that the details can be set out in the exact order of their accomplishment.

Perhaps the Lord does not intend us to do this in advance of the fulfilment of the various details. It is certain that the items are nowhere in Scripture related in a clear numerical sequence, so that we need to be ever watchful and studious in these closing times of the Gospel Age. Of this much we can be certain - the great program is not to be accomplished in a twenty-four hour day.

The Nations Were Angry

Let us compare the first two items of our verse 18: *“And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come”* with the two items in 1 Thessalonians 5:3: *“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them”*.

How do these two important passages, each with two items, fit together? The anger of the nations comes after the sounding of the seventh trumpet begins, and there is nothing to show that anything comes in between the anger of the nations and God's wrath. Yet, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:3, the nations are to say *“Peace and safety”* preceding their *“sudden destruction”*. The nations surely will not say *“Peace and safety”* while they are *“angry”*. Where then does the saying *“Peace and safety”* come into the program? Will it come between the anger of the nations and the coming of God's wrath to bring sudden destruction upon them?

The greatest manifestations of anger of the nations were the two world wars in 1914-18 and 1939-45. Most of the world's nations were participants in these two great manifestations of national anger, and it seems that the anger has by no means departed. There are still in the twenty-first century a number of nations angry with one another, and engaging in conflict. In the Middle East and Jerusalem, where the so-called "peace process" affecting Jews and Palestinians seems to be continually stalled or breaking down, "*peace and safety*" in the near future seems unlikely.

If the two world wars of the twentieth century are to be understood as the main manifestation of the anger of the nations, and that anger still remains to a considerable extent, then the saying "*peace and safety*" is still future from our time. Believers in God through Jesus Christ need to be ever watchful of the partially-fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture.

The Dead to be Judged

The next item of our verse is "*and the time of the dead, that they should be judged*". This corresponds to John 5:29, "*and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment*". The word "*damnation*" in the KJV should be more accurately translated "judgment" as in Phillips MEV, the RSV and the LB. The dead referred to here, who are to be judged, are those who have died as unbelievers because of lack of enlightenment.

None of those who have died approved by God will be included in the number to be judged after their resurrection. Those approved ones of the Jewish and earlier ages obtained a "*good report*" because of their faith, and therefore have been judged (Hebrews 11:39). Their resurrection will not be to further judgment, but to reward. The Gospel Age believers are promised that they "*shall not come into judgment*" (John 5:24), and because of faith in God through Jesus Christ, the only Way, they will be raised to life (John 5:29) and not to more judgment.

The approved ones of the Gospel Age will be the "*kingdom of priests*" already considered in Revelation 5:9 and 10, who are to reign as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). The approved ones of earlier ages will be "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16), assisting in the righteous government of the world during the Kingdom Age. The Gospel Age joint-heirs with Christ will be judges of angels and humans, including all who have died

and whose time has come to be raised and judged under the sounding of the seventh trumpet (1 Corinthians 6:2,3). The judging of the vast numbers of resurrected people during the Kingdom Age will consist of enlightening them concerning the reason for their resurrection from death, and training them in the ways of righteousness and obedience to God so that they may qualify for endless life on a reconstituted earth.

The item, *"the time of the dead, that they should be judged"* is stated in our verse before the matter of rewarding the prophets and the saints. But the Scripture declares that the prophets and saints are to receive their respective rewards before the general resurrection of the dead to their time of judgment. This sequence as recorded in our verse is an illustration of what has already been noted, namely that the items and events of the vast program under the seventh trumpet are not stated in the order in which they are to be fulfilled.

A further illustration of this observation is revealed in the next two items, *"and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints"*. If this statement stood alone in Scripture, it could be understood that the holy prophets of Old Testament times are to be rewarded before the Gospel Age saints. But, as we have seen, our verse 18 is not stating the items in their order of fulfilment. The order of fulfilment is as recorded in Hebrews 11:40, *"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"*.

The *"better thing"*, that is, the *"High Calling"* of Philippians 3:14, is to be given to the Gospel Age faithful first, and then the earthly reward to the ancient worthies, not the other way round. If the Old Testament faithful were given their reward before the Gospel Age faithful, the Old Testament worthies would be made perfect, that is, righteous and sinless and no longer under sentence of death, without or apart from the Gospel Age believers. The rewards are to be given to both of these classes before all the dead, small and great, are resurrected and called forth to be judged, such judgment consisting of enlightenment and blessing.

In our verse, a distinction is made between *"thy servants the prophets"*, *"the saints"*, and *"them that fear thy name small and great"*. Also mentioned are those who *"destroy the earth"*, of whom more will be said shortly. The order of fulfilment of the many prophecies will be:

- * firstly, the Gospel Age saints who will rule with Christ as a kingdom of priests enjoying their inheritance in heaven;
- * secondly the faithful of old, resurrected to life as human beings and occupying responsible positions on earth for the administration of God's Kingdom; and
- * thirdly, all members of the human race who prove co-operative and obedient under the enlightenment and blessing of God's righteous Kingdom.

Reward is to be given also to *"them that fear thy name, small and great"*, a category distinct from the saints and the prophets previously mentioned. Those in this category must be drawn from the immense multitude of the dead who are to be judged during the Kingdom Age. All in this category will be those who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, that is, those who obtain forgiveness for sin and become acceptable to the Lord God through faith in Jesus Christ. They will learn obedience to God's righteous requirements and receive their reward as already described in Revelation 7:9-17.

In the consideration of Revelation 7:9-17, it was pointed out that the great multitude of saved ones standing before the throne of God was not said to include every individual *"of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues"*. On the contrary, the preposition "ek" used in the text means "out of", showing that this great multitude came out of *"all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues"*. The implication here is that there will be some individuals of all nations and people who will not wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Such individuals, of their own free will and choosing, will not gain forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and will therefore not be included in the great multitude who will obtain salvation from sin and death in the Kingdom Age.

It was also noted that in Revelation 7:9-17 nothing was said about the prospects of those not included in the great multitude of saved ones. It was only indicated that there will be some not included among the saved ones. Now, under the seventh trumpet, this class is met again. The class is described and its future prospects defined in the concluding clause of our verse 18.

The people of this class are described as *"them which destroy the earth"*. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that such people must be those who are contributing to pollution of the earth's atmosphere and environment, bringing about such

dangers as the hole in the earth's ozone layer and global warming with predicted dire consequences. These dangers, however, pertain to the physical environment of the earth, and such dangers will receive attention from the Lord at such time as He sees fit.

The "earth" in our verse is not the physical earth, nor the symbolic "earth" or social order which came into existence after the flood of Noah's day. This symbolic "earth" is reserved by the Word of God unto destruction at some time future from our day. Neither of these earths is meant, for the class of evildoers mentioned pertains to the Kingdom Age under the seventh trumpet. The "earth" which they will seek to destroy will be the new "earth", the new order of things described in Scripture, according to God's promises, as the new heavens and new earth, for which all believers long and pray. (2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65: 17-25)

In that promised "*new heavens and a new earth*" will dwell righteousness under the rule of the Lord God and His Christ, in association with the Gospel Age overcomers as joint-heirs in heaven, and the faithful of old as princes in all the earth.

The fact that anyone would seek to destroy that righteous order of things would reveal such persons as enemies of righteousness. It seems from Isaiah 65:20 that some will desire to destroy that righteous order after experiencing one hundred years of its existence and the new quality of life that it will bring to the world. In seeking to destroy God's righteous order after experiencing its blessings, and learning the means of gaining life eternal, such persons will prove themselves to be hardened and unrepentant sinners, who will refuse to walk in the way of righteousness.

The Scriptures tell us that God will do to such hardened sinners what they will try to do to the new and righteous world. He will destroy them, as our verse tells us. It is clear from Isaiah 65:25 that the attempts of those recalcitrant ones to destroy the righteous world will be unsuccessful, but God's destruction of them will be complete and everlasting as we read in 2 Thessalonians 1:9,10.

It seems from Isaiah 65:20 that during the Kingdom Age, as the Lord from time to time may see fit, some hardened individuals remaining wilfully sinful will be destroyed, having disregarded and

misused for one hundred years of probation, the opportunities of repentance and life in that favoured time.

At the end of the Kingdom Age, Satan will be released from his imprisonment and will seek to tempt people to rebel against that righteous world order in which they will have seen and experienced the love and blessings of God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

All such rebels, having revealed themselves and their intentions, will be destroyed together by Divine power and will never be heard of again. This matter will be further looked at when we reach Revelation 20:7 to 10.

When we compare Revelation 8:1 with our verse 18 we will see that the information given to us under the seventh trumpet has increased our knowledge concerning the last things hinted at but not fully expressed in the opening of the seven seals.

When Will the Trumpet Sound?

Is it possible to ascertain the time when the seventh trumpet should begin to sound? There is no definite statement that gives us this information, but Revelation 10:7 says, as rendered in the KJV, *"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished"*. Thus the finishing of the *"mystery"* or *"secret"* of the taking out of the Gospel Age Church is associated with the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

"In the days of the voice of the seventh angel" would seem to mean that the seventh trumpet would be sounding while the gathering of the Gospel Age Church is being completed. But the second clause, which literally rendered by the RV and the NIV, reads *"when he is about to sound"*, seems to imply that the work of gathering the Church would be finished some little time before the seventh angel would have begun to sound his trumpet.

The KJV translation, *"when he shall begin to sound"*, seems to resolve the indefiniteness as well as can be done, indicating that the gathering of the Church will be finished early in the sounding of the seventh trumpet. This agrees well with Matthew 24:31 and 1 Corinthians 15: 51 and 52. But in all this information, no point of time is given.

We have now considered the seven trumpets, and give thanks to God and the Lord Jesus for the pre-delineation of history covering some three thousand years from early in the Gospel Age to the close of the Kingdom Age. Our minds and hearts should be so impressed, as the Apostle wrote to the Ephesians, that *"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints"* (Ephesians 1:18), we may continue our work as witnesses for Him, seeking always to make our own calling and election sure.

CHAPTER 8

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN CHILD REVELATION 11:19 - 14:5

Preliminary

Each of the sets of visions considered so far has had a preliminary vision relating particularly to heavenly or spiritual things.

* The messages to the seven churches were preceded by a vision of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ recorded in Revelation 1:10-20.

* The vision of the Lamb opening the seven seals was preceded by a remarkable vision of the glory of God, and of God giving the revelation to His Son, as we saw in Revelation chapters 4 and 5.

* The vision of the sounding of the seven trumpets had as its preliminary in Revelation 8:3-5, a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ in His High-priestly office, carrying out some of His great work in that capacity.

Now we find that the vision of the Woman and the Man Child also has a preliminary vision described in only a few words, but nevertheless marvellously significant with far-reaching implications.

The recording of a preliminary vision before each of the above four sets of visions shows that the visions have been carefully planned, and is further evidence of the Divine origin of *"the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him"*.

11:19 *"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."* The word "testament" is translated as "covenant" in nearly all modern and literal translations.

In the Jewish Age, the Lord God specifically commended material structures to be built, constructed according to His directions with furniture and fittings designed by Him, all of which and only by which worship and sacrifices could be offered in the manner prescribed by the Law Covenant.

The first of these structures was the tabernacle in the wilderness which God commanded Moses to erect according to the pattern shown to him on the mount at Sinai. Within the tabernacle was an inner sanctuary, called the Most Holy or Holy of Holies, in which was one, and only one, article of furniture called the ark of the covenant. The ark was a chest with a covering lid all overlaid with pure gold on which the Divine Presence was miraculously manifested. The chest, with its covering lid featuring two cherubim of beaten gold constituted the place of propitiation (conciliation, making favourably inclined) or mercy seat.

The tabernacle in the wilderness was fully portable. The whole of the tabernacle structure and all of its furnishings and fittings were carried about from place to place during the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. When at last the Israelites took possession of the promised land, the tabernacle was set up in the place which God had shown as its site.

After several hundred years, the tabernacle was replaced on the same site by the temple built by Solomon. This temple was much larger than the tabernacle, but the same proportions were observed, and the ark of the covenant was placed in the Most Holy sanctuary within the temple, as had been the case in the tabernacle. Subsequently the temple built by Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonian invaders, and the sacred vessels were carried away to Babylon.

When the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, Cyrus the king granted liberty to the Israelites to return to Palestine to rebuild the temple and restore the worship of Jehovah in the manner acceptable to Him on the only site recognised by Him for this purpose. The returned exiles did this, having received from Cyrus the sacred vessels carried away by Nebuchadnezzar.

After some five hundred years, the second temple was substantially and elaborately rebuilt by Herod the Great. Herod's temple was the temple in Jerusalem during our Lord's earthly ministry. This third temple was subsequently destroyed by the Romans in the siege of Jerusalem in 68-70 AD. Some of the foundation stones, known as the wailing wall, remain to this day, but there has been no temple on the site for nearly two thousand years. There is on the site a Mohammedan structure for worship by Mohammedan adherents and devotees according to their rites and modes of worship.

If there is another structure erected on the site in the future, it will not be a temple for the worship of God in the Law Covenant manner, as such worship is "*done away*" and "*abolished*", superseded by worship under the New Covenant, a new and living way of serving God through Jesus Christ.

No one knows what became of the ark and the temple furniture. They were taken to Rome by the Roman general, Titus, and formed part of his triumph. Some fanciful stories and adventures have been published in books and portrayed on cinema and television screens concerning searches for the lost ark of the covenant, but God is finished with the old Law Covenant and the old temple worship, so it seems most unlikely that the ark and the temple furniture will ever be recovered.

The comments so far are a brief resume of what is known about God's temples on earth.

In his vision John saw that "*the temple of God was opened in heaven*", this vision being given to him about twenty-five years after the destruction of the last of God's earthly temples.

The temple of God in heaven is surely symbolic of the worship of God under the New Covenant, which Covenant entirely supersedes the former Law Covenant. The New Covenant form of worship was foreshadowed by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry when He talked with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4: 21, 23 and 24).

Worship by Samaritans had never been recognised by God, and the worship at Jerusalem, which was divinely instituted and recognised, was about to become, when the Lord Jesus talked with the woman of Samaria, no better than the Samaritan worship. The Lord Jesus said, "*Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem*".

A new manner of worship was soon to supersede and replace the old forms, worship which could be conducted everywhere at all times, and would be acceptable to God if offered in spirit and in truth. An essential requirement of the new form of worship to God is of course that it be offered to God through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ's Name.

An essential part of divine worship is the confession of the worshipper's sins and the seeking of forgiveness for those sins, whether sins of omission or commission. The Law Covenant worship provided elaborate arrangements for forgiveness of both individual and national sins; and once every year the day of atonement was observed with imposing ritual and ceremonial, in which the whole Jewish nation participated. All such observances and actions under the Law Covenant were but shadows *"of good things to come"* (Hebrews 10:1), *"for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4).

During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus revealed that a new method of forgiveness of sins was soon to be introduced, namely forgiveness in and through His Name. Jesus even demonstrated by a miracle that this would be so, but the hard-hearted and stiff-necked Scribes and Pharisees neither heeded nor were converted.

A man suffering from palsy (a form of paralysis, perhaps resulting from a stroke) was brought on a bed to Jesus. Those who carried the man on his bed could not bring him and lay him before Jesus because of the crowd, so they took him to the roof of the house where Jesus was, and lowered the man down to be laid before Jesus. When Jesus *"saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee"* (Luke 5:18-20).

Under the Law Covenant Jesus could not have said words like these, because He was not a priest under that Covenant. Moreover, it was impossible for our Lord to become a priest under the Law Covenant because He was of the tribe of Judah and not of Levi, the priestly tribe, as we are told in Hebrews 7:14.

The Scribes and Pharisees began to object, calling our Lord a blasphemer. Then Jesus showed them that a new manner was coming in, proving it so effectively by a miracle that their objections were over-ruled by the joyful multitude.

"But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day." (Luke 5: 22 to 26).

After observing the Passover on the night before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus again showed His disciples that a new method of worship was coming in when He took the cup and said, *"For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28).

The New Covenant manner of worship through Jesus Christ was what John saw symbolised as the temple of God opened in heaven. Truly, as the Apostle Paul says of God's New Covenant people, God *"hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"*. *"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6). Since Christ's resurrection, God's people are able to worship Him in spirit and in truth, confessing their sins and seeking forgiveness on the basis of the New Covenant blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for many for the remission of sins, and giving thanks and praise to God.

John also saw *"the ark of his covenant"* in the temple in heaven. This vision was of a situation in complete contrast to the Law Covenant, under which the High Priest was the only one who saw the ark on the day of atonement once every year (Hebrews 9:1-7). This exclusiveness was miraculously and forever broken on the day of our Lord's crucifixion, when, at the moment of His death, the veil of the temple was torn apart from the top to the bottom, exposing the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy for all to see.

This miraculous act was a clear demonstration that the New Covenant sacrifice for sins had been offered successfully, and that the Lord God would no longer recognise the Law Covenant sacrifices with the blood of animals sprinkled on the mercy-seat in the Most Holy in the earthly temple (Matthew 27:50,51).

In the New Covenant mode of worship, every believer can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith", and can enter "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Hebrews 10:19-22). We can therefore look unto Jesus in faith as the One whose flesh was pierced so that we might have access into the holiest, into the presence of God by faith and prayer.

When we so draw near to God, we can behold Jesus also as the mercy-seat. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (literally "mercy-seat") through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 8: 24 and 25).

When the temple of God, the New Covenant mode of worship, was opened in heaven, the symbolic heaven of spirituality in the minds of people, there was a great commotion, described in almost the same terms as the disturbance that followed the casting of the censer filled with fire into the earth as was seen in Revelation 8:5.

When the New Covenant mode of worship was introduced, to the Jews first, and afterwards to the Gentiles, there were "lightnings" (sudden periods of illumination), "voices" (some people expressing agreement and understanding of the new mode of worship, and some opposing it), and "thunderings" (agitation of people's minds and of the social order), and an "earthquake" (shaking of the social order), and "great hail" (new, hard-hitting teachings of Gospel truth).

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN CHILD

Revelation 12:

¹And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

²And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

³And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

⁴*And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.*

⁵*And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.*

⁶*And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.*

In considering this passage of Scripture, it is essential to bear in mind that the "*thousand two hundred and threescore days*" of verse 6 sets a time mark, showing that everything foretold in verses 1 to 5 was to be fulfilled before the 1,260 prophetic years began. We have endeavoured to show in our book "Notes on the Book of Daniel" and in the comments on Revelation chapter eleven, that the 1,260 prophetic years began in 539 AD. If this interpretation is understood and accepted, the fulfilment of verses 1 to 5 must be sought in the time before 539 AD. We believe this to be the case.

12:1 In the same symbolic "*heaven*" in which John had seen the temple of God opened, appeared a great wonder or "sign", as in the RV, NIV, Phillips MEV, the Jerusalem Bible and the Diaglott. The sign was a woman. In the Revelation, it is now and will be subsequently contended, that a "woman" is a symbol of the Christian Church, either the true or the false, according to the context. In the context under consideration, the symbolic woman in the symbolic heaven symbolises the true Church making its appearance in the realm of religious worship. This was indeed a great sign, for in the early years of the Gospel Age, the Christian Church was an entirely new religion.

The woman was clothed with the sun of Gospel light and truth, superior to Judaism under the Law Covenant, which is represented as the moon under her feet. On her head was a crown of twelve stars, the divinely-inspired apostles of Jesus Christ.

The word translated "crown" is "stephanos", which is defined by Dr. Strong as "a chaplet (as a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games, or a symbol of honour generally; but more conspicuous and elaborate than the simple fillet), literal or figurative". A chaplet is a wreath or garland worn on the head,

while a fillet is a band or ribbon worn around the head. The word "stephanos" stands for the best of crowns, even the incorruptible crown of life and glory to be given to the Gospel Age overcomers (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4,10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1 and 14:14). The word has also been taken over into the English language as a name, either surname or given name: Stephen, Stephanie, Stephens, sometimes with variations of spelling, and sometimes with "son" added to make Stephenson.

No other system of religion ever made such an impressive appearance in the ecclesiastical heaven as did the Christian Church, bringing with it new light to replace the shadows of the Law Covenant. The Law Covenant had been the highest form of the worship of God prior to the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but was completely abolished and replaced by the New Covenant in Christ's blood. The New Covenant bringing reconciliation to God and salvation by faith in God through Jesus Christ was vigorously proclaimed by the twelve divinely-inspired apostles and faithful disciples working in co-operation with them. The Christian Church was given an imposing start.

12:2 John saw, in the vision given to him, the woman, representing the true Church, after the disturbances described in chapter 11 verse 19. The Church, symbolised by the woman, was in great distress and pain, crying to be delivered and separated from something within her. What was it in the history of the early Church that could bring about such a disturbing situation? The answer to this question is given by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8. The quotation is taken from the RV because of its more accurate translation.

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming (literally "presence") of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him:

2 To the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is now present;

3 Let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition,

4 He that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 *And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season.*

7 *For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way.*

8 *And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay (margin "consume") with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming (literally "presence").*

The second letter to the Thessalonians is believed to have been written about 54 AD, more than forty years before the Revelation was given to John and recorded by him on the Isle of Patmos.

The lawlessness or iniquity that was working in the Church in Paul's day was the desire by some within the Church for exaltation and dominance. Even during our Lord's earthly ministry His disciples sometimes disputed amongst themselves as to who should be the greatest in God's Kingdom, and were duly rebuked by the Master. The mystery of lawlessness or iniquity was a counterfeit of the mystery or secret of God, the true Gospel Age Church, as revealed by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, particularly chapters one and three.

The temple of God in which this "*man of sin*" would sit would not be the temple in Jerusalem, for God had clearly shown that He was finished with that temple and all the rites and ceremonies associated with it.

The temple of God in which the man of sin would sit would be a spiritual temple, the New Covenant mode of Divine worship, the same temple mentioned in Revelation 11:19. In this temple the man of sin would show, and indeed has shown for centuries, himself and his presumptuous pretensions to receive worship and be worshipped as though he were God himself.

This evil development within the Church had its beginnings even in Paul's time as we saw in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. The vision seen by John some forty years after Paul's prophetic words, shows the Church in trouble and distress just as the separation of *the "man of sin"* from the true Church was about to take place.

12:3 *But there appeared another wonder, or sign, in heaven: a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and having seven crowns upon his heads.* One crown upon each head seems to be the intended meaning.

The word translated by "crowns" in this verse is "diadema", defined in Strong's Concordance as "a diadem (as bound about the head)." "Diadema" was less elaborate and less valuable than "stephanos", and of less significance.

The great red dragon symbolised the pagan Roman Empire with seven "heads" or forms of rulership, signified by the diadem on each head. These seven "heads" did not all exist at the same time, but came one after another. They were:

1. Kings,
2. Consuls,
3. Dictators,
4. Decemvirs,
5. Tribunes,
6. Emperors,
7. Despotic Emperors.

"Consul" was the title of the two annually-elected magistrates who exercised conjointly supreme authority in the Roman Republic. The title was also used for the three chief magistrates of the French Republic from 1799 to 1804. "Decemvir" (Latin decem viri - ten men) means a body of ten men acting as a commission, especially the two bodies of magistrates appointed in 451 and 450 BC to draw up a code of laws, and who were, during the time, invested with the supreme government of Rome. "Tribune" is a title designating one of several officers in the Roman administration, such as a Tribune of the people (Latin tribunus plebis), one of two (later five, then ten) officers appointed to protect the interests and rights of the plebeians from the patricians.

The ten horns were ten powers or nations which, at the time when the "woman" was in pain "to be delivered" were within the Roman Empire but were not independent sovereign powers exercising rulership, and had no crowns at that time. More will be heard of these.

12:4 The "tail" of the great red dragon, the Pagan Roman Empire, *"drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth."* In the third century AD at approximately the time pertaining to the vision of the "woman" in "heaven", Christian people were divided into three parts under the rulership, more or less, of the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria respectively.

The ecclesiastical historian, J.L. Mosheim, writes: "It is further to be noticed, as a matter beyond all dispute, that the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, considered as rulers of primitive and apostolic churches, had a kind of pre-eminence over all

others, and were not only consulted frequently in affairs of a difficult and momentous nature, but were also distinguished by peculiar rights and privileges." (Mosheim, J.L. "Ecclesiastical History" volume 1, page 131).

While these three cities were all in the Roman Empire, the city of Rome was perhaps more under the influence of the tail of the dragon than were Antioch and Alexandria. It seems therefore reasonable to understand that the third part of the stars of heaven drawn by the dragon's tail, and cast down to "earth", were mostly conspicuous religious leaders who for geographical or other reasons were in closest touch with the bishop of Rome.

This is not to say that the religious leaders of Antioch and Alexandria were free from Pagan Rome's attention, but were further away geographically from the city of Rome and were not "drawn" to the same extent as were the religious leaders of Rome.

Mosheim is again helpful here in his writing concerning the third century AD. He writes: "The bishops assumed, in many places, a princely authority, particularly those who had the greatest number of churches under their inspection, and who presided over the most opulent assemblies. They appropriated to their evangelical function, the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty. A throne, surrounded with ministers, exalted above his equals the servant of the meek and humble Jesus; and sumptuous garments dazzled the eyes and the minds of the multitude into an ignorant veneration for their arrogated authority." (Mosheim, J.L. "Ecclesiastical History" Volume 1, page 132).

The "*dragon*" the pagan Roman power, could see all this occurring in the Church, and saw it as a grave menace to his own supremacy in government, both political and religious. Therefore he stood before the "woman", ready to devour that which was about to be separated from her as soon as it was born. To this end the most ferocious persecutions were set in motion by Pagan Rome, culminating in the "ten days" of tribulation from 303 to 313 AD, as we saw in the consideration of the letter to Smyrna in Revelation 2:10. The Christian leaders and followers in Rome and its environs were thus "drawn" from their spiritual lives and aspirations into worldliness and subsequent persecution, much more so than the Christian leaders and followers of Antioch and Alexandria.

12:5 The *"man child"* was *"brought forth"*, but was not devoured by the *"dragon"*. The *"man child"* was *"caught up unto God and to His throne"*. The historical events, here symbolised and foretold, were as follows.

In 313 AD after the death of the Emperor Maximin, who ruled in the Eastern Roman Empire, the persecutions of Christians ceased, and about this time the Emperor Constantine, who was co-ruler with Licinius, embraced Christianity. Subsequently, from 324 AD, after the defeat and death of Licinius, Constantine reigned as sole ruler of the Roman Empire, and Christianity, such as it was, represented in the *"man child"* of John's vision, became the official religion of the Roman Empire. In the words of the vision, the man child *"was caught up unto God, and to his throne"*. If the understanding of the symbolism as presented is correct, then the "God" mentioned cannot be the almighty Lord God of heaven, the God of love, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In keeping with the interpretation of the vision, the "God" mentioned must surely be the *"god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4), none other than Satan; for this *"man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron"* became in time the *"man of sin"*, the Papacy. The Papacy, with its doctrine and practice of the combination of Church and State, was one of Satan's great masterpieces of invention. It was set up by the decree of the Emperor Justinian in the years 529-33-39 as previously mentioned in these notes and discussed in detail in the book *"Notes on the Book of Daniel"*.

12:6 When the Papacy was officially set up, the *"woman"*, the true Church, had to flee *"into the wilderness"*, which may be understood as the condition or situation of ostracism. In this situation, the members of God's true Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, suffered great persecution; for the saints were given into the hands of this fearful *"man child"* for *"a thousand two hundred and threescore days"*, and by him the saints were almost completely worn out. (Matthew 24:15-22; Daniel 7:25)

But God was still watching over them. As Elijah the prophet was fed by the ravens for three and a half years during a severe drought in Israel (1 Kings 17:1-7), so the *"woman"*, the true Church, was fed with spiritual food during her time of great tribulation. For this we thank God, and trust His fatherly care to watch over His saints in any and all trials now and yet to come.

Verses 1 to 5 of this vision have brought us to the beginning of the 1,260 prophetic days, and verse 6 brings us to the year 1799, a date well known to us.

WAR IN HEAVEN

⁷*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,*

⁸*And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

⁹*And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

¹⁰*And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

¹¹*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

¹²*Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

¹³*And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.*

¹⁴*And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.*

This section also contains the helpful time mark of *the "time, and times, and half a time"* of verse 14, indicating that the account of verses 7 to 13 was to have its fulfilment before the beginning of the 1,260 prophetic days, that is, before 539 AD.

12:7 *"And there was war in heaven."* In his epic poem "Paradise Lost", the poet John Milton interpreted this passage as referring to a great conflict that he supposed to have occurred in the heaven where God dwells. The conflict was thought to have taken place before the Adamic fall into sin. We have endeavoured to show in these notes that the book of Revelation is prophetic, and intended to show to God's servants things that would come to pass after the visions were given to John on Patmos in 96 AD (or thereabouts), as told us in Revelation 1:1.

In view of the prophetic nature of the Revelation, Milton's interpretation cannot be correct.

Incorrect also is the futuristic interpretation of the Revelation which consigns almost the whole of Revelation into the future from the present day. As indicated above, the time in which we may look for the fulfilment of the "war in heaven" is after 96 AD and before the beginning of the 1,260 prophetic days in 539 AD.

The "*heaven*" in which the "*war*" was fought was not the heaven where God dwells but the symbolic heaven as mentioned in the discussion of the previous passages of Revelation 11:19 and 12: 1-6. The war was fought not with material weapons such as swords, guns and bombs, but with words and ideas. It was a war of ideas, being a conflict for the control of people's minds and the mode of people's worship in the ecclesiastical heaven. The war of ideas, it must be noted, often resulted in the stirring up of angry passions, literal battles were often fought, and people's natural blood was often shed.

The time covered in Revelation 12:7-14 is partly the same as that covered in 12:1-5, though the portion being now considered (12: 7-14) refers more to the latter part of the time from 96 AD to 539 AD. There is some overlap of the two accounts, but such overlap is not great.

"Michael and his angels fought against the dragon." Who is Michael? In the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", pages 271 to 275, the scriptural references to Michael are discussed, and the case is put forward in an endeavour to establish that Michael the Archangel is the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-human estate. There is no need to repeat that discussion here, because the name Michael is used symbolically in the context under consideration.

We have already noted that names of persons, cities and countries are often used in Revelation symbolically, and are not intended to be understood literally or historically. The use of the name Michael here is an illustration of this symbolic usage. The name Michael, according to Dr. Strong (3413) means "who (is) like God?" The name "Michael" is not used to mean or refer to the Michael mentioned in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; and Jude 9; but is used symbolically to refer to a counterfeit of the true Michael, the "man child" separated from the "woman", the true Church.

The dragon (Pagan Rome as a political power) disputed the right of the "man child," the counterfeit Michael, to a place in the symbolic heaven (the governmental and ecclesiastical realms). Therefore a war in the symbolic heaven ensued.

"Michael and his angels", the emerging Papal system with its "angels", that is, messengers in the form of Christian teachers, bishops, deacons and priests, were favourable to the idea that the Christian Church should be combined with the political powers, and that Christian doctrines and precepts, as they were then understood, should direct the motives and actions of governments, as well as those of all subject peoples.

The "dragon" and his "angels" (Pagan Rome and the messengers and priests of paganism) were opposed to the pretensions of Michael (the emerging Papal system). The pagan priests, temples, idols and paraphernalia of worship constituted the entrenched vested interests, and Pagan Rome fought fiercely to retain them.

12:8 But Pagan Rome did not succeed. The war of ideas was won by "Michael" and subsequently Pagan idolatry was to have no place in the ecclesiastical "heaven".

12:9 When Constantine became a convert to Christianity, Pagan Rome became Christian Rome. In this way the great dragon, which deceived the world by its secular teaching that men can govern themselves without reference to or regard for the Lord God, was cast out (literally "cast down") into the "earth" (the social order) and his angels, the pagan priests and rulers, were cast down with him. Thus the secular power within the Roman Empire lost its influence over the people.

The great dragon is also referred to as *"that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan"*. The word "Devil" means "accuser" (Strong 1228), and "Satan" means "adversary" (Strong 4567). The terms "Devil" and "Satan" are here used symbolically to signify a pagan and evil governmental system. This symbolic usage does not mean or imply that there is no being or identity as Satan. For if Satan did not exist, his name could not be used symbolically, just as if the Old Testament character Jezebel did not exist, her name could not have been used symbolically in Revelation 2:20.

12.10 When Pagan Rome became Christian Rome, a great cry went up in "*heaven*". Religious leaders and teachers thought that the change from Paganism to Christianity meant that the kingdom of God had come with the power and authority that God had given to Jesus Christ. Their eyes were blinded by the real and personal Satan, the one who has blinded the minds of "*them that believe not*" (2 Corinthians 4:4), that is, the great majority of the world's people.

Religious leaders and teachers in that fourth century were so far astray from the Scriptures that they considered it to be the Church's mission to convert the world. Therefore, when the emperor professed Christianity and the Roman Empire became Christian, they thought a wonderful victory had been won, and the world was as good as converted. They did not realise that what they were celebrating was really a phase of the great falling away foretold in 2 Thessalonians 2. They were glad that paganism, the accuser of their brethren which had been accusing them "*before our God day and night*", had been overthrown. In this context "God" should be understood as "mighty one", that is, the emperor, whoever happened to be on the throne at any given time. The accusations against Christians had been virtually unceasing, particularly during the ten years 303 to 313 AD, and the persecutions fierce and terrible.

In relation to the change from paganism to Christianity, some enthusiastic scribe copying the Gospel of Matthew inserted in his manuscript the unauthorised words found in Matthew 6:18: "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*". The unauthorised words must have been written later than the fourth century AD, because the words in question are not found in any manuscript of Matthew's Gospel prior to the sixth century. In any case, the scribe who first added these uninspired words evidently desired his readers to believe that Christian Rome was God's kingdom ruling on earth there and then, in spite of his having written earlier "*Thy kingdom come*".

12:11 Those who were congratulating themselves over the great victory and the coming, as they supposed, of God's Kingdom, and the authority of Christ, ascribed their victory to the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. They applauded those who had suffered the pagan persecutions, "*they loved not their lives unto the death*" or, as the NIV renders the sentence, "*they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death*".

These words are grand testimonials to the martyrs for the sake of Christ, which doubtless some of them were.

The victory thus gained over paganism was claimed to be *"by the blood of the Lamb"*, but it was not so, nor could have been. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was the blood of the New Covenant shed for many for the remission of sins. His blood was not shed for the purpose of enabling people to gain political power and influence in the present evil world.

The Lord Jesus' death and resurrection procured for Him the ownership of the whole human race, living and dead. (Romans 14:9) When the time comes for Him to show His power and begin to reign, He will destroy all the political powers of the world, not merely that portion once known as the Roman Empire. In the Gospel Age, the Lord's people have had to be subject to *"the powers that be"* (Romans 13:1), and each believer has had to gain the victory over sin and self personally by faith in God through Jesus Christ, so that he or she by God's grace might be accounted worthy to sit with the Lord Jesus Christ in His throne, and reign with Him for one thousand years.

12:12 In this verse, the words "inhabiters of the..." are omitted from the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, and from all modern translations. "Come" in this verse is rendered "gone" in the RV, NIV and the Jerusalem Bible. The verse then should read: *"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the earth and sea! for the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."*

The ecclesiastical *"heavens"* and those dwelling in them - bishops, deacons, priests and other officials in Christendom - were to rejoice in this great victory. But the *"earth"* (the social order) and the *"sea"* (the restless masses of people) would experience trouble because of the wrath of the dragon (the secular Roman power) who had gone down to them in fury because of knowing that his time was short. The Church had by this time become corrupt, and had adapted many pagan customs and practices to its own purposes, but paganism by and large was soon to disappear from that part of the earth known as the Roman Empire.

12:13 The dragon, realising that he had lost his place in "heaven" and would not regain it, persecuted the true Church as much as he could.

12:14 The dragon's persecution of the true Church was not successful because Divine Providence intervened. In the consideration of Revelation 4:7 the fourth "living creature" was like a flying eagle, and the meaning of the symbolism was suggested to be the swiftness and directness of Divine Providence.

In our context the meaning would seem to be that God intervened to prevent the true Church from possible extinction. The picture is that of the woman being given two wings of a great eagle to enable her to "fly into the wilderness, into her place" where she would be "nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent". The "wilderness" would seem to signify ostracism. The time mark of 1,260 prophetic days, as mentioned previously, means that the events we have been considering were to have their fulfilment before 539 AD.

The Church was not free from persecution while in the wilderness of ostracism, for when the pagan persecutions died out, another power arose which was even worse. The next section will tell us more of this power.

THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

¹⁵*And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.*

¹⁶*And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*

¹⁷*And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

12:15 The serpent (another symbol for the Pagan Roman power) tried to overwhelm the woman with water from his mouth as a river, and cause her to be swept away. The water would seem to refer primarily to thoughts and ideas expressed by words spoken and written, and secondarily to actions prompted by these words. In this way, prophetic reference is made to Julian the Apostate (331-363) of bitter memory.

Julian, the son of Julius Constantine, one of the brothers of Constantine the Great, was elevated by the army to the imperial throne in 380 AD as co-ruler with his father; and in the following year, upon the death of his father, Julian was confirmed as sole emperor.

Dr. J. L. Mosheim writes as follows: "This flourishing progress of the Christian religion was greatly interrupted, and the church reduced to the brink of destruction, when Julian, the son of Julius Constantius, and the only remaining branch of the imperial family, was placed at the head of affairs ... No event could be less favourable to the Christians. For, though he had been educated in the principles of Christianity, yet he apostatised from that divine religion, and employed all his efforts to restore the expiring superstitions of polytheism to their former vigour, credit, and lustre ... It is true this prince seemed averse to the use of violence, in propagating superstition, and suppressing the truth; nay, he carried the appearances of moderation and impartiality so far, as to allow his subjects a full power of judging for themselves in religious matters, and of worshipping the Deity in the manner they thought the most rational. But, under this mask of moderation, he attacked Christianity with the utmost bitterness, and at the same time with the most consummate dexterity. By art and stratagem he undermined the church, removing the privileges that were granted to Christians and their spiritual rulers composing books against the Christians, and using a variety of other means to bring the religion of Jesus to ruin and contempt." (Mosheim, J.L. Ecclesiastical History. Volume 1 pages 162, 163).

12:16 But the "*earth*", the social order, helped the woman by absorbing the "*flood*" which the dragon cast out of his mouth, and in this way the Church was not undermined nor overwhelmed by the malignant efforts of Julian to destroy Christianity.

Dr. J. L. Mosheim further writes: "After the time of Constantine the Great, besides the long and laborious work which Julian wrote against the followers of Christ, Himerius and Libanius, in their public harangues, and Eunapius, in his lives of the philosophers, exhausted all their rage and bitterness in their efforts to defame the Christian religion; while the calumnies that abounded in the discourses of the one, and the writings of the other, passed unpunished. The prejudice which the Christian cause received in this century, from the stratagems of these philosophers and rhetoricians, who were elated with a

presumptuous notion of their knowledge, and prepossessed with a bitter aversion to the gospel, was certainly very considerable. Many examples concurred to prove this; and particularly that of Julian, who was seduced by the artifices of these corrupt sophists. The effects of their disputes and declamations were not, indeed, the same upon all: some, who assumed the appearance of superior wisdom, and who, either from moderation or indifference, professed to pursue a middle way in these religious controversies, composed matters in the following manner: They gave so far their ear to the interpretations and discourses of the rhetoricians, as to form to themselves a middle kind of religion, between the ancient theology and the new doctrine that was now propagated in the empire; and they persuaded themselves that the same truths which Christ taught, had been for a long time concealed by the priests of the gods, under the veil of ceremonies, fables, and allegorical representations. Of this number were Ammianus Marcellinus, a man of singular merit; Themistius, an orator highly distinguished by his uncommon eloquence and the eminence of his station; Chalcidius, a philosopher, and others, who were all of opinion that the two religions, when properly interpreted and understood, agreed perfectly well in the main points; and that, therefore, neither the religion of Christ, nor that of the gods, were to be treated with contempt." (Mosheim, J.L. Ecclesiastical History Volume 1 pages 165, 166.)

Thus *"the earth helped the woman"*.

12:17 After the short and bitter reign of Julian the Apostate, the empire was again Christian, but only in name. The pagan priests and philosophers were not extinguished, and they continued in their wrath against the Christians until the first half of the sixth century AD.

During this time, Rome, Christian in name only, was not pleased with the truly faithful Christians living in the empire, and many had to suffer for their faithfulness".

The learned Dr. Mosheim writes as follows concerning the state of the Church in the fourth century: "When we cast an eye towards the lives and morals of Christians at this time, we find, as formerly, a mixture of good and evil; some eminent for their piety, others infamous for their crimes. The number, however, of

immoral and unworthy Christians began so to increase, that the examples of real piety and virtue became extremely rare. When the terrors of persecution were totally dispelled; when the church, secured from the efforts of its enemies, enjoyed the sweets of prosperity and peace; when the most of the bishops exhibited to their flock the contagious examples of arrogance, luxury, effeminacy, animosity, and strife, with other vices too numerous to mention; when the inferior rulers and doctors of the church fell into a slothful and opprobrious negligence of the duties of their respective stations, and employed in vain wranglings and idle disputes that zeal and attention that were due to the culture of piety and to the instruction of their people; and when, to complete the enormity of this horrid detail, multitudes were drawn into the profession of Christianity, not by the power of conviction and argument, but by the prospect of gain and the fear of punishment; - then it was indeed no wonder that the church was contaminated with shoals of profligate Christians, and that the virtuous few were, in a manner, oppressed and overwhelmed with the superior numbers of the wicked and licentious.

It is true that the same rigorous penitence, which had taken place before Constantine the Great, continued now in full force against flagrant transgressors; but when the reign of corruption becomes universal, the vigour of the laws yields to its sway, and a weak execution defeats the purposes of the most salutary discipline. Such was now unhappily the case; the age was sinking daily from one period of corruption to another; the great and the powerful sinned with impunity; and the obscure and the indigent felt alone the severity of the laws." (Mosheim, J.L. Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1 page 189)

The words apply also to centuries following the fourth

The "*obscure and indigent*" would be those who kept "*the commandments of God*" and had "*the testimony of Jesus*". If such good people did anything considered by the Church authorities to be contrary to their own selfish interests, even if such words and actions were in conformity with "*the commandments of God*" and "*the testimony of Jesus*", these obscure and poor ones whom God had chosen (James 2:5-9) would be made to suffer on one pretext or another.

A BEAST RISING FROM THE SEA

Revelation 13:

¹*And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.*

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

³*And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.*

⁴*And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?*

⁵*And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.*

But great and disturbing events were soon to enter into the experience of the "dragon" (Rome now as a political power). The Western Roman Empire was about to be cast into the "sea", as we saw in considering Revelation 8:8, 9, and on "the sand of the sea", that is, on the brink of this upheaval and confusion, the "dragon", now political Rome ruled by the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire, would stand to see what would happen.

Some versions have the dragon standing on the shore of the sea, while others have John the writer placed there. Perhaps the intention is that both were there in the vision. What is important is that John was there to record what he saw and place it on record for us to read.

13:1 While the dragon stood on the shore, John saw a further vision of a beast rising out of the "sea", which symbol seems to indicate the restlessness and agitation of the people of the former Western Roman Empire. This beast was described in similar terms to the dragon, with the important exception that diadems were on the ten horns of the beast, whereas on the dragon, diadems were on its seven heads. Perhaps this is the reason why the phrases are reversed. The KJV says "*having seven heads and ten horns*", while the RV, NIV, RSV and most modern versions have "*ten horns and seven heads*".

The beast rising out of the "sea" was a kind of resuscitation of the Western Roman Empire which fell in 476 AD. But the revived beast was not the same as it had been before its fall, inasmuch as its ten horns now had crowns (Greek diadems). This indicated that the tribes formerly subject to Rome in the west, and attached to it as provinces of the Empire, were now independent sovereign powers. These provinces were still linked to Rome, but not to the same degree of subordination as before.

Upon the beast's seven heads were names of blasphemies. This was true of all the forms of government that had ruled over the Empire, whether of the west, of the east, or of both together.

13:2 The beast had the characteristics of the three world empires that had preceded Rome. In Daniel 7:4-6, Greece was the leopard, Medo-Persia was the bear, and Babylon was the lion. When the main characteristics are combined, we learn that Rome was as tyrannical as the lion, voracious as the bear, and swift and deadly as the leopard.

The beast then was Rome with its Papal head, having under its influence the ten sovereign provinces of the Empire. The provinces attained their relative independence when Western Rome fell under the onslaught of the Germanic barbarian warrior Odoacer. The meaning of these "heads" will be discussed in the comments on a later vision, so they will not be considered now.

The dragon (political Eastern Rome, now Christian at least in name) was favourable to his counterpart, the beast. The dragon (Eastern Rome), standing in the vision on the sand, that is, the edge of the "sea" (Western Rome), saw that there would be no possibility of reducing the ten "horns", now with diadems, to their former state of subjection without their diadems. Therefore he (the Eastern Roman Emperor) utilised the bishop of Rome, and conferred upon him his power, his throne (RV, NIV and RSV) and great authority.

This conferring of power was accomplished in the years 529, 33 and 39. The way in which this was done has been set forth in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", mainly pages 72 to 82.

13:3,4 One of the seven heads was mortally wounded. The "beast" was the counterpart of the "dragon", so it may be understood that the mortally wounded head was the seventh of the seven heads, as outlined in the comments on verse 3 of the

previous chapter, that is, the Despotic Emperor, the seventh head on the "dragon" as it was taken over by the "beast". The "*mortal wound*" was the death of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD.

But the empire rose again "*out of the sea*" (the restless masses of people), but not in the same form as before. Instead of a despotic emperor there was a despotic bishop. The despotism of the bishop, the Pope of Rome, was worse than that of the former emperor. The new religious system became the eighth head, which we will further consider in Revelation 17:11. The aim as well as the endeavour of the Papacy was to dominate everything on earth, including the eternal destiny of every individual. This aim and this endeavour have had to be watered down and kept largely unsaid and in the background in these latter days, but there has been no denial or renunciation of this aim and endeavour by Papal spokespersons. There has never in human history been anything like it.

It is not surprising that the whole "*earth*", the social order, wondered after the "beast" and worshipped the "dragon" because he gave power and authority to the Papal "beast" (Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, the RV and most modern versions have this wording). "*Who is like unto the beast?*" they cry, and "*Who is able to make war with him?*". And so it was for centuries until these latter days of the Gospel Age when believers see evidences of the decline of Papal power as its consumption progresses and its end approaches, all of which is to be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ as we read in Daniel 7:26 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

13:5 The "*beast*" that rose up out of the "*sea*" had "*a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies*", even as the "*little horn*" also did in Daniel 7. Throughout the existence of the Papal "beast" his utterances have been of that sort. The prophet Daniel said that even while the consumption of the "beast" was in progress, the words of the "beast" were greater and more presumptuous than ever (Daniel 7:11).

Authority was given to the "*beast*" to carry on with his evil works for "*forty and two months*", the same prophetic period as that mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and the "*thousand two hundred and threescore days*" of Revelation 11:3 and also 12:6, and the "*time, and times, and half a time*" of Revelation 12:14. As mentioned earlier in these notes, the length of the time period is 1,260 years,

and the time period dates from 539 AD to 1799 AD. An explanation of these time prophecies, also found in Daniel 7:24 and 25, and 12:6 and 7, is made in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel" pages 80 and 81. The "beast" carried on with his evil and presumptuous activities with great vigour for the whole of the period prophesied.

This fifth mention in Revelation of the time mark is the last time it is made. None who read these notes were living during this period of the Gospel Age, and we are thankful that we were not. But this fact should not diminish our appreciation of the value to us as Christian Bible students, of the appearances of this time mark. We should also be grateful to the Lord for giving us these time prophecies to guide us in the paths of correctly understanding His Word of truth.

THE TWO-HORNED BEAST AND THE IMAGE

⁶And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

⁷And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

⁸And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

⁹If any man have an ear, let him hear.

¹⁰He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

13:6,7 The Papal beast was very busy during his allotted time doing exactly what Daniel and John were inspired to say he would do. He professed to carry on the worship of God and lead people in true Christian ways, but his words and actions were blasphemous. The so-called "sacrifice of the mass" is the very centre of Roman Catholic worship, and is surely the greatest blasphemy of all in its negation of the true efficacy of Jesus Christ's sacrifice and shed blood.

The teaching and practice of the mass claims that Christ is sacrificed anew each time a mass is conducted, a clear contradiction of the Scriptures which tell us that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice and shed blood are the only means to deliver all people for all time from sin and death. There cannot be any

addition to or detraction from this fundamental truth as expressed in Colossians 1:12-20; Hebrews 7:27 and other Scriptures. The mass takes from the Lord Jesus the credit for the means of salvation for the whole human race, and substitutes a man-made teaching. This is the main reason why the Papacy is described as the *"abomination that maketh desolate"*.

Beside this fundamental untruth, there are doctrines of the soul as a separate entity from the body and its alleged immortality, hell and purgatory, the worship and veneration of the Virgin Mary and saints, the Trinity and other blasphemous teachings too numerous to be discussed here.

The Papal beast also blasphemed God's tabernacle in heaven and those who have been made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, even those mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 1:3 and 2:5, 6. The Papacy was also permitted to make war with the saints, to overcome them and all but exterminate them, so that during his allotted term, the very existence of the saints was threatened. So severe was the tribulation that the Lord Jesus said, *"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"* (Matthew 24:22).

The meaning of the shortening of the days cannot mean that they were any fewer than specified in the prophecies. The days, 1260 prophetic years, were permitted to run their full course, but some help was given to believers towards the end of this period, in particular the Protestant Reformation; and once the allotted period had ended, the persecution and war against the saints came to an end. Had that not happened, the beast would have continued his war and persecution until all the Lord's true saints had been exterminated.

13:8-10 All *"whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"* have worshipped the beast. These are persons who have not understood the call to qualify for the prize of *"the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14) and who therefore are not eligible for joint-heirship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these persons have worshipped the Papal beast because they were in sympathy with the beast's aims and actions. Others again, while not being so fully in sympathy, have worshipped the beast for reasons of convenience and their own private gain.

"If any man have an ear, let him hear." The hearing is not physical but spiritual. Verse 10 is not a statement of a general principle, because it is well known that many who have led others into captivity, have never themselves been captives, and that many who have killed with the sword or followed a military career in peacetime and wartime, have died peacefully from natural causes.

Verse 10 is a prophecy of the fate of the Papal beast. It has led many into captivity, and it will eventually be led the same way. It has killed many with the sword and it will be killed with the sword, that is, the *"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17), that *"sharp two-edged sword"* (Revelation 1:16) which has issued from our Lord's mouth.

In realising this prospect, the saints who have had to endure the persecutions by the Papal beast have been strengthened in faith and patience, and enabled to endure to the end, thus gaining the Lord's approval. They have not retaliated against their tormentors, for they have understood and believed the Lord's words, *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"* (Romans 12:19).

THE BEAST COMING UP OUT OF THE EARTH

¹¹*And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.*

¹²*And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*

¹³*And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,*

¹⁴*And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.*

13:11,12 From the relatively more stable and settled social order, represented by the *"earth"* arose another *"beast"*. This beast had two horns like a lamb, but his conduct was opposite to the natural behaviour of lambs, for he spoke *"as a dragon"*, a political power. He acted in the *"sight"* (RV) and *"presence"* (RSV) of the first beast and in the same manner, exercising authority just as the first beast had done. This did not all take

place in one moment when the two-horned beast rose up from the earth, but in the course of time.

Thus is described the rise and progress of Protestantism taken as a whole. A distinction should be made between the Protestant Reformation and Protestantism. The Protestant Reformation was good and right as far as it went, but it stopped well short of the length it might have gone in helping God's people. The movement for reform ground to a halt while there remained teachings and practices in need of reform, and Protestants became fixed in various groups and sects. When that happened, the Protestant Reformation ceased to be a living movement and became dead, as we saw in Revelation 3:1.

In making this assertion we do not forget or overlook the great and commendable efforts of the original reformers such as Huss, Luther, Zwingli, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Knox, Calvin and others. They pointed out the errors of the Mass, Purgatory, Penance, the Worship of Mary, prayers to deceased saints, and so on; and restored the great scriptural teaching of justification by faith. The results of their efforts were so great in these matters, and they were so much revered by their followers, that their followers could progress no further with reform, and settled down at the position they occupied at the decease of their highly-honoured leaders. The same thing has happened to many movements for reform since the Protestant Reformation; most of the followers have settled at the points to which their respective leaders have brought them.

But even so, the Lord has always had a few people who did not lie down and die spiritually when the various movements settled into denominations and sects, as we saw in Revelation 3:4.

The two "*horns*" or powers involved in the Reformation when it began according to history would appear to be Britain and Germany. The speaking "*as a dragon*" occurred when the Protestant movement became clothed with authority similar to that of the first beast, who centuries before had had draconian powers conferred upon him.

By these means, the two-horned beast caused the inhabitants of the "earth" to worship the first beast. Protestantism caused people to worship Romanism inasmuch as "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery". The imitation of many Papal doctrines and practices became features of many Protestant

denominations and sects. Many Protestants came to forget the great spiritual issues and unscriptural practices that they originally opposed and about which they protested.

13:13,14 Great "*signs*" (RV, RSV and NIV) were accomplished by the two-horned beast, even to make "*fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them*". Not since the time of Elijah the prophet is there a record of fire brought down miraculously from the natural heavens to the natural earth; therefore, as indicated by the text, there was something deceptive about the sign of the "fire" brought about by the two-horned beast in the sight of the first beast.

The objects of the miraculous fires brought down by God at Elijah's command were to prove that Jehovah was the true God, Elijah was His prophet, and to bring the Israelites back from the worship of Baal to the worship of Jehovah. These objects were accomplished by the miracles as recorded in 1 Kings 18:36-39, and 2 Kings 1:10,12.

Some centuries later, John the Baptist came "*in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah)*" to endeavour to bring about a reformation of the children of Israel. John did not bring down fire from heaven, and did not work any other miracles, but his preaching and baptising in the Jordan made such an impression on the people that they regarded him as a prophet. John's reformation of Israel was only partly accomplished; therefore judgment that was threatened came on the nation (Malachi 4:5, 6; 3:1; Luke 1:13-17; Matthew 11:7-10; 17:10-13; 14:5; 21:25-27; Luke 20:4-7; John 10:41).

As no literal fire was brought down from heaven to the natural earth by the two-horned beast, what does the symbol mean, and what was the significance of the symbol?

The answer seems to lie in the vehement preaching by the Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century of endless torment in the flames of hell as the punishment of the unsaved. This teaching was proclaimed with such power and forcefulness that great fear came into the minds and hearts of thousands who listened and heeded the terrible doctrine, so that it seemed to the hearers that the preachers made "*fire come down from heaven in the sight of men*". The object of the "*sign*" was to retain the loyalty of the hearers, and thus persuade them to make an image to the beast which was mortally wounded but lived. The doctrine

of eternal torment in a fiery hell was taken over from the Papacy by the Protestant reformers. Even today in these more enlightened times, the doctrine is still believed by many professing Christians.

But the most significant image to the beast was accomplished by Protestants in various countries in the creation of State Churches in imitation of the Papal Church as the State Church in countries where Protestantism gained the ascendancy over the Papacy. Lutheranism became the State Church in most of Germany and in Scandinavia, the Anglican Church in England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and the Reformed Church in Holland and Switzerland. These branches of Protestantism have also their synods and congregations in America, Australia and New Zealand; but in such countries which were settled by the West after the Protestant Reformation, these Churches in the overseas dominions did not become State Churches.

THE NUMBER OF HIS NAME

¹⁵And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

¹⁶And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

¹⁷And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

¹⁸Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

13:15 He had power, or he was "allowed" (NIV, Jerusalem Bible, Phillips MEV, and other modern versions) to give life ("breath" in most modern versions) to the image of the beast. The thought seems to be that the image, the two-horned beast, gained in stature and strength, and became strong enough to cause death to as many as would not worship the image of the beast. The fulfilment seems to be both spiritual and literal.

Those who remained outside the Protestant State Churches and refused to obey them, were regarded as "killed" by the Church systems. The Protestant State Churches saw to it that laws were passed imposing rigorous restrictions and penalties on all non-conformists and dissenters, both clergymen and laymen. In

England, John Bunyan (1628-1688) was imprisoned for sixteen years in Bedford Gaol, and in Geneva, Switzerland, Dr. Michael Servetus (1511-1553) was burnt at the stake for heresy under the rule of John Calvin. Further instances of symbolic and literal killing can be found in church and ecclesiastical histories.

13:16,17 Not only must all people worship the image, wherever it gained the ascendancy, they must be *"marked"* in their right hand or in their forehead. To be marked in the right hand would denote the devotion of the individual's powers and activities in the service of the image. To be marked in the forehead would indicate that the individual's mind was wholly occupied and under the influence of the teachings and practices of the image of the beast.

All the above constitute an apt description of the devotees of Protestantism taken as a whole. The Papacy has sought to dominate the whole earth, alleging that its head, the Pope in office at any particular time, is the vicar of Christ, that is, Christ's representative with authority to rule in Christ's name. Protestantism has a similar desire, claiming that it is the duty of the Church on earth to increase its influence, and so bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. It has endeavoured to do this by means of missionary activities in various countries and among various peoples, and by supporting sympathetic political parties and politicians in Christian lands.

Neither Catholics nor the generality of Protestants realise that the purpose of God during this Gospel Age has been quite different from their ambitions. Instead of ruling the world during the Gospel Age, God has been taking out from the *nations* *"a people for his name"* (Acts 15:14-18). When this work has been accomplished, the people taken out from the nations will reign as joint-heirs with Christ for one thousand years for the blessing of all nations and all families of the earth. The human race in general will not receive God's promised blessing until the joint-heirs are taken out and revealed to the world, as we understand from Romans 8:16-23. At the present time and throughout the Gospel Age, the world does not recognise these children as God's elect, but God knows them (1 John 3:1, 2; 1 Timothy 2:19).

No one *"might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"*. This does not mean ordinary commercial buying and selling, but the sort of activity spoken of in the parables of the pounds and talents,

namely, activity with the Lord's truth and in His service. If a person is marked, that is, a devotee of the beast or his image, there will be no problem with speaking and acting along the lines of fundamental error approved by the particular religious system he or she serves.

But if a person is not so "marked", opposition or disregard may well be met by a person seeking to proclaim the great truths of the Scriptures. In past centuries, such preaching would have been met with absolute prohibition, with the threat of gaol or the stake to enforce it. Nowadays facilities and liberties are much improved, and every opportunity should be sought and used by the few believers who seek to proclaim the great truths of the Scriptures until such time as the Lord God has decreed for His Kingdom to begin its work of blessing.

13:18 *"Here is wisdom,"* we are told, to *"count the number of the beast"*, that is, *"the number of his name"*. The number is *"the number of a man"*. No one man could have been and could have done all that is said of the beast that rose out of the sea. But this beast, that is, his highest human official, has a number or title describing him in his high position.

The number we are given is *"six hundred threescore and six"*. If our identification of the beast as the Papacy is correct, the name or title of the man in its highest official position will confirm our understanding. It seems reasonable to seek the name or title of the beast in the language it has used, namely Latin, and to count the numerical value of the letters of its name in the same language, namely Roman numerals.

The highest official of the Papacy is the Pope for the time being. The official title of the Pope is "Vicar of the Son of God", or as it is in Latin, "Vicarius Filii Dei". This adds up as follows:

V	=	5
I	=	1
C	=	100
A	=	no value
R	=	no value
I	=	1
V	=	5
S	=	no value

F	=	no value
I	=	1
L	=	50
I	=	1
I	=	1
D	=	500
E	=	no value
I	=	1

Total	=	666

So there it is, the official title in the beast's own language, counted according to the numerical values of the letters in the same language, understood by the majority of people in the Western world, including the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and the dominions once ruled by European nations.

Thus by this title and its value in Roman numerals is confirmed the interpretation of the beast that rose out of the sea, the two-horned beast, and the image to the first beast. If the official title of the Beast were his by right, if he really were the "Vicar of the Son of God" reigning in Christ's stead as the earthly representative of God, he would have an undeniable right to dominate, and would have the power to rule over the nations, neither of which he has had.

But the Papacy is now ill with consumption. The beast is being consumed by the Lord Jesus, Whose vicar the beast claims to be, and he (the beast) will eventually be destroyed, never to rise again (Daniel 7:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

THE LAMB AND THE 144,000 ON MOUNT SION

Revelation 14:

¹And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

²And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

³And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

⁴*These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.*

⁵*And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

14:1-3 In verse 1 the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts and most modern versions have "the" Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty-four thousand having His name and His Father's name written in their foreheads.

In verse 3 the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts and most modern versions have the voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and great thunder, *"and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps"*.

The Lord God said, as recorded in Psalm 2:6 , *"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion"*. God fulfilled these prophetic words when He set His Son at His right hand after His Son's death and resurrection. Evidently the Son was there alone with the Father, as we may gather from Hebrews 10:12. But now in the vision, John sees the Lamb on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 others.

The others with the Lamb are the sealed ones mentioned previously in Revelation 7:1-8, where it was said that they were sealed with the seal of the living God, but nothing was said about the seal or about any words on the seal. In the present vision, the seal has the Lamb's name and His Father's name on it, and the 144,000 are marked with the two names. This surely is the fulfilment of the Lord's words in John 17:10 *"And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them"*.

They sang a new song, and the sound was as the sound of many waters, of great thunder, and of many harpists playing on their harps. No one else could learn the song they sang, not even angels. The exclusiveness of the new song symbolises the exclusiveness of the high calling, and the fact that the high calling was a new calling, not known or understood before the Gospel Age. John sees and hears this vision as referring to the time when the 144,000 will all have been raised from death, and glorified with Jesus in the heavenly realm as His joint-heirs.

The vision therefore belongs to the end of the Gospel Age, or very soon after the end, a time still future from our time, when John sees the 144,000, who previously were human beings on the earth, joined with the Lamb in heaven, no longer to live on the earth. They have been redeemed or purchased from the earth by the blood of the Lamb.

14:4,5 The joint-heirs "*were not defiled with women; for they are virgins*". This reference to the joint-heirs should be understood symbolically to refer to all joint-heirs, both men and women, who made their calling and election sure, and kept themselves from giving allegiance to false religious systems and false doctrines.

The symbolic significance of fornication is idolatry, as well as union forbidden by God, as shown in many allusions such as Ezekiel 6:9 and 23:37: "*And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a-whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.*" ..."*That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them.*"

We know from Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 that there is neither male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus, so the reference in our verse should not be taken to refer to male persons only.

The joint-heirs are said to follow the Lamb "*whithersoever he goeth*". In their lives on earth during that period of the Gospel Age in which they lived, the joint-heirs followed in their Master's footsteps of rejection and suffering as well as they could. Now, with Him in glory, they are rewarded by being permitted to be with Him and attend Him everywhere. Once they were human beings, but by God's mercy and grace they have been redeemed or purchased from the sinful human race, and have been changed into the glorious likeness of their Lord, the Lamb of God, Who is a spirit being. As the Apostle Paul said, "*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*" (1 Corinthians 15:49).

It is wonderfully reassuring to realise that the 144,000 are not the only beneficiaries of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. They are but the *"firstfruits"*, a small number to precede the much greater number of all people, small and great, who will be raised from death to learn of God and His Son, and discover the way to gain eternal life; not, however, in the heavenly places, as many have believed, but on the earth in fulfilment of the Lord's prayer, *"Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven"*, as we saw in Revelation 7:9-17.

In verse 5 a remarkable statement is made about the joint-heirs. According to the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts and nearly all the modern versions, the verse should read, *"No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless"*. This could not be said of the joint-heirs in their earthly lives.

The joint-heirs no doubt did their best to follow the Lord Jesus, but they were sinners, and fell short of God's holy requirements from time to time, and needed to seek forgiveness and cleansing through Jesus Christ. But now in the heavenly realm they are without blemish, not merely before the throne but in the throne, as we saw in Revelation 3:21, *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"*.

Glorified and enthroned, standing with the Lamb on Mount Sion, a symbol of the heavenly kingdom under the New Covenant provisions (Hebrews 12:22-24), the joint-heirs are ready to take their appointed part under the Lord Jesus' leadership in blessing all nations and all families of the earth.

There we must leave them for now, because the visions given to John are about to lead us in another direction. But later we shall learn more of the specially blest ones, the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb.

CHAPTER 9

THREE ANGELS AND THEIR MESSAGES REVELATION 14:6 - 20

God's hour of judgment has struck several times in the history of the human race. The first judgment was in Eden, from the effect of which no one has escaped. The flood of Noah's day was another judgment, from which only eight human beings and some animals were saved by means of the ark. There were judgments upon Sodom and Gomorrah, upon other communities, upon individuals, upon the nation of Israel at various times, including the judgment on Jerusalem and the temple in which approximately one million lives were lost in 70 AD. All of these judgments occurred before the Revelation was sent to John on the Isle of Patmos in 96 AD, therefore none of them is included in the vision about to be considered.

THE FIRST ANGEL'S MESSAGE

Revelation 14:

⁶And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

⁷Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

14:6,7 John saw an angel flying in mid-heaven (RV, RSV, Phillip's, MEB and the NEB). This would not mean the atmospheric heaven but the ecclesiastical heaven. The angel seen by John in the vision has the everlasting gospel or good news to deliver to all people. The main item of this good news is not the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, but the fact that the hour of God's judgment has come, all are to fear God and glorify Him, and worship Him as the Creator of all things.

But what hour of God's judgment is this, that should be everlasting good news to all that dwell on earth, every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people? As we look ahead in the context we see that a second angel follows the first, and a third angel follows the second. The third angel's message is delivered during the lifetime of the beast and his image, as we see in 14:9. This information helps us to gain our bearing in time, because if

the third angel's message relates to the time while the beast and his image are still in existence, the second and first angels' messages must refer to times earlier than that of the third angel.

Can a judgment hour of God be found to have come while the beast and its image are still in existence? Can a date be known for this judgment hour? Daniel and Paul enable us to answer both questions.

Daniel 7: 9-26. *"I beheld till the thrones were cast down and the Ancient of days did sit, The judgment was set, and the books were opened. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. I Daniel came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, ... even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, ...And I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them (Compare Revelation 13:5-7); Until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise and another (the Papacy) shall rise after them; And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time (See comments on Revelation 13: 1-7). But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion to consume and to destroy it unto the end.*

2 Thessalonians 1:6; *"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy by the manifestation of his presence"* (Variorum and margin readings).

Thus it was that under different but not dissimilar illustrations, Daniel, as recorded in chapter 7, saw a vision of the "beast" that John also saw and recorded in Revelation 13. Daniel was given the information that God's judgment would come upon the beast at the end of the 1,260 years, and God would formally authorise the Lord Jesus to deal with the beast, consume and finally destroy him by the breath of His mouth, that is, the Word of Truth, and by the manifestation of His presence.

That most helpful time mark, the 1,260 years, is thus shown by Daniel 7 to indicate when the first angel would fly in the midst of the ecclesiastical heaven. The angel proclaimed to all the dwellers on earth the good news that the hour had come for God's judgment on the beast of Revelation 13, and also called upon all to give glory to God and worship Him.

The important matters of the Lord Jesus' "parousia", the identifying of "Michael", and the meaning of "Michael" standing up, will not be further discussed now, as such discussion would involve setting aside for a time the significance of the messages of the three angels. These matters, however, have been discussed in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel".

Can the angel *"flying in mid-heaven"* be identified? "Angel" means "messenger", and it has pleased the Lord from time to time to use many messengers: spirit beings; human beings; and even impersonal things such as winds and flames. *"And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire"* (Hebrews 1:7). *"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."* (Malachi 3:1).

It seems reasonable therefore to follow the principle that "whoever delivers the message is the messenger," and the most notable messenger at the end of the 1,260 years were the Bible Societies, which circulated the Scriptures without note or comment, beginning their activities very soon after the year 1799.

In fact, any person or organisation distributing a Bible or Bible containing the books of Daniel and Revelation, may be understood as taking some part in the delivery of the message of everlasting good tidings that the hour of God's judgment has

come, and that it is time to turn to the Lord God, fear Him and worship Him, Who is the Father and Creator of all.

As time has gone on, many important matters have become clearer than they were at the end of the 1,260 years. A marvellous array of Scriptural truths came to light during the nineteenth century after the close of the 1,260 years of prophecy. The main truths that came to light are:

The Plan of the Ages;
The Truth of the Ransom and Sin Offering;
The Kingdom of God;
The New Covenant;
The Truth of Death and the Second Death;
The High Calling and Joint Heirship with Christ;
The Second Advent.

The first angel's message is much better understood now than when it first began to be declared, and can be delivered more helpfully and knowledgeably, and is still being delivered to all who will listen and give earnest attention.

THE SECOND ANGEL'S MESSAGE

8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

14:8 The Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, the RV, NIV, RSV and most modern translations omit the word "city" and translate the second angel's message as "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication*".

For the first time in the book of Revelation, the name "Babylon" appears in this verse, and is used as a symbol, as are other names in the Revelation. The original Babylon was a great city on the river Euphrates, and was the capital of the Babylonian empire. The empire of Babylon was the first of the world empires described in Daniel chapters 2 and 7. Babylon was conquered by the military prowess and exploits of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian. More will be said of Babylon, both literal and symbolic, when considering chapters 16, 17 and 18 of Revelation.

In the Revelation, the name Babylon is applied symbolically to a woman and also to a city, and much the same things are said about both the woman and the city. It seems that the woman and the city have the same significance, and represent the false, nominal church systems of the Gospel Age.

The second angel proclaims that Babylon is fallen, that is, in a fallen condition, signifying her union with the secular governments. This union of church and state is a form of idolatry which constitutes spiritual fornication. The false church is responsible in God's sight for this illicit union, by which she has enticed the nations *"to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication"*, promising benefits of all kinds, temporal and spiritual, to those who would join her in this illicit union. All the governments of the Roman world, east and west, were made "drunk" by this "wine", symbolising teaching; some leaders even fearing to incur the penalties of excommunication as well as endless torment if they did not agree and conform. Babylon has been in this fallen state for centuries.

Public attention began to be drawn to this state of affairs early in the nineteenth century, when, with the founding and progress of the Bible societies, there was a revival of interest in the study of Bible prophecy and in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this connection, Daniel was inspired to make mention of a particular time; *"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days"* (Daniel 12:11).

It has been consistently maintained in these notes that the beginning of this time mark is 539 AD, so that the end point of this prophecy is 1829 AD.

In Daniel, nothing is said as to what should be expected at the end of the 1,290 prophetic days, fulfilled as years. But what did in fact occur at that time was the revival of studies of Biblical prophecy, especially those prophecies concerning the return of Jesus Christ, and the recognition of the fallen condition of great Babylon. In view of these facts, it may be understood that Daniel 12:11 and Revelation 14:8 are mutually complementary, Daniel indicating the time but not the events, and Revelation indicating the events but not the time.

As with the proclamation of the first angel, so with that of the second. The passing of time has brought clearer understanding of the meaning and importance of the message to the Lord's people, and the message can be given out more clearly and authoritatively. This message unfortunately is not popular, but the many participants in the early Adventist movements did not shirk their perceived duty, nor shrink from persecution in proclaiming the message as they understood it. In delivering and proclaiming this message, it is not necessary to be dogmatic, but rather firm and straightforward, leaving the effects and consequences to the Lord.

If we follow the latter course, any resultant persecution will not be our fault, but will be to our credit, in which we may rejoice, as the Lord Jesus says; "*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matthew 5:11, 12).

THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE

⁹*And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,*

¹⁰*The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:*

¹¹*And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

¹²*Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*

14:9 The message in this verse is addressed to every individual of a particular class or group, namely to all who worship the beast and its image, and receive his mark in either their foreheads or their hands. This message is also a warning to the whole world, even though directed only to the class named.

The beast and its image have been identified in the consideration of chapter 13. If the identification of the beast and its image set out there is correct, the message of the third angel is addressed to all devotees of the Papacy and of Protestantism, with whom may be included the devotees of the Greek and Russian

Orthodox Churches also. All such devotees would include firstly those whose mental and physical powers are devoted to the advancement of the interests of those systems, as indicated by the "mark" in the forehead or in the hand; and secondly, those whose mental and physical powers are not so actively engaged, but who nevertheless acquiesce more or less passively in the activities and progress of those systems.

The devotees of the systems in question do not understand the Divine Purpose of the Gospel Age. They appear to believe that by preaching the Gospel, they will bring people to membership of this or that church, and so work together to bring peace to the earth and prepare everyone to go to heaven. They do not understand that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom on earth for the resurrected millions.

The Scriptures reveal to us that God's purpose in this Gospel Age is to take out from all nations, peoples, kindreds and languages, a people for His Name, to be given a heavenly inheritance to reign with Christ a thousand years for the purpose of blessing all nations and all families of the earth, who will live forever as human beings on earth (Acts 15:14, Romans 8:16,17; Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:4; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:6).

14:10 An outpouring of undiluted divine wrath will be the experience of those who continue to worship the beast and its image after the announcement of the third angel's message.

But why is divine wrath mentioned to come upon devotees of the beast and its image after the giving of the third angel's message? Why should not all devotees of the beast and its image from first to last down the centuries experience the same divine wrath? And how do fire and brimstone come into the imagery?

In response to these questions, the first consideration is the fact that the third angel's message is announced well into the time after judgment has been pronounced on the beast and its image, and after the sentence of consumption and eventual destruction is well under way and obvious enough to be noticed.

The fire and brimstone symbolise complete destruction, the eventual fate of the beast and its image (later referred to as the "*false prophet*") by their being cast into "*a lake of fire burning with brimstone*". (Revelation 19:20). The torment of the adherents of the false systems, symbolised by fire and brimstone, is their

distress as they witness the gradual but perceivable consumption of the systems to which they have given their devotion and allegiance. The devotees of these systems in former centuries have gone into the grave, and therefore cannot know what is happening during the time of the third angel's message, nor be tormented by the process of consumption, because the state of the dead, as recorded in Ecclesiastes 9:5 and 10, Psalm 6:5 and many other places is a state of non-existence and therefore a state of knowing nothing.

The torment of the devotees occurs *"in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb"*. Why is this said? In response it would seem that the prophecy refers to the *"time of the end"* or the *"latter days"* in which the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, is overseeing the consumption and eventual destruction of the false religious systems. With His holy angels, the Lamb is bringing about the downfall of the Papal and Protestant systems, and therefore the devotees and adherents of these systems are tormented by the mental distress they suffer because of the destruction being accomplished upon the religious systems which they follow and worship.

The tormented worshippers do not comprehend what is happening because they do not understand God's purpose to bring to an end this order of things in all its aspects, religious, social, political and commercial, and to replace the existing unjust order with His righteous Kingdom.

14:11 The smoke of the torment of the worshippers is a symbol of the darkness and confusion of people's minds as they witness the consumption of the beast and its image. Many devotees of the religious systems sincerely believe they are doing God service by devoting their mental and physical powers to God within and through these systems, and it is very difficult, usually impossible, to persuade them otherwise. Seeing the gradual decline of these systems means that the worshippers are in continual distress and perplexity. *"They have no rest day nor night"* as they see the systems to which they are devoted declining more and more.

The statement that *"the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever"* has often been taken to mean endless misery and torment. But the worshippers, the devotees of the religious systems mentioned above, are not in literal fires or flames, they

are simply spectators of the consumption and inevitable destruction of the beast and its image.

The prophet Daniel wrote of this process in chapter 7, verses 11 and 26; *"I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame"..... ""They shall take away his dominion to consume and to destroy it unto the end."*

The Apostle Paul, when speaking of the same religious systems, wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 *"Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the manifestation (epiphaneia) of his presence (parousia)"*.

The phrase *"for ever and ever"* is more exactly rendered *"for ages of ages"* as in the Diaglott. In the present context it should be understood to mean "continuously" or "uninterruptedly" until the intended purpose is achieved, namely destruction of the false systems, which will not continue for ever, but whose destruction will be accomplished in God's due time.

14:12 Can we know when the third angel's message began to be announced? Daniel's time prophecies can help us here, as they have already done in locating the time periods of the messages of the first two angels.

In reply to Daniel's questions in chapter 12:6 and 8, the angel included in his reply, *"Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days"*. This is another time mark, having as its starting point the year 539 AD, the same as the 1260 and 1290 prophetic years already discussed. The 1335 prophetic days fulfilled as years bring us to the year 1874.

The angel did not tell Daniel what was to be expected at the end of 1,290 years, nor did he tell Daniel what was to be expected at the end of the 1,335 years. A discussion of the significance of these time prophecies may be found in our book "Notes on the Book of Daniel", pages 315 and 316.

It would seem that from the year 1874, the end of the 1335 years of prophecy, there began that condition of obscurity, perplexity and distress, symbolised by the "smoke" of verse 11, as the devotees of the beast and its image became aware that they were witnessing the decline in power and influence of the

religious systems whose "marks" they bore in their "foreheads" and "hands".

God's people see all this as a blessing because they see in this the fulfilment of prophecy and the progress towards their redemption. They would like to help the distressed ones out of their torment, but can only accomplish this by directing them to the Scriptures, which regrettably is often difficult to do.

Further comments on the prophecies believed to be fulfilled in 1874 will be made in the notes on the next verse.

FROM HENCEFORTH AND THE HARVESTS

¹³*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

14:13 The RV renders the last clause *"for their works do follow with them"*, Phillips MEV has *"their labours and their deeds go with them"*; the Jerusalem Bible has *"their good deeds go with them"*, while the NEB has *"they take with them the record of their deeds"*.

The phrase in this verse *"from henceforth"* is very significant because it marks a point in time differing between what has occurred before and what is to occur after this point in time in the experience of the saints, whose patience in faith and obedience has been commended in verse 12.

Can this point in time be located? We believe it can, not necessarily an hour or a day, but a year in the Gospel Age. The association of this verse with the previous verse, which is part of the third angel's message, suggests that the time for the beginning of the third angel's message (1874) is also the time mark for the beginning of the time *"from henceforth"*. This seems to be a reasonable and straightforward understanding, linking the same point of time to mark the beginning of the fulfilment of the two prophecies.

It is contended, therefore, that the year 1874 witnessed a special blessing for those dying in the Lord from that time onward; a blessing not experienced by those who had died in the Lord before 1874, the date of the beginning of the *period "from henceforth"*.

Amongst Christian people there are two general views about what happens to people when they die. The majority of Christians believe that people who have died continue in existence as disembodied souls or spirits in either a state of bliss, or undergoing some kind of refining or purgatorial experience, or in torment and misery. Many Christians on the other hand believe that people who have died are in a state of non-existence, knowing and experiencing nothing, until raised to life again by the Lord Jesus Christ in the resurrection.

The blessing "*from henceforth*" promised in our verse cannot have any meaning to those who believe that those who die continue to exist as souls or spirits, because at the moment of death, so it is believed, those who die "*in the Lord*" go to be with Him immediately in heaven.

We have shown in many of our publications that the Scriptures clearly teach that the dead are indeed in a state of non-existence, knowing nothing. This teaching will not be again discussed here, but the reader is invited to read some of our booklets such as "The Dead - Where are They?", "Everlasting Punishment", and "Do the Dead Communicate?" and consult relevant Scriptures on the subject, such as Psalm 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; 115:17; Isaiah 38:18,19; Ecclesiastes 9:4-6,10; John 11:11-14, 25; Acts 2:34; 1 Corinthians 15:16-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14.

The believers in Christ in the Gospel Age are not exempt from going down into the grave as their lives end, and remaining in that state of non-existence until such time as the Lord Jesus Christ comes for them and raises them to life again, as He has promised to do. But Christian believers in the Gospel Age have been given a special promise that each will be changed from an earthly existence to a heavenly existence, that is, each will no longer be a human being, but will be raised to life as a spirit being at such time as the Lord Jesus Christ comes for them.

The promise to the human race in general is that all people, apart from true and sincere Christian believers, will be raised to life again as human beings to live on earth forever, if they will believe and obey God. The reader is invited to read our booklet "The New Era", and consult the relevant and numerous Scriptures on the Kingdom of God.

So what is meant by the blessing promised to *"the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth"*? We should note that the inspired Word expresses a two-fold promise:

1. those who die in the Lord *"may rest from their labours"* and
2. *"their works do follow with them"*.

We need to consider the two parts of the promised blessing together to gain a balanced understanding. The meaning seems to be that those who *"die in the Lord from henceforth"* may rest from their labours and also continue working, that is, they do not experience the state in death of ceasing to exist and knowing nothing. In them, from the henceforth time, will be fulfilled the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52. They will be *"changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"* from their present existence as human beings to a new spirit existence, in which new estate they will be able to continue to serve the Lord without the work being or seeming laborious, as it sometimes may be under present imperfections (2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Such a blessing as this has never been given in past ages, nor during the greater part of the Gospel Age. It has begun only *"from henceforth"*.

How long will the period *"from henceforth"* last? We can say only until there are no more remaining to *"die in the Lord"*. We do not know when the last faithful saint will die. Only the Lord knows that.

But let us ponder the prospect of being changed when our time comes *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"* from our present earthly existence to a heavenly one, and so be able to be like the Lord Jesus, and see Him as He is, as we are told in 1 John 3:2.

Whether we agree or do not agree with these comments and interpretation of the blessing promised in our verse 13, we should continue to be *"stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

THE HARVESTS – THE FIRST VISION

¹⁴*And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*

¹⁵*And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.*

¹⁶*And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.*

This vision of the harvest is also a vision relating to the end of the Gospel Age.

The end of the Jewish Age was likened by the Lord Jesus to a harvest. His disciples were likened to harvest workers, He Himself was the Master over the workers, and the heavenly Father was the Lord of the harvest. The harvest to be reaped consisted of Jews who would believe the truth then being preached, and the reaping tool, represented by the sickle, was the truth of the Gospel message of life and salvation (John 4: 35-38; Matthew 9:36-38; Luke 10:1,2).

In the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, recorded in Matthew 13:24-30 with its explanation in verses 36 to 43, the Lord Jesus gave an illustration of Gospel Age conditions among the people of God, committed and nominal. The field, He said, was the world or social order, the good seed represented the children of the kingdom sown by Jesus' teachings in the world, while the tares represented the children of the evil one sown amongst, and allowed to grow together, with the children of the kingdom in the world or social order. The children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one are to be allowed to grow together during the Gospel Age, because any attempt to separate the tares from the wheat during that time could have resulted in damage to the wheat.

The Lord Jesus also said that the harvest represented the end of the age, and that the reapers should gather the tares into bundles for burning, and the wheat into the barn of the Lord of the harvest.

The reapers are the angels, said the Lord. The word "angel" is the Greek word "angelos", taken over into the English language. When people speak of angels they generally have in mind

heavenly spirit beings, but the Greek word in the New Testament, and the corresponding Hebrew word "malak" in the Old Testament, each has a wider application than heavenly spirit beings. Both the Hebrew and Greek words mean "messenger", and they are used sometimes of human beings and sometimes of impersonal things such as winds and flames, as well as of heavenly spirit beings.

In Malachi 3:1 the word "messenger" in its first occurrence refers to John the Baptist, a human being, in his appointed role as forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ at His first advent. In its second occurrence in Malachi 3:1, the word "messenger" refers to the man Christ Jesus as messenger of the New Covenant at His first advent. In both cases the word "messenger" is used to translate the Hebrew word "malak" meaning "angel".

In Matthew 11:10 is the record of a reference by the Lord Jesus of that part of Malachi 3:1 which refers to John the Baptist as *"the messenger before thy face"*, and here "messenger" is a translation of the Greek word "angelos".

In Hebrews 1:7 it is said that God *"maketh his angels spirits (or winds) and his ministers a flame of fire."* This is a quotation from Psalm 104:4, showing that God sometimes uses impersonal, natural things such as winds and flames as His messengers or "angels".

In Hebrews 1:13 and 14 it is further said of the holy, heavenly angels, *"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"*.

Jesus also said as recorded in Matthew 18:10: *"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven"*.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as the *"archangel"* or *"chief angel"* (Strong's reference 743), indicating that He is the Chief Messenger of the Heavenly Father, with all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18).

From the foregoing references it is clear that God has a variety of angels or messengers, and it is also clear that the highest class of His messengers, the heavenly beings, are active in service and ministrations to God's people during the Gospel Age. The question then arises, which of the various classes of angels or messengers are the "reapers" in the parable of "The Wheat and the Tares"?

It would seem from the foregoing references that all classes of messengers are included in the harvest activities, as they have been so utilised in all the work of the Gospel Age.

14:14 The vision being now considered is therefore understood to be a representation of the Lord Jesus, wearing the golden crown of divinely appointed rulership, seated on a white cloud symbolising the purity and righteousness of all His actions, and having in His hand a "*sharp sickle*" symbolising the truth of the Scriptures, which will be the means of harvesting or separating the lovers of truth and righteousness from the lovers of self and unrighteousness, and also the apathetic who are content to drift along in life without purpose or direction.

14:15 To Him "*that sat on the cloud*" comes the message out of the temple, from God's dwelling place, that He is to "*thrust in*" or "*send forth* (as in the RV and Diaglott) *thy sickle and reap*". So the Lord Jesus sends forth the messengers of truth as reapers to the harvest: messengers heavenly and earthly, all under His power and direction to accomplish this great work. The message of Scriptural truth is delivered by these messengers to all parts of the field (Matthew 24:31), and the message of truth accomplishes the intended purpose of separation, and gathers the elect to the truth of God's Word, as indicated in Luke 17:34 to 37. And so, as we are told in the vision, the harvest of the earth is reaped at God's appointed time.

THE HARVESTS - THE SECOND VISION

¹⁷*And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.*

¹⁸*And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.*

¹⁹*And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.*

²⁰*And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*

14:17,18 Here is another harvest vision, but one greatly differing from the one just considered. This latter vision concerns the end of the present evil age, and the end of all its evil activities.

Another angel is said to come out of the temple in heaven, *"he also having a sharp sickle"*. This angel must be a divinely sent messenger, because he came out of the temple, God's dwelling place, but he is not identified.

After him came another angel, but this angel *"came out from the altar"* with power or authority over the altar fire. In the Jewish Age, the high priest had authority over the altar fire. The Jewish regime has now passed away and the New Covenant is now in force with the Lord Jesus as High Priest. (Hebrews 7:11-28; 9:11-15) We may therefore understand that the second angel in the vision represents the Lord Jesus giving the command for the reaping of the clusters of the vine of the earth, for the grapes are fully ripe.

The *"vine of the earth"* is the final development of or outgrowth from the present social order. The vine in this vision is not a pleasant plant. It is quite unlike the vine of John 15:1-8, which is identified by the Lord Jesus as Himself, the True Vine, with His Father the Husbandman, and true believers as the branches yielding the fruits of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

The sap or spirit which nourishes the vine of the earth is *"earthly, sensual, devilish"*, producing *"confusion and every evil work."* (James 3:15,16) The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, is quite specific; *"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5: 19 to 21).

All this evil fruit is the outcome or production of the spirit of the present evil world surging through the vine of the earth. The Apostle John wrote; *"Love not the world, neither the things that*

are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2: 15 to 17).

In contrast, of course, as the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5: 22,23).

14:19,20 The angel with the sharp sickle *"thrust in his sickle into the earth,"* or social order. Again it seems reasonable to understand that the sickle represents truth, but this time the truth relates to secular subjects such as politics, economics, commercial and social matters. Truth on these subjects exposes the inability of sinful humans to manage their own governmental and social affairs for the benefit of individuals and whole nations. Democracy, perhaps the best governmental form of an unsatisfactory lot, has not been able to bring about peace and safety; and other forms of government, mostly dictatorships of one kind and another, have certainly not succeeded in bringing peace and stability to the peoples of the earth.

Soon, we believe, the whole appalling world situation will have gone as far as the Lord will permit, and the clusters of the vine of the earth will be in *"the great winepress of the wrath of God"* to be trodden out, that is, subjected to the pressure of Divine displeasure.

Then will be revealed the failure of fallen and sinful humanity, manifested in the *"blood"*, that is, the sinful life of this evil order of things being forcefully removed by God in a continuing time of trouble foretold by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24:21, 22.

The winepress of Divine wrath is to be *"trodden without"*, that is, outside, *"the city"*, meaning not under the control or jurisdiction of the city. The context in which this "city" is mentioned indicates that reference is made to a city already named and known, the fallen city of Babylon, first mentioned in Revelation 14:8.

The vine of the earth is so extensive that the blood, or juice of the vine, is produced to a depth *"even unto the horse bridles"*, enough to submerge a standing human being of average height,

and to an extent of *"a thousand and six hundred furlongs"* The picture seems to be that of the extent of the manifestation of the evil spirit or disposition of humanity, so widespread that none will be able to stand against it. All earth's people will be involved, and will be powerless to stop it. But the saints will be taken away before the culmination of this time of trouble (Luke 21:36).

What is meant by *"the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs"*? The measure of a furlong is not the exact equivalent of the Greek "stade", the word used in the text. The Greek "stade" is 176 yards in length, while the English "furlong" is 220 yards.

It is difficult to reach an understanding of the symbolism of the 1600 furlongs or stadion (the plural of "stade" as given by Dr. Strong, reference 4712). The prophecy is not yet fulfilled, so any interpretation offered is bound to be tentative and subject to amendment as events and developments in the social order occur.

The suggestion put forward by E.C.Henningses, and other brethren who have addressed this subject, is that the "furlongs" may be transposed into time, and the calculation made amounts to five and one half days, which become five and one half years at the Divinely authorised rate of a day for a year. This length of time may be taken as the length of time of the winepress trouble. Whether this interpretation is correct remains to be seen.

At the end of the winepress trouble, the Lord Jesus will speak peace to the nations. God's Kingdom will take control, and Jesus will establish the promised new heaven and new earth in which righteousness will dwell. We learn this from many other Scriptures such as Psalm 46:6-11; and 2 Peter 3:7-13.

CHAPTER 10

THE LAST SEVEN PLAGUES

REVELATION 15:1 - 16:21

¹*And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.*

²*And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.*

³*And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.*

⁴*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.*

Interlude

We have seen in the interpretations suggested that the order in which John saw the visions does not necessarily mean that the fulfilments of the visions were to take place in the same order. This is a principle of interpretation of the visions given to John, and must be followed in order to gain a coherent and consistent understanding of the visions graciously given for the enlightenment and blessing of God's people.

In considering the large-scale visions, it has been found necessary to go back once from the end to the beginning of the Gospel Age; twice from the end of the Kingdom Age back to the beginning of the Gospel Age; once from the end of the Gospel Age back to the end of the 1260 years of prophecy in 1799 in order to follow a new vision from the time of its beginning. Even within some visions there have been occasions to go back.

And now, in considering the vision of the last seven plagues, it will be necessary to look back from the end of the Gospel Age to which the preceding vision brought us; but not so far back as in some other visions. For, beginning with the vision of the three angels, and their messages (Revelation 14:6), the visions, with

one exception, tend to concentrate on the closing section of the Gospel Age, until, in the beginning of Revelation 20, the visions again look forward to Kingdom Age glories.

GOD'S WRATH IS ENDED

15:1 The clause in the KJV *"for in them is filled up the wrath of God"* is more accurately rendered in the NIV as *"because with them God's wrath is completed,"* and in the RSV as *"for with them the wrath of God is ended"*.

Seven angels or messengers have seven plagues which are the last to come upon this present evil order, because in them the wrath of God is completed. The vision appears to be an amplification of the statement in Revelation 11:18, where, under the sounding of the seventh trumpet, it was said *"thy wrath is come"*. The vision of these plagues will reveal some details of the completion of God's wrath against the present evil order of things.

God's wrath is destructive in its application, because God's purpose is to abolish forever the present political, ecclesiastical, commercial and social arrangements amongst earth's peoples, and replace them with His own righteous kingdom, which will cause His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is good to know that God's wrath will be finished in this complete destruction of the present social order, even though a vast number of unrepentant and disobedient humanity will remain to be dealt with and educated to make them aware of God's offer of salvation and life based on the knowledge of the truth that there is one God and one Mediator between Him and the human race, Jesus Christ, Who gave His life as a ransom and sin offering to purchase and redeem the whole human race (1 Timothy 2:4-6)

And now it appears that, as with some of the remarkable visions shown to John, the vision of the last plagues has a preliminary vision which must first be considered.

15:2 Until now, the sea of glass has not come under notice since the first mention of it in Revelation 4:6. In the discussion on that section, it was commented that the sea of glass was not a body of water of glasslike smoothness, but an article of furniture made of glass. It seems that the meaning is the same as here, with the *"sea of glass"* representing the cleansed condition of

the New Covenant royal priesthood who come to serve and worship God on His grand throne. The glass was *"mingled with fire"*, which seems to represent the cleansing process of God's chosen people who have been saved *"yet so as by fire"* (1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12).

John also saw *"them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God"*. This image of the overcomers would represent those who have been raised from death to stand with harps, representing a condition of harmony, in readiness to sing praise to God.

Instead of the overcomers standing "on" the sea of glass, most modern versions have "by" or "beside" the sea of glass. The purpose of the water in the Jewish temple and the laver containing water in the courtyard of the tabernacle was to provide for the priests to wash their hands and feet before performing their priestly duties.

This washing foreshadowed the *"washing of water by the word"* of the members of *the "royal priesthood"*, the saints of the Gospel Age, so that they might be cleansed by faith in the blood shed by Jesus Christ, and might walk worthily, having their minds and conduct cleansed because of their faith in God through the only way, Jesus Christ. The vision seen by John represents the risen saints of the Gospel Age having been cleansed by their faith and now in God's sight perfectly clean for evermore.

Is this vision of the resurrected overcomers a repetition or duplication of that related in Revelation 14:1-5? The answer seems to be that this is not so. The question is important, but to give reasons for this negative answer, it will be necessary to anticipate a little.

Firstly, in both visions there is a song. In Revelation 14:3 it is said that no-one *"could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth"*. The song was exclusively theirs, but the words are not given. However, in Revelation 15:3 and 4 the words are given, and we are told that this song was also known in the time of Moses, so that although the Gospel Age overcomers sing this song, they are not the only ones.

Secondly, in Revelation 14:1-5 the whole number of the joint-heirs - 144,000 - is included, whereas in Revelation 15:2 no number is stated. Not only is no number stated, but in Revelation 16:15, under the pouring out of the sixth plague (the second last plague), there is an exhortation to God's people to watch - "*Blessed is he that watcheth*". This seems to tell us that some of God's people are still on earth seeking to make their calling and election sure.

For these two reasons, it seems clear that while Revelation 15: 1-4 is a vision of Gospel Age overcomers raised and glorified, the vision does not cover the full number of the Gospel Age overcomers. It is therefore to be understood that this vision is not a repetition or duplication of Revelation 14:1-5.

Revelation 16:15 shows us that up to the second last plague, there are still some of the Lord's saints needing a reminder and an exhortation. How are we then to understand Revelation 15:2 which tells us of some who have finished their course and been glorified? How is it that some have received their heavenly reward while others are still on earth?

An answer to these questions has been suggested in comparing the blessing promised in Daniel 12:12 with the change mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52 and the "*henceforth*" time of Revelation 14:13. The time prophecy of Daniel 12:12, the "*one thousand three hundred and five and thirty days*" brings us to the year 1874, the year in which the third angel's message began (Revelation 14:9). The special blessing promised in Daniel 12:12 is that believers who die in the Lord from that time (1874) will be changed "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*", and their works will follow with them. If this is correct, then believers who have died from 1874 onwards have not remained asleep in death, but have been changed immediately on finishing their earthly lives to be with the Lord in heaven.

This understanding also requires the belief that the "*dead in Christ*" would have been raised to their heavenly reward either in the period of time beginning in 1874 or shortly before, as indicated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

Whatever we may think of these explanations of events affecting the Lord's people in 1874 and beyond, they do enable us to understand the passages in Revelation chapters 15 and 16 which speak of some of the Lord's people in the heavenly places and

some still on earth with their earthly courses still to be completed, and eventually be numbered among *those "called, and chosen, and faithful"* (Revelation 17:14).

One question remains. Revelation 15:2 speaks of *"them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name"*, as we have seen. Are we to understand that the overcomers of Revelation 15:2 include all the saints from the beginning of the Gospel Age who lived and died before the time of the beast and his image?

The answer has to be "yes". The *"mystery of iniquity"*, which later became the *"beast"* of Revelation 13, was working even in apostolic times, as the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, and its influence had to be recognised and overcome by the Lord's saints who lived in those earlier times of the Gospel Age. Those who gained the victory over the "beast", as yet unrevealed but beginning to work, should therefore be understood as being included in the vision of Revelation 15:2.

15:3,4 The song the saints sing is one of glory, in full accord with the inspired words of Moses, the servant of God, and with the gracious and redeeming words of the Lamb, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and with the teaching of His inspired apostles and disciples who spoke and wrote on His behalf. The song of praise has been known and sung from earliest times. The holy prophets of God have praised Him in this manner, and all of God's people whose minds have not been clouded by ritual, formality and tradition, have rejoiced in the praise expressed in this song of Moses and the Lamb: *"Great and marvellous are thy works Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of the Ages"*. The KJV has *"King of saints"*, but the RV, NIV, REV and NEB all have *"King of the ages"*. We should also note that the word "saints" is translated "nations" by Today's English Version, Phillips Version, the Jerusalem Bible and the Diaglott.

The traditions and teachings of men and also women in the Jewish and Gospel Ages have made void the Word of God to such an extent that many people, believing without question the teachings of unbelievers, are not able to realise that the ways of the King of the Ages are both just and true. The theory of evolution has led millions to think that God has never wrought any work, while secular teachings of philosophy and humanism often seek to deny the very existence of God.

But believers understand and are sustained by faith in the knowledge that in due time the King of the Ages will see to it that, through His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, people will come to know better, for all are to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4-6; John 1:9).

Even among those who believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ, there are errors that cloud the appreciation of the justice and truth of God's ways. The problems of pain and the prevalence of evil, for example, disturb many to such an extent that they become weak, and sometimes lose their faith, so that they have no solutions to these problems, and no means of finding solutions.

The solution to all problems is found in the Word of God, and it is the prayer of faithful, believing people that all who are troubled by the problems of life and death may seek a helping hand and be led to the Scriptures and to an understanding of the message of salvation by faith in God through Jesus Christ. The reassuring prophecy of Revelation 15:4 is well rendered in the NIV; *"Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you."*

There are many references to show that this song was known in earlier times. One from Psalm 86 will suffice; *"Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone."* (Psalm 86: 6 to 10)

We know that God has *"made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth"* as Paul said in Acts 17:26. God has made all the nations, and they shall all come to worship before Him, *"for thy righteous acts are made manifest"*. Many of earth's nations no longer exist, and many millions of individual inhabitants are dead, but this will not prevent the fulfilment of the words of the song.

The people of Nineveh and the queen of the south will rise from the grave; the people of Sodom and Samaria will return to their former estate; the slain children of Bethlehem will come again to their own border and be reunited with their mothers; Assyria will be known as the work of God's hands; while Israel's former evil neighbours will also have the opportunity to join in the sincere worship of God and will be blest in doing so. (Matthew 2:17,18;

11:20-24; 12:41,42; Ezekiel 16:44-63; Isaiah 19:23-25; Jeremiah 12:14-16; 31:15-17). It is also said in Jeremiah 12:17 that any nation that will not obey shall be utterly plucked up and destroyed.

The scope of the glorious song of Revelation 15: 3 and 4 comprehends things that are to be accomplished in the Gospel and Kingdom Ages, and goes well beyond the time of the seven last plagues. The plagues with all their accompanying troubles are among the manifestations of God's righteous acts, but those who experience the effects of the plagues do not at once realise this, because the seventh plague finds them unrepentant and blaspheming God.

After further comments on Revelation 15:5-8, the plagues will be considered one by one as they prophesy God's judgment on this present evil social order, leading on to the destruction of secular and ecclesiastical systems and the final action of the establishment of God's righteous Kingdom, promised through the ages and finally fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and also the Son of God.

THE POURING OUT OF THE PLAGUES

⁵*And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:*

⁶*And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.*

⁷*And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.*

⁸*And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.*

We should be aware that in the New Testament three words are translated as temple: "Oikos" (only in Luke 11:51 meaning a dwelling or a home - Strong 3624), "hieron" and "naos." The latter two words occur many times. Strong's Concordance (2411) tells us that "hieron" signifies a sacred place, that is, the entire precincts of the Temple at Jerusalem or elsewhere, while "naos" (3485) denotes the central sanctuary itself. In the Revelation the word "temple" is always a translation of "naos".

15:5-7 Having described what he saw and heard as recorded in Revelation 15:2-4, John now returns to the main subject referred to in verse 1. He sees *"the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony"* opened.

The vision takes our minds back to the nation of Israel, who after leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness, finally entered the promised land of Canaan, where God gave them directions for the building of the tabernacle, a divinely appointed place for the worship of God. This structure was known as *"the tabernacle of testimony"*, *"the tent of testimony"*, and *"the tabernacle of witness"* (Numbers 1: 50, 53; 9:15; 17:7,8; 18:2).

The most sacred and exclusive article of furniture in the sanctuary was the ark, with its covering overlaid with pure gold, known as the mercy seat, where God's presence was manifested. The ark was known as *"the ark of the testimony"* (Exodus 25:22).

The Israelites also had a law given to them by God through Moses. The ten commandments of the law were written by the finger of God on two tables of stone. These were known as the *"tables of testimony"* (Exodus 31:18), and they were to be placed in the ark of the testimony (Exodus 25:16; 40:20).

In addition to the two tables of stone, all the many words of the law, including the ten commandments, were written by Moses in a book (Strong 5612 - a writing or scroll) which was also to be placed in the ark as a testimony. The purpose of this testimony is found in Deuteronomy 31: 24 to 26; *And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee."*

In verses 27-30 Moses prophesied the disobedience and rebellion of the Israelites and the punishments God would bring upon them. Thus we are led to understand that the purpose of the tabernacle of testimony, the ark of testimony, the tables of testimony and the book or scroll of the whole law placed in the ark was a testimony against Israel.

All these things were shadows, of which the Apostle wrote to the Hebrews in chapter nine, verse 23, that they were "*the patterns of things in the heavens*". These patterns, or Law Covenant types, have passed away, but the heavenly things have remained during the Gospel Age; among them "*the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven*", which John saw opened, as recorded in our verse 5.

In the comments on Revelation 11:19 it was said that the heavenly tabernacle or temple is not a material, physical structure, but a symbol of the New Covenant form of worship, which began at the commencement of the Gospel Age. This form of worship is the approach to God in spirit and in truth, made in the only way acceptable to God, that is, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour (John 14:6).

But the New Covenant form of worship is also a "*tabernacle of testimony*", the purpose of which is indicated by the fact that seven angels emerge from it to pour out seven plagues. As the earthly tabernacle was a testimony against Israel, so the heavenly tabernacle is a testimony against Christendom in general.

The opening of the tabernacle which John saw does not mean opening in the sense of inaugurating a new institution, because that inauguration was done at the beginning of the Gospel Age, as described in the comments on Revelation 11:19. The vision that John records in chapter fifteen pertains to the closing section of the Gospel Age. The opening of "*the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven*" may be considered as the opening of the door to allow the seven angels to emerge to deliver their severe but just testimony.

The seven angels coming out of the temple, that is, the sanctuary, are pure and holy, as indicated by their pure and white linen garments. Their golden girdles indicate that their service was divinely authorised.

One of the four living creatures, symbolic of Divine Providence, directs the events described, showing that God is providentially directing these operations. We are not told which of the four living creatures is involved, but this living creature gives seven golden vials or bowls full of the wrath of God to the seven angels. The bowls are full, indicating the fullness of God's wrath against the present evil order of things.

15:8 The filling of the sanctuary *"with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power"* is an indication of Divine approval of the action taken. God's approval and the association of Himself with proceedings were made manifest firstly at the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness, secondly in dealing with the rebellion of Korah, and thirdly at the dedication of the temple built by Solomon. On those occasions no-one could enter the tabernacle or the temple (Exodus 40:17-35; Numbers 16:1-43; 1 Kings 8:10, 11).

There is also an indication of definiteness and finality in this impressive sign of the sanctuary being filled with Divine glory and power. The matter is determined and fixed, and not subject to any appeal or amendment.

What was said of ancient Babylon is true also of Christendom, the Babylon of the Gospel Age, and the following words are appropriate. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord said; *"Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.* (Jeremiah 51: 8 and 9).

THE PLAGUES POURED OUT

Chapter 16

¹*And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.*

²*And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.*

16:1,2 The seven angels are commanded to go forth and pour out their bowls of Divine wrath upon the earth, that is, the social order among earth's peoples.

The first sight of the vision of the seven angels with the plagues is recorded in Revelation 15:1, which is like a straightforward announcement of what was to come, a title or heading over what was to be related. But as soon as the title is set down, another vision described in Revelation 15:2-4 was shown to John.

This was a preliminary vision because it was shown before the vision of the pouring out of the plagues. Whether this vision was fulfilled before the fulfilment of the pouring out of the plagues is open to question.

In Revelation 15:5 the vision of the seven angels is resumed, and is not again interrupted.

THE FIRST PLAGUE

It seems reasonable to understand that the first plague began as far back from our time as 1789, the commencement of that unprecedented social and political upheaval, the French Revolution; and the beginning of the closing decade of the 1,260 years of Papal ascendancy as prophesied in the book of Daniel and also in the Revelation.

In 1789 there fell upon the worshippers of the Papal beast and its Protestant image the *"noisome and grievous sore"*, meaning the effects produced by the French Revolution. The word "noisome" is seldom used now, and means "offensive, harmful, injurious." The Greek word, of which "noisome" is a translation, is "kakos", and means, according to Strong's Concordance "injurious" (reference 2556).

The French Revolution was anti-God in its intention, because anti-Papacy was, in the minds of the people of France, the same as anti-God. At the time of the Revolution, there were comparatively few Protestants in France, but fears of what might happen were soon revealed in the Protestant state-church countries of Europe. The Revolution ended in 1795, and was soon followed by the Napoleonic wars which lasted until 1815. The Revolution and the wars which followed made all Europe - Papal, Protestant and Greek Orthodox - as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, very sore indeed. The soreness was not only in the ravages of war, but also in the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", which the French armies took with them wherever they went. The slogan was also brought to Britain by the British soldiers and sailors who served in foreign fields and seas in those years. The effects of the French Revolution and its aftermath did not end with Napoleon's downfall in 1815. Their influence is still felt even today.

THE SECOND PLAGUE

³*And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.*

16:3 Instead of "upon" the sea, the RV, Phillips MEV, and the RSV have "into" the sea. The masses of humanity in Papal and Protestant countries had the second plague come upon them, and they all "died". Their dying was not physical but symbolic, in the sense that a person "dies to" something and becomes "alive to" something else, that is, a person discards an old idea or way of life, and takes up new ways and a different lifestyle.

Paul writes that Christians should consider themselves *"to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:11).

The masses of people in Europe affected by the pouring out of the second plague became dead to their former governmental forms, and alive to revolutionary ideas. Their discontent broke out in the rebellions of 1848-9, which affected almost every European country. Not all thrones were overturned, but many changes were brought about. To the ruling powers the "sea" became *"as the blood of a dead man"*, that is, poisonous. Further information on the middle years of the nineteenth century may be found in chapter twelve of the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel" (pages 270-317).

THE THIRD PLAGUE

⁴*And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.*

⁵*And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.*

⁶*For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.*

⁷*And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*

16:4-7 In verse 4 the RV, Phillips MEV, the Jerusalem Bible and the RSV, have "into" instead of "upon the rivers and fountains of waters". In verse 5 the RV and all modern versions follow the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts more closely than the KJV does. The NIV reads, "And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments".

The third plague represents the devastating effect of so-called "higher criticism" and the theory of evolution upon *"the rivers and fountains of waters"*, that is, upon the sources and avenues of religious teaching in Christendom.

"Higher Criticism" is highly destructive of the faith once delivered to the saints, and of reverence for the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. The higher critical form of teaching does indeed turn "water" into "blood", making it unfit to drink. Higher Criticism has made such inroads into Christendom that Protestantism as a whole accepts most of its theories and pronouncements.

Roman Catholicism does not favour higher criticism, but is itself the foremost of all higher critics, because it claims that it (the Roman Catholic Church) as a teaching body is of greater authority than the Bible, and that the Church may, at its discretion, override the Bible, should that be considered necessary. In taking this attitude, the Papacy fulfils the Scripture which says of the *"little horn"* (a symbol of the Papacy), that he shall *"think to change times and laws"* (Daniel 7: 8, 25).

Thus, while condemning higher criticism as practised among Protestants, the Papacy has been practising similar principles for centuries before higher criticism was even thought of.

The theory of evolution, surely another of Satan's cunning tactics to divert people from the truth of God's Word, is a teaching deriving from worldly-minded scientists who ignore or oppose the Scriptures and propound materialistic theories of the origins of the universe, including our world and all that is in it, focusing particularly on the human race. Unfortunately most schools, colleges and universities of Western civilisation have embraced evolution and teach that humans have evolved from a ruthless "survival of the fittest" progression of nature.

According to many evolutionists, religion is held to be only inside people's heads, while evolution explains the real world. The Biblical teachings of a future life and a peaceful, stable and happy future world are dismissed as wishful thinking put forward to keep people from thinking too much about their unhappy lot in this life. Professor Richard Dawkins of Oxford University in an article published in the *Melbourne Age* of 24 September, 2001, attacked all the "Abrahamic religions" (including Christianity) as intrinsically slaughter-prone. His message that only belief in an afterlife would make a person capable of suicidal atrocities.

Such evolutionary assertions as these ignore the millions killed because of the ideologies of Hitler and Marx, and the deadly attacks of Japan's kamikaze pilots in the Second World War. The terrorists of this century have been well-schooled by secular and de-Christianised Western education into believing that there is no hope for people outside Islam, because they have simply developed from earlier life-forms, and do not owe any allegiance to a higher power. The Columbine school killers in the USA, one wearing a "natural selection" T-shirt, believed there was no afterlife and no future judgment, so why not kill as many as possible?

If we take the evolutionist view of the world to its logical conclusion, we end up with a godless and meaningless universe. Such a conclusion should bring home to all Christian believers the importance of having right beliefs. Having right beliefs matters firstly to our own eternal destiny and secondly to the eternal destiny of the whole human race. There is only one source of right belief, and that is the Word of God. Please see our book list for books containing further discussion on reasons for placing our faith and hope in the Bible.

We should note that the description of the third plague has two commendations. The "*angel of the waters*", that is, the angel who poured out this plague upon (or into) the waters, praises the righteousness of the Almighty for thus judging. The Papacy, and also some Protestants after the Reformation, have shed the blood of God's saints and prophets. God, Who has prohibited the eating and drinking of blood (Genesis 9:4), has now given them blood to drink. The "blood" would symbolise teachings and practices forbidden by God. They have shown themselves worthy of God's judgment.

The second commendation comes from the altar, not from "*another out of the altar*" as the KJV says. The evidence for this rendering is in the reading of the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts and most modern versions. This seems to mean that the sacrifice of Christ Himself commends this third plague and thus protests against higher criticism and evolutionary teaching.

Higher criticism cannot pass the test of the ransom, which, as William Tyndale said, is the "touchstone to try all teachings". Higher Criticism, in both its Protestant and Papal forms, is clearly

anti-ransom. The Protestant higher critic derides the ransom, the Papal higher critic overrides it.

The theory of evolution is a secular teaching which runs counter to the Scriptures, dismissing the need for the ransom. Christians should reject it utterly. Unfortunately many do not, and endeavour to dilute and manipulate the Scriptures to try and get around the plain teaching that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Therefore the altar says, *"Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments"* (RV).

THE FOURTH PLAGUE

⁸*And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.*

⁹*And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.*

16:8,9 In keeping with the symbolic interpretation of much of the Revelation put forward in these notes, the sun is to be taken as a symbol in the understanding of this plague. As the physical sun is the main source of light in the natural heaven, so the Papacy is the main source of light in the ecclesiastical heaven.

The outcome of fire, both literal and symbolic, is destruction. The fire in the fourth plague poured out on the sun is symbolic of the consumption of the Papal system, which will continue until the whole system is eventually destroyed. Feeling the effects of the consumption, the Papacy has responded by making, in the year 1870, an unprecedented claim, that of the infallibility of the Pope when speaking "ex cathedra", that is, from his chair or throne in his alleged official capacity as Christ's representative on earth. This doctrine of Papal infallibility was, and is, so inflammatory in its nature that its symbolic effect has been to scorch people's minds.

The Roman Catholic Church as a body, by its delegates assembled in a general council, was, and still is, authorised, so it is claimed, to override the Scriptures. Added to this presumption is the claim that infallibility is declared to reside in the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope in office at any particular time.

This was one of the "great words" that Daniel heard the "little horn" (the Papacy) speak while being consumed after its 1,260 years of dominion ended in 1799, as prophesied in Daniel 7:11, 25 and 26. Roman Catholics and other churches and

individuals have felt the heat of this claim of Papal infallibility, but few if any have opposed it or rejected it, nor have they repented and sought God's forgiveness, nor given Him praise and glory for His love and mercy in exercising righteous judgment.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE

¹⁰And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

¹¹And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

16:10,11 Shortly after the "great words" spoken under the influence of the fourth plague came the outpouring of the fifth plague. This latter plague came upon the Papal throne. The word translated "seat" in the KJV is rendered "throne" in the RV and all modern versions.

Up to this time in the Gospel Age (1870), the Papacy had had sovereignty over three Italian states. These three states stretched across Italy, separating the northern from the southern parts of the country. At this time, the spirit of nationhood was stirring, and the people desired unity of the country under one sovereign. The Papal states stood in the way of this unity of people and country.

It was also the time of the Gospel Age in which the Papacy's consumption was proceeding, so, it seems, just as God used the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, He used the aspirations of nationhood in Italy to end Papal sovereignty over its last remaining territories. The Papal military forces were small, and French troops were on guard in Rome. When the French troops were withdrawn because of the Franco-Prussian war, Victor Emmanuel was able to take Rome and proclaim himself King of a united Italy with Rome as its capital. Thus it came about that the kingdom of the Papal beast was "*full of darkness*", signifying obscurity and uncertainty.

The effect of this plague, following as it does the previous four plagues, was very painful to the devotees of the Papacy. The united Italy became a secular, limited monarchy, and freedom of religion was allowed to all churches and sects. This liberty did not immediately make much difference to the people of Italy generally, because they continued to remain under the domination of the priests. This domination has been steadily

decreasing since that time, and today large numbers of people have freed themselves from priestcraft and spiritual bondage.

The Pope retired to the Vatican in 1870, and was referred to as "the prisoner of the Vatican", as were many of his successors. Subsequently an arrangement was made between the Italian government and the Pope, by which the Italian government granted the Pope the Vatican premises and surrounding land to the extent of about 160 acres (approximately 65 hectares) and recognised the Pope as the temporal sovereign of this territory, now known as "Vatican City".

Because of the painful experiences of the plagues, the Papal devotees "*gnawed their tongues*" and "*blasphemed the God of heaven*". Blasphemy in one form or another was nothing new for the Papacy, but in the time of this plague, a new blasphemy was proclaimed in 1854 in the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. This doctrine holds that Mary was immaculately conceived in order that her Son, Jesus, might be born perfect and holy; thus making our Lord's perfection dependent upon the supposed perfection of His mother, rather than upon the miraculous power of God, His Heavenly Father.

There has never been any questioning of this doctrine, rather the reverse. In 1950 the doctrine of the bodily assumption into heaven of the Virgin Mary was proclaimed, contradicting the many Scriptural statements that flesh and blood cannot inhabit heaven nor can human eyes see the Lord in His heavenly estate.

Thus the Papacy and its devotees did not repent of their serious and blasphemous errors, but added to them. Therefore two more plagues were to come.

THE SIXTH PLAGUE

¹²*And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.*

¹³*And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.*

¹⁴*For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*

¹⁵*Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

¹⁶*And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.*

16:12 The symbolic significance of *"the great river Euphrates"* was discussed as part of the symbolism under the sixth trumpet when Revelation 9:14 was considered. It is, of course, acknowledged that some natural objects may have more than one symbolic significance in Scripture. The river Euphrates, however, in the Revelation, features four times, being twice mentioned by name and twice by allusion, and has the same significance in all four places. As defined in Revelation 17:15, the Euphrates represents the *"peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"* upon which sits mystic Babylon, just as the ancient city of Babylon was located on the natural Euphrates river.

Our understanding of the symbolism of the pouring out of the bowl on the symbolic Euphrates, and the drying up of its water, is assisted by remembering the strategy used by Darius the Mede in his war against ancient Babylon. Darius caused the literal Euphrates river to be "dried up", by having his men dig channels to divert the flow of the river from its natural course. Then the dry river bed became the road by which Darius's armies marched into ancient Babylon and captured it. Thus the way of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, kings from the east, was prepared in ancient times.

So we are led to understand that the drying up of the water of the symbolic Euphrates signifies the diversion of people and their allegiance from mystic Babylon and Christendom generally. This has been continuing for some time and now is proceeding more and more quickly. Church membership and attendance are diminishing, churches are amalgamating, and church buildings and property are being sold. Materialism, material possessions, worldly influence and greater affluence are often blamed, but the basic cause is that God is allowing, and perhaps to some extent causing, the diversion of the interest and support of the people from Christendom.

God is working through Jesus Christ, Who is operating according to the Divine commission given to Him, as recorded in Daniel 7: 14, 25 and 26 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Many Bible students see

this diversion as one of the signs of Christ's presence and His "standing up" since the end of the 1260 years of prophecy in 1799, as mentioned in Daniel 12:1.

Christendom as a whole does not recognise the reasons for its problems with diminishing congregations and loss of church property, and seeks to try to preserve the social order and civilisation by praying and working for peace and improvement in social conditions, without realising that God's intention is to take away this evil social order and replace it with His righteous order. The emphasis of prayer should be "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*" as the Lord taught us.

The diversion of popular support from Christendom prepares the way for "*the kings from the east*". These are not Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, but Jesus Christ and His joint-heirs, the kingdom of priests who will reign over the earth in God's new and righteous order. But before these are revealed to the world, (Romans 8:19, Colossians 3:4) there must be a further demonstration of the futility on the part of Christendom in trying to save that which is doomed.

16:13,14 Out of the mouth of the dragon (political power) and that of the beast (the Papacy), and that of the false prophet (Protestantism as a whole, also called "*the image of the beast*"), come three unclean spirits like frogs. The unclean spirits would represent wrong teachings.

The wrong teaching or advocacy on the part of the dragon, or political power, is militarism. The secular powers have large standing armies, navies and air forces, supported by vast research projects as well as arms and weapons production centres and factories. The pretext for these developments has been for defence purposes, but in more recent times, attacks on countries have been made and some countries have been invaded.

The wrong teaching on the part of the Papacy is that the Church should support the forces of the State in bringing about peace and the defeat of nations and peoples who are opposed or indifferent to the Papacy's doctrines and practices.

The wrong teaching on the part of Protestantism is similar to that of the Papacy, but with more emphasis on prayers for peace and involvement in social programs and activities. Assistance for the

poor and needy are certainly commendable and should not be set aside or adversely criticised, but the emphasis of Christianity should be on spreading the truth of the gospel and salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. This is not to say that Christians should do nothing about assisting the poor and needy, but social programs and activities to benefit the poor are not advocated in the Scriptures, nor did the early Church engage in organised programs to assist needy people generally. Therefore the matter is left open for individual Christians to do good to all as they have the opportunity, as Paul writes in Galatians 6:10.

The wrong teachings outlined above are directly contrary to the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His chosen apostles and disciples. Jesus said, "*Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world*". He prayed that they might be sanctified or set apart from the world by the truth of the Gospel message and the Word of God. Any prayer for the secular power, the State, was that peace might prevail to allow the work of spreading the Word to continue unhindered (John 15:19; 17:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:1-8).

The wrong teachings work "miracles" or "signs" as rendered by the RV, NIV and RSV, similar perhaps to those described in the comments on Revelation 13: 13 and 14. The purpose of the teachings outlined above is to gather together the governments and authorities of the world to "war" (not battle) of that great day of Almighty God. The "war" as translated by the RV, Today's EV, the Jerusalem Bible and the Diaglott, is not nation against nation, but rather all nations against God and His Son and joint-heirs.

The "war" is not with physical or carnal weapons, for such would be useless, but a war of ideas. The ideas and motivation of the world powers are that they themselves can work together to bring about world peace and security, contrary to and in ignorance of God's promises to overthrow this evil world order and set up His righteous Kingdom on earth under His rightful King, Jesus Christ.

16:15 The RV, RSV, NEB and the Diaglott all place brackets around this verse, and for good reason, as it is really a parenthetical statement. The verse expresses an exhortation to God's people still remaining on earth and seeking to make their calling and election sure while the process of consumption continues. The Lord comes as a thief, as the Scriptures tell us (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 3:3; 16:15).

A blessing is promised to those who watch, remain awake and alert, and do not allow themselves to be led astray by the influences abroad in the world, especially the wrong teachings previously mentioned in the comments on verses 13 and 14. The blessing promised requires believers to "keep" their "garments", that is the righteousness imputed to them because of their faith, so that they are not vulnerable to false teaching and loss of faith, and do not need to be ashamed before God. To them comes a blessing now and a greater one hereafter.

16:16 Under the influence of the wrong teachings, the governments and authorities of the present evil order are gathered together to a place called Armageddon. In former times this place was a scene of several battles, but in Revelation 16:16 the name is used symbolically, and means "a rendezvous in the mountains." Mountains in Scripture often symbolise kingdoms, while a rendezvous is a meeting place.

The meeting place would seem to mean some common ground of thoughts, ideas and purposes, on account of which the nations and kingdoms of the world could reach agreement to combat the influences that are alienating people from them, symbolised by the drying up of the river "Euphrates." The subject of "Armageddon" is more fully discussed in the publication "Armageddon - What is it? What Does it Mean?" which is available free on request.

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

¹⁷And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

¹⁸And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

¹⁹And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

²⁰And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

²¹And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

16:17 The "air" in this verse is not earth's natural atmosphere but a symbol of the region of influence on people's minds, as when we say "war (or some well-known happening) is in the air". So the seventh and final plague affects people's minds. A great voice comes from the throne of God saying, "*It is done*". The outpouring of divine wrath upon the present evil order is now completed.

16:18,19 Among earth's peoples are "*lightnings*" (flashes of illumination), "*voices*" (people teaching various doctrines and advocating social and political change), "*thunders*" (agitation both mental and physical), and "*a great earthquake*" (social upheaval), "*such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great*". This seems to be the worst phase of the "*time of trouble*" foretold in Daniel 12:1. It is believed that those who "watch", as exhorted in Revelation 16:15, will not remain on earth to experience the final destruction to come under the seventh plague (Luke 21:24-36).

As a result of the great upheaval the "*great city*" is divided into three parts. It is unlikely that earth's present super powers and lesser powers are meant, but rather the three influences, institutions or organisations from whose mouths the gathering "*voices*" issue - the dragon, beast and false prophet.

The division into three parts seems to signify the disintegration of their supposed common ground. In other words, they will have lost the war of Armageddon.

"*The cities of the nations fell.*" The governmental forms and institutions of the various nations will go down, never to rise again.

"*Great Babylon*" - the Papacy in particular - that made all nations drunk (Revelation 14:8), will experience God's wrath, which will be the end for her.

16:20 The "*islands*" (governmental forms and institutions in the "sea" of humanity, such as unions, lodges and associations of various kinds) will all disappear, and the "*mountains*" (kingdoms and political national governments) will not be found. This will be a complete departure of all authority among human beings. There will be no tax collecting authorities, no welfare payments, no sickness benefits or compensation from governmental authorities, lodges, hospital and medical benefit organisations

and the like. Notes and coins which the departed governments have declared to be "legal tender" will no longer have any value.

16:21 When this final chaotic state of affairs comes about, a great hailstorm breaks out. This is described as *"great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent"*. A talent of silver among the Hebrews weighed about 42 kilograms (94 pounds), and a talent of gold about 84 kilograms (188 pounds). Water has frequently been found to be a symbol of truth, so hail, which is frozen water, would symbolise hard-hitting truth. This truth will strike hard in the symbolic air (people's minds), forcing them to realise that everything political, economic, social and even ecclesiastical that they have formed and built up, has crumbled and fallen.

People's reactions to *"the plague of the hail"* will not be those of repentance or contrition. They will blaspheme God, their hearts and minds will not at first be moved or touched; their notions of self-sufficiency, whether national or individual, will continue and remain in rebellion against God, albeit unknowingly and in ignorance of God's purposes and actions.

So there in the midst of their political, economic, social and ecclesiastical ruins we must leave humanity for the present, because the vision of the last seven plagues goes no further.

Something remains to be done before the hearts of people can be so moved that they will fulfil the predictions of Revelation 15:4 and Psalm 86:9: *"All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name"*.

We can say no more at this point than that all that is necessary will be done, and that everything will be revealed in the further visions shown to John. Before these further prophetic revelations are considered, there will be visions providing more details of the prophecies given in "The Three Angels and Their Messages" and "The Last Seven Plagues".

CHAPTER 11

THE JUDGMENT OF GREAT BABYLON REVELATION 17:1 - 18

Most remarkable are the truths that have been made known by the visions that we have so far considered.

The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and His watchful and diligent care for His Church throughout the Gospel Age, and the vision of the greater glory of His Father, Who gave Him the Revelation to benefit His servants, have moved our hearts to join even now in the ovation to the Lamb and in the acclamation of both the Father and the Son.

Then we saw and considered the visions of the opening of the seven seals by the Lamb, and the sounding of the seven trumpets by the angels, both visions taking us through to the end of the Kingdom Age. We have noted the accuracy of the predictions and so have been given sound reasons to increase our faith regarding the predictions yet to be fulfilled. The visions of the woman and the man child, the war in heaven, the dragon and the beast, the two-horned beast, the image of the beast, and the glory of the 144,000 have reminded us of the suffering of so many of the saints of the Gospel Age, who have been worn out almost to extermination by the persecutions of the terrible "beast".

We marvelled at the time mark of the 1,260 days, fulfilled as years, and at the accuracy of the foreknowledge that could reveal the number of the beast centuries before it came into existence. All of this makes us more than ever desirous of being numbered among those who will be able to learn and sing that wonderful and exclusive "new song".

The three angels and their messages, the great words about the blessedness of those who die in the Lord "*from henceforth*", the harvests and the winepress, and most recently the vision of the last seven plagues have brought to us their words of comfort and of exhortation to keep our "*garments*" in these perilous times of the sixth plague.

As we see how far the fulfilments of the visions have progressed - that the sixth plague is well on its way to completion, and that only the seventh is to come, we lift up our heads and rejoice, knowing that our redemption and the completion of the Gospel Age Church draw very near (Luke 21:28).

One of the outstanding features of the Revelation is not a vision at all, but is the consistently evangelical character of the book including its unflinching loyalty to the Gospel of the Cross of Christ. Yet the word "cross" does not occur in the book, and the word "crucified" occurs only once. There are, however, many places in the Revelation where there are direct or indirect references to the Cross. Readers may wish to search out for themselves where these references are to be found.

THE JUDGMENT OF GREAT BABYLON FORETOLD

Revelation 17:

¹*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:*

²*With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.*

³*So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.*

⁴*And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:*

⁵*And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

⁶*And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*

⁷*And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.*

17:1 This vision is an enlargement of the previous visions (in chapters 14:8 and 16:19) foretelling the doom of Great Babylon. Babylon is depicted as a courtesan "*with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication*". An account will be given not

only of the Divine Judgment against her, but also of her previous activities, the cause of the judgment.

17:2 In verse 2 there is a comprehensive statement in few words of the woman's, Great Babylon's, offences. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, a symbolic statement describing the unscriptural union of the church with secular political power. The inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. The "wine", it would seem, is that same teaching of the union of the church with secular political power set persistently before the people to the extent that they have come under the influence of the harmful error. Most peoples of the social order have become intoxicated by the error, some more than others.

17:3 These two offences, the teaching of the union of church and state and the deception of earth's peoples, contain within themselves all of Babylon's misdeeds. Her offences have covered the earth and reached unto Heaven. From the kings of the earth to the poorest and most humble citizens of earth, all have come under the seductive influence of this evil woman and her "wine".

In verse 3 we are told that John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit was carried away *"into the wilderness"* (literally "a" wilderness) where he saw a woman sitting *"upon a scarlet coloured beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns"*. This beast has already come under notice as the *"great red dragon"* of chapter twelve. When Revelation 12 was being considered, this beast was seen to be a symbol of the Roman empire, first pagan then Christian, at least in name. The fact that the woman was described as sitting upon the beast indicates that she had control over it. The *"wilderness"* in Revelation 12 was thought to be the outcast condition into which the true church fled, and in which she remained for 1,260 years. The symbolism seems to be the same here. While the true church was ostracised and persecuted almost to extermination, the apostate church was seated on the beast (the political powers) and exercised very considerable control over the political powers symbolised by the beast.

17:4 The gorgeous array of the woman - purple and scarlet - representing her claim to royalty and her agreement to join with the scarlet coloured beast in persecution of the true church, is described in our verse. But she was only *"gilded"* (the KJV has

"decked") not possessed of solid gold. Nevertheless, in display of her wealth and power, she was arrayed with precious stones and pearls, creating an image of worldly pomp and ostentation. The woman had also a golden cup "*full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication*" that is, the symbolic "cup" was full of the "wine" of the error of the union of church and state, with which she made all nations drunk.

17:5 The name "Babylon" has already been met in chapters 14 and 16, and its significance "confusion" is well understood. But it has not been expressed before that the woman, Babylon, was to be the mother of daughters who would follow to a considerable extent her unscriptural teachings and practices; that is, churches who would come from her and carry on the same teaching and practice of the union of church and state. The accuracy of this prophetic description is clear to all interested observers, the "mother" prior to the Reformation and the daughters since then. This evil woman is also mother of earthly abominations as we will see as her characteristics and activities are further considered.

17:6 One of the most abominable of her misdeeds is her drunkenness with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus. This means that the woman, the Papacy, persecuted the Lord's saints unto death, seeking to exterminate them. When John saw the evil woman in the vision, he wondered "*with great wonder*" (RV). The word rendered "admiration" in the KJV, is out of place here, and the Greek word is not so rendered in any of the modern translations.

17:7 And now the angel tells John he will explain the mystery or secret of the woman and of the beast that carries her. A study of history will help us understand how the woman, the apostate church, came to be seated on the beast, the political power, and able to control it. Volumes have been written on this subject, so we will endeavour to summarise the several causes that contributed to the rise of the Papacy to temporal power, symbolised by the woman seated on the beast.

The several contributing factors were as follows:

1. The declining power, the indolence, and the absence from Rome of the emperors;
2. The deference of the barbarian invaders of Rome to the Christian hierarchy because of the hierarchy's ability to keep the people in order;

3. This deference by the invaders was only in the nature of a transfer to the Christian priesthood of a subservient reverence formerly given to the pagan priesthood of the barbarians. History shows that the Christian priesthood was only too willing to receive it;
4. There existed a general feeling for the unity of the church after the fall and dissolution of the Western Roman Empire. The former Empire developed into a number of independent states with little sympathy for and indeed a certain amount of hostility towards one another. From this state of affairs came the feeling that the church should be united under one head, a feeling that did much to prepare the way for Papal despotism;
5. The decay of the Roman aristocracy, and filling of that vacancy in the social system by the Christian hierarchy;
6. The fact that throughout the Western Roman Empire the Christian bishops, who numbered about 1,800, sat as magistrates with a life tenure, over whose nomination and appointment the civil power had no direct control.

All of the above causes, and some not as conspicuous but nevertheless important, assisted the "woman" to gain and maintain control over the political powers for a very long time.

Most of the factors outlined are not now in existence, nor is the influence of the Papacy anything like it formerly was. We at this time see the Papacy in crisis and striving to save itself from destruction, particularly from within. We understand from Scripture that the Papal power will be completely destroyed, and its despotisms and its very existence will come to their everlasting end.

THE ANGEL EXPLAINS

⁸*The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

⁹*And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*

¹⁰*And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.*

¹¹*And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.*

As already ascertained in Revelation 12 and in verse 3 of this chapter, the beast is a symbol of the Roman Empire, and in this context the Empire relates to the Empire after the fall of Western Rome and its revival under the Papacy.

17:8 In verse 8 the *"bottomless pit"* is translated as *"the abyss"* in almost all modern versions. There is no word corresponding to "bottomless" in the text. The words *"and yet is"* in the KJV are translated *"and shall come"* in the RV and most modern translations.

17:9 We are told in verse 9 that the seven heads of the beast are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Some commentators have suggested that the seven mountains refer to the fact that the city of Rome is situated on seven hills. The angel's explanation, however, does not favour this view. The angel says in verse 10 that the seven mountains are seven kings. "There are" in the KJV should be "They are" as in the RV and all modern translations. "Mountain" in Scripture frequently symbolises "kingdom", that is, a form of government ruled by a king or ruling authority.

17:10 The seven forms of government under which political Rome was carried on were not in existence together. They came one after another, as the angel said, *"five are fallen, and one (the sixth) is, and the other (the seventh) is not yet come"*. This tells us that as the woman sat on the seven mountains or kings, she must have been the successor to the seventh, just as the seventh was the successor to the sixth, the sixth to the fifth, and so on.

The seven heads of the beast (Rome) were:

1. Kings;
2. Consuls;
3. Dictators;
4. Decemvirs (Councils of Ten);
5. Tribunes (Triumvirates or Councils of Three);
6. Emperors;
7. Despotic Emperors (beginning with Diocletian).

Some commentators think that numbers 6 and 7 should be considered as one, and that number 7 should be the Exarchate of Ravenna. But this political organisation was a subordinate one. The Exarch was the Western Roman Emperor who lived in Ravenna, not Rome, and was subject to the supreme Emperor in the East, who lived in Constantinople. Ravenna was the

administrative centre of the Western Roman Empire, and continued as an important city and port for centuries under both the pagan and Papal forms of the Roman power. The "king" of verse 10 is meant to symbolise a form of government ruled by a king, in this case the Roman Empire ruled by a supreme Emperor in Constantinople.

17:11 In verse 11 the angel speaks of *"the eighth" head*. In the vision being considered, there were seven heads on the beast, not eight. The woman was said to be seated on the seven heads. As these seven heads came one after another, the woman must have succeeded the seventh head and become the eighth head of the beast. The eighth head was of (literally "out of") the seven, so we are given another picture similar to that of Revelation 13:4, in which it was commented that the "dragon" (pagan Rome) gave power to the beast (Papal Rome) when the beast rose up out of the "sea" after the decline and fall of the Western Empire.

The description in verse 11 is *"And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of (literally "out of") the seven."* The eighth is the last "king" or form of government, and will soon follow its predecessors into "perdition", that is, ruin or destruction (Strong 684). This prophecy, along with many others relating to the Papacy, is being fulfilled today before our eyes.

THE TEN HORNS

¹²*And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.*

¹³*These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.*

¹⁴*These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*

17:12-14 The *"ten horns"* are also ruling powers. In chapter 12 they were seen without crowns. In chapter 13 they were seen with crowns or "diadems", indicating that the ten ruling powers had moved from their former positions as subject provinces, and had become independent sovereign powers. In verse 12 they are not as yet sovereign powers, but they are to become such *"one hour with the beast"*. In Biblical prophecy a day is often fulfilled as a year, but there seems to be no such interpretation for an "hour". An "hour" may therefore be

understood to symbolise an indefinite length of time, such as the "hour" of God's judgment (Revelation 14:7) against the beast, which began in 1799 at the end of the 1,260 years of prophecy, and will continue until the final destruction of the beast at some time in the future, perhaps the not-so-distant future. It seems likely that the "hour" of Revelation 17:12 is the same as the "hour" of Revelation 14:7.

In verse 13 it is declared that the ten horns have "*one mind*", that is, agreement of purpose, and so they give their strength and authority to the beast. Their purpose would seem to be self-preservation, and because they think the beast will help them to achieve their united purpose, they submit to it for a time.

They will even make war with the Lamb. This war would be that of Armageddon spoken of in Revelation 16:16. The ten horns cannot possibly win such a war against the Lamb, because the Lamb has all power in heaven and earth, and nothing can stand against Him.

Those with the Lamb (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5) are His joint-heirs. These are they who are first called, then chosen, and thirdly faithful. They are called firstly by the fact that they heard the Gospel message; secondly they are chosen because they believed in Jesus Christ and have come to God through Him; and thirdly they have remained faithful unto death. These who are "*called, and chosen, and faithful*" are to receive the crown of life and are to receive the inheritance of joint-heirship with the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 1 John 3:1,2; Matthew 24:13; Romans 8: 15-17).

GOD'S WILL FULFILLED

¹⁵*And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*

¹⁶*And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.*

¹⁷*For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.*

¹⁸*And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

17:15 The ancient city of Babylon was situated on the river Euphrates, the significance of which as a symbol was considered in the comments on Revelation 9:14 and 16:12. In verse 15 the comments made about these verses are relevant and applicable to the context of verse 15.

Ancient Babylon, the first of the world empires seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, which was interpreted by Daniel, ruled over many peoples and tongues for seventy years, then fell to the Medes and Persians. *"Mystery, Babylon the Great"* has ruled over many more *"peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"* for a much longer time than did ancient Babylon.

Just as ancient Babylon fell when the Euphrates river was diverted by Darius from its channel, so *"Mystery, Babylon the Great"* will fall when its *supporting "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"* are diverted from their allegiance to and support of her.

17:16,17 The ten *"horns"* or political powers that arose out of the ruins of the Western Roman Empire, at first gave superstitious veneration to the woman, the Papacy, and helped her to mount and ride the beast, the political power, as we have seen. But the tyranny of the woman caused the political powers to hate her and to take active measures against her, to *"make her desolate and naked,"* and to *"eat her flesh and burn her with fire"*.

France was the first of the ten *"horns"* to oppose the Papacy, and since the French Revolution of 1789-95 others of the ten have done the same to divest her of her impressive finery, to feed on her wealth and to consume her with fire, particularly the symbolic fire of indignation, anger and destruction.

In other passages of Scripture it has been seen that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One commissioned by God to accomplish the consumption and destruction of the Papacy. And so it is indicated that He uses the *"ten horns"* as some of His instrumentalities for this purpose, which is still His work and God's will, because God has put it into the hearts of the powers represented by the ten horns *"to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast (the political power) until the words of God shall be fulfilled"*. Wherever the Papacy is represented, the consumption is proceeding, and the consumption will continue until the will of God is fulfilled, and the Papacy as well as all of Christendom is finally destroyed.

17:18 The woman is here defined as *"that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth"*. The "earth" here would not mean the whole globe, but that portion which was formerly the Western Roman Empire and the colonies in other parts of the earth acquired by the "ten horns" through voyages of discovery, and the seizure of lands and peoples in the name of the rulers of the "ten horns" or territories over which they ruled. The rights of the occupants of the lands seized and colonised received little or no recognition from the colonising powers.

When, in the year 800 AD, Charlemagne, king of France, desired to re-establish the Roman Empire of the West, with himself as emperor, he went to Rome to receive from the Pope the crown and the Papal blessing. So also did Charlemagne's successors.

When Napoleon Bonaparte desired to humiliate the Pope, he brought him to Paris, ostensibly for the purpose of the crowning ceremony of Napoleon. But during the ceremony Napoleon took the crown from the Pope's hands and placed it on his own head, thus repudiating the Pope's power and authority to set up and put down Kings and rulers. This brought to an end what is sometimes called "the Papal millennium." Thus the "Holy Roman Empire," as it had been called, came to an end, and from 1806 onward, the expression ceased to be used in diplomatic correspondence. Nor do the kings and rulers of the earth now travel to Rome to receive their crowns and Papal blessing. The rulership of the woman over the kings of the earth has ended, and soon the woman herself will come to her end.

CHAPTER 12

BABYLON THE GREAT IS FALLEN

REVELATION 18:1 - 19:4

¹*And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.*

²*And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*

³*For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.*

⁴*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

⁵*For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*

Preliminary Comment

In chapters 17 and 18 we see again the distinctness of the visions given to John. Chapter 17 was a picture, complete in itself, concerning Babylon the Great. Chapter 18 is another picture, complete in itself, of that same Babylon the Great. Chapter 17 has made it clear that the kings and rulers of the earth who have agreed to give their power and authority to the beast, and to the woman seated on the beast, are in reality fighting against the Lamb. In such conflict, success is hopeless, for *"the Lamb shall overcome them."* (17:14) Then, when they turn against the woman, they make her *"desolate and naked ... and burn her with fire"* in stark contrast to their previous willingness to fight for her.

Chapter 18:1-5 teaches us that God's purpose in foretelling events is to give His people information in advance, and to assist them to cultivate the right attitude and conduct towards the prophecies as they unfold and are revealed and fulfilled. The events of the present time which threaten the continued existence of the Papal system are a case in point. More revelations and events will surely follow.

The vision of chapter 17 enlarged on Babylon's doom as predicted in chapters 14:8 and 16:19.

The vision of chapter 18 gives us more detail concerning what will come upon Great Babylon, and contains a command to God's people. We saw that the French Revolution was the culmination of a series of attacks on the Papacy by the political powers, which had been for a long time ruled by the Papacy symbolised as the Woman seated on the beast.

Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I denounced the Papal authority, as did many reformers. At the same time there was raised up in its stead the Church of England. Scotland also established a Church of its own, differing from the Church of England in some of its teachings, but in a similar way taking over Church buildings and property, and accepting State aid. In Germany and Scandinavia, the Lutheran Church was established with political authority. In Holland the Dutch Reformed Church was formed. In Switzerland an established Church was formed as a result of the preaching of such reformers as Calvin and Knox.

Thus the Papal pattern was followed, and the Parish Churches were authorised to draw tribute from land owners and tenants over a considerable area, and the Churches were also authorised to condemn and punish so-called "heretics", just as the Papal system did.

Thus it was that Protestantism became an "Image" of the Papacy, and the individual Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and other State-aided religious bodies are easily recognised as fulfilling the description of "daughters". In addition, erroneous teachings brought over from Rome concerning the soul, life after death, the means of salvation and the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, serve further to identify the "daughters" of the prophetic Woman.

There is no doubt that there were many devoted and sincere reformers, such as John and Charles Wesley, who laid the foundation of Non-conformity in the closing years of the eighteenth century. They pointed out the worldliness of the State Church, and urged the people to live holy lives. Eventually freedom of religious belief was recognised by the British government in the nineteenth century.

But when we examine the doctrines, creeds and observances of the Protestant religious organisations generally, we see them advocating and practising unscriptural teachings and observances inherited from Rome, thus indicating that they are indeed the "daughters" of the Revelation prophecy.

18:1 *"I saw another angel come down from heaven"* John writes. The "angel" which spoke in the vision of chapter 17 was *"one of the seven angels which had the seven vials or bowls"*. The angel giving the present message in chapter 18 is a special messenger from heaven, that is, the place of God's authority, *"having great power"*. So exalted and mighty was this "angel" that John says, *"and the earth was lightened with his glory"*.

The enlightenment of *"the earth"* (the social order) identifies this Angel as the Lord Jesus, Who, as already seen in chapter 17, is Lord of lords and King of kings, and is qualified to overcome and cast down those who have usurped His position as Head of the Church. There is no doubt that great light has shone forth on every subject these days. This light is exposing the Papacy in its true character, and also various aspects of Protestantism which has set up an image of the Papacy and exercised and influenced political power contrary to the Lord's instruction that His people should be separate from the world, "in" the world, of course, but not "of" the world.

The enlightenment of the "earth" or social order had its clear beginnings at the end of the 1,260 years of prophecy, that is, in the year 1799 and shortly afterwards. The effects of the French Revolution with its doctrines of "liberty, equality, fraternity" impacted greatly on other nations, especially the Protestant countries. This was the first widespread era of agitation for freedom and enlightenment of the masses, enabling them to use their new political and religious freedom to advantage. Bible Societies were founded for the wide circulation of Bibles free or at low cost, Sunday schools followed by secular schools were opened for teaching the young to read, and campaigns were begun for a fair wage and reasonable hours for working people.

18:2 *"And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird."*

The enlightenment brought about by the Lord Jesus now begins to expose for all to see the wickedness of great Babylon and the agencies which Babylon has used to deceive and enslave the people.

Great Babylon is now seen as a "prison", a "cage" or "hold" of devils, evil spirits and unclean and hateful birds. The words "hold" and "cage" are translations of the same Greek word (Strong 5438), while the RV and Phillips MEV use the word "prison". "Foul" and "unclean" are also translations of the same Greek word (Strong 169).

The whole picture is one of unpleasant and even repugnant images. A "cage" of hateful birds, carrion crows, vultures and the like; a "hold" which reminds us of the hold of a ship containing rats, cockroaches and other vermin, and a general habitation of evil spirits, together make up a most unpleasant picture.

We remember that the Lord while on earth and His apostles afterwards commanded many devils or demons to come out of persons of whom these evil spirits had taken possession. The evil spirits were forced to obey (Matthew 8:28-32; Luke 9:1, 37-42; Acts 5:18) Yet great Babylon harbours them. She has become a hold for spiritistic practices and other mystic agencies of the evil one.

18:3 Here is repeated the cause of the Lord's denunciation. Great Babylon's chief wickedness is that she has made all nations drunk, as already described in Revelation 17:2. The main ones to derive advantage from Great Babylon's activities are the *"merchants of the earth (who) are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies"*. More will be heard of these merchants in verses 11 to 19.

The professing Christian Church has acted wrongly in allying itself with the kings of the earth. The Lord Jesus is the rightful King, and only He should have the Christian's spiritual allegiance. Worldly civil powers must be obeyed, of course, and the Scriptures exhort us to obedience (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2: 13-15). But the Papacy and Protestant organisations have got around the union of Church and State by claiming to speak with God's voice in social and political affairs. They have no legal status to this effect, but seek to obtain influence and dominion by craft, using such arguments as from time to time seem best to serve their ends.

18:4 The vision of the cage is figurative of the bondage in which Great Babylon has held the people for centuries. The hateful birds and the evil spirits represent agencies and influences derogatory to the spiritual life and advancement of a Christian. From this bondage the Lord calls upon His people to come out.

The "*coming out*" involves a leaving, a forsaking of the teachings and practices of Great Babylon and her "*daughters*". For those involved in the Church systems of Babylon and her daughters the task of leaving may not be easy. But such is the Lord's command, and He will grant strength to believers to help them leave and dissociate themselves from unscriptural teachings and practices.

From the beginning of the Gospel Age there has been the call to come away from evil associations and practices, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6: 15 to 18; "*And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"

One in whom God dwells becomes a temple, and that one must therefore dissociate himself or herself from false gods and unscriptural practices. If a servant of God remains in the bondage of Babylon, then that servant becomes a partaker of her sins and will receive of her plagues.

The matter is serious, and all believers need to heed the Scriptures and be aware of the warnings.

18: Great Babylon's sins have reached unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. There is no suggestion of reform, there is nothing left for God to do but destroy the whole system which has imported and multiplied all forms of false teaching and unscriptural practices. God has been longsuffering and patient. He has allowed His people to suffer persecution even to death while Great Babylon has flourished. But in this suffering for righteousness' sake, the saints have been blest, and will not lose their reward.

But *"strong is the Lord God who judgeth her"* as the vision proceeds to declare in unmistakable terms. God can no longer withhold the extreme and last of the judgments pronounced against her. None of Great Babylon's sins and iniquities will be forgotten by the Lord.

JUDGMENT IN AN HOUR

⁶*Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.*

⁷*How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.*

⁸*Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.*

⁹*And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,*

¹⁰*Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*

18:6 The words *"Reward her even as she rewarded you,"* or as the RV and RSV have *"to render as she rendered"* are not addressed to the people mentioned in verse 4. These people, God's people, are called upon to *"come out"*, both for their own safety and as a protest. When they *"come out"*, their duty is to hold to the Scriptures and proclaim the Gospel message.

18:7,8 The torment and sorrow due to Babylon as a punishment for her sins are inflicted by other agencies. We saw in chapter 17:15 to 18 how the kings of the earth, who drank her wine and lived luxuriously with her, turned against her and inflicted injury upon her. And the mourning, famine and burning with fire thus inflicted are a judgment of God against her.

18:9,10 When the kings and governments of the earth see Babylon's punishment, they will reflect more on the loss to themselves than on the justice of the punishment. The governments of the earth will surely miss their alliance or understanding with great Babylon.

The vision of chapter 18 enables us to realise that the time is now approaching when the *"kings of the earth"* shall bewail Babylon and will stand *"afar off"* while they watch the smoke of her burning.

These verses may be seen to be an emphatic repetition of God's determination to overthrow modern "Babylon" completely as He did the ancient city. The final burning is surely not far off. The *"kings of the earth"* are not yet stirred up to the wrath which will finally destroy her, but the time of her destruction is fast approaching.

The words spoken of ancient Babylon apply just as forcefully to mystic modern Babylon. *"You said, 'I will continue forever - the eternal queen.' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells".* (Isaiah 47:7-9; NIV).

MERCHANTS AND SHIPMASTERS

¹¹*And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:*

¹²*The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble,*

¹³*And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.*

¹⁴*And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.*

¹⁵*The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,*

¹⁶*And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!*

¹⁷*For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,*

¹⁸*And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!*

¹⁹*And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.*

18:11-14 There are others beside the "*kings of the earth*" who have made profit from great Babylon. The "*merchants of the earth*" are among others who have profited from great Babylon, and still continue at the present time in their various enterprises. The merchants have not yet come to the stage where they "*weep and mourn*" because "*no man buyeth their merchandise any more*". But it is well to have our attention called to these things now, in advance of their happening, so that we may know what to expect, and understand what is behind the events as they occur in fulfilment of the prophecies.

The list of goods and merchandise supplied by the merchants to Babylon is a lengthy one. It includes everything used in buildings, the ornamentation of buildings and in their interior furnishings - fine linen, silk, rich and costly materials for hangings and ecclesiastical garments, jewels, pearls, precious metals, ivory, rare marble and stained glass for adornment of churches and ecclesiastical buildings. Add to these incense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep for the holding of great feasts, and we begin to grasp the extent of the profits made by merchants from great Babylon.

The "*horses and chariots and slaves*" indicate the support by the merchants of great Babylon's conquests and persecution of all who opposed her. The "*horses and chariots*" supplied by merchants were literal, but can also be understood to include and represent modern-day armaments and means of transport used to further Papal interests in these latter days. The costs of Papal visits to various countries today are a case in point.

18:15-17 The "*merchants*" will be sorry for great Babylon, but mostly they will be sorry for themselves. The merchants are not the only ones who are sorry for themselves when the "*Woman*" comes to her end as verse 17 tells us; "*Every shipmaster and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea,*

stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!"

18:18,19 The end of the trade by shipmasters, sailors, and as many as trade by sea is indicated by the vision of these seafaring people casting dust on their heads, showing them to be in a dry place as they watch great Babylon burn.

After centuries of prosperity in the accumulation of wealth by various means which enabled her to secure the support of great ones in the political and commercial sphere, Babylon's overthrow seems to occupy a comparatively short time. The phrase "*in one hour*" indicates that once the final stages of Babylon's punishment are reached, the end will come quickly.

"Made rich by reason of her costliness" means enriched by the extravagant conduct of her affairs. Great Babylon has had sources of wealth which have enabled her to gain and secure the loyalty of kings and merchants, and it was to their financial benefit to remain in the "Woman's" good graces.

The source of Great Babylon's wealth is indicated in Revelation 17:15: "*peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues*". How did Great Babylon obtain wealth from peoples and nations? She obtained it by false teaching. The threat of torment in the alleged fires of hell or the sufferings of purgatory have been taught for centuries, along with the avoidance or mitigation of these sufferings by payment of money to the Church. It is impossible to know the extent of the vast amount of money gained by Babylon from this source alone.

Another source of wealth is the placing of a price upon masses said to secure the repose of the souls of dead friends and relations already in purgatory. It is claimed the priest can render the sufferings of purgatory less severe by the repetition of masses intended to secure the relief of those in purgatory, provided of course that payment is received for the masses said. This source of wealth has brought untold millions, perhaps billions, into Babylon's coffers.

Many reasons for the living to pay cash as penance for their sins committed in this life have been invented by the Papacy. Indulgences, that is, documents claiming to free people from punishment for their sins, were once a huge source of wealth for the Papacy. The sale of these indulgences was one of the

reasons why people rose in revolt against the Papal system, and, under Martin Luther, set in train the Protestant Reformation.

In a very practical way Great Babylon has fulfilled the prediction of verses 12 and 13: *"the merchandise ... of slaves, and souls of men"*. For "slaves" the KJV margin and the NIV have "bodies", and for "souls" the RV margin and the NIV have "lives". The distinction between "bodies" and "lives" may be understood by recalling the language of the slave market. All human beings have bodies and life. But the slave is sold as a "chattel", largely on the basis of his work value to his owner. Some slaves have done intellectual work, but it was the ownership of their bodies that gave the master his use of the slaves' minds.

The *"lives of men"* would refer to people who were not slaves, and would include the masters of the slaves and all the adherents of Great Babylon.

As if the list of "merchandise" in verses 12 and 13 were not sufficiently comprehensive, mention is made in verse 14 of *"fruits that thy soul lusted after"* and *"all things which were dainty and goodly"*. The time will come when all these will depart from her, and Great Babylon will never again be able to find them.

Are the things mentioned in verses 12 to 15 to be taken literally or figuratively? It seems that both interpretations are reasonable. In the figurative sense we may understand the items collectively as a way of describing Great Babylon's willingness to accept and make use of anything and everything the world has to offer which will give her power over the suppliers of these things. Included among the "merchants" would be politicians and representatives of other religions which may hope for gain from traffic with Great Babylon.

The lament of the "merchants" with the list of their "merchandise" instructs God's children that Great Babylon, the professed Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a very worldly institution. The time is now near when *"the Lord God who judgeth her"* will demonstrate His complete control of the earth and all its affairs. Then while the *"merchants"* and all that had ships in the sea are *"weeping and wailing"* over the complete destruction of that once powerful institution, another voice is heard, as we will read shortly.

We ought to remember that Babylon includes the "daughters" as well as the "mother". For while the Protestant Reformation was a great movement under divine providence to revive study of the Scriptures, exposing the errors of the Papal "mass", and restoring the gospel of salvation to its proper place as the only true foundation of the faith, yet Protestantism itself, as already stated, is organised to a large extent on similar lines to the Papacy.

The "merchants" profited enormously by trade with the Papacy and with Protestantism generally. Vast churches, cathedrals and basilicas have been built in many countries at enormous cost, and furnished and equipped most luxuriously with elaborate altar frontals and ornaments in silver, brass, carved wood and stained glass. Ecclesiastical vestments, banners in tapestry and exquisite embroidery, as well as silver-gilt and enamel crosses may be seen in Roman Catholic and many Protestant churches.

The Lord gives no authorisation or command to construct luxurious buildings, nor does He require His people to wear ecclesiastical vestments. Denominations and groups which practise simplicity in their buildings and furnishings are to be commended. But they may be considered as disobedient in so far as they hold and preach doctrines that the Lord did not give, and which are contrary to or not to be found in the Scriptures. Examples of such doctrines generally held are the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, and the acceptance of secular evolutionary theory with its attendant consequences of rejection of the need for the Lord Jesus' sacrifice and the ignoring of moral obligations. The Lord's judgment will come upon all forms of trade with the "merchants" and "shipmasters" in the realms of both natural and spiritual matters.

18:20 *"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her."* All modern versions mention *"saints and apostles and prophets"* in their translations, and do not use the word "avenged", but rather say *"God has given judgment for you against her"*. The Lord's holy ones have never sought revenge against those who persecuted them. They have sought to imitate the Master in His dignified submission to evil and injustice, and pray for those who have despitefully used them.

But God Himself has seen fit to bring upon Babylon the extermination which she has endeavoured to bring upon the

faithful testifiers to the truth of the Scriptures. And we are told the manner of God's judgment in the verses to follow.

THE GREAT MILLSTONE AND THE SMOKE OF BURNING

²¹*And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.*

²²*And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;*

²³*And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.*

²⁴*And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.*

18:21 When a great stone is cast into a body of water, a great disturbance of the surface results, with waves and ripples moving outward from the point of impact. Vessels and floating objects would be affected by such a disturbance. Great Babylon, being a vast worldwide system, would, at its destruction, have worldwide repercussions on all institutions of the social order.

Verse 24 gives a most important reason for the complete and everlasting destruction of that great mystery of iniquity. Great Babylon has claimed and exercised autocratic powers for many centuries. Emperors, kings and other heads of state have bowed the knee to her, but the Lord is strong Who is judging her. It is right that the Lord executes judgment against her, for *"in her was found the blood of prophets, saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth"*. "All" is a comprehensive term, but should not be understood to mean every single person on earth who was put to death. We ought to understand "all" to mean all of God's people who openly opposed the Papal system during the prophesied period of 1,260 years, when the system was permitted to have such great dominion in the Western World.

18:22 The mention of harpers, musicians, pipers and trumpeters tells of wealth and celebration; the campaigns of military activities are suggested by the sounding of trumpets; while the skills of craftsmen are closely associated with great Babylon's extravagant and worldly policies.

18:23 *"The light of a candle"* or lamp tells of activities after nightfall, feasting and entertainment. The voice of the bridegroom and bride tell of prosperity, marriage, the building of new homes and increase of population with consequent further prosperity.

The "merchants" of great Babylon were great men or princes of the earth who supported great Babylon's claims and "sorceries", that is, her deceptive teachings, especially the union of church and state.

These word pictures made up of familiar objects provide each generation of God's people with messages of exhortation and warning to enable God's people to be aware of what is happening in world affairs, and conduct themselves in accordance with the requirements of the Scriptures.

Explanations have been included in the visions to assist the Lord's people to interpret them. Chapter 17 tells of the rise of Babylon the Great to power over the kings of the earth, and then their subsequent hatred and opposition. Chapter 18 gives a picture of a "cage" or "hold", evidently symbolic, from which God's people are called to "come out". Then follows more description of Babylon's wealth and power and final burning, representing her complete destruction, all spread over a period of time. Verse 21 of chapter 18 depicts the violence and suddenness of her final end.

Verse 24 recounts the persecution of God's faithful people by Great Babylon. But why is it said that the "blood" of the saints is charged against great Babylon, when many of God's faithful servants have died peacefully? In response it may be said that Babylon has wished their death, having anathematised all who oppose her, claiming that she alone could guarantee salvation.

God holds her guilty of her will to destroy, even when she has been unable to inflict punishment or bodily injury on her opponents. More is said of this in the final scene of this vision in the first four verses of chapter nineteen.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT OF BABYLON

¹And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

²*For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.*

³*And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.*

⁴*And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.*

The above four verses round out the explanation of events predicted in chapter 18. We have seen explanatory comments in the visions given in chapter 18. We have read of the complete destruction of great Babylon by fire (symbolic of trouble and destruction) over a considerable period of time, and we have also read of another symbol of a millstone thrown into the sea, symbolising the suddenness of the end of great Babylon.

19:1 The vision tells us that John *"heard a great voice of much people in heaven"*. Evidently John did not see the *"much people in heaven"* but heard them. The words that John heard are as much a part of the vision as the people and the things he saw.

The *"heaven"* in the vision is to be understood symbolically, representing the realm of control over people's minds.

As shown in 2 Peter 3 the "world" (Strong 2889 "kosmos") or "order of things" is composed of two major parts: the "earth" symbolising the social order among people, and the "heavens" representing spiritual and moral control over people. As Peter tells us the *"heavens"* and *"earth"* which are now will be destroyed, and will be followed by *"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:7-14).

We must remember also that the present "heavens" and "earth" are strongly influenced by Satan, a spirit being who is referred to in Scripture as *"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"*, and also *"the god of this world"* who has *"blinded the minds of them which believe not"* (Ephesians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan's influence is seen largely in the "heaven" of ecclesiasticism and idolatry. The believer is freed by faith from Satan's power, and is graciously granted the honour even now to *"sit in heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:3).

The Apostle Paul tells us that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles was *"to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God"* (Ephesians 3:10). The affairs among idolatrous nations, together with idol worship itself, constituted portion of the *"principalities and powers"* in the heavenly places, or heavens, referred to.

When the gospel was preached to the Gentiles, there was conflict in those heavens, the region of control over people's minds, and people aligned themselves on one side or another of the conflicting elements which caused rivalry and friction in the "heavens". An example in this connection is the uproar in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:23-41.

The "heaven" of our context is not the "heaven" of heathen idolatry and priestcraft, but the "heaven" of rulership of established Christianity, in which the "Woman" flourished, and from which she exercised influence over the kings and peoples of the earth, and from which she was cast out, as we have read in chapter 18.

The *"great voice"* issuing from this *"heaven"* indicates a complete change of view on the part of many who were associated with the various "branches" of Christendom, and who were therefore interested for centuries in upholding these "branches" or institutions. In addition to the Papal system, these "branches" include the Greek and Russian Orthodox systems, all of which have millions of adherents and multitudinous religious and commercial orders. Included also are many of the Protestant religious systems. In our time we see all of these systems uniting to uphold the Church as the true guide of humanity, and the means of bringing peace and a better social order on earth. Of particular interest are the many journeys by the present Pope to many countries of earth preaching this very message.

But our verse, Revelation 19:1 foretells that these institutions will come eventually to acknowledge that their intentions and efforts have been a total failure. The salvation and the glory and power were all along God's own possession. He allowed the religious institutions to do their best in their own way, as He allowed the worldly secular nations to do their best in their own way to bring about world peace with prosperity for everyone.

We may reasonably understand that we are in these days witnessing a kind of "showing up" by God of the futility of humanity's efforts as nations strive in vain to bring about peace and stability. We can also see Satan at work attempting to bring people and even nations more and more into bondage to himself, even transforming himself into *"an angel of light"* to achieve his purposes (2 Corinthians 11:14). We do not know for certain where Satan's influences and machinations lie, but it seems most likely that his influences extend to earth's warring peoples and random attacks and killings by suicide bombers, and such devastating events as the destruction of the twin towers in New York on 11 September 2001.

But God has absolute control and will accomplish His purposes regardless of human intentions and obstructive acts (2 Corinthians 11:15). And when God's ways are shown to be the best and only ways to peace and happiness, it seems that all those who were once deluded will acknowledge this, and join in the ascription of praise to the Heavenly Father. All modern translations omit the word "honour" from verse 1, and all use the wording *"belong to our God"*, so that the verse should read: *"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Alleluia; salvation and glory and power belong to our God"*.

19:2 *"For true and righteous are his judgments."* These words were also said in Psalm 19:9. Those whose eyes will be opened acknowledge the one true God and acknowledge His judgments as true and righteous. God has been right in carrying through His plan and His final judgment against the *"great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication"*. At the same time, the saints and martyrs will be vindicated as God executes righteous vengeance upon the system that shed the blood of so many faithful people. All who took up the sword, such as the Papacy, must perish by the sword, as shown in Matthew 26:52 and Revelation 13:10.

19:3 The victory is complete. The smoke *that "rose up for ever and ever"* is the smoke of symbolic Babylon, the evil system that deceived the whole world. The smoke rising up for ever and ever is a symbol of complete destruction. The fire and smoke cannot be literal because systems cannot be set on fire or literally burnt. That great city Babylon that deceived the whole world will never be rebuilt, nor will the ground ever be cleared for anything

similar to be built, nor will any such institution be permitted to engage again in tyranny and misery.

19:4 The words here remind us of chapter 4, in which is described the vision of the Lord God seated in state.

The four *"living creatures"* do not rest from saying, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty"*. And the four and twenty elders pay tribute, saying, *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created"* (Revelation 4:8-11).

The worship of the four *"living creatures"* and of the *"four and twenty elders"* indicates that God's providence has been vindicated, and the testimony of the Scriptures has been fulfilled. Whatever God sets out to do He succeeds in doing. His plans and purposes are set down in the Scriptures of truth, and with every fulfilment, fresh praise and honour are His due. Isaiah records these very same thoughts: *"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the things whereto I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11).

CHAPTER 13

A VOICE OUT OF THE THRONE REVELATION 19:5 - 10

A new series of visions now begins, ushered in by a voice from the throne of the Lord God Almighty.

⁵*And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.*

⁶*And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

⁷*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*

⁸*And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

⁹*And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.*

¹⁰*And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

19:5 A new vision begins in the presence of God on His throne. A voice from the throne would signify an authoritative announcement or command. In this instance all God's servants, small and great, are called upon to praise Him.

19:6 The response is immediate as of a great multitude, likened to the sound of many waters and mighty thunderings, joining in praise to God saying, "*Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*". There are still important events to come, besides the victory over the great whore, for which praise to God is due. God has had a constructive program to carry out, and this mighty chorus tells what it is in respect of one certain and important feature of God's great plan.

Throughout the Gospel Age a call has gone forth announcing the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, the One by Whose sacrifice and shed blood forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God were

made possible for members of the sinful race of Adam. In addition, a few members of the human race who loved God and came to Him through Jesus Christ became chosen as His special people. To these devoted ones the Lord has said, "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32). Just before He left them, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "*Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me*" (Luke 22:28, 29).

Many other Scriptures might be quoted to show that the Lord's faithful disciples of the Gospel Age are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in His kingdom and glory. During the Gospel Age, these prospective joint-heirs have been chosen; the call going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The entire age has been occupied with the selection and preparation of the joint-heirs, each of whom, if faithful to death, will be rewarded with the crown of life.

Many of the Lord's faithful people suffered persecution and martyrdom under the tyranny of the apostate church. We can appreciate the appropriateness of the information given by the voice from the throne, that these faithful ones are in God's mind, and will be rewarded in due time.

The Lord God Omnipotent Reigns

Our English word "omnipotent" is derived from Latin, and well expresses the meaning of the Greek word "pantokrator", which signifies "the all-ruling, i.e. God (as absolute and universal sovereign)" (Strong 3841). The RV and almost all modern versions render "pantokrator" as "Almighty". Other texts in which "pantokrator" is rendered "Almighty" are 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; 4:18, 11:17; 15:3; 16: 7,14; 19:15; 21:22. The meaning of "omnipotent" as defined in the Macquarie Dictionary is, as an adjective, "1. almighty, or infinite in power, as God or a deity. 2. having unlimited or very great authority;" and, as a noun, "3. an omnipotent being".

A senior government official or the head of an industrial concern may be all-powerful in the exercise of duties within the limits of his or her particular area or sphere. But God is all-powerful over the whole universe. Many of the world's great religious systems appear to be unaware or have forgotten that God is taking account of them as He is of the worldly nations. All who desire God's approval must come to Him through Jesus Christ and

conform to His will in their daily lives and in all their thoughts and actions. They must choose, if they have sufficient enlightenment, whether to stand about the burning city lamenting the loss of their hopes and prospects, or be included with those whom God Almighty remembers, and will honour when the time comes for the marriage of the Lamb.

The Marriage Of The Lamb

19:7 The great voice of verse 6 is shown not to be the voice of those chosen to be the bride of Christ, that is, the Gospel Age Church. Their voice is a kind of official announcement expressing joy that the time for the marriage has arrived. No date or time is mentioned. The announcement simply states that the time has come for the marriage, and this is made the occasion of fresh rejoicing and renewed honouring of God.

The Jewish marriage arrangements help us to understand the symbolism here. A year's betrothal was usual. The father of the prospective bridegroom found someone he considered a suitable wife for his son. At the end of the betrothal period came the marriage ceremony. We are reminded of the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthian church, *"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:2).

When the bride was received into the home, the bridegroom's father made a great feast to which friends and relations and indeed everyone was welcome. So when the Lamb comes to receive the Church into His Father's house, all friends, relations and well-wishers will rejoice as our verse says, *"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him"*, - the Father Who arranged it all.

In what way did the betrothed virgin make herself ready? Only believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can be considered as eligible to be members of His bride, the Gospel Age Church. This implies belief in Jesus as Redeemer, Mediator and Lord, and, upon confession of sins, the receiving of forgiveness through faith in the blood of His cross. In addition, there would be consecration of each believer to Him in preference to the world or any other person or thing. Also, the transforming influence of the Scriptures and the help of God's Holy Spirit should so prevail in believers' minds that to a large extent believers should act and think righteously.

The attainment of righteousness in this life is, of course, not possible for any but the Lord Jesus, and failure to do so on the part of believers should be followed by readiness to confess failure in both general and specific terms, and a resolve to make new endeavours to overcome evil tendencies. Prayer is a great aid in the believer's endeavours.

19:8 The word *"granted"* here is the same word in Greek as *"granted"* in Acts 11:18: *"When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."* Peter and his companions were greatly impressed when the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household. Recounting it afterwards, Peter told how Cornelius was instructed in a vision to send for Peter, *"who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"* (Acts 11:14). Evidently Cornelius and his household were to believe the words when they heard them in order to gain salvation. Their faith was genuine, or the Spirit would not have been shed upon them. Therefore Peter and the other disciples realised that God had opened the way of salvation to the Gentiles and *"granted"* them *"repentance unto life"*. God had arranged that, on their repentance, beginning with Cornelius and all his house, Gentiles would be forgiven and received as His children on the same terms as Jews.

So when we read in our verse 18 that God *"granted"* that the Lamb's bride should be *"arrayed in fine linen, clean and white"*, the thought is that God arranged a way by which sinners could be accepted as members of Christ's collective bride by having their sins forgiven and receiving justification by faith.

All this is represented by the fine linen. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *"...not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith"* (Philippians 3:9).

But there is this distinction. In this present Gospel Age, righteousness is imputed to each individual believer separately. As each believer repents and takes up his or her cross to follow the Master, each separately and individually has righteousness imputed to him or her. This means that, although each believer continues to commit sins because of weakness of the fallen human nature, each believer is considered by God to be righteous, and is dealt with by God as though he or she were righteous and without sin.

This most gracious provision makes it possible for God to accept believers as His children, and also makes it possible for believers to come to Him through Jesus Christ, the only Way.

When the time comes for the marriage of Christ to His bride, the Gospel Age Church, all members will have made their calling and election sure, and will have received the Lord's blessing and approval, as indicated by the Lord Jesus, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant..."* (Matthew 25:21). The vision emphasises this fact by describing the *"wife"*, the Church as a whole, as *"arrayed in fine linen, clean and white,"* and therefore suitably clothed for the marriage ceremony. But at the wedding, the righteousness of individual members is no longer imputed or reckoned, but is, by God's grace, the attribute of every single member. The fine linen therefore also represents the independent and fully righteous character of each individual member comprising the *"wife"* made ready. The bridegroom's perfection of holiness and righteousness makes it unquestionable that the true believers will also be granted the same level of holiness and righteousness, for the promise to faithful believers is that they *"shall be like him and see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2).

So also is the resurrection of the dead in Christ, says Paul. *"It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."* (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

The RV and most modern versions translate the phrase *"the righteousness of saints"* as *"the righteous acts or deeds of saints"*. This seems inconsistent as an interpretation of a fine linen robe covering the whole person. Righteous acts or deeds are single actions, whereas righteousness signifies the whole character of a person, as when we say that God is a righteous God. His many acts are all righteous, but they originate in His righteous character, and are simply manifestations of the perfect righteousness of His character.

The Lord said to His disciples, *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:2, 3). Resurrection into His likeness to be members of His collective bride, will be the believer's reward for faithfulness in this life.

19:9 Now comes an announcement of which only a few Christians realise the import. There are to be guests at the wedding. This is important because the messenger links it with the previous announcement concerning the Lord's wife: *"These are the true sayings of God"*. The guests at a marriage feast are not the bride, neither is the bride one of the guests. The marriage feast under Jewish custom was to celebrate the receiving of the betrothed wife into the home of her husband, as we saw in the comments on verses 7 and 8. The guests at the wedding feast were as numerous as the wealth and position of the bridegroom's father would permit. Even strangers were welcome if they wished to join the supper and festivities, giving honour to the happy couple and to the father who arranged the feast. The guests would surely be the Ancient Worthies and the resurrected millions of the earth who have been raised to life and invited to believe and live for ever.

This symbolic picture of chapter 19 verses 8 and 9 is very brief, and the angel does not give an explanation. We already have an explanation, however, in the vision of chapter 7, verses 9 to 17, to which the reader is invited to refer. In summary, the explanation on pages 168 to 172 of this commentary consists of the understanding given of the *"great multitude"*. This *"great multitude"* was *"of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues"*. They *"stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands"*. The expression *"stood before the throne"* indicates that the great multitude was subject to the rulership and dominion of God and Jesus Christ. The *"great multitude"* consists of all people saved from sin and death. The *"cry"* that they raise is a continual acknowledgement of their salvation, and praise to God and Jesus Christ that undeserved grace has been freely granted to them.

19:10 So impressed was John with this vision of the bride of the Lamb arrayed in fine linen white and clean, and with the announcement of a great supper to which many would be invited, that he fell at the feet of the angel who told him what to write. This may be taken as part of the vision, and also symbolically. John may be thought as a representative of the Gospel Age Church and the joy of the overcomers in the fulfilment of the promise to them of joint-heirship with Christ, and also the joy and praise of the Church that they are not the only ones to benefit from the love and sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Other visions describe the thousand-year reign and the feast of blessing provided under the rule and authority of the Lord Jesus and His joint-heirs. Paul writes, *"Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"* (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

The Testimony of Jesus

The protest of the angel in our verse 10, *"See thou do it not"* was the correct attitude to be taken, because it identifies the messenger as a holy angel faithfully carrying out his appointed task with no desire for honour or worship for himself.

Thus was John reminded that he (John) was a fellowservant, and under no obligation to render worship to another servant nor expect worship for himself. Worship is due to God.

The angel announced himself as a fellowservant of John and also a fellowservant of all *"that have the testimony of Jesus"*. This is a means of identification of true brethren in Christ. True brethren are those who have and hold the testimony of Jesus.

The words *"the testimony of Jesus"* have been used before in the Revelation in 1:2 and 9, and 12:17; while in 6:9 faithful ones are spoken of as having been *"slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held"*.

A testimony may be given by words or actions or both. The Lord Jesus testified to the fact that He was the Son of God. He said, *"I am one that bare witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me"*. In addition to the voice from heaven, the wonderful miracles that the Father enabled Jesus to do were a testimony that God was with Him (John 12:28-30; 8:14-19).

By His death on the cross, Jesus was *"a testimony in due time"* that *"there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, a testimony in due time"* (1 Timothy 2:5, 6 marginal reading; *"in its own seasons"*- Diaglott; *"in its proper time"* - NIV and RSV; *"at the appointed time"* - Jerusalem Bible).

The truth in whole or in part is a testimony, and the disciples held to the testimony or teaching that Jesus gave them. The Lord supported their testimony by His own testimony, as we read, *"The Lord gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done at their hands"* (Acts 14:3).

The testimony of Jesus is comprehended in the New Covenant, as the testimony of God given to the twelve tribes of Israel was contained in the Law Covenant. As already mentioned in comments on chapter 11 verse 19, our Lord brought in a new form of worship, His blood being the seal of the New Covenant whereby people were invited to draw near to God under certain terms and conditions. Of Jesus, the apostle said, "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (literally propitiatory or mercy seat) through faith in his blood to declare his (God's) righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*" (Romans 3:25, 26).

The New Covenant declares not only the terms on which repentant sinners may be received, it declares also God's condemnation of sin and sinners, of every device of humans which is contrary to the will of God. Consequently when we read that "*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*" we realise that all the visions given to John were in accord with the outworking of God's will in harmony with the terms of that New Covenant.

The spirit, the power, the life of the prophecies given to John were in harmony with New Covenant terms, not only the blessings to the faithful but also the outpourings of God's wrath on the unfaithful and on evil institutions of the world in general. Particular wrath was due to fall on the "*great whore*" which professed divine right, but was in fact against the Lord God and His Anointed. Regardless of her intrigue and often subtle warfare, God's plan will succeed; the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, the true Church, will come as appointed, and the great feast of blessing will take place as appointed.

Comments on the testimony of Jesus, the New Covenant in His blood, and the manner in which it is a "*testimony against*" great Babylon, were made in the discussion on chapter 11 verse 19.

Let us then not fall at the feet of God's servants who help us understand His purposes, but let us worship God not simply with our lips but with the devotion of our lives. The importance of this true devotion is brought out in the next vision.

CHAPTER 14

THE ARMIES OF HEAVEN

REVELATION 19:11 - 21

¹¹ *And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

¹² *His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

¹³ *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.*

¹⁴ *And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*

¹⁵ *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

¹⁶ *And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

19:11 Again the vision of heaven is not that of God's dwelling place, but the symbolic "heaven", the ruling position of ecclesiasticism and governmental authority. For some time before the Lord finally deals with mankind, He is gathering to Himself the saints who are to reign with Him for one thousand years, thus forming as it were an army to be led by Him against the powers and institutions entrenched in the ecclesiastical and governmental "heaven". These ecclesiastical and political powers and institutions rule the nations, and they must be dealt with by the Lord to clear the way for His righteous rule over all the earth.

Faithful and True

The name "*Faithful and True*" applied to the One Who "*in righteousness ... doth judge and make war*" reminds us of Revelation 3:14, where the Lord Jesus is called "*the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God*". The time of Revelation 3:14 is the Laodicean era of the Gospel Age Church, the time when lukewarmness is one of the chief characteristics of the professing Church; the time when many professing believers are neither cold nor hot, and therefore are to be rejected by the Lord.

But our verse 11 of Revelation 19 portrays another aspect of the Lord's dealings with the nominal Church "heavens", that is, as a mighty conqueror at the head of an adequate and trustworthy army to defeat and put down completely the false religious systems which have claimed authority to rule and guide spiritually the peoples of the nations.

The aspect of a Judge is included. A judge in former Biblical times meant a ruler of the people who sat in judgment on all the affairs of his territory. Moses judged the twelve tribes of Israel, all cases and disputes being at first brought before him, and subsequently, as the workload became too great, only those cases that were too difficult for the lesser judges.

We should note that this Judge mentioned in our verse 11 is superior to all judges of the past, for He *"doth judge and make war"* in righteousness. The righteousness of the Lord Jesus and His complete harmony with God, His heavenly Father, ensure that all actions and decisions will be just and righteous.

19:12 Eyes *"as a flame of fire"* represent piercing vision from which none can hide and save themselves from His judgment. The devices and intents of every heart are open before Him. Millions of earth's unbelieving and idolatrous peoples hardly know His name and know nothing of His purpose to establish God's kingdom on earth. The Christian Church in general, which claims to speak and act in Jesus' name, has no authority from Him, because the Church knows nothing of God's great plan nor His coming world order in which all nations will be ruled with a rod of iron (Matthew 24:38, 39; 25:13).

"On his head were many crowns", indicative of royal authority over earth's countries and nations. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's appointed Ruler over all nations and peoples and tongues, whether they acknowledge or know of Him now or not. As the prophecy foretold centuries ago in Psalm 2, 8 and 9, tells us: *"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"*. Similar declarations are also recorded in Psalm 72; Isaiah 11; and Daniel 2:31-45.

19:13 Jesus reveals His name to those of humble mind who acknowledge Him and submit themselves to Him. *"His name is called The Word of God"*. Believers of the Gospel Age Church

know Him also as "the Word of life." The apostle John in his gospel wrote: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with (the) God, and the Word was (a) God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.*" (John 1:1-3). The Diaglott translation makes the meaning of these verses clear in its word for word rendering: "*In a beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and a God was the Word.*"

In his first epistle John gives the same teaching: "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life: (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*" (1 John 1:1, 2).

Thus the name "*The Word of God*" identifies the Conqueror with the Lord Jesus as One Who is sent as a messenger and hence a bearer of the Word from God. The title identifies Him as the One Who was in heaven with God from the beginning, and Who was the only direct creation of God. It is most wonderful to contemplate that God should so love the world, and take such an interest in the world's peoples, that He should send His only-begotten Son to die for them and shed His sinless blood for the remission of all their sins for ever. It is also most wonderful to contemplate that after Jesus' resurrection, and exaltation to God's right hand, God has arranged that Jesus will lead the conquering armies to triumph in the new world order which He alone has been delegated to establish.

The faithful and true Leader was "*clothed with a vesture dipped in blood*". We may wonder about this because He was riding at the head of armies, all of whom were "*clothed in fine linen, white and clean*". He Himself rode upon a white horse, the whole picture being a symbol of purity.

But what of the "*vesture dipped in blood*"? The blood-sprinkled "*vesture*" would seem to be an outer cloak symbolic of the Lord Jesus' former conflict, when He was apprehended, tried and crucified, His blood being shed for the remission of the sins of all people for all time. Jesus' blood did not apply to Himself, for He had no sin. The vision emphasises the great act of deliverance in which Jesus shed His blood for the sins of all of us and also as the seal of the New Covenant of mercy and forgiveness.

This whole picture is stated in plain language in Philippians; *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth"* (Philippians 2: 6 to 10).

During the Gospel Age a *"little flock"* has bowed to Him, and on being changed and raised in His likeness will be united under Him to engage in the conquering work depicted in chapter 19, verses 11 to 15.

But only Jesus, the Leader, is entitled to wear the *"vesture dipped in blood"*, for His blood alone accomplished the deliverance of the race from sin, and was accepted by God as the blood of the New Covenant by which, and only by which, all members of the human race may draw near to God. More will be said of the vesture in the comments on verse 16.

The Armies In Heaven

19:14 The *"armies which were in heaven"* would represent not only the Gospel Age Church, but also the holy heavenly angels who have been the Lord's servants throughout the history of the human race. The "heaven", as has been said earlier, is not the heaven where God dwells and the holy angels have their home, but the symbolic "heaven", the realm of political power and ecclesiasticism, which has dominated the social order among earth's peoples referred to symbolically as the "earth" in 2 Peter 3:10-12.

The righteousness of the members of these armies is indicated by their being *"clothed in fine linen, white and clean"*. In comments on Revelation 6 it was suggested that horses represent movement and activity. The horses in this vision are white, indicating the purity and righteousness of the whole movement led by Jesus Christ, the King and Conqueror.

Ruling The Nations

19:15 The sharp sword out of His mouth may be understood to represent the righteous commands that will result in the defeat of the nations. The defeat of the nations will bring them under the

rulership of the Lord Jesus and His "armies", who will rule with righteousness, firmness and love.

The rulership with *"a rod of iron"* is softened by the literal rendering quoted in the footnote of the Variorum, *"he shall rule them as a shepherd"* A shepherd looks after the interests of his flock. The Lord Jesus gave a parable in which His mission is described as comparable to the authority and care of a shepherd. The shepherd's duty is to lead his sheep to green pastures, and also to use his staff or crook to guard his sheep from danger, or rescue them if they wander too far from the path and fall into a ditch or pit, or become bogged in mud while trying to drink from a lake or dam with a low level of water. Believers of the Gospel Age are likened to sheep under the care of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-16; 1 Peter 2:25).

But in the context of our verse, the nations are to be dealt with, so the *"rod of iron"*, a symbol of firmness and strength, will be needed to overcome whatever resistance might be offered by the people of earth accustomed to the forces of evil prevalent in their former social order.

What is to be understood by *"he treadeth the winepress"*? The winepress is said to symbolise *"the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God"*, so we may understand that the Lord Jesus is shown to be carrying out the judgment and vengeance of God on the whole evil social order.

In the comments on Revelation 14:19 and 20 it was said that the blood that resulted from the crushing of the grapes does not symbolise human blood, but the evil institutions and deeds which will be crushed and destroyed by the Lord Jesus and His "armies" with the power and authority delegated by God.

19:16 The *"vesture"* worn by the Lord Jesus is the same as that referred to in verse 13, and, like a cloak, covers the thigh. The name written on the vesture makes it clear Who is the leader of the mighty armies. There is only One in all the universe Who bears the title *"King of kings and Lord of lords"*, and He is the only One Whose vesture bears the insignia of the Lamb of God, Whose blood was shed to redeem a lost and sinful race.

It is of great reassurance to believers to know that the One Who so loved our sinful race as to die for us, is the One empowered and authorised to overthrow this present evil order of things and

establish God's righteous Kingdom to rule over the whole world to bring peace, stability and blessings undreamt of and unattainable in this present world order.

THE GREAT SUPPER

¹⁷*And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;*

¹⁸*That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.*

¹⁹*And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*

²⁰*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

²¹*And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.*

19:17 Instead of "*the supper of the great God*", the Sinaitic manuscript has "*the great supper of God*". The "*sun*" mentioned in this verse is often used symbolically in the Scriptures with different applications. The prophet Malachi in chapter 4 verse 2 wrote of "*the Sun of righteousness*" that would arise with healing in his wings. This was a prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus, the light of the world, Who came as a light and healer to God's people. The righteous shall "*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matthew 13:43). In one of our Lord's parables the sun stood for persecution (Mark 4:3-6, 16, 17).

In seeking an understanding of the "sun" in which the angel stood in the vision, three thoughts suggest themselves, because the angel should not be thought of as standing in the literal sun.

1. The angel represents a messenger or announcer in these more enlightened times giving notice that a great battle is to take place. In the natural world a battlefield attracts vultures and other birds of prey which fly about searching for food suited to them, provided by the bodies of soldiers, people and animals killed as a

result of battle. The symbolism here shows the great extent of the conflict between the Lord and His armies and the opposing forces.

The feast of the birds of prey is called *"the great supper of God"* (Sinaitic manuscript), inasmuch as the power of the King of kings will be directed against *"the beast, and against the kings of the earth, and their armies"* when they *"make war"* as described in verse 19.

2. The "sun" is sometimes used symbolically of a great and leading light in the religious and political "heavens". The Lord said to His disciples: *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:"* (Matthew 24:29).

The fulfilment of this prophecy commenced at the close of the 1,260 prophetic days mentioned by Daniel, that is, the period of the French Revolution and the campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte. With the commencement and growth of the Bible societies and the upsurge of interest in Christian Scriptural teachings, the Papal "sun" was "darkened" and other religious organisations were dimmed, and the "stars" or other conspicuous teachers and authorities - both religious and political - fell from their influential position over people's minds.

The "angel" is symbolic of an announcer, and if we take the "sun" to represent the Papacy then we have the picture of the Lord's opponents calling to the birds of prey in anticipation of a great feast following the destruction (so they believe) of the Lord's armies ranged against them.

3. It is not necessary to interpret the angel as representing any individual religious or political system, or the head of any such system as making the announcement. It is sufficient to understand that the Lord gave this entire vision to inform His people of events to be expected.

19:18 There are in the world at large numbers of people always on the lookout to loot and benefit from opportunities to plunder and steal when businesses and premises can be entered or broken into because of a natural or man-made disaster or disturbance. Such people correspond well to birds of prey such as vultures and carrion crows in the animal kingdom. They will

be in their element when the "beast" leads his forces against the Rider on the white horse and His armies.

An inducement to such looters is set out in this verse. The rank and quality of the army leaders, kings, captains and mighty men suggest heavy spoils in wealth and goods; besides great numbers of lower ranks to be taken captive and sold as slaves, a common practice in former Eastern warfare. The looters remind us of vultures and carrion crows who take all they can get, as verse 21 tells us, *"and all the fowls were filled with their flesh"*.

The Armies Opposing The Lord

19:19 We saw in verses 11 to 16 of Revelation 19 that the Lord and His armies were prepared for conquest, but conquest in righteousness. They are not mentioned as the aggressors. Our Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace, ready to take over the kingdom that is rightly His. The aggressors are the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies *"gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army"*

If the nations were ready to receive the Lord and His righteous kingdom they could sue for peace. But they do not understand or know of God's plan and purpose, and do not realise that by striving to bring about world peace themselves they are fighting against God. The *"beast"* joins with the political powers in offering support to them with statements, exhortations and Papal visits to many countries in an endeavour to influence the masses and bring about peace to the nations.

19:20 *"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet."* The false prophet was not mentioned in the armies opposed to the Lord, which would seem to indicate the subordinate position Protestantism occupies in relation to the Papacy. And lest the Lord's people, for whom these visions were given, should have any doubts, a description is given to help them with identification: *"... the false prophet that wrought miracles before him (the beast), with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image."*

This causes us to look again at Revelation 13. Verses 1 to 8 refer to the *"beast"* with seven heads and ten horns that received power from the *"dragon"*. This beast had a mouth speaking great things, and he made war against the saints. Verse 11 describes *"another beast"*, which we recognised as Protestantism. It is

described also as a deceiver (verse 14), causing people to make an *"image"* to the *"beast"* and placing a penalty on those who would not worship the *"image"*.

A study of Church history shows how Protestantism, once strongly opposed to Rome, adopted many of its false teachings. Nowadays Protestantism has little to say against Rome or its teachings. The relation between Romanism and Protestantism is more fully discussed in the comments on Revelation 13.

There is no doubt that the Lord has rejected Protestantism as a system because of its pandering to Rome and the world. But He has not rejected individuals, calling upon true believers to come out from the religious systems and be separate and He will receive them as His children.

The Lord has no good word to say about the *"false prophet"* which exercised various powers in the sight of the *"beast"*, and deceived many by errors in doctrine and practice. The *"miracles"* mentioned in this verse were previously discussed in the comments on Revelation 13, verses 11 to 18.

Hence we can only deeply regret that, with all Protestantism's opportunities to serve the Lord and encourage people to look for His kingdom, the great body of Protestants unknowingly fight against Him. Therefore the Lord will deal with the *"false prophet"* as with the *"beast"*. Both are cast alive into *"a lake of fire burning with brimstone"*.

This action is part of the symbolism. The symbolism is that of destruction. The Papacy and Protestantism are systems, not human beings, so there is no question of a fiery hell or eternal torment reserved for people. The lake of fire stands for the second death, as we shall see when considering Revelation 20 and 21. The symbolism is based on the Valley of Hinnom outside the ancient city of Jerusalem, in which the refuse of the city was deposited and consumed by fire. There is no question of torment after death here or anywhere else in Scripture for that matter. The false teachings of a fiery hell and eternal torment are fully discussed in the books *"Everlasting Punishment"* and *"The Dead - Where Are They?"* which are available free of charge.

Over the centuries, many have thought that the lake of fire *"burning with brimstone"* meant either the burning of sinners for ever, or the burning out of impurities from human beings to make

them free from sin and worthy of eternal life. The teachings of eternal torment and the burning out of impurities from people in Purgatory are completely false and unscriptural, as we have elsewhere shown.

The "*beast*" and the "*false prophet*" are certainly not purified by being cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (or sulphur). They are completely destroyed and their millions of adherents are liberated from their false teachings. This is made clear in the next verse which tells us how the Rider on the white horse will deal with the people.

The Lord at the right time in His plan will end the career of the beast and the false prophet. These great systems built up by false leaders and false teaching must go down to destruction and the people be liberated.

19:21 The symbolism here is based on another common practice in war, the complete annihilation of opposing armies. Such massacres often took place in ancient warfare. The Rider on the white horse will slay the nations along with the religious systems of the Papacy and Protestantism, but the slaying will not be of people but of systems of government and religion. The slaying will be accomplished by the sword which proceeds "*out of his mouth*", that is, by righteous and just commands that all nations and systems will be compelled to obey.

The Lord's victory will differ from the victories of many conquerors of the past. All the inhabitants of the earth will be slain in the sense that no further resistance will be left in them, and the "*fowls*" will make the most of the opportunity to loot. And here the vision ends.

But God's dealings with the conquered world of people will not end here. The Lord as Conqueror will not be King over an empty earth. He is the Prince of Peace, the High Priest after the order of Melchisedek, Who will reign in righteousness over the earth for one thousand years. This will involve the resurrection of the dead, the enlightenment of the nations, and blessings undreamt of in this present unsatisfactory social order. (Hebrews 7; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:3)

CHAPTER 15

THE DRAGON BOUND

REVELATION 20:1 - 3

The arch-enemy of God and of Christ is still to be dealt with. He has been a persistent and wilful opponent of God and the Lord Jesus, and must not be allowed to interfere in the new and righteous kingdom. He is to be bound. Although this vision is given in our Bibles in chapter 20, it should be considered as a concluding feature of chapter 19, as well as an introductory vision to the two main themes: the thousand years' reign and Satan's last attempt to lead a revolt at the end of the thousand years of the Kingdom Age.

¹And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

²And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

³And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

The Binding of Satan

20:1 The position to which our Lord was exalted after His death and resurrection is "*Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*" (Ephesians 12: 20-22). Consequently the Lord Jesus has the authority and power to deal with Satan who first led the human race astray. The "*angel*" with the "*key*" and the "*great chain*" appropriately symbolises our Lord with His power to deal with the arch-enemy.

The "*key*" represents the power to open and to close and lock securely. In His message to the church of Philadelphia, it is written, "*These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.*" The Lord was ever faithful to His position, and helped the overcomers because they kept the word of His patience (Revelation 3:7-13).

In the vision of Revelation 1:12-20 the Lord Jesus said to John, *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death."* Thus the Lord Jesus has the power to open Hades (the grave) and Death, and loose their prisoners. But He will not exercise that authority to raise the dead to life in a world still under the control of Satan, since Satan would only operate to repeat his former enslavement of the human race. Hence the vision of chapter 20 gives a clear statement of Satan's position in the age to come, the Kingdom Age. The vision tells us plainly that Satan will have no status at all.

The *"bottomless pit"* is also a symbol. No word corresponding to the English word "bottomless" occurs in the Greek text. The word here rendered "pit" is rendered "well" in John 4:11 and 12 (Strong 5421). This was Jacob's well, and must have been remarkable to have continued through the centuries since Jacob drew water from it. The Lord in His comments used another word (Strong 4077): *"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:14). Thus a continuing flow of water is distinguished from a well.

The one to whom the Lord gives eternal life need never draw from a natural well to sustain that life.

In Revelation 9:2 and 11 Mohammedanism was foretold as coming out of a pit or abyss. When Revelation 9 was considered, it was seen how forcible was the symbolism representing Mohammed and his followers swarming like locusts from the depth and obscurity of the Arabian deserts to become a scourge on idolatrous Christendom.

The apparent reason for using the word "bottomless" seems to be that the theology of the time of the King James Version taught that there was a burning place of torment somewhere to which all sinners are consigned to suffer for eternity.

20:2 Satan is now to be prohibited from continuing his evil work, and this prohibition is fitly represented by the great chain and its use. The Lord uses this great chain, a symbol of restraining power, to bind Satan for a thousand years, the period of Christ's reign.

20:3 In addition, Satan is cast into an abyss, and a seal is set upon him, meaning the abyss is sealed, confining Satan for one

thousand years. He will remain alive, but will not be permitted to influence or deceive earth's peoples until the Lord releases him and allows him liberty again, which liberty Satan will be quick to misuse, as shown further on in this vision.

Satan Identified

Satan is described in Revelation 20:2 as *"the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan"*. He is *"the god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4), *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2), the spirit being who first deceived and led astray Adam and Eve, then continued to deceive and lead astray the human race by various devices and machinations in the personal, political and ecclesiastical realms.

The apostle Paul tells us that Satan is *"the god of this world"* who *"hath blinded the minds of them which believe not"* (2 Corinthians 4:4) Those who become converts to the Lord Jesus are said to be *"delivered ... from the power of darkness, and translated (set over) into the kingdom of his dear Son"* (Colossians 1:13).

Paul also tells us *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"* (Ephesians 2:2). The "air" in this reference from Paul's letter to the Ephesians could reasonably be understood to mean the earth's atmosphere, because it is on earth that Satan and his servants, the fallen angels, were encountered by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry; and contact with the disobedient angels, *"the angels that sinned"* (2 Peter 2:4) occurs on earth through spirit mediums and the seances conducted by them. It seems more likely though that the "air" should be understood as a symbol of the realm of thought, of the influence on people's minds, as when we say "war (or some other eventuality) is in the air."

When the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry cast out evil spirit beings that possessed some unfortunate individuals, He said that He had as it were entered a strong man's house to spoil his goods, and must first bind the strong man. Jesus had come to *"cast out devils"* or demons *"by the Spirit of God"* (Matthew 12: 22-30; Luke 11:14-26; Matthew 8:28-34) Our Lord's ministry was the first step in demonstrating that the Kingdom of God which He preached was able to deal effectively with Satan and his angels.

The Lord also gave His disciples power to cast out demons, as well as to heal the sick and cure those physically in need (Matthew 10 (whole chapter); Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-16).

The meaning of Satan is "adversary". Not every adversary of course is Satan. Peter was described by the Lord as an adversary (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33) and the Lord Jesus Himself was and is an adversary to all evil-doers. The apostles warn the Church to beware of Satan and resist his devices and machinations (1 Peter 5:8,9).

Satan's Schemes and Operations

It is not until the Gospel Age Church has been chosen - overcomers in spite of Satan's efforts to mislead them - that Satan is deprived of his liberty. This is clearly shown in advance in the symbolic picture of Revelation 20:3 with the decisive statement, *"that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled"*. Then he will be released, but only for *"a little season"*.

Satan, the liar from the beginning (John 8:44), who deceived and misled our first parents, has been active ever since, in opposition to God and righteousness. His schemes and machinations were carried out with subtlety and various forms of masquerade. First he used the serpent, then later on angels that he had induced to disobey God and sin. These disobedient angels became his emissaries in further deceptions of human beings.

Some of these deceptions took the form of idol worship, with which many evil and immoral practices were associated. The heathen temples became centres for the fallen angels, who were able to influence and even take possession of some of the worshippers who were so misguided as to permit them to do so.

After Jesus Christ came to earth to preach the Kingdom of God, and the apostles and disciples were sent out to preach deliverance from Satan and his evil messengers and institutions, Satan's opposition was manifested through the Scribes and Pharisees, Jewish leaders, and hypocritical priests and others who considered their place and power were threatened.

Still later, the great truths of the Gospel were counterfeited, and false teachings were freely circulated, purporting to be part of the Gospel message. The apostles were obliged to warn and forewarn the people to make sure they examined all teachings

critically, comparing them with the inspired apostles' teachings and writings to enable them to differentiate between truth and error (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

To foretell the future and thus help genuine truth-seekers to discern truth and reject error, the visions of Revelation were given through John in a succession of symbolic representations. By this means, genuine truth-seekers were given a knowledge of what to expect and how to recognise the evil systems that would arise. Unbelievers would not be able to understand the visions, and consequently would be unable to appreciate the significance of many of the major developments that would take place.

Thus it was that Pagan Rome, the political and idolatrous power which dominated the known world in the latter part of the Jewish Age and the early years of the Gospel Age, was represented by "*a great red dragon*", as we saw in the consideration of Revelation chapters 12 and 13. The great red dragon was described as "*that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world*" (Revelation 12:9). When Christianity was adopted as the religion of the Roman Empire, the new government under Constantine made Christianity compulsory, but in a debased form. The people continued their lives under the government of Rome, which government became more and more dominated by the State Church. In the course of time, this government became the Papacy with its claim to be the only true religious authority to which the whole world should be subject politically as well as spiritually (Revelation 13:1-8).

Then the two-horned beast arose and did great wonders, and an image of the beast was formed. The two-horned beast had horns like a lamb, but he spoke as a dragon, that is, a political power, as we saw in the comments on Revelation 13. The Church which protested against Rome and became Protestantism repeated the same mistake by establishing itself in and by worldly governments, and continuing with many errors of doctrine and practice taken over from the Papal Church. In doctrine and practice, Protestantism became an "*image*" of the "*beast*".

In Revelation 19:19 and 20 we are told of God's judgment on the Papacy and Protestantism in general. These represent the religious aspect of the social order, leaving the "dragon" aspect to be dealt with; the dragon which gave political power to the religious systems, when these in loyalty to Christ should have remained separate from the world (Revelation 13:2).

Chapter 19 tells further of the Lord's dealings with Great Babylon, including both the "beast" and his "image". Thus we are brought to the basis, right down to bedrock consisting of the great red dragon upon whom all of false Christianity had been resting, and upon whose support false Christianity had always relied (Revelation 17:15-17; 18:11-19). Chapter 19 further tells how the "beast" and the "false prophet" are found fighting together against the Lord in such ways as working with the secular political power to bring about world peace, and becoming involved with politics and social programs, contrary to the Lord's instructions to His people to be subject to and separate from the powers that be (Revelation 18:20).

Both the "*beast*" and the "*false prophet*" have been and still are used by the personal Satan, "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Ephesians 2:2). The Devil's name, Satan, from first to last is particularly attached to political world power, which Satan took over in the Garden of Eden when he succeeded in turning our first parents from obedience to God to subjection to himself.

Satan deceived Eve into disobeying God's command. Adam was not deceived but followed Eve in disobedience (1 Timothy 2:13,14). They were sorry afterwards as God punished them by exclusion from Eden, and by making them follow a life filled with toil and sweat, until death finally overcame them.

Cain rebelled against God by offering to God a sacrifice that was not acceptable. Apparently Cain offered only what suited him to offer, and not what God required as an offering. The apostle John tells us how to regard Cain 's actions: "*Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*" (1 John 3:12).

That is why we see in Revelation 20:2 a forecast concerning both political power and Satan, whose name the Lord God attached to the "dragon" of world power. "*And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.*"

To Satan, in his efforts to supplant God as the Ruler of the human race, it has made little difference what the professed religion of any tribe, people or nation might be. What has concerned him most has been the retaining of influence in the government of any tribe, people or nation as would encourage

worldliness, selfishness, ignorance and idolatry in one form or another (any or all of them). In particular, since Jesus came to earth and Christianity began, Satan has sought to pervert any and every reform movement, and every effort of sincere Christians to learn, teach and live the true doctrine of Christ. Satan has sought to influence people to believe in and worship idols, images, statues and icons. To those who preferred something more intellectual, Satan provided vain philosophies such as those among the ancient Greeks mentioned in the New Testament, (Colossians 2:8), and false teachings such as the Trinity and the immortality of the soul.

In more recent times, the theory of evolution has caused many to turn from the account of creation given in the Word of God, and so do away with the need to worship a personal God, or realise the nature of sin and the need of faith in Jesus Christ. Some people today have turned from Christianity to one or other of the heathen religions, and accepted their false theories of life and life after death.

In Western society today, there is no longer prominence given to Christianity. Freedom of worship and equality of all religions are now advocated and promoted, allowing and encouraging all sorts of organisations, religious and irreligious, to flourish and prosper, resulting in the increase of confusion among people generally. The Lord Jesus said, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad"* (Matthew 12:30).

Therefore, when the *"beast"* and the *"false prophet"*, the systems of Christianity, are dealt with by the Lord, along with heathen religious systems, and the Lord takes full political control by establishing His Kingdom over all the earth, then Satan, *"the god of this world"*, and *"the great red dragon"* of ungodly political despotism called by Satan's name, will be bound and powerless. No influence will be able to interfere with the Lord's thousand-year work of raising the dead and leading all earth's peoples in ways that are right and true.

CHAPTER 16

THE DESTRUCTION OF SATAN AND DEATH REVELATION 20:4 - 15

THE FIRST RESURRECTION AND THE REST OF THE DEAD

⁴*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

⁵*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*

⁶*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*

We have seen in the previous three verses that the great work of the thousand-year Kingdom Age will not be interrupted or interfered with by Satan, the "god of this world". Satan has persisted in his disobedience and opposition to God, and in his efforts to mislead the human race, even in the face of the marvellous example of obedience set by the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan has shown no sign of remorse or repentance for the sorrow and misery he has brought on the world. The fact that the Lord will restrain him for one thousand years is something over which all who love righteousness and hate iniquity can rejoice and be thankful.

20:4 The certainty of the reward of the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus is now emphasised: "*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them*". Previous visions have indicated the need of patience under affliction, persecution and martyrdom, with the promise that the "overcomers" will in due time sit with the Lord in His throne, for their names are "*written in the book of life of the Lamb*". The "bride" of the Lamb "*hath made herself ready*" and will sit with Him in His throne, even as He overcame, and is set down with the Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21; 13:8; 14:1-5). Furthermore, when the Lamb stands on Mount Sion, one hundred and forty-four thousand having His name and His Father's name written in their foreheads, stand with Him (Revelation 14:1-5).

But in our verse we read of thrones: "*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them*". The number of these thrones must surely be equal to the number of resurrected overcomers of the Gospel Age, the "*heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:17). These overcomers, who are also joint heirs, are said to number 144,000, so it follows that the number of thrones on which "they" sat is 144,000.

To sit on a throne signifies a political position as head of a government to see to the implementation of the laws, and to have authority to punish wrongdoers. In the few modern countries where a monarch is still recognised, the monarch has only a semblance of power. He or she is really a figurehead whose duties are mainly of a social kind.

But of those who will occupy the 144,000 thrones, the declaration is: "*And they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them*". This means that they are given authority as rulers to execute judgment. In ancient times a ruler was also called a judge, and exercised judicial powers. Dealing with lawbreakers was only part of his or her prerogative. His or her duty was to preserve peace and order in the realm, and also give rewards for well-doing.

In ancient Israel, the Judges, and later the Kings, were to preserve the true worship and encourage the people to serve God faithfully. The joint heirs, who have judgment given unto them, will administer justice in a kingdom of truth and righteousness, and see to the general welfare of those over whom they are set in authority for one thousand years. They will no doubt work closely with the ancient worthies, the faithful of Old Testament times, whose reward is to be "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16).

It is good for believers to recognise that to seek political power and influence now is not what the Lord requires or commands, rather the reverse. Life for the Christian believer now means proclaiming the gospel and living in harmony with it, faithfully following as far as possible in the Lord Jesus' footsteps. Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.*" (John 18:36). He also said, "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32).

Satan from the beginning has fought in his own destructive way to gain the kingdom of earth for himself, and has freely offered its

professed benefits to all who would serve him. He even tried to persuade the Lord Jesus to worship him, offering to give Jesus *"all the kingdoms of the world"* in return for His worship (Matthew 4:8-11).

The *"great red dragon"* fought for power in the Christian era in imitation of Satan. *The "beast with the seven heads and ten horns"* represented the successful rulership of a false religious system combined with temporal power and authority. The *"false prophet"* has also sought to work to bring about God's Kingdom on earth in this present age, not realising that God will set up His Kingdom on earth in His own due time.

The Gospel Age saints understand that they do not need to work or fight for the Kingdom of God. It is given to them. They are to be spirit beings, like the Lord Jesus, and see Him *"as He is"* (1 John 3:2). They will have powers given to them by the Lord to assist in the great work of enlightenment and blessing of the whole human race throughout the world. The details of the workings of the Kingdom are not given to us, so we must wait and see how the Lord Jesus, as God's appointed King, will order and direct the operation of the Kingdom of God.

We are given only an occasional indication of the organisation of the Kingdom to come. In the parable of the pounds in Luke 19: 12-27, the following two verses 17 and 19 are interesting: *"And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities"*.

It would be unwise to say that these verses indicate that each overcomer will have an allotted area or locality of control in God's Kingdom, because the verses are part of a parable, and may not be intended to teach such a lesson. But God is a God of order, and it is reasonable to assume that the Lord Jesus will delegate certain responsibilities to His faithful servants in administering His Father's kingdom.

Jesus said to His twelve apostles: *"... Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* (Matthew 19:28).

The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians who sought to grasp power and indulgence. *"Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you."* (1 Corinthians 4:8). The apostle was foreshadowing rulership of the joint heirs in the Kingdom of God, but the time for that was in the future from the time when the apostle wrote his words of rebuke.

In marked contrast is the description in our verse of those who will, with Paul, reign as kings, having suffered for Christ's sake: *"them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"*.

These words of Scripture run counter to the aims and aspirations of those religious bodies and organisations which have sought political power in connection with the preaching of the Gospel. Believers are exhorted to be subject to earthly rulers, not try to join with them. (Romans 13:1-7) Believers must wait in patience and faithfulness until such time as the Lord sees fit to give them the Kingdom, and to each a throne with power and ability to assist with the enlightenment and blessing of those over whom each believer will be given authority.

But the details are not given to us. The emphasis should be on Christ: *"and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"*.

The First Resurrection

20:5 This is the first resurrection, and only specially chosen ones will be in it. They have not been arbitrarily chosen, but called by the Gospel, and chosen if they respond to the call, and devote their lives to Him Who died for them and will call them forth to this glorious inheritance.

The words in this verse, *"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished"* are an interpolation and are not part of the inspired Word of God. The evidence for this understanding is as follows:

* The words do not occur in the oldest known Greek manuscript of the Revelation, the Codex Sinaiticus of the fourth century;

* The words *"The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished"* occur in the Alexandrine manuscript, but it is a later manuscript than the Sinaitic, as it dates from the fifth century;

* The third of the three oldest Greek manuscripts, the Codex Vaticanus 1209 is of the fourth century as is the Sinaitic, but the Vatican manuscript contains none of the Revelation , so it cannot be quoted as evidence one way or the other.

The Emphatic Diaglott, which is often very helpful with its translation and footnotes, unfortunately gives a wrong impression in its footnote on Revelation 20:5. The footnote states that Vatican manuscript 1160 omits the words in question, saying "These words were probably omitted by oversight in Vat.MS (evidently meaning Vatican MS 1160), as they are found in A.B.C." This is surely an unwarranted assumption, since there is no early evidence for the authenticity of the words.

It is also not true to say that Vatican manuscript 1209 contains the words in question, because that manuscript contains not one word of the Revelation. The Diaglott also gives a wrong impression when it adds in its footnote, "though not in the Syriac" as though the omission of the words from the Syriac version were an error.

It is contrary to Scripture to say that the rest of the dead will not live again until the thousand years are finished, because the thousand years of the Kingdom Age are a time of judgment and blessing of the human race promised in the Word of God, as we will see in the comments on the remaining chapters of the Revelation.

The Sinaitic manuscript is believed by scholars to be the oldest of all known manuscripts of the New Testament, and is thought to be dated about 350 AD. It was discovered in fragments by Constantine Tischendorf at Mount Sinai in the years 1844 to 1859, carefully preserved and subsequently published. In the Tauchnitz edition of the English New Testament, there are footnotes showing the variations of the Sinaitic manuscript from the renderings of the King James Version. The edition contains a Preface by Constantine Tischendorf himself, dated 1868. Whether all the footnotes are also by Tischendorf is not clear. But it is curious to read the footnote on Revelation 20:5 stating that the omission of the words in question from the Sinaitic manuscript was "a mere error." This assumption is unwarranted,

and pushes aside the helpful evidence of the Sinaitic, so remarkably preserved through some fifteen centuries, that the thousand-year reign of Christ, the Church and the ancient worthies, will be an age of blessing and enlightenment for the whole human race as shown in another vision still to be considered.

20:6 "*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.*" In this present life the believer strives to be holy, but because of the believer's inability to attain true holiness, the Lord graciously imputes righteousness to each individual on account of faith (Romans 4:6-8, 22-25).

But in the first resurrection, true believers will be raised as glorious spirit beings, able then to live and act in full accord with God's holy will.

On those who are granted to take part in the first resurrection, we are told, "*the second death hath no power*". The second death is God's punishment meted out to all who remain wilfully perverse and unbelieving after enlightenment is made freely available to them. Some, it seems, have remained or become perverse and unbelieving after receiving enlightenment in this life, as indicated in Hebrews 6:4-8. "*They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*". Those who are so favoured as to sit with Him in His throne will not conduct themselves in this way (Ephesians 5:1,2; Galatians 1:4, Matthew 20:28).

"*Blessed and holy*" will true believers be, and as it is written, "*they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*". They will be "*a royal priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:9) exercising royal governmental prerogatives, and performing priestly services of love and mercy to those over whom they rule. Of our Lord Jesus it is said, "*Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec*" (Hebrews 7:17-22).

Among the Jews under the Law Covenant, priests were not kings, and the Israelitish kings were never priests. Our Lord's priesthood differs from theirs. Jesus as High Priest offered Himself as the one and only efficacious sacrifice for sins for all people forever. We recognise Him now in the combined office of King and High Priest, as the apostle writes in Hebrews chapters seven and eight.

In Hebrews 10, verses 11 to 14, the Lord Jesus' priesthood is contrasted with the service of the priests under the Law Covenant. *"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."*

Those who are invited to be members of the royal priesthood in the thousand-year reign are not in any sense included in the office of High Priest, but in their office as *"priests of God and of Christ"* during the thousand years, they will perform other functions associated with priesthood, such as kindly service with a view to helping people to appreciate the love of God in sending His beloved Son to die for the whole human race who will be brought back from the grave to be given the opportunity of gaining everlasting life.

Having been themselves sinners redeemed by God's grace, the overcomers, members of the royal priesthood, will know from their own experiences how to sympathise with that vast multitude of people called forth from their graves to learn of God's gracious mercy offered to them through the great Melchisedec High Priest. Each of the overcomers, 144,000 in all, will be ready and eager to carry out their mission of helpfulness to the human race without having to contend with Satan and his devices.

This whole course of action is surely a most wonderful conception on the part of our Heavenly Father, enabling us and all true believers to be granted the opportunity to extend those sympathies developed in us by our own experiences and sufferings as believers and followers of Jesus Christ. Our own need of learning and our progression from sin to holiness enables us to realise even now how much the people of the world will need instruction and help.

Our confidence in God is such that He has planned the thousand-year reign to be an age of enlightenment and blessing. It is both unscriptural and fruitless to believe, as some do, that the earth will be desolate and uninhabited for the thousand-year period. The ultimate wonderful results of the thousand-year reign will be seen in visions still to be considered.

SATAN RELEASED

In Revelation 20:1 we noted the prophecy that Satan is to be bound during the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ and His joint-heirs. It follows that the program and work of that future age will be free from interference by Satan. The vision immediately before us omits details of the thousand-year reign and passes to its conclusion when Satan is to be released from his imprisonment.

⁷And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

⁸And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

⁹And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

¹⁰And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

20:7 Satan was bound by God's power and command through the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan was completely restrained and unable to escape or free himself for one thousand years. Then at the end of that time the power of God is used to release him.

20:8 Satan's character is unchanged. He is still in rebellion against God and goes out to deceive the nations after his release. There is no indication that Satan shows any gratitude or appreciation for his release, nor any sign of reform after seeing the great and benevolent work accomplished on earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Church. He simply wants to lead the nations down the path of rejection of God and His righteousness and along his own path of rebellion and evil.

The use of the names "Gog" and "Magog" in this connection has led some commentators and some believers in the thousand-year reign of Christ to think that the reference is to the Gog and Magog mentioned in Ezekiel. This understanding has led to the application of Ezekiel's prophecy to the end of the thousand years of the Kingdom Age.

From our studies we believe that the application of Ezekiel's prophecy mentioned above to the end of Christ's thousand-

year reign to be incorrect. The fulfilment of Gog of Magog (not Gog and Magog as in the Revelation) of Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 took place some time between 586 BC and 536 BC, as expounded in great detail by Ernest Henninges in the issue of the New Covenant Advocate of April 1934.

How then do we understand the insurrection of Gog and Magog referred to in Revelation 20:7-9? It is our contention that the names in Revelation are used symbolically, as are other names such as "Satan", "Jezebel", "Sodom", "Jerusalem" and "Babylon". This symbolic usage does not mean that the persons and places named did not exist, rather that lessons can be drawn from the characteristics and attributes of the historical persons and places when used as symbols, to convey important events and truths impressively and memorably.

Gog and Magog actually existed in Old Testament times. Their characters and attributes were such as to make them fitting symbols of the characters and attributes of certain persons and institutions to be found at the end of the Kingdom Age, that is, at the end of the thousand years during which Christ and the Church have been reigning while Satan has been bound.

The character of Gog and his hordes is clearly seen in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39: ungovernable, roving, cruel, treacherous and destructive. Of such character will be those who will rebel against the righteous government of God's Kingdom, incited no doubt by Satan, who will be at large and will oppose the righteous and just rule established by Christ and His joint-heirs, and seek to establish his own evil rule.

Those persons of the disposition of Gog and Magog will certainly not constitute everyone living on earth at the end of the Kingdom Age. They will be only a portion of earth's populace scattered throughout the *"four quarters of the earth"*, that is, the whole earth. The majority of the human race will not join in the rebellion. They will be able to see through Satan's deception, and will remain loyal to the King of kings and thus gain the reward of eternal life, enjoying God's favour and the beauties of a restored earth.

"The number of whom is as the sand of the sea" is sometimes taken to refer to the immense numbers of people who will follow Satan at the end of the thousand years. But what our verse 9 says is that a great seduction of the nations will be attempted by

Satan, and it is the nations that are "*as the sand of the sea*", not the numbers who will follow Satan.

The figurative expression is apt, as it reminds us of the promise to Abraham, in which the multitude of the stars of heaven is given as an example of a very great number. "*As the sand of the sea*" is another illustration of the same thing, as is "*the dust of the earth*" (Genesis 18:16; 15:5; Hebrews 11:12).

Satan has been persistent in his efforts to deceive and mislead earth's peoples of every generation. When people die, as all have done down the ages, they are of no more use to him. It would seem that Satan will view the earth peopled with millions called forth from their graves during the thousand years as a harvest ripe for reaping, a huge number over whom he can establish his rule in opposition to Jesus and His Heavenly Father.

What inducements and devices Satan will use to deceive the nations are not stated, so it is unwise to speculate. Satan's final efforts will be a test so important as to be a matter of life and death to earth's resurrected millions. Earth's peoples will have experienced the benefits of God's Kingdom ruled over by Jesus Christ, and will have offered to them the prospect of eternal life if they believe God's promise and obey His requirements.

Satan will endeavour to subvert God's promise of eternal life as he did in Eden when he said, "*Thou shalt not surely die*". For those who follow him and rebel, the names "*Gog and Magog*" are a fitting symbol, in view of the characters of those who overran Palestine while the Children of Israel were captive in Babylon.

20:9 The "*camp of the saints*" and "*the beloved city*" represent the established government of the Lord Jesus and His joint-heirs. We will see this more fully described in the visions of chapter 21. The ancient worthies, the "*princes in all the earth*" will be included in the earthly phase of the established government, and will certainly be in a position to explain to the peoples of earth the dire consequences of disobedience and rebellion.

But some will rebel and disobey, and, it seems, will seek to take control over the peoples whom Jesus died to save, and to whom He has granted the blessings and opportunities of the thousand years. Such persons would have to be unrepentant and evil, deserving of God's punishment. We can and should have no

sympathy with them. Their punishment is declared to be destruction: *"fire came down out of heaven and devoured them"*.

How are we to understand the nature of this punishment? "Heaven" or "heavens" in Scripture may have any of four straightforward meanings:

- (1) the heaven where God dwells;
- (2) the astronomical heavens of the stars and planets;
- (3) the heaven or "windows of heaven" that released the flood waters in Noah's day; and
- (4) the atmospheric heavens where the clouds gather and the birds fly.

"Heaven" and "heavens" and "fire" are also used symbolically in Scripture. The context must always be taken into account when considering the meaning. The fact that God punishes sinners appears symbolically in Psalm 97:3 *"A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about."*

Literal fire, however, rained upon Sodom *"from the Lord out of heaven"* (Genesis 19:24). We surely cannot think that the Lord God stored fire and brimstone in His heaven and rained it down from there. The meaning is better understood as out of his heaven the Lord commanded natural forces to operate. Recent geological research has discovered that there were deposits of pitch and sulphur in the hills near to Sodom, and the Lord seemingly used these substances to destroy the ancient city.

An invading army is like a fire, destroying everything in its path. Isaiah 9:28 says, *"wickedness burneth as the fire; it shall devour"*.

The valley outside Jerusalem where rubbish was burnt is spoken of as *"a lake of fire"*. The Jews were not to throw anything alive into it. The bodies of criminals were thrown in, but only after they had been executed by the due process of law. The second death is spoken of as a *"lake of fire"*. This "fire" signifies destruction, not torment, as we will endeavour to show.

When God was about to give the law to Israel, He impressed upon them His majesty and the importance of the occasion by manifestations of fire on Sinai. *"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to*

meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." (Exodus 19: 16 to 18).

This account, accompanied by lessons applicable to the Gospel Age, appears in Hebrews 12:18-21, 25,26.

When Aaron made his first offerings before the Lord according to the command of Moses, God testified His approval and His acceptance of the offerings: *"And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces "* (Leviticus 9:24). *"From before the Lord"* would not mean from God's Heaven, but from the Most Holy of the tabernacle, where God's presence was, and where His presence was represented by the light between the two cherubim.

When Nadab and Abihu presumptuously put fire and incense in their censers, God demonstrated His disapproval: *"And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord."* We should note that while the fire *"devoured them"*, we read that *"they died"*. The context shows that their bodies were not consumed. Moses called two men to carry the dead bodies away and deposit them outside the camp (Leviticus 10:1-5). Verse 10 of Leviticus 10 tells us that the lesson was *"that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean"*. See also Numbers 3:4; 26; 61; 1 Chronicles 24:1,2; and Leviticus 7:22-27.

Deuteronomy 4:24 and 9:3 were warnings to Israel that *"the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God"*. When God went as a consuming fire before the Israelites in the wilderness, literal fire is not meant. God prepared the way and brought success to the Israelites in driving out and destroying heathen nations.

These methods of expression in the Old Testament help us to understand similar forms of expression in the New Testament. At the end of the thousand years, it seems that the recalcitrant will rise up against the government that has instructed them and helped them to turn voluntarily from sin, accept forgiveness through Jesus Christ and proceed toward righteousness and life everlasting.

Our inquiry concerning the "heaven" out of which fire will come to consume the rebels at the end of the Kingdom Age would be incomplete without a consideration of Peter's words concerning the "heavens" which are to "pass away" at the end of the Gospel Age. *"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men"* (2 Peter 3:7).

The Apostle goes on to explain how that day of judgment and perdition will be revealed: *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"* (2 Peter 3: 10 to 12).

Evidently "heavens" and "earth" are used in the above verses in a symbolic sense, and refer to the order of things which followed the flood of Noah's day and which has continued to the present time, the "heavens" referring to the ruling and governing powers, the "earth" to the social order.

Peter then tells us that a new heavens and a new earth will follow *"wherein dwelleth righteousness"*. This will be the new order, the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Church which will operate in marked contrast to the present evil order of things.

The new "heavens" will have authority at the end of the thousand years to deal with wilful opposers, God Himself having authorised and decreed His promised Kingdom.

Finally, the Lord Jesus will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father, *"that God may be all in all"* (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Those who proved rebellious toward a righteous order of things will die the second death, from which there will be no resurrection. Believers, approved of God, will receive everlasting life, so that at last God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

20:10 *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* Does this teach eternal torment? We say it does not.

In the first place the *"beast"* and the *"false prophet"* are religious systems and as such cannot experience or feel torment. Satan, a spirit being, surely cannot suffer the agonies of burning in a literal fire as a human can. In the second place, the peculiarities of language should be considered. In Exodus 21:6 we read, *"Then his master shall bring him unto the judges: he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post: and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."* The idea is, of course, continuously, as long as he lives. This enables us to understand that *"for ever"* may mean for a continuous uninterrupted period of whatever length. (See also Leviticus 7:34, 36.) All the ordinances of the Jewish law were *"for ever"*, but they came to an end when Christ nailed the law to His cross (Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 7:27,28; 9:1-13).

"For ever" was the right term to apply to the law in the sense that the Israelites were to understand that they could not do one day according to the law, and the next day do as they pleased contrary to the law. Under the law was their position continuously for centuries, and they could not get out of it.

Continuity is the meaning here, as it is when we say in English, for example, "Please close the door, it is for ever banging", or "The weather is for ever dry, we badly need rain", or again, "Kindly stand aside, you are for ever in the way". The idea of "for ever" is continuity for a short or long period.

On the other hand when we say that God lives for ever, there is no limitation or end meant, but the idea of continuity is there. So it is with the promises of everlasting life to those who are saved. It is continuous, unbroken and eternal life.

The *"lake of fire"* is the second death, not a place of torment, as we will see in verse 14. *"Tormented day and night"* would seem to refer and apply to the rebellious ones who seek to rise up against the Lord's government in an attempt to overthrow it. They will be tormented continuously as their plans and schemes come to nought during the duration of their manoeuvring and plotting as described in verse 9: *"they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city."*

These prophetic words convey to us that God will not overlook wilful or persistent sin after enlightenment. These and other passages of Scripture are contrary to the doctrine of universal

salvation. The Scripture makes it clear that the terms of salvation must be recognised, accepted and obeyed in order to gain salvation to life eternal (Hebrews 10:26-31). The Scriptures also tell us that not everyone will follow the path that leads to eternal life.

Destruction is meant by the *"lake of fire"* which is the second death. Satan, the "beast" and the "false prophet" are not to be tormented for ever, they are to be destroyed. The two prominent institutions of the Papacy and Protestantism, by which millions have been led astray, are to be destroyed at the end of this Gospel Age, and remain destroyed never to rise again. Satan's destruction will not occur until the end of the Kingdom Age.

The destruction of Satan and false religious systems demonstrates that God is just and true and has no double standards and will not compromise with wrong, as the Psalmist wrote: *"The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy"* (Psalm 145:20).

Our verses 7-10 form a complete picture and constitute a complete vision. Verse 11 begins another vision complete in itself of the great judgment day.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

¹¹And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

And I Saw

20:11 *"And I saw ..."* These words, since they follow verse 7 *"when the thousand years are expired"*, have sometimes been taken to mean that at the end of the thousand years Christ will sit on His throne and then proceed with the work of calling forth the dead and judging them. But such an understanding fails to give sufficient weight to the character of the book and the manner and timing of the visions given to John.

Revelation 1:2 says that John *"bare record of ... all things that he saw"*, but nowhere is it said that he saw all the visions one after the other in one uninterrupted session.

Revelation 1:9 explains that John was on the island of Patmos. In John's day Patmos was a penal settlement, and John must have been a prisoner there because of his faithfulness in the

Lord's service. He must have been an old man when he received the visions and recorded them. We are not told the length of time over which the visions were spread. The time may have been weeks, months or even years. We do not know. John saw first a vision of the Lord, and at the conclusion of the vision he received the command, *"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"*. Then follow the messages to the seven churches.

It seems only reasonable to assume that John must have been given time to write down each vision after it was given to him. The words *"And I saw"* occur frequently throughout the Revelation, and indicate that John was given the visions by the Lord Jesus, Who received them from God. They were given for the benefit of the Gospel Age Church as a whole, to inform believers by means of recorded signs and symbols to enable each generation to recognise and identify the mighty political and religious systems that would arise.

But the visions given are not necessarily in chronological order in the circumstances of their fulfilment in historical movements or events. We can understand this arrangement when we think of historical records. Events that occur in the same period of time in different parts of the earth cannot be described in a jumble of movements of armies, navies and air forces all together. Each event or campaign or political development must be described individually in order to make sense. The timing of each separate historical event or development must be indicated separately and as precisely as possible, so that the reader may gain an understanding of the scene or period of time in history in its many aspects as completely as possible.

The Lord's method in giving the visions to John was to separate the future from John's day into distinct parts. By separate visions or images which John saw, Christians of any given period were able to distinguish the political from the ecclesiastical, the true Gospel teaching from the false, and determine their attitude toward each.

Christians living in earlier centuries have been able to trace the working of God down to their own times. Unbelievers have not understood the visions. The Lord arranged the visions to John in a way that each covered a certain period, not necessarily in chronological order; sometimes four or five pictures were given of

the same chronological period, each disclosing various aspects of the forces and events, religious and political, of that period.

So when John writes, "*And I saw ...*" we must understand firstly that he relates the visions in the order that he saw them; and secondly that some visions cover different aspects of the same period of time in order to portray political events on the one hand and religious events on the other, which could not be coherently described in one combined presentation.

The same method of presentation is followed by the Lord in the visions of chapters 20, 21 and 22, so it is incumbent on us to continue with the same method of interpretation.

The messages to the Seven Churches recorded in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 cover the whole of the Gospel Age, and describe true and false teachers and teachings in each of the seven periods of the age. But these seven messages do not give us all details of the political and religious institutions, wars and other events of the Gospel Age. Other visions are given to supply additional details.

Another factor to be taken into account is the division of the books of Scripture into chapters and verses as found in the King James Version, and followed by most modern versions and commentators. This division into chapters and verses is a comparatively modern device, and is a very convenient aid for ready reference and study of various passages of Scripture under research or discussion.

Those who introduced the divisions into chapters did not always use the best judgment in where to end one chapter and begin another, but this need not cause difficulty if we consider the context, look ahead and take into account what follows.

So when we read the words "*And I saw ...*" repeated throughout John's record of the visions, we need to consider whether the things he saw in any one instance were things in connection with the same vision, as in Revelation 8:13 under the sounding of the fourth trumpet; or whether "*And I saw ...*" introduces a new vision as in Revelation 14:1, "*And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion ...*". The last verses of the preceding chapter (Revelation 13) show that the subject matter of the dragon, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, and then the two-horned beast is concluded within chapter 13.

We must also take into account that chapter 17 contains another vision of the same beast with seven heads and ten horns in relation to Babylon the Great which is described as riding the beast.

The more we study the Book of Revelation, the more we become aware of its careful construction. Instead of stating at the end of chapter 6, for example, that this is the end of this vision, and that now in chapter 7 we are seeing the beginning of another vision, the subject matter in the two chapters is so presented that the thoughtful reader will recognise two distinct visions.

Revelation 6:13-17 tells of a finality of certain events in the Gospel Age, while Revelation 7:1-3 beginning "*And after these things I saw ...*" relates to another work of the Gospel Age, namely, the sealing of the saints in their foreheads, and informing us in our day that the age will not end until this work has been completed. This reminds us of our privilege and duty as God's people to witness and seek out, even in these last times, individuals who may be searching for the truth of the Scriptures and the messages and prophecies that the Scriptures contain.

In Revelation 7:9 "*After this I beheld*" may mean a new vision given after a period of rest in which John might have written down what he had seen up to this point. Verses 9 to 17 may be the record of something to follow immediately after the conclusion of the events of chapter 7:1-8. But the words, "*after this I beheld*" do not necessarily place the vision chronologically.

However, it is a fact that verses 9 to 17 refer to the Kingdom Age, the age following the selection and sealing of believers throughout the Gospel Age who have been chosen to live and reign with Christ for the one thousand years of the Kingdom Age.

All the visions we have considered so far constitute the inspired forecast of what secular history has told us has actually come to pass. We have considered separately, as we have studied the visions, political, religious, philosophical and military events, and prevalent teachings recorded for our knowledge and consideration.

We are therefore in a position to say with conviction, now that we are considering verse 11 of chapter 20, that the verse begins a separate and distinct vision of God's purpose pertaining to the same thousand-year period of time covered by the vision of the

previous verses. We have seen that Satan is to be bound for one thousand years during which Christ and the Church are to reign; the resurrection of the Church is called "*the first resurrection*" and their reign with Christ begins at the commencement of the thousand years. We know also from other Scriptures, such as Psalm 45:16 and Hebrews 11:2, 8-10, 13-16 and 39 that the faithful Ancient Worthies will receive their reward of resurrection to human life without sin to assist with the work of the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Church.

This leaves the remainder of the human race still to be dealt with, and it is the human race in general who will be the subjects of the thousand-year reign.

20:11 The "*great white throne*" stands for the absolute purity and holiness of God Who established it. It represents the supremacy of His righteousness in all His dealings. God can neither compromise with evil nor let the guilty go free. It declares the inflexibility of His justice, the inviolability of His decrees, and the impartiality of His decisions. God cannot look on iniquity with any degree of approval or even tolerance, however long He may bear with it and however successfully He may find in the midst of it a few faithful and upright people to serve Him with a sincere heart (Habakkuk 1:13; Philippians 3:3).

The "*great white throne*" is also a symbol of God's love inasmuch as God's supreme gift of His own beloved Son made possible a plan for the recovery of sinners and evil-doers, who would see what God has done for them, and would respond in repentance to His love and mercy.

Evil has been permitted by God for a time because God has the means of dealing with it, and because He knows that the majority of earth's millions will in time accept the means of salvation provided in and through His Son as the one and only efficacious sacrifice for sin. And it still remains, as the Apostle wrote to the Philippians, an obligation upon all to bow the knee, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and work out their "*own salvation with fear and trembling*." (Philippians 2:5-12).

Our verse 11 gives to us the location in time of the vision with the words "*from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away*".

John also saw *"him that sat"* on the great white throne. The throne is that of the Lord God, and it is that throne to which the Lord Jesus was exalted at His resurrection. The apostles in their preaching and writing emphasised this high honour granted to the Lord Jesus. After referring to a prophecy given through David, Peter said, as recorded in Acts 2: 32 and 34 to 36; *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

Hebrews 12:2 states also that Jesus *"is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"*.

This high position at the Father's right hand was given to our Lord at His ascension, and is still occupied by Him. But during the Gospel Age He has been engaged for the most part in dealing with the Church, whose members are to be joint-heirs with Him: *"heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together"* (Romans 8:17).

However, we need to be aware that in the vision of Revelation 20:11-15, the Church is not mentioned. There is good reason for this. The identity of the One seated on the throne, as well as the time to which the vision refers, is indicated by the words, *"from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them"*.

The Apostle Peter explains what is meant by "the earth" and "the heaven". In answer to the question *"Where is the promise of his coming?"* Peter explains that because of the great flood of Noah's day, the first "heavens" and the first "earth" perished. The *"world that then was"*, that is, the order of things that existed before the flood, was taken away (2 Peter 3:4-6).

But that former "world" or order of things, consisting of a "heavens" or ruling authority, and an "earth", or social organisation among the people, was succeeded by another "heavens" and "earth", of which Peter says, *"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men ... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great*

noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:7-10).

Peter goes on to explain that the destruction of the present ruling powers, political and religious, will not mean the destruction of the earth on which we live, because God has promised "*new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Peter 3:13) We understand this to mean completely new and righteous governmental arrangements, and completely new and righteous social arrangements among earth's peoples overseen by Jesus Christ, His Church, and the Ancient Worthies as "*princes in all the earth*".

There is another most important part of the vision of the great white throne with no reference at all to the joint-heirs. That part is not openly stated, but clearly implied. It is the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ in His sole prerogatives.

Jesus alone purchased the entire human race by giving His righteous and sinless human life as the ransom for all. The ransom or corresponding price was paid by the Lord Jesus with His life, which act brought about redemption from sin and death for all who will believe. He was also made a fully efficacious offering for sin, being the Antitype of the animals offered as sin offerings in earlier dispensations and later in the Tabernacle and Temple services. He is the one and only Mediator of the New Covenant. He also has the exclusive authority to call forth the dead, as we will see as we consider verses 12-15.

THE SOLE PREROGATIVES OF JESUS CHRIST

The sole and exclusive prerogatives of the Lord Jesus Christ are closely implied in the next vision.

¹²*And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

¹³*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*

¹⁴*And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

¹⁵*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Jesus alone purchased the whole human race by giving His perfect and sinless human life as the ransom for all, as Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2: 4-6. Jesus referred to this during His ministry when He said, *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

In the giving of the ransom, the Church to come had no part. Jesus alone in God's plan was *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"* (Revelation 13:8). The Apostle Peter says in his first epistle, chapter 1, verses 18 to 21, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."*

The Lord Jesus was also made an offering for sin, being the antitype of the animals offered as sin offerings in the Tabernacle and Temple services. In this sacrifice the Church had no part. When He died on the cross, *"the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God"* (1 Peter 3:18), the Church was not yet in existence, His disciples themselves being sinners under the Law requiring His sacrifice to atone for their sins. All this great work the Lord Jesus accomplished alone, and the apostles afterward went about preaching and emphasising this great fact.

Our Lord Jesus was also the antitype of the scapegoat, as the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:24, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree"*, or literally "to" the tree, that is, the cross; just as on the Day of Atonement the scapegoat carried the sins of the people out of the camp into the wilderness, signifying that the people's sins were carried away and no more held against them.

His blood was shed and figuratively sprinkled on the Mercy Seat on our behalf, as we read in Hebrews 9: 11 and 12; *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."*

Christ's sacrifice is finished and complete. Nothing needs to be, nor indeed can be, added to it.

Another of our Lord's special and exclusive offices is that of Mediator: "*And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*" (Hebrews 9:15) It is profitable for the believer to read and contemplate the whole passage, consisting of verses 11 to 27 of Hebrews 9.

The Jewish high priest alone entered the "Most Holy" on the Day of Atonement. Jesus Christ entered heaven alone in fulfillment of the type; His blood being accepted by the Father for the remission of sins as well as the seal of the New Covenant of mercy and forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22-28; all of Hebrews 20).

20:12 Another office exclusive to our Lord, represented in the vision of the Great White Throne, is the authority to call forth the dead. "*And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*" The Sinaitic and Alexandrine Manuscripts, the RV and all modern versions have "*before the throne*" instead of "*before God*".

Nowhere is it said that the Church will have any part in raising the dead, and this seems to be the reason why the Church is omitted from this vision.

The Lord Jesus Himself said, as recorded in John 5: 26 to 29', "*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*" (The word "damnation" is more accurately translated as "judgment".)

The "*resurrection of life*" to a heavenly existence is for the Church only, and it involves a change from earthly to spirit beings. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others who lived before the Christian era, and who were faithful, also come under the "resurrection of

life", but in their case the resurrection is to an earthly, human life. These ancient worthies, as we often call them, are to inherit the promised land, now known as the Holy Land. They are to have honourable positions in the thousand-year Kingdom as "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16; Luke 13:28; Hebrews 11:1-40).

They that have "*done evil*" includes all in this present life who have not become believers. The evil doers are of two main kinds:

- (1) persons who have had some light and who have neglected it and gone their own way; and
- (2) persons who have had no light and consequently could not have neglected to acknowledge the Saviour of Whom they had never heard (Matthew 11:20-24; 12:38-42).

When the Lord calls all people from the grave, and they come under the righteous rule of the Great White Throne, they will be held responsible for their attitude to the light that will then be available to all.

The Lord Jesus died, paid the ransom price for all, and shed His blood for the remission of everyone's sins, and therefore has the right to deal with and judge everyone under His righteous rule. The members of the Church have been and are being dealt with in this life. The remainder of the human race will be dealt with under the judgment of the Great White Throne.

Does this mean that everyone must go to heaven in order to stand before that throne? In responding to this question we should remember that the whole account is a vision illustrating the Lord Jesus' right to deal with the dead, small and great, that stand before the throne. "*Before the throne*" in the vision means under the authority of the throne, the new order of things on the earth after the Kingdom of God (symbolised by the Great White Throne) is established as the "*new heavens*" and a "*new earth*" wherein righteousness will dwell.

This new order of things ruled over by Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords will be completely different from the former order (this present evil world), in that the governmental arrangements will be righteous and just, and the social arrangements fair and equitable to all. This new order will be the granting of the prayer spoken by Christians for centuries, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10).

Now in this life we who have believed in God through Jesus Christ stand in a figure before the judgment-seat of God. We remain on earth and are being judged as we live out our lives striving to be overcomers, faithful to the end of our lives. So it is not difficult to understand that when the Lord Jesus calls forth "*all that are in the graves*", believers will be first called to be changed and given spirit bodies to be like Him and see Him as He is (1 John 3:2), while the remainder of the human race will be raised as human beings with human bodies suited to the earth, which God has prepared for people's everlasting home.

The Significance of Judge and Judgment

When the dead are raised to stand before the throne and be judged, we should consider carefully what is meant. Many Christians think that judgment means condemnation. Condemnation may or may not be the verdict of a judgment, but is not the judgment itself. Everything depends on the nature of the case and the scope of the judgment.

The terms judge and judgment were used in Biblical times in a broader manner than they are now in English usage. In our day, a judge is an official who presides over a court of law, hears and considers evidence and submissions in cases brought before him, and finally passes sentence in each case. When this is done for each case, the judge's work is finished. In Bible times, however, the title Judge was used of a ruler, and hearing cases was only a minor part of his official duties.

In the Old Testament we read of many rulers who were called judges. The Lord raised up judges to rule over Israel, to govern the nation for their civil and social benefit, and also for their religious duties and worship. Often judges were raised to deliver the Israelites from their idolatrous practices copied from their heathen neighbours and bring them back to the worship of the true God Who had brought them out of Egypt to be His special people (Judges 2:16-18). "*Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.*" He travelled the country and judged Israel in various places, but his seat of judgment was at Ramah. We read also that when Samuel was old "*he made his sons judges over Israel*" (1 Samuel 7:15-17; 8:1).

Later the rulers of Israel were called "kings", but in general they performed the same functions as the judges. The kings who were faithful ruled over the people and encouraged them to be true to God and serve Him for ever (1 Kings 3:3-11, 28; 4:29-34).

Solomon was a great king who ruled over and judged the nation of Israel. He was famous for his wisdom and his judgments when settling disputes and deciding cases brought before him.

The *"great white throne"* will be greater than Solomon's kingdom, or for that matter any kingdom or government, because it is to be established over and bring into subjection all kingdoms, governments and democracies found in all nations of the earth. The dead will be restored to life to receive enlightenment and the opportunity for everlasting life.

The Dead, Small and Great

"The dead, small and great" is a comprehensive description including all social classes. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the nobility, aristocracy, and the beggars all go to one final resting place, sheol (Hebrew), hades (Greek), the grave. All are of dust, and unto dust all return, as God told Adam. In death all will remain until Jesus Christ calls them forth to life under the judgment of the Great White Throne. All will then be on the same level, the same terms of salvation, the same opportunity of enlightenment, and the same responsibility to believe and obey, if they so choose.

If any choose not to believe and obey, and persist in disobedience, they will forfeit their opportunity to gain everlasting life. It seems from Isaiah 65:20 that a period of one hundred years will be the time allowed in the Kingdom Age for faith and obedience to be developed.

The work and mission of the Great White Throne are misunderstood, we believe, by Christians generally. Many suppose that the dead, raised to life, stand before the throne of God to have the good and evil deeds of their lives on earth read out, their sentences pronounced and that many will then go to heaven, while others will go to the fires of hell.

Some have thought also that the final punishment of the dead will be everlasting extinction. Such ideas unfortunately make a farce of one of the grandest and most loving of God's arrangements for dealing with the generally sinful and disobedient human race, which is to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

The Books Were Opened

"And the books were opened." The object of bringing forth the dead from the graves is that the Lord may deal with them justly and lovingly and provide the opportunity for all to gain everlasting life. We contend that it is a mistake to suppose that the books to be opened are books containing catalogues of each person's good and evil deeds, which are supposedly read out prior to judgment and possible condemnation.

A moment's contemplation should enable us to see how impracticable this understanding is. Millions, in fact billions of people have lived on this earth. The labour of recording all the deeds, good and bad, of billions of people who have lived, and to have the deeds read out like an accusation to which no reply is allowed, and no opportunity to repent or reform is given, would be a futile and useless arrangement. The millions who have never known the God of the Bible, and who have never heard of Jesus Christ, would not stand a chance to gain life, and would be condemned without opportunity or trial. God is just. He will certainly not let the guilty go free, but will not summarily condemn the innocent or those who have lived in ignorance of Him.

God is all-knowing. He is able to read the hearts and thoughts of everyone. The Lord Jesus while on earth could read the minds and hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees and other Jewish leaders whom He denounced as hypocrites. There is no need for huge volumes of records to be read out on a single twenty-four day. Such a notion is impracticable. God knows everything and can act and judge righteously and justly.

In any case, the literal understanding outlined above disregards the fact that what is recorded for us is a vision, and the vision is symbolic. What then is meant by the books to be opened on Judgment Day, and how will they be opened?

The books to be opened are those in which God's will and plan are set forth, and which contain a history of the human race, and the measures taken by God and His beloved Son to redeem mankind from sin and the condemnation of death. The only books answering this description are those of the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, the Bible, the world's best-selling book of books. In the Bible are collected historical books, Psalms, laws and ordinances of various kinds, and wonderful books of prophecy. There are four Gospel narratives recounting the Lord Jesus' teachings and actions, the Book of Acts, and the letters,

also inspired, explaining the true doctrine first to the Jews then to all people and nations. Finally there is the book we are striving to understand, the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

In this present life, the vast majority of people know nothing of the great truths of the Scriptures. They know nothing of God and nothing of Jesus Christ. Many who have heard of the Bible, and perhaps read some of it, have had false ideas about God's plans and the power of the Gospel as the means of salvation. All of the above have died in ignorance and taken their sins with them to the grave, where, as Ecclesiastes tells us there is neither wisdom nor knowledge, nor opportunity to learn better. *"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, ... there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest"* (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

The Books of the Scriptures provide the standard by which all under the rulership of the Great White Throne will be judged. The Bible account of man's creation, the fall into sin, and the consequent death which God declared would be man's punishment, will be useful to convince those called from the grave that God's warning to Adam was carried out as decreed without fear or favour. They will be witnesses that the decree of death inexorably came upon everyone, small and great.

But, on the other hand, the books of the Bible explain God's plan of redemption, and publish His willingness to receive repentant sinners who approach Him in the Name of Jesus. The books also state that faith and obedience of the Lord's commands will be as necessary in the Kingdom Age as they are now.

Those who stand before the Great White Throne will be informed of all this. It is that knowledge of the Truth of God's gracious plan that will be opened up to the people in the Kingdom Age.

And, as our verse 12 states, the peoples and nations will be judged according to the attitude they take toward God and toward the redemption offered to them in Christ Jesus. The question will then be: Will they accept the terms?

Judged According To Works

The myriads of the dead will have new responsibility resting upon them in the light of the new order of things under the rulership of the Great White Throne. The new order will be established to last for one thousand years, and will not be idle or weak. There

will need to be means and methods established to deal with the myriads of humanity. Many will have to learn simple but necessary practical things such as the necessity of personal hygiene to accompany cleanliness of mind and heart. The rule will be benevolent, teaching the people to distinguish between good and evil, between worship of the true God and idolatry, and teaching the people the principles of mercy, forbearance and love, and the renunciation of hatred, revenge and war.

The new order in the Kingdom Age will be a vast school, and the faithful of former ages will have an honourable position as leaders, directors and teachers (Hebrews 11:2, 8-10, 13-16, 39).

The statement *"and they were judged every man according to their works"* should therefore be understood to include their response to enlightenment, the knowledge of God's great plan and the salvation offered to all who will accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God Who gave Himself to redeem them and open the way to reconciliation with God.

Belief is a *"work"* the Lord Jesus said, when asked by the multitude, *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?"* Jesus answered, *"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"* (John 6:28, 29). The sending of Jesus by God included an appeal to mind and heart to turn from sin and accept Him as the Bread from heaven, *"he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world"*. That applies of course to those who would accept Him thankfully, for Jesus is that true Bread of life (John 6:32-35, 40).

So in the Kingdom Age. The first *"work"* to be expected from the risen dead under the rulership of that new and righteous order will be that they *"believe"* that Jesus died and shed His blood so that they who were dead now live again.

Their further *"works"* will consist of acting in accordance with the commandments given from God's throne by Jesus Christ, God's rightful King. *"Believe and obey"* will be the requirement then, as it is now.

The Book Of Life

"And another book was opened, which is the book of life." This will be a new book of life, new in the sense of being different from the book of life opened in the Gospel Age. Believers in this present Gospel Age are offered eternal life with the Lord Jesus

as joint-heirs in His Kingdom, being raised as spirit beings in His image and likeness (1 John 3:1,2; Philippians 3:8-14; 2:5-11; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15: 44-53).

The terms and conditions of salvation in the Kingdom Age will include a promise of life everlasting to those who had been dead, the majority in ignorance of God and Jesus Christ, all of whom are to receive enlightenment under the rule of God's Kingdom. Everlasting life will be granted to all who believe and obey the requirements of that righteous Kingdom.

When they hear out of the "books" all that God and the Lord Jesus have done for them, it seems only reasonable to think that they will be moved with gratitude and the desire to serve and obey. They will see and acknowledge the superiority of the new order of things over the old which led them only to the grave.

When they are called forth from the graves they will come as the same individuals as they were when they died, for memory is an essential part of individuality. They will know themselves, and recognise their loved ones and friends of their former lives. The time will be a most interesting one for all concerned.

20:13 *"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it."* It is tempting to think that these words apply specifically to those who were drowned or buried at sea. Certainly those drowned or buried at sea will be raised to life along with all who have died, but the "sea" in this verse is symbolic, as it is in the verses of Revelation. The "sea" is symbolic of disordered society with its restless masses of humanity as seen in other Scriptures such as Revelation 17:5 and Psalm 46:2, 3, 6-10.

There is an indication here that when the Kingdom is set up, some people living on the earth will be taken over from the present age to the next without passing into death.

They will not have died physically, but they will be "dead" as far as the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ is concerned, *"dead in trespasses and sins"*, and needing to be raised from that condition before they can have the life offered under the Kingdom rule.

This is shown in the next sentence: *"and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them"*. Death is a term used in Scripture of that state into which all mankind fell when the sentence of death was passed upon our first parents. Before

going down into the grave, all have death working in them, that is, all are imperfect and subject to illness, accident and other troubles leading to death (Romans 5:14, 17). When the present life ends for people, they are said to be in the grave.

So then the vision of the Great White Throne shows both groups, some in the grave and some not gone the whole distance to the grave, but in the latter case must be called from death in trespasses and sins in order to benefit from God's new order. We must be thankful to God that His Kingdom under Jesus Christ the King of kings will overlook none of our suffering and condemned race, except any who by their wilful and persistent sin have brought themselves under condemnation to the second death, from which there will be no resurrection (Hebrews 10:26-31; 6:4-6).

20:14 When the Kingdom Age work is finished, both Death and the Grave will have delivered up the dead that were in them, and they will no longer be operative, for there will no longer be sin and sinners. Hence the statement that they were cast into *"the lake of fire..* As we have already seen, the "lake of fire" is the Second Death, which means complete and everlasting destruction, as our verse says, *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."* The Sinaitic manuscript adds, *"even the lake of fire"*.

20:15 *"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* This emphasises that the wilfully wicked during the Kingdom Age will be held responsible for their perverseness. God cannot allow the earth, which was planned and intended to be the everlasting home for a faithful and obedient race of human beings, to be disturbed and undermined by the presence of any persons disposed to evil and practising evil deeds.

The choice is always available to everyone: choose obedience and everlasting life, or choose disobedience and everlasting death. The final destruction of the wilfully wicked must take place at the close of the Kingdom Age, because death, the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26) will not be allowed to continue into the ages to come. And death must be destroyed before Jesus finally delivers up the Kingdom to God the Father, that God may be *"all in all"* or *"everything to everyone"* (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

CHAPTER 17

A GREAT VOICE FROM THE THRONE

REVELATION 21:1 - 8

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

The reason for considering this parable of our Lord at this juncture is that it is often quoted as supposed authority for a mistaken understanding often given to the vision of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20.

The Lord Jesus gave several parables illustrating conditions in the closing period of the Gospel Age, such as the parable of the trustworthy servant, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, and the parable of the talents (Matthew 24:45-51; 25:1-30).

The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 refers to a time after the Gospel Age has concluded, after the Lord has come and has been established on the throne of His glory. His dealings at that future time are to be with all nations, not simply with those who believe and accept Him as their Saviour. All nations will include all people still on earth when the Lord Jesus appears, and all those who had gone down into the grave and have been called forth. The parable of the sheep and the goats is discussed in detail in the book "Our Lord's Parables" pages 371 to 409.

Since God is a God of order, we may understand that the proceedings in His Kingdom will be orderly. This orderly procedure will involve arrangements to cater for the physical needs of the people, the means of making known to them the facts of the Kingdom and the reasons for its establishment, their obligations of belief and obedience, and the benefits that their faith and obedience will bring them.

The people of all nations will be judged by their attitude toward the Lord's righteous and just government, that is, whether they will accept and obey, or seek to reject it and rebel. Their final position as either "sheep" or "goats" will be determined only after complete knowledge and abundant opportunity have brought them to full responsibility for their attitudes and actions.

It ought not to be supposed that the thousands of millions of the dead will be called forth pell-mell to stand before the throne for a few minutes while judgment is pronounced. Isaiah 65:17-25 refers to practical conditions in the Kingdom Age. Verse 20 of Isaiah 65 seems to be saying that a period of one hundred years will be allowed to all people to enable them to learn right ways and decide whether to serve God or not. Any who might decide to go their own way and not conform to the new and righteous order after one hundred years may forfeit the gift of everlasting life and go into eternal death.

It further seems from Isaiah 65:21 and 22 that the dead will be called forth from time to time in such numbers to enable the living to provide them with accommodation and food until they can provide for themselves. The Lord Jesus will be in control of the earth's weather and productivity, so that necessary food and water will be available in abundance and will be distributed and used fairly and wisely. Thus we can understand that the texts mentioned in Matthew 25:35-40 and 42-45, refer to the conduct of people after they have come forth from the grave to experience the enlightenment and help offered to them in God's Kingdom. The texts do not refer to people's conduct in this life, as many seem to think. The parable of the sheep and the goats is in complete harmony with the vision given to John, in which he sees the dead, small and great, stand before the Great White Throne.

Under the Law given to Israel, both sheep and goats were acceptable as sacrifices when offered in the prescribed manner - Leviticus 3:6-16; 5:6. The comparison in the Lord's parable relates to flocks of sheep and goats in the pastures. They were kept separate. But if through some mischance they became mixed together, the shepherd's duty was to separate them. It will be the task of the Lord Jesus to separate the unbelieving and disobedient out from among the multitudes of the faithful and obedient ones in the age to come.

The Kingdom Age, the time of the Great White Throne, will be the time when the true Light will enlighten everyone not previously enlightened or insufficiently enlightened (John 1:9). The age to come may well have sick people to be healed, hungry people to be fed, former prisoners of death to be helped when they are raised to life again to be participants in the new order of things. All will be judged by their actions and attitudes to the new circumstances and to those around them. Will they be sympathetic and helpful to others, co-operating with the Lord's

work of blessing, or will they be selfish, self-centred, intent on getting whatever they can for themselves? The Lord will know, and He will judge and judge righteously, separating the "sheep" from the "goats".

The parable of the sheep and the goats is in complete harmony with the Lord's principle of responsibility according to enlightenment and opportunity, as pictured in the vision of the Great White Throne. In this promised time, the books will be opened, as we have seen, in order that the nations might be taught the way of life through Jesus Christ Who died for all people, and so became the Purchaser of the entire human race. God's purpose in Jesus Christ is to do good to all and offer them eternal life, and do so without taking away their individuality or freedom of choice, whether that choice be made quickly or after a long period of struggle. The Lord will be ever patient then, as He is now, in giving time for repentance and newness of life (2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 21:28-32).

Among other indications of patience on the part of the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ during the Kingdom Age is the fact that this new age, and all it stands for, will be in operation for a very long time, one thousand years in all. This fact alone makes the conduct of the disobedient and the rebels the more reprehensible. They will not be able to say that they did not have enough time, or that the light was not bright enough, or that God's requirements were too demanding and beyond their abilities. The fault of disobedience will be all their own, and it will be useless trying to blame God for their own hardness of heart after abundant opportunity has been given them to observe and decide which course they will follow: obedience leading to everlasting life, or disobedience leading to everlasting death.

"And I saw..."

The first words of chapter 21, "*And I saw...*" indicate that the Lord had more to reveal to John concerning the work of the Kingdom than was contained in the vision of Revelation 20:11-15. In the vision to come, Revelation 21:1-8, John sees and hears matters necessary to be considered in connection with the preceding and succeeding visions. The additional details concerning the activities of the "*great white throne*" are of value to God's people today, as they have been also in the past, as they endeavour to understand the various services that the Throne will carry out in its dealings with the thousands of millions of the human race who will require enlightenment and guidance.

These details are also in harmony with the descriptions given in the vision of the Great Multitude in Revelation 7:9-17.

A GREAT VOICE FROM THE THRONE

¹*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

²*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

³*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

⁴*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

21:1 This verse locates the vision as beginning at the Kingdom Age, when the *"great white throne"* takes control. The *"first heaven and the first earth"* in the vision are not the natural heaven and earth, but the whole "order of things", that is, the political and ecclesiastical ruling powers and the social order among the people. This "order of things" will have given place to the new world order, God's government under Jesus Christ, and the new social arrangements under the authority of God's government and His King. *"There was no more sea"* tells us that there will be no more restless masses of people agitating, protesting, demonstrating, and rebelling against the political and religious powers.

21:2 A new order, described as *"the holy city, New Jerusalem"*, is to occupy the power and place of the kingdoms of this world. "City" in prophecy stands for government. Government, to win respect, must be established with powers of offence and defence under recognised authorities. Jerusalem was so established when the children of Israel were given Canaan for their inheritance, in which land they were required to conquer the heathen people and tribes who were inhabiting the land at that time.

The city or government, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God is *"holy"*, in contrast to the old Jerusalem, which suffered from the defects of its rulers and others. God's holy government is in contrast also to every other government under which all humanity has laboured and suffered.

These symbols show, when viewed in connection with Revelation 20:11, that the Kingdom of God will have earthly representatives. The dead, "*small and great*" will have over them a government they can see, understand and respect. The further symbolic description, "*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,*" indicates the peaceable object of its establishment. A symbolic wedding is to take place, so peace and goodwill are needed to provide the desirable conditions and atmosphere.

Some Bible students have wondered at this description of the holy government "*prepared as a bride*" because of the fact that the Gospel Age Church is called the bride of Christ. We should keep in mind that the same symbol may have different meanings according to the setting and the intention of the lesson to be drawn.

The Church as the bride of Christ is a symbol of a close relationship, unity, affection, a common holy purpose, and eventual joint-heirship as indicated in Romans 8:17 and 2 Corinthians 11:2. Revelation 21:2 speaks of the Holy City, and makes no mention of the Church as a bride. The symbolism represents the adornment, indicative of peaceableness and serenity accompanied by finery and more than usual attractiveness of the new world order under Christ and His bride, the Gospel Age Church.

The new seat of government is called New Jerusalem in contrast with old Jerusalem, with which the Jews were familiar. Old Jerusalem stood not only for political power, it was the place of the tabernacle, and later the temple, where the worship of God was carried on. That worship was based on the Law Covenant entered into by the Lord God and the Israelites at Sinai. By that covenant, provision was made for a priesthood and for forgiveness of sins upon prescribed sacrifices being offered and confession of their sins made by the sinners. God's presence among them was represented by the Shekinah light in the Most Holy, before which the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sin offerings on the Day of Atonement each year.

21:3 Consequently when the Great Voice from the throne says, "*Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them*", the question arises as to whether this refers to God personally dwelling among people, or whether the understanding is that a form of worship will be carried on

whereby all people may be enabled to draw near to God in such a way that He may be thought of as dwelling with them.

The "*tabernacle of God*" may be intended to symbolise permanent residence. But which ever way the words are to be understood, it does not seem likely or even probable that the great God of the universe will abandon His heavenly home to live on earth, rather that His blessing and personal care over the human race will be continually seen and experienced. As the last words of our verse 3 express it, "*they shall be his people* (literally "peoples", Variorum notes and RV) *and God Himself shall be with them*". The words "*and be their God*" are not found in the Sinaitic manuscript and are omitted from the RV margin, the RSV, Phillips MEV and the NEB translations.

There are reasons also for believing that the New Jerusalem is here used as a symbol of the New Covenant. This understanding will be more fully discussed in the vision described in Revelation 21:10 and onward.

In the meantime verse 4, discussed below, comes to our aid in understanding what will take place among the peoples who in Revelation 20:12 were said to "*stand before God*" to be judged.

21:4 Here it is clearly shown that part of the work of the Great White Throne will be the introduction and maintaining of such measures as will remove the causes of crying and tears. We have only to look around us and read the history of the human race in the Scriptures and in secular writings to realise that sin and its consequences constitute the greatest cause of tears.

The penalty for sin, death, is also a major cause of crying and tears. Life's disappointments, difficulties and sorrows also cause many tears. These things emphasise the importance of the work of the thousand years, which is to deal with sin and reveal the advantages of obeying and serving God.

There is no reason to believe that God will automatically take away sin and automatically make people righteous. Our verse 4 declares that after the work of the thousand years is complete, "*there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*".

ALL THINGS NEW

⁵*And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

⁶*And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*

⁷*He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

⁸*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

21:5 *"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."* This is most significant. God will not patch up the old order of things to prolong its life, or give the people liberty to experiment with government along their own lines in an endeavour to improve social conditions themselves. God intends and purposes to begin a new order of things, quite different from the old. The new order is to last for a thousand years, and will accomplish all that God intends it to accomplish.

Then follows in our verse 5 what seems to be a pause. *"And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."* What God promises He will perform. On our part we should study these *"true and faithful"* words which John was told to write.

21:6 Now we are given another statement to impress on our minds God's ability to deal with the situation. *"It is done."* This does not mean that all is done in a moment of time, but rather that whatever God says or promises that He will do, it is as good as done, for nothing in heaven or earth can interfere with its accomplishment or prevent it from being done as promised.

Psalms 33:6,7, referring to God's original creative work, is similarly expressed, and verse 9 of this Psalm explains, *"For he spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"*.

We believe that God's creative work covered a period of time. Evidently we are to understand that when God says a thing will be done, it will be done, even though the doing of it may cover a thousand years or more.

The next statement is the truth of God's further assurance to our faith: *"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."* In other words, God is the Self-existing One. His existence covers all time, and He has the power to carry out His will in the way and at the exact time He may see fit. This great fact has been proved by the fulfilment of prophecy. At the creation of the human race, God had certain designs, and those designs will be accomplished notwithstanding Satan's interference and the wickedness of some of the heavenly angels, as well as the persistent sin of mankind. God foretold a Great Deliverer, and that Deliverer came in the way and at the time the prophecies foretold: the birth of Jesus Christ of a virgin, and at a certain place and date. Jesus accomplished the work foretold, giving Himself as the ransom and sin offering that God's justice required.

Similarly, prophecies were made concerning the call and development of the Gospel Age Church, whose members are to occupy a special position as joint-heirs with Christ in the Kingdom. These prophecies are still being fulfilled, and one day all will come to pass as God has foreknown and foretold.

So also with the great work of the thousand years. All passages of Scripture in the Old Testament, our Lord's parables and teachings, the preaching of the Lord's apostles and disciples on the Kingdom, and the visions of the Revelation relating to the thousand years will all come to pass. The great Alpha and Omega will cause all prophecies to be fulfilled in His own due time. In due time Christ died for the ungodly. In due time He was raised from death and given a place at God's right hand. In due time His kingdom will be established over the whole earth, and its promised benefits and blessings will be a reality and no longer a prospect.

The reassuring words concerning God as the Alpha and Omega are followed by a significant promise: *"I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."* Our Saviour said on one of the feast days, *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink"*. The Law Covenant was futile as a means of giving life, for the Jews could not keep it. Hence the force of Jesus' words that He could give life to all who would come and drink of the water which He would give. Some believed and did drink of that water of life. Some also since then have heard the Gospel message and have drunk from the Fountain, and have been given the living water springing up unto everlasting life (John 7:37; 4:13,14).

The offer of the water of life was given first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, and we today are among some who have accepted the invitation. But millions have never heard the invitation and have died in ignorance of Christ, knowing nothing of the fountain of life offered by Him.

We who have been favoured because of belief in the Saviour and His atoning work for us, and who remain ever grateful for the life promised, may well and truly believe that in the Kingdom Age there will be thirsty ones among the unenlightened who will be glad to learn of the Fountain and drink of its life-giving water.

The "*fountain of the water of life*", the Gospel message, will be the means to cure the crying, sorrow, and pain, and finally do away with death itself.

Many Christians understand that in the present life opportunity is given to some to drink from the Fountain to which the Lord invited the multitudes to come and drink. They have been glad such a Fountain has been available. Unfortunately many Christians have failed to see that another age is to follow the present Gospel Age, and that the Great White Throne is a guarantee that the Fountain will still be available in the new age, to which "*him that is athirst*" may come and drink freely.

The new age, the Kingdom Age, is to be an era of blessing and enlightenment for earth's millions, but it also will be an age of judgment, that is, an age in which people's responses to God's righteous order under Jesus Christ will be assessed by Him and acted upon with divine knowledge and justice.

21:7 "*All things*" in this verse appears as "*these things*" in the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, the KJV margin and Phillips MEV. The same meaning, though differently rendered, is given in the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible, the RSV and the NEB.

Willingness to receive the water of life freely will be a significant step in the right direction for earth's resurrected millions. But the throne of God is a throne of righteousness, and He desires a fitting response to His offer freely made and offered free. It is only fair and reasonable that God requires faith and obedience before granting to each individual everlasting life and full inheritance of the benefits and blessings of His new and righteous order.

Drinking of the water of life is not a momentary action. It is a lifelong privilege and necessity as evidence of love for and devotion to the One Who opened the way by giving His own life on the cross. The Lord Jesus was faithful unto death, and as the risen Lord offers every assistance to those who will drink of the fountain He brought into being. Nothing short of faithfulness to death in this Age is a suitable response for Gospel Age believers, revealing a proper love towards Him Who so loved us. In chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation it is seen that the promises offered in this Gospel Age are to the overcomers who remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26 and 3:5, 12, 21).

Overcoming means, among other things, resisting temptation arising from our own natural inclinations, and the allurements and enticements placed before us by Satan and by others. We in this Age cannot do this in our own strength, but are assisted by the Lord when we ask His help.

In the Kingdom Age, some overcoming on the part of the people will be necessary, as our verse 7 tells us, for even though Satan will be bound, it seems there will still be some evilly-disposed persons, who by their own choice, will not come to the Fountain and drink, and who will try to persuade others not to drink of the life-giving water. Overcoming in the next age will involve refusal to follow the path of evil, and perseverance in doing the will of God. To such overcomers the promise is sure, *"He that overcometh shall inherit these things"*.

The necessity of submission to God by the people called forth from death and the grave to receive the benefits of the thousand-year reign is obvious. God's will shall ultimately be done on earth as it is done in heaven. The overcomers in the Kingdom Age will inherit all the rich provision of a restored earth, for which the Lord Jesus taught His disciples and all believers to pray, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10).

The relation of sonship mentioned in our verse 7 will mean perfect human life on the earth and harmony with God to all eternity; a free gift to those who appreciate God's love and mercy and the work of Jesus Christ, and who accept the terms of repentance, faith and obedience.

There will still be temptation to evil behaviour during the thousand-year reign of the Great White Throne. This fact is shown in the next verse.

21:8 The fact that some people will choose not to believe and obey during the age to come, and will forfeit salvation and life, will be no reflection on the power, dignity and righteousness of God's government. Nor will it imply any weakness on the part of God. Never at any time has God or His Son given people to understand that any refusal to believe and obey would be tolerated. No modification or watering down of God's requirements has ever been mentioned or implied. The exercise of self-will and selfish living contrary to God's requirements would be an eternal blemish on God's righteous order, and God could not tolerate that.

Hence the strong language of our verse. The incorrigible ones will consist of *"the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"*. The *"abominable"* mentioned above would mean participants in the abominable practices associated with spiritism, idol worship and the like.

We should understand that the above is not a list of such characters at the beginning of the Kingdom Age, for there will be many brought forth from the graves who will have lived in countries where the whole culture tolerated or was given over to such attitudes and practices.

The Kingdom Age is provided and arranged for the purpose of enlightening all with the knowledge of the true God, His Son Jesus Christ, and the instruction of all in righteous ways of living. Conformity of behaviour will be mandatory, but evidently there will be perverse individuals who may still secretly indulge their evil ways in defiance of Kingdom requirements.

This eventuality is implied in the statement that there are such in spite of all the enlightenment given and the examples set by the faithful and obedient. The fact that God will consign the wilfully disobedient to the second death, from which there will be no resurrection, is sufficient evidence that everything had been done for them consistent with God's purpose to have the earth filled with a race of human beings in His own image and likeness, with

freedom of choice, hating sin and hypocrisy, and fully established in holiness and goodness.

At this stage we are reminded of Revelation 17:5-18 concerning abominations in the Gospel Age, and how God dealt with them.

Adam, created in the image of God, had freedom of choice, albeit without experience, and some allowance was made for that. In the Kingdom Age, under the world-wide rule of the Great White Throne, there will be no excuse for persistence in evil ways after their wrong character is known and understood. There may be some punishments or measures put in place with a view to correction of evil actions and consequent reform, but we are not given any information about such other than the second death for wilful and persistent disobedience.

God, Who is longsuffering and patient, will not make any mistakes as to who *"shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"*. God's decision will be final, as final as the decision will be concerning those who shall be accounted worthy to live for ever in the earth freed from all curse and made suitable for man's everlasting home.

We should compare Revelation 21:24-27, still to be considered, and the following two verses.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

CHAPTER 18

THE CITY DESCENDS REVELATION 21:9 - 22:9

THE CITY COMING DOWN

⁹*And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.*

¹⁰*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,*

¹¹*Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;*

¹²*And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:*

¹³*On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*

¹⁴*And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

21:9 One of the seven angels, which John had seen in the vision recorded in chapter 15, was given the privilege and duty of showing John the next vision. It seems significant and appropriate to associate with the new order an angel who was involved with the punishments inflicted on the old sinful and corrupt order before its fall.

The angel in this vision represents official notification to all who will read or listen that God's promise of a new Divine Government will come to pass. The angel was a representative of God in the destruction of the old order, and now gives assurance that the new Government has the endorsement of those who took part in the overthrow of the old.

In the vision of Revelation 17 one of the angels in the vision showed John the judgment on that great religious and political system called "Babylon the Great". The angel explained to John that the ten horns (political powers) would make Babylon the Great desolate. Babylon would not be allowed to continue forever. In destroying her, the angel explains the "horns" were carrying out the will of God (though they were probably not aware of the fact).

In Revelation 21:2 the holy city is described as *"prepared as a bride"*, and in the following verses we read how a great voice proclaimed a great work to be accomplished. The holy city was not itself a bride, but prepared *"as a bride adorned for her husband"*. The holy city, the new government, is ready and fully equipped to carry out the great work as determined by God.

21:10 The angel carried John away *"in the spirit"* to see the holy city in more detail from a different vantage point. John was carried away to *"a great and high mountain"*. "Mountain" frequently symbolises "kingdom", and this may indicate to us that members of the Gospel Age Church living in these last days should be aware that they need to rise spiritually above the kingdoms of this world, and take their standpoint with the Lord God on His holy mountain or kingdom. Believers have in their possession these wonderful word pictures which help them to understand what is happening in world affairs and why. But we must always bear in mind that the new government promised will be set up in God's due time, and we must with patience wait for it.

The coming down of the holy city means more than the enforcement of political authority over the earth and regulation of the social order among people. The name "New Jerusalem" indicates more than this. We ought to consider other passages of Scripture which draw a contrast between the Old Jerusalem - God's government over the children of Israel for many centuries - and the new arrangements first proclaimed by the Lord Jesus when He said, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"*. He also at that time claimed authority to forgive sins (Matthew 11:28; 9:2-7).

When certain of the scribes said within themselves, *"This man blasphemeth"*, we are told that *"Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?"*. And to prove that *"the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house"* (Matthew 9:4-7).

The declaration of sins forgiven by one not of the tribe of Levi, to which belonged the priesthood, and the offering of sacrifices at the temple, and the blessing of the people with assurance of sins forgiven, was nothing short of revolutionary. But the people who witnessed the healing and rejoiced in it (Matthew 9:8) probably

did not realise or comprehend what the Lord's words signified. The days of the Jewish priesthood and sacrifices under the Law Covenant were numbered. When the Lord Jesus gave Himself on the cross as the one true Sacrifice for sins, the veil of the temple was torn apart from top to bottom. From that time the only true approach to God was to be in the name of Jesus, and forgiveness of sins only to those who came to God in Jesus' name with faith and penitent hearts (Hebrews 7:14-28).

The Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices were associated with Old Jerusalem. A great part of the mission of the Lord's disciples after His death and resurrection consisted in telling the Jews and proselytes that the Law Covenant was nailed to Christ's cross, and they should now seek forgiveness of sins and atonement by the new and living way, or new way of life opened up by Jesus Christ when He appeared in the presence of God as the one true Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Old Jerusalem stood for the Law Covenant with its bondage and inability to bring life to its adherents, while the New Jerusalem stands for the New Covenant, sealed by the one perfect sacrifice for sins, Jesus Christ the righteous, our High Priest through Whom alone forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God the Father is now freely obtainable. This wonderful subject is thoroughly examined in the book "Comparisons and Contrasts", a full and detailed discussion and exposition of the letter to the Hebrews and other relevant Scriptures.

God's plan and purpose in this Gospel Age is to call a few of earth's millions to repent and turn from sin, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in newness of life. Those who hear this call and respond to it receive the benefits of the New Covenant, the arrangement by which sins are forgiven and taken away, and also receive the invitation to qualify for the High Calling of Philippians 3:14, an inheritance in heaven to be with God and the Lord Jesus Christ to assist in bringing about God's promised blessing of all nations and all families of the earth.

What then is the significance of *"that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God"*? As a preliminary to a direct answer, let us first of all attempt to clarify the main issues. Many details of the Law Covenant were but shadows of better things to come. The new and better things are fulfilled in Christ. He is the One Who was typified in the animal offerings for sin. But now, by His shed blood, Jesus is able to

take away sin, to pronounce forgiveness of sins to those who come in faith, believing in His sacrifice and shed blood as the ever-sufficient atonement for sin (Colossians 2:9-17; 1:18-22).

Therefore the New Covenant is appropriately called the New Jerusalem. In this present age, New Jerusalem is said to be "above" in contrast to the Law Covenant established at Sinai. The children of the Law Covenant were in bondage, as Hagar was; but the children of the New Covenant are the children of promise, as Isaac was, and are free (Galatians 4:21-31). The apostle said, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"* (Galatians 5:1).

The liberty enjoyed by believers in Jesus under the New Covenant is not licence to do as they please. To the Jew and Jewish proselytes it meant liberty from Law Covenant bondage. And Gentile converts enjoy the same liberty under the New Covenant when they confess Christ, and receive through Him the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with the Heavenly Father.

The New Jerusalem, which is also the New Covenant, has no earthly temple such as the Jews had. Nevertheless the New Jerusalem has all that the ancient temple stood for, but on a higher plane. It operates from Heaven by virtue of the Lord's presence there as our High Priest, ever in the presence of God making intercession for us (Hebrews 7:22-28; 8:1-5). In Hebrews chapter 8 the apostle emphasises the Lord's present office as Mediator of the New Covenant on behalf of all Christian believers (Hebrews 8: 6-13).

Under the New Covenant, the agreement is that God will put His laws in their minds and write them in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:14, 15). This is achieved by having the Word of Truth and receiving the Holy Spirit promised in some measure at least to all believers.

By these means a character like our Master's is developed in believers to prepare them for a place with Him in heaven to engage in the great work of the Kingdom Age, during which New Covenant blessings will be made available to all who will believe, namely, forgiveness of sins and the will of God written in their hearts.

By saying that Jerusalem now, in this age, is "above" is meant that the New Covenant is ruling and regulating heavenly things and conditions. There is, firstly, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled to which our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, and which is reserved in heaven for those who are being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. And secondly, the heavenly conditions the children of the heavenly Jerusalem are permitted to enjoy, being "*blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*", sitting "*together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (1 Peter 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:6).

These two heavenly things and conditions agree with the understanding that our Lord Jesus became Mediator of the New Covenant in order that we, and all believers who have been called, may receive the promised eternal inheritance. And it is more firmly than ever established that the members of the Gospel Age Church are beneficiaries of the New Covenant, children of "*Jerusalem which is above*".

We now take up a more direct response to the question of the significance of "*the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven*" as mentioned in Revelation 21:2 and 10. By saying that New Jerusalem is coming down is meant that the sphere of influence of the New Covenant is to be increased to include the affairs of earth and its peoples, so that they too will be ruled and regulated by New Covenant conditions.

In this sense "*Jerusalem which is above*" has not yet "come down". Certainly it had not "come down" in Paul's day, as he speaks of it then as being "above". It is also certain that the holy city had not "come down" when John was receiving the visions recorded in the Revelation on the island of Patmos. John makes mention of a few facts before the visions were begun, but then makes the statement that the Revelation was given "*to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass*". This statement identifies the Revelation as a prophetic book, a prediction of events which were yet to take place. (Revelation 1:1) The visions of Revelation 21:2 and 10 were accordingly a prediction of great things yet to happen.

Those great things were not fulfilled in John's day, and the history of human affairs from that time until the present, clearly demonstrates that at no time have people been governed by New Covenant terms and conditions. Today we must still say, as did Paul to the Galatians, that the New Jerusalem is "above", and

has not yet "come down". In non-symbolic language we may say that the New Covenant is still involved with matters pertaining to the heavenly inheritance, the High Calling, because this very important feature of the Divine purpose is not yet completed.

It may well be asked why the holy city has not come down sooner. In response, it should be understood that the selection of the Gospel Age Church was to take a considerable time. To date, more than two thousand years have elapsed, and the full number of the Church is not yet complete. The New Covenant has been preached, and the Church, the joint-heirs with Christ, are being selected, but rulership in this present life in this evil order of things was not one of the conditions offered. Romans 8:17 tells believers that they are *"heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together"*.

Until the calling out of these joint-heirs is finished, the "city" will not come down. These children of God must first be given their heavenly position of glory before the remaining families of the earth can receive their appointed blessing. The whole creation groans and travails in pain together, the apostle writes in Romans 8, waiting for *"the manifestation of the sons of God"* (Romans 8: 19-22). Their manifestation will occur when Christ is revealed in glory to the whole world (Colossians 3:4). When the children of God are revealed as joint-heirs with Christ, the "city", the New Jerusalem, will then "come down."

Some Bible students take the New Jerusalem, the holy city, to represent the glorified Church in their position of joint-heirship. They do this because the Gospel Age saints are called the bride in Revelation 19:7, 8, and because the city is also called the bride in Revelation 21:9, 10. In this connection we should remember that in Scripture the same symbolic object may represent more than one spiritual reality, and also that the same symbolic object may have more than one meaning in close association or juxtaposition. So in Matthew 13:6 and 21 the shining of the sun symbolises persecution or tribulation for the truth's sake, while in Matthew 13:43 the shining of the sun symbolises the glory of the saints in the Kingdom after tribulation and persecution have finished.

In Revelation 19:7 and 8 the "bride" doubtless stands for the Gospel Age Church, but in Revelation 21:2, 9 and 10 *"the bride, the Lamb's wife"*, which is the New Jerusalem, undoubtedly

represents the New Covenant. The New Covenant, as Paul explains in Galatians 4:26, 27 is to have many more children than the Old or Law Covenant. Christ and His glorified Church, the King and High Priest, and the royal priesthood will reign over the earth under New Covenant conditions (Revelation 20:6).

Not until John was *"carried away in the spirit to a great and high mountain"* did he see *"that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God"* as our verse 10 tells us. So, not until the glorified Church is carried away to its glory in the mountain or Kingdom of God, shall they see the glorious New Jerusalem descending to earth to rule justly and righteously over all of earth's peoples.

21:11 *"Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."* The general description of *"her light"* emphasises the heavenly origin of the City; the New Jerusalem being altogether different from the kingdom of darkness which has ruled over the human race.

The *"jasper"*, being described as *"clear as crystal"* is evidently the diamond, because jasper is an opaque precious stone like agate. Strong's Concordance (2393) has for *"jasper"* simply *"a gem"*. The diamond is the most precious and most beautiful of all precious stones, and is a most striking expression of light. Its chief wonder is its brilliant sparkle. *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* as John wrote in 1 John 1:5. The New Jerusalem coming down from the God of light is well represented by a holy city of light, like a stone most precious, even the flawless, sparkling diamond.

21:12 *"And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."* The *"wall great and high"* represents the New Covenant laws and regulations, as they extend from a few believers now to all the human race. The New Covenant is well safeguarded in this respect, as all may see who read the Sermon on the Mount and other explanations regarding the New Covenant throughout the New Testament.

Every facility will be provided for all who wish to become citizens of that holy city, for on each of its four sides will be three gates. From whichever direction a person may come, he will find an

entrance before him and will not need to travel around to gain entry. The symbolism indicates that entrance to that city is by a way provided and appointed, and blessings will come to all who enter by one of the appointed ways. No provision is made for unauthorised entry or entry on terms other than God's.

21:13 *"On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates."* On the twelve gates John saw written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, very probably one name on each gate. This surely alludes to Revelation 7:1-8, where the whole number of the glorified church is mentioned, and also in Revelation 14:1-4 where their position as first-fruits and as joint-heirs *"which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"* is clearly shown.

Because there were not enough Israelites according to the flesh to make up the required number, the Lord went to the Gentiles, to choose out from among them sufficient obedient believers to complete the *"people for his name"* (Acts 15:14-18, Romans 11: 17-24). The Gentile members have been added to the original Jewish nucleus who believed in Jesus, and together they constitute the *"Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16).

It is perhaps intended that the whole picture be carried into the next age, when the City will be ruling over earth. Each *"gate"* will, it seems, have the name of one of the twelve tribes, and over each tribe will be an apostle, called an *"angel"* in Revelation 20:12, judging or ruling in that time of regeneration as the Lord Jesus had said in Matthew 19:27 and 28

The Old Testament uses the phrase *"sitting in the gate"*, meaning judging in matters by the elders who sat at the gate to judge cases and disputes brought before them (Ruth 4:1-11; 1 Samuel 4:18; 9:18; 2 Samuel 19:8; Jeremiah 38:7; Daniel 2:49). Thus it may be that a citizen in the age to come would belong to the "tribe" of God's Israel by whose "gate" he had entered.

21:14 *"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."* Presumably one name would be in each foundation. These foundations would be seen by each person entering a "gate" and walking along a passage through the walls.

The symbolism would seem to mean that the teaching of each apostle of the Lamb is the teaching of all the twelve. No one will

be able to become a citizen of the Holy City in the age to come, the Kingdom Age, without submitting to the teaching and commands of all the apostles. The apostolic teaching of salvation through Jesus Christ is the foundation of that great City.

MEASURING THE CITY

¹⁵*And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.*

¹⁶*And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.*

¹⁷*And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.*

¹⁸*And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.*

¹⁹*And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;*

²⁰*The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.*

²¹*And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*

21:15 John did not measure the city. In the vision he saw the angel measure it. The angel had a golden reed to measure the city, indicating that he was divinely appointed, and that the measure would be according to the divine will. Gold, the most precious of the metals, was used in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle and Temple at Jerusalem. It seems that explanations were given, for John says that the angel *"talked with him"*.

21:16 The length, breadth, and height of the city are equal. The angel measured the city and found it to be twelve thousand furlongs. It would seem that the angel measured the four sides of the city, not one side only. If this is correct, the length, breadth and height of the city would each be three thousand furlongs. This would make the capacity of the city 27,000,000,000 cubic furlongs. Can this symbolic picture be understood?

21:17 The word "furlong" is not the exact equivalent of the Greek word "stadion" in Revelation 21:16. The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 9:24 where it is translated "race". The "stadion" was the length of a well-known Grecian footrace, and it is used in 1 Corinthians 9:24 as a symbol of the Christian life, the end of which is a developed Christian character.

If this meaning of "stadion" is applied in Revelation 21:16, the understanding of the city's capacity ultimately will be 27,000,000,000 Christian characters developed under New Covenant conditions in the age to come. In other words it may be that the number of those who will be eternally saved is revealed to be 27,000,000,000 who will have conformed to the law of love and the requirements of the New Covenant, in which the law of Christ and of God has been written not on documents or tablets, but on their hearts and minds.

Statistics of the earth's population, living and dead, are not known to us, and it may be that the final number of those eternally saved may be more than 27,000,000,000. We must leave the matter in God's hands.

21:18 As we will see in the next verse, *"the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones"*. Bible commentaries say that it is impossible to be certain of the modern names of the precious stones which garnish the temple walls, or of those attached to the breastplate of Aaron when he entered into the tabernacle *"before the Lord"*. Exodus 28:17-21 tells us there were four rows of precious stones in Aaron's breastplate, each row containing three stones.

Row 1	sardius (ruby)	topaz	carbuncle (beryl)
Row 2	emerald	sapphire	diamond
Row 3	ligure (amber)	agate	amethyst
Row 4	beryl (chrysolite)	onyx	jasper

In Exodus 39:10-13 we are told that the stones were set in *"ouches of gold"*. The word "ouch" is now an archaic word meaning a setting for a precious stone, as in our time, rings, brooches and ornaments have precious stones placed in settings. Each stone was engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel, while each of the two onyx stones on the shoulder of the breastplate was engraved with the names of six of the tribes.

Thus when the High Priest entered in before the Lord, he bore into the Lord's presence a representation of all the tribes, indicating the worship and fidelity of them all. This procedure also signified the willingness of God to receive them representatively into His presence. All of this should have impressed upon the people the honour and privileges conferred on them, as well as their reasonable duty of faithfulness to God, Who, although the Almighty, was graciously willing to receive their loyalty to Him.

In any case it is not necessary to identify each precious stone positively. All stones were precious, and each was of sufficient hardness to be engraved "*as signets are graven*" (Exodus 39:6) meaning the engraving of signet rings, which were a convenience for the authorising of documents. In nomadic times the jewelled and engraved signet ring was easily and safely carried about on the hand of the owner. Centuries after the making of Aaron's breastplate, the engraved signet ring was used by Nebuchadnezzar and his lords and later by Darius (Daniel 6:17).

"And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass". The "*building of the wall*" may refer to the wall above the foundations; or, if the wall to its full height was of building stone, the jasper may refer to the outer covering or finish. Jasper is defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as a "compact, opaque, often highly coloured, cryptocrystalline variety of quartz commonly used in decorative carvings". In verse 19 it is said that the first foundation was garnished with jasper. In this context some commentators regard jasper as meaning the diamond, as it is here associated with the sapphire, amethyst, emerald and others described as precious stones.

The city being "*pure gold*" would seem to refer to the interior finish of the wall, or to the pavement of the city, or to a square or plaza, or to all of them. Dr. Strong defines the Greek "*plateia*" as meaning "a wide plat" or "place", i.e. "open square".

The gold surface "*like unto clear glass*" would mean flawless, without deficiencies or blemishes, fully able to reflect the light of the glory of God as we will read in verse 23. The words "pure" and "clear" in our verse 18 are translations of the same Greek word which is also rendered "clean" in verses 8 and 14. These descriptions of purity, transparency and clearness intensify the idea of the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:2; Ephesians 4:23, 24).

21:19,20,21 The foundations of the wall were garnished with precious stones. "*The first foundation was jasper*" would mean garnished or ornamented with jasper. The first of the foundation stones was jasper, and this stone was inscribed with the name of an apostle, as were each of the remaining eleven stones, probably one name on each stone. In this way the individuality of each of the apostles would be preserved, just as in the High Priest's breastplate the distinctiveness of each tribe was preserved.

The name of each apostle would have a surrounding ornamentation of its own particular precious stone. The order in which the names were engraved is not stated, leading us to consider the apostles as equals and not to try to differentiate between them and rank some as more important than others.

Smith's Bible Dictionary gives useful descriptions of precious jewels mentioned in Scripture, particularly the precious stones of Revelation 21:19 and 20. Of particular interest is the comment on jasper. "Jasper, a precious stone frequently noticed in Scripture. It was the last of the twelve inserted in the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:20; 39:13), and the first of the twelve used in the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:19). The characteristics of the stone, as far as they are specified in Scripture (Revelation 21:11), are that it was "*most precious*" and "*like crystal*": we may also infer from Revelation 4:3, that it was a stone of brilliant and transparent light. The stone which we name "jasper" does not accord with this description. There can be no doubt that the diamond would more adequately answer to the description in the book of Revelation".

The second stone was a "*sapphire*". The Macquarie Dictionary describes the sapphire as "a variety of corundum, especially a transparent blue kind valued as a gem". The RV, NEB and the Jerusalem Bible have "lapis lazuli", which is defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as "a deep blue stone containing sodium, aluminium, calcium, sulphur, and silicon, and consisting of a mixture of several minerals, used chiefly for ornamental purposes".

The third stone was a chalcedony, a waxy, translucent quartz named after a Greek town in Asia Minor (now modern Turkey).

The fourth was an emerald, a bright green variety of beryl.

The fifth was a sardonyx, a variety of onyx consisting of alternate layers of light-coloured chalcedony and reddish carnelian.

The sixth was a sardius, a deep brownish-red variety of carnelian, translucently blood red: used as a gem.

The seventh, a chrysolite, was an olive-green transparent to translucent magnesium iron silicate: used as a gem.

A beryl, the eighth, was a precious stone of varying colour. The aquamarine and emerald varieties are used as gems.

The ninth, a topaz, was a transparent yellowish mineral, valued as a precious stone.

The tenth was a chrysoprasus, an apple-green variety of chalcedony, coloured by nickel oxide, sometimes used as a gem.

The eleventh was a jacinth, which is defined as a gem, anciently bluish-violet, probably the sapphire, now a brownish, reddish, or orange zircon. A zircon is defined as an adamantine, variously coloured silicate, certain varieties of which are cut into gems.

The twelfth was an amethyst, quartz of a clear purple or violet colour: a precious stone.

These descriptions of precious stones help to convey to our minds something of the beauty and attractiveness of the city, and of the honour bestowed on the twelve apostles. In the age to come, the Kingdom Age, their teachings, being the true teachings of Jesus Christ, will aid and encourage the millions of humankind to make their way into the city, in all its splendour of spiritual truth, to learn the ways of righteousness. The symbolism means that all the human race, including the millions raised from the dead, will have the opportunity of accepting and conforming to the new and righteous world order.

When we think about the beauty and light of the holy city, and the richness of the ornamentation, we must not lose sight of the fact that these wonderful pictures are symbolic of God's arrangements of a very practical kind for the enlightenment of the nations concerning the need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The statistics on the possible size of the population which will inherit the promises of the Kingdom and live forever were mentioned in the comments on Revelation 21:15-17. There was no thought in these comments of teaching universalism, the theory that God will not be satisfied until every mortal who has ever lived is eternally saved. Certainly the teaching of the way to eternal life through faith and obedience will be general. It will remain for each individual to exercise his or her free judgment as to whether he or she will or will not accept the terms offered on which eternal life may be obtained. Revelation 21:27 specifically excludes those who refuse to conform to the Lord's requirements and continue to indulge in sin; *"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"*.

After learning of the Lord's requirements and the necessity of faith and obedience, the wilfully disobedient are represented as shut out from the favour of everlasting life promised to the obedient. All those shut out are described as those who work abomination and continue to tell and support lies. These prove themselves to be followers of Satan, and with him go into the second death, from which there will be no recovery. Revelation 22:14 and 15 clearly state that only the obedient will have access to the tree of life, a symbol of everlasting life.

THE CITY OF GOD

²²*And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*

²³*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

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

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

²⁶*And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.*

²⁷*And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

21:22 John saw no temple in the City for *"the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"*. The Law Covenant required all the worship of God to be conducted at a certain

place, where initially a magnificent temple was built by Solomon for that purpose (1 Kings chapters 5 to 8). The New Covenant, which has replaced the Old Law Covenant, requires neither special place nor building, for under its terms all people everywhere may worship God in spirit and in truth. This Covenant applies now in this Gospel Age, while the Heavenly City is "above", and it will continue to apply in the age to come after the City has "come down" (Galatians 4:26-28).

21:23 Present day religious and political institutions, which men now regard as their lights and guides, will have no place when that great City rules over people on earth. The glory of God will be the light of all people in that great time to come. Their minds will be enlightened by the truth then proclaimed, and they will see, and realise by experience, the superiority of that rulership over anything that humanity has ever known in the past. *"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"* (Isaiah 40:5).

"The glory of the Lord" is His righteousness combined with His loving kindness. That glory is even now revealed to believers under the New Covenant as *"the light of the glorious gospel of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:4). And, as now *"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God"* shines in our hearts *"in the face of Jesus Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:6), so in the future age, when the City "comes down", the glory of God will be the "light", and the Lamb will also be a lamp or means of conveying light to cause the glory of God to shine out to all people.

In our verse 23 there is a distinction between the words "lighten" and "light". The word rendered "lighten" is the Greek word "photizo" which means "to shine" especially to "shed rays" (Strong 5461), while the word "light" is the Greek word "luchnos", which means "a portable lamp or other illuminator" (Strong 3088).

During His earthly ministry Jesus said, *"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me"* (John 5:30). Jesus revealed the Father, showing His love and mercy. To the disciples gathered around Him Jesus said, *"For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God"* (John 16:27).

So throughout the Kingdom Age the Lord Jesus as the Lamp will reveal to all people the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, making known to everyone God's true character of love, which as

we well know was revealed in the sending into the world His only Son. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16).

The preposition "in" is better understood as "into" which indicates coming "into" Jesus Christ, that is, belonging to Him as a member of His Church. The fact of God's supreme gift will be the gospel or good news in the Kingdom Age, as it is now in the Gospel Age.

21:24 The nations shall walk in the light of it. The words *"of them which are saved" "and honour"* are not found in the Sinaitic or the Alexandrine manuscripts. The oldest Vatican manuscript, 1209, contains none of the Revelation.

The RSV renders the verse in these words: *"By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it"*. So it is that not only those who have been saved in this present life who will see the light of that great City. Those who have died without knowing of that light will be brought back from death so that they may see and experience that light, and walk by it, if they will. Jesus Christ is *"the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."* (John 1:9). Those who prefer the light and walk by it will gain life everlasting, while those who reject the light and prefer darkness will be condemned by the Lord and incur the penalty of the second death (John 3:17-21).

We should always bear in mind that it cannot be said of anyone that he or she loves darkness rather than light until both are known and understood, and the individual makes a choice between them. In the span of this life, millions have known only darkness, but in the age to come, when they are brought back from death, they will be shown the true light and be invited to live by it. They will see the glorious light of the Heavenly City which involves being shown and instructed in the Lord's requirements, and most who will be so instructed will gladly become obedient citizens (Revelation 22:14).

Even those who have occupied thrones in past ages and in the Gospel Age will come under the rulership of the great City of God. If they are rightly exercised by the requirements of God's Kingdom, they will see and acknowledge that their attempts at rulership were selfish and inadequate to say the least. They will see a just and righteous order, and will gladly surrender to the City and its King the glory which previously they would have

claimed for themselves. They will become, as everyone who believes will also become, obedient subjects of Him Who is by divine appointment "*King of kings, and Lord of lords*" (Revelation 19:16).

21:25 Here is a striking way of saying that there will always be access to the Heavenly City. "*The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there*". This means that the "gates" will be open all the time. When the former great ones of the earth, and everyone for that matter, are brought back from death and understand the requirements of faith and obedience, they will be able to enter the City, that is, become a citizen and live by the City's requirements, and in doing so gain everlasting life.

21:26 The nations, the myriads of peoples who have lived under their various rulers and governments, will be amazed at the light of the City and its ever open gates as they are brought from death and restored to life again. All people will learn the old, old story of Jesus and His love which makes their salvation possible, if they will but believe and obey God through Jesus Christ, "*the way, the truth and the life*" (John 14:6).

Since the peoples of the nations lost everything when they died, it follows that in the resurrection, when they are called forth from the grave, they will rise without any possessions, and will require attention to their physical, moral, intellectual and religious needs. They will need to learn the meaning and purpose of the City and their duty towards it. Information about the Saviour Who died for them will be given to everyone, and with that knowledge will come responsibility to believe in Jesus as their Saviour, the Mediator between God and themselves, and Advocate for all who accept the terms of the New Covenant.

We must trust in the Lord concerning the arrangements to be made to cater for the needs of so many people as they are raised from death to life again. They will need food, clothing and shelter, as well as arrangements for them to occupy their time usefully as they adapt to life in a peaceful and righteous order. The Lord has not revealed detailed information to us, so in faith we leave all these matters in His providential care.

All who believe and obey in the new world order will no doubt receive many blessings and privileges: the right to enter the City, that is, to participate in its benefits by acknowledging that they

now belong to the King of kings. All they are and all they possess belong no longer to themselves but to Him Who bought them "*with a price*", and thus they bring their "*glory*" to Him Who has saved them (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

The "City", as was said earlier, represents government under the New Covenant as the governing principle and foundation law of the new world order, as it now is for the Church in the Gospel Age. The "gates" of the City will always be open, but the "*wall great and high*" (Revelation 21:12) will prevent the entrance of any who might wish to gain unauthorised access without acknowledging their sins and without accepting the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

21:27 Nothing may enter which would defile the City, such as idols and the abominable practices usually associated with idol worship. All such beliefs and practices must be repudiated and never be brought into the City. So it will be with all who give themselves to lies of any kind. The nations must repent of their collective wickedness, and the people must repent of their individual lies either by personal lying or by association with lying teachers and doctrines.

To invent or "make" a lie is a serious evil. To make lies and circulate them in opposition to the rulers of the City, and to prevent others from entering, will not be tolerated. Our Lord's words to the Jewish leaders are relevant and significant in this connection (Luke 11:29-54; Matthew 23:1-33).

The mention in Revelation 21:23 of God and the Lamb as the Light and the Lamp gives assurance that all aid to enlightenment and understanding will be given. The nations and their rulers will come to see that whatever they may have possessed in this life of gods of their own invention, and of philosophies and beliefs which run counter to the teachings of Scripture, will be shown to be valueless. When they see and understand their former errors, and are forgiven and converted, they will bring the best of their powers to the new City of Light, and give glory to the King of kings.

Our verse 27 shows us that there will be conditions of entry to the City, notwithstanding the open gates; and also in the statement of Revelation 21:21 that every gate is a single pearl, a symbol of purity. The gates, though ever open, are nevertheless a barrier. In ancient walled cities there were gates and attendants at the

gates so that no unauthorised person gained admittance. Revelation 22:14 and 15 should be noted in connection with the gates and the individuals who may enter and who may not.

Only *"they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* may enter the City as permanent inheritors of its privileges. Humanity will need to learn and act upon the statement here made that only those who acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God will have their names written in His *"book of life"*.

Chapter 22 contains further details of that great City which will be considered in the remaining pages.

In the meantime let us take to heart the great blessing the Lord has given us in being able to consider and contemplate His plans and purposes. And let us also take to heart our Saviour's words to His disciples: *"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."* (John 15:9-10).

REFLECTIONS

The division of the Scriptures into chapters and numbered verses is not part of the original Hebrew and Greek writings, but a device of translators and publishers of the King James Version. The device is a great convenience to students of Scripture, as it makes easier references from one passage of Scripture to another, and encourages memorising of Scripture verses. Most versions of the sacred Scriptures follow the divisions of the King James Version.

There are some instances where the division of the Scriptures into chapter and verse could well be improved. For example in the Revelation when a vision is carried over from one chapter to the next, we need be aware of this and not lose the continuity of the vision until its completion. We are often shown by the method of description where one vision ends and another begins. A case in point is Revelation 19 which begins with the statement, *"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven"*, that is, after the things described in chapter 18 without saying how long after. John received a series of visions, and would have needed time in which to write down all that he saw and heard, as well as time to recuperate from the experiences.

Verses 1 to 9 of Revelation 19 record praise to God: *"true and righteous are his judgments"* for the judgment of *"the great whore"*. A distinction is made in these verses between the Gospel Age Church, the bride of the Lamb, and the multitudes to be enlightened and blest in the Kingdom Age. In verse 9, it seems, an interval occurs during which the angel speaks to John and tells him to *"Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb"*. And the angel encourages John with the assurance that *"These are the true sayings of God"*.

John was overcome with joy and gratitude, and would have worshipped the angel, but the angel protested that, though a spirit being, he was nevertheless a fellowservant of John and of all others who *"have the testimony of Jesus"*. The angel continues, *"Worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"*.

Verse 11 of Revelation 19 then begins another vision. We may understand from verses 9 and 10 that in the interval between the visions, John wrote down the preceding vision and his conversation with the angel. The lesson here is clearly conveyed to us and all servants of God that worship is for God only.

Verses 11 to 21 relate events in the closing years of the Gospel Age. Another vision begins in Chapter 20, covering in verses 1 to 15 the thousand years of the Kingdom Age, including a preliminary vision (verses 1 to 3) of an angel binding the dragon and casting him into a pit, where he is to be confined until the thousand years are fulfilled.

Not only did John see certain things in this vision, he also heard explanations which enabled him to describe accurately what he saw and interpret their meanings; verses 11 to 15 giving another picture of the work of the thousand years, when *"the dead, small and great"* would stand before the throne. The Gospel Age Church would be associated with God's throne, as verse 6 of Revelation 20 tells us, *"they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years"*.

Revelation 21 is another vision, bringing to light other important features of the thousand years, particularly with respect to the New Covenant, which will be known and available to all who will acknowledge Jesus Christ as its Mediator.

Under the direction and guidance of Christ and the Church, the New Covenant will be the basis of the new world order, so that all nations who will may walk in the light of it; while such as may remain perverse and rebellious after full opportunity of enlightenment, will not be permitted to enter the City, and will forfeit the privilege of eternal life.

This is a right and proper arrangement, because the New Covenant stands pledged as the only means of reconciliation between God and repentant sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, must be recognised and acknowledged in His capacity of Reconciler, based on the sacrifice of Himself on the cross as the ransom price for the purchase of the human race, and His sinless blood shed as providing the means of the remission of sins of all people for all time.

As we come now to chapter 22 of the Revelation we find that the separation between chapters 21 and 22 is unfortunate in that readers may overlook the connection and continuity of the vision, and so may not fully grasp the remaining information concerning the work to be accomplished during the thousand years of the Kingdom Age referred to in Chapters 20 and 21.

THE WATER OF LIFE

Revelation 22:

¹*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*

²*In the midst of the street of it, ...*

22:1 The "*street of it*" in verse 2 (or the broad place or plaza) refers back to the City described in Revelation 21:10, the holy Jerusalem which represents the Government under the New Covenant to be established over the earth for one thousand years. Consequently the throne of God and of the Lamb associated with the New Jerusalem is set up over the whole earth, and "*the river of water of life*" is made freely available to "*the dead, small and great*", which in Revelation 20:12 are said to stand before the throne.

The statement that the river of the water of life issues from the throne of God and of the Lamb is equivalent to saying that God and the Lamb are in control. They and they alone are responsible for the wonderful arrangement of love and mercy by which the human race, including millions who died in ignorance of

God and Jesus Christ, will yet be brought to a full knowledge of God's supreme love in sending His only-begotten Son to die so that all might live.

A river of natural water gives life by satisfying people's bodily needs as well as the needs of the earth in the production of food from crops, trees, vegetable and flower gardens, and the animal creation. But natural water cannot give everlasting life. The "*water of life*" is the "*living water*" by which Jesus meant the true worship of God that would indeed give everlasting life.

The account of Jesus at Jacob's well in John 4:6-26, telling the Samaritan woman of the living water, is both touching and informative. It is also most significant as one of Jesus' first discourses linking the subject of "*living water*" with the abolition of the Jewish form of worship. Jesus said: "*If thou knowest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water ...*" *Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*" (John 4:10-14).

The Samaritan woman thought Jesus meant some kind of natural water that would make it unnecessary to draw water from wells for household use. But Jesus went on to explain that *the "living water"* was related to the worship of God, and that whoever had the living water no longer needed the old forms of worship represented by the Samaritan worship on the mountain and the Jewish worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

Both forms of worship of God would be completely abolished. "*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*" (John 4:21-23).

The water of life therefore is for sincere worshippers who worship in truth. Those who know "*the gift of God*", namely Jesus Christ, will come to God through Him and ask Him for living water. In doing this, worshippers will be acknowledging the true and only source of the water of life, and the promise is fulfilled to them that

they will never thirst again. The promise on God's part is sure, as it will also be for true and sincere worshippers as long as they remain true and faithful.

The prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah contain predictions directly related to the water of life. God included in His vision to Ezekiel a prophecy of something to come which would be of the greatest importance for Jews, and indeed for all people. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 this new thing was spoken of as a New Covenant which would supersede and replace the Law Covenant.

In Ezekiel's vision we have an intimation that all the arrangements of the Law were powerless to give life. A new source was needed, a source unheard of before. To Ezekiel's astonishment this new source was symbolised by a stream, a stream deep and wide, healing where it flowed, with trees growing on either side with fruit and leaves for food and medicine. The whole prophetic picture of Ezekiel 47:1 to 12 is a clear lesson that the Law could not give life, and would be superseded and replaced by an arrangement from God which would give life.

The vision given to Ezekiel foretells also how that arrangement is to be brought about and how the prophecy was to be fulfilled. The waters flowed out from the right "shoulder" (according to the Hebrew) of the temple to the south side of the brazen altar standing in the court, from whence the waters flowed through the gate which faced eastward (Ezekiel 47:1,2). What did this mean? It meant a blessing from God flowing out of His sanctuary, acknowledging the altar of sacrifice, and using the main and most beautiful gate reserved for the Prince, and blocking forever the entry of that Prince into the typical temple with its typical sacrifices; blocking also the way of the people who had been admonished to worship through that gate under the patronage of the Prince. (For fuller information see Ezekiel 45:7, 8; 46:16-18; 47: 21,22.)

To see where the stream flowed, Ezekiel was taken out of another gate where he saw and experienced the ever-deepening strength of the stream. First the stream was ankle-deep, then knee-deep, then waist-deep, and finally a river in which to swim, and which could not be passed over (Ezekiel 47:4,5). This symbolised a new way of life which was typified in the temple and altar and the mercy seat on which the blood of animal sacrifices

was sprinkled by the Jewish High Priest to make atonement for sin. Ezekiel's astonishment in the vision was no greater than that of the Jews in our Lord's day, when Jesus offered them the river of the water of life entirely apart from and superior to the Law Covenant with its animal sacrifices. The life-giving water was centred in and dependent on one life-giving sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself on the cross.

But before the life-giving stream flowed from the temple in the vision, the Prince came to His temple. The Prince in the prophecy signified our Saviour, the Prince to Whom Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah looked forward, and in some respects typified; the great Prince foretold by the prophet Daniel (also a prophet of the captivity) Who would be "*cut off, but not for himself*", thus linking Him with the altar of sacrifice (Daniel 9: 25,26). In this great Prince rested the fulfilment and antitype of those things for which the tabernacle and temple stood. When He, the great Prince, would come, the typical things would be no more. The apostle Paul said, "*But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building*" (Hebrews 9:11).

The prophet Malachi foretold that the Prince would suddenly come to His temple. As the Prince, He had a right to a ceremonial entry at the East Gate. He was "*the Lord, whom ye seek*" and Whom the Israelites should have sought. He was the One Whom they should have delighted in, but Whom only a remnant received with joy.

The prophet goes on to say that, like Nehemiah and other princes and leaders who preceded Him, this great Prince would sit as a refiner of the sons of Levi and in the refining would reject the unfaithful. He came "suddenly" to His temple, notwithstanding all the prophecies and the special mission of John the Baptist.

We may see the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy in our Lord's visit to the temple at the beginning of His ministry. It was His first official act after turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. He went from Cana to Capernaum for a few days, then went up with other Jews to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. When He came to the temple, He found there those who were defiling the place with unauthorised selling of animals and birds for sacrificial purposes, and changing money into currency acceptable to the temple. He drove out the merchants, and the

sheep and cattle, overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and said, "*Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise*" (John 2:13-16).

The Jewish leaders were quick to ask by what authority Jesus took this action saying, "*What sign showest thou unto us?*". Jesus did not satisfy them, but His words afterward about raising again the temple after it had been destroyed gave enlightenment to His disciples after His resurrection when they remembered the words that He had spoken. Jesus showed many signs to the multitudes by His mighty miracles, signs which satisfied the humble and meek, but had the reverse effect on the proud and hypocritical Jewish leaders.

Our Lord might have told His questioners that He took this action in His capacity of Prince, but the time was not then ripe for a clear announcement of His authority and mission as indicated in Matthew 16:20 and Luke 9:22. It was not our Lord's wish to arouse the extreme enmity of the "*elders, chief priests, and scribes*" before He had finished His ministry and witness to the people. Any pious Jew was authorised to reprove iniquity, and doubtless there were some who did so. But the majority of the "*publicans and sinners*", realising their helplessness in view of the relapsed state of the nation as a whole could only weep and mourn in private (Luke 2:25,33; Mark 15:43; Matthew 5:4). Such as named in these Scriptures welcomed the bold and fearless action of the then unrecognised Prince, as well as His later exposures of the sophistries of the scribes (Mark 12:37).

Having thus fulfilled the prophecy that the Prince should suddenly come to His temple, our Lord proceeded to carry out the remainder of the prophecy that He should sit as a refiner and purifier of gold and silver. "*But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?*" the prophet asked (Malachi 3:2).

The Gospel writers record that the majority were found to be dross, and only a remnant showed themselves symbolically to be true and precious metal when "*tried in the fire*". John the apostle makes this clear when he says, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name*" (John 1:11,12). This refining and separating process is also referred to in Zechariah 13:8-10.

As our Lord's ministry progressed, and the time drew near to be put to death for our sins, He permitted a freer discussion of His claims to be the Prince. It had been prophesied by Zechariah, who was contemporaneous with Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Joshua and Haggai, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation..."* (Zechariah 9:9).

So while at first declining public acknowledgment, He later accepted it, that the prophecies might be fulfilled. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem showed the willingness of the people to acknowledge Him, yet had they not done so the very stones would have cried out to fulfil divine prophecy (Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:40).

Moreover, Jesus approached Jerusalem from the east. The gate through which He entered was known as the "Sheep Gate". He came *"as a lamb to the slaughter"* even as He rode into the city as King. He came also as the true Shepherd of the sheep, Who would *"gather the lambs in His arms, and gently lead those that are with young"* (Isaiah 53:7; 40:11; John 10:1-18, 27-29).

The Jews as a whole did not wish to be carried or led like sheep, but some did, and later some Gentiles also (Acts 13:46-48). Peter wrote, *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"* (1 Peter 2:25). Paul also wrote, *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will"* (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

Jesus came from the Mount of Olives, the area east of the city which, according to Ezekiel's vision, was the portion of the Prince, but which the Jews unfortunately had not kept ready and waiting for their greatest Prince. The Son of Man often had no where to lay His head, and no place He could call His own. But in the mount of His inheritance He found a family in whose home He was always welcome; and at the last a garden where He could spend His heaviest and most sorrowful hours in prayer.

While the people rejoiced, and spread palms and garments before Him, the Prince knew His triumph would be short-lived. His enemies would prevail, He would be taken and slain, and His disciples scattered. The same prophet who foretold His

triumphant entry also foretold His final rejection: *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,...smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered..."* (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31, 56).

Our Lord wept over Jerusalem, glorious in aspect as He approached from the Mount of Olives, yet so soon to be devastated, and over the magnificent temple, soon to be left without one stone upon another. But chiefly He wept for the people betrayed by their leaders, and who would soon readily cry, *"Crucify Him"* as loudly as they had acclaimed Him their King. That fickleness of His own people must have been grievous to Him, that they should choose wrong instead of right (Luke 19:41-44; Acts 3: 14,15).

For five days before His crucifixion, the Prince made the final assertion of His rights in the temple. The people listened to His gracious words, and told one another that this was indeed the Messiah, their King (Luke 19:47, 48; 21:37,38; John 7:14; 8: 1,2; 10:22, 23; 12:12). The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them (Matthew 21:14). His opponents also came endeavouring to trap Him with subtle questions, but His answers were so wise and easy to understand that the people marvelled the more (Matthew 22:23, 33). Finally the objectors were silenced, and in their envy and hatred they plotted to kill Him (Matthew 22:46; 26:3, 4).

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Matthew 23:37, 38).

When the glory of Jehovah left the temple at the beginning of the captivity in Babylon, that same glory was to return to a restored temple at an appointed time. Not so in the case of the Prince. The sacrifice of Himself and the sinless blood He shed provided the means of taking away sin forever, and His departure from the temple marked the beginning of the end of that temple made with hands. And not only the temple, but also that form of worship for which the temple stood, served by the Aaronic priesthood with offerings of animal sacrifices. The temple will never be rebuilt and the Aaronic priesthood will never be restored.

The apostle tells us this plainly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus is High Priest, but not after the order of Aaron, rather the

order of Melchisedec. This means of course that Ezekiel's temple will never be built because it was designed for the service of priests of the house of Aaron. Moreover, the description of Ezekiel's temple shows provision for a Prince who was a person distinct from the High Priest.

As priest after the order of Melchisedec, the Lord Jesus is both High Priest and King (Hebrews 6:20, 11:28). He rules over His people now as their King, and He serves them as their High Priest. In the Kingdom Age His authority will be openly established over all the earth, and people will come to God through Him.

Buildings may possibly be erected on the site of the ancient Jewish temple in the age to come, but they will not be for the sacrifices of animals, nor will they be served by priests of the order of Aaron. There may be a building or buildings to be used as a place or places of assembly and worship, but such will be for use in the new manner through Christ. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. He can be worshipped anywhere at any time, but for human beings, suitable buildings offer many conveniences, and may well add to the atmosphere of oneness. These matters must be left in the Lord's hands.

In John's vision of the New Jerusalem, he *"saw no temple therein"* (Revelation 21:22), which is another reference to the fact that the Jewish form of worship will not be revived. But, as the whole passage is symbolic, it ought not to be taken to mean the absence of buildings on the earth. Isaiah tells us that in the age to come *"...they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."* (Isaiah 65:21, 22).

THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE

Previously we have considered the stream of living water recorded in Ezekiel 47:1-12. Zechariah supplements Ezekiel in regard to the living stream. Ezekiel wrote that it came out of the east gate and flowed to the "desert", or more properly the plain of the Jordan, and then to the western sea. In harmony with this Zechariah wrote, *"And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: half of them toward the former (eastern) sea, and half of them toward the hinder (western) sea: in summer and in winter shall it be"* (Zechariah 14:8).

Jerusalem is really the centre of God's actions, the dividing line between East and West. The message of life brought by the Lord Jesus came first to the Jews in Palestine and those scattered throughout the East. But after Jesus' death and resurrection, the good news was sent also to the West. In other words the message of life became universal, for the benefits of "*the water of life*" are not limited or restricted to any district, nation or people. Nor are these benefits limited by the seasons. The message of truth is always in season. Wherever and whenever the penitent heart is found, the Lord Jesus is ready and willing to receive him or her and impart the water of life with the assurance of sins forgiven and reconciliation with the Father.

Ezekiel's statement that the waters became deep enough for swimming suggests the all-sufficiency of God's arrangement in Christ. For the individual and the whole human race, God's provision is more than adequate.

In reading Ezekiel's description of the fish and the fishers in Ezekiel 47:9 and 10, we are reminded of our Lord's call to the fishermen of Galilee: "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:18-22). In some respects the fishing resembled net fishing, the gospel being likened to a huge net that gathers in all and sundry, the unsatisfactory and unsuitable being returned to the sea and the suitable ones retained (Matthew 13:47-50). But in other respects the fishing is like line fishing because each individual fish must be considered as an individual and dealt with as such.

Christians gather together in companies and congregations for worship, but the salvation of each individual depends on his or her acceptance of Christ, and personal efforts to obey Him and do His will. Each individual must personally drink of the water of life to enable him or her to experience the benefits. Each must, like Peter, confess that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*", take up his or her cross daily and follow in Christ's steps (Matthew 16:13-19, 24).

In a secondary sense, living water flowed from Jesus ministering in the temple and throughout the country, in that He granted physical and natural healing and raised at least three persons from physical death. This work was of course necessary as part of Jesus' credentials to establish Him as the Messiah, but its effects were only temporary, for the healed and risen ones eventually went into death to await the resurrection.

Similarly, those who believed on Him during His ministry had to wait for their hope to be established and confirmed until after He had paid the ransom price and shed His blood, as Romans 4: 24, 25; 1 Corinthians 15:17; 1 Peter 1:3 and Hebrews 9:22 declare. The full import of the prophecy of the living stream is realised only after the Prince had finished His ministry, had been put to death and shed His blood, had been raised to power and glory, and left the Mosaic system and temple desolate. Only then did the living stream flow out for the salvation of repentant and believing people. Jesus said, *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"* (John 7:37).

The rending of the veil of the temple was the visible sign of the desolation of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, and the abolition of their Law Covenant. Paul tells us that the way into the holiest is now through the veil of Christ's flesh (Matthew 27:57; Luke 23:45; Hebrews 10:19, 20).

The mighty stream pouring from the temple is a most expressive symbol of all gospel truths. As well as the symbol of living water, there is also a symbol representing food. This latter symbol is that of the trees on either side of the stream. In line with the suggestion of Psalm 1, that the godly man is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, these trees represent people who have accepted the offer of salvation and who bring forth fruit in their lives.

The consecrated Christian becomes a source of encouragement and spiritual healing to others. The ability to influence others is due to continuing contact with the living water of the river rather than to any individual ability. This is expressed in Ezekiel 47:12, *"...whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: ..."*.

Our Lord in His discourses made the same distinction between the action of the living water giving everlasting life to the believer, and the results in the believer's manner of life in this age. As He said to the woman at the well, *"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:14) This is the result in the individual's own experience. He or she receives everlasting life, and in the case of Gospel Age overcomers, life means inherent life independent of outside sustenance. Jesus said, *"For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself"* (John 5:26).

The overcomers, Christ's joint heirs, are to be given immortality and incorruptibility, as well as the power of self-existence (1 Corinthians 15:49-54; 1 John 3:1, 2).

When our Lord referred to the effect of this inner experience of faith in His true disciples, He used the same figure of "living water" flowing out from the believer.

In this discourse the living water represented the Holy Spirit: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."* (John 7:37-39; NIV).

The Holy Spirit, which the Lord gives to every true disciple (Ephesians 1:13), is in believers a life-giving power (Romans 8:11) and the manifestations of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are called the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). These manifestations are not confined within the believer, but flow out to influence others, recommending them to come to the Saviour to receive the same benefits. The streams flowing out from individual believers do not in themselves give life, but direct attention to Jesus, the Source, by God's power and direction, of life. The words quoted above were spoken by the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem, and further emphasise the New Source of life to which all must come to gain life everlasting.

Some Christians limit the operations of the life-giving stream to the present life, and they limit the trees in the prophecy to those who become believers in this life and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. But there is nothing in Ezekiel's vision to tell us the length of time the stream should flow, for how long the trees should supply food and medicine, or how many individuals or nations should participate.

We may gather the extent from the fact that no limit is given to the flow east and west, so that it is reasonable to assume that all people will experience its benefits. But as unknown millions of our race died before the waters issued from the Mercy Seat sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, and further unknown millions have died since without hearing of it or having any opportunity to benefit from its life-giving properties, we may well understand that

the fulfilment was not in Ezekiel's day, but the fulfilment began with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, continued in the Gospel Age, and will continue until the close of the Kingdom Age, when all the dead, small and great, will have had the opportunity to understand and believe, if they so choose.

NO MORE CURSE

²*In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

³*And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:*

⁴*And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.*

⁵*And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*

22:2 We have seen that the "river of water of life" in verse 1 is represented as flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, and from the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21. The vision of the New Jerusalem applies to the time when the present order of things has passed away, and the new heaven and new earth are established, the time of the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Church. The "river of the water of life" was seen and understood by the members of Christ's Church during the Gospel Age while being chosen by Him. In the Kingdom they will have the privilege and joy of bringing this knowledge and experience to the masses of humanity who have never heard of or understood the water of life, the Gospel message.

The throne of God mentioned in verse 1 is a symbol of the dominion of God, just as the Holy City is a symbol of the New Covenant, and the river is a symbol of the provision which God has made in Christ for giving life to all who accept the invitation. Because of His dominion and authority Jesus can say, as recorded in Revelation 21:6, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely".

And He gives authority to the Spirit and the Bride to join in the same invitation, as we shall see in Revelation 22:17. All those invited are not coerced, they may drink or not drink as they themselves decide. Those who drink will be granted life, those who refuse will die, never to rise again.

The descriptive words, "*On either side of the river, was there the tree of life*" imply that one tree, the tree of life, is found on both sides of the river. It seems that only the Emphatic Diaglott has seen the impossibility of this, and translated "tree" as "wood" in the sense of a number of trees, or grove of trees. The Greek word "xulon" permits such a translation (Strong 3586). The trees by the river are the same as in Ezekiel's vision, righteous people who have been refreshed by the river of the water of life. In this latter vision, they are not members of the Church, because in the vision, the Church is with Christ in the throne, ruling with Him over the peoples of the earth.

The "trees" may be understood in John's vision to mean the ancient worthies, those holy men and women who served God faithfully in previous ages, and who in the Kingdom Age are "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16). They believed prospectively in Jesus the Messiah, and when they are raised to life again, they will come to understand more fully than they could in the obscure and then unfulfilled words of the prophets of past ages. These ancient worthies, by their example of faith, goodness and right living, will yield spiritual fruit and leaves for the healing of the nations. They will be the earthly representatives of the Kingdom, and by their presence and activities among the resurrected millions of the human race, they will assist "*whosoever will*" to an understanding of salvation in Christ Jesus. They will help the resurrected peoples to drink of the water of life, that is, they will help the peoples to believe in God through the Lord Jesus and gain everlasting life.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be there, as will Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets and patriarchs, with many more whose names and records are not given, but who endured "*as seeing him who is invisible*", and who will in that great day receive their reward by holding honourable office in the City of life and peace, to which they in their lifetimes looked forward (Hebrews 11:27, 39; Luke 13:28,29).

The wilfully perverse will have no place in God's kingdom, as our Lord's words in Luke 13: 28 and 29 indicate. But no one will be considered hopeless until everyone has heard and understood the invitation, and had a full opportunity to believe, repent, and obey the King of kings and His representatives, both heavenly and earthly.

The Jewish nation as a whole did not hear or believe in Jesus when He was sent to them, nor did they hear His chosen apostles and disciples, and therefore were "*cut off*" from among God's people and not accepted into the High Calling or heavenly ruling position in the Kingdom (Acts 3:23). If they or any of them continue in obstinacy in the Kingdom, they will not be allowed to enter, even as subjects. But, as previously said, none will be rejected until all have had every opportunity to learn the truth of the Gospel message and reform their lives.

It is surely unreasonable to suppose that the Lord would set up His Kingdom of righteousness and peace on earth, send forth the river of the water of life, with an earnest invitation to drink of it, to no purpose. The visions given to Ezekiel, Zechariah, and John picture a glorious future for a redeemed and believing human race at the end of the thousand years reign of Christ, the Church and the Ancient Worthies, over an earth from which every vestige of the curse will have been removed.

22:3 "*And there shall be no more curse*" seems to have more meaning than an allusion to the Adamic penalty. The word "curse" is a translation of the Greek word "katathema" which signifies a cursed person or thing (Vines Dictionary page 264). The thought therefore seems to be that there shall no longer be any cursed person or thing.

At the close of the Kingdom Age, sin and death will be forever abolished, the reconciliation between God and all obedient members of the human race will be made full and complete, the animal kingdom will live in harmony, and nothing will hurt or destroy (Isaiah 65:25), and the desert will blossom as the rose (Isaiah 35:1). All these wondrous developments will take place because "*the throne of God and of the Lamb*" will be in control, with the power and authority to do all things well.

The "*servants*" in this verse would be the obedient and saved members of the human race. "They", the "servants", the "people", and the "nations" are the same in Revelation 21:3 and 22:1-5.

The opening chapters of Genesis describe the entry of sin and death - Paradise Lost. The closing chapters of Revelation describe the rolling back of the curse - Paradise Regained.

The curse upon the human race will be lifted from all who come into harmony with God through Jesus Christ the Mediator.

The rest will go into everlasting death. The Lord Jesus said, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"* (John 12:32).

Paul added, *"Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation"* (Hebrews 9:28). By these words Paul meant that Jesus was the antitype of all offerings under the Law Covenant, in particular the two goats on the Day of Atonement, one that was slain and its blood shed, the other with the people's sins confessed and laid upon it, and subsequently led away into the wilderness. Jesus, as the believers' High Priest, shed His own blood for the remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22), then bore our sins away so that they would never be held against us.

John, in the opening verses of Chapter 22, looks at the vision in retrospect from a future standpoint upon the Holy City and sees its ministrations and services as a wonderful success. The setting of the scene is after the destruction of Satan and the wilfully wicked, after the Kingdom has been handed over by the Son to the Father. Verses 1 to 5 of Revelation 22 should be viewed as a finished picture denoting past actions. Verses 22 to 27 of Revelation 21 and the first two verses of Revelation 22 describe the process by which restitution will be brought about.

22:4 The obedient of mankind will *"see his face"* in the sense that Job and Adam did, in a figurative manner, for *"no man hath seen God at any time"* (John 1:18). It seems that the way to harmonise these Scriptures is to understand that God will make His presence known to people in the manner of a close relationship, but not on human level. Some manifestation of God's power and presence will be given to the people, but they will not actually see God Himself, for He dwells *"in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see"* (1 Timothy 6:16). People will see God's face in the sense of having His favour and being able to communicate with Him.

God's *"name shall be in their foreheads"* signifies that the people have now returned to the likeness of God's image, in which likeness their original ancestors were created. They have obeyed and remained faithful, and now have His final approval. Each mind will have *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16), which means each will also have the mind of God.

22:5 There will be no night of sin or darkness of ignorance and superstition. The light of the Gospel will have accomplished its purpose, and humanity will know the will of God and the course to follow. The road on which to walk is the "*highway*", "*the way of holiness*" (Isaiah 35:8).

If there are news media in the time to come they will provide right and constructive information to assist humanity to gain the knowledge of God and His Son. Visual aids may well be used, and perhaps the Ancient Worthies will speak directly to the people by means of television, in addition to personal assistance and instruction. "*The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*", for "*the knowledge of Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.*" (Isaiah 35:8; 11:9). The Scriptures also declare that "*The Lord God giveth them light*" (Revelation 21:23 25; 22:5).

"They shall reign for ever and ever." This seems to mean that all who pass the final test at the end of the Kingdom Age will be like kings as mentioned in Revelation 21:24. Dominion of the earth will be given to the children of men as declared in Psalm 115:16. Jesus Christ, the Church and the Ancient Worthies will have finished their reconciling work, and the redeemed and reconciled human race will continue on "*for ever and ever*", as will the Ancient Worthies and the Joint-heirs, to the eternal praise and honour of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9: 6,7; Daniel 7:13-18, 27; Revelation 11:15).

THE EPILOGUE TO THE WHOLE BOOK

With the words of the angel recorded in 22:5 "*they shall reign for ever and ever*" the prophetic visions of the Revelation cease. The whole series of remarkable symbolic images of the history of the Gospel Age Church, truly spiritual as well as nominal and apostate, comes to a close.

The series of images given to John the Apostle included the destruction of the nominal and apostate Babylonian systems, the union and exaltation of the true Church with the Lord in glory, and finally the blessings to come to humanity through the reign of the Messiah resulting in Paradise regained and restored and available to all members of the human race who have ever lived. The whole panorama of the Gospel Age had passed in visions before the inspired Apostle.

FAITHFUL AND TRUE SAYINGS

⁶*And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.*

⁷*Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*

⁸*And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.*

⁹*Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.*

22:6 Instead of "*the Lord God of the holy prophets*" the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts read "*the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets*". The statement that God "*sent his angel to show unto his servants things which must shortly be done*" reminds us of the angel's statement in the very first verse of the Revelation that he would "*shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass*".

The adverb "shortly" applies to the beginning of the events and developments prophesied, indicating that from the Lord's standpoint, the whole period covered by the Revelation is but a short time. Hence each generation of Christians reading the Revelation would be encouraged to study it with a view to what had already been fulfilled, what would be fulfilled in their own day, and what still remained to be fulfilled beyond their day.

John was to "*write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter*" (Revelation 1:19). The instruction to John differentiates between the things John would see in the visions and their fulfilments; the fulfilments in some cases being things that were already happening in John's lifetime, and in other cases things that would come to pass in later years.

The Revelation, both in its introduction and comments, and in its description of visions and events, is a token of the Lord's love in that it not only warns of evils that would arise, but also gives advice as to the right attitude to take towards them, and the way in which the Lord would support believers in their faithfulness to His instructions. In love He rebukes and chastens, and offers help in enduring and overcoming.

John is assured that the sayings of the entire book are "*faithful and true*", and that their purpose is "*to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done*". The sayings were to move John and all true believers not to be slack and superficial, but to heed the Lord's warnings, and watch for signs of evil systems that would arise, systems that would betray the truth, and lead many away from the Lord. From first to last there is no encouragement given, nor even tolerance permitted of idleness or selfish living. All the promises are to those who watch and pray and continue in the Lord's service in all that their individual trials and temptations may require of them to conquer and overcome.

Some of the events mentioned had been fulfilled already, such as the Lord's resurrection and the establishment of groups of believers and churches in various parts of Palestine and nearby countries, to which the apostles and others had travelled in obedience to the Lord's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 9:15-22; 11:19-21; Romans 10:9-18).

22:7 "*Behold, I come quickly.*" In considering what is meant by coming "*quickly*", it is well to note its use in Revelation 2:16. The word "*quickly*" occurs in the King James Version in Revelation 2:5, but the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts omit it from this verse, as also do all modern translations. But Revelation 2:16 contains it, and we need to keep this in mind when we endeavour to understand its meaning in context. Revelation 2:16 occurs in the message to the Church in Pergamos. The message to Pergamos is one of the seven messages given by the Lord Jesus Christ when He gave seven messages to seven Churches, prophesying major events and developments involving the Church during the Gospel Age.

Pergamos is the third in order of the seven messages, and this helps us to locate it in time. As was said earlier, the period of history represented by the message to Pergamos dates from the so-called conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 314 AD to the setting up of the Papacy in 539 AD. By this time in the Gospel Age, wrong doctrines had been accepted and wrong practices introduced. When the Lord said "*or else I will come unto thee quickly*", did He mean that His second advent would occur at that time? Manifestly this was not the Lord's meaning, for there were further periods to follow in the history and experience of the Gospel Age Church, all of which would cover many centuries.

The warning to Pergamos, centuries before the end of the Gospel Age, that He would come quickly, should not be understood as an alteration of the time of Jesus' second advent, but rather as a warning that if serious errors in teaching and practice were allowed to flourish unchecked in the Church, He would take action. The nature of the action is described in Revelation 2:16, *"Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth"*.

As history reveals, the majority did not repent. The Church had become a worldly organisation, and false teaching and practice had become well established. The Lord did not immediately take action, but gave time for repentance and reformation before He came *"quickly"*.

When, as far as the Lord was concerned, the limit of His forbearance was reached, He began to fight. What was the weapon with which He fought? The weapon was *"the sword of my mouth"*, that is, the Lord raised up teachers of Gospel truth who would expose the wrong teachers and teachings and bring about a separation.

When the Lord acted, He acted *"quickly"*. The professed Church was endeavouring to establish itself as a political institution instead of keeping separate from the world. The Lord did not prevent this from happening, and the whole eventuality became a test for Christians as to who would be loyal to the teaching of Christ, and who would succumb to the wrong aspirations for worldly power and wealth.

In the message to Thyatira, space was given for repentance, but the aspirants for a worldly Church continued their activities. Then again the Lord intervened (Revelation 2:20-23). Great men of the Protestant Reformation began to stir the Christian world, and delivered a *"deadly wound"* to the Papacy. The faithful were given assurance of power later on, when He would set up His Kingdom, and the faithful overcomers would be His joint-heirs.

The period symbolised by Sardis is the period following the Reformation, when the Church as a whole began to lapse again into worldliness and apathy in spiritual matters. The Lord took action again in the Philadelphia period. He had a *"key"* (Revelation 3:7), and would use it as stated in Revelation 3:11, *"Behold, I come quickly: hold fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"*.

Then follows the promise to the overcomers, whose crown is not of this world, but is to be given in the world to come.

Here evidently the Lord coming "*quickly*" refers to taking action at the appropriate time in the affairs of a worldly Church, described in Revelation 3:9 as "*the synagogue of Satan*". Satan, as we know, is the god of this world, who blinds the minds of those who believe not (2 Corinthians 4:1-4).

The Laodicean stage of the Church finds it worldly, blind, and covetous. With that Church, the Lord will deal, at the appropriate time, quickly, swiftly, after long patience with the worldliness and luke-warmness of that Church.

The overcomers, who suffered under the worldly powers of religions professedly Christian, will be given a throne. "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne*" (Revelation 3:21). The final dealing with the world's ecclesiastical and political powers draws nearer year by year.

22:8 The series of visions is now concluded, as we saw in verse 6, in which the angel makes a direct statement to John, that he (the angel) was the Lord's messenger, assuring John that the sayings were "*faithful and true*", and that the matters prophesied would not fail of fulfilment. The angel gave further assurance to John of the Lord's words, "*Behold, I come quickly*". The Lord would come "*quickly*" to any and all who would keep "*the sayings of the prophecy of this book*" (verse 7), by giving help in time of stress and the blessing of His presence with the believer in accordance with Jesus' promise, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (literally age)*" (Matthew 28:20).

As the life of each believer is limited to only a fraction of the Gospel Age, the message to "*keep the sayings*" could refer only to those "*sayings*" which the Lord made known to that believer in his or her own lifetime. For instance, faithfulness to the Lord could be exercised under the circumstances of the "beast" with seven heads and ten horns only when it arose as successor to the "dragon", the latter being a symbol of Pagan Rome (Revelation 13:1-10). Similarly, faithfulness to the Lord which is the constant endeavour of all true believers under all circumstances, could be exercised during the operations of the two-horned beast described in Revelation 13:11-17 only when that "beast" arose.

After the two-horned beast arose, the thoughtful and discerning Christians of the time would have been able to see that they should not give allegiance to it, because it was also a system of deception operating on similar lines to the beast before it.

Great Babylon was a professedly Christian political and religious system combined with world-wide ramifications. But it will come to an end. Discerning Christians should dissociate themselves from her and "*come out of her*" without waiting for the final destruction (Revelation 17:1-18; 18:1-4).

John was so impressed with all that he saw and heard that he fell down to worship before the feet of the angel, no doubt overwhelmed with the wonder of it all.

22:9 Similar words are spoken by the angel in Revelation 19:10. The thought seems to be that angelic messengers, the inspired prophets, and John as a disciple and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ were, and are, fellow servants. None should be worshipped, because all are fellow-servants of God through Jesus Christ. All worship should be directed to God.

In these words, there is a clear criticism of those in the professed Church who bow down to fellow-clergy or receive homage from fellow-clergy. These words also constitute a reproof of every professed minister of the Gospel, every priest and bishop who accepts such titles as "Father", "Lord" or "my Lord Bishop", or who sets up images and idols before whom people are required to bow.

Our duty is clearly pointed out in the words, "*keep the sayings of this book*" (Revelation 22:7 and 9). We should keep clear of the apostate forms of worship of our day, not of course forsaking true worship and the assembling of ourselves together, but holding fast to the truth and the giving to God that sincere worship in spirit and in truth that He calls for through Jesus Christ our Mediator (Hebrews 10:10-25).

CHAPTER 19

FINAL COMMANDS AND EXHORTATIONS OF JESUS

REVELATION 22:10 - 16

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

¹⁰*And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.*

¹¹*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*

¹²*And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

¹³*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.*

¹⁴*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

22:10 The instruction not to seal the "sayings" requires explanation. One thing it does not mean is that everything in the Revelation would be clearly understood from the beginning when John recorded the "sayings". We are of the opinion from the progress of events in the Gospel Age that the Revelation has sometimes been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and wrong ideas about it have been circulated among inquirers. The meaning of not sealing the sayings seems to be that John should not place a seal on the sayings to prevent their contents and meaning becoming known.

The object of the visions to John, which he was told to write down, was to give information, not conceal it. It was God's will that believers and sincere inquirers would be able to read of things that pertained to their own lifetime and things that were still future.

The Gospel Age has been set apart for the calling and selection of the Church. It may be that believers did not fully understand all details of events still future from their lifetimes, but the mere possession of descriptions of great apostasies to arise would help believers to prepare and recognise the evil systems as they developed, and should help believers not to be deceived into thinking that such false doctrines and practices were right and proper.

Another reason for not sealing the Revelation prophecies given to John is that the Lord Jesus in His teachings had told the disciples many things to expect and watch for in the great prophecy of Matthew 24 and some of His parables such as "The Wise and Foolish Virgins" (Matthew 25:1-13) and "The Sheep and the Goats" (Matthew 25:31-46).

Later, the apostles were inspired to write warnings and explanations as in 1 Corinthians 15:12-28; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; Colossians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 4:1-18; 5:1-13, 16-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12; and 2:1-17.

These prophecies given early in the Gospel Age by the inspired apostles were valuable to the sincere Christians when the predicted false systems actually arose. They could see in the events that the Lord knew in advance what would happen, and would provide the means to help believers endure and remain faithful. The most notable example is the work of the dedicated reformers as they brought about the great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

The future Kingdom of God and the blessing of all nations and peoples has not been known or understood by people in general, though these great truths are clearly recorded in the Bible. The New Testament Epistles and the Book of Revelation reveal that the Lord desired His people to have light and understanding, not only of past times, but also of the day or period in which they lived, and of what would happen in the future. *"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief"* (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

In this reference to *"that day"* there can be no uncertainty as to the apostle's meaning. He is referring to the Lord's second advent at the end of the Gospel Age. He had been comforting the brethren by telling them that the resurrection of the saints would then take place. *".... that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (1 Thessalonians 4: 15 to 17).

No seal was put on this information regarding the Lord's second advent and His receiving the overcomers to Himself. The Revelation tells us that the believers' resurrection to be with Christ will be first and foremost for the purpose of reigning with Him for one thousand years. In spite of the fact that no seal was put on this information, it is a fact that it is not understood or misunderstood by many Christians today.

The Apostle Peter was also inspired to prophesy of the Lord Jesus' return and how to prepare for it. He tells us how *"the day of the Lord"* would come *"as a thief in the night"*, and tells us also of the *"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:1-18). And we should note verse 14 which still applies to us today, *"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"*.

DANIEL'S PROPHECIES

Long before the Christian era, the prophet Daniel had been used to record certain predictions, and these writings have been preserved among the treasures of Israel. The Lord used Daniel to prophesy, giving the Israelites hope in their God, with an outline of their future, showing that God would not abandon His people but would deliver them after a period of time had elapsed.

Of Daniel's prophecies, some had a relatively near fulfillment, while others were for remote future times. These prophecies are discussed in detail in the book "Notes on the Book of Daniel".

A later prophecy of Daniel was commanded to be sealed. *"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."* (Daniel 12:4). After this command, Daniel saw a vision, and words were spoken whose meaning Daniel could not understand (Daniel 12:5-7). He desired an explanation, but was told that *"the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end"*, at which time *"the wise shall understand"*.

History shows that it was only in the course of the Gospel Age that the true Church went through the experience of trial and persecution at the hands of an apostate system. The *"wise"* were believers true to God, while the *"wicked"* were those who ignored God and went their own way. A special blessing is mentioned in Daniel 12:12, and that blessing, it seems, is available in our own day to sincere and true believers.

We can now see the meaning the Lord gave to the sealing of a prophecy. The prophecy was there to be read and considered, but its full understanding was not given to God's people until events developed, and the prophecy in God's Word could be identified. It was not God's will that the events in the Gospel Age should be fully understood in the Jewish Age.

The direction given to John not to seal the sayings of the prophecy of the book differed from the directions given to Daniel. In Revelation 10:3 and 4, John was told not to write *"those things which the seven thunders uttered"* but to seal them up. But the assurance was given that *"in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets"*. In this case, it was a postponement of an explanation to a time nearer the end of the Gospel Age (Revelation 10:7).

The reason given for not sealing the sayings of the prophecy of the book is that *"the time is at hand"*. This would mean that the time was *"at hand"* in John's day for the beginning of the fulfilment of the events which John had seen in the visions. The visions which John saw and recorded would be of help to God's people from generation to generation throughout the Gospel Age.

22:11 A standard of character is laid down here, indicating that the Lord had one standard of character to which all His people should conform, that standard being righteousness, holiness and justice.

Whatever was unjust or filthy or unholy in God's sight at the beginning of the Gospel Age would continue to be regarded by the Lord as unjust, filthy or unholy, as the case might be.

The pattern the Lord set for His people was just, holy, and righteous. He lived this pattern Himself without fault while on earth, and of course retains the same traits of character in His position as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Lord's holiness, purity and justice were to be developed in His true disciples throughout the Gospel Age. If we wish to be like Him, and see Him as He is in glory, we must develop our own characters here and now. Any attempts by religious bodies or political powers to set up some other standard and excuse sin, as some religions have done on payment of a fee, are abominable in God's sight.

22:12 This verse and the next, are a further statement of the Lord's care of the Church during the Gospel Age, and of the responsibility resting on those who have been enlightened.

The Church is spoken of as one, that is, one "body" and as the "bride" of Christ, and here we are reminded that the one body is composed of many individuals, each of whom is responsible for his or her own conduct. The responsibility that belongs to each believer does not extend to conduct before he or she became a believer, because on coming to Christ in repentance and confession of sins, the believer receives forgiveness and is justified by faith. Our verse has "*according as his work shall be*", that is, from the time he or she is accepted as a believer. Our Lord's parables recorded in Matthew 20:1-16; 13:3-52; and 25:14-30 are also relevant here.

Individual responsibility rests on each member, and the Lord has been, from the time of His ascension to the Father's right hand, prepared to give as a reward the blessing of His love and care to each member during this present life, as well as at His promised return when the Church as a whole is to be received. The individual members will be rewarded with a resurrection in His likeness to be forever with the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:42-57; Philippians 3:8-14; Colossians 3:1-4).

All through the Gospel Age, the Lord has from time to time "*come quickly*" to strengthen and sustain His people when persecution was their lot. Suffering and persecution were frequently permitted to continue unchecked, but the Lord has always kept His people peaceful in mind and heart with their minds stayed on Him. The Lord has intervened from time to time to restrain the persecutors, and has seen to it that over periods of time better political and social conditions have been brought about to ease the burdens on His persecuted people. As He said when He went away, He would send the Holy Spirit upon them with the truth as a sanctifying power, and in the prayer recorded in John 17, He committed them to the Father's care, that they too might know the Father, and the Father might be in them.

The love and care given to the individual members of the Church have been appreciated by true believers as they strove to make their calling and election sure. Many have slept in the grave while the Age progressed and fellow members were being called and chosen. But the time would come when the overcomers would be called forth from the grave, and then the words "*behold*,

I come quickly" would again apply as the last faithful members of the Gospel Age Church would be gathered to Himself by the Lord Jesus Christ.

22:13 "*Alpha*" is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, equal to the English "A", and is often used to denote the beginning or first of anything. "*Omega*" is the twenty-fourth and last letter in the Greek alphabet, and is often used figuratively to mean the end.

From the beginning to the end, from the first to the last is a comprehensive way of expressing complete and continuing power. In Jesus, the whole plan of God is comprehended and made operative. In Jesus is the beginning and the end of each section of the divine plan. When the Gospel Age work is complete, Jesus is the beginning and the end, the first and the last of the Kingdom Age work; the establishment of the "*city*", that is, the government described previously in chapter 21, verses 10 to 27. The "*city*" will be established by the Lord Jesus at the close of the Gospel Age and the beginning of the Kingdom Age, and will continue for the thousand years set apart for the Lord's rulership over the nations, with the purpose of blessing them and informing them of the conditions for and means of gaining everlasting life.

In the city or government to come, the Church will be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, and will assist in the great work of helping and dealing with all nations and people in every part of the earth with no exceptions. Under Jesus Christ, the Church will deal not only with those nations and peoples who will be living on earth when the time comes for the new government to be set up, but with all nations and peoples who have passed into the grave, and are described as captives of death and the grave, the state or condition from which Jesus said He would one day call them forth. "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment*" (John 5: 28, 29)

This is the "judgment" mentioned in John 5:27, "*And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man*". In ancient times, the title of Judge signified a Ruler, as may be seen in the records of the judges and kings of Israel, for example, "*Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life*" (1 Samuel 7:15; 8:1,5; Judges 2:16-18).

With these historical facts in mind, we ought to understand that the Judgment Day is not a twenty-four day, but a period of one thousand years of good government, of hope and progress under Jesus Christ, the Judge appointed by God.

Since His resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been Judge, but has not operated on the scale of the Kingdom Age judgment. When Paul preached at Athens, telling of Jesus and the resurrection, he explained that God *"now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31).

The Athenians and others down to our own day who have heard this message were to repent, accept Jesus as Saviour, Lord and Judge, and become His obedient followers and subjects. The Apostle's teaching is that, knowing there is a thousand-year judgment day coming, the reasonable and proper thing to do is to acknowledge even now Jesus Christ's present position as Judge appointed by God (Acts 17:31). The fact that Christ was raised from the dead and set at God's right hand with all authority in heaven and earth, should lead any reasonable person to reflect and investigate the truth of this statement, as well as the benefits and consequences of believing it and becoming a servant of Jesus Christ now in this life.

Responsibility begins with hearing the Gospel with its call to repentance and faith, whether now or in the Kingdom Age; for Jesus is *"the Alpha and Omega"* in God's plan, with complete control over the two ages - the Gospel Age and the Kingdom Age.

22:14 In this verse we have a direct reference to the Holy City with its twelve gates and other opportunities to obtain salvation. These opportunities are still the same as now: repentance and faith, and obedience to Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

This verse should read, according to the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, *Blessed are they that wash their garments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"*.

The Church is not referred to in this verse, because the members of the Church have previously *"washed their garments"* and have

been raised in the *"first resurrection"* to sit with Christ in the appointed task of ruling and reigning (Revelation 20:4, 5). *"Washing their garments in the blood of the Lamb"* signifies personal acceptance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross, and the shedding of His blood as the means of cleansing from sin and taking its condemnation away.

To *"enter in through the gates"* will be the privilege of the nations to be enlightened during the Kingdom Age. The *"gates"* symbolise God's requirement that the nations and their peoples are to repent and come to worship Him in the appointed way, through Jesus Christ under the New Covenant arrangement. The *"wall great and high"*, already considered in Revelation 21:12, symbolises the means that will operate to exclude the wilfully perverse.

All who love righteousness, and who appreciate what Jesus has done in giving His life as a *"ransom for all"* will surely agree with the justice of the decision that those who persist in the ways of wickedness described in Revelation 21:8 deserve to be shut out of the city and *"have their part"* in the second death, from which there will be no resurrection. The wilful sinners are described again in the next verse, verse 15.

The *"tree of life"* should be understood as it was in Revelation 22:2, not as a single tree, but a wood, or grove of trees, symbolising the Ancient Worthies, as discussed on page 446 of this commentary.

THOSE THAT ARE OUTSIDE

¹⁵*For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie*

22:15 *"Dogs"* in this verse is used figuratively to refer to persons of undesirable character. Unfaithful watchmen in Israel were called *"dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough"* (Isaiah 56:10, 11).

A similarity between a dog returning to its regurgitated food and the conduct of a fool is mentioned in Proverbs 26:11, and is quoted by Peter in connection with false teachers (2 Peter 2: 1-22). Anyone who has been delivered from sin and returns to it again is like the dog in the *"true proverb"*, as Peter writes: *"turned to his own vomit again"*.

Our verse 15 therefore is seen to teach that persons of a greedy disposition, not willing to reject completely the sin and error of their lives, but willing to return to their former ways, will be banned entry to the Holy City. How this ban will be implemented we are not told, so it is wise not to speculate. If perhaps some have shown some measure of repentance and have been admitted through *"the gates"*, and then turn back to their former ways, such will be thrust out from the City and not permitted to re-enter.

Paul warned the Philippians in chapter 3 verse 2, *"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision"*. The concision were those false teachers who contended that Gentile converts to the Christian faith should be circumcised to put them on a level with the Jews, who were urged to continue that feature of the Law. Thus Paul placed the "concision" on a level with "evil workers" and "dogs", and warned against them.

The only true position is that stated by Paul, *"...worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"* (Philippians 3:3). The right way was exemplified in Paul himself, as set forth by him in the deeply-moving and inspiring statement of his faith and purpose, addressed to the Philippians (Philippians 3:7-17 and 4:4-9).

The term *"sorcerer"* merits comment. A "sorcerer" is an opponent of God, no matter how large a following a sorcerer may have, or how plausible his or her assertions may sound. Sorcerers and enchanters opposed Moses and Aaron in ancient Egypt. Their evil deeds are recorded in Exodus, chapters 1 to 15, and mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:8. In Scripture the children of Israel were continually warned to avoid sorcerers (Deuteronomy 18:9-15; Isaiah 46:1-8; Jeremiah 27:9).

When the Lord Jesus was engaged in His earthly ministry, He made it clear that fallen angels were the power behind sorcery and spirit possession. These fallen angels were spirit beings who sinned in the days of Noah, and had been bound under chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day, as Peter explained (2 Peter 2:1-11).

The sorcerers Simon and Elymas are mentioned in Acts 8:5-24 and 13:1-11 as opposing the Lord. Paul cast out an evil spirit from a possessed woman (Acts 16:19-40). The accounts tell us

how the opposition from sorcerers and evil spirits was dealt with by Peter and Paul.

The "*sorcerers*" in our verse 15 represent a section, hopefully a small section, of all the world's peoples bought back from death to be enlightened in the Kingdom Age. It seems from the Scripture that there will be some with an eye for their own gain posing as benefactors, while at the same time they will by various schemes and false promises turn as many as possible away from the true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

The power behind sorcery, ancient and modern, and behind modern Spiritism, are the same rebellious angels who disobeyed God and were confined in chains of darkness. They take possession of any persons who submit to their control. The Lord and the apostles cast out many such evil spirits, calling upon them to come out of the people they possessed, and the evil spirits had to obey.

Today Spiritists are deceiving large numbers of people into believing that these disobedient spirit beings are the spirits or souls of dead people, and the spiritists pretend to convey messages from deceased people to inquiring relatives and friends. The spiritists also claim the ability to read the future and bring good fortune to those who come to them for assistance.

We need to be aware of these modern machinations of Satan, and concentrate on Jesus Christ, our true and faithful Helper, and continue to study God's word which will make *us "wise unto salvation"*, and help us to make our calling and election sure, and finally to gain entrance into the glory of His Kingdom with its great work of blessing for all the families of the earth.

What is meant by "*whoremongers*" in our verse 15? The word "monger" is defined by the Standard Dictionary as meaning a dealer or trader. Its use is chiefly in compound words such as fishmonger, ironmonger and cheesemonger. When "monger" is used in a figurative way, its meaning is often derogatory, as in scandalmonger, scaremonger or gossipmonger. Whoremongering was not a legitimate trade. It was a debased form of traffic prohibited under Jewish law, but freely practised by Gentiles in their idol temples. The term is used in Revelation to describe a group of persons excluded from the Holy City. A whoremonger was and is one who profits from the moral weakness of others.

The warning implicit in our verse 15 indicates that no one willing to encourage others in sin after experiencing the enlightenment of the Kingdom arrangements, will be permitted to live forever.

Whoredom involves fornication or adultery or both, and the Christian believer is specifically exhorted to abstain from such conduct (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Corinthians 5:1,11; 6:9,13; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 12:16). We may learn from these exhortations that anyone in the Kingdom Age, where all people will be the Lord's, who will try to draw people away from God, and thus make a trade of seduction, will be revealed as unworthy of everlasting life. Everlasting life is the reward of the penitent who turn from sin to the worship of God in sincerity through Jesus Christ and remain faithful to Him, as a married person should remain faithful to his or her married partner and never stray from the marriage bond.

"Murderers" are next mentioned. A murderer is one who willingly takes the life of another, or who joins in a mob whose object is to kill a victim. If there are any such people in the Kingdom, they will display no regard for the law of God which, based on love, provides that no one will hurt or destroy. We must surely believe that all crime, including murder, will not be permitted in the age to come. A "murderer" in the age to come may therefore be considered as one who sees the good work being done, but who turns traitor, and tries to draw away those foolish enough to follow him, and place themselves in danger of committing wilful sin which will deprive them of everlasting life.

In addition, as 1 John 3:15 tells us, "*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*". Therefore if any hate another person in the age to come, God may well consider that person to be a murderer in his or her heart. In the future age, it will remain true as our Lord said to the disciples, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad*" (Matthew 12:20).

How can anyone be an idolater in the Kingdom Age, seeing that the Ancient Worthies will be there as earthly rulers, and the setting up of idols will be prohibited? In view of this it would seem that a person could become an idolater by means of thoughts in his or her own mind. Such a person may form some idea, some theory or teaching, become devoted to it, and strive to induce others to follow him in his teaching and aspiration. Such a

person may make a god of ambition and self-exaltation, and in doing so become an idolater, drawing worship to himself and his teachings instead of to God and Jesus Christ.

When the work of the Kingdom Age has opened people's eyes to the fact of fallen human nature and the necessity of following a higher standard in harmony with the teachings of Christ, then anyone who may set up his or her own opinions as better than the rules of the Kings of kings, will in fact be worshipping himself or herself and consequently be an idolater.

God is long-suffering and patient with everyone, but He expects gratitude and true worship voluntarily given in return for His grace and favour. True worship of God will completely take away any form or manifestation of self-worship.

Still another evil is mentioned which will be contrary to God's Kingdom of mercy, peace and truth: *"whosoever maketh and loveth a lie"*.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Love therefore is the supreme virtue and the deepest sentiment of the heart. There are many things we may like, but only a few that we really love, and would feel sad and disappointed if we had to do without them. Anyone who loves a lie has made it very important in his or her life. The lie may consist in something done or achieved with which the wrong-doer is pleased. It may be in the Kingdom rule that a person may outwardly conform but may nourish and foster other thoughts in his or her mind and heart. The life of such a person would then be a living lie, completely out of place in God's Kingdom of equity and truth. If it should happen that there are some people such as just described, it goes without saying that God would see through the pretence and deal justly and rightly with such people.

It may be that some disobedient persons will be permitted to dwell with the obedient for a time under the Kingdom rule, but sooner or later their disobedience will be brought out into the open for all to see, and they will remain outside the Holy City. Being outside the Holy City may be understood figuratively, that is, the benefits of righteous living and eternal life will not be given to the disobedient unless they repent and become true believers in God through Jesus Christ, the only name and way by which any can be saved.

It seems we may assume that the wilfully and persistently disobedient will not be allowed to continue beyond one hundred years of instruction and response to that instruction, if we have understood Isaiah 65:20 correctly: *"There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed"*.

The same lesson was taught by our Lord in the parable of the sheep and the goats recorded in Matthew 25:31 to 46. The Lord makes a division between sheep and goats, the test being the showing of love and compassion to those in need of assistance in the age to come. The test is easily attainable by all, but those who fail to measure up to it will merit the Lord's judgment against them. The *"everlasting fire"* of Matthew 25:41 does not mean everlasting torment but simply everlasting destruction, as is maintained and expounded in detail in our booklet "Everlasting Punishment".

THE ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID

¹⁶I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

22:16 Instead of *"in"* the churches, the RV and almost all modern versions have *"for"* the churches. The testimony of the angel was given by the Lord Jesus to John personally, and John was committed to write down all that he saw and heard in the visions. The contents, the instruction and the lessons were for all members of Christ's Church throughout the Gospel Age, and the messages are still "meat in due season" for all genuine Christian believers of whatever race or language.

Our verse 16 is really the Lord's signature concluding the revelations, just as the very first verse of the Revelation contains the inspired testimony through John the Apostle that the visions are genuine and recorded accurately by him through the power of the Spirit of God. Only Jesus Himself could testify that He is *"the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star"*.

Jesus' description of Himself forever identifies Him with the house of David in an exclusive position. In normal genealogy, as in nature, the root is not the branch, and the branch is not the root. The root is the part of a tree or plant from which the stem grows, the original life being in the root. In genealogy there may be one

branch or a hundred branches originating from one root, but never can the descendants from the original stock be at the same time the origin or root.

In order that the Messiah, the Anointed of God, might be identified by the Israelites, and so distinguished from false claimants to the title, the prophets of old were inspired to foretell the great work He would accomplish, as in Isaiah 11:1-16. Verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah 11 declare that the Spirit of the Lord should rest upon Him; and verse 1 states, as a means of identification, that He shall be of the house of Jesse. At the time this prophecy was written, Jesse had been long dead, his most notable descendant having been King David. In 1 Samuel chapter 16 and onward we may read the history telling us how David was chosen and anointed King, and how the Spirit of the Lord was with him.

We may note also how God worked out His plan, and the fact that genealogies were kept (Genesis 5:1-32; 9:18, 19; 10:1-32; 11:10-32). Thus at the birth of Jesus the line could be traced back through His mother Mary, who was of the tribe of Judah and was betrothed to Joseph, a just man of the same tribe under whose protection Mary was placed (Matthew 1:1-25). The Gospel accounts agree that Jesus was the One foretold by the prophets. At the same time, the prophets testify that Jesus had no human father. He was the Son of God. (Matthew 1:20-25; 3:17; Mark 1: 9-11; Luke 1:26-35; John 1:1-5, 14, 18, 32-34; 7:68,69).

When the apostles preached the Gospel from place to place, first to the Jews in Palestine, and then to the Jews scattered abroad, they quoted prophecy to prove that Jesus was of the line of David, and was their Saviour (Acts 13:22, 23). The Apostle Paul explained to the Jews at Antioch that Jesus, Who was falsely accused and crucified, had been raised to life again by God, and given a name and position far above angels (Acts 18:14-43).

Jesus was the promised "*seed of David*"; God was His Father, Who alone was able to raise Jesus to life again after His crucifixion, and did so because Jesus was never a sinner and could not therefore remain in death, which was the penalty for sin (Acts 2:24; Romans 6:23). The apostles and disciples were eye-witnesses to the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that He was the same identity (John 19:19; Acts 1:1-9; John 20:11-31).

Jesus was of the house and lineage of King David, and David's prophecies were inspired by God to foretell David's greater Son. These prophecies proved helpful when the apostles and disciples were explaining why the Saviour died, and also pointing out that He was still the same Jesus Who had been crucified and raised to life again on the third day. On the day of Pentecost, Peter gave a convincing discourse with quotations from the Psalms (Acts 2:22-36).

Jesus came to the Jews as the rightful heir of David's throne, and therefore had full authority to rebuke the Scribes and Pharisees and other prominent leaders of the people for their unbelief and unfaithfulness, and full right to claim the position of King. The common people heard Him gladly, and it was declared by the officers sent to apprehend Jesus, *"Never man spake like this man"* (John 7:46).

When Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem as King of the Jews, the people rejoiced greatly and spread their garments and the branches of trees on the path before Jesus, and said *"Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven and glory in the highest"* (Luke 19: 28-38; Mark 11:1-10). But wicked men had already laid the plot for His betrayal and death, thinking to do away with Jesus forever.

But God had planned and decreed otherwise. Paul the Apostle wrote, *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:9-11).

The same word translated *"offspring"* in our verse 16 is rendered *"kindred"* in Acts 4:6, *"as many as were of the kindred of the high priest"*. As a man, Jesus was of the kindred of David, being a direct descendant of David through Mary His mother, as was said earlier.

The distinction between *"root"* and *"offspring"* is seen in the case of Adam, who was a direct creation of God. Adam was therefore the *"root"* from which was developed the whole human race. But Adam was never the *"offspring"*, nor were any of Adam's offspring the *"root"* of the human family. King David was a distinguished member of Adam's offspring, but never the root.

And it was on account of Adam's transgression that death came upon all people (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22). And so the question arises: how could Jesus, Who lived on earth long after David, speak of Himself as the root of David?

The Lord Jesus spoke these words through His angel to John as a last message to the Gospel Age Church. His purpose was to keep alive in our minds the fact that He was not only the One Who had been born as a babe in Bethlehem, Who grew to manhood, became the greatest Teacher ever known, preached the Gospel, called His disciples to follow and serve Him, preached forgiveness and laid down His life as a ransom and shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins, and was raised to the right hand of the Father; but that He was also the One Who at the beginning was with the Father, was the direct creation of God the Father, and was God's agent in the entire creative work.

John wrote; *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was (a) God. The same was in the beginning with (the) God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (John 1: 1 to 3. The insertions are taken from the word-for-word translation of the Emphatic Diaglott.)

John could not have known these things from his own knowledge. He was not there when the Lord Jesus was created, nor when the creative work was done by the Son. These things were revealed to him under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, so that we might receive these truths concerning Jesus as testimony deriving from God Himself.

It is surely amazing to us to contemplate that Jesus left His heavenly glory, was made a human being and therefore able to suffer death and give to God a ransom or corresponding price for the perfect man Adam who sinned. Moreover, Jesus shed His sinless blood for the remission of sins to lay the basis for the salvation and redemption of the whole human race.

Psalm 49 describes the hopeless condition of the human race under the condemnation that came upon all because of Adam's sin - *"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him"* (Psalm 49:7). The only hope for the human race lay with God. Through David, God promised redemption - *"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave"* (Psalm 49:15). This was the purpose for which the Lord

Jesus left the glory of heaven - to become a man and redeem all people from their state of sin and helplessness. Becoming a man involved the miraculous transformation of the Lord Jesus from a mighty spirit being to a human being to be born as a babe in Bethlehem.

Though He became a man, Jesus retained in His memory His previous life with the Heavenly Father, and was sustained by the promise God had given Him. Jesus said, *"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father"* (John 16:28). These words emphasise the fact that Jesus' life with the Father before He came to earth was a reality, a personal existence, a life of love for God and participation in the Father's work; even as His life here on earth was a reality, a personal existence with knowledge of the Father and activity in His service.

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". (John 17: 1, 2 and 24).

These words of our Lord confirm the words of John 1:1-3 that Jesus was with God before the creation of the world. He fully expected to be raised from death and return to heaven to the Father He loved and served throughout all the ignominy and suffering of His rejection by His own people, and the unwarranted cruelty and barbarity of His trial, ill-treatment and crucifixion.

The Lord Jesus, the Creator of the human race by God's power and authority, can therefore be truly understood as "the root of David", the same David of whom He was to be, in His transfer to earth, the "offspring". No other being in heaven or earth could make such a claim. And here, in the closing words of the Revelation, He impresses the Church of believers today with the importance of still clinging tenaciously to this great truth.

THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR

"And the bright and morning star" There are hundreds of thousands of stars visible in the natural heavens, but there is only one "morning star" at any one given time of the year. The "morning star" is actually one of the planets. The Standard Dictionary names the morning stars as "Jupiter, Mars, Saturn or Venus when rising shortly before the sun" on any given day, meaning that only one morning star is visible on a given day, whether in the northern or southern hemisphere. The morning star is a very bright star visible in the sky shortly before sunrise. When the sun rises, the light of the morning star is no longer visible.

Since His resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been invisible to people except for the appearances and demonstrations given to His disciples in proof of His resurrection. They did not see His spiritual body because the human eye cannot see a spirit being. But the Lord made Himself visible to their natural sight as described in the Gospels and in Acts 1:1-9, with a special manifestation to Thomas recorded in John 20:20 to 29.

When Jesus was taken up into heaven, two angels appeared to the disciples, and assured them that *"this same Jesus"* would *"come again"*. The interval between His going away and His coming again has been a long one, almost two thousand years. During this time, the Gospel Age Church has been, and is being chosen, and it seems that this selection by the Lord has not yet finished. All the prophecies and signs evident in these latter days indicate that we are close to the end of the age, but how close we do not know.

In Revelation 12 we read how the Church of believers in the Gospel Age were in a wilderness condition by reason of the tyranny of the *"dragon"* (Revelation 12:6, 14). But even before this period of the *"dragon"*, the believers in Jesus suffered persecution, making it more difficult for them to overcome, as shown in the messages to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The promise that overcomers would live and reign with Christ was always an incentive to faithful endurance throughout the Gospel Age.

In due time the reign of one thousand years will shine as a glorious sun for the enlightenment and blessing of all the families of the earth. The dead small and great will be raised to learn of the good news. The Lord Jesus will shine as the sun in the glory

of His Father's Kingdom, and the overcomers will shine with Him as He promised, *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"* (Matthew 13:43). The Kingdom of heaven was likened by our Lord to a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who sold all that he had to purchase one outstanding pearl (Matthew 13:45,46). The prospects of the Kingdom were like the sunrise of a perfect day.

But that great day is not yet here. All through this age the tried and persecuted believers in Jesus have looked forward to that glorious day still to come. In the meantime they have been given consolation by their faith in the brightness and glory of the Morning Star. It has been a long "morning" from first to last, but to each individual the "morning" has been but a few years. Each has been sustained by looking at and contemplating the righteousness of Jesus' character, and His self-denying love in dying for us on the cruel cross of Calvary.

As the early riser sees and admires the beauty and brilliance of the morning star, so believers are encouraged and strengthened by the light of the Saviour's life as He lived it while on earth and as He has shown it in His resurrection life. As the *"good shepherd"* He has watched over and cared for His flock. He has sympathised with us and helped us in all our difficulties. To each of us He has said in Matthew 11: 28 to 30; *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

And so with our minds fixed on Him, *"the bright and morning star"*, we have patience to await the dawn of the perfect day, and gladly join in His and the Spirit's invitation to others to enjoy the same benefits as He invited us to do, as we will see in the next verse - Revelation 22:17.

Rejoicing as we do in the prospects of the glorious day ahead, let us always bear in mind that we are still in the time of the morning star before the sunrise. There are in the world millions of professed Christians who are still asleep as far as the knowledge of God's plan and purposes are concerned. In this day of the most striking achievements and technological advances, many Christians still cling to so many false teachings of former times, and embrace political goals and teachings such as the theory of

evolution, all of which leave many Christians in darkness concerning why Christ died and shed His blood, and concerning the truth that God has revealed to us in the Bible of His plans and purposes.

Let us do what we can to awaken them, so that they may see *"the bright and morning star"*, the herald of the new day of peace on earth and good will to men.

In the great prophecy of Luke 21, the Lord gave several signs concerning events to be expected during the Gospel Age. *"And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven."* (Luke 21: 8 to 11).

During these times, the work of preaching the Gospel must continue; believers must not be discouraged, but possess their souls in patience (Luke 21:16-19). In Luke 21:24 it is written that *"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"*.

We know now that this period of the Gentiles has covered nearly two thousand years. There have been many signs in the ecclesiastical heavens as political and secular figures have gained control over the Christian Church. The *"sea and the waves"* have roared, and the political powers of both Christian and non-Christian lands have been engaged in conflict and warfare. The peoples of various nations have agitated, demonstrated and risen in rebellion, as the Lord Jesus said: *..."upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken"* (Luke 21:25, 26).

The Lord said, *"then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh"* (Luke 21:27, 28).

This is the message of the Day Star, the "*Star out of Jacob*" (Numbers 24:17); the "*day star*" that will arise in our hearts (2 Peter 1:19). Jesus is also referred to as the "*dayspring*" in the inspired words of Zacharias, "*Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us*" (Luke 1:78).

We are surely nearing the time when as King of kings the Lord Jesus Christ will take up His great power and reign. At present He is not visible to human eyes, but He is visible to the eye of faith. There still remain to be made ready the last members of the Church, of whom He said, "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matthew 13:43, 1 Corinthians 15:48-57).

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years ... Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4-6; 21:10-27; 22:1-16).

Thanks be to God for the Bright and Morning Star, the Lord Jesus Christ, visible now to believers by faith, and in the age to come visible by sight to believers changed to be like Him to see Him in glory as He is (1 John 3:2).

CHAPTER 20

CLOSING WARNING AND BENEDICTION

REVELATION 22:17 - 21

¹⁷And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

¹⁸For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

¹⁹And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

²⁰He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

22:17 The Holy Spirit will continue to operate in the Kingdom of God, and will sanctify those who accept its invitation to "come". The Holy Spirit and the Bride, the Gospel Age Church of overcomers will together say, "Come". All who hear the call will be invited to take freely of salvation and blessings given by God on the basis of faith and obedience. The Kingdom will be a time of great rejoicing, and all who in this life sought for the truth and thirsted for it but did not find it will be glad to quench their thirst with the water of life.

As was said earlier, the water of life symbolises the truth, the true worship of God through Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In this verse, the bride is surely the Gospel Age Church, the "chaste" virgin" as Paul wrote, to be presented to one husband, Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). They are joint-heirs with Christ, who will be inviting everyone to take of the water of life freely, that is, inviting everyone to worship God through Jesus Christ. This will be a most important aspect of the work of the Kingdom, a work attainable by all through faith and obedience. Everlasting life as a gift from God will be attainable by all who will choose to believe and obey.

To apply this verse to the Gospel Age, as some do, contending that now is the only time for salvation, is a misunderstanding that fails to take into account God's promises of a Kingdom, a resurrection of all the dead and a blessing to all nations and all families of the earth, and everlasting life to all who believe and obey.

22:18,19 Both verses contain confirmation that the whole book is a prophecy, and both verses contain a warning to all readers that anyone who adds to or takes away from *"the words of the prophecy"* of this book will be punished.

The most ancient manuscripts reveal to us that certain words and even whole phrases have been added, giving the impression that these additions form a genuine part of the book. An example is seen in Revelation 20:5, where, according to the Sinaitic manuscript, the first sentence is missing, and must have been inserted later by some unknown scribe. Taking from the book would mean the removal of words or sentences, or suppressing certain parts so that the whole truth is concealed.

The words of Proverbs 30:5 and 6 are very significant. *"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."*

The warnings expressed in the above quotation and our verses 19 and 20 are very severe, and remind us to take care in our endeavours rightly to divide the Word of truth, the Scriptures, and always seek God's help through Jesus Christ in our studies and discussions.

22:20 Jesus was the One testifying *"these things"*. They had been revealed to Him by the Father, and Jesus in turn was revealing them to His people through John. John, the inspired Apostle had already written of Jesus' promised return in John 14, and the great change in 1 John 3:2 from flesh to spirit for believers to be made like the Lord Jesus. No doubt John even then was longing for Jesus' return when he wrote the words *"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"*. And the Lord Jesus will surely come *"quickly"*, not necessarily at once, but when the time is appropriate. Then the Lord Jesus will come without delay.

We are living in the time referred to by Daniel the prophet as the time of the end, when this order of things is passing away in preparation for the new order, the *"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13). We warmly endorse the Apostle's words, *"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."*

22:21 The benediction forms a most fitting close to this remarkable and deeply-moving book.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."



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