

# How To Understand The End-Time Prophecies Of The Bible A Biblical-Contextual Approach

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Jesus' Prophetic Discourse : Matthew XXIV

Paul's Apocalyptic Outline : Second Thessalonians II

John's Apocalypse

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# Foreword

The purpose of this study of biblical prophecy is simple: it is my witness as a theology professor who has taught "Biblical Eschatology" and "Apocalyptic Interpretation" for some 25 years in the Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and in seminars around the world.

This book is a result of my ongoing efforts to learn with the passing of time. The present study is not an exhaustive treatment of every long-range prophecy of Holy Scripture. The problematic chapters of Daniel 8-12 constitute a class by itself and is beyond the scope of this book

The focus of this work is the prophetic discourse of Jesus in Matthew 24 and its parallel chapters in Mark and Luke, the apocalyptic outline of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, and John's Apocalypse.

I am convinced that the continuous-historical interpretation of the major apocalyptic series provides the adequate approach for the challenging task of understanding the end-time. This includes, however, a careful testing of the traditional historicist fixations in church history, in an effort to learn from past mistakes. The approach, however, is primarily the contextual exegesis of each apocalyptic passage prior to any historical application is undertaken.

Since its first edition in 1997, an improved Spanish edition has been issued in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1999, under the title: *Las Profecias del Fin* (Asoc. Casa Ed. Sudamericana). I acknowledge gratefully the greatly appreciated translation by Dr. David P. Gullon, Professor at the Universidad Adventista del Plata in Argentina. He suggested several improvements in the text, which this second edition has adopted.

The present edition also contains more Appendices as suggestions for a constructive critical approach to some aspects of the historicist tradition.

Dedicated to all who thirst for a deeper knowledge  
of God and for a better  
Understanding of his Word for our time.

# General Introduction

The purpose of this book is to attain a better understanding of the progressive fulfillments of the plan of God for the redemption of planet Earth. The book of Revelation is recognized as the summary of all previous prophecies. This implies its spiritual unity with the other books of the Bible. It requires therefore a basic knowledge of all Scripture before a more mature insight into the Apocalypse can be ascertained.

The Apocalypse borrows its symbols, images, and terms mostly from the Old Testament and these cannot be understood properly in isolation from their Hebrew roots. To read the Apocalypse within this wider biblical context demands that we acquaint ourselves with the Hebrew Scriptures, with their way of speaking, and with their prophetic language and images. In addition, their interpretation by the rabbis of Judaism is also important. This Jewish background increases our insight in the newness of the apostolic gospel message and of its apocalyptic fulfillments in Jesus Christ.

Our authoritative example for the Christian application of the prophecies of the Old Testament will be the way Christ and the apostle Paul used the apocalyptic symbols of Daniel's book. Jesus' prophetic discourse in Matthew 24 (and parallels) and Paul's prophetic outline in 2 Thessalonians 2 form the two indispensable links between the prophetic-apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation. Both Jesus and Paul apply the continuous outline of salvation history in Daniel 7-12 to their own contemporary times. As Christian believers, we derive our fundamental principles of prophetic interpretation from their historical applications of Daniel, as recorded in the New Testament. These hermeneutical (interpretative) principles should also determine our understanding of the end-time prophecies in Holy Scripture.

The first part of our investigation concentrates on Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2 in order to be properly equipped to understand the Apocalypse, which is the climax of all prophecy.

In Revelation the focus will be on the progress of salvation history according to its basic outline of prophecy. The aim will be to grasp the essence of the supreme test of faith in the great controversy of the ages. Bible prophecy was never given to satisfy our abstract curiosity about things to happen in the future. Its divine goal is rather to encourage the people of God to persevere by faith in the saving gospel and to revitalize their blessed hope in the return of Christ as the Savior-King. When the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ has its full impact on our hearts and minds, we will experience its poetic and dramatic portrayals as the most sublime message of divine mercy and justice for humanity. This climax of prophecy is the heavenly assurance that the Creator cares for us and for our world and that His justice will prevail for all eternity on earth as it does in heaven.

A suggested list of Source Material is provided at the end of some chapters of this book as a guide for in-depth study. Unless otherwise indicated, the New International Version is cited.



# Abbreviations

## Bible Versions

AB	Anchor Bible
Gr	The Greek New Testament (K. Aland, et al., United Bible Societies, London)
JB	The Jerusalem Bible
LXX	The Septuagint Version (with English translation, Zondervan Pub. House)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	The New English Bible
NTV*	New International Version
NKJV	The New King James Version
RSV	Revised standard Version
MT	Masoretic Text

## Other Abbreviations

AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
cf.	confer (compare)
cp.	compare
Gr.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
lb.	Ibidem, in the same place
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Lit.	Literally
NIDNTT	<i>The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
PF	<i>The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers</i>
Str-B	Strack and Billerbeck's <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
Symp. on Rev.	<i>Symposium on Revelation</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (Kittel - Friedrich)
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TWNT	<i>Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i>

	Ellen G. White Books and Articles:
AA	<i>Acts of the Apostles</i>
CWE	<i>Counsels to Writers and Editors</i>
DA	<i>Desire of Ages</i>
Ed	<i>Education</i>
EW	<i>Early Writings</i>
FCE	<i>Fundamentals of Christian Education</i>
GC	<i>The Great Controversy</i>
PK	<i>Prophets and Kings</i>

PP	<i>Patriarchs and Prophets</i>
RH	<i>Review and Herald</i>

References to the sources in the text are amplified in the SOURCE MATERIAL after each chapter.

# Acknowledgments

The Source Material at the end of most chapters shows my enormous debt to the Bible scholars who have attempted to ascertain the meaning of the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. I am especially grateful to my theological colleagues and students who have read the manuscript and have stimulated me to a renewed study of certain passages of Scripture.

Especially I like to mention Dr. Peter M. van Bemmelen, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI; Dr. Angel M. Rodriguez, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD; Dr. Norman R. Gulley, Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern College, Collegedale, TN, Dr. Roy C. Naden, retired Professor of Religious Education of Andrews University; Dr. George R. Knight, Professor of Church History at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University; Pastor Graeme S. Bradford, Ministerial Secretary of the Trans Tasman Union Conference in NSW, Australia; Pastor Jac Colon, Field Secretary of the Washington Conference at Bothell, WA, for their special interest, stimulating conversations, and helpful suggestions for clarification and improvement.

To all of my colleagues and fellow students of Bible prophecy I express my profound gratitude. Of course, I alone am responsible for the shortcomings and errors that can be identified. The book only reflects my present convictions, on the way to a fuller understanding.

# Chapter I:

## The Apocalyptic Hope of the First-Century Jews

The Apocalypse of John stands in marked contrast to the various Jewish apocalyptic writings that were current in the first century of the Christian era. Ever since the Roman general Pompey invaded Palestine in the year 63 B.C., and subjected the Jewish nation to Roman rule, the Jewish hope for the promised Messiah intensified. Most Jews looked for the coming of a powerful King-Messiah from the house of David who would slay the Roman dragon by His military strength assisted by divine power. He would then restore the nation of Israel to supreme political greatness as the Messianic kingdom on earth.

This apocalyptic hope was vibrant among the Pharisees. It can be demonstrated from the so-called Psalms of Solomon, a Pharisaic document written shortly after the death of General Pompey in 48 B.C.

*See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,  
the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel  
in the time known to you, O God.  
Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous  
rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles  
who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out  
the sinners from the inheritance;  
to smash the arrogance of sinners  
like a potter's jar;  
To shatter all their substance with an iron rod;  
to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth;  
At his warning the nations will flee from his presence;  
and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts  
(Psalms of Solomon 17:21-25, quoted in J. H. Charlesworth,  
The OT Pseudepigrapha, vol. 2, 667).*

The Testament of Moses, a hymn written by either Essenes or Pharisees before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, also expressed the urgent desire for the soon-coming kingdom of God:

*For God Most High will surge forth,  
the Eternal One alone.  
In full view will he come to work vengeance on the nations.  
Yea, all their idols will he destroy.*

*Then will you be happy, O Israel!  
And you will mount up above the necks and the wings of an eagle.  
Yea, all things will be fulfilled.  
(Testament of Moses, 10:7, 8; quoted in J. H. Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. I, p. 932).*

In 4 Ezra 7, a document written after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, we read that the Messiah will come to deliver Israel's remnant from the tyranny of Rome and establish the

Messianic kingdom for four-hundred years (ch. 12).

Israel's central hope was for political deliverance, similar to the way God delivered them from Egypt. Only this time the expectation was for a permanent redemption from the evils of history. The party of the Zealots had such an apocalyptic fever that it supported a guerilla war against Rome in the assurance that God would destroy the oppressors of Israel and create a world in which Satan and sorrow would be no more.

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, records that a certain Judas, a Galilean, caused an uprising early in the first century with his philosophy that the people of God should recognize only God as their Ruler and Lord and refuse to pay taxes to a pagan overlord (Antiquities 18, 1,61; Wars 2,8). The New Testament reports that this rebellion came to a miserable end (Acts 5:37).

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in caves near Qumran was found a so-called War Scroll (QM), written at the beginning of the Christian era. It describes a battle plan for these Qumran covenanters to fight the last holy war against Rome (Kittim) and Belial. The expectation again was that God would intervene with His holy angels and give the faithful remnant of Israel eternal victory through a display of Michael's power as divine warrior (1 QM 6; 12-14).

This political hope for a brighter future reached such a feverish pitch in the first century A.D. that it led to the Jewish uprising against Rome in A.D. 66-70 and again in A.D. 132. On both occasions the Jews began a military war against the Roman empire trusting that God would vindicate them with a supernatural victory.

Solomon Schechter summarizes the essentials of the Jewish apocalyptic hope in the first century with four characteristics: 1) The Messiah, coming from the house of David, will restore the kingdom of Israel and extend His rulership over the entire earth; 2) The enemies of God will launch a massive attack against Israel, in which the Messiah will destroy all His heathen opponents; 3) All surviving nations will accept the God of Israel, acknowledge His kingdom, and seek instruction from His Torah (law); 4) The era of the Messianic kingdom will be an age of material prosperity and spiritual bliss. Even death would be abolished through the resurrection of the righteous ones who have died. This kingdom of the Messiah is, according to some sources, a preparation for the time when God Himself will reign (see Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, New York: Schocken Books, 1961, p. 102).

Unfortunately, the Jews were dominated so much by their hatred of Rome that they emphasized one-sidedly the mission of the coming Messiah as the deliverer from Roman rule and the restorer of the national kingdom to Israel. For this reason the rabbis studied the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures with a biased mind which prevented insight into the fullness of the Messiah's mission to save all men from sin. Looking for a political Messiah for their own nation alone, they overlooked those prophecies and types that predicted the atoning death of the Messiah at His first coming. Interpreting prophecy to find evidences to sustain their national ambition, the Jews prepared themselves to reject the Savior of the world. When Christ came in a manner contrary to their expectations, they were utterly disappointed and would not receive Him.

Christ tried to show the Jews that they had misinterpreted God's promise of eternal favor to Israel. They had come to regard their natural descent from Abraham as a claim to this promise (John 8:33-40). Indeed, in their racial pride the Jewish leaders overlooked the precondition that God had specified. The favor of God was assured only to a spiritual

Israel in whose hearts God had written His law: "'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people; . . . because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD" (Jer. 31:33, 34). The divine promises of salvation and blessing for the world were assured to a regenerated Israel as the true covenant people. The spiritual people of God are those that are "circumcised" in their heart (see Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). Such people will not claim God's promises and render outward service to God merely for the sake of attaining national greatness. The core of the Hebrew Bible is not Israel but the Messiah of Israel! The Messianic prophecies form the heart of both Scripture and Israel's sacred sanctuary services. Many rabbis and Pharisees had come to believe that through a knowledge of Scripture and external compliance to it they possessed eternal life. The Mishnah teaches: "Great is the law, for it gives life to them that practice it both in this world and the world to come" (Aboth 6:7). But Jesus pointed out a fundamental lack of insight:

*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39, 40).*

Life is centered not in Scripture but in the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus claimed: "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). By losing sight of Christ as the living heart of Scripture, the Jews no longer understood the spiritual meaning of the ritual service in their temple. They began to trust in the sacrifices and ceremonies themselves instead of looking to Him to whom they pointed. Thus, they lost the spiritual meaning from their temple worship. Holding on to the dead forms these rituals became an inexplicable riddle.

Even the rabbinic restrictions of Sabbath observance reveal that many Jews no longer perceived that the Sabbath was a divine promise of the Messianic rest. The Jewish leaders misinterpreted Jesus' act of miraculously healing a lame man on the Sabbath as evidence of an anti-Sabbatarian attitude (John 5:16-18). The opposite was the case, however. Jesus taught that deeds of mercy were not only permissible, they were obligatory on the Sabbath by the Messiah, and in perfect harmony with the heavenly Father's will. "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17). Evangelical scholar Leon Morris explains it this way: "He [Jesus] was not saying that the Sabbath should not be kept . . . He was saying that His critics did not understand what the Sabbath meant and why it had been instituted (Reflections on the Gospel of John. Vol. 2 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987], pp. 265, 266).

No wonder Jesus rebuked the Jews for their lack of spiritual perception, for not discerning who He really was, the One sent to Israel by the Father. He challenged them by asking: "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? . . . Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:19, 24). While the Jews longed for the coming of the Messiah, they no longer had a true concept of His divine mission as Redeemer from sin and Satan.

Christ said to the Jews: "Every one who sins is a slave to sin... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34, 36), but they claimed to be free because they had "never been slaves of anyone" (John 8:33). They did not grasp the spiritual meaning of sin or of the nature of Christ's kingship. The Messiah must come as the true Interpreter of Israel's prophets. He must define the principles of the kingdom and the plan of redemption. That is what Christ did, and His teachings are recorded in the Gospels which form the essential key to understand the Old Testament correctly. They also form the theological bridge between the Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation.

Before we can properly understand the Bible's last book, it is essential to learn first how Jesus interpreted the prophetic perspective of both the classical prophets and the book of Daniel.

## Chapter II

# The Distinction Between Classical Prophecy and Apocalyptic Prophecy

Old Testament prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, are called the classical prophets. Their messages were first spoken aloud to either a rebellious Northern Israel (the Ten Tribes) or to an apostate Jerusalem and Judah (the Two Tribes). Their message was frequently a cry for social, economic, and political justice for the oppressed classes. The prophets summoned Israel and Judah to return to the Torah or covenant law of Moses and to serve God in true repentance. If the political and religious leaders of the chosen people would bring about social justice and renewal in worship, the kingdom of God would come on earth in their future history. In reality the "Day of the Lord," or the "Day of Yahweh," would not come as popularly anticipated in Israel. The prophet Amos, as God's spokesman, thundered these shocking words to the ten tribes:

*"Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. . . Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? . . . Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty [God of hosts, NKJV] (Amos 5:18, 20, 27).*

Amos introduced two judgments on Israel: the unfaithful nation would first be taken captive and exiled to Assyria ("beyond Damascus") as a result of the covenant curse of Israel's God in harmony with His covenant threats made through Moses (Deut. 28; Lev. 26). This judgment took place in the year 722 B.C. and is known as the Assyrian exile of the Ten Tribes. Second, the full significance of this national judgment becomes visible only when this event is viewed as a type or prefiguration of the cosmic judgment of God at the end of history on all nations that rebel against God.

Amos pointed to God's final judgment when he referred to cosmic signs: "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight" (Amos 8:9); and "Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn?" (vs. 8). Sudden darkness at midday or a catastrophic earthquake can be more than a natural disaster. Apocalyptic fire will consume the sea and the land (Amos 7:4) and bring to an end Israel's history!

In Amos' eschatology (order of final events), the Day of the Lord would be an imminent judgment on Israel by her national enemy Assyria (in 722 B.C.). But Amos announced a further catastrophe in which God would judge an apostate world-society and deliver His faithful ones in all nations. The relation of the imminent local judgment and the end-time world judgment is called a typological connection. Both judgments issue from the same God, but the national judgment is a prophetic type or model that guarantees that God will eventually judge the whole world by the same moral principles. Only by His final visitation will God's redemptive purpose for this earth be completely fulfilled. The historical type may be local and incomplete, but the eschatological antitype will be worldwide and complete in its results.

This double focus of God's judgment in Amos is also portrayed by the other prophets. Zephaniah is generally considered to be the greatest prophet of the judgment of God. He



even begins his little book with a warning for the coming universal destruction:

*"I will sweep away everything from the face  
of the earth," declares the LORD.*

*"I will sweep away both men and animals;  
I will sweep away the birds of the air  
and the fish of the sea.*

*The wicked will have only heaps of rubble  
when I cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD (Zeph. 1:2-3).*

Like Amos, Zephaniah views the immediate historical future against the background of the final judgment, because it is the same God that visits Israel and the world for judgment and salvation. The central message is that God acts, not the duration of the time span between the judgments.

The prophet Joel structured his prophetic perspective so that an historical locust plague (1:4-12) serves as a prophetic type of the eschatological judgment of the whole world, its antitype (2:10-11; 3:11-15). The local history and the end-time eschatology are so blended together that they cannot be completely separated in the prophetic description. The present corresponds to the future, because it is the same God that comes now and in the future. This is the central message of the Old Testament. The moral purpose of each announcement of a judgment from God is to bring His people into harmony with His redemptive will in the present. The ultimate goal of prophecy is not catastrophe and destruction but a new creation and the restoration of paradise lost on earth.

An example of how God's judgment on an historical archenemy of Israel and His final world-judgment are blended together, as if they were one day of the Lord, is found in Isaiah 13. Isaiah announces the soon-coming fall of the Neo-Babylonian empire by the Medes: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty" . . . See, I will stir up against them the Medes" (Isa. 13:6, 16). In this prophetic war oracle God will soon act as the divine Warrior in order to set His oppressed people free: "The LORD of hosts musters the army for battle" (Isa. 13:4 NKJV). The result will be destruction: "Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations (Isa. 13:19, 20).

Then the prophet adds the cosmic dimension of the apocalyptic Day of the Lord: "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light" (Isa. 13:10). God "will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins" (Isa. 13:11). The "heavens" and "the earth" will be shaken at the wrath of the LORD Almighty (Isa. 13:13).

This is a portrayal of a worldwide judgment. Thus, Isaiah's doom prophecy on Babylon contains the structure of a typological perspective. It is clear that the apocalyptic Day of God, with its cosmic signs and universal earthquake, had not yet occurred during the historic overthrow of Babylon by Medo-Persia in 539 B.C. That judgment on Babylon only serves as a type of the final judgment of mankind. The two judgments are described as if they were one day of divine visitation. The typological nature of the fall of ancient Babylon does not require that every feature of prophecy be fulfilled in the type. Rather the partial fulfillment of the old prophecies of doom and deliverance indicate that they

still need to find their ultimate consummation. The book of Revelation assures us that all the ancient prophecies of doom and deliverance will take place on a worldwide scale at the second advent of Christ. By definition the antitype is always greater than its type. Thus, we find the characteristic feature of classical prophecy is its dual focus on the near and the far, without any differentiation in time. It teaches us that the God of Israel is the Lord of history. He is the King who comes both in history and at the end of human history. His coming brings the end of this evil age, in order to restore the kingdom of God on our planet through Christ Jesus.

Another vital characteristic of classical prophecy is its ethical concerns, its appeal to repentance and a sanctified life. The prophets of Israel made no unconditional predictions but challenged both Israel and the Gentiles with the immediate will of God. In fact, the divine predictions serve the higher purpose of calling people to repent and to obey God's will and thus to escape the coming judgment. The significant consequence of this ethical concern of Israel's prophets is the assurance that only a faithful and purified remnant of Israel will enter the eschatological kingdom of God. The prophets announced that only a fragment or remnant of the nation as a whole would be saved, like the remaining "stump" of a tree (Amos 3:12; 5:14-15; Hos. 5:15; 6:1-3; Isa. 4:2-4; 6:13; Jer. 23:3-6). The reason is that only the restored remnant will turn to the Lord in true repentance (Isa. 10:20-23; Zech. 12:10-13); only a spiritual Israel within national Israel will receive a "circumcised" heart (Deut. 10:15-16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). This distinction in the Old Testament between a true Israel of God within the nation of Israel is not based on race or blood relationship with Abraham, but on faith and obedience to God. The decisive factor is a spiritual covenant relationship with God. According to this remnant theology of the Old Testament, the apostle Paul arrived at the conclusion: "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6). His apostolic teaching emphasized that only Israelites who acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah of prophecy, are the light-bearers of God's new-covenant promises. And while the Gentiles are called to be heirs of the same promises, he insisted: "only a remnant will be saved" (Rom. 9:27).

The book of Daniel forms a class of prophecy by itself within the Old Testament. Here we face the phenomenon that not a single event or judgment is forecast, but a whole sequence of events that starts with Daniel's own time and runs forward without interruption until the establishment of God's kingdom of glory. Such an unbroken historical continuum in prophecy was unprecedented in classical prophecy. Some prophets, like Joel and Ezekiel, had revealed the principle of a succession of two periods in their prophetic outlook (Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36-39), but no one had predicted a continuous religious-political history of God's covenant people ending with the final judgment of the Day of the Lord. Such a comprehensive overview of salvation history in advance is the specific characteristic of apocalyptic prophecy. This apocalyptic continuum in history stands in marked contrast to classical prophecy with its double focus and future typological outlook.

The second unique feature in Daniel's apocalyptic book is the fact that it contains a number of historical outlines each culminating in the world judgment of the God of Israel. Four major outline series can be distinguished (Dan. 2; 7; 8; 11). Each repeats the same essential order of events, yet each adds details regarding the conflict of God's covenant people with the anti-god forces.

These parallel visions show an increasing interest in focussing on the era of the Messiah

and His conflict with the anti-messiah or antichrist (especially Dan. 8 and 9). The thrust of each prophetic series is the triumph of God's rulership over evil. We need to realize therefore that the aim of biblical apocalyptic is not to predict specific events of secular world history as such. Biblical apocalyptic is not an exhibitionism of God's foreknowledge. Rather its concern is to inspire hope among the oppressed people of God. It encourages them to persevere till the end, because the faithful covenant God has set limits of time and power to the antichrist. He will vindicate His faithful in the struggle between good and evil. The ultimate focus of biblical apocalyptic is not the first advent of the Messiah and His violent death (Dan. 9:26, 27), but rather His second advent when He returns as the victorious Michael to rescue the faithful remnant (Dan. 12:1, 2).

It is this end event of human history that forms the culmination of all apocalyptic prophecy of the Old Testament. It is this "end" that is in view in Daniel's unique phrase, "the time of the end" (five times in Dan. 8-12). This pronounced end-time focus also accounts for the fact that apocalyptic prophecy emphasizes more the unconditional aspect of God's determined plan of redemption for humanity. But this distinctive aspect of determinism must not be seen as a fundamental contrast with Israel's classical prophecies with their appeal for repentance.

Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies are centered around the final deliverance of Israel's faithful remnant, the spiritual covenant people of God, in whom the ethical concerns of all the prophets will finally be realized (Dan. 11:32-35; 12:3; Ezek. 11:17-20; 18:23, 30-32; 33:11; Isa. 26:2-3).

In Daniel God's vindication of His falsely-accused saints appears to be the central concern of both the historical chapters (chs. 1-6) and of the prophetic (chs. 7-12). This rulership of God as King and Judge is expressed in the Messiah-centered focus of many chapters (Dan. 2, 7, 8, 9, 10-12) and in its predetermined time-divisions of redemptive history (Dan. 7:25 [3 ½ times]; 8:14, 17 [2300 days]; 9:24-27 [70 weeks of years]; 12:4, 7, 11-12 ["the time of the end," 1290 and 1335 days]).

God provides a faithful remnant people at all times, sets limits on the sinful history of this world, allows specifically apportioned times for apostasy and persecution, determines "the time of the end," orders the world to its final judgment hour, and will accomplish the deliverance of the saints at the second coming. These unique features belong to God's sovereignty and constitute the unconditional backbone of Daniel's prophecy.

## **In summary**

Daniel's apocalyptic book reveals at least four unique characteristics:

1. a repetition of apocalyptic outlines which show a continuum of redemptive history; each outline culminates in the establishment of the kingdom of glory (Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:27; 8:25; 12:1-2);
2. the Messiah-centered focus of all outlines (Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14; 8:11, 25; 9:25-27; 10:5-6; 12:1);
3. the predetermined time-divisions which serve as the sacred calendar of God's progressive history of redemption (Dan. 7-12). These unique time prophecies determine the beginning of the appointed "time of the end," particularly the termination of the prophetic time period of the 2300 "days" in the sealed vision of Daniel 8 (vss. 14, 17, 19);

4. the unconditional aspect of redemption history, which emphasizes a predetermined judgment session in heaven and the vindication of the faithful saints by a Son of Man; this is also expressed by the image of a final holy war and the triumph of Michael as Divine Warrior, and the resurrection of all the dead to receive their rewards (Dan. 2; 7-12).

One further observation about the historical portion of the book of Daniel may be noted. In chapters 3 (the deliverance from the fiery furnace) and 6 (the deliverance from the lion's den) the stories of divine intervention and supernatural rescue are intended to be more than just historical interest. The author of the book draws attention to their inherent typological perspective in view of the future deliverance of the remnant people of God at the end of redemption history. This becomes apparent from the emphatic repetition of the key verb "to deliver" or "to rescue" found in Dan. 3:15, 17 and 6 (five times) and reapplied in the apocalyptic section of Dan. 12:1, when Michael shall "deliver" the true Israel of God by His personal intervention. In addition to this literary connection between the historical and the prophetic-apocalyptic section of Daniel, there exists also a fundamental thematic correspondence between the two portions of the book. Daniel's narratives of religious loyalty to God's sacred law by a few faithful ones provide the essential types or prefigurations of the nature of the final crisis for God's people in the time of the end. These historical events in Daniel's book serve as the background for the coming end-time crisis and its providential outcome as portrayed in the book of Revelation (chapters 13-14).

In short, Daniel's apocalyptic book contains the basics of classical prophecy (the double focus of a typological perspective in the book's historical section) and the prophetic outline of an historical continuum in its apocalyptic section.

The organic unity of the classical and apocalyptic prophecies can be observed in the harmonious blending of their end-time prospect: the universal judgment with the cosmic deliverance of a faithful remnant people in the last war between good and evil, and the restoration of the kingdom of God in eternal peace and righteousness.

# Chapter III

## Christ's Use of the Hebrew Bible

The objects of this book are threefold. First to discover how Christ understood the Scriptures of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Next to formulate Christ's hermeneutical principles for interpreting Bible prophecies. Finally, to apply those principles to the unfulfilled prophecies, especially those of Revelation.

As Christians who believe in the gospel truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah, we need to learn how Christ understood the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Jesus is the true Interpreter of Holy Scripture. His message is our key to unlock the correct meaning of the Old Testament. In order to understand the Old Testament, we must understand it from God's point of view. Our point of departure therefore is the way Jesus Christ explains the Old Testament. Christ's use of Israel's Scriptures is our model of biblical interpretation. Our guiding principle is based on the conviction that the redemptive activity of God in the history of Israel reached its fulfillment in Christ. We therefore seek to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the life and message of Christ as the Incarnate Word of God. Of Him alone it is written:

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning ...  
The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us  
(John 1:1, 2, 14).*

God sent Jesus to reveal the God of Israel fully in His life and teaching. Christ maintained that He was sent with a message from God and that His words came from God Himself:

*For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say (John 12:49, 50).  
I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me (John 8:28).*

Only Christ could disclose the significance and the sometimes hidden meaning of Scripture and of Israel's history. Both Jews and Samaritans expected that when the Messiah comes, "he will explain everything to us" (John 4:25). Without hesitation Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:26, NKJV). "Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58 NKJV).

Jesus' testimony of His authority as Messiah is echoed repeatedly in the New Testament (e.g. John 1; Col. 1 and 2; Heb. 1), and is of crucial importance for understanding the symbolic visions of the Apocalypse of John. In the Bible's last book the Hebrew images and symbols are consistently applied to Christ and to His new-covenant community as the new Israel.

The need for a correct approach to the book of Revelation is apparent. We must first know the truth of the gospel of Christ as taught by Jesus before we can understand Revelation. In prophetic interpretation, the proper method has often been neglected. It is

essential to recognize the progressive and unfolding nature of divine revelation within the Bible.

The books of the Old Testament must be allowed to tell their own message, but not as if these were the last word of God. The Hebrew Scriptures are not a closed canon of Scripture. They form an incomplete record of the totality of divine revelation. They mostly present God's promises of a coming Messiah as the greatest Prophet, the supreme King, and the only High Priest. The Old Testament ends with the promise of the coming of Elijah before the Day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5, 6). The inspired writings of the New Testament, on the other hand, record the beginning of the fulfillments of the Messianic promises in the coming of Christ (Messiah) Jesus, and in His creation of a new Messianic community, the Christians (a name that means "people of the Messiah").

The Apocalypse of John focuses specifically on the glorious consummation of all fulfillments. To receive a deeper understanding of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets, we must accept the teaching of Christ and His apostles as the true interpretation of the Hebrew types and prophecies. The New Testament functions as God's final revelation of truth as taught in these apostolic words:

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Heb. 1:1, 2).*

Just as the Son of God is infinitely greater than any prophet in Israel, so the word of Christ is the norm for interpreting the Old Testament writings. Jesus taught that the Hebrew Scriptures were centered on the Messianic promise. His special burden was to teach the Jews that Scripture is not an end in itself, that memorizing the letters of Holy Scripture does not bring merit. The purpose of Scripture is to lead to Christ! "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39, 40).

According to Jesus the Hebrew Bible is Christ-centered. Therefore it is crucial for a Christian to discover the new method by which Christ explained the Old Testament. Two of Jesus' disciples were privileged to hear the risen Christ explain all the Scriptures that referred to Him (Luke 24:25-27). As a result, their hearts began to burn with new enthusiasm. Christ had "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." He showed them how "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44, 45).

The challenging question to us is, Can we find out how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament in a Christ-centered way? Can we discover the hermeneutic of His Christocentric approach? If we could establish Jesus' hermeneutical principles for fulfilled prophecy, we would know how to understand unfulfilled prophecy, specifically the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

### **The New Insight of Messiah Jesus**

For Jesus, the Messianic prophecies were not isolated predictions, but part of God's comprehensive plan for man's redemption. He even saw Israel's history as a series of redemptive events that foreshadowed the greater salvation by the Messiah. Christ, therefore, recognized that God's promises were given to Israel on two levels: through verbal predictions as well as historical types of deliverance and judgment. In the Bible a

"type" is an historical event or person or institution, ordained by God to prefigure a redemptive truth of Christ. Jesus publicly applied to Himself Isaiah's mission to preach the good news from God, to heal Israel's wounds, and to bring liberty to the captives (see Luke 4:17-21 and Isa. 61:1, 2).

What might have stunned the Jews even more, however, was Jesus' startling declaration that He was the intended Antitype or consummation of all Israel's prophets, kings, and priestly mediation:

*"And now one greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41).*

*"And now one greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42).*

*"I tell you that one greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6).*

Jesus even declared that his self-sacrificial death would provide the "blood of the (new) covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). By all these claims Jesus introduced into Judaism the staggering idea that the time of the antitypes had arrived. He presented himself as the reality to which all the symbols of Israel's redemptive institutions had pointed. As a consequence, He solemnly announced in the synagogue that in Him the Messianic age or the Year of Jubilee (deliverance) had begun. Having cited the Messianic promise of Isaiah 61:1, he said: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). He pointed to His triumph over demons as proof that God's rulership was now present in Israel: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Where Satan is driven back, the reign of God is manifest. In Jesus, the saving sovereign rule of God is operative. In other words, with Christ's first coming the eschatological time has been inaugurated. "The time has come," He said, "the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). The time of waiting for the kingdom of God has ended, the time of the rule of God has begun in the ministry of Christ. Jesus is the Initiator of the kingdom of God's grace. As the King-Messiah He represents the kingdom of God; as the giver of divine mercy He is the priestly Mediator of God's kingdom. Wherever Christ is present, the kingdom of God radiates its power. Jesus even assured: "The kingdom of God is within (or among) you" (Luke 17:21). God's grace is within man's reach wherever Jesus is proclaimed as the Messiah. This is the essence of the gospel. The truth that the risen Christ is Lord and seated at the right hand of God's throne, was endorsed on the day of Pentecost in the outpouring of the Spirit. The apostle Peter then announced that the "last days" had arrived, the days of Christ's spiritual kingship had begun (Acts 2:17; cf. Heb. 1:2).

### **Christ: Representative of the New Israel**

The fact that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah of prophecy should not obscure the fact that the Messiah was also appointed to be the perfect Representative of Israel. God's covenant with Israel must be realized in the perfect obedience of the Messiah. As the embodiment of Israel, He is described by the prophet as "the Servant of the LORD," just as Israel herself had been designated (Isa. 42-53). Like Israel, Christ also was called God's "Son" (Exod. 4:22; Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:17). Jesus was sent to endure the same round of trials as Israel had, in order to conquer where Israel had failed. After His baptism He went for forty days into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, to match symbolically the forty years of Israel's testing by God in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2; Matt. 4:1). Most New Testament scholars recognize that Jesus saw himself, in a typological sense, as the New Israel. Israel had failed, but Jesus fulfilled God's covenant on behalf of Israel and mankind. In this way Israel's history is brought to a successful fulfillment in Christ. The New Testament truth

that Jesus Christ incorporates Israel and thus brings Israel's mission to a completion in His own life is of decisive importance for the true understanding of Israel's prophecy and of the book of Revelation.

The rejection of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ by the Jewish nation were not unforeseen tragedies that frustrated God's plan of salvation for humanity. God is not dependent on the Jews for the fulfillment of His promises. He depends on the Messiah. The prophet had assured: "The will of the LORD will prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10). What happened with Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection took place, says Peter: "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Two examples from the book of Psalms illustrate how Jesus learned what to expect in God's Providence.

Christ perceived in the experiences of king David a foreshadowing of His own trials and rejection by Israel. Jesus appealed specifically to Psalms 41:9 to reveal His insight that David's betrayal by his trusted friend was a type of the sufferings of the Messiah, the greater David (see John 13:18-27). In His moment of deepest agony at the cross, Christ cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). He was quoting Psalm 22:1 which David had cried out, in his own despair while surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies. Because the psalm is a unit consisting of an extended lamentation about intense suffering (vss 1-21), Christ saw in David's experience a type of His own agony. Many commentators do not consider David's historic lamentation in Psalm 22 a direct Messianic prophecy. Yet Christ and the New Testament writers apply many aspects of Psalm 22 to the cross and the glory that followed.

This surprising pattern of typology in the book of Psalms, which was brought to light by Jesus Christ, justifies the classification of such psalms as Messianic prophecies.

The purpose of such New Testament quotations is not simply to show how hidden Messianic predictions were accurately verified in Jesus' life, but rather to proclaim Jesus as the goal of Israel's history and as the realization of God's covenant with them.

The Gospel writers often declare that events in Israel's past were "fulfilled" in Christ's life. Matthew quotes the prophet Hosea, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1), which reminded Israel of its historic exodus from Egypt. Matthew applies these words to the flight of Joseph and Mary to Egypt until the death of Herod: "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (Matt. 2:15). The point of Matthew's quotation is that Hosea's Scripture was "fulfilled" in the little child Jesus. Hosea's words, however, were not a prophecy but a meaningful reminder of Israel's historical experience as God's "son" (cf. Exod. 4:22). How, then, can Matthew state that Hosea 11:1 was "fulfilled" in Jesus? By the same rationale that justified the Messianic interpretation of David's experiences (see Pss. 41:9 and 22:1).

As the Son of God, Christ not only represents Israel before God, He also represents Israel's destiny in His own life. Matthew teaches that the meaning of Israel's history is fully revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. In this way the New Testament strongly suggests that the events in Christ's life--His birth in Bethlehem, His humiliating death, His resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God--were not unforeseen, accidental events. They were all part of God's predetermined purpose (see Acts 2:23; 4:28).



# Chapter IV

## Christ's Use of Apocalyptic Symbols

As noted in chapter one, Jesus lived in a time when the Jewish hope for a soon-coming political Messiah had greatly intensified. A number of apocalyptic writings under false names or pseudonyms were widely circulated. These kept the Messianic hope burning by applying the judgment message of Daniel and other prophetic passages to their own time and situation. The names of some of these pseudepigraphic writings were: IV Ezra, I Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and Jubilees.

The terms "apocalyptic" and "apocalypticism" were later used by scholars to indicate the speculative and conflicting eschatologies contained in these writings of late Judaism. Three dominant features of this Jewish apocalypticism were: 1) the cosmic-universal judgment around national Israel or a faithful Jewish remnant; 2) this sinful age suddenly replaced by the creation of a sinless world and a new cosmos; 3) the predetermined end of this sinful world and the imminent coming of the Messiah. This urgency is often supported by conflicting calculations of time periods in world history.

Most apocalyptic writers believed that the end of the wicked age was near in their generation. They also believed that they were the true interpreters of Israel's canonical prophets for their own crisis. A striking example is the Qumran community, whose founder and teacher taught that Habakkuk's prediction of a surviving remnant people of God (Hab. 2:4) was being fulfilled in his own exclusive sect in the caves near the Dead Sea.

Against the background of this general imminency hope of first-century Judaism, Jesus' use of some well-known apocalyptic symbols becomes more significant. It shows the innovative approach of Jesus' gospel message. Christ gave a new meaning to such popular apocalyptic terms as: Son of Man, Judgment, Everlasting Life and Resurrection, Kingdom of God, This Age and the Age to Come. All these expressions were more or less technical terms in the apocalyptic schemes of late Judaism. Jesus' message surprised the Jews of His time because He filled each apocalyptic symbol with a new Messianic or Christ-centered meaning that shattered their eschatological systems. The old skins could not hold the sparkling new wine of His message of a present fulfillment in Himself.

The most dramatic connection of Jesus with the book of Daniel and late Jewish writings was His explicit self-designation as "the Son of Man" (65 times in the Synoptic Gospels and 12 times in the fourth Gospel). He applied this title consistently to Himself. It was Jesus' own way of referring to Himself. Christ's extraordinary use of this symbol has generally convinced biblical scholarship today that Christ adopted the apocalyptic term "one like a Son of Man" from the vision of Daniel 7:13, 14 and exalted it to a Messianic title. The Similitudes of I Enoch 37-71 and the sixth vision in IV Ezra 13 (both post-Christian documents) reflect how certain Jewish apocalyptic circles interpreted the Danielic figure "Son of Man" as a pre-existent, celestial Messiah who would come to earth as the Judge of all men, and rule over a new earthly kingdom.

The question is, How did Jesus use the title and what content did He place in this apocalyptic expression, the "Son of Man"? Jesus explained that His healing miracles were

performed for a higher purpose: "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). But how could Jesus be the humble Son of Man and the glorious pre-existent Being of Daniel's vision at the same time? This mystery intensified when Jesus began to say that the heavenly Son of Man "must" suffer and be killed, yet would rise again after three days (Mark 8:32; 9:31; 10:33, 34). His most profound declaration, however, was; "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Here Jesus identified Himself with the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 who would die for the benefit of all. In so doing, Jesus merged the suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecy with the Son of Man of Daniel's vision. He poured, as it were, the content of the suffering Servant into the apocalyptic figure of the Son of Man. Such a combination of two Messianic figures in prophecy was unknown. It seemed quite paradoxical to the Jews. It was the creative idea of Jesus to introduce this radical reinterpretation of the Danielic Son of Man. Christ saw His mission as Messiah completely different from all the Messianic expectations in Judaism. He placed His mission of a suffering and dying Messiah within Daniel's apocalyptic framework. The greatest surprise of the Jews was, however, to hear that this lowly carpenter's son claimed to be that apocalyptic Son of Man, not only now but also in the final Judgment. Consider these claims of Jesus:

*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).*

*At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13:26).*

*Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"*

*"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61, 62).*

In these dramatic declarations Jesus maintained that the prophecy of Daniel 7 still awaited its future, apocalyptic fulfillment when God will judge all men, but that the Danielic Son of Man had already appeared for another purpose, to bring salvation from the bondage of sin. Christ plainly stated that He as the Son of Man had come "from heaven" (John 3:13) and that "the angels of God (were) ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51). Thus Christ taught that He had established in Israel a new communication between heaven and earth by His divine authority (John 3:31; 6:62). This also implies His mission to judge Israel on behalf of God: "And he (God) has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:27), although the purpose of Jesus' first advent was explicitly salvation and not judgment in the sense of condemnation (John 3:17; 12:47).

Nevertheless, John can also report that Jesus came into the world for a present judgment, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (9:39). This kind of judgment or sifting process was inherent in Christ's offer of salvation. The offer of salvation necessarily implies judgment. Those who reject God's gift of Messiah Jesus have inevitably pronounced their own judgment. They have chosen to be condemned. The gospel of Christ separates those who accept the gracious offer from those who reject it (see John 3:18-21; 5:24). Christ's presence brings an eschatological time of decision now. Each person is compelled to refuse or to recognize Him, and thereby determines beforehand the verdict at the last Judgment on himself. Christ considers our confession of Him as the Son of Man of decisive importance. He asked the blind man whom He had healed, "Do you believe in the Son of

Man?" (John 9:35). Thus Jesus gave this person a higher revelation of Himself. Jesus revealed that He was the celestial Messiah spoken of in the book of Daniel, who would come with the clouds of heaven to "the Ancient of Days" in order to receive glory and sovereign power over all peoples (Dan. 7:14). This knowledge leads to a more mature faith in Jesus.

The important point in all four Gospels is the message that Christ spoke of the mission of the Son of Man in a twofold way: first, with respect to a present earthly fulfillment and also to a future, cosmic consummation. In other words, Christ explained that Daniel's apocalyptic Son of Man had a historical fulfillment in salvation and judgment ever since His humble first advent, while He also looked forward to the consummation in salvation and judgment at His second advent. In short, the judgment of God, eternal life, and the resurrection through the Son of Man are both present and future. This dual application is expressed in John's Gospel by his peculiar phrase:

*"A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:25, 26; see also 4:23 and 16:32).*

How striking that Jesus' taught it is not sufficient to believe there will be a resurrection at the last day, as promised in Daniel 12:2. His new message was: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26). In other words, the future life in the glorious kingdom of God is available by faith in Christ now as a spiritual quality of life.

A similar twofold use of apocalyptic terminology can be seen in Jesus' application of the concepts of the Kingdom of God and its corresponding age (aeon). Both ideas are combined in Jesus' announcement, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1: 15 RSV; cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 5:17). Christ's appeal seems to be motivated by an apocalyptic urgency of the coming of the kingdom of God and may well be informed by the Messianic time prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. Especially Daniel 2 and 7 promise the coming of the kingdom of God (2:44, 45; 7:27).

Jesus' concept of God's universal kingdom was also part of the Scriptures. They taught that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is King now and will become King in the future "over the whole earth" (Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5; Ps. 103:19; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 2:44; 4:3; Isa. 24:23; Zech. 14:9). In addition, the prophets had predicted that a Son of David would become the King of Israel and as the Messiah of the world represent the kingly rule of Yahweh forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Pss. 2:7-9; 132:11-18; Isa. 9:7; 11:1-5; Mic. 5:2; Dan. 7:14, 27).

As noted in chapter one, Pharisaic Judaism had developed the expectation that in the last days the Messiah would come at God's appointed time, ascend to the throne of Israel, and by His power dash the unjust rulers, purge Jerusalem from gentiles, and shatter all their substance with an iron rod, and then submit all the nations of the earth to Himself (e.g. Psalms of Solomon 17:21-30).

The kingdom of God was the central concept in the preaching of Christ. His teaching of the kingdom of God, its nearness--as represented by His own life, His healing ministry and conquest over demons--revolutionized Jewish apocalypticism, which had lost all hope of God's ruling in the historical present. Christ's first advent was not the end of time but the kingly power of God that could "bind" Satan and deliver men from the power of evil (see Matt. 12:29).

Jesus insisted that in Him the Kingdom had arrived as a spiritual rulership of God which was now active in His Messianic bestowal of grace and His dominion over demons, a reality totally different from what was expected by the Jewish rabbis and apocalyptic writers. His kingdom was not of this world order (John 18:36). In short, Jesus' message is that in His own person God has invaded human history and triumphed over evil. At the same time Christ taught that the final deliverance would come at the end of the age at His second advent (Matt. 6:10; 13:41-43; 16:27; 19:28; 25:31).

The new idea that Jesus introduced was that both the present and the future kingdom of God were mediated by Himself as the Son of Man. In this connection He applied the apocalyptic terminology of the "two ages" to His new eschatological structure. While the apocalyptists conceived a sharp dualism of two aeons or periods in which the future sinless age would completely replace this sinful age, Christ taught that with His ministry the Messianic age and salvation had begun. At the same time He acknowledged that "the age to come" would only begin with the resurrection of the dead (Luke 20:34-36).

The identification of the Messianic age with "this age" by Jesus (Mark 10:29, 30) shattered the basic idea of the two-ages doctrine of the apocalyptists. Christ's emphasis in His message was to call for repentance (metanoia) and acceptance of Himself as Lord and Messiah (Matt. 4:17; 19:21) as the condition to enter God's kingdom in the present. In this way Messianic peace and joy would be experienced in the soul now (John 15:11; 16:33). This tension between an inaugurated eschatology and an apocalyptic eschatology, between the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory, between the "already" and the "not yet," is characteristic of the gospel message of the New Testament as a whole. The gospel is not simply good news about Christ's work in the past or in the future. The powers of the coming age have already invaded this age dramatically since Pentecost and are now in Christ being "tasted" or experienced by all true believers (see Heb. 6:5). This gospel truth dispels the despair of Jewish apocalypticism. The apostles claim that salvation history has now entered the Messianic age, or the "last days", in which the liberating Spirit of God is fully available to all who are in Christ Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2; Acts 2:17-39).

# Chapter V

## The Apostles' Understanding of Prophetic Fulfillment

Peter's application of Joel's prophecy is highly instructive. The apostle applies Joel's promise of the Spirit of God to the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Christian Jews gathered in Jerusalem. Peter cites Joel's prediction of a future outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28) and then points to his present experience as the fulfillment "in the last days," stating, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). A closer look at the items mentioned in Joel's prophetic outline raises the question, Why did Peter announce the historical fulfillment of the "last days" on the day of Pentecost? He cited Joel 2:28-32, although some predicted signs were not yet visibly fulfilled, including: 1) "All people" had not yet received the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit, because only 12 apostles or at most 120 believers had received it (Acts 1:15); 2) The miraculous signs of "blood and fire and billows of smoke" seem to involve more than the "tongues of fire" resting on the heads of the disciples, shaken by a violent wind; 3) The cosmic signs of the sun and the moon were at best only partially fulfilled, even if one accepts the darkening of the sun for three hours during the crucifixion of Christ as one of the signs (Matt. 27:45).

This brings us to an important principle of apocalyptic interpretation in the apostolic message: the fulfillment at Pentecost constitutes only a partially realized eschatology. From the apostolic viewpoint the fulfillment of the "last days" does not require an immediate fulfillment of each detail. Fulfillment focuses on the Messianic realization of God's promise in the history of salvation. The outpouring of the Spirit proves to be the indication on earth of the enthronement of the risen Jesus as the King-Priest in heaven (Acts 2:33, 36). In other words, the fulfillment does not require the verification of each detail of prophecy in present history. Fulfillment is determined by the progress of salvation history in the ministry of Christ and His apostles. A new way of salvation has now been opened for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:21; see also Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 1:2). Joel's eschatological age has been inaugurated by the kingship of Jesus Christ. What about the universal ("all flesh") and cosmic ("sun" and "moon") features of Joel's future outlook? These point to the consummation at the end of the Christian age, at the second advent of Christ. These apocalyptic aspects were not yet fulfilled in Peter's time. In his application of Joel 2, Peter stressed that the risen Christ was the source of the outpouring of the Spirit. He further pointed out that the Spirit is given on the condition of faith in Jesus as the Messiah:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the LORD our God will call (Acts 2:38, 39).

The bestowal of the Spirit on Christ-believing Israel by the risen Lord is at the core of the apostolic gospel message. This teaches that the apostles' chief principle of prophetic interpretation is determined by a fulfillment in Christ (the Christological fulfillment) and, by extension, in Christ's church (the ecclesiological fulfillment). This leads to a final

characteristic of Peter's application of Joel's prediction: the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ on earth will initiate the "last days" (Acts 2:16). The concept of "the last (or latter) days" is used frequently by the Old Testament prophets, but receives in the New Testament a Messianic or Christological quality, because Christ has now come in the fullness of time (see Gal. 4:4). His life-giving Spirit has begun to be poured out on all people (see John 7:37-39). The idea of "the last days" does not refer to a quantity of time but to a quality of time, to the beginning of the Messianic age, in contrast with the time of Israel's prophets (cf. Heb. 1:1, 2).

The apostolic truth of the arrival of the "last days" implied that the "end of the ages" of the old covenant era had arrived (Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 Cor. 10:11). This announcement of the end of the old dispensation and of the beginning of the Messianic "last days" implies a rejection of Jewish apocalyptic time divisions and a return to the prophetic concept that God is in control of time and history. "Angels, authorities and powers," even "all things" are in submission to Christ (Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:22). Even the political authorities are designated as servants of God to govern mankind (Rom. 13:4, *diakonos*; 13:6, *leitourgoi*; see also John 19:11). With prayers of request, intercession, and thanksgiving, the church is called to submit herself "for the Lord's sake" to the political protectors of law and order in human society (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; 1 Tim. 2:1-3). This positive attitude toward history by the apostolic church is well summarized by R. J. Bauckham:

*The significance of present history was guaranteed for the New Testament writers by their belief that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has already acted in an eschatological way, the new age had invaded the old, the new creation was under way, and the interim period of the overlap of the ages was filled with the eschatological mission of the church ("The Rise of Apocalyptic," Themelios 3:2 [1978] 22).*

## **The Organic Unity of the Christological and Ecclesiological Fulfillments**

The apostles' sense of mission was rooted in their unshakable conviction that Christ had appointed them as the leaders of a new Israel to fulfill the vocation of the Jewish nation: to be the light of divine salvation for the whole world (Matt. 21:43; Luke 12:32; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). Paul and Barnabas appealed for their mandate to preach the gospel of Christ to Isaiah's prophecy that commissioned the Servant of the Lord, "I will also make you as a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the end of the earth" (49:6). Paul cited this divine call and mission to the Jews in his sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch and applied it directly to his apostolic mission: "For this is what the Lord has commanded us" (Acts 13:47; cf. 26:23). This means that the Christological fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies is extended to include the ecclesiological fulfillment in the church of Christ. This we may call "the gospel hermeneutic." The Christian church is essentially the people of the Messiah, those who are gathered in His name and who follow Him as the Messianic Shepherd (Matt. 18:30; John 10:14-16; 11:51, 52). The old ethnic and geographic restrictions of Israel are removed in this new Israel. It is gathered by the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ. Christ had already announced: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

The book of Acts describes in more detail the historical application of this gospel hermeneutic to the apostolic church. An illuminating example is found in Acts 4 where the second Psalm (with its Messianic focus and judgment perspective) is applied to the

conspiracy of Gentiles and Jews against Jesus and His apostles (Acts 4:18, 23-30). This gospel interpretation of Psalm 2 is not a reinterpretation that introduces foreign elements into the text. Rather the gospel of Christ unfolds the intended meaning of Israel's prophecy in the light of its fulfillment in Christ and His church. As a consequence, the New Testament recognizes that fulfillment in the church age as an ongoing activity of the Spirit that will one day come to its worldwide consummation (see Rev. 18:1).

The Apocalypse of John is a complementary counterpart of the four Gospels, because it focuses mostly on the joys and inheritance of those who are faithful till the end and who overcome the evil one by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Rev. 12:11). The book of Revelation is decidedly Christ-centered and intended for the church of the ages, especially to prepare her for the end-time crisis.

All New Testament eschatology is governed by the gospel truth. This is the apostolic principle of prophetic interpretation.

### **The Universalizing Principle of Israel's Territorial Promises**

Christian interpreters of prophecy have sometimes been confused in their application of the territorial promises made to ancient Israel. This is especially true for the applications of the unfulfilled prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah, and Revelation. Some expect that the territory of the Middle East will become the focal point of the end-time fulfillments of prophecy. This calls for a serious effort to determine the basic principle the New Testament follows in its application of Israel's territorial promises. Christ has set the standard for us in this respect also. He announced the principle of the worldwide enlargement of the local territorial promises when He said that the covenant promise of the land would be fulfilled in the earth made new. This can be seen by observing how Jesus applied this ancient territorial promise:

Psalm 37:11 and 29 David	Matthew 5:5 Jesus
But the meek will inherit <i>the land</i> and enjoy great peace (vs. 11). The righteous will inherit <i>the land</i> and dwell in it forever (vs. 29).	Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit <i>the earth</i> .

Christ clearly applied Psalm 37 in an innovative way: (1) This "land" will be larger than David thought; the fulfillment will include the entire earth in its recreated beauty (see also Isa. 11:6-9 and Rev. 21-22); (2) The renewed earth will be the inheritance of all the meek from all nations who accept Christ as Savior. Christ is not spiritualizing away Israel's territorial promise. On the contrary, He enlarged the scope of their future territory to include the entire earth.

The apostle Paul, likewise, understood the territorial covenant promise as worldwide, just as Jesus did: "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith

(Rom. 4:13; emphasis added). Paul declares that this worldwide territorial promise was the substance of the Abrahamic covenant and would be granted through righteousness by faith alone. God's suggestion to Abraham that he should look to the "north and south, east and west" in the land of Canaan, sets no boundaries.

*"All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted" (Gen. 13:14, 15-16).*

To grasp the gospel principle, one must view the land of Palestine as a down payment, or pledge, that assured Israel the larger territory necessary to accommodate the countless multitudes of Abraham's offspring. The Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of a countless offspring and of a boundless land for that offspring.

However, Paul considers Abraham as the father of all believers, of all those who are justified by faith in Christ among the nations of the world (see Rom. 4:13, 16-24). Abraham "is the father of us all" (both believing Jews and believing Gentiles). The apostle states: "As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God" (Rom. 4:16, 17). Paul interprets God's promises to Abraham concerning land and offspring as being fulfilled through Christ "in the sight of God." That is not according to the hermeneutic of literalism. It is Paul's Christocentric exegesis. The "land" becomes the world; the "nations" become the believers who trust in the God of Israel and who are justified by faith in Christ. Abraham would become the spiritual father of a multitude of Gentiles through Christ.

## **The Inadequacy of the Hermeneutic of Literalism**

The hermeneutic of ethnic and geographic literalism in prophecy is based on the assumption that prophecy is nothing but history ahead of time. Consequently, it ascribes to the prophetic portrayals the exactness of a photographic picture in advance. This assumption allows no room for greater and better things to come, things that "no mind has conceived" but God alone (1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:4). Literalism denies the inherent biblical structure of an escalating typology. Christ came in humility, yet He was greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, greater than the temple (Matt. 12:40, 42, 6). He raised the Jewish hope far above expecting a Messiah who was identical with a king, prophet, or priest in Israel. As the divine Messiah, He stood infinitely above those ancient prototypes, in both His humble incarnation and future glorification. An exact reproduction of Israel's theocratic kings should not be expected. One may, therefore, also view the promised land (Palestine) as "a miniature world in which God illustrated His kingdom and His way of dealing with sin. The land which God promised to Abraham and his seed. . . was a type of the world (Rom. 4:13)" (L.F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message* [Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1979], p. 86). The full scope of Israel's prophetic outlook was not nationalistic but universal, with an added dimension that included both heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; 24:21-23).

The decisive principle for the end-time application of Israel's territorial promise is the way Christ and the New Testament as a whole apply this covenant promise. The classical passage that teaches the worldwide enlargement of Israel's restricted territory is found in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. To her question which mountain was the holy one, Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion, He replied: "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John



4:21). Since the Messiah has come, He is now the holy "Place," to whom all Israel and the Gentiles must be gathered (Matt. 11:28; 23:37). "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them," declared Christ (Matt. 18:20 RSV). A little later He added, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Christ does not differentiate between a Jewish-Christian and a Gentile-Christian hope for the future. The spiritual descendants of Abraham among all nations will be gathered or united into "one flock," under "one Shepherd" (John 10:16; Matt. 8:11).

The underlying principle is clear. Christ removes all ethnic restrictions in the new-covenant people and therefore also the geographic Middle East center for Christ's church. Wherever Christ is, there is the holy place! This is an essential part of the gospel hermeneutic. For the Shekinah holiness of the old temple, the New Testament substitutes the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The basic continuity of the Old and the New Testament hope is visualized in the Letter to the Hebrews. It assures the Jewish Christians that by faith in Christ: "You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come. . . to the church [ekklesia] of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God. . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 12:22-24). Through faith in the atoning blood of Christ's death the church now constantly enters the heavenly temple and draws near to the throne of grace to receive help from Christ (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22).

This imagery of Christian worship is not intended as a parallel worship beside that of Israel, but as the true fulfillment of Israel's types. The continued use of Hebrew names expresses the essential continuity of true worship in the progressive revelation of God in Christ (see Heb. 1:1-3). Israel's promises are experienced in Christ now as "the powers of the coming age" (Heb. 6:5) and will be fulfilled in a more perfect way in their apocalyptic consummation:

*For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come (Heb. 13:14).*

*For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).*

# Chapter VI

## Christ's Understanding of Daniel's Prophecies

Jesus' use of symbolic terms taken from the book of Daniel, such as "Kingdom," "Son of Man," and "desolating sacrilege," indicates that He took a deep interest in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel. He applied the Danielic expressions to His own Messianic mission. Christ thereby taught that the portrayal of Daniel's visions was of fundamental importance for His church. His own outlook follows Daniel's outline of salvation history. It is known as Jesus' Olivet Discourse, because He gave it while being seated on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The picture that Christ painted of future events for Jerusalem and for His worldwide followers is similar to that sketched first by the prophet Daniel. Some have called the Olivet discourse, Jesus' comments or midrash on Daniel's book. It is widely recognized that Daniel's long-range prophecies, with their predicted apostasy, persecution, judgment, and ultimate vindication of the faithful, shaped Christ's eschatological speech. This connection can be readily seen from the following comparative list:

Daniel	Jesus
"How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" (Dan 12:6 NKJV). The angel answered that when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, "all these things shall be finished" [LXX: <i>suntelesthesetai tauta panta</i> ] (Dan 12:7).	"When will these things be? . . . and the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" [mellei tautasunteleisthai panta] (Mark 13:4,(NKJV).
"What will happen in days to come" (Dan 2:28) [LXX: <i>ti dei genesthai meta tauta</i> : (What must happen here-after)].	"Such things must happen" (Mark 13:7, NIV) [dei genesthai].
"But the people who know their God will firmly resist him . . . Some of the wise will stumble . . . until the time of the end." "But at that time your people . . . will be delivered" (Dan 11:32, 35; 12:1).	"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13; Matt. 24:13 NIV).

"How long will it take for the vision... concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation"(Dan. 8:13)	"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does belong" (Mark 13:14, NIV).
"One who... will place abominations on a wing of the temple" (Dan. 9:27). "Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation" (Dan 11:31; cf. 12:11).	"When you see in the holy place ... the abomination" (Matt. 24:15).
"There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Dan 12:1).	"Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning" (Mark 13:19; cf. Matt 24:21, NIV).
"There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven . . . He was given authority,glory and sovereign power" (Dan 7:13).	"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark13:26; cf. Matt 24:30, NIV).

It becomes apparent from the above parallels that Jesus followed Daniel's sequence of future events in His own discourse. Christ applied Daniel's outline to the immediate future of Israel and His disciples. Each of Christ's statements must therefore be understood against the background of Daniel's forecast of salvation history. D a n i e l presented the drama of a religious conflict that concentrates on one that invades the holy land, desecrates Israel's temple by setting up his own "abomination," or object of false worship, instead of the truth of God. He persecutes the saints, whose "distress" will last for "3½ times." God's reaction comes in the form of "One like a Son of Man," ordained in heaven to execute God's judgment on the evil intruder. He restores true worship in God's temple and vindicates the maligned worshipers.

Daniel's theme is portrayed in two visions that form a progressive and complementary parallelism (chapters 7 and 8). Daniel's final chapters (9 and 10-12) consist of the angels' explanatory notes regarding the two visions. The main motif of Daniel's book, however, is the assurance of the restoration of God's sanctuary truth and the deliverance of His faithful covenant people through the celestial Son of Man. He executes the judgment on the "little horn," the desolator on earth.

Jesus likewise connects the temple and its future defilement with an "abomination of desolation" or sacrilege. Then He assures His followers that He will return in the power and glory of the celestial Son of Man (of Dan. 7) to rescue His faithful ones and gather them into the Messianic kingdom of God. In this way Christ reverses the death sentence so unjustly meted out to them by the antichrist.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus borrowed some key apocalyptic phrases from Daniel and applied them to Himself as Messiah, and other phrases He applied to Jerusalem and His followers.

*Dan. 7:13 (A heavenly Son of Man comes to vindicate the accused saints) is*

*applied to Christ in Mark 13:26.*

*Dan. 8:13 (The sanctuary shall be trampled underfoot) is applied to Jerusalem in Luke 21:24.*

*Dan. 9:27 (The desolator will set up his sacrilege within the temple) is applied to Jerusalem's temple area (Matt.24:15).*

*Dan. 11:31 (The sacrilege will desecrate the temple) is applied to Imperial Rome in Mark 13:14.*

*Dan. 11:45 (The holy mountain will be besieged) is applied to Jerusalem in Matt. 24:15 ("the holy place").*

*Dan. 12:1 (A time of unequaled distress will follow) is applied to Jesus' followers in Mark 13:19.*

Jesus mentioned that the literary source of His speech was Daniel's book: "So when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--" (Matt. 24:15). This indicates that Daniel's apocalyptic outline of the four successive world empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome) must be placed as the historical setting behind Christ's future outlook. This requires the understanding that the Roman Empire, that in Jesus' time ruled Israel, fulfilled Daniel's prophecy. The Roman general Pompey subjected the Jews to Roman rule in 63 B.C. Jewish expositors prior to Jesus, specifically the Maccabeans, believed that their military victory over the Syrian oppressor Antiochus IV, in 164 B.C., was God's victory over the temple desecrator portrayed in Daniel 8-12 (see 1 Macc. 1:54-59; 6:7). The Pharisees saw in Pompey's death (48 B.C.) the triumph of God over the desecrator of the holy city (see Psalms of Solomon 17).

Shortly after Christ, Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, expressed his conviction that the temple desecration by the Zealots and Jerusalem's desolation by the Roman army (in A.D. 70) was a fulfillment of Daniel's prediction (Antiquities X, 11, 7). Few Jews, however, seemed to have understood the real reason for Jerusalem's destruction that took place some forty years after the crucifixion of Christ.

Earlier prophets, including Jeremiah (ch. 7) and Ezekiel (ch. 24), had announced the imminent destruction of the temple and the city as the divine covenant curse upon a rebellious covenant people. But this had occurred in Daniel's own time when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (see Dan. 9:17). Daniel's new prediction, however, was the shocking truth that the future temple, to be rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, would be destroyed also, as the result of Jerusalem's murder of the Messiah (Dan. 9:26, 27)! This prophecy is a new development in Israel's prophetic tradition. Daniel 9 became more specific regarding the Messiah's time than the earlier prediction of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

Jesus applies Daniel's forecast of the future destruction of "the city and the sanctuary" (Dan. 9:26) to the time of His contemporary generation, when He solemnly declared: "I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:36, see also vs. 35 and 24:34). The additional admonition, "Let the one who reads understand" (Mark 13:14; literal translation) is Christ's counsel to those able to read the Hebrew Scriptures, to study carefully the book of Daniel as the context of His own prophetic discourse. The phrase "to understand" was already a key word in the book of

Daniel (Dan. 9:23; see also 8:27; 9:2; 10:1; 12:8-10). Jesus' advice therefore is a serious pointer to Daniel to understand His own prophetic forecast and historical application of Daniel.

It has long been assumed that Mark's Gospel was written first and that Matthew and Luke took it as their basic guideline, each producing his own modified version from a slightly different theological perspective. Recent studies, however, suggest that all three synoptic Gospel writers were drawing from a common pre-synoptic document that contained all the essentials of the oral tradition of Jesus' Olivet discourse (see David Wenham, in the Source Material).

Jesus' Olivet discourse also formed a vital source for Paul's pastoral counsel regarding the future and for his method in applying Daniel's apocalyptic outline to his own time and future. This will be considered in the next chapter.

Both Jesus' prophetic speech and Paul's prophetic outline constitute the major bridgeheads that connect the books of Daniel and Revelation. Jesus' eschatological address in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul's prophetic outline in 2 Thess. 2 teach us authoritatively how the prophecies of Daniel are to be applied to the church age. They are the necessary preparation for understanding the book of Revelation.

### **The Chronological Structure of Jesus' Prophetic Discourse Mark 13**

Some have observed a literary style in Mark 13 that marks off verses 5-23 as a literary unit. This is suggested by the warning against false prophecy at both the beginning and the close: "Take heed [blepete]" . . . (vss. 5, 23 NKJV). This section describes the events that must precede the end, specifically the days of tribulation (vss 19, 20). It thus forms a thematic unit as well. The next section, vss. 24-27, introduces the second coming of Christ as the end itself. It suggests a definite progression in time: "But in those days, after that tribulation..." (vs. 24).

Returning to the first section (vss. 5-23), one can observe chronological progress within this part. The prediction of wars, famines, and earthquakes is not intended to announce signs of the final events, because they are said to be no cause for alarm: "Such things must happen, but the end is not yet ..." These are the beginnings of sorrows (lit. "birth pains") (13:7, 8; cf. Matt. 24:8). Next are mentioned the sufferings of the disciples of Christ and their worldwide gospel witness: "and the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (13:10; cf. Matt. 24:14). This portion of Scripture concludes with Jesus' counsel: "But he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (vs. 13; Matt. 24:13). The delay of the parousia (advent) is clearly present in this context. When Jesus said that the gospel "must first" be preached, He emphasized the fact that the end will not come until the gospel has been brought to every nation on earth (see Mark 13:10).

In the following subdivision, Mark 13:14-20, Christ turns His attention to His contemporary generation by focusing on "the abomination of desolation." This phenomenon is no longer part of "the beginning of birth pains." Christ's prediction of "the sacrilege" as a visible indicator of Jerusalem's immediate destruction is the decisive sign that answers the question of the disciples, "What will be the sign that the temple will be destroyed?" (Mark 13:1-4; Matt. 24:1-3).

But Christ does not follow this up with a description of His glorious return as the disciples had expected. Rather Christ proceeds to stress that the sacrilege will bring about a period

of unequalled distress, of tribulations for His followers (Mark 13:19-23; Matt. 24:16-21). All this, Jesus reiterates, will happen before the heavenly signs introduce the returning Redeemer (Mark 13:24; Matt. 24:29). In other words, the desolation of Jerusalem is clearly separated from the second advent by the time interval of "days of distress" [thlipsis] for Christ's followers all over the world. This period of distress is left indeterminate by Christ but is a clear allusion to Daniel's predictions of a period of suffering and apostasy after the desolating sacrilege has been set up in Daniel, chapters 7-12. The first time of distress in Daniel's book lasts "three and a half times" (7:25), and is to be understood as an apocalyptic symbol for a long period, referred to repeatedly in Revelation 11-13 with regard to the church age (see below, Part II, Chapter 13). But Daniel foresees beyond the 3½ times of distress (in Dan. 7) a further time of unprecedented distress in the time of the end (11:40-45; 12:1), from which Michael will deliver His people. This final time of tribulation, Daniel says, will be unequalled "from the beginning of nations until then" (12:1; LXX: thlipsis).

Both Mark and Matthew state that the distress will be so severe that "no one would survive," if the Lord did not cut short those days for the sake of "the elect" (Mark 13:20; Matt. 24:22). This announcement suggests not a short local crisis in Jerusalem, but a prolonged period of universal distress for the people of God. The additional reference to the activity of false Christs and false prophets (Mark 13:21-23; Matt. 24:24) indicates a period of widespread apostasy. We can safely conclude that Christ foresaw an extended period of religious desolation after the abominable sacrilege of Daniel's prophecies has appeared among His followers. Christ did not teach that the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world were identical, but rather that this would inaugurate a period of apostasy and tribulation. It seems that Christ combined all the periods of distress for His people in one statement borrowed from Dan. 12:1.

The key to understanding Christ's prophetic perspective is His continuous-historical application of Daniel first to the Roman Empire and to His contemporary generation in Jerusalem, then to periods of increasing worldwide distress from which He will deliver His followers at His return.

### **Christ's Use of Typology**

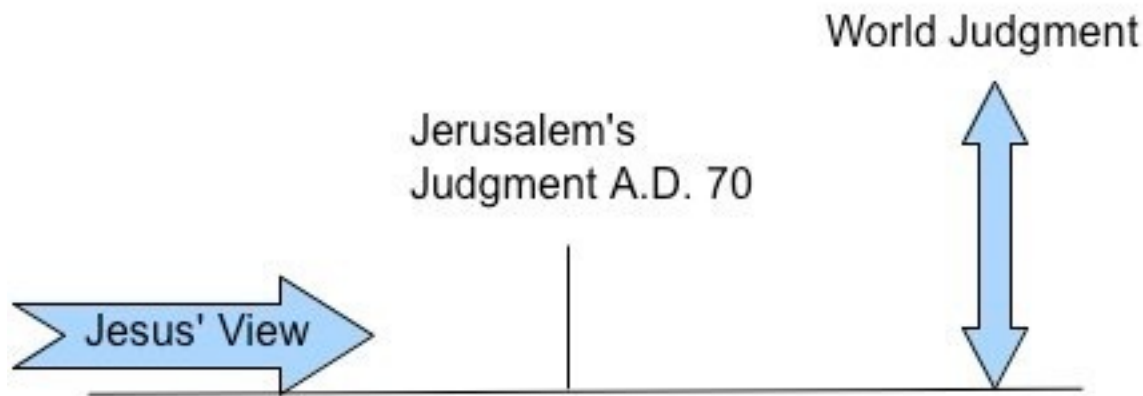
What was the occasion that led Jesus to deliver His forecast of doom on Jerusalem and of persecution for His followers until their rescue at His parousia?

Nearing the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus noticed the decided rejection by the Jewish leaders of each evidence of His Messiahship. He anticipated His imminent violent death. Only then did He pronounce the inevitable covenant curse: "Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). What did Christ mean by this ominous prediction? He declared that the temple in Jerusalem would be bereft of the divine Presence and destroyed, adding: "Not one stone here will be left on another" (Mark 13:2).

While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, shortly afterwards, some of His disciples asked Him privately: "Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). These questions relate to two different events. In the minds of the disciples, however, these were not yet differentiated in time as "the destruction of Jerusalem" and "the second advent of Christ" to judge the world. In Christ's view, however, the impending judgment on Jerusalem and the final world judgment have a basic feature in common: both judgments are by the same covenant

God. This essential correspondence of both judgments implies typology, something associated with the classical prophets (see Chapter II). This means that Jesus considered the imminent day of the Lord for Jerusalem as a warning type of the world's judgment.

In keeping with Israel's classical prophecy, Christ likewise blended the two divine judgments into a bifocal prophetic perspective:



In His judgment on Jerusalem, Christ provided the world with an example of its future judgment. He draws no sharp line of separation between the contemporary judgment and the end-time judgment. Both are described as if they intertwine. Chronological separation is deliberately omitted in the prophetic perspective. The typological principle only intends to teach that in Jerusalem's destruction the apocalyptic world judgment is foreshadowed.

Jesus' forecast does not offer some kind of soothsaying of future events but rather summons all people to be prepared to meet God. As the prophets of old, Jesus projected the judgment on Jerusalem as imminent ("this generation will certainly not pass away," Mark 13:30, see below Chapter 10) while placing the world judgment in the distant end-time ("No one knows about that day," Mark 13:32). Jesus emphasized that the reason for the imminent catastrophe for Jerusalem was her rejection of God's visitation in the Messiah; "They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (Luke 19:44). Israel had rejected her real King in the person of Christ. As a result God withdrew His presence which left only God's retributive justice. According to the same principle, Jesus ordered that "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10). Only then the world judgment will come. For that reason Christ sent His church on a worldwide mission:

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14; cf. 28:18-20).*

Jesus also borrowed the apocalyptic term "the end" from the book of Daniel. In Daniel 9:26 and 27 "the end" is used as a synonym for a divinely decreed "destruction" on the horrible desolator. This suggests that the world will be destroyed for the same reason that Jerusalem was devastated. Just as Jerusalem was destroyed for rejecting her Messiah, so the world will be destroyed for the rejection of Christ as Saviour. Thus Christ revealed the unity of God's work.

## Christ is the Key to Understanding Prophecy

The approach of the enemy on the temple grounds was the sign for Christ's followers to flee. That sign served as a warning for all believers, enabling them to escape from Jerusalem.

*When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Mark 13:14).*

*So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:15, 16).*

*When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written (Luke 21:20-22).*

It is important to recognize the complementary function of the three Synoptic Gospels in the study of Jesus' prophetic discourse. The identical phrases at the beginning of each report strongly suggests that Luke interprets Mark's prediction of the "desolating abomination" as being fulfilled in the historic desolation of Jerusalem by the Roman army in A.D. 70. Luke adds an important clarification of his own: that terrible devastation must be understood as a divine "punishment," in fulfillment of all that Israel's prophets had predicted. Matthew points explicitly to the prophet Daniel. Daniel indeed contains the unique prophecy of seventy weeks of years, which announces the violent death of the Messiah followed by the destruction of Jerusalem:

After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (Dan. 9:26).

When the armies of Rome were approaching the "holy city" they could be seen by all in Judea. While Matthew and Mark had spoken only of a coming "desolating abomination," Luke explains to his Gentile readers that this desolation was about to come to Jerusalem by means of the Roman armies (see Luke 21:20). The date for the publication of Luke's Gospel is debated, but is believed to be around A.D. 70. Luke's announcement that the doom of Jerusalem was "the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written" (Luke 21:22) validates the interpretation that Christ's violent death and Jerusalem's subsequent destruction by Imperial Rome fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 9. Luke's statement also confirms Jesus' prediction that His own generation would not pass away until His words would be fulfilled (Matt. 24:34; 23:36; Mark 13:30, 31).

We may now draw the conclusion that Daniel's Messianic prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27) received its historical fulfillment in the death of Christ. Thus Christ is the key to understand Daniel's prophecy. He must also be our guide in understanding the fulfillment of the "desolating sacrilege."

## The Abominable Antichrist

Jesus' mysterious term "the abomination of desolation" (NKJV, NASB) or "the desolating sacrilege" (RSV) or "the abomination that causes desolation" (NIV) [bdelugma tes



eremoseos] is a direct allusion to the anti-messiah figure in Daniel's prophecy. The vision of Daniel 8 was even called by the interpreting angel "the vision concerning . . . the rebellion that causes desolation" (8:13 NIV; "concerning . . . the transgression of desolation" NKJV)! This vision focuses on the sacrilege of trampling underfoot the temple of God and its worshipers by a self-exalting power.

The subsequent chapters in Daniel (chs. 9-12) apply the horrifying vision of Daniel 8 to the Messianic age (9:24-27; 11:31-36; 12:11). Already in the vision of Daniel 8 the successful desecrator played a prominent role as the opponent of the Messiah, the "Prince of the host" or "the Prince of princes" (8:11, 25). This means that as early as the writing of Daniel this desolator of the sanctuary is cast in the role of an anti-Messiah! He tramples underfoot the sanctuary of the Messiah, the Prince of the host: "the place of his sanctuary was brought low" (Dan. 8:11). The following explanation enlarges on his profanation and destruction: "He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet, he will be destroyed, but not by human power" (Dan. 8:25).

This was the Hebrew concept of the nature and fate of the coming anti-Messiah. In His prophetic speech Jesus did more than merely reproduce Daniel's forecast. As the Messiah of prophecy, He warned His disciples and the church of the ages against the coming of His rival who may therefore be called the "antichrist." This antichrist opposes not only the true worship cultus, but desecrates God's temple and deceives and persecutes the followers of Christ. The antichrist thus brings about the great tribulation for God's new-covenant people (Mark 13:14-19; Matt. 24:15-21). Only the sudden appearance of Christ in His sovereign power as Son of Man will cut short the reign of the antichrist. Christ promised to personally intervene and to vindicate His people (Mark 13:26, 27; Matt. 24:30, 31).

Many expositors have noticed an interesting point in the fact that Mark refers to the "abomination" in the masculine form as "standing (hestekota, Mark 13:14) where he does not belong." This personal form is usually interpreted as suggesting that the threat is not an impersonal apostasy but one caused by a specific person.

Christ announced that after his departure many deceivers would rise up, claiming: "I am the Christ." On the other hand, the true followers of Christ will be universally hated and persecuted until death, "because of me" (Mark 13:12, 13; Matt. 24:9-11). The conflict will intensify to the point that the false Christs and false prophets will perform supernatural signs and wonders to enforce their false worship (Mark 13:19-22; Matt. 24:21-24). Daniel's anti-Messiah is clearly applied by Jesus to more than one individual antichrist, all of which function as false prophets, until the end of time.

One specific counsel of Jesus to His disciples in connection with the advancing "abomination" against the apostate city of Jerusalem deserves attention for its application to the end time: "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matt. 24:16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21). Jesus' advice was a reminder of God's command to Lot and his family in Sodom: "Flee for your lives! . . . Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" (Gen. 19:17). Both Sodom and Jerusalem had fallen under the judgment. Both cities had been weighed in the heavenly balances and found wanting. For both,

probationary time had closed. The destruction that fell on both cities was only a foreshadowing of their future judgment. Jesus had warned Capernaum earlier:

*"If the miracles [of the Messiah!] that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Matt. 11:23, 24).*

Jesus' urgent advice to His disciples to flee from Jerusalem, as the place of apostasy and doom, implied therefore His call to escape also the final condemnation of heaven. The believers fled in A.D. 66, not to literal mountains, but to the town of Pella, in the Transjordan Valley some 17 miles South of the Sea of Galilee (see Eusebius, Hist. of the Church, III, 5). At the appointed time, Christ's disciples had to detach themselves from the doomed city. Their flight was from both religious apostasy and its judgment.

The book of Revelation endorses the end-time application of Jesus' counsel to flee from Jerusalem. In Revelation 18 a heavenly voice announces in the time of the end that "Babylon the Great is fallen," because of her apostasy and demonic possession (Rev. 18:2, 3). The divine ultimatum will then be activated for those lingering in Babylon:

*"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes" (Rev. 18:4, 5).*

Thus, Jesus' counsel to flee from Jerusalem in Matt. 24:16, finds its universal application in the end-time.

We learn from Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians (especially 2 Thess. 2) and from John's epistles that the antichrist concept was a familiar theme in the apostolic church. We may therefore infer that the antichrist warning was regarded from the beginning as an essential part of the message that Christ Himself committed to the church. Christ and the apostles Paul and John already considered the identification of the antichrist a matter of real importance. The New Testament scholar Herman Ridderbos comments on Matthew 24:15

*Some commentators have rightly brought this verse into connection with the Antichrist spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, who "sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." Although Jesus was speaking primarily of the fall of Jerusalem, the end of the world and the abominations it will bring have fallen within the purview of His speech from its very beginning (see vs. 3). He described the latter, as it were, in and by way of the former. And the abominable, blasphemous appearance of the Antichrist will indeed be one of the marks of the final days (Matthew. Bible Student's Commentary. ET. Zondervan, 1987, p. 444).*

The study of the antichrist doctrine in the Gospels and in the apostolic epistles is a necessary preparation for the study of the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse of John may be considered as the most extensive unfolding of Christ's Olivet discourse. It has been said that John omitted Christ's prophetic speech from his fourth Gospel because he wrote a whole book on the Apocalypse of Christ (see Rev. 1:1). Be that as it may, a careful study of the book of Revelation is an indispensable part of our Christian faith.

## **The Post-Apostolic Antichrist**

It is remarkable that Mark and Matthew do not identify "the abominable sacrilege"

explicitly with the Roman army, as does Luke. The symbolic description in Matthew and Mark is therefore open to more than one application, that is, to both the idolatrous Roman Empire and to a coming religious desecrator of the temple of God. To state it differently, both the Roman army and the antichrist are described in one inclusive perspective of the future. The local application widens, according to biblical typology, into an increasingly worldwide fulfillment.

Jesus used the prophetic perspective of blending the imminent historical and the future end-time fulfillments, without dwelling on any intervening time span. He views all political and religious messianisms as essentially one abomination, even when they come in more than one historical manifestation: first within Judaism, then within Christianity. The new Israel (the Church), would repeat the history of ancient Israel (see Ezekiel 8-9) and develop another religious apostasy in its cultic worship that would call forth the divine judgment. The Christian apostasy would be embodied in the antichrist and in his sacrilegious cultus. The Jewish messianic pretenders, who claimed that Jerusalem and her temple could never fall, were only partial fulfillments or types of the coming false messianism within the church. Whenever a denominational leader is granted excessive reverence and final authority, the unique place and glory of Christ's kingship is obscured.

Christ forewarned His followers: "At that time if anyone says to you: 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible" (Matt. 24:23, 24; cf. Mark 13:21, 22). Not the performance of great signs and miracles, but the authoritative Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus form the ultimate standard of truth. Jesus alerted the church to her duty to detect the deception of the antichrist.

Jesus' warning against the coming sacrilege referred to much more than the Roman army in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The sacrilege of the antichrist would develop later more fully within the church, as Paul explained in 2 Thess. 2. This fulfillment would stretch through the Middle Ages and find a renewed manifestation in the time of the end. Christ did not explain in His prophetic speech exactly how the "sacrilege" of His redemptive work would be manifested in the history of the church. That is the subject of 2 Thessalonians 2 and of the book of Revelation

## **The Apocalyptic Style of Matthew 24**

One cannot reduce the structure of Christ's master prophecy to a purely typological perspective. The discourse has a complex structure in which repetition and recapitulation can be detected. Only few have recognized, however, that the structure of Jesus' prophecy is patterned after the book of Daniel: that of a progressive parallelism. Repetition and amplification are the features of both Daniel and the Revelation. As LeRoy E. Froom observed: "Daniel and John both begin the revelation of things to come with their own day, and carry the reader with rapid strides across the centuries, with the unfolding events reaching to the end of the Christian Era" (The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers. Vol. IV, 1241).

The visions of Dan. 2 and 7 and 8 are in essence repetitive, yet each adds further details to clarify the basic issue. Jesus urged his followers to read and understand Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies (Matt. 24:15). Matthew presents Jesus' discourse for his Jewish

audience in a way that reflects the style of Daniel's book.

In Matthew 24 two parallel forecasts can be distinguished, each of which concludes with the end or the second advent of Christ: the first in verses 1-14; the second in verses 15-31. The universal completion of both series is stated in the following words:

*"And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (24:14).*

*"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (24:30; also vs. 44).*

The parallel structure of the two forecasts of the church age, each culminating in the second advent of Jesus Christ, is similar to Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies. Further, Matthew 24 also reveals some theological similarities with Daniel. The carefully structured unit of Matt. 24:10-12, which focuses on the increase of lawlessness [anomia] (vs. 12), can be understood best as an expansion of the predicted apostasy of Daniel's book. The phrase, "the love of the many [ton pollon] will grow cold" (24:12, literal translation), is an allusion to the "many" who will apostatize from God's covenant described in Daniel 11:34. This means that the widespread increase of lawlessness of Matt. 24:12 expands the idolatrous lawlessness of Daniel's "desolating sacrilege."

We concur with the conclusion of David Wenham that Jesus' prediction in Matt. 24:10-12 describes "an eschatological upsurge of apostasy in Danielic terms" (Tyndale Bulletin 31 [1980] 161). Thus Daniel did forecast the Christian age and its spiritual decline.

### **Luke's Accent on the Course of History**

While Matthew 24 and Mark 13 present Christ's application of Daniel's antichrist in a double perspective in which the imminent and the end-time fulfillments are related as type and antitype, Luke 21 accentuates more the historical order of events in church history.

As a historian (see Luke 1:1-4), Luke was more interested in a continuous-historical fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. This does not mean that Luke intends to describe a detailed sequence of events, each of which would match some apocalyptic symbol in Daniel's outline series. Such an approach is followed by Paul in 2 Thess. 2 and more intensively by John's Apocalypse. The concern of Luke is rather to indicate that between the fall of Jerusalem and the glorious advent of Christ there will elapse a considerable time span. This reality should cool down the apocalyptic fever of all who expected the immediate return of Christ in conjunction with the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke places the cry, "The time is near" (21:8), therefore, on the lips of false prophets!

Luke alone applies Jesus' sign of the approaching "abomination of desolation" to the historical siege of Jerusalem by military forces (21:20). What Mark and Matthew had only hinted at, Luke explicitly applies to a specific historical event for Jerusalem. One could say that Luke makes Jesus' warning of the coming "desolating abomination" at the "holy place" concrete for his generation: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (21:20). Many Bible scholars acknowledge the report of Flavius Josephus (Wars VI, 6, 1) that the Roman armies were notorious for their reverence for military banners with the imperial images.

Luke furthermore states that the destruction of Jerusalem was the time of "fulfillment of all

that has been written" (21:22), an allusion to Daniel 8 and 9. He places Jerusalem's devastation within the providence and sovereign rule of God. This historic catastrophe forms a significant part of the history of divine revelation to the Jewish nation. Christ even attached an unprecedented finality to this judgment: "Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! . . . I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:32, 36).

Matthew and Mark hint at the interval between Jerusalem's fall and Christ's return by stating that it will be a time of unequalled distress for the elect (Matt. 24:21, 22; Mark 13:19, 20). These "elect" are then qualified by Christ to be "His" elect (Matt. 24:31). They are therefore Christian believers. This implies that the true believers in Christ will not be raptured from the world before the time of tribulation, but will pass through it. Matthew adds that those days will be shortened for the sake of the elect (Matt. 24:22).

Concerning the inter-advent period, Luke makes a revealing statement: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Here Luke indicates that the second advent of Christ should not be expected shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. Calling the interim period in a general way "times of Gentiles" (without articles in the original), Luke characterizes them as times of oppression for Jerusalem and the Jewish people. Many expositors take these "times of Gentiles" to begin in A.D. 70 and to end only when all Gentile domination over the Jews is crushed by the advent of Christ (see Dan. 2:34, 35, 44; Rev. 19:11, 21). This conclusion seems to be confirmed by Daniel's prediction that the "desolation" will continue until the very end (Dan. 9:26, 27).

While Matthew and Mark follow the structure of a dual or bifocal prophetic perspective, Luke's description of Jesus' discourse is characterized more by a straightforward succession of historical events. Matthew and Mark represent the typological perspective of Israel's classical prophecy with its compressed time scale. Luke, however, chooses to follow the continuous-historical pattern by inserting "times of Gentiles" after the fall of Jerusalem. Both approaches are complementary and equally valid, because each approach continues an Old Testament tradition: the classical prophetic and the continuous-historical type of Daniel's apocalyptic.

### **Christ's Theology of the Cosmic Signs**

In all three Synoptic Gospels the appearance of the Son of Man is ushered in by cosmic signs. These will accompany the coming of the Son of Man when He brings God's Kingdom to the saints (Mark 13:24-27; Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28).

A brief survey of the prophetic tradition of cosmic imagery will show its theological significance. The prophets used celestial signs as stereotypical language to indicate a retributive judgment of Yahweh:

#### **Against Babylon**

*See the day of the LORD is coming . . . to make the land desolate. . . . The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light.*

*The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. (Isaiah 13:9, 10, 13, NIV).*

### Against Egypt

*When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars;*

*I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD (Ezekiel 32:7, 8).*

### Against Jerusalem

*Before them [the army of locusts] the earth shakes, and the sky trembles, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.*

*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD . . .*

*For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*

*The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine (Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15).*

### Against Judah

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother." (Hag. 2:6, 7, 21, 22).*

### In Habakkuk's poetic description of the Divine Warrior against Babylon

*Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear (Habakkuk 3:11).*

*Against Israel (Ten Tribes in apostasy)*

*"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight" (Amos 8:9; 9:5 [first two lines]; cf. Jer. 15:9 for Jerusalem).*

### Against Edom

*All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll;*

*All the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree (Isaiah 34:4).*

## Against the Whole World

*The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously (Isa. 24:19, 23).*

In all these passages the heavenly signs serve only to introduce the judgment day of the Lord, even when they refer each time to an imminent doom in history. Unnatural signs in the sun, moon, and stars were part of the standard apocalyptic language of Israel's prophets. The cosmic dimension taught Israel to see God's historical judgments as types of His final judgment. The moral purpose of this cosmic imagery was therefore an implicit warning to prepare for the imminent judgment of the Day of God.

Jesus modifies the theological significance of this cosmic imagery by rearranging the heavenly signs around His own future appearance as the Son of Man:

*The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory (Matt. 24:29, 30; cf. Mark 13:24-26).*

It is obvious that Jesus only uses Old Testament language to describe His second coming. Christ blends two judgment oracles, one against Babylon (see Isa. 13:10) and one against Edom (see Isa. 34:4). Jesus' merging of two prophetic judgment passages teaches that these prophecies were only partially fulfilled in the fall of ancient Babylon and Edom. In the theology of Christ these oracles will find their full consummation in the cosmic-universal judgment at His second advent. Christ's startling message is that the judgment of the world will not come from Yahweh alone. It will be executed by His Son, who is the Son of Man of Daniel's prophecy:

*Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son . . . And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:22, 27).*

As a consequence of Jesus' prophetic speech any predicted theophany (God-appearance) in the Old Testament is restructured as a glorious Christophany (Christ appearance). This christological interpretation of the day of the Lord is a breathtaking theological truth in Jesus' application of Daniel's book. In His new theology, Christ transferred the cosmic signs in the prophetic books to His own future appearance so that all the prophecies of Israel will meet and end in Him. This is the essence of Christ's theology of the cosmic signs. This conclusion is confirmed in the dissertation on Matthew 24:27-31 by Dr. Ki Kon Kim:

*The vocabulary and motifs of the Old Testament, from its prophetic and apocalyptic standpoint, provide the framework of the Matthean Parousia scene. Matthew combines almost all the apocalyptic vocabulary and motifs of the Old Testament into his Parousia scene, and portrays that all the Old Testament prophetic terms and apocalyptic signs are met and fulfilled in the Son of Man, Who will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This is the main reason that Matt 24:29-31 exhibits more continuity with the Old Testament than any other passage in the New Testament (The Signs of the Parousia. Ph.D. Diss., A.U. Theol.*

Some scholars consider the cosmic imagery as only symbolic, as metaphorical language, intended to signify the beginning of the Messianic age (as Peter is said to have done in Acts 2:19-20). The heavenly signs would serve only as "apocalyptic stage-effects" that do not belong to the substance of the prophecy and therefore do not require a literal fulfillment. However, more conservative Bible students have warned not to confuse poetic expression with allegorism. They instead prefer to call this cosmic imagery "semi-poetical language," because it represents eschatological events that transcend our limited historical experience. If the second advent of Christ is a literal coming, then the signs of the parousia must also be intended as literal cosmic events.

Matthew's and Mark's Gospels seem to indicate that the cosmic signs introduce and accompany the second advent of Christ. Luke's report, however, suggests that "signs in the sun, moon, and stars" may also be a prelude to the coming of the Son of Man. Luke associates the heavenly signs with natural disasters on earth, that together will strike terror in the hearts of all people: "men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world for the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Luke 21:25, 26).

### **Christ's Universalizing of the End-time Prophecies**

The climactic end of Jesus' discourse centers in the vindication of His maligned disciples through the ages. The Son of Man will come with His angels to gather "His elect" from all directions in the world to Himself (Mark 13:27; Matt. 24:31). Matthew adds that the gathering will be introduced "with a loud trumpet call" (Matt. 24:31), a direct allusion to the Jubilee trumpet blast in the Isaiah's apocalyptic outlook: "In that day . . . you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound" (Isa. 27:12, 13).

Jesus' declared that all the ancient covenant promises which state that Israel would be gathered or restored as God's people would be fulfilled in His followers at His second advent. They will be "His elect" (see also Luke 21:28; cf. 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:9). Christ thereby defined the Israel of God in terms of His own disciples. As a consequence, He constituted the new-covenant people of God as the people of Christ.

He further promised that at His return "all the tribes [phulai] of the earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:30). This phrase is an allusion to the prophecy of Zechariah which predicted that all the tribes "in the land" [Palestine] will mourn, because they will look on God as "the One they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10-14). Christ reapplied this national judgment oracle of Zechariah on a worldwide scale, to be fulfilled in "all the tribes of the earth" (Matt. 24:30). All these "tribes" of the human race will "see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). This universal application of Israel's tribes forms a keynote also in the book of Revelation:

*Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all peoples of the earth  
[all tribes [phulai] of the earth, RSV]  
will mourn because of him.  
So shall it be! Amen (Rev. 1:7).*

This principle of universalizing Israel's local and national judgment oracles was



introduced by Christ Himself. He was not a literalist or a racist in His prophetic Scripture interpretation. He consistently universalized the covenant promises of Israel. This principle of worldwide application of the Hebrew prophecies became an essential part of the apostolic Scripture interpretation.

## Conclusion

The Olivet discourse presents Christ's commentary on Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies. Jesus made historical applications all of which center around His first or His second advents. He thereby gave Daniel's forecast a christological interpretation, as the key to unlock apocalyptic prophecy. Christ candidly explained that the predicted fall of Jerusalem would be the result of Israel's ultimate rejection of His messiahship. Even His own followers would have to suffer condemnation by false religionists. But the final vindication of the true saints and the ultimate sentencing of their persecutors will come when Christ returns as the Danielic Son of Man, accompanied by a cloud of angels. Then all the tribes of the world will face the same judgment that was meted out to Jerusalem.

According to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus placed both judgments in a typological perspective, in keeping with the structure of classical prophecy. Luke's Gospel presents a complementary perspective: that of a continuous-historical application of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy. Jesus did not base His prophetic expectations on any of the Jewish apocalyptic speculations or timetables. In this respect He was an anti-apocalypticist. He spoke of the future only in the language of the Old Testament prophets.

The newness of His understanding was the interpretative principle that Israel's prophecies would be fulfilled only by and through Him. He transformed all apocalyptic prophecy into christological eschatology, that is, into Christ-centered fulfillments. As a consequence, God's covenant promises to Israel will be fulfilled only in those who are united with Christ. The moral purpose of Christ's prophetic discourse is to urge upon His church the need to be prepared for His soon coming:

*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come (Mark 13:32, 33).*

The biblical term "the last days," suggests that the first and the second comings of Christ are an inseparable unit. No matter how many centuries may pass between the resurrection of Christ and His return, both Messianic events belong together as two moments of one unbreakable plan of God. Because the Messiah has come and is now the exalted Lord of all, the second advent is always "near" for the eyes of faith and must be expected with unrelenting patience. This certainty is the very essence of the gospel hope. Yet, Christ also recognized the need to sustain this hope by giving signs in historical time that would indicate, to the discerning eye, the last phase of the history of redemption.

*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28).*

All the Synoptic Gospel accounts conclude with a lesson from the budding fig tree: "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near" (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28; cf. Luke 21:29). This means that although we are not able to know "that day or hour," we have no excuse for being ignorant about the signs of the time, particularly about the great apostasy within the Christian church. To wait for Christ's

coming requires unceasing vigilance and an awareness of the progressive fulfillment of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy. Only when the signs of the end are taken in their historical fulfillment, will biblical eschatology become relevant to the present. Discerning the signs, while keeping our eyes on the coming Lord, will revitalize our faithfulness to Him.

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# Chapter VII

## Paul's Understanding of Daniel's Prophecies

Paul's apocalyptic outline of church history in 2 Thessalonians 2 serves a similar purpose as did Matthew 24 (and its parallels) in the Gospels. There is no more explicit prediction about the church age in the New Testament. Strangely, most commentators find 2 Thessalonians 2 an obscure passage in Paul's writings.

It is generally recognized that the apostle's aim in 2 Thess. 2 is to give pastoral counsel for the present, as was Christ's aim with His prophetic discourse. It must be assumed, therefore, that Paul's phrases in 2 Thess. 2 were not obscure to the original Christian readers around A.D. 50.

Many believe that Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonian church was written to counter a misunderstanding by some church members of his first letter that the Day of the Lord would come suddenly, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2, 4) and that Paul and others could be "still alive" when the Lord returned (1 Thess. 4:15).

Some apparently had assumed that the day of the Lord had "already come" or was about to break in at any moment (2 Thess. 2:2). This unjustified idea of an imminent expectation had led some church members to become idle or disorderly and overly excited (2 Thess. 3:6-15). Paul seeks to correct the error of this any-moment expectation of the day of the Lord. He derived his argument from Daniel's apocalyptic outline. In Paul's view, knowledge of the sequential order of two basic events in the history of the church was essential to meet the error of a misdirected hope. Paul concentrated on the chronological order of two prophetic events: the coming of the antichrist and the coming of the Christ.

First, "the rebellion" [he *apostasia*], must be revealed in the "man of lawlessness" [ho *anthropos tes anomias*] who will "set himself up in God's temple" [*eis ton naon tou theou kathisai*] accompanied by "counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:3, 4, 9). Only then will the Lord be revealed and destroy the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8).

Paul's warning focuses on the uprising of apostasy within the temple of God during the church age, that is, within the church as an institution (see 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 1 Cor. 16, 17; Eph. 2:19-21). His point is that this coming apostasy, foretold by Daniel, had not developed as a public phenomenon in the apostolic church, even though the power of lawlessness was secretly "already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Consequently, the day of the Lord could not have arrived nor could it be expected in the immediate future.

Paul used his apocalyptic knowledge about future church history to correct an extreme apocalypticism in the apostolic church. The apostle's use of the book of Daniel as the source for his prophetic outline of church history, makes 2 Thessalonians 2 another indispensable link between the books of Daniel and Revelation.

### The Continuous-Historical Approach in Daniel

Daniel twice forecasts the reign of four successive world empires (chs. 2 and 7). The interpreting angel identifies the world empires as Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece (in Dan. 2:38; 8:20-21), and points to Rome in 9:26-27. The critical point in Daniel's vision,

one that needs careful attention, is the revelation that the fourth beast (or empire) has ten horns among which an eleventh, "a little one," slowly rises to become the antichrist. The interpreting angel explains more precisely:

*The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this [fourth] kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones: he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*

*But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever (Dan. 7:24-26).*

The angel does not suggest that the fourth (Roman) empire itself will be ruled by ten contemporary kings, for that would contradict Roman history. Rather the angel's statement is that "from" this world empire will come ten kings, who will then rule contemporaneously. This order of events, the replacement of the Roman Empire by the divided kingdoms of Europe, was also predicted by Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metallic statue: "Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom" (Dan. 2:41).

The kingdoms of the ten rulers gradually replaced the Roman Empire and they will last till the kingdom of glory replaces them in the day of judgment (Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:26-27). Thus, both Daniel 2 and 7 include the whole spectrum of the eventful Middle Ages within their prophetic scope. To ignore this interim time of many centuries in Daniel's prophetic perspective is the fundamental oversight of the dogmatic systems of preterism and futurism. Both schools of interpretation create an unjustified gap of more than 1500 years in Daniel's prophetic history; as if the Middle Ages, characterized by the rise of the Papal kingdom among the ten rulers of Europe, were irrelevant in God's view of history. The symbols of Daniel must be interpreted in harmony with history, with ecclesiastical history in particular. Prophecy is ratified by its fulfillment (see John 14:29).

In His prophetic discourse, Christ apparently took future church history with unmistakable seriousness. It is essential for Christian eschatology to recognize that Christ interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies as a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies (see Matt. 24:15; Luke 21:20-24). It confirms the view that the fourth beast of Daniel 7 represents Imperial Rome (cf. Dan. 9:26, 27). The crucial point is that Christ took Daniel's prophetic outline as the guideline for His own future outlook and then identified a certain prophetic feature in Daniel as being fulfilled in His own generation.

This method of interpreting Daniel's apocalyptic outline was also followed by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, in order to demonstrate that the day of the Lord was not imminent. As a consequence, Paul's outline and Christ's discourse have remarkable parallels in their historical applications.

## **Parallels Between Jesus' and Paul's Apocalyptic Outlines**

Many have noticed that Paul's prophetic outline in 2 Thessalonians 2 displays a remarkable structural parallel with Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Both apocalyptic outlines contain identical and similar terms, such as the advent, the day of the Lord, the gathering of the saints, the deception of the antichrist, and signs and miracles. Some commentators have even concluded that Christ's prophetic discourse was the primary source of Paul's

teaching (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15). A most striking resemblance of expressions has been established between 2 Thessalonians 2 and Matthew 24. One may, therefore, study both apocalyptic outlines fruitfully together. At the same time, we need to realize that both Jesus and Paul base their future outlook on Daniel's apocalyptic outline. And each intends to apply Daniel's view of the advancing history of salvation to his contemporary epoch of time. This common Danielic source explains why Jesus and Paul use similar outlines and phrases.

As noted earlier, Paul urges the Thessalonians not to be deceived by believing that the day of the Lord had already come. His major argument is that "the rebellion," as represented by "the man of lawlessness," had not yet been revealed publicly on the stage of history (2 Thess. 2:3). Jesus likewise had indicated that during the church age "many will turn away from the faith" (literally, "be caused to stumble") and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people (Matt. 24:10, 11). Until the very end, Christ insisted, "false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24). It seems that according to Jesus false Messiahs are those that shall claim to be Christ returned at His second coming; and false prophets are those that falsely claim to speak on behalf of Christ.

Jesus began his prophetic speech with the warning, "Watch out that no one deceives you" (Matt. 24:4). Paul adopts the same beginning: "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way" (2 Thess. 2:3). Both seek to cool down an excessive and premature anticipation of Christ's return with their prophetic outlines. Each emphasizes that a horrible apostasy will develop which precipitates and necessitates the judgment at the coming of Christ.

The nature of the coming apostasy is described by Christ as "the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place" (Matt. 24:15), an obvious allusion to the blasphemous temple desecration in Daniel 8-9. Paul personifies the religious apostasy in "the man of lawlessness," a self-deifying, blasphemous human being, that is "doomed to destruction" (2 Thess. 2:3). Paul also locates the coming apostasy in the temple of God: "He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4). This agreement of Jesus and Paul regarding the location of the apostasy in the temple of God is rooted directly in Daniel's apocalypse. In particular the vision of Daniel 8 was summarized by the interpreting angel as "the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion [pesha'] that causes desolation" (Dan. 8:13). The angel's further explanation is important:

*His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him (Dan. 11:31, 32).*

It seems obvious that Daniel is the source for the New Testament teaching that a blasphemous antichrist will emerge during the church age. Both Christ and Paul mention that the sacrilegious apostate will be accompanied with deceptive "signs and miracles." Christ connects these with "false Christs and false prophets" (Matt. 24:24); Paul associates them with the advent of "the lawless one" that he portrays as the eschatological antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9).

On the basis of this overall parallelism, many have concluded that Paul's apocalyptic teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 runs structurally and theologically parallel to Christ's prophetic discourse (in Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Both illuminate one another. The major conclusion is therefore that "the desolating sacrilege" in the holy place of Christ's prophecy and the personal antichrist seated in God's temple in Paul's prediction are the same phenomenon. One could say that while Matthew focuses on the future sacrilege in God's temple, Paul stresses the perpetrator of the sacrilege. Mark's Gospel, however, had already suggested that the eschatological sacrilege would be committed by a personal antichrist, "standing [hestekota] where he does not belong" (Mark 13:14), or "usurping a place which is not his" (NEB).

### **Paul's Emphasis on the Religious Apostasy**

It deserves attention that Paul's phrase "he apostasia" (2 Thess. 2:3), translated variously as "the falling away" (NKJV), or "the apostasy" (NASB), or "the rebellion" (NIV), always signifies a religious revolt in the Old and the New Testaments, that is, a forsaking of the Lord and His truth (cf. Josh. 22:22; 2 Chron. 29:19; Jer. 2:19; Acts 21:21). This revolt is more than an incidental transgression of the divine law. This "lawlessness" [anomia] represents a fundamental and sustained rebellion against God. Although active already in a hidden form in Paul's time, the apostasy would eventually grow into a worldwide rebellion, an idolatrous form of worship that defies the authority of God's Word. The apostle does not suggest that he is revealing some new, startling truth. Paul reminds his readers of the fact that he had already taught them this apocalyptic secret while he was still with them (2 Thess. 2:5). Paul's instruction to new Christian converts apparently included the essentials of Christ's prophetic discourse and of Daniel's antichrist (cf. Acts 20:27-30; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Paul does not remind the Thessalonians of a coming general apostasy, but specifically of "the rebellion" that was portrayed so dramatically as the counterfeit of the Messiah in the book of Daniel.

To understand the apostle, we must realize that "the man of lawlessness" that opposes every god by exalting himself in the temple of God, is doomed to destruction (2 Thess. 2:3, 4), is Paul's condensed description of the self-deifying antichrist in Daniel 7-11 (specifically 7:25, 26; 8:11-13, 23-25; 11:31, 36-39, 45).

The essential nature of Daniel's antichrist is his self-exalting will "to change" God's law and the sacred times (Dan. 7:25) and to exchange the redemptive worship in God's temple for his own idolatrous cult (Dan. 8:11-13, 25). Therefore Daniel's perspective represents a double apostasy: one from the divine law (Dan. 7) and one from the gospel of the sanctuary (Dan. 8). It is crucial to grasp the point that the evil goal is not to establish atheism, but rather to impose a counterfeit religion with a false system of worship and salvation.

Paul stresses the religious nature of the coming antichrist, that will try to authenticate his idolatrous cult by means of supernatural signs and miracles (2 Thess. 2:4, 9). The antichrist will solemnly seat himself in the temple of God with one compulsive obsession to claim divine authority and to usurp the prerogatives that belong to Christ alone. By this deception he forces himself on all men as their Messiah and Lord.

## Paul's Use of the Term "Temple of God"

The apostle never uses the Greek term *naos* (temple) for the building in Jerusalem. Since Paul believed that God no longer dwelled in the old shrine but among the Christian community, he viewed the church of Christ as the new temple of God:

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him: for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17).*

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; . . . (1 Cor. 6:19).*

*What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living god. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16; citing Ezek. 37:27).*

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the LORD (Eph. 2:19-21).*

Besides referring to the individual believer as God's temple, Paul saw both the local and the universal church of Christ as the fulfillment of the eschatological promise made by the prophet Ezekiel, that God would create a new temple in the time of the Messiah (Ezek. 37:24-28). He solemnly declares that anyone who destroys the holiness and the spiritual unity of this new temple (by false teachings or idolatry) "God will destroy him!" (1 Cor. 3:17).

From this evidence in Paul's writings, we may conclude that his normal use of "temple" [*naos*] is a reference not to Judaism but to the Christian church. This conclusion is confirmed further when we consider how Paul evaluated "the present city of Jerusalem," representing Judaism, as an enslaving covenant of works (Gal. 4:25). For Paul "the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. 4:26).

In the light of these references, it seems highly unlikely that the apostle Paul would suggest that the phrase "the temple of God" refers to the temple building in Jerusalem. The wider context of Paul's use of temple imagery supports the idea that his use of "the temple of God" in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 refers to the Christian church community of the future.

Paul's statement that the apostate one will "take his seat" [*kathisai*] in the "temple of God" is profoundly significant. This bold image reflects Daniel's vision in which the Ancient of Days "took his seat" in order to bring the arrogant, self-deifying power to justice. In the light of this Danielic background of the judgment seat, Paul's description of the adversary "taking his seat" suggests the antichrist would set himself up as teacher and judge within the church!

Here, Paul is offering more than "pastoral admonition." Paul's forecast follows Daniel's disclosure of the coming development of salvation history. He interprets Daniel's outline according to the gospel principle: fulfillment is in Christ and the church of Christ.

The apostasy predicted in Daniel 7; 8; 11 was to arise within the new-covenant people in a false teacher, a false Messiah. On the other hand, Jesus promised that the gates of hell



would never overcome His church (Matt. 16:18) and that His elect would not be deceived if they remained on their guard (Mark 13:22, 23). The tension between the church as institution and church as spiritual community is reflected also in Paul's pastoral warning in 1 Corinthians 11:19 and in his prophetic forecast to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31, "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (v. 30). It became a serious threat in some apostolic churches in Roman Asia (Rev. 2:19-29; 1 John 2:18-27).

Finally it is developed as the central theme in John's Apocalypse, in the symbolism of the two women in Revelation 12 and 17. Here the true Christian church and the apostate church are portrayed not only in terms of dogmatic differences but also as separate worshiping communities.

### **Paul's Use of Old Testament Types of False Worship**

Paul's warning focuses on the coming of the religious apostasy of the "man of lawlessness" within the temple of God on earth, an apostasy that would remain until the glorious return of Christ.

*Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion [the apostasia] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:3, 4 RSV).*

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming (2 Thess. 2:8 RSV).*

Two features characterize Paul's outline of future church history: First, the historical time of emergence of the "man of lawlessness" within church history, and second, the religious nature of his Messianic claims.

It becomes evident, on close comparison with the Old Testament, that Paul composed his antichrist description by blending three prophetic revelations concerning anti-God powers:

1. the historical epoch of time of the rise of the anti-Messiah in Daniel 7; 8; and 11;
2. the religious blasphemy of self-deification by the kings of Tyre and Babylon in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14;
3. the final destruction of "the wicked" by the appearance of the Messiah in Isaiah 11.

We can observe some literary and religious allusions in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 to the Old Testament prophecies in the following survey (according to the RSV):

2 Thessalonians	Old Testament Passages
v2:4a ... who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god . . .	Dan. 11:36 ... he shall exalt himself And magnify himself above every god
2:4b ... so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.	Ezek. 28:2 You said, "I am a god I sit in the seat of the gods."
2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his and with the breath of mouth . . .	Isa. 11:4 ... and he [the Messiah] shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

Paul fuses together these three allusions to anti-God rulers in order to inform the saints how to identify the antichrist when he arises in the church age, even within Christendom as the "temple of God" on earth (see also Acts 20:29-31).

Paul uses the principle of Christian typology when he applies God's promises and threats for Israel to the church (see e.g. 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Gal. 4:21-31). The relationship of an Old Testament type to a New Testament antitype is determined theologically by their connection with Yahweh prior to the cross and with Christ in the church age. In the prophetic perspective the temporal distance between type and antitype is of no concern. Its emphasis is in the fact that the same God who acts in the imminent historical fulfillment, will also act in the final judgment and salvation.

In this way Paul views the self-idolizing of the kings of Tyre and Babylon (in Ezek. 28:2 and Isa. 14:13, 14) as prophetic types of the religious essence of the antichrist (2 Thess. 2:4). The adversary of Christ in the Christian age will teach and judge as if he is God, with divine authority and infallibility.

### **Paul's Application of Daniel's Predicted Anti-Messiah**

As in Dan. 8 and 11, Paul localizes the blasphemous apostasy of the eschatological enemy of God "in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4). Without the apostolic principle of the Christological fulfillment, the pitfalls of literalism or allegorism in interpreting "the temple of God" are inescapable. Dispensational interpreters see "God's temple" in 2 Thessalonians 2 as a literal, rebuilt temple in Jerusalem in which the antichrist will personally set himself up to demand worship from the Jews, after the church has been

raptured. A more popular interpretation is to take the "temple" in 2 Thessalonians 2 as a symbol for God's throne in heaven, with an appeal to Isaiah 14:13-14; 66:1. In other words, the "temple of God" is understood as a metaphor to suggest that the lawless one tries to usurp the place of God and will demand divine honors and obedience. This is then applied historically to any totalitarian system of government--to the deification of the state--when law and order break down and demonic lawlessness bursts forth in persecution of the church. In other words, the "lawless one" is applied to atheistic totalitarian governments.

The foregoing interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2:4 may seem attractive and convincing to some. But the vital question is: Has proper consideration been given to the Old Testament root context on which Paul bases his apocalyptic description?

Paul's allusion to Daniel 11:36 should lead us first to consider the religious profanation of the temple by the "king of the north" in Daniel 11:31-45, and Daniel 8:9-13. He will cause corruption or apostasy among the covenant people. The origin of Paul's predicted apostasy is Daniel 11:32.

Protestant expositors since Luther and Calvin have traditionally interpreted the self-exalting king of Daniel 11:36 and the lawless one of 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as the same individual, who will exalt himself above all gods (Dan. 11:37). He cannot be an ideological atheist, because he claims to be God.

We capture the theological essence of Daniel's abomination, when we observe that the desolator will set up in the temple of God a counterfeit worship that teaches a false way of atonement (see Dan. 8:11-13; 11:31; 12:11). This defines "the rebellion" as a cultic apostasy from the ordained worship in God's temple.

In Christ's application of Daniel's "desolating abomination" to the Roman army (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14), we see a partial fulfillment, a type that points beyond A.D. 70 to its universal antitype, the greater abomination within the church. Paul explains that the historical manifestation of the apostate cultus must take place before the coming of Christ.

The larger context of the New Testament relates true worship of God on earth to Christ's intercession in the heavenly temple (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25; 8:1, 2). It is absolutely essential not to separate the earthly temple from the heavenly one. To defile the "temple" or church on earth means also profanation of Christ's ministry in the heavenly temple (Rev. 13:6).

Just as the anti-Messiah in Daniel 8 is suddenly destroyed "not by human power" (vs. 25), and as "the king of the north" is suddenly destroyed with no human helper (Dan. 11:45), so antichrist in Paul's description will be destroyed at Christ's appearance, "by the breath of his mouth" (2 Thess. 2:8; see Isa. 11:4).

### **Paul's Historical Timing of the Antichrist**

Paul's pastoral burden in 2 Thessalonians 2 is to correct the false view among the Thessalonian Christians that the day of the Lord had begun already (2 Thess. 2:2). He reminds them of his oral teachings that first (protos, omitted in NIV) the rebellion [the apostasia] must arise within the "temple of God." Only then will the day of Christ come and destroy "the lawless one" by "the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:3-8).

In Paul's view, a knowledge of the sequence of the events is essential to prevent any unjustified imminent expectation. He introduces the idea of a prolonged retardation of

the emergence of the antichrist because of the existence of a restraining power: "And you know what is restraining him now" (2 Thess. 2:6). The apostolic church apparently had no question about the identity of this "restraining" power. They knew it. It is interesting that most of the early Fathers in the post-apostolic church taught that the civil order of the Roman Empire, with the emperor at its head, was the hindering power Paul referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7. In spite of various new theories (for instance, that the Holy Spirit or Paul's mission could be the restrainer), several leading scholars today maintain that the classical interpretation is the most satisfying.

The Roman Empire ruled the world from 168 B.C. until A.D. 476. Then came the division of Western Europe into various smaller kingdoms. In Daniel 7 the blasphemous "little horn" arose among these kingdoms which existed simultaneously (7:7, 8, 24). This historical sequence in Daniel's outline--first the "beast" and then the rise of the antichristian "horn"--lies at the base of Paul's historical outline in 2 Thessalonians 2. Only this historical perspective of Daniel 7 can unravel the riddle of Paul's mysterious "restrainer," who was retarding the development of the antichrist.

More important than the "restrainer" is, of course, what Paul writes about the coming "man of lawlessness" (anthropos tes anomias) or, according to less authoritative manuscripts, "man of sin" (hamartias). The apostle states that the public display of "the lawless one" (ho anomos, vs. 8) will occur only after an extended historical development of hidden forces that were already active in Paul's own time (vs. 7). Paul places the actual unveiling of the lawless one immediately after the Roman Empire (as the "restrainer") has been "taken out of the way" (2 Thess. 2:7). He strongly suggests that the same throne occupied by the restrainer would be occupied by the lawless one.

The implication of Paul's message in 2 Thessalonians 2 is unmistakable: when the empire of Rome has fallen, the rise of the antichrist will no longer be restrained or held back in Rome. Consequently, the antichrist will be revealed without delay in the subsequent age, commonly called the Middle Ages. This prolonged period was described by Daniel as the 3½ times of political oppression of the saints (Dan. 7:25; 12:7). It is in this Christian era that Paul locates the apostasy. The Anglican Bishop Christopher Wordsworth has drawn a compelling conclusion:

*Since, also, the Man of Sin is described here by St. Paul as continuing in the world from the time of the removal of the restraining Power even to the Second Advent of Christ (vs. 8), therefore the Power here personified in the "Man of Sin" must be one that has continued in the world for many centuries, and continues to the present time. Also, since it has this long continuance assigned to it in the prophecy, a continuance very far exceeding the life of any one individual, therefore the "Man of Sin" cannot be a single person (Is the Papacy Predicted by St. Paul? An Inquiry. Cambridge: The Harrison Trust, 1985, 3rd. ed., p. 15).*

The purpose of the Apocalypse of John is to encourage the universal church until the very end, to withstand the deceptive and persecuting power of the antichrist-beast and of his ally, the false prophet, and to overcome the eschatological mark of the beast when it is imposed on the nations. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians acknowledged the presence of the fourth empire of Daniel 7. It taught the church that Daniel's "little horn" would not arise during the Roman Empire. John's Apocalypse, however, alerts the church universal to the proper timing of the beast after the Empire's demise. John describes this antichrist power with the features of Daniel's little horn that will rule the nations for 42 months (Rev. 13:5), a variant of the 3½ times (Dan. 7:25). This time symbolism in Daniel and

Revelation must be applied therefore to the period after the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. This brings the Middle Ages within the scope of biblical prophecy.

In short, Paul's historical application of Daniel 7 in 2 Thessalonians 2 favors the continuous-historical approach rather than the exclusive contemporary or futurist constructs. Paul's outline of future church history in successive periods regarding the apostasy and the restrainer, proves that the apostle did not believe in an any-moment expectation of the end. In fact, 2 Thessalonians 2 intends to refute this very idea on the basis of Daniel's historical perspective.

### **Paul's Antichrist as a Parody of Christ**

Special attention should be given to the fact that Paul describes the apostasy of the coming "man of lawlessness," as one that denies both true Christian worship and all pagan worship; "he opposes ... everything that is called God or is worshiped" (2 Thess. 2:4). He will exalt himself to the point of self-deification within the temple of God "so that he takes his seat in the temple of God displaying himself as being God" (2 Thess. 2:4 NASB). Paul adopts this specific cultic characterization of the antichrist from Daniel's predicted anti-Messiah (see Dan. 7:25; 8:11-13; 11:31; 12:11). In the prophecies of Daniel the little horn, or self-deifying king, invades the holy land, intrudes the sanctuary of God and of His Messiah. He desecrates the divine cultus of the sanctuary not only by changing the divine law and the sacred times (e.g. the Sabbath, Dan. 7:25), but also by his own "abomination," the counterfeit worship of himself as the "god of fortresses" (or power) unknown to the covenant people (Dan. 11:31, 36-38).

Paul seems intentionally to cast the antichrist into the image of a false Christ, because he describes him in need of being "revealed" at

his "coming" (2 Thess. 2:3, 8, 9), terms which he applies equally to Christ (both have a personal revelation [apokalypsis]) and His coming [parousia, cf. 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:8]. This suggests that Paul considers the antichrist as a rival Messiah, whose "coming" is a parody of the coming of Christ.

Just as the revelation of God culminated in Christ, so the manifestation of evil will find its climax in the antichrist, whose appearance is the satanic caricature of Christ. Already Irenaeus had declared that the antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2 would be a religious "apostate," that would lead astray those worshipping him "as if he were Christ" (Against Heresies, 25; in Ante-Nicene Fathers I, p. 554).

Significant is Paul's description that the "man of lawlessness" will come "according to Satan's activity" [kat'energeian tou Satana] that is, Satan will energize and authorize the antichrist by "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). Once again Paul seems to indicate, by this threefold phrase (miracles, signs and wonders), that the antichrist will attempt to imitate the ministry of Christ (see Matt. 24:24; Acts 2:22). The Book of Revelation describes more fully how Satan will energize the sea-beast or antichrist: "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority" (Rev. 13:2).

### **The Mystery of Lawlessness**

Paul refers to the satanic activity of evil in this suggestive phrase: "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7 NIV; or literally: "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (NASB, NKJV). Here the apostle recognizes that an evil force was already operating in a hidden way behind human activity, determined to gain the supremacy over the church of Christ. This antichristian scheme was at first suppressed from its realization by the prevailing political power of Paul's time (vs. 6). Nevertheless, when the restrainer was removed, the forces of apostasy emerged immediately and became publicly known during the Middle Ages.

In Paul's writings the term "mystery" carries the basic concept of saving truth, once kept secret by God but now disclosed in the gospel (see Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 1:9-10; Col. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 2:7). The content of this mystery is the redemptive plan of God to save humanity through union with Christ. This divine "mystery" was personified in Christ as the great "mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (2 Tim. 3:16 NKJV). When Paul, on the other hand, speaks of "the mystery of lawlessness" he may well have in mind the very opposite of the saving truth of God in Christ: it is the mystery characterized by lawlessness, to be manifested in the coming "man of lawlessness." From Paul's teachings we can learn some basic points of instruction concerning the antichrist:

(1) This mystery would never be inoperative, but rather operate continuously from Paul's time to the end of time. Consequently, the incessant satanic activity does not permit us to locate "the mystery of lawlessness" exclusively in some isolated historical period in the past or in the future, as the theories of preterism or futurism postulate. The very opposite is taught by Paul: after the fall of Rome this mystery of rebellion will be active and successful without restraint (2 Thess. 2:7).

(2) This satanic secret, however, is known to the true elect of Christ, because they "are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11 NASB). Enlightened by the divine wisdom coming from the book of Daniel (see Dan. 11:33; 12:10) they know that Satan's attack is aimed at God's kingship and His plan of redemption, centered in the sanctuary with its sacred law and gospel.

(3) By analogy with the "mystery of godliness," as God's plan to reveal the Messiah and His gospel of salvation, the "mystery of lawlessness" indicates Satan's evil purpose to oppose God's plan by means of a diabolical counterplan and countercultus that exalts the false priest-king. One Bible scholar defines this Pauline phrase with profound insight: "In a parallel fashion, the mystery of lawlessness, Satan's counterplan, is a fixed diabolical purpose, a continuing scheme, to oppose the realization of the divine decree (of redemption)" (Paul H. Furfey, see article in Source Material, quotation from p.190).

Paul concludes by stating that there exists a fundamental antagonism between the truth of the gospel of Christ and the delusion of the man of lawlessness: "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12). The antichristian apostasy is based on a deep-rooted hostility to the gospel of God and His Christ. In this encounter, humanity must make its ultimate decisions for or against Christ. According to the apostle, one's decision for Christ now reveals in principle the choice all have to make in the end-time between Christ and the antichrist. All history is governed by the spiritual controversy between God and Satan. The church age is characterized by the conflict

between the truth of the gospel of Christ and the lie of the antichrist.

The apostle Paul alerts the church therefore to be on guard against the deception of a powerful teacher of Christendom that will claim to speak in Christ's stead and who insists that his will alone is divine law. Paul warns not merely against a future counterfeit gospel and cultic worship, above all he points to the cosmic origin of this master deception: it is Satan's scheme and achievement (2 Thess. 2:9). For this supernatural dimension Paul could find support in the Scriptures. Daniel had disclosed a cosmic battle between God and Satan as the motivating power behind the religious conflicts on earth (see Daniel 10). Isaiah had pointed to the self-deifying Lucifer or Morningstar in heaven who works through rulers on earth (Isa. 14:12-14).

### **The Crowning Act of Deception**

Paul's prophetic perspective in 2 Thess. 2 indicates that the end-time will bring more and more supernatural signs of Satan, all supporting "the man of lawlessness", "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3). These last designations of the antichrist suggest that he will appear as an individual who stands in sharp contrast to "the Son of Man." This makes room for an overmastering delusion for man, Satan's impersonation of Christ and of His return to earth. Paul deliberately paralleled the appearances of the man of lawlessness and of Christ, each having his own parousia, each his own signs and miracles, each claiming worship. To all appearances Satan masquerades "as an angel of light" (see 2 Cor. 11:14). His supreme goal has ever been to claim the dignity and prerogative of God (2 Thess. 2:4). His ultimate sin is therefore the idolatry that he demands in worshiping him.

Paul emphasizes that the worldwide rejection of the truth of the gospel will prepare mankind for the ultimate deception and rebellion (2 Thess. 2:10-11; 1:7-8). At that point of the maturation of evil God withdraws His Spirit from all who refuse "to love the truth." As a consequence, there will be no longer any restraint to "the powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). Paul thus points to the end of human probation, when the final act of Satan begins. This scene is enlarged in Revelation 16:13-16, where the spirits of demons lead the inhabitants of the world to unite in rebellion against God, deceiving even all the civil rulers. One scholar sums up the resulting situation as follows: "With the ultimate rejection of the pleadings of the Spirit of God would come the dissolution of civil law, and then the enactments of the 'man of lawlessness' would lead men to war against the holy" (D. Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Bib. Esch.*, p. 225).

In addition, one crowning act of deception still threatens humanity: the impersonation of Christ and His coming. We are placed on alert by these words of spiritual insight:

*Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (1:13-15). . . The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands, and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth (E.G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624).*

In summary: Paul's historical application of Daniel's antichrist visions forms an

indispensable interpretative link between Daniel and Revelation. Paul's structural outline in 2 Thessalonians 2 functions as the apostolic endorsement of the continuous-historical approach of Daniel's prophecies. Paul characterizes the coming Christian apostasy as a counterfeit cultic worship, authorized by a rival Messiah, that will rise within the Christian temple of God soon after the fall of Pagan Rome. The book of Revelation develops the theological theme of the antichrist in more detail as the Beast and his false prophet in Revelation 13-19.

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# Chapter VIII

## Introduction to the Book of Revelation

The last Bible book is quite different in style and composition from the other New Testament writings. It is ingeniously constructed, with an exceptional balance in its literary patterns. Their arrangement indicates the unity of the book. Such a composition forbids us to isolate any verse or section from the totality of Revelation. The Apocalypse is meant to be read as a whole, so that its movement from beginning till the end can make its full impact on our minds and hearts. While focusing on its end-time prophecies we need to be aware that we can appreciate their meaning only when we recover the internal movement and full perspective of the whole Apocalypse.

Because its literary arrangement and theological message are interwoven, a knowledge of its architectural design contributes substantially to our understanding of its message. John conveys its unity by his construction of a symmetrical pattern, an inverse parallelism called a chiasmus. This is first evident in the fact that the beginning (prologue) (Rev. 1:1-8) and the epilogue (Rev. 22:6-21) correspond to each other. And the seven promises to the churches (in Rev. 2-3) find their counterpart in seven end-time visions (each beginning, "I saw") in Rev. 19:11 -- 22:21. The first and last series of seven relate to each other as divine promise and fulfillment, the church militant and the church triumphant. Both units begin with a splendid Christophany (Christ-appearance): Rev. 1:12-18; 19:11-16. The symmetrical pattern extends to other duos, and they focus on one central section. Such a literary framework, "a truly monumental architecture" (J. Ellul), has been recognized by numerous scholars and has become an indispensable requirement to the understanding of Revelation. The form serves to clarify the meaning of the message of the Apocalypse.

One lesson learned from a growing consensus of critical studies is the conviction that Revelation as a whole is an apostolic-prophetic letter, addressed to the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, at any time and in any place. Therefore it is not legitimate to separate the seven letters of Rev. 2-3 from the following visions (Rev. 4-22). This inner unity of Revelation is widely recognized, as K. A. Strand reports: "Most expositors recognize that the description of the New Jerusalem and the new earth in the final chapters of Revelation recall (as fulfillment) the promises made to the overcomers in the messages to the seven churches in the initial chapters" (in *Symposium on Revelation*, F.B. Holbrook, ed., 1:31). Revelation promises the New Jerusalem on the new earth to all the followers of Christ in all churches.

Especially noteworthy is the movement from the church in John's time (Rev. 1-3) through the eventful Christian age (Rev. 12-13), until she safely enters the City of God in Paradise restored on earth (Rev. 21-22). First the risen Christ presents His assessment of the condition of the apostolic church in seven letters to seven churches (Rev. 2-3). But these messages are not intended for the primitive church only, as if the Lord of history was interested in that period alone. The promises of Christ in these letters show a significant progressiveness, pointing increasingly to His second coming. The messages of Christ's letters should be understood on more than one level. First as directed to the churches of the first century, then to each individual church member at any time during the church age, and last to the various conditions of the church during the Christian era. This predictive aspect of the seven letters was increasingly stressed by the historicist

interpreters (see L.E. Froom, PF IV: 848, 1118). Today all three aspects are recognized by modern Adventist expositors (see D. Ford, Crisis! , II: 264-308; C.M. Maxwell, God Cares, II: 89-132; R.C. Naden, The Lamb Among The Beasts, Chs. 4-5). Representative is this summary statement: "The seven letters, taken in order, march in step with the predominant experience of the Christian church during seven successive eras" (Maxwell, Ib., p. 93).

The letters are interrelated with the subsequent visions and illuminate each other with an increasingly urgency as history progresses. This progression is underlined by John's successive temple visions, which follow the sequence of the annual festivals in ancient Israel's tabernacle. The first temple visions in Rev. 1:12-16 and Rev. 4-5 portray the risen Lord as having fulfilled the spring feasts of Passover (1:5, 17-18) and . The Apocalypse then proceeds in the Temple vision of Rev. 8:2-6 to reveal Christ's long-term ministry in the series of the "seven Trumpets" (Rev. 8-9; 11), leading to Israel's Feast of Trumpets, the first of the fall feasts of Israel's religious year. The sequence of the fall festivals is meaningful: Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23; Num. 29). Richard M. Davidson points out:

*Just as the Feast of Trumpets (also called Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year), summoned ancient Israel to prepare for the coming day of judgment, Yom Kippur, so the trumpets of Revelation especially highlight the approach of the anti-typical Yom Kippur. (in Symposium on Revelation, I:123).*

The feast of Trumpets came as the climax of seven moon festivals. They formed the bridge between the spring festivals and the solemn Day of Atonement and the feast of Tabernacles. In Revelation the focus shifts gradually to the final judgment and to the earth restored when Jesus will tabernacle with His people. The seventh trumpet presents a temple scene that centers in the "ark of his covenant" (11:15, 19). In Israel's tabernacle the "ark" stood in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary and came into view only during the final cleansing ritual on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15). On that day Israel was judged and separated from her defiling sins through the scapegoat (Lev. 16:19, 22; 23:29, 30). Likewise, Rev. 10 announces that there will be no more time or delay when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet. Then "the mystery of God will be accomplished" (10:7).

In Rev. 15 we observe the cessation of the mediatorial work of Christ in the heavenly temple, followed by the retributive judgments of the seven last plagues (Rev. 16-17). In Rev. 19:1-10 we hear that the wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride "has come" (19:7).

Revelation 20-21 introduces the millennium of triumph for all who have died in the Lord (20:4-6). The New Jerusalem comes down on a renewed earth: "the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (21:3). This points to the glorious fulfillment of the feast of Tabernacles, when Israel celebrated her liberation and rejoiced before the Lord with the waving of palm branches (Lev. 23:40, 43). This imagery depicts the future salvation of the church of Christ from all peoples (Rev. 7:9-10; 15:2-4). We must relate the structure of the book to its progressive movement if we are to comprehend the meaning of Revelation.

The intentional meaning of Revelation is not merely to document a historic moment of the church in Asa Minor or to provide an apostolic encouragement for the church in crisis under Imperial Rome. Above all, it places every church in the testing light of the Lord's eyes, so that each church may know what He expects from His people. Thus, Christ places both His expectations and their responsibilities before all churches. This raises our awareness of the close connection between Christ and His people at all times. Jacques

Ellul expresses it this way:

*The Lord of the Church who is at the same time the Lord of history is not a God far off, inaccessible and incomprehensible; he is the one who speaks to his Church, he is the one who lives in history by a people (Apocalypse. New York: Seabury Press, ET 1977, p. 51).*

The various septenaries (series of sevens) such as the letters, seals, trumpets, and bowls with the last plagues, all contain special spotlights on end-time events. This recurring phenomenon indicates that the Apocalypse places a particular emphasis on the end-time period of the church and of the world. Ellen White expresses this larger view:

This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation . . . Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth's history, as well as to those living in the days of John (Acts of the Apostles, pp. 583, 584).

# Chapter IX

## The Purpose Of The Book Of Revelation

"The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1) states its purpose clearly at the beginning: "to show his servants what must soon take place." . . . "what is now and will take place later" (Rev. 1:1, 19). This means that the historical perspective of the book is not either the immediate present or the far future, but rather the entire history of the church from the author's time until the second advent. This makes Revelation a unique guide for the church at any time. It forms a sequel to the four Gospels which focus specifically on the first advent. Revelation is emphatically Christ-centered in its philosophy of history, calling Christ "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last" (Rev. 22:13). Its prophetic message is not merely foretelling the future course of church history. Its major concern is pastoral: to guide and console the believers in Christ Jesus in times of persecution, to encourage them to persevere in the true faith until the end, and to admonish and warn them against deception and false beliefs.

Revelation assures the "servants" of Christ that their Redeemer is in their midst at all times, because He walks among the seven heavenly "lampstands," which represent "the seven churches" (1:13, 20). Apparently these "seven churches" cannot be restricted to the literal number of seven local congregations in the Roman province called Asia Minor. Christ is Lord of all His churches in all history. These "seven churches" represent His worshiping church communities among all nations, from John's time until His return.

This Apocalypse or Revelation of Christ was not addressed to either Jews or Gentiles, but to His "servants" (1:1). They need the reassurance that the risen Lord remains closely connected with His new-covenant people and that He will prepare them for the final test and triumph of faith. God's cause on earth will be victorious over all antichristian powers. The kingdom of God will be fully realized in this world as His final act, to which the whole creation moves (Rev. 11:15; 21:1-5). Seven times Christ promises the "overcomer" in each church a specific reward of end-time salvation.

1. *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Rev. 2:6)*
2. *He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. (Rev. 2:11)*
3. *To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)*
4. *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations . . . I will also give him the morning star. (Rev. 2:26, 28)*
5. *He who overcomes will . . . be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

(Rev. 3:5)

6. *Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it . . . (Rev. 3:12)*
7. *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev. 3:21)*

Besides these promises, Revelation provides seven beatitudes for the present age to motivate each believer to persevere (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

Revelation is thus the book of hope, comfort, and inspiration for His church during her eventful journey through the ages. God has not promised smooth sailing, but a safe arrival! He is with us to the end of the age. Everything depends on who our King is. Our eternal security rests in His faithfulness. The Apocalypse is primarily a revelation of Christ Himself and of His covenant faithfulness; He is "the faithful Witness" (1:5).

## **Christ as Our Divine Judge**

No book in the New Testament emphasizes the glory and rulership of the risen Christ as does Revelation. John's inaugural vision (1:12-20), introduces Christ as the celestial Messiah by designating Him as "One like a son of man" (1:13), an apocalyptic expression adopted from Daniel's vision of the Messianic King-Judge (Dan. 7:13, 14). The glorified Messiah is not only the giver of Revelation, but also its central theme (1:7). As the exclusive Mediator of our salvation, He can truthfully say: "I am the Living One, I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (1:18). He holds in His right hand the "seven stars," which are the "angels of the seven churches" (1:16, 20). As the Head of the Church, He "searches hearts and minds" at every stage of church history. He "will repay" all believers according to their deeds (2:23; 22:12). To Him is committed the Messianic judgment of all people in the world (1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21). He is the divine Warrior who will vindicate His faithful remnant people. As King of kings and Lord of lords he shall crush all of the antichristian powers at the end of time (12:5; 17:14; 19:11-16).

The lofty titles and divine prerogatives which in the Old Testament were reserved for God alone, are now applied to Christ in Revelation. It portrays the glorified Christ in Rev. 1:14-15 with features borrowed from the God-appearance in Dan. 7:9. As the Ancient of Days was portrayed in Daniel's visions, so Christ has head and hair "as white as snow" and eyes like blazing fire (Dan. 7:9; 10:6). Just as Yahweh's eyes ranged throughout the whole earth in the Old Testament (Zech. 4:10), so the "seven eyes" of Christ or the sevenfold Spirit is sent out "into all the earth" (Rev. 5:6). Just as God searched the hearts and minds of His covenant people (Jer. 17:10; Ps. 7:9), so now does Christ examine and evaluate His church (Rev. 2:23). While Yahweh's garments are said to be sprinkled with the blood of His avowed enemies (Isa. 63:1, 2) this portrayal is applied to Christ's coming as the King-Judge in Rev. 19:13. As Moses called Israel's God "Lord of lords" (Deut. 10:17), this applies now to Christ (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). In short, Revelation consistently transforms the Old Testament theophany or Yahweh-appearance into a Christophany or sublime Christ-appearance. The risen Lord Jesus has assumed the authority and the executive power of the Almighty One (Rev. 19:15, 16; 22:1; compare Matt. 28:18). He is one with the Father and the executor of the Father's will. Revelation portrays Christ with

more than thirty allusions to the Judgment vision of Daniel 7. This central vision of Daniel functions as the immediate source for the portrayal of the final mission of Christ as the "One like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13, 14) in Rev. 14:14-16. Thus John expresses in pictorial language the Messianic fulfillment of God's judgment day. Revelation 14 confirms what Christ had declared earlier to Jerusalem's leaders:

*The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father... And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:22, 27).*

### **Christ as Man's Only High Priest**

John sees his exalted Lord standing among the heavenly lampstands, "dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest" (Rev. 1:13). This long robe suggests His present role as our Mediator (see Exod. 28:4, 5; 39:5). The "golden" sash or belt around his waist is also part of Daniel's vision of a heavenly Messenger who gave him the understanding of God's message (Dan. 10:5, 6). The apocalyptic portrayal of Christ in Rev. 1 teaches the church that her Lord is now fulfilling in reality what Israel's priesthood had foreshadowed. The living Christ hears our confessions and forgives our sins with absolute assurance. Christ has replaced all earthly priesthoods by establishing the validity of His present Priesthood (see Heb. 10:9). Christ therefore is more than even Melchizedek, the King-Priest, to whom Abraham paid a tenth of the spoils of war (Heb. 7:1-10). Christ's priesthood is effective, because of His "power of an indestructible life," confirmed by a solemn oath of God (Heb. 7:16-21; Ps. 110:4). And because of this divine oath, "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22). The risen Christ is now "able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25). This apostolic message of consolation is dramatically confirmed by John's inaugural vision in Rev. 1. Here Christ begins to speak in more specific terms to His church by means of seven letters that He dictates to John (see Rev. 2-3).

Not John, but Christ, speaks from heaven to encourage and admonish seven churches beginning with Ephesus and through them to all of His churches everywhere, at any time. Christ obviously considers seven specific churches at the end of the first century representative of seven ecclesiastical conditions that exist in His expanding church till the end. In other words, Christ considers these seven original church communities as prototypes of the future church development in the entire world. In these seven epistles of Rev. 2-3 Christ speaks today to the Christian churches. The fact that Christ ends each letter with the same appeal: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches [plural]" is important (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 14, 22). This sevenfold appeal to all churches proves that Christ includes every church. In this way Christ still shepherds His followers. His concern is to save and sanctify His sinful churches. He does not immediately reject any of them, but gives them time to correct their ways, their doctrines, and sacraments. Christ knows perfectly everyone's heart and mind (Acts 1:24; 15:8; Mark 2:8; John 21:17). He reveals to His servants that the only way they can have security lies in remaining connected with Him by faith. They can be the light of the world solely by reflecting His light, and the purity of His truth. The assurance of the risen Lord is that His people will be ready for His coming and that they will shine forth their light with Pentecostal power to the whole world (see Rev. 18:1).

# Chapter X

## Interpretative Keys Within Revelation

The book of Revelation is dated around the year A.D. 96, when the New Testament Gospels have ended. The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all speak about the first appearance of Messiah Jesus and focus on His life, mission and death, resurrection and ascension. Then the four Gospels end. But the book of Revelation begins after His resurrection, with Christ exalted at the right hand of the Father performing His work of intercession in preparation for His return. Thus Revelation focuses on His mediation for the church during the Christian era and on His final work of judgment and deliverance as the introduction to His second advent. Revelation is the complement of the four Gospels. It is the only book revealed by Jesus Christ directly from heaven. He calls it His own "testimony for the churches" (Rev. 22:16). The book of Revelation is, in a special sense, the testimony of Jesus and the testimony of the Spirit (Rev. 22:17; 2:7, 11).

What keys do we have to decode its apocalyptic symbolism? The first interpretative key is offered in virtually every verse of the book. The Greek edition of the New Testament indicates that the Apocalypse contains more than six hundred allusions to the writings of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible remains the foundation and root of the New Testament and only when we keep both Testaments together, do we have a complete Bible. To a large extent the Old Testament is prophecy and the New Testament proclaims its fulfillment in Christ and in His people. We cannot fully understand the one without the other. The fact that Revelation refers over six hundred times to Old Testament history and its Hebrew images, suggests that the older Testament is the first key to unlock the book of Revelation. In her book *Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White states, "In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end" (p. 585). That is a profound and challenging theological statement! All the other books of the Bible, 65 in total, find their hidden meaning and consummation in Revelation. This means that the books of Moses, the Prophets, even the Psalms, find their ultimate application in the book of Revelation. It means that all the historic acts of God in salvation and judgment will happen again on a worldwide scale.

The fact that the older Testament is the key to Revelation has been recognized today as a breakthrough in the history of apocalyptic studies. Nevertheless, some interpreters still try to explain the book of Revelation by itself, by literalizing its words and images as if they present photographs of future events. Consequently, the focus shifts immediately away from Christ to the Jewish people in the Middle East and to other political events. Mount Zion in Rev. 14 is applied to the literal mount in Jerusalem. This approach is called literalism. Others have gone to the opposite extreme, called allegorism, whereby every symbol is explained speculatively, without any biblical norm. That approach is called allegorism. Both literalism and allegorism are unjustified speculations.

The only key that unlocks the hidden meaning of Revelation is the key indicated by the book itself. Its symbolic images and terms are borrowed from the Old Testament. There we find the meaning of the apocalyptic symbols in their original covenant setting and salvation history. In the Old Testament we find the prototypes in history of what God will do in the future. God reveals the future by pointing us to how He acted in the past. He tells the people of Christ that they have a high calling and a great future, because of what



God promised in the past.

Revelation stresses its authority by declaring it is "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him" (Rev. 1:1). Who is meant by "God"? The covenant God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That covenant God is now speaking again "to show His servants what must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1). These words, "what must soon take place", with the exception of the word "soon," are all quoted from Daniel. Standing before Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, Daniel said: "There is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come" (Dan. 2:28). These words are repeated as the theme of Revelation. However, John adds the word "soon" (Rev.1:1). This tells us that Christ's first coming brought the expectation of Daniel's hope closer to their historical realization.

To appreciate the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, we should know at what time he received his vision. Daniel lived during the Neo-Babylonian empire (604-539 B.C.). In Daniel 2 he reveals a vision that God gave king Nebuchadnezzar. It consisted of a metallic statue, made of four metals, a golden head, silver breast and arms, bronze belly and thighs, and iron legs, with feet made a mixture of iron and clay, a very brittle foundation for such a heavy statue. This is a revelation of how God sees the course of world history, with humanity standing on feet of clay. In Daniel's motion picture, however, God is acting a part. Twice it is stressed that a stone was cut out "not by human hands" (Dan. 2:34, 45), indicating that man has nothing to do with the world's final destiny. At God's appointed time a rock will come from heaven, heading for planet Earth. The statue symbolizes our world in its political history since the time of the prophet Daniel. Starting with Babylon, it presents the succeeding empires of Medo-Persia and Greece-Macedonia, to be followed by the iron rule of the Roman empire which lasted from 164 B.C. till A.D. 476. After that would come a "divided" world (Dan. 2:41). Today there is no world government, although some have attempted to do it by force during the last centuries, including Charles the Great, Napoleon and Hitler. Our present world situation is strikingly represented by the feet of the prophetic statue. We are witnesses of the advanced stage of world history, as outlined in Daniel 2.

God is the Lord of history, and through Christ He will bring it to its ordained conclusion. When Christ comes the second time, He will end all political power structures, just as Daniel predicted in 2:44, 45. God is not a spectator of world history, He actively guides and directs the flow of history toward its destiny, whether we help Him or not. He reassures us in Revelation, "I am making everything new" (Rev. 21:5).

No community can restore Paradise. Revelation opens with the guarantee that Daniel's prediction will "soon" come to pass! There is a new timeliness in the Apocalypse not present in Daniel.

A further indication of this urgency of the end of time is the fact that the scroll of Daniel was "sealed" until the time of the end (Dan. 12:4). Daniel 8 explicitly was sealed, for "the distant future" (8:26). Daniel did not write for his own time. His visions were sealed because they were intended for future generations. On the other hand, the book of Revelation closes with this direct command: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near" (Rev. 22:10). Daniel's sealed book is therefore gradually unsealed in Revelation. This means that one cannot understand the book of Revelation without its roots in Daniel. This is confirmed by John's first statement of the cardinal theme of the Apocalypse:

*"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who*

*pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen" (1:7).*

By itself, this imagery does not release its deeper significance. The key to unlock its meaning is found in the Hebrew Bible! The primary Old Testament taproot of Rev. 1:7 is Daniel 7. Daniel 7 constitutes the leading apocalyptic vision for the book of Revelation. Daniel himself was deeply moved by what he heard and saw. His new vision amplified his earlier prophetic forecast in Daniel 2. The four metals of the statue in Dan. 2 are now portrayed as four unusual beasts that come out of the sea of nations as world empires, sequentially. Then a new revelation follows, which develops the meaning of the Stone from heaven that smashes the statue.

Daniel writes: "In my vision at night, I looked, and there before me was one like the son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" (Dan. 7:13). This specific portrayal forms the source of John's proclamation in Rev. 1, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7). In Daniel's vision that man-like, celestial Being went on to approach "the Ancient of Days," "with the clouds of heaven" (Dan. 7:13).

*He then was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan. 7:14).*

This heavenly coronation of the celestial Messiah in Dan. 7 expands the climactic event in Dan. 2, where the rock "cut out without human hands" smashes into the statue, pulverizes it and blows it away so that nothing is left except the rock, which becomes Paradise restored. Thus in both Daniel 2 and 7 the prophet assures us that the kingdom of God will be restored on earth. There is something very important developing between Daniel 2 and 7. The stone of Daniel 2 becomes the Messiah, portrayed as "One like a son of man," in contrast with the ungodly "beasts" in Daniel 7. This astounding revelation discloses that in heaven there is another celestial figure besides God the Father, one of divine appearance, who comes on a celestial cloud chariot: "with the clouds!" These must represent the clouds of heavenly angels. The imagery of "clouds" indicates a divine appearance (see Exod. 13:21; 14:19; 19:16; 40:34; Lev. 16:2; Num. 9:15-23; Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Deut. 33:26). The divine Messiah will come to judge and restore (Dan. 7:22). The Father gives Him all dominion over the earth. This Messiah will rule our world on behalf of God. Daniel states:

*Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High (Dan. 7:27).*

Here we read that the saints will receive the kingdom of God. That "kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him," the divine Son of Man (Dan. 7:27). Thus God transfers in heaven all the authority and sovereign power over our planet to the divine Messiah.

The celestial Son of Man must proceed from heaven to earth. At that point Revelation 1 continues and advances Daniel 7. Revelation 1 announces: "Look, he is coming with the clouds" (Rev. 1:7). He will "soon" come to our earth: "and every eye will see him." This is not a spiritual, invisible coming, because even the unbelievers all over the world will see Him coming (Rev. 1:7). It signifies the glorious reappearance of the risen Lord Jesus Christ (see also Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 9:28).

For the Jews, the Messiah was primarily a political and military figure. Jesus did not want

to confirm this Messianic expectation (John 6:15). He distanced Himself from the prevailing Messianic image and chose a symbol from the Old Testament that was not loaded with misinterpretation. Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man." He changed Daniel's expression of "One like a Son of Man" to a more explicit Messianic term. Christ called Himself repeatedly "the Son of Man", in fact, seventy-seven times in the four Gospels.

The phrase "the Son of Man" does not mean that Jesus was merely a man. Christ explains His self-designation from the vision of Daniel 7: "To show you that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins, I say to you, Rise" (Mark 2:10). Here Christ calls Himself "the Son of Man." As the Danielic Son of Man He has the authority to forgive sins. No Levitical priest ever said, "I forgive your sins." There is no Protestant pastor who claims, "I forgive your sins." Only Roman Catholic priests claim, "I forgive your sins" ("Ego te absolvo").

According to Scripture only God can forgive our sins (Ps. 32:5; Isa. 43:25). Thus, when the Son of Man of Daniel 7 comes to forgive sins, the phrase "Son of Man" means celestial Messiah or "Son of God" (see John 5:27). Only in the light of Daniel 7 can we understand that the Son of Man is a divine Messiah with authority equal to God the Father.

When Revelation emphasizes that Christ is coming again soon, this is good news for the followers of Jesus. He will come to execute His judgment on the wicked. If we are "in Christ" by faith, we have nothing to fear, because Christ has already freed us from divine condemnation (see Rom. 8:1). In fact, we must welcome and long for the divine Judge, as the book of Psalms teaches. In Psalm 96 all the trees of the forest "sing for joy", because God comes to judge the earth in righteousness (Ps. 96:11-13).

Revelation proclaims that everyone on earth will witness His second coming, even those who "pierced Him." This expression clearly refers to the death of Christ. Jesus was pierced by a spear of a Roman soldier. From Jesus' body flowed water and blood (John 19:34, 37). But in a certain sense all the major opponents of Christ Jesus in history are included in "those who pierced Him," by means of the "spears" of their words and actions. This phrase also has a taproot in the Old Testament. The prophet Zechariah had previously predicted that Jerusalem would "pierce" her own Shepherd Messiah and then all the tribes of Israel would mourn for Him (Zech. 12:10-14; cf. 9:9; 13:7). The fulfillment of Zechariah's predictions began at the first appearance of Christ, during His triumphal entry in Jerusalem as her King Messiah (see Matt. 21:4, 5). One week later Jesus announced that all His sheep would now be scattered, as Zechariah had predicted (see Matt. 26:31). Zechariah foretold that Jerusalem would reject and "pierce" her Messiah:

*"They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son" (Zech. 12:10).*

He stressed that the twelve tribes of Israel would "mourn bitterly" (Zech. 12:12-14). This national mourning has not been realized yet in the Jewish nation. Revelation 1 makes this expanded application:

*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen (Rev. 1:7 RSV).*

This means that all the peoples of the earth will mourn in despair at the second advent,

"because of Him." Revelation develops this scene more dramatically in its subsequent visions (see Rev. 6:15-17; 14:14-20; 19:11-21). The importance of this culmination point in the Apocalypse is underscored by Jesus' prophetic words in the Gospel of Matthew.

*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory (Matt. 24:20).*

Because "every eye" will see Him and "all tribes" or peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him, no one who rejects Christ in the final generation will be able to hide from this glorious King-Judge on the last day.

Summing up the findings of this investigation, the Apocalypse discloses two specific interpretative keys to unlock its symbolic images. The first key is that its imagery is borrowed from the older Testament, the Hebrew Bible. This maintains the continuity of God's covenant with His true Israel. God's word has not been annulled because of the rebellion of Israel. God's Messiah has appeared in Israel and fulfilled His mission (see Mark 10:45 and John 19:30). The second key to understand Revelation is the gospel truth found in the four New Testament Gospels: the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of prophecy. This means that all the Old Testament terms and images of the old covenant are now recast in the Christ-centered imagery of the new covenant. A Roman Catholic scholar was so impressed by John's "Christian re-reading of the Old Testament" he concluded: "It seems now that this deliberate use of the Old Testament, which the Apocalypse author makes, should be studied more carefully than has been the case so far" (André Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*. Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1965, p. 79). The multiple connections of the Apocalypse with the Old Testament must be studied, not to show how John ingeniously adapted the Hebrew symbols and prophecies, but in order to understand in what way the God of Israel will consummate His promises of the old covenant through Christ and His new-covenant people.

# Chapter XI

## The Literary Composition Of Revelation

The Apocalypse contains a detailed architectural design in its literary construction, which until recently has been overlooked. One modern scholar states that "the key to understanding a work is its literary form" (A. Y. Collins. *The Apocalypse*, p. x). While the Apocalypse is appreciated as a work of poetry and is considered an ingenious artistic poem, John did not compose his book for the sake of art. The purpose was to "highlight various aspects of the book's theological message" (K. Strand, in *Symp. on Rev. I:35*). This implies that the literary design is an essential part of John's teaching. C. Mervyn Maxwell even concludes that the symmetrical pattern of Revelation provides "one of the most helpful possible keys for unlocking the book's meaning" (*God Cares*, II:54).

The interrelatedness of literary form and theological content requires the reader to pay careful attention to the structure of the book. It discloses some inherent guidelines for interpreting Revelation. John's Apocalypse is construed according to the pattern of an inverse parallelism, comparable to the corresponding arms of a lampstand or menorah, of which the arms on the left side parallel those on the right. This symmetrical design divides the Apocalypse into two main divisions, suggesting a two-fold theme of the book: Christ's sustaining presence and His glorious second advent (Rev. 1:7-8, 17-18; 22:12-13). Kenneth A. Strand concludes:

The first major part of the book (chs. 1-14) deals with the era in which the Alpha and Omega is the protector and sustainer of His people in spite of trial and persecution that may come their way. The second major part of the book, beginning with chapter 15, deals with eschatological judgments that cluster around and center in the consummation of the age: Christ's second advent (in *Symp. on Rev.*, I:30).

The Apocalypse can be divided differently, if points of view other than the close of probation are applied. One could see the end-time visions begin already in chapter 10, with regard to heaven's final call for a people that will stand firm against the antichristian empire. But the fact remains that the book is arranged in two major divisions that correspond to each other. The first indication of this literary pattern is the parallel nature of the Prologue (1:1-8) and the Epilogue (22:6-21). Both sections speak of an angel, sent by God to show His servants "the things that must soon take place" (1:1 and 22:6). Both parts contain the same beatitude for the hearers of John's prophecy (1:3 and 22:7). Furthermore, Rev. 1:2 explains that the book contains "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus"; the epilogue concludes, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches" (22:16 NIV). Both sections mention the central theme of the return of Christ (1:7 and 22:7, 12, 20). Both times we read that "the time is near" (1:3; 22:10). In the prologue, God is called the Alpha and the Omega (1:8), while the epilogue describes Christ as the Alpha and the Omega (22:13). In addition, both sections mention the Spirit as part of the Godhead (1:4-5 and 22:6, 9, 16, 17).

These correspondences reveal that the Prologue and the Epilogue form a deliberate pattern of counterparts or parallels. This is the initial indication of an intentional

parallelism within the Apocalypse.

The second set of striking counterparts is found in Rev. 2-3 and Rev. 21-22. Seven letters in Rev. 2-3 contain specific promises to the Church Militant. These promises return in Rev. 21-22 as being fulfilled in John's vision of the New Jerusalem in Paradise restored. For example, Christ promises the "tree of life" in Paradise (2:7), while Rev. 22:2 shows its fulfillment. The promise of escaping "the second death" (2:11) is realized in Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:4, 8. The promise of receiving the "Morning Star" (2:28) returns in Rev. 22:16 as fulfilled in Christ. The "book of life" (3:5) returns in Rev. 21:27 as the Lamb's book of life. The promise of becoming a "pillar in God's temple" (3:12) with the inscription of the names of God and of Christ and of the New Jerusalem (3:12) is realized in Rev. 21:7; 21:10, 22; 22:4. A place with Christ on His throne (3:21) is seen fulfilled in Rev. 20:4; 22:3-5. These promises to the church in Rev. 2-3 return in Rev. 21-22 as promises fulfilled in the Church Triumphant. These intentional correspondences show that the full understanding of one part requires the integration of its counterpart. The seven letters of Christ in Rev. 2-3 therefore cannot legitimately be divorced from the rest of the book. Rev. 2 and 3 deal with the struggling church, while Rev. 21-22 assure us of her safe arrival in the New Jerusalem. All parts of the first division of the book (chs. 1-14) are anticipatory of the second division. As mentioned in the Introduction, there is a noticeable progression of time between the two main divisions of Revelation.

The third major parallelism can be observed between the Throne visions of Rev. 4-6 and of Rev. 19-21. Both sections begin with an open heaven in which twenty-four elders and four living beings worship God seated on His throne (see Rev. 4:1, 4, 9; 5:13, 14; 19:1, 4). Both units portray a Rider on a white horse, thus mutually explaining the beginning and completion of the gospel mission (6:2; 19:11) and again portraying progress in time. This time dimension is impressively portrayed by means of the souls of the martyrs in Rev. 6 and Rev. 19-20. During the fifth seal John hears the martyrs cry out, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:10). In Rev. 19 he hears the victorious song: "Hallelujah! . . . true and just are his [God's] judgments . . . He has avenged on her [the great prostitute] the blood of his servants" (19:2). Rev. 20:4 shows how the martyrs are vindicated. This is further evidence of the continuous progression of salvation history between Rev. 4-6 and 19-20. The justice requested in Rev. 6 becomes justice granted in Rev. 19-20.

A fourth symmetrical parallelism can be detected in two judgment series: the sequence of the seven trumpets in Rev. 8-9 shows striking correspondences with the sequence of the seven bowls (or plagues) in Rev. 16. Both prophetic series portray judgments of God and use identical symbols. Both sections adopt the Hebrew exodus motif with its plague-judgments that reveal the Kingship of Israel's God. It becomes apparent, however, that the plagues of Rev. 16 are more intensive and extensive than the restricted plagues, which affect only one-third of the world. The bowls represent God's ultimate judgments on the last generation of a rebellious world. Their setting is after probationary time has ended (Rev. 15:7, 8). This confirms the literary composition of the book, in which the trumpets are placed in the historical division, while the bowls are strictly in the Last-Judgment division. The clear progression of time implied between the trumpet and the bowl judgments reveals the merciful character of God, who is "slow to anger" (Exod. 34:6), in the gradual rise of the intensity of the judgments. The trumpets of Rev. 8-9 form the warning types during the Christian age, of the merciless judgments in the last plagues of Rev. 16, to be poured out at the end of the age.

Finally, the prophetic vision of Rev. 12 shows some striking parallels with the judgment on

Babylon in Rev. 17. Both visions portray a symbolic "woman" (12:1; 17:1) and a seven-headed beast with ten horns (13:1; 17:3). Again we notice advance in time in these prophetic sequences. The "crowns" of the dragon are shifting from the seven heads to the ten horns between Rev. 12 and 13. In Revelation 17:10 we hear that five of the seven wicked powers "have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." Development in time is thus stated emphatically here.

The demarcation line between the historical era and the apocalyptic Judgment era may be seen at the end of Revelation 14. Revelation 15 begins with the announcement that the heavenly mediation in the Temple of God has ended. Consequently, Rev. 1-14 cover the Christian era by means of various progressive cycles of prophetic sequences.

Each prophetic sequence in Revelation will be understood better if its corresponding counterpart in the other division of the book is taken into account. For instance, the meaning of the mysterious chapter 17 (with its judgment on the beast with seven heads) can be understood adequately only in the perspective of the gradual fulfillment of Rev. 12-13, where this beast is portrayed in its historical rise and development as the antichrist.

These examples of literary correspondences between the two main divisions of the Apocalypse imply an inherent principle of interpretation: every prophetic unit must be related to its own division and theological theme, either the historical era of the church (Rev. 1-14) or the future judgment era after probationary time has ended (Rev. 15-22). The progression between the two divisions leads us to interpret the trumpets and the seals as prophetic sequences covering church history, while the bowls are portrayed as specific end-time judgments. Some moral exhortations within the Judgment division can occasionally be found; e.g. Rev. 17:9-12; 16:15; 18:1, 4; 20:6; 19:9. This would place the Millennium in Rev. 20, in the future age, after probation time has ended (Rev. 15).

Understanding the full scope of prophecy and fulfillment requires a careful relating of the corresponding parts in both divisions. This procedure follows the architectural design of the Apocalypse. Thus by interrelating theology and composition, Revelation discloses the key to its understanding. It is therefore not valid to isolate any verse or section from the total arrangement of the book.

## **Structural Analysis**

Many expositors have presented detailed outlines of the structure of the Apocalypse. They divide the book into five, six, or seven series of visions. Some divide each of these further into seven units or septenaries, after the example of the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. M. C. Tenney and others distinguish within the self-contained series of Rev. 12-14 seven symbolic "personages" (Woman, Dragon, Child, Michael, Sea-beast, Land-beast, Lamb) and within Rev. 21-22 seven "New Things."

It seems best, however, to concentrate on the meaning of John's explicit septenaries of the churches (Rev. 2-3), the seals (Rev. 6), the trumpets (Rev. 8-9), and the bowls (Rev. 16). Each series of seven contains a complete sequence of its own. Remarkable, however, after the sixth seal, after the sixth trumpet, after the sixth bowl, there is a special intermission with a spotlight vision, intending to enlarge on the preceding events in each chain, with pastoral concerns for the end-time people of God. C. M. Maxwell calls these parenthetical visions "scenes of end-time assignment and assurance" (God Cares, II:61). These pastoral interludes belong to the most meaningful and comforting visions of

Revelation: Rev. 7; Rev. 10-11 and Rev. 16:15. These end-time passages require our special attention.

The three septenaries all close with the dramatic advent of Christ in judgment (6:12-17) or the signs of His holy war against the wicked (11:19; 16:17-21). These apocalyptic endings of each chain indicate that the three series are not three chronological sequences, each following the other. Rather they repeat the same historical sequence viewed from different perspectives. Each time the next septenary intensifies the focus on the final events, as in a spiral staircase. This creates an increasing urgency in the Apocalypse. Robert H. Mounce explained: "Each new vision intensifies the realization of coming judgment. Like a mounting storm at sea each new crest of the wave moves history closer to its final destiny" (The Book of Revelation, p. 46). We need to recognize the literary style of recapitulation in Revelation. This principle of repetition and enlargement was already present in Daniel's outline prophecies (Dan. 2; 7; 8; 11). John's style of recapitulation and intensification thus has adopted the literary style of Daniel's apocalyptic book.

John announces, in both the Prologue (1:2) and the Epilogue (22:6), that the theme of the Apocalypse is: "things which must shortly take place" (NKJV; NASB). This he borrowed directly from the book of Daniel (see 2:28, 29, 45, in the Greek Versions), with the exception of the term "shortly" or "soon," which John has added now. The book of Daniel also served as the model for John's theological theme: the great controversy between Christ and His church, on the one hand, and Satan and his antichrist powers on the other hand. Like Daniel, John's emphasis is on the outcome of the conflict, the cosmic-universal judgment and the subsequent restoration of the kingdom of God on earth. George K. Beale has pointed out: "The idea of cosmic, eschatological judgment is not a major theme of any of the Old Testament books, except Daniel" ("The Influence of Daniel upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 27:4 [1984] 414). One may conclude that Revelation represents the Christ-centered development of Daniel's prophecies. André Feuillet even called Revelation "the book of Daniel of Christianity" (L'Apocalypse, p.65). The repeated allusions to Daniel 2 in Revelation suggest that John's Apocalypse intends to be the continuation and further outworking of Daniel's prophecies.

We observe that the prophetic cycles of the seals (chs. 4-7), the trumpets (chs. 8-11) and the bowls (chs. 15-16), surround the central core of the book of Revelation, which is found in chapters 12-14. This unit, within itself, portrays the major development of church history. It begins with Christ's first advent during the Roman Empire (Rev. 12:1-5), continues with the church in the wilderness for 1260 prophetic days or 3½ prophetic times (Rev. 12:6, 14), and ends with the remnant church at the end-time (12:17). Revelation 13 develops the theme of the Antichrist and its false prophet. Revelation 14 discloses God's ultimatum for a world united in rebellion against God. This final call for the restoration of true worship creates a faithful people of God before the judgment arrives (see Rev. 14:6-12). Thus the theme of the church as the community of salvation in the last days not only stands at the beginning and end of the book, but also constitutes the core of the Apocalypse.

This literary arrangement confirms the conviction that Revelation does not merely contain seven letters to seven churches (Rev. 2-3). The entire Apocalypse, as an indivisible whole, is directed as one apostolic-prophetic letter to the church universal. Through the symmetrical arrangement of Revelation, John emphasizes that the Christian community is the focal point of the Apocalypse. All symbolic terms and images are to be related to



Christ and His people as the true Israel of God. In the remaining chapters of Revelation, John uses the style of a contrasting parallelism between Babylon as "the great prostitute" (17:1) and New Jerusalem as "the wife of the Lamb" (21:9) and thereby teaches the relationship of these two final sections: (17:1--19:10 and 19:11--22:5). Together they dramatically portray the twofold theme of retribution and reward. The fact that both scenes, the fall of Babylon and the triumph of the New Jerusalem are introduced by the same judgment angel of Revelation 16 (see 17:1; 21:9), suggests that the whole section of Rev. 17-22 is the further outworking of the double harvest of the world in Revelation 14:14-20. We stand in awe before the ingenious design of John's Apocalypse and accept it as the creative artistry of divine inspiration. We concur with C. Mervyn Maxwell:

*Revelation is a book of internal artistry inspired by God and composed with loving and intelligent devotion. Even the form in which God and God's man, John, delivered it to us helps confirm our conviction that God cares. (God Cares, II:62).*

## Symmetrical Outlines

The most simple outline of Revelation that shows the literary composition of an inverse parallelism is the following arrangement:

- A. The Church Militant, Chs. 1-3
- B. Christ Begins the war, Chs. 4:1--8:1
- C. Trumpets Call to Repent, Chs. 8:2--11:19
- D. Overview of the Christian Age, Chs. 12-14
- C1 Probationary Time Ends: Retributive Judgments, Chs. 15-16
- B1 Christ Ends the War, Chs. 17-20
- A1 The Church Triumphant, Chs. 21-22

A more detailed outline of the literary composition of Revelation is offered by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Invitation to the Book of Revelation, Appendix).

- A. Prologue, 1:1-8
- B. The Community under Judgment, 1:9 - 3:22 (Seven Messages)
- C. God's and Christ's Reign, 4:1 - 9:21; 11:14-19 (Seven Seals and Seven Trumpets)
- D. The Community and Its Oppressors, 10:1 -11:13; 12:1 - 15:4
  - Prophetic Commissioning, 10:1 - 11:13
  - Enemies of the Community, 12:1 - 14:5
  - Eschatological Harvests, 14:6-20; 15:2-4
- C1 Judgment of Babylon/Rome, 15:1, 5 - 19:10
  - Seven Bowls, 15: 5 - 16:21
  - Rome and Its Power, 17:1-18

Judgment of Rome, 18:1 - 19:10

B1 Final Judgment and Salvation, 19:11 - 22:9

A1 Epilogue, 22:10-21

The most detailed outline of the chiastic structure of Revelation is presented by Kenneth A. Strand in his study, "The Eight Basic Visions" (see Symposium on Revelation, I:36-37). He also places Rev. 11:19 - 14:20 at the height of the historical visions.

In all outlines, the basic message of the Apocalypse stands out clearly at the center: Rev. 12-14 (enlarged by the interlude of Rev. 10-11). This main part of the book focuses on the church of the Lord Jesus as the worshiping community during the Christian age. Within this framework, the beacon light of prophecy shifts from the apostolic church to the church in the wilderness and finally dwells on the remnant community in the end of time (Rev. 12-14). A responsible study of end-time prophecies cannot be made by divorcing some selected portions of Scripture from their inalienable contexts. Revelation repeatedly directs its spotlight on the conclusion of the prophetic cycles of the seals and the trumpets, so that the perspective of each cycle is necessary to understand a specific end-time vision and its message of consolation.

This is all the more imperative in view of the fact that the apostles apply the Old Testament end-time prophecies to the entire inter-advent period and not merely to some specific segment of salvation history. For instance, Peter and Paul both see the end-time prophecy of Joel 2:32 already in the process of fulfillment in the apostolic church and in her worldwide missionary outreach since Pentecost (see Acts 2:16-21; Rom. 10:9-13). But John's Apocalypse applies Joel 2:32, in its final consummation, to the final generation of the followers of Christ (see Revelation 7 and 14:1-5; 17:12-14; 18:1-4; 19:11-21). This New Testament pattern of fulfillments points to the dynamics of a progressive fulfillment of Israel's end-time prophecies. Revelation constitutes the capstone of all prophetic revelations since Moses. The apocalyptic dimensions of all the other books of the Bible find their consummation in John's Apocalypse.

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# Chapter XII

## The Throne Vision of the Creator

The risen Christ now calls John to rise in the Spirit for a new vision and a look into heaven (Rev. 4:1). The Spirit allows him to see through an "open door" into the throne room of the Almighty. Such a privilege was granted to only a few of God's servants, such as Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. While worshiping in the temple of Jerusalem, Isaiah had seen God sitting on a heavenly throne, surrounded by seraphim and angels. These throne guardians were praising God singing: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).

While he was a captive in Babylon, the priestly prophet Ezekiel was also permitted to see the heavens opened. He reports that he saw the likeness of four living creatures supporting God's throne. These beings carried the throne like a chariot to Jerusalem in order to arraign the apostate city before the divine Judge. He describes the four beings as each having four wings and four faces that resembled the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezek. 1:5, 6, 10). Above the four throne bearers Ezekiel saw "the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal" (Ezek. 1:22 RSV), and, above that firmament, "the likeness of a throne" with someone seated on it who had the shape of "a human form" (1:26 RSV). Around the throne he saw a rainbow (1:28). The impact of this throne vision was so overwhelming that Ezekiel fell down on his face (1:28).

When John on Patmos describes his throne vision, he uses words that merge the two earlier visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel. Although he views the majesty of Israel's God, he only describes God by His appearance of bright shining "jasper" and red "carnelian." Further, he sees a halo, in the shape of a rainbow, with an emerald color around the throne (Rev. 4:3), as if to signify that divine mercy surrounds omnipotent justice. John also sees four living beings around the throne, resembling the ones that Ezekiel had described (Rev. 4:6, 7). However, John blends them with the seraphim of Isaiah's vision, because he says that each being had six wings instead of four (Rev. 4:8) and had one face instead of four (see Ezek. 1:6). He also says that the beings "were covered with eyes, in front and in back" (Rev. 4:6), a detail taken from the wheels of the throne of God in Ezek. 1:18. The Apocalypse shows a fluidity with the Hebrew imagery that defies our demand for photographic exactness.

An important feature in John's throne vision, not seen by the earlier prophets or in Jewish apocalyptic visions, is that of twenty-four smaller thrones around God's throne, on which are seated twenty-four elders [presbyteroi], "clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads" (Rev. 4:4 RSV). These "elders," mentioned twelve times in Revelation (4:4, 10; 5:8, 11, 14; 7:11-13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4), are apparently the fulfillment of Isaiah's apocalyptic forecast that Yahweh would manifest His glorious reign "before His elders" (Isa. 24:23 NASB). The number 24 has often been understood as the addition of 12 and 12, suggesting twelve representatives each of Israel and the Church, but it would be arbitrary to split the group of elders into two units. Jesus had said that His apostles were assigned to "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30; Matt. 19:28). John sees its fulfillment in his vision of the millennium in Rev. 20:4. The throne

visions with the elders in Rev. 4-5, however, intend to portray a heavenly activity in John's own time. This means that John himself could not be one of the heavenly elders. The twenty-four elders, furthermore, do not function as judges, but as royal priests that worship God with songs of praise, lay their crowns before the throne (Rev. 4:10), hold harps in their hands and present the prayers of God's people to God in their golden incense bowls (Rev. 5:8). In ancient Israel, twenty-four priestly orders from the tribe of Levi were set aside to minister the order of worship, and also twenty-four orders for the ministry of prophesying, with the accompaniment of lyres, harps, and cymbals (1 Chron. 24:4; 25:1, 6, 9-31). This suggests that John sees in heaven the representatives of the old covenant people of God.

In Revelation the "elders" are distinguished from the angels of God (5:11; 7:11) and constitute a new and unparalleled group before the throne of God. They form a major feature of the vision of Rev. 4. They may be seen as glorified men who have been victorious over sin and temptation. All died as victors. They have three characteristics that fulfill the promises of Christ to the faithful ones in Rev. 2-3: the thrones, white garments, and crowns [stephanoi] of victory (see 3:5, 11, 21). L.W. Hurtado comments: "Coming as it does [Rev. 4] right after these promises [of Rev. 3], the vision of the twenty-four elders seems to be assurance of the heavenly reality of the promises" (JSNT 25 [1985]:113; see Source Mat.). The fact that the elders are seated on thrones that surround the throne of God is of great significance:

*These figures are thus given a status and honor denied to the highest angels, even to the living creatures; but their status and honor correspond perfectly to the promises made just a bit earlier in Revelation to the elect (Hurtado, lb., p. 113).*

So they may be identified with the glorified saints that were raised from the dead shortly after Jesus' own resurrection (see Matt. 27:52, 53; Eph. 4:8). Ellen G. White explained: "Those favored, risen saints came forth glorified. They were chosen and holy ones of every age, from creation down even to the days of Christ. . . They bore testimony that it was by His mighty power that they had been called forth from their graves" (Early Writings, p. 184). "They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave" (Desire of Ages, p. 786). The presence of the elders in heaven expresses the conviction that Christ's exaltation has in fact happened.

As priestly assistants of Christ, they represent spiritual Israel and confirm the glorious reality of Israel's hope in the Messianic kingdom of God. One of the elders assures John in Hebrew terms that the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed" (Rev. 5:5). Their ministry in God's throneroom is a reassurance for the churches to remain faithful until the end. André Feuillet comments:

*The idea that the Old Testament saints are present throughout the unfolding of history, and that they take a lively interest in the destiny of Christians, is nothing short of magnificent. One could hardly be more eloquent in expressing the internal unity governing the whole history of salvation and the essential link uniting both testaments (Johannine Studies, p. 211).*

John further describes the dynamic presence of the Spirit of God by stating: "Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God" (Rev. 4:5; see 1:4). The prophet Zechariah had explained the seven lights on the temple menorah as "the eyes

of the LORD, which range throughout the earth" (Zech. 4:10). In the throne vision of Rev. 5, John connects this sevenfold Spirit with Christ as the Ruler of His Church (Rev. 5:6), thus stressing that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

### **The Heavenly Liturgy**

After John described what he saw in heaven, he begins to tell what he heard, the worship of God in a heavenly liturgy. He heard antiphonal songs of praise by different choirs. The four angelic beings or seraphs lead out in an exultant doxology, derived from the worship song of the seraphs in Isaiah 6,

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).*

The new aspect of this doxology is the added praise of God as the Lord of history: "Who was, and is, and is to come." This sequence of past, present, and future is intentionally formulated in distinction from the descriptions in 1:4 and 8, in order to proclaim God's rulership in history, from beginning to the final judgment (see Rev. 21:5). This characterization of Israel's God guarantees the promised destiny of humanity. The Creator will not abandon the works of His hands (Ps. 138:8). His "coming" determines the world's future. He is never just a spectator of human affairs, but actively involved in shaping them. The seraphs already praise God Almighty because He is the source and ground of all created reality, especially of His chosen people, the new Israel of God.

Whenever the seraphs lead out in their doxology of giving "glory, honor and thanks" to the Ruler of the universe, the twenty-four elders respond by falling down before the majesty on His throne. They lay their crowns before the throne and worship God with a meaningful acclamation of praise.

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created [literally: "they existed," RSV] and have their being [literally: "and were created," RSV]" (Rev. 4:11).*

The elders exalt God's worthiness, primarily because it was His will to design all things by His infinite wisdom (see Gen. 1) and to call forth all reality by His creative power. This Hebrew faith remained basic for the worship of God in the apostolic church (see Acts 4:24; 14:15; 1 Pet. 4:19).

The way in which the twenty-four elders address the Creator, as "our Lord and God" (Rev. 4:11), deserves special attention. Like his predecessors, emperor Domitian insisted that all people would worship him as "Dominus et Deus noster" ("our Lord and God"). Emperor worship was enforced in an annual ritual by the pagan priesthood in the Roman province of Asia Minor. Facing this threat of totalitarianism, John encourages the church to remain steadfast (see Rev. 2:10).

The description of a "rainbow" around God's throne (Rev. 4:2) expresses the faithfulness of the Creator to His promises. He is the faithful covenant-keeping God (Deut. 7:9), the "faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19). The heavenly throne vision intends to evoke our worship of God in the Spirit and in truth so that the church on earth may be one with the church in heaven. John's throne vision continues with the scene of Revelation 5.

# Chapter XIII

## The Enthronement of the Lamb of God

The purpose of John's Apocalypse is to unveil those things that "must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1, 19; 4:1). Surprisingly, what John now sees in his vision, deals not with what was going to take place on earth but with what was taking place in heaven! The reason for this remarkable focus in Rev. 4-5 can be found in the disclosure that the decisions in the heavenly throne room determine the course of human history, such as the rise and fall of human governments, but most of all, the ultimate destiny of the world. Daniel had pointed to God's sovereignty over mankind: "He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them" (Dan. 2:21; see also 4:17; 5:18, 26-28). Jeremiah assured the Jews, after the devastation of Jerusalem: "You, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation" (Lam. 5:19). Jesus submitted to the brute power of the Roman governor Pilate, but stated, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11).

Now the Ruler in heaven reveals to John an outline of the church age, with special stress on the final outcome as determined by His sovereign will. This future centers in Christ and His covenant people and is disclosed by means of the "scroll" vision in Rev. 5-7.

The divine scroll [*biblion*] in Rev. 5 is sealed with seven seals which no one in heaven and earth is worthy to break. This is highly significant. No created being, either an angel or saint, has the worthiness of the exalted Lord Jesus. Christ alone can disclose the judgments of God, by opening the seals (Rev. 6-7), and by the clarifying, subsequent visions of the Apocalypse. Christ thus gives meaning to world history. He has set mankind on course to a goal that God has predetermined in His throne room in heaven. The throne visions of John are thus fundamental to the entire Revelation. G. R. Beasley-Murray perceived this: "In this respect these chapters [Rev. 4-5] constitute the pivot of the structure which holds the book together, for the rest of the visions dovetail into this main structure" (Revelation, p. 108).

The emphasis on the divine scroll in God's right hand expands the focus from God as the Creator in Rev. 4 to God as the Redeemer of His creation. The throne vision in Rev. 5 unveils the manner in which God "is to come" (4:8) in human history to accomplish His purpose. The Majesty on the throne has in His right hand a scroll, written on both sides, and sealed with seven seals (Rev. 5:1). Some have seen here a similarity with the unrolled scroll that Ezekiel received from God, on which were written on both sides "words of lament and mourning and woe" (Ezek. 2:9,10). Others see a more fitting parallel with the scroll of Deuteronomy which, as the covenant book, was to be given to a newly crowned king in Israel (see Deut. 17:18-20; 2 Kings 11:12). In his dissertation, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, Ranko Stefanovic draws this comprehensive conclusion:

*With the taking of the biblion, Christ has been committed the lordship over the world (cf. 1 Pet. 3:22; Phil. 2:9-11); the biblion would then signify the rightful transfer of the kingdom. In such a context, it has also a testamentary character, and it can be called the book of Christ's inheritance as well. Since the transfer of the kingdom refers to the recovering of the possession forfeited by sin, the biblion has all the qualities of the book of redemption or the title deed of sale. With the taking*

*of the bible the whole destiny of humankind is put into the hands of the enthroned Christ; hence it is indeed the heavenly book of destiny. On the basis of its contents he would judge, hence, the judgment book (p. 322).*

The content of this sealed scroll, describing the judgments of God on a hostile world, as appears from the following chapters, is placed in the hands of the risen Lord, the all-wise and almighty Christ (see Rev. 5:6). Revelation 5 assures that through Christ's victory on earth the kingdom of God will be restored (see Rev. 21:5).

*Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne (Rev. 5:5-7).*

One of the glorified saints in heaven explains that God's promises to Israel have found their fulfillment in the risen Lord. He refers to three essential Messianic prophecies and merges them into one proclamation of fulfillment: Gen. 49:9, 10 and Isa. 11:1-10; 53:7. "Nowhere else in the NT are the most significant Messianic royal terms and titles grouped together in association with Christ and his post-resurrection ministry as well as his sitting on the throne of the Father at his right side" (R. Stefanovic, *Ib.*, p. 318). But why was Christ Jesus alone deemed worthy? Why was God's plan for the restoration of all things made dependent on the moral worthiness of the Davidic Messiah and on His mission as the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:6)? W.C. Van Unnik explained this well:

*He has been tested in his sufferings and has gained the victory. The greatness of his work is described in vs. 9: from all nations he has ransomed slaves and he has made them, former slaves, from all peoples, even pagans (!), to be the holy people of God, priests and kings, the typical prerogative of Israel (Ex 19.5f.) (in his article "Worthy is the lamb," p. 460, see Source Mat.).*

John sees the crucified and risen Christ being exalted and enthroned in the heavenly throne room as the Ruler of history. The transfer of the sealed scroll from the Father to Christ makes Him the Lord over the developing history of the planet, since it is His task to open the seals of the scroll of man's destiny. Christ begins to execute the decrees for the world and the church. Human history with its final judgment is placed in the hands of the risen Lord. Without Christ, world history is an enigma, and without purpose. All heaven, therefore, burst forth with praise when Christ was declared worthy to receive the divine scroll of destiny:

*And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8).*

In response to the enthronement of Christ in heaven all seraphs and elders sang with adoration a "new song" to the Lamb of God:

*And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,*



10).

This song is "new" because the rightful King has now been enthroned. His triumph over sin, Satan, and death on earth is regarded in heaven as of decisive importance (see also Phil. 2:9-11). George Ladd clarifies: "If he had not come in humility as a suffering Savior, he could not come as conquering Messiah" (A Com. on the Rev. of John, p. 85). The song is new because it is based on the fact that the Lamb has been slain, and has proved to be worthy to break the seals of the scroll as if it were His own testament.

In another sense, the song of the seraphs and the elders is new, because it is based not only on past events, but also looks forward to the future of redeemed humanity: "and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). This means the faithful ones will be granted the privilege of sharing the reign of Christ (Luke 22:29, 30; Rev. 3:21). John sees the heavenly choir growing even larger when millions of angels join in with their doxology of seven-fold praise to the Lamb:

*In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12; cf. 1 Chron. 29:11-13, for Yahweh).*

The choir continues to grow until, finally, John sees all creatures in heaven, on earth and under the earth (the dead), adding their voices to the heavenly choirs in exaltation of both the Father and the Lamb: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing ..." (Rev. 5:13; see also Phil. 2:10, 11).

Here Christ receives the cosmic-universal recognition of His deity, because "every creature" worships God and the Lamb. In John's vision the circle of worshipers has been constantly enlarged. First the inner circle of the four seraphs, then were added the twenty-four elders, followed by the countless angels. Finally the outermost circle of all creatures in the universe join the adoration and praise of the majesty of God. This is the ultimate goal toward which history moves and which will be fulfilled in the end. Heaven anticipates this celebration of the reign of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22-27; 22:1-5). The church today can take heart from this assurance. Her best days are still to come. The kingdom of God will be restored. Bruce M. Metzger makes this application: "The author's primary purpose is not so much to describe the liturgy of heaven, as to give hope and a sense of victory to his people on earth in the struggle that lies ahead" (Breaking The Code. Understanding the Book of Revelation, p. 54). George Beasley-Murray rightly points out that "the important feature of the sealed scroll is not the judgments which accompany the opening of the seals [Rev. 6-9], but the supreme event to which they lead" (Rev., p. 123).

## **The Breaking of the Seals**

The throne vision of Revelation 5 does not portray the judgment scene of Daniel 7, as some assume. The differences between both visions are too marked. First, the intention of John's throne vision is to disclose the beginning of Christ's heavenly ministry and reign because of His enthronement as the risen Lord, the initiation of a new era of salvation, the Messianic age.

Daniel's vision portrays a judgment in heaven that inaugurates Christ's final ministry when the antichrist has ruled the earth for 3½ prophetic times (Dan. 7:8-11, 25-26). Jon Paulien states: "The judgment does not take place in chapters 4 and 5 when the seals have yet to

be opened" (in Symposium on Revelation, I:187).

Revelation 5 describes the ecstatic joy in heaven about Christ's self-sacrifice, resurrection and enthronement as the King-Priest in heaven, that enables Him to restore the kingdom of God on earth. Christ's acts of breaking the seven seals of the scroll resemble the ritual of the opening of a testament which in Roman culture was closed with seven seals (Th. Zahn, *Intro. to NT.*, III:394). When a testament was unsealed, it was read aloud before the original witnesses, and then executed. Zahn states:

*The document fastened with seven seals is an easily understood symbol of the promise and assurance by God to His Church of the future basileia [Kingdom]. This irrevocable disposition of his goods has long ago occurred, been documented and sealed, but not yet carried out. The inheritance is still laid up in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4), and the testament therefore not yet opened and executed (III:394).*

This comparison illustrates the significance of the opening of the divine scroll: it can be read and executed as a testament by Christ only after His sacrificial death. Each breaking of a seal by Christ unveils a new phase of the history of the church, until the sixth seal reveals the terrible day of judgment for all who have rejected the kingship of the Lamb.

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Th. Zahn

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# Chapter XIV

## Understanding The Seven Seals

### Revelation 7

Bible commentators frequently point to the parallel structure of the seven seals in Rev. 6 with Jesus' prophetic discourse in the Synoptic Gospels. G. Beasley-Murray speaks for many when he says, "No passage in the New Testament is more closely related to this element [seals] within the Book of Revelation than the eschatological discourse of the gospels, Mark 13 and its parallels (Matt 24, Luke 21)" (Revelation, p. 129). Placing the two prophetic sequences parallel to each other reveals that the seven seals present the same features and successive order as the Mount Olivet discourse.

Mark 13 (par.)		Revelation 6	
1. Wars	v.7; Matt. 24:6	War	v.2
2. International strife	v.8; Matt. 24:7	Strife	v.4
3. Earthquakes	v.8; Matt. 24:7	Famine	v.5, 6
4. Famines	v.8; Matt. 24:7	Pestilence	v.8
5. Persecution	v.9,11; Matt. 14:9	Persecutions	v.9, 10
6. Preaching of Gospel	v.10, 13; Matt. 24:14	Waiting	v.11
7. Eclipses, falling stars	v.24; Matt. 24:29	Eclipses, falling stars	v.12 v.13
8. Fear for the coming Christ	Luke 21:25 v.26; Matt. 24:30	Fear for the wrath of the Lamb	vv.15-17

This comparison shows that we must consider the successive seals in Rev. 6 as Christ's further unfolding of His earlier speech in which He had outlined to His disciples what would happen to them during their mission in the world. This means that the seals forecast not only the end-time judgments but also the Messianic judgments during the entire church age. In Matt. 24 Jesus adopted Daniel's apocalyptic style of repetition and enlargement. Twice Jesus started His outline with His own generation and then went quickly forward in history until the end of the church era: see Matt. 24:1-14 and 24:15-31. Jesus announced that the coming wars, famines, persecutions and apostasy would not immediately precede His return.

*When you hear of war and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. . .*

*They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.*

*Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:9, 24).*

He specifically cautioned against an imminent expectation:

*He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them" (Luke 21:8).*

If the seals further unfold Matthew 24, then the seals equally span the centuries of the entire Christian period. This historical perspective of the seals expresses the structural flow from the historical age to the final judgment in the book of Revelation.

## **The Significance of the Christian Era**

It is instructive to reflect on the meaning of Christ's forecasts of wars, disasters in nature, persecutions of the saints and increasing apostasy from truth, love and morals. The seals of Rev. 6 point to the significance of all history by placing the seals in an end-time perspective, that is, in the light of eternal destinies. Both church and world history receive their transcendental meaning from Christ's rulership and judgments (Rev. 5). He places man's history in the larger context of the spiritual controversy between God and Satan and their respective principles of government. This was recognized by the apostle Paul:

*For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men (1 Cor. 4:9 NKJV).*

The crucible of church history is the means by which Christ is sanctifying those that accept His Lordship and testimony of truth under the most adverse circumstances. On the other hand, He demonstrates on earth the bitter fruits of rebellion against Him, by sparing the lives of His enemies, from Cain onward. E. G. White offers this profound insight:

*Satan is constantly at work, with intense energy and under a thousand disguises, to misrepresent the character and government of God. With extensive, well-organized plans and marvelous power, he is working to hold the inhabitants of the world under his deceptions. God, the One infinite and all-wise, sees the end from the beginning and in dealing with evil his plans were far-reaching and comprehensive. It was his purpose, not merely to put down the rebellion, but to demonstrate to all the universe the nature of rebellion. God's plan was unfolding, showing both his justice and his mercy, and fully vindicating his wisdom and righteousness in his dealings with evil (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 78).*

Each calamity provides a new opportunity for fallen man to turn to God. Christ taught this lesson from events of His own time (see Luke 13:1-5; also John 9:2, 3).

In Israel's past God had sent four judgments on His rebellious covenant people: war, plague, famine, and death (see Lev. 26:23-26; Deut. 32:23-25, 42 ["My arrows"]; Ezek. 14:12-14, 21). But these judgments were never God's final judgment. These served as preliminary judgments, to motivate His wayward people to return to God (see Hos. 5:14, 15; 6:1-3). In this respect the Old Testament is also a lesson book for the church (1 Cor. 10:11).

Christ wants the church to realize that the coming judgments are still restricted by His

will. God remains in control even when His children die as martyrs. He also sets boundaries to the pale rider under the fourth seal (Rev. 6:8). Likewise do Rev. 12 and 13 assure that the antichrist is given no more than 3½ prophetic times, while the last rebellion is allowed just "one hour" (Rev. 17:12).

Revelation 5 teaches that the responsibility for God's judgments has been transferred to Christ. The apocalyptic seals, and by extension the trumpets and bowls, are all to be understood as Messianic judgments. The enthroned Christ is the Lord of history, both the Lion of Israel and the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:5, 6). This means that the rejecters of the blood of the Lamb will have to face the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16, 17). By faith in Christ men may trust that the Christian era has meaning, because He moves humanity forward to its glorious destiny.

## **Unrolling the Scroll of Providence**

The seals in Rev. 6 unfold the enthronement vision of Christ as the slain Lamb in Rev. 5. The Lamb alone breaks the seals of the scroll of providence. Each time Christ opens one of the first four seals, one of the four seraphs calls out "in a voice like a thunder:" "Come!" In response four horses come up consecutively, each in a different color: white, red, black and pale. These horses carry different riders. They are sent to earth one after the other to fulfill their assigned mission. We understand that each horse joins the previous ones sent, so that finally all four horses ride together on earth until the end of the Christian age. This means that the first four seals are still not completed, even in the end-time. John is indebted to the Old Testament for his imagery of heavenly cavalry. Zechariah described four horses with different colors in his visions (Zech. 1:8-17 and 6:1-8). This indicates that we should look at the meaning of Zechariah's four symbolic horses before we interpret the four apocalyptic horse riders.

In Zechariah 1 the riders were assigned the duty to inspect the gentile world for any movement to restore Jerusalem and Judah (1:10). Their report was disappointing: nothing was going on (1:11). God assures the prophet, however, that in spite of appearances to the contrary, He was zealously working for Jerusalem and Zion (1:14), while at the same time being angry with the nations (1:15). The God of Israel would return to Zion and her temple and city would be rebuilt. Permanent peace and prosperity shall be established (8:12).

In Zech. 6 the prophet presents the counterpart of his first vision. This time he sees four different horses with war chariots [merkaba], each being sent by God from heaven in all directions of the earth, in order to realize God's redemptive plan for Jerusalem. The interpreting angel explains that the four charioteers signify the four spirits or winds of heaven, which are sent out as ministers of Yahweh, to fulfill the redemptive will of God in the entire hostile world (Zech. 6:5; compare Ps. 104:3-4; Jer. 49:36; Isa. 66:15). The "land of the north," or Babylon, is singled out as an exemplary place where Israel's God wants to rule and establish His rest (6:8). This means that Zechariah's four visionary war-chariots were sent out into the world with a double mission: 1) to submit all the political world powers to the will of Israel's God (also Hag. 2:7-10; 2:20-23; 2) to gather all believing Israelites and Gentiles to Jerusalem and Mount Zion (Zech. 8:8, 20-23). The main purpose is the realization of God's plan of redemption and the restoration of true worship (Zech. 8:22, 23).

In the Apocalypse Christ sends out His four apocalyptic riders to the earth, this time with a

new-covenant mission (Rev. 6:2-8): to conquer human hearts for Christ with the bow and arrows of the gospel and to bring humanity to reflection by some limited judgments as foretastes of God's final punishment of their rebellion against Christ.

## **The First Seal**

*I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest (Rev. 6:2).*

The white horse carries a rider with a bow and a victor's crown, riding out "as a conqueror bent on conquest" (Rev. 6:2). Some modern expositors interpret this apocalyptic rider as a symbol of man's lust for power and world domination. The argument is that all four riders in Rev. 6 initiate judgments, so that it seems "inappropriate to the context" to see Christ's conquest through the gospel here. Horses were used to wage war. Yet each symbol must receive its meaning from its own context and there we can discover the nature of that war.

The seals further unfold the throne vision of Rev. 5, where Christ was portrayed as the risen Lord, symbolized by the Lion who has triumphed (5:5). He established His victory by His death on the cross, symbolized by the slain Lamb (5:6). He then sent His disciples, with the authority given Him, to go to all nations and make disciples (Matt. 28:19). He gave them power of the Holy Spirit to conquer for Him, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), just as He conquered His "enemy" Saul, near the Damascus gate (Acts 9). He continues to conquer through the power of the gospel and the "double-edged sword" of His Word (Heb. 4:12), to win sincere hearts of men and women to His kingdom until the end of probationary time.

Further, the chiastic structure of the Apocalypse places Christ as the Warrior in Rev. 19:11-16 as the meaningful counterpart and end-time consummation of Rev. 6:2. The Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament pictured the Davidic King as conquering with bow and arrows (see Ps. 45:4, 5; Deut. 32:23; Hab. 3:8-11; Pss. 7:12; 21:12). Christ announced that He came to bring the "sword" to all who rejected His peace (Matt. 10:34; Luke 12:51-53). We may therefore interpret the white horse of the first seal as the gospel horse that offers to all men the perfect righteousness of Christ. This gospel rider still conquers men and women around the globe (1 John 5:4, 5). Paul's last confession of faith illustrates the power of the white-horseman: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

## **The Second Seal**

*When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword (Rev. 6:3, 4).*

The next three apocalyptic riders have authority to bring severe judgments on the earth. We should not consider these forays that produce death, famine and plague, as the results of secular wars. For centuries there was peace in the Roman Empire, the pax Romana, from Armenia to Spain.

The red horse represents the spirit of opposition to the gospel rider, or war against the people of Christ. Jesus had warned that the witness of His followers would cause bitter

opposition: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34; see the connection with vs. 32-33; also Luke 12:51-53). This was experienced by the apostolic church, as can be seen in Christ's letters to the churches in Smyrna and Pergamum (Rev. 2:10; 2:13). On the other hand, only Christ brings the peace of heart, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27); "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

The Roman caesars would not tolerate any thought of Christ as supreme King and Lord. They attempted to eradicate all public Christian witnesses, until the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century. The understanding that the red horse means religious-political persecution for the sake of Christ is confirmed by Christ's letter to the church in Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) and the cry of the slain martyrs under the fifth seal (6:9).

Wherever the Prince of Peace is rejected the results are strife and violence, not only within the church but in society. The bloodshed in the seals is fulfilled on two levels: first within the church of Christ and against the church by executing Christ's people during the entire church age.

### **The Third Seal**

*When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day wages and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (Rev. 6:5, 6).*

The color "black" of the third apocalyptic horse is the exact opposite of the first horse. This suggests that Christ's righteousness is now widely rejected or unknown. Such a situation results in spiritual famine, which reminds us of a judgment foretold by Amos (see 8:11). The word of God and the testimony of Jesus have become so scarce that it can be symbolized by weighing out man's staple food in a pair of scales (6:5, 6). This symbol is taken from Lev. 26:26, where it refers first to God's judgment on a rebellious people, that will suffer from a literal famine (see also Ezek. 4:16). Scripture also uses the scales to symbolize a heavenly verdict (Dan. 5:27). The third apocalyptic rider announces a famine of God's Word and Spirit in the post-apostolic church, suggesting she will become weak in the truth of the gospel replacing it by a doctrinal belief system, called orthodoxy. But doctrines and ceremonies cannot feed the soul, as Christ warned in His letter to the church in Pergamum (2:14-16). The third seal applies especially to that period of church history when church and state were united and began to enforce orthodoxy on the human conscience. The command, "Do not damage the oil and the wine!" (6:6), suggests a restricted judgment of God, that God protects His gospel in a time of spiritual scarcity. It reveals that God tenderly cares for His people.

### **The Fourth Seal**

*When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the*



*wild beasts of the earth (Rev. 6:7, 8).*

The pale-horse rider is named Death, followed by Hades (the grave). The four judgments had been sent earlier by Israel's God on the old-covenant people (see Ezek. 14:21). The color of a deathly pale suggests a continued state of spiritual decline and of a greater hardening of the heart. The result is apostasy of the soul. We may think of heresies and errors as a consequence of rejecting the truth of the gospel (see Rev. 2:20-23). It is the road to eternal death. The "wild beasts" are then a symbolic anticipation of the persecuting beasts of Rev. 13 which were also "given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them" (13:7, 14, 15). The fourth rider gathers the results of the work of the previous riders: death and doom. He represents the prolonged state of the medieval church.

The first four seals follow the outline of Jesus' prophetic discourse in Matt. 24:6-8. The difference between Matt. 24 and the apocalyptic seals lies in the fact that in the Apocalypse a deeper meaning can be detected because the first rider is the gospel of Christ.

Seals 2 to 4 show an increased hardening of the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth, as they reject the gospel message of the white-horseman. Their spiritual death will ultimately be sealed in eternal death when they receive the "wrath of the Lamb" during the sixth seal (6:15-17).

While there is historical progression, the seals reflect the experience of all who accept or reject the gospel of Christ. This means that history can be repeated and that the past can become the future again. Ellen White made this pastoral application of the third and fourth seals:

*The same spirit is seen today that is represented in Revelation 6:6-8. History is to be reenacted. That which has been will be again. This spirit works to confuse and to perplex. Dissension will be seen in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; and those who have not had a spirit to follow the light that God has given through His living oracles, through His appointed agencies, will become confused. Their judgment will reveal weakness. Disorder and strife and confusion will be seen in the church (Letter 65, 1898, in Symp. on Revelation, I:371-2).*

In short, the apocalyptic riders of seals 2 till 4 have found their fulfillment in the corrupted post-apostolic church, but apostasy and persecution are not limited to past history. As Roy C. Naden states: "Once released, each horse continues to ride until the Second Coming" (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p. 110).

## **The Fifth Seal**

*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Rev. 6:9-11).*

This symbolic image must be interpreted again by Scripture. Jesus had announced that after the natural and political upheavals, His disciples would be persecuted (see Matt.

24:9-11, 21).

After opening of the fifth seal, the cry for divine justice is heard from all who have died a violent death for the sake of the "Word of God and the testimony" (Rev. 6:9). This cry does not come from the living believers, but symbolically from their "souls" after they have shed their blood, just as in the case of Abel, the first martyr. God called his murderer to account with these words: "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). This teaches us that the Creator will never forget His faithful children and holds their murderers accountable! He considers the ground where His witnesses died as an "altar," where their sacrificial blood was poured out (compare Lev. 4:7). Paul likewise considered that his imminent beheading at the order of Emperor Nero was a sacrificial death to God (2 Tim. 4:6).

The vision of the fifth seal serves as a clarifying parallel to Daniel's visions of the trampling underfoot of the saints (in Dan. 7-12). The vision in Daniel 7 stretches from the successive world empires through the division of Rome, to the rise of the little horn and the persecution of the saints during the Middle Ages, until the time of the end with its majestic judgment scene in the throneroom of God. At that time, the "Ancient of Days" will pronounce His verdict "in favor of the saints" (Dan. 7:22).

The meaning of the fifth seal must be unlocked with the key of Daniel. Especially Daniel's vision of the desolating rebellion and its trampling underfoot of the true worshipers stands in the background of the fifth seal. The martyrs' cry, "How long ...until you avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:10) corresponds to the same cry in Daniel 8, "How long will it take for the vision...of the host that will be trampled underfoot?" (8:13). The fifth seal reveals that the moment for vindication must wait "a little longer," because the end-time persecution has not yet come (Rev. 6:11). God's answer to the question of the slain witnesses in Rev. 6 is: "Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer..."(6:11). The white robe given to the martyrs expresses the fulfillment of Daniel's forecast of a forensic vindication of the maligned saints (see Dan. 7:22,25). This gives assurance to God's people that He cares for them, that He hears their cries for divine justice, and that they will be publicly vindicated. This consideration leads to the conclusion that the fifth seal reaches until the end of the Christian era, when God will execute His verdicts regarding the saints and their persecutors (Rev. 11:15, 18). The cry of the Christian martyrs evokes "the wrath of the Lamb" on those who have slain the followers of Christ.

## **The Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus**

Before moving on to the sixth seal, we must pay attention to the stated cause for which all the true martyrs died. The fifth seal explained: "Because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained" (Rev. 6:9). At first we might think that the "testimony" they maintained refers to the personal testimony of their faith in Christ and in the word of God. This is certainly true. But a comparison with the cross references in the Apocalypse indicates that the "testimony" for which they gave their life was the testimony of Jesus' self-revelation, conveyed by the Spirit of prophecy through the apostles (see Rev. 19:10). John uses the term "testimony" regularly for the testimony which Jesus Himself gave. The book of Revelation itself is called Jesus' "testimony for the churches" (Rev. 22:16). John writes that he was on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). This indicates that the broader sense of the testimony of Jesus is "the gospel as the revelation of Christ's life and work" (G. Pfandl, in Symposium on Revelation,

II:310). This means that the New Testament Gospels are included in the testimony of Jesus. The Apocalypse opens with the declaration that it continues the revelation which God gave Jesus Christ for the church (1:1). John therefore testifies to "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2) in Revelation. The Apocalypse as a whole, together with the gospel proclamation of the New Testament, is part of the testimony of Jesus. The remnant church in the prophecy of Rev. 12 is identified as the faithful church by this twofold characteristic: "those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). The Apocalypse calls the church to be faithful to this twofold standard of truth. This repeated expression in the book of Revelation serves as the demarcation line between true and apostate worship of God during the entire Christian era (see also Rev. 20:4). Within this larger context it becomes clear that the martyrs during the Christian era have suffered a violent death because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus which they maintained (Rev. 6:9). The martyrs held on [eichon] to the testimony that they had received from Jesus and thus were faithful witnesses. "They accepted it, they refused to give it up, and consequently they were put to death. The 'testimony,' no less than the 'word,' was an objective possession of the martyrs" (G. Pfandl, in Symp. on Rev. II:313).

For a more comprehensive study of the apocalyptic term "the testimony of Jesus", see below, Chapter 21, on Rev. 12:17.

## The Sixth Seal

*I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black as sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every island and mountain was removed from its place.*

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17).*

The breaking of the sixth seal portrays Christ's final response to the cry of the "souls under the altar" (6:10). He announces His arrival as Divine Warrior with the same cosmic signs in heaven and on earth as God did when He appeared as Israel's King. Moses had described the manifestation of Yahweh on Mount Sinai:

*There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled . . . Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder (Exod. 19:16, 18-19).*

This coming of God on Mount Sinai was accompanied by a violent earthquake, the darkening of the sun with a thick cloud and smoke, and a loud trumpet blast. It caused everyone to tremble with fear (Exod. 20:18, 19). This description by Moses was adopted by Israel's prophets as the archetype of all subsequent theophanies. They portrayed each visitation of the Lord on behalf of His people with cosmic signs similar to the Mount Sinai theophany. Besides the earthquake and the thunder, they could add a hailstorm, a heavy rainfall, the sudden drying up of a river, a terrifying panic among the enemies of God and

His people, and even sun, moon and stars as participating in Yahweh's holy warfare on behalf of His covenant people (see Josh. 3:13; 4:22-24; 5:1; Judg. 5:20, 21; 1 Sam. 7:10; 14:15, 20; Josh. 10:11-14). This cosmic aspect gave dramatic proof that the covenant God was also the Creator of heaven and earth. It caused the heathen nations to acknowledge that the living God was on the side of Israel (Exod. 14:25). Rahab of Jericho said: "When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Josh. 2:11).

A great earthquake, rain and hailstorm and darkening of sun and stars became part of the announcements of God's appearance in the forecasts of the "Day of Yahweh" (Yom Yahweh) as the day of judgment (see Ezek. 38:19-23; Joel 2:30, 31; Isa. 24:1-4, 13, 18-23; Jer. 4:23-28).

## **The Hebrew Theology of Cosmic Signs**

The forecast of cosmic signs in heaven and on earth was not intended as a prediction of some isolated and intermittent phenomena. Cosmic signs carry theological significance in Hebrew theology, because they were depicted as manifestations of the Creator, coming as the King and Holy Warrior on behalf of His covenant people (see the discussion of eight examples in Part I, Chapter VI, Section "Christ's Theology of the Cosmic Signs"). Joel states that the darkening of sun and moon will occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Joel 2:31). Yet, in his two other forecasts Joel does not indicate any different perspective on the celestial signs other than the standard prophetic view: that they introduce and accompany the manifestation of the Day of judgment (Joel 2:10-11; 3:15-16).

The prophets never suggested that we can wait to see some unusual sign in heaven or on earth first, before turning to the Lord. Their cosmic imagery intended to motivate God's people to repent now (see Joel 1:15, 2:1, 10-17). The prophets were not concerned with teaching a particular order of cosmic signs, in fact they felt free to change the patterns of the signs, sometimes letting the earthquake precede the celestial upheavals and at other times follow them (Joel 2:10 and 3:15, 16; also Isa. 13:10-13 and 24:18-23; also Jer. 4:23-28).

The prophet Haggai even mentions one apocalyptic earthquake as a cosmic sign: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations . . .'" (Hag. 2:6, 7). This future universal earthquake is not presented as an isolated disaster to inform the world of God's foreknowledge about a coming earthquake. Haggai gives his prediction in a manner similar to that on Mount Sinai, to announce God's final visitation to the earth, to judge the world and to establish His Messianic glory on earth (Hag. 2:7). The Letter to the Hebrews applies Haggai's prediction to the cosmic quake at the end of the Christian age:

*But now he [God] has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:26-29).*

This application of Haggai's predicted quake shows that the New Testament takes his picture language literally for a cosmic earthquake of all "created things" to be expected at

the end of the Christian era. This fits exactly the opening of the sixth seal in Rev. 6:12, "There was a great earthquake..." It will not be some warning sign that will provide room for a period of repentance. It will simply introduce the coming age of Messianic glory (see Hag. 2:7-9). The moral purpose of both Haggai and Hebrews is clearly to lead to a commitment to worship God now, not when the cosmic quake occurs! Furthermore, we learn the important lesson that the apocalyptic quake is not presented as an isolated forerunner of the judgment day, but as the manifestation of that Day itself.

### Christ's Prediction of a Great Distress for His Elect

Jesus' prophetic discourse is based on the apocalyptic book of Daniel (see Matt. 24:15). He pointed out to His disciples where they stood in the prophetic outline of salvation history. At that time Jerusalem and its temple were about to be destroyed by the approaching enemy of Israel (Luke 21:21-24), in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy (Luke 21:22; Dan. 9:26, 27). In addition, Jesus stressed a further concern for His disciples that would remain after Jerusalem's destruction, "For then there will be great distress [thlipsis], unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again" (Matt. 24:21). This phrasing is also derived from Daniel's prophecy and demands a closer look:

MATTHEW 24: 21	DANIEL 12: 1
For then there will be great distress [ <i>thlipsis megale</i> ], unequaled from the beginning of the world until now -- and never to be equaled again.	At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress [ <i>kairos thlipsis</i> ] such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

A common consensus exists that Christ in His prediction of the "great distress" referred to the end-time distress of God's people in Dan. 12:1, which will be shortened by the rise of Michael as the Divine Warrior (Dan. 12:1). Jesus applied this coming distress, however, to His own followers during the entire Christian age (see Matt. 24:21, 22, 29). Jesus did not restrict His application of Daniel's end-time distress to any particular period within the church age.

The immediate context in Matt. 24 (and in Mark 13) connects the "distress" directly with the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:21; see also Mark 13:18-19). Jesus covers all periods of distress for His true followers, beginning with the tribulations under Judaism and Imperial Rome (see Mark 13:9; Rev. 2:10), then the killing of His disciples "by all nations" (Matt. 24:9) during the centuries of the Middle Ages to which Dan. 7:25 had pointed. But Jesus used the phrase of "unequaled distress" (Matt. 24:21-22) not from Dan. 7, but from Dan. 12:1 (see Table above). As in Dan. 12:1, so Jesus emphasized the unprecedented nature of the distress in human history (Matt. 24:21). He announced that the distress would be "cut short" for the sake of his elect in those days or not one of them would survive that distress (Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20). This cutting "short" fits exactly the assurance of Daniel that Michael will rise "at that time" (the "time of the end," Dan. 11:40-45) to deliver His people by His supernatural intervention (Dan. 12:1). Michael's deliverance cuts short the ultimate distress, or not one of God's people would survive.

The divine "cutting short" of the global distress to prevent the complete annihilation of the

elect of which Jesus speaks in Matt. 24:22, can be applied as a partial fulfillment to the rise of Protestantism and of the subsequent Enlightenment which gradually achieved religious freedom and the end of persecution.

In summary, Jesus predicted days of "distress" for His followers, not by singling out one particular time of persecution under either Judaism, Imperial Rome, Papal Rome, or apostate Christendom. He covers the entire inter-advent period with special emphasis on the intensive, universal distress at the end of history, to which He points in Matt. 24:21 in words derived from Daniel 12:1. This comprehensive scope of the days of distress is also the scope of the fifth seal in Rev. 6:9-11. The cry of the slain martyrs does not come exclusively from one period of persecution but from the entire Christian age, "until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed" (6:11). The final distress for Christ's followers will be cut short by divine intervention and deliverance.

### **Cosmic Signs Follow the Final Distress**

Jesus ended His prophetic forecast with this assurance:

*Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky . . . (Matt. 24:29, 30).*

In this cosmic image Jesus also uses the language of the prophets. He even blends into one what Isaiah pictured in two images of the day of the Lord (Isa. 13:10 and 34:4). As Isaiah's perspective did not focus on astronomical signs as such, but on Yahweh's appearance as Holy Warrior, so Jesus' central message in Matt. 24 does not center on celestial signs as such, but in the "sign" that He will come as the appointed "Son of Man" of Daniel's prophecy (Matt. 24:30) and that He will gather together, not the chosen nation but His own elect from all the tribes of the earth (Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27; compare Matt. 8:11, 12).

The phrase "after the distress of those days" (Matt. 24:29) or "in those days, following that distress" (Mark 13:24) fits the end-time distress of Dan. 12:1, to which also the fifth seal pointed (Rev. 6:11). That "distress" would be cut short for the sake of Christ's elect by the immediate rescue of Michael (Dan. 12:1), who appears with cosmic signs as the Son of Man on His cloud chariot (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:27).

The whole thrust of Jesus' prophetic speech is the new Christological re-interpretation of the day of Yahweh. This was the shocking news for Judaism. The day of the Lord has become the day of the Lord Jesus. This fundamental truth became an essential part of the apocalyptic gospel (see 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Thess. 2:2; Phil. 1:10). Israel's standard cosmic imagery, centered in the theophany of Yahweh, is reconstituted by Jesus as centering in His own glorious Christophany. The second advent of Christ will reveal to all nations His Messianic glory as the Son of God.

### **Literal Exegesis of the Sixth Seal**

We have followed the recognized method for a responsible exegesis when we examined the earlier use of the language and theme of the sixth seal in the other books of the Bible.

No passage in Revelation should be interpreted in isolation from its immediate and wider contexts. The contextual procedure is our protection against any speculative or forced exegesis. It allows a fresh look at our current interpretations with the possibility of discovering a more adequate understanding.

We have discovered a consistent theology of cosmic signs in the Old Testament prophecies and theophanies which are rooted in the creation narrative of Genesis 1. The fact that Israel's covenant God is at the same time the Creator of heaven and earth provides the theological rationale for the uncommon natural phenomena at the appearance of the Creator. Such dramatic, literal upheavals in the laws of nature frighten both believers and unbelievers with an overwhelming sense of insecurity, of facing the Creator as the Judge of all the earth. Virtually all the doom prophecies of the prophets include cosmic imagery as the introduction to the final day of Holy War on behalf of the Israel of God.

We learned from Jesus' prophetic discourse (Matt. 24, par.) that His return as the "Son of Man" of Dan 7 was the appointed "sign" (Matt. 24:30) to look for. The supernatural celestial signs would immediately introduce and accompany His coming. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, that is, be filled with bitter remorse because of Him (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). There is no suggestion in Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 that the celestial signs are warning signs to repent and prepare for His coming. Luke's Gospel alone tells us that when the final upheavals on earth and in the sky begin to take place, "Stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). This will not be the time for the unprepared to receive another call for repentance. George R. Knight summed it up appropriately: "Thus the pattern of Matthew 24 appears to be that the real signs are not signs of nearness but of coming. The less precise signs are to encourage believers to keep watching, waiting, and working" (Matthew, p. 237)!

In the Apocalypse Christ repeatedly places the event of His return at the center, even as the essence of the whole book (1:7; 6:12-17; 14:14-20; 17:14; 19:11-21). The sixth seal begins with a cosmic quake that shakes both the earth and the heavens (Rev. 6:12-14). It describes the global effect on the earth dwellers who have no shelter against the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15-17).

The sixth seal leaves us with the impression that there will be a universal ruin of all humanity. All people cry out, "Who can stand?" (6:17). The answer to this anxious question is presented at length in Rev. 7, one of the most comforting chapters in the book of Revelation. There we find the true motivation for repentance in preparation for His coming: we need to be sealed with the seal of the living God before the final winds of judgment are released (Rev. 7:1-3).

## **The Apocalyptic Earthquake**

The sixth seal opens with: "There was a great earthquake" (6:12). This feature requires careful attention by cross references to the other books of the Bible. In the Old Testament an "earthquake" has theological significance. It constitutes a regular feature of God's appearance to Israel (a theophany) from the time He came down on Mount Sinai with an earthquake (Exod. 19:18; Ps. 68:7, 8; see also Ps. 144:5, 6; Isa. 64:1, 3). While the Old Testament speaks often of local earthquakes as manifestations of Yahweh's visitation as Holy Warrior on behalf of Israel, the prophets describe the last earthquake in salvation history as a cosmic quake that will shake the earth and all the heavenly bodies (see Joel

2:10, 11; Isa. 2:19-21; 13:10, 11, 13; Zeph. 1:2, 3). This all-inclusive shaking of heaven and earth as the introduction to the Messianic glory of a new earth is presented in the apocalyptic perspective of Haggai:

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD Almighty . . .'* (Hag. 2:6, 7).

Haggai's prediction is applied to a literal cosmic quake that introduces the second coming of Christ in Hebrews 12:26, 27. This apocalyptic earthquake is sharply distinguished from all earlier, local earthquakes which Jesus had announced as the "beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:7, 8; Mark 13:8). All local earthquakes can be interpreted as wake-up calls to prepare for Christ's coming, as strong motivations to repentance before it is too late (see Luke 13:4, 5).

To which of the two categories does the "great earthquake" of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12) belong, to the cosmic or to the local one? Not every earthquake in the Apocalypse is portrayed as the cosmic quake which shakes both the world and the heavenly bodies. The "severe earthquake" in Rev. 11:13, for instance, is characterized by its location in "the second woe," during the sixth trumpet, as a preliminary warning sign, intended to lead to repentance. It is further described as a local quake, because "a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev. 11:13). This local quake is distinguished from the universal quake which will occur during the seventh trumpet or "third woe" in Rev. 11:19 which is further enlarged in the seventh plague (Rev. 16:17-21).

### **The Great Earthquake of the Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:12-14).**

Does the sixth seal mention two different earthquakes, a local (6:12) and a cosmic quake (6:14)? Neither the seventh trumpet nor the seventh plague mention two earthquakes. Jesus did not refer to any particular earthquake in the end-time in Matthew 24. The answer to our question can be found, however, in the context of the sixth seal itself. The literary style of Rev. 6:12-14 and 15-17 points to its meaning. The first unit of verses 12-14 shows the pattern of ABB'A', the typical structure of an inverse parallelism.

A There was a great earthquake.

B Sun, moon, and stars malfunction.

B<sup>1</sup> The sky receded like a scroll rolling up.

A<sup>1</sup> Every mountain and island was removed.

This literary arrangement describes one cosmic shaking of heaven and earth, exactly as Hag. 2:6 and Heb. 12:26, 27 had predicted: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.'" No local earthquake can match the finality and global dimensions of the portrayals of Haggai, Hebrews, and of the sixth seal. Revelation 6:12-14 describe first the cosmic signs on earth and in the sky (A and B); then it goes on to describe the effects of these signs in



reverse order: in the sky (B1) and on earth (A1). The earthquake mentioned in A is the cause of the global effects described in A<sup>1</sup> : the disappearance of mountains and islands. A similar description of cause and effect can be seen in the seventh plague, where a severe, universal earthquake is mentioned first (see Rev. 16:18), followed by its effect on Babylon and on the mountains and its islands (16:19, 20). The description of the seventh plague is a striking literary parallel with that of the sixth seal! Both need to be understood in the same way. This parallel indicates that the sixth seal does not project two different earthquakes, with hundreds of years between them (in Rev. 6:12-14).

To understand John's literary composition of the upheavals in the sky during the sixth seal, it is instructive to observe his borrowing from Isaiah's portrayal of God's devastating world judgment:

*All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree (Isa. 34:4).*

*The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. . . Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger (Isa. 13:10, 13).*

In this vivid imagery, expressing the dire aspects of the day of the Lord, no order of events is in view and there is no biblical indication that the sixth seal intends to teach a specific order either (see Part I, Chapter 6, Section "Christ's Theology of the Cosmic Signs"). In the next unit (Rev. 6:15-17) John describes the global impact of the cosmic quake on the political, military, economic, and social world. In vain they all seek shelter before the Judge of the earth. Thus the sixth seal describes the progressive order of cause and effect. If we compare the descriptions of the apocalyptic earthquake in Revelation, we observe its gradual enlargement in the seventh trumpet and in the seventh plague:

Rev. 6:12,14	Rev. 8:5	Rev.11:19	Rev. 16:18, 20-21
There was a great earthquake...	And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.	And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.	Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth.. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones ...fell upon men.
The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.			

This progressive expansion of the cosmic quake is obviously not the prediction of two or more earthquakes. The literary composition of the Apocalypse teaches one final, cosmic quake, which is enlarged in the description of each subsequent series, in keeping with the increasing severity of the trumpet and plague judgments as the end approaches.

It is significant that John borrows consistently from the ancient prophecies of the Day of the Lord for his portrayal of the sixth seal. This is especially true of his adopting the

cosmic signs from Isaiah 13:10, 13; 24:18, 19, 23; 34:4, 8; and from Joel 2:10, 11, 28, 30-31; 3:14-16. John did not find in the Prophets a list of a uniform order of cosmic signs! He even changes the arrangement of his main source, Isaiah 34:4, in his own description in Rev. 6:12-14. John's overriding concern is not to create a particular chronological order of cosmic signs, but to place them around Christ as the new Center and Goal of the final upheavals in the universe, in keeping with Jesus' own understanding in Matthew 24:29-31. This pervasive borrowing from the Old Testament stresses the theological unity of both Testaments and their common apocalyptic outlook. Both Testaments reveal one Creator-Redeemer and one day of judgment (see Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 6:17).

In conclusion, the sixth seal cannot be properly understood by itself divorced from the previous five seals. The sixth seal is the consummation of the earlier seals. The cry for vindication by the martyrs was answered only in a preliminary sense with their heavenly vindication ("the white robe") under the fifth seal. They had to "wait a little longer", until the end-time distress for God's people would be completed (Rev. 6:11). The sixth seal opens not with another waiting period for the dead and the living saints but with the arrival of the day of reckoning, the day of justice and vindication.

The seventh seal adds no further event, only "silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev. 8:1). This silence suggests that the justice of God has been fully executed, based on Israel's expectations (Isa. 62:1; 65:6, 7; Ps. 50:3-6). It is interesting to note that the Fourth Book of Ezra, written in the late first century A.D., reports a Jewish belief that the end of history would bring a "silence" corresponding to the silence before the creation of the world:

*And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginning; so that no one shall be left (4 Ezra 7:30; in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, I:537. J. H. Charlesworth, ed.).*

The seventh seal seems to declare a "silence in heaven" as the end of the "loud voice" of the martyrs for divine justice. Thus the prophetic seals cycle reassures the church that Christ is the faithful covenant-keeping Lord of history. The covenant blessings promised to the church in Rev. 2-3 will be bestowed on those who persevere in the faith or testimony of Jesus until the end! This theme of fulfillment becomes the central focus of comfort in John's vision of Revelation 7.

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# Chapter XV

## Assurance Of Rescue In The End-Time

### Revelation VII

Revelation 7 contains an interlude in the seals' cycle. In this chapter John capitalizes on his theology of the remnant people. Rev. 7 shows a specific end-time focus, which complements the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-11). Both this seal and Rev. 7 deal with the same subject: the great distress for the people of Christ. The beacon light of prophecy spotlights the final tribulation with its global crisis. This crisis is caused not merely by the persecuting powers of the world but, in a higher sense, by the wrath of the Lamb manifested in the seven last plagues (Rev. 6:16, 17; 15:1). Divine protection is essential if the last generation of God's people is to stand unharmed during the outpouring of God's wrath. Revelation 7 is designed to assure all generations of God's people, especially the final one, of His provision to rescue each follower of Christ in that time of emergency.

This heaven-imposed crisis of worldwide proportions is portrayed in the sixth seal, where the cosmic signs introduce the judgment day. Then the existential question becomes acute: "Who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17). This ultimate question had been asked earlier by three prophets: Joel (2:11), Nahum (1:6), and Malachi (3:2). Each time the prophet answered his question by saying that the only way to stand in the day of wrath is by true repentance (Joel 2:12-27, Nah. 1:7, Mal. 3:3-4). Nahum stressed that Yahweh alone is "a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him" (Nah. 1:7).

Therefore we may expect to find the answer to the question of Rev. 6:17 in Revelation 7. The purpose of Rev. 7 is to show who will stand in the day of retribution. The question, "Who can stand?" is most vital for those who will be alive when probationary time suddenly ends and the last plagues are poured out from heaven. Revelation 7 is to encourage God's people to persevere in their faith in Christ until the end. It is one of the most reassuring chapters for the Christian faith. Here we find for the first time a group called the "144,000" true Israelites. These can stand in the day of the Lord without fear, because they have a shelter against the wrath of the Lamb. Their special place in salvation history is at the end of time. They will come out of the great tribulation triumphantly. This is the end-time setting of Rev. 7, in its immediate context of the sixth seal.

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.*

*Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God" (Rev. 7:1-4).*

With this portrayal of divine deliverance, the risen Lord assures His followers that the plagues will not destroy all of mankind. Christ will first put a mark of protection on His

"servants". "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). Malachi had promised special protection for God's people at the end of history:

*A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (Mal. 3:16-18).*

This expresses the Hebrew theology of a final remnant people of God. It implies the separation of a God-worshipping Israel from the nominal Israel.

Daniel also pointed to the remnant of Israel this way: "But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered" (in Daniel 12:1). Daniel distinguishes between a national Israel and a spiritual Israel. Only those who are registered in heaven as citizens of God's kingdom will receive deliverance from the ultimate distress at the end of time (Dan. 12:1, 2). The angel assured Daniel, "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand" (Dan. 12:10). Isaiah also predicted that a holy remnant would survive the judgment of Israel's God:

*Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The LORD will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain (Isa. 4:3-6).*

In Revelation 7 God assures His church that His wrath will not come until He has sealed His true Israel. That seal will protect them, not just from physical death, but from all supernatural powers of destruction, both demonic (Rev. 9:4) and divine (Rev. 16). Only this way can they stand on the last day. Christ thus fulfills His promise:

*Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Rev. 3:10).*

The "seal of the living God," which angels of heaven will put "on the foreheads of the servants of our God" (Rev. 7:2, 3), is in sharp contrast to the "mark of the beast," a strictly end-time battle against the saints (see Rev. 13:15-17). Both identification marks operate simultaneously in the time of the end as the final stage of ultimate separation.

Some have identified this apocalyptic seal with the gospel seal, of which Paul speaks in Eph. 1:13; 4:30 and 2 Cor. 1:21, 22. Paul said that the believer's assurance of salvation was sealed in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Christ has "anointed us" and thereby "set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:22). But this gospel seal by the Spirit in the heart must not be identified completely with the unique apocalyptic seal which angels will put on the foreheads of the servants of God (Rev. 7:1-3). The end-time seal has a different purpose than personal assurance of salvation. It is an external mark added to the internal sealing of the Spirit, as the sign of divine approval during the final test of faith, forced on God's people by the beast of Rev. 13. It is also the sign of protection against the seven last plagues of the

wrath of God (see Rev. 16).

After the description of the sealing of the 144,000, John saw in heaven a "great multitude" of redeemed and glorified people that had "come out of the great tribulation" (7:9). This raises the question, How do these two scenes of Rev. 7 relate to each other? Do they present two different groups of redeemed people, as many have traditionally concluded? Do they portray 144,000 Jewish people and a countless throng of Gentiles? We first observe that there are some distinctions between the two scenes.

1) First, there is clear historical progress in Rev. 7, because the sealing of the 144,000 is placed on earth, prior to the final crisis of faith, while the great multitude is standing "before the throne and in front of the Lamb" in heaven (Rev. 7:9). These have "come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14). The two scenes thus portray progress in salvation history.

2) A second difference concerns the imagery of the two scenes in Rev. 7. At first sight it seems to describe two different groups, one consisting of the 144,000 Jews from twelve particular tribes and a great multitude from all nations of the earth that cannot be counted. But if one considers the context of the Apocalypse as a whole, we can see that these apparent distinctions do not describe two different classes of the redeemed. The book begins to announce that the church fulfills the election of Israel: "[He] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6; compare Exod. 19:4, 5). This truth of the gospel is amplified in the song of the elders:

*With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, --and they will reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9, 10).*

This truth of the new covenant, that the twelve apostles continue the theological calling of the twelve tribes of Israel, was the result of the proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. All believers in Christ Jesus are called Christians, that is, people of the Messiah. Their baptism into Christ sealed them as children of Abraham, the father of all believers (see Rom. 4:12). The promises of God to Israel are guaranteed by Christ "to all Abraham's offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16). The apostle Paul no longer recognized a theological difference between Jew and Gentile with respect to the covenant promises of God:

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).*

On this basis, he could even call the church "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16; for an in-depth study, see LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy. Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*). For James, the Christians are "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1; also 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:9). This fundamental truth of the gospel is the reason why the Apocalypse assures the church in distress that her goal is the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22) and that both the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles are written on the same Holy City (Rev. 21:2, 10-14).

Returning to Rev. 7, we acknowledge that John views the remnant of Israel in promise and fulfillment. He first portrays the Israel of God symbolically in the great distress of the end-time on earth. He then proceeds to explain its real size as a countless people that remain faithful during "the great tribulation" and therefore will enjoy the eternal peace in heaven. One could express this by saying that the first scene of Rev. 7 represents the church militant, the second scene the church triumphant. The last scene (Rev. 7:9-17) is proleptic, anticipating the future joys of the new earth, which are expanded further in similar terms in Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5.

It is important to note that John does not state that he saw 144,000 Israelites as the sealed ones. He states only that he "heard the number" (Rev. 7:4). When John turned to see the sealed ones, he saw only a great multitude of conquerors. This word-picture confirms the gospel truth that the promises of God to Israel will not fail but will be fulfilled in Christ and His people.

The pattern of hearing and then turning to see, was used by John in Rev. 1:12, 13. What John heard is then further clarified by what he actually sees. Another instance is found in Revelation 5. He hears an elder declare: "See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has triumphed" (5:5). But when he looks to see the Lion, he "saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne" (5:6). What John saw was a clarification of what he had first only heard.

This style of disclosure is used also by John in Rev. 7. After he had heard the number of Israelites who were sealed, John "looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). In a later vision John sees the 144,000 also "before the throne" (Rev. 14:3), while they "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev. 14:4). Thus John identifies the 144,000 spiritual Israelites as the countless believers in Christ, the Lamb of God. While Abraham was a Gentile, God promised that his offspring would be as countless as the stars (Gen. 15:5; Gen. 32:12). God's promises of blessing to Abraham and the other patriarchs of Israel will be fulfilled through Christ in ways that exceed all expectations (see Gal. 3:29; 6:16). Revelation 7 contains the key to unlock its own Hebrew symbolism: the true Israel of God is not limited to 144,000 literal Jews, but is symbolic of the totality of spiritual Israel among the human race. In the last day they will all receive the seal of protection, not just a small number of Jewish believers, leaving gentile Christians to stand unprotected. This is the assurance of Rev. 7 for the end-time church. Some Bible scholars rightly stress the idea that "the sealing must be co-extensive with the peril, and must, therefore, embrace the entire Christian community, alike Jewish and Gentile" (R. H. Charles; also G. R. Beasley-Murray). Others state: "The two visions depict the same body, under widely different conditions" (H. B. Swete, also I. T. Beckwith). This conclusion is confirmed in Revelation 14:1-5, where the Christian faith of the 144,000 is portrayed in the pictorial language of Joel 2:32 and Zeph. 3:13.

The number 144,000 is broken down by John in 12 x 12,000, by which he shows that the number 12 is the key number, to be understood in its covenantal significance, as standing for the covenant people or kingdom of God. The multiplication expresses the completeness of God's people in the time of the end. Douglas Ezell explains it this way:

*As John used the Old Testament title reserved for Israelites, "a kingdom of priests," to refer to all Christians, so now he uses the twelve (tribes) multiplied by twelve (the apostles) multiplied by ten (the number of completeness) raised to the third*

*power (the number of deity) to symbolically describe all the redeemed (notice also that the gates and foundations of New Jerusalem have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, Revelation 21:12-13) . . . The round number of 12,000 symbolically represents a full quota. (Revelations on REVELATION, p. 60).*

Placed in the end-time context of Rev. 7, we understand that the number 144,000 represents the worldwide covenant people of God during the final crisis of the Christian age. The list of twelve tribes in Rev. 7 is unique in all of Scripture and points to a Christian symbolism, because it places Judah first in line, apparently to stress that Christ is the head of the new Israel (Rev. 5:5, 6; 7:5). The fact that Dan is omitted and Manasah is added, although he is already included in Joseph (Rev. 7:6, 8), again implies its non-literal meaning. One may conclude, in the words of Beatrice S. Neall:

*The number 144,000 should thus be understood as a symbol of the unity, perfection, and completion of God's church, complete because the number has been made up (6:11). (in Symposium on Revelation. 1:262).*

The meaning of Rev. 7 becomes clear if seen in its immediate connection with the seals of Rev. 6, which ended with the anxious question, "Who can stand in the day of wrath"? Revelation 7 replies with a twofold answer: it first visualizes the holy remnant as victorious in the verdict of God (7:1-8), and then describes them as glorified in the kingdom of God (7:9-17).

## **The Angel from the East or Sunrise**

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." (Rev. 7:1-3).

This passage suggests a certain "delay" of the end, similar to that in the fifth seal (6:11). The four winds of warfare and destruction (see Jer. 49:36-39; Dan. 7:2) are restrained by divine intervention. It is God's will that determines the course of human history. The higher purpose of the covenant-keeping God will be realized. God will send a special message from His throne (the cosmic East) to secure a people that will stand as His faithful ones during "the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). The mission of this angel anticipates that of the angel of Revelation 10, which is unfolded further in the threefold message of Rev. 14:6-12. Uriah Smith concluded: "The angel with the seal of the living God is, therefore, the same as the third angel of Revelation 14" (*Revelation*, p. 462). The angel with the seal of the living God comes "from the sunrise." This particular phrase announced in Isaiah's prophecy the coming of *deliverance* for Israel in Babylonian captivity (see Isa. 41:2, 25). Ezekiel also saw the glory of God "coming from the east" (Ezek. 43:2). And Malachi predicted that for those who fear the name of Israel's God "the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4:2). Heinrich Kraft comments on Rev. 7:2,

*This angel, by his origin from the sunrise, represents Christ as the sun of righteousness . . . the angel here represents the saving and preserving power of*



*Christ (Die Offenb. des Joh., p. 125).*

### **The Sealing in Type and Antitype**

The purpose of the "seal of the living God" can better be understood in the perspective of its antecedents in Israel's history. Two crises for Israel, one in Egypt and the other in Jerusalem, provide the historical types to understand the theological significance of the end-time sealing of God's people. To safeguard His covenant people from the angel of death, God had ordered Israel to apply the blood of a lamb on their doorposts:

The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt (Exod 12:13).

Here we observe the essence of the end-time sealing. God appointed a certain mark--the Passover lamb's blood--as the external expression of their trust in Yahweh, as the sign of belonging to Israel's covenant God. Israel needed to accept and apply this seal of God's protection by faith in order to survive the ordeal on Egypt. No less significant is Ezekiel's vision of six angels sent to Jerusalem to execute the covenant curse of God. The Lord ordered the angels to slaughter all the idolaters in the temple and city. Nevertheless, God's grace was manifested by sending a special angel with a writing kit in advance of the executioners:

"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it" (Ezek. 9:4).

God showed His mercy by separating a repentant, spiritual remnant from an apostate Israel. Those identified by the angel's token found protection from the "outpouring" of divine wrath. God commanded, "Do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary" (Ezek. 9:6). The justice of God was executed upon the impenitent only after the angel of mercy had completed his sealing work (see Ezek. 9:10; also Ezek. 8). In both Exodus 12 and Ezekiel 9 we notice the same sequence: first the sealing, then follows the covenant curse on those who did not receive the mark of protection.

This purpose of the sealing in the historical types--to provide a supernatural protection against the imminent outpouring of God's wrath--constitutes the essence of the end-time sealing in Rev. 7. The apocalyptic sealing will be the prelude to the outpouring of the wrath of God in the seven last plagues of Revelation 16 (see Rev. 15:1). Revelation 7 must be understood as the worldwide antitype of the historical types in Exod. 12 and Ezek. 9. Consequently, the 144,000 sealed ones are not portrayed as missionaries that bring in a multitude from all nations. Nowhere does Rev. 7 indicate that the innumerable multitude owes its salvation to the preaching of the 144,000, as some dispensational writers have asserted. Rather, Rev. 7 describes the 144,000 as the remnant of God, who alone can stand in the day of wrath. Only the sealed ones will survive Armageddon (Rev. 16). All the others, the "dwellers on the earth," will receive the "mark of the beast" (Rev. 13:15-17).

If all people receive either the seal of God or the mark of the beast, then no one can remain morally neutral or uninvolved in the final test of faith. This last separation of humanity is expressed in Revelation as follows:

*Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong;  
Let him who is vile continue to be vile;  
Let him who does right continue to do right;  
and let him who is holy continue to be holy.  
(Rev. 22:11; see also Dan. 12:10).*

This declaration implies that the apocalyptic sealing signifies the ultimate fixation of character. R.H. Charles gave this profound explanation:

*In its deepest sense this sealing means the outward manifestation of character. The hidden goodness of God's servants is at last blazoned outwardly, and the divine name that was written in secret by God's Spirit on their hearts is now engraved openly on their brows by the very signet ring of the living God... In the reign of the Antichrist, goodness and evil, righteousness and sin, come into their fullest manifestation and antagonism. Character ultimately enters on the stage of finality (The Rev. of St. John. I:205, 206).*

*This final moment occurs during the final test of loyalty, as Ellen White explained:*

*While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God. (The Great Controversy, p. 605).*

This simultaneous bestowal of the seal of God or the mark of the beast implies that this apocalyptic event is still in the future. John unfolds the meaning of this hour of trial further in Revelation 12-14.

It is evident that only those who have received the gospel sealing of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts and thus experience God's sanctifying power, are candidates for the apocalyptic seal. The angels of God will place that seal on the foreheads of those who are already the "servants of our God" (Rev. 7:3).

## **The Assurance of Victory for the 144,000**

All the redeemed wear "white robes" and hold "palm branches in their hands" (7:9). They cry out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (7:10). They do not ascribe salvation to their own righteousness, to their good works or merits, not even to their repentance, but exclusively to the saving grace of God. These people are truly spiritual, because they give all praise to God and to Christ. They turn their eyes away from their own sacrificial life to the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb. That is the worship which we need to cultivate now if we expect to join the saints of all ages in the doxology, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Rev. 5:12).

Revelation 7 presents another important feature of the 144,000. An elder in heaven asks, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" (7:13). John answers, "Sir, you know." Then he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Here every literalism fails. One can never wash a garment white in literal blood. We have to understand its spiritual meaning, namely, that they have washed the

robes of their character by faith and trust in the atoning death of the Lamb of God. This image portrays the effectiveness of the cross of Christ. Peter pointed to the same reality of redeeming grace when he stated that the believers were saved from "an empty way of life" through "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). John likewise wrote: "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). This victory of faith is especially assured to the last generation.

## **The Great Tribulation of the End-time**

The 144,000 spiritual Israelites are said to come out of "the great tribulation." That time of distress for God's people in Revelation 7 is, of course, determined by their time in salvation history. The New Testament points to several major periods of distress for the faithful people of Christ:

- 1) The time of persecution by the Jewish councils and synagogues: Mark 13:9-13; Matt. 10:17; John 16:2; Luke 21:12; Acts 4:1-3; 5:17, 18, 40; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; 3:3-4.
- 2) The time of persecution by the Roman Empire: Matt. 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-19; Rev. 2:10.
- 3) The time of persecution during Papal rule in the Middle Ages: Rev. 12:6, 14 (expanding Dan. 7:25 and 8:11-13).
- 4) The end-time persecution by the revived Antichrist or Babylon: Matt. 24:22; Rev. 12:17; 13:15-17 (expanding Dan. 12:1).

Jesus did not specify four different periods of persecution, but referred to the coming persecutions in a general way: "In this world you will have trouble [thlipsin]" (John 16:33). He said: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). Paul also wrote in general terms "that through many tribulations [thlipseon] we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22 RSV). He explained: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

But these statements of expected opposition and suffering for the followers of Christ do not nullify the forecasts of Daniel and the Revelation about specific periods of major distress for the people of Christ. The most severe tribulation will come in the time of the end, specifically for the last generation of God's people. Specifically, Daniel pointed to an intensified persecution (12:1), to which also Jesus referred in His forecast of Matthew 24:21, 22 (and Mark 13:19, 20) and which had to be "cut short" by divine intervention. This end-time war against the saints is enlarged further in Revelation 12:17 and 13:15-17. PHEME PERKINS gives this perceptive comment:

*This promise [of "cutting short"] shows that the end-time sufferings are qualitatively different from the persecutions the disciples can expect to undergo during their routine testimony of the gospel. The latter can be endured to the end (Mark 13:13b), but for the elect to endure the end time, God must shorten the time (Mark 13:20) (in The New Interpreter's Bible, 8:690).*

In the midst of the global outlawing of the followers of the Lamb, this prophecy assures their sudden rescue by the divine Warrior (see Rev. 17:14; 19:11-21). Michael will finally rise to wage His holy war and all persecutions in the entire world will be cut short (Dan.

12:1; Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20). We can review the widening scope of the major persecution periods in the following diagram:

Expanding Persecutions				
				Global Outlawing of God's People
			Religious Freedom	
		In the Medieval Church State		
	In the Roman Empire			Sudden Rescue from Heaven: Daniel 12:1
In Judea under Jewish Rule	Next two Centuries	Middle Ages	Today	Future Rev 12 –19

The question becomes, To which "great tribulation" does Revelation 7 refer, when it declares of the great multitude: "These are they who have come out of [or: "are coming through", G.Caird] the great tribulation" (v. 14)? This "great tribulation" is the testing time for which Christ prepares His church: "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). This "hour of trial" fulfills that final persecution for which the earlier martyrs had to wait during the sixth seal (Rev. 6:11). Mounce comments on Rev. 7:14, "The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will rise to such a pitch as to become the great tribulation" (The Book of Revelation, p. 173).

John has not yet explained the nature of the "hour of trial" that will come upon the end-time generation. Revelation 7 anticipates that final testing time and its promises of the protection of God. John anticipates in short phrases what he later will develop more fully. He unfolds "the great conflict of loyalties" (Caird) at length in Revelation 12-14.

John places the reward of the 144,000 Israelites in the light of all the redeemed that will be rescued in the kingdom of God. Their reward will be that of all the redeemed: "they are wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands," while standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). "Palm branches" were required in Israel for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, when they had to "rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days" (Lev. 23:40). The meaning of this annual celebration was to remember their miraculous deliverance from Egypt and their safe journey to the promised land (Lev. 23:43). Revelation 7 thus assures that the consummation of the Feast of Tabernacles in the house of the Father is certain.

In late Judaism the waving of palm branches had come to mean the welcoming of the

Messiah who came in the name of Yahweh: "Blessed is the King of Israel!" (John 12:12, 13; Ps. 118:25, 26). This Messianic aspect is fulfilled in the song of the great multitude:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10).

John explains that fellowship with the Lamb of God is the reason ("therefore," 7:15) why they are before the throne of God and serve Him. To serve God is to worship Him with praise (see Luke 2:37; Rom. 12:1).

The ultimate joy of salvation is the experience of the continuous presence of God: "He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them" (7:15). The Shekinah glory--the radiance of God's presence--will be among them (see Rev. 22:3-5). This promise was the hope of all the saints. Isaiah expressed it beautifully:

*Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain (Isa. 4:5, 6).*

This Messianic promise was repeated by the prophets Ezekiel (37:27) and Zechariah (2:10). The promises of eternal security in Revelation 7:16-17 are also borrowed from the Old Testament, mostly from Isaiah's restoration promises to Israel (see Isa. 25:8; 35:10; 49:10; 51:11; 65:19). The fulfillment of these restoration promises will be infinitely more splendid than was conceived by Israel. Hunger and thirst for righteousness will be profoundly quenched by the Messiah Himself, as Jesus assured: "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35; see also 7:37). Thus the deepest longings of the human heart will be gratified forever. What a thrilling promise!

Revelation 7 culminates in the declaration that "the Lamb at the center of the throne" will be the divine "Shepherd" (Rev. 7:16, 17; compare 49:10). This will also fulfill the Messianic promise of Ezekiel, "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd" (34:23). The God of Israel will also lead His new-covenant people in the eternal future. One particular promise of God to Isaiah is repeated twice by the risen Christ in His Apocalypse:

*He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken (Isa. 25:8).*

The promise that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" is now made double sure by Christ for the followers of the Lamb (see Rev. 7:17 and 21:4). Bruce M. Metzger says of the promise in Rev. 7:16-17,

*The chapter [Rev.7] ends with words that have brought comfort and consolation to millions. There are no words more comforting in the ears of those who have been bereaved than the closing promise: 'They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (7:16-17) (Breaking The Code, p. 62).*

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# Chapter XVI

## Understanding the Trumpets in their Contexts

### Revelation VII - IX

The fundamental problem which the futuristic interpreters have with the book of Revelation is their assumption that John describes the end-time events with photographic accuracy and absolute literalness. The Apocalypse, however, portrays what God has "signified" through an angel to John (Rev. 1:1, NKJV). To take John's images of future events in absolute literalness is, therefore, a basic misunderstanding of the Apocalypse, and leads to a speculative picture of the end-time.

John presents the future in a complex imagery and symbolism. A key to understand John's literary style is His pattern of anticipation and amplification. For instance, Christ's promises to the conquerors in chapters 2-3 return as being fulfilled in chs. 21-22. The announcement of Babylon's fall in chapter 14 is explained later in chs. 16-19. The persecuting beast in ch. 11:7 is described more fully in chs. 13 and 17. John thus uses the technique of interlocking his anticipatory visions in the first half of the book with the end-oriented narrative in the second half. The Apocalypse is a cohesive body, an organic whole that shows a beautiful architectural design.

A major challenge is, how to understand the apparent reiterations in the book. The end of this age is described several times (Rev. 1:7; 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 14:14-20; 19:11-21; 20:11-15). These recurrent visions of the end are part of the design of the author. They forbid the assumption that John describes the church age in a straight-line progression. He rather presents different perspectives on the end. John describes the seven seals (Rev. 6-7), the seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11), and the seven bowls (Rev. 16-17) as parallel cycles which complement each other and increasingly center on the final events.

The book of Revelation as a whole progresses from promise to fulfillment. This movement resembles the upward movement of a spiral staircase. The series of seals, trumpets and bowls all build on each other. Together they express more adequately the complexity of the church age than any one of the cycles alone. Each cycle reveals its own emphasis on apostasy, judgment, and deliverance. This intensifying pattern reinforces the message of hope for the beleaguered church of Christ. It also counteracts a fatalistic acceptance of all hostilities. The persecuted church must remember that the glorified Christ is portrayed as an all-powerful Lamb with "seven horns" (Rev. 5:6). A "horn" in the Old Testament is the symbol of political and military power (Deut. 33:17; Dan. 7:24). The unrealistic imagery of a lamb with seven horns assures God's people that the apparently defeated Lamb of God now has omnipotent power to judge and to deliver. He has this ability because He has triumphed over Satan in heaven and on earth through His testimony and death (Rev. 5:5, 9). He now reassures His true followers that they also "will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

John presents the story of apostasy, persecution and deliverance first in the seven seals and the seven trumpets (Rev. 6-9). Just as Jesus went twice through the church age in Matthew 24 [a] vss. 4-14; b) vss. 15-31], so we observe how the risen Christ repeats the basic

themes of Matthew 24 in the seals and the trumpets. While the seals inform the reader about the sufferings of the church, the trumpets deal with God's preliminary judgments on the enemies of His faithful people.

### **The Introductory Vision of the Trumpets**

In Revelation 8:2-6 John presents an introductory vision which shows the origin and purpose of the seven trumpets. It begins and ends with the announcement that there are seven angels before God that were given seven trumpets (8:2, 6). This literary device, an inclusion-introduction, marks the introductory vision as a self-contained unit. It describes the intercessory ministry of Christ and its cessation. This heavenly throne scene in Rev. 8 functions in a similar way as the introductory vision to the seven seals in Rev. 5. Just as the twenty-four elders were holding "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (5:8), so John sees in Revelation 8 an angel, "who had a golden censer," standing at the altar: "He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne" (8:3). The request of the prayers of the martyred saints "under the altar" was mentioned in the seals in Rev. 6:9-10. They cry out for divine vengeance because of the injustice done to them, as well as to God's covenant with them. They asked God to be "true" to His covenant. The vision of Rev. 8:3-4 thus parallels the time period of the seals in Revelation 6. The vision refers to the ongoing intercessory ministry of Christ in heaven, because it recalls the daily offering of incense in Israel's sanctuary service (Exod. 30:1, 7-8).

The main theme of this introductory vision to the trumpets is the assurance that Christ hears the prayer requests of His oppressed people, as was stated directly in Hebrews 4:14-16. Although the prayers of all the saints rise directly to God, they need the essential "incense" from God's own altar. This incense represents the divine propitiation for our sins. John writes of Christ: "He is the atoning sacrifice [hilasmos, propitiation) for our sins" (1 John 2:2; also 4:10). Ellen White offers this practical application: "Morning and evening the heavenly universe behold every household that prays, and the angel with the incense, representing the blood of the atonement, finds access to God" (MS 15, 1897; in S.D.A. Bible Com., 7: 971). The introductory vision ends with a scene that describes the cessation of the angel's ministry of incense, followed by his casting fire from the altar on the earth, accompanied by thunderclaps and lightnings and an earthquake:

*Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake (Rev.8:5).*

In his final act the angel uses the censer no longer for intercession but for judgment: fire without incense. This indicates that the prayers of the saints (in 6:9-11) will be answered by judgments on earth, followed by the appearance of the Judge of all the earth, in conjunction with a cosmic earthquake. A striking prototype is found in Ezekiel, who describes a vision of the curse of Yahweh on an impenitent Jerusalem:

*The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, 'Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city' (Ezek. 10:2).*

The historical context points out that just before the fateful year of 586 B.C., Israel's God was leaving Jerusalem's temple with a mighty sound (Ezek. 10:4, 5, 18). The casting of burning coals symbolized the execution of God's judgment on Jerusalem by means of war



and exile (11:8-10). This judgment was the manifestation of the covenant curses of Leviticus 26, which included the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and the scattering of Israel through wars (Lev. 26:31-34). The covenant curse implied that God would wage war against His apostate people: "I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over" (Lev. 26:24). Nevertheless, God's covenant would provide mercy for those that repented and confessed their sins (Lev. 26:40-45; Ezek. 11:16-21).

In Ezekiel's historical setting, the casting of burning coals from God's throne on earth did not symbolize the final judgment but a punitive judgment on Israel, intended to lead her to repentance (see Ezek. 11:18-20). John's introductory vision to the seven trumpets in Rev. 8:2-6 must be understood against this background of Ezekiel. John's vision covers both probationary time and the wrath of God. The series of the trumpets announces not merely the final wrath of God (this comes only under the seventh trumpet), but also a sequence of restricted judgments, which harm "only" one third of the earth (11 times, Rev. 8-9). These partial judgments of the first six trumpets are preliminary warning judgments. They warn the world concerning the last plagues to come and the unmixed wrath of God at the conclusion of the day of atonement when no one can enter the temple in heaven (Rev. 15:1, 5-8). The first six trumpets are still sent from the golden altar of incense before God (Rev. 9:13). This suggests that probationary time is still not closed during these six trumpets. The symbolic act of hurling fire from the altar on the earth indicates the initiation of God's judgments in response to the prayer requests of the saints. The sequence of the six trumpets (Rev. 8-9) that culminate in the seventh trumpet or the seven last plagues (Rev. 15-16), teach that the angel's symbolic acts at the altar will have a twofold fulfillment:

- 1) Calamities of a limited extension during the church age;
- 2) The last plagues, without mercy, on the worldwide enemies of Christ and His people.

## **The Relationship of the Seals and the Trumpets**

A challenging question is, When do the trumpets begin in relation to the preceding seals? Are they completely parallel and thus simultaneous, or sequential, or only partially parallel? There is no unanimous opinion among Bible scholars on this point. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary reports that the favored Adventist interpretation sees the "trumpets retrace, to a large extent, the period of Christian history already covered by the seven churches (chs. 2; 3) and the seven seals (chs. 6; 8:1), and that they emphasize outstanding political and military events during this period" (Vol. 7: 788). Also the "sequential" view is mentioned, according to which the seven trumpet-judgments are poured out on the earth after the close of probation. But this view is found unsubstantiated in the biblical context by the Adventist "Daniel and Revelation Committee." It points out that the events of the end-time gospel proclamation in Revelation 10 and 11:1-14 belong to the sixth trumpet. The conclusion is therefore drawn: "The trumpet events occur in historical, probationary time . . . If the seventh trumpet is tied to the closing up of the gospel work, the gospel dispensation, then the preceding six trumpets must of necessity sound during probationary time" (Symposium on Revelation, 1:181)

The post-probation view of the trumpets is based on the assumption that the trumpets

begin only after the introductory vision of Rev. 8:2-6 has expired. This view supposes that the sanctuary scene and the trumpets in Rev. 8 are portrayed in a chronological sequence. But this assumption is not justified in view of the fact that the other introductory sanctuary visions have not expired before each series begins: the one preceding the seven churches (Rev. 1), the one preceding the seven seals (Rev. 5), and the one preceding the seven bowls (Rev. 15). All introductory visions remain active throughout each series. In fact, each letter to the seven churches refers back to Christ in John's inaugural vision of Rev. 1; each seal-breaking is the result of Christ's work in the introductory vision of Rev. 5; all seven bowls are poured out while no one could enter the temple (Rev. 15:8). Consequently, it is a more adequate assumption to view the throne-vision of Rev. 8:2-6 as the abiding active source for the seven trumpets. Jon Paulien concludes: "It is more likely that John intended the reader to see the intercession at the golden altar as being available right up to the instant the seventh trumpet blows, leading to the finishing of the 'mystery of God' (Rev. 10:7), that is, the closing up of the gospel (Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 3:2-7; 6:19)" (in *Symp. on Rev.*, I:195).

The fact that the fifth trumpet refers to "the seal of God" on the foreheads of God's people (9:4), and thus seems to coincide with the end-time sealing of God's servants in Rev. 7, is a significant feature. The reference to the seal of God on "the foreheads" indicates that the sealing work of Rev. 7 and the fifth trumpet are closely connected. Both events can be viewed as historical counterparts which occur still in probationary time. Also the sixth trumpet has been recognized as a strong parallel with the sealing of Rev. 7, because this trumpet portrays the demonic counterparts of the 144,000 in a stupendous number of troops (9:13-18) (see Paulien, in *Symp. on Rev.*, I:196).

It is important to observe that God's command for the sealing time, "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God" (7:3), is still effective during the fifth trumpet (9:4), in spite of the fact that the earlier trumpets had brought a partial harm to the earth, the sea, and the trees ("a third" part was affected, 8:7-9). The revelation that the sixth trumpet-judgment is coming from the angel at the "horns of the golden altar that is before God" (9:13) indicates that the first six trumpets cover the whole probationary time of the church age. What each trumpet portrays with reference to actual human history, must be determined by careful application of each trumpet to the religious and political history of the Christian church from the Roman Empire until the present. The trumpets should not be considered by themselves, in isolation from the larger context of Revelation, if we want to avoid speculative conclusions.

### **The Post-probation View of the Last Plagues**

The content of the seventh trumpet is unfolded in the seven bowls of God's final judgment (Rev. 15-16). This is implied in the explicit numbering of the last three trumpets as the three "woes" on the earth dwellers (Rev. 8:13).

The fifth and sixth trumpets are characterized as the first and the second "woe" (9:12; 11:14), with the announcement that "the third woe is coming soon" (11:14). However, the seventh trumpet does not include any woe, except the declaration, "The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants . . . and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (11:18). Some interpreters have concluded that the seventh trumpet therefore lacks the third woe altogether. But others rightly point to John's further

revelation that the seven plagues will be the "last woe," because with them "God's wrath is completed" (15:1). Isbon T. Beckwith comments: "The recognition of the bowl-plagues as the third woe has important bearing on the question of the composition of the Apocalypse" (The Apocalypse of John, p. 671). The series of the trumpets is interwoven inextricably with the seven last plagues through John's device of the three woes. As a result, the major portion of Revelation, chapters 8-19, constitutes a unit that unfolds a successive order of God's judgments.

The critical point in this chronological sequence is the beginning of the seven last plagues, described as the "unmixed wrath of God" (Rev. 15:1; 14:10 RSV). The phrase "unmixed" [akratou, undiluted] indicates that the wrath of God will be manifested "in full strength" in the seven last plagues (Rev. 14:10; NKJV, NASB). This means that justice is no longer united with grace in "the cup of His wrath." John stresses the warning that the rejecter of God's final message will be "tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (14:10). This reminds us of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 19:24, 25) and confirms the concept that the plagues come after human probation has ended. The statement, "And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever" (14:11), reminds us of God's destruction of Edom, as a "retribution to uphold Zion's cause" (Isa. 34:8-10). These Old Testament judgments are apparently alluded to as types of the final outpouring of God's wrath in the last plagues.

*A particular indication of the salvation-historical turning point with the last plagues is the disclosure that no one can enter the heavenly temple during that time:*

*And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Rev.15:8).*

This text teaches that when God's time has come, the plagues can no longer be delayed by intercessory prayers. The "smoke from the glory of God" reminds us of the Shekinah cloud which was manifested in Israel's temple as the visible presence of God (see 2 Chron. 5:13, 14; 7:1, 2; Ezek. 10:2-4). When Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, while "the temple was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:1, 4), he received messages of doom for an apostate Israel (Isa. 6:9-13). Similarly, John sees the smoke coming from the golden bowls "filled with the wrath of God" (Rev. 15:7). The meaning is evident: "The time for intercession is past. God in his unapproachable majesty and power has declared that the end has come. No longer does he stand knocking: he enters to act in sovereign judgment" (R.H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 290).

If the seven last plagues constitute the woes of the seventh trumpet, this implies that the previous six trumpets symbolize God's preliminary judgments which take place during the church age. If the bowl-judgments mark the beginning of post-probationary time, then the trumpet-judgments fall within probationary time and cover the church age. This interlocking of the trumpets and the bowls presents a telescopic view that John has condensed in his introductory throne vision of Rev. 8:2-5.

### **Comparing the Introductory Visions of the Trumpets and the Bowls**

It is significant that the series of the trumpets and of the bowls are each rooted in a specific sanctuary vision: 8:2-5 and 15:1, 5-8. Both their distinctions and common characteristics are full of meaning. John's altar vision of Rev. 8 reveals two successive stages, one of intercessory prayer with incense at the altar (8:3, 4), followed by one of casting fire on earth by means of the censer (8:5). Thus this vision unites Christ's

mediatorial service at the altar of incense with His closing work of judgment by fire. The vision ends with a description of God's coming to the earth: "And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flushes of lightning and an earthquake" (8:5). Jon Paulien sums up both stages: "They [trumpet warnings] symbolized God's present judgments which were a warning of greater judgments to come" (Decoding Revelation's Trumpets, p. 208). The trumpets and the bowls relate to each other as local historical types to the worldwide antitype.

The seventh trumpet ends with a temple vision, which shows a marked progression with the one in Rev. 8. John sees the temple of God in heaven opened again, but now he views "the ark of his covenant," followed by thunderclaps, lightnings, an earthquake and a great hailstorm (Rev. 11:19). The progression is evident. The focus has shifted from the heavenly altar of incense in Rev. 8 to the ark of God's covenant, which was located in the Most Holy Place in Israel's temple. This progression points to the Day of Atonement in Israel's tabernacle services (see Lev. 16). On the final day God separated the repentant from the impenitent: "Anyone who does not deny himself ["humble himself," NASB] on that day must be cut off from his people" (Lev. 23:29).

The temple vision of the ark in Rev. 11:19 is further expanded in Rev. 15:5-8 where the judgment ministry of the seven angels is portrayed. When these angels have poured out their bowls of the wrath of God on the earth, God's voice exclaims from the throne: "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake . . . From the sky huge hailstones . . . fell upon men" (Rev. 16:17, 18, 21). This final description matches that of Rev. 11:19 giving the seventh trumpet the same ending as the seventh plague. The trumpets are thus continued in the last plagues. And both the trumpets and the plagues are rooted in the throne vision of Rev. 8:2-5. Jon Paulien states it well in summation:

*The book of Revelation flows naturally . . . from a view of the cross to a view of the inauguration of Christ's ministry in the light of the cross (Rev. 5), to a picture of the intercessory ministry that results (Rev. 8:3, 4), and ultimately to the judgment that precedes the end (Rev. 11:18, 19). This order of events is characteristic of the entire NT (in Symp. on Rev., I:197).*

The descriptions of the final theophany in Rev. 11:19 and 16:17-21 show the additional feature of a great hailstorm, which was not included in Rev. 8:5. The meaning of this addition can be seen in the fact that "hail" was an essential part of God's holy wars against His enemies (Job 38:22, 23): against Egypt (Exod. 9:18, 22-26), against the Amorites (Josh. 10:11), against David's enemies (Ps. 18:12-14), against an apostate, rebellious Israel (Isa. 28:2, 17) and Judah (Ezek. 13:11, 13). Especially Ezekiel's prediction that God will fight against Gog and his allied nations, by His fiery wrath in "a great earthquake," together with "torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur" (Ezek. 38:19, 22), is significant. The fulfillment of Ezekiel's last holy war, which Revelation explains as "Armageddon" (16:13-16), will not take place during the first six trumpets, but during the last plagues. Richard Bauckham interpreted the gradual enlargement of the eschatological earthquake and hail in Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 15:5; 16:17-21 as follows:

*The progressive expansion of the formula accords with the increasing severity of each series of judgments, as the visions focus more closely on the End itself and the limited warning judgments of the trumpets give place to the seven last plagues of God's wrath on the finally unrepentant (The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation, p. 204).*

The trumpet-judgments reveal something of God's agonizing patience with His enemies. The gradual rise of the intensity of God's judgments shows the divine reluctance to bring about an end to probationary time. Here Peter's word applies: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

## **A Theology of the Seals and the Trumpets**

What is the theological significance of the seals and of the trumpets? The content of each series reveals that it is directed to different kinds of people. The seals center on the martyrs slain because of their witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus during the church age (Rev. 6:9-11). Their loud cry "How long . . . ?" indicates that Christian persecution had been going on for a long time. The first four seals forecast the persecutions of Christians due to the synagogue (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) and pagan Rome (Rev. 1:9; 2:10, 13). The fifth seal extends the persecution of the saints beyond Imperial Rome until the final tribulation has expired (6:11; 7:14). The phrase of the angel: "to wait a little longer" corresponds to the "short time" allotted to the devil in Rev. 12:12, and also extends till the second coming of Christ. The seals teach that discipleship of Christ implies suffering for Christ (see Rev. 1:9). Leon Morris expressed this lesson well:

*John's words [in Rev. 6:9] are a reminder that throughout history there has been a persistent hostility towards deeply committed Christians on the part of those wielding power. It is manifest today as at other periods, and it will be so to the end of time (The Rev. of St. John, p. 108).*

But the Lamb who breaks each seal of the scroll is at the same time the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5; 6:1). He stands at the completion of the seals to judge all men (6:15-17; cp. Matt. 25:31-46). The kingdom of glory comes only after the great tribulation (Rev. 7:9-17). Christian existence is living with the tension of suffering and hope for the kingdom of Christ. Graeme Goldsworthy remarks perceptively:

*It reflects the suffering of the Lamb and anticipates the consummation of the kingdom through the conquest of the Lion (The Lamb and the Lion. The Gospel in Revelation, p. 33).*

The fifth seal comforts those who sacrifice themselves for Christ's sake. The cry of the martyrs is not for bitter revenge but for the vindication of their faith in God and in the cause of Christ for which they had died.

The martyrs expect the execution of justice on "the inhabitants of the earth." The judgments portrayed in the seals should not be understood as direct judgments from God, but rather as the unholy actions of persecutors, "the inhabitants of the earth," a term used in Revelation as a technical term for all who have succumbed to idolatrous worship (Rev. 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8). The cries of the saints are aimed not at some preliminary judgments but on the ultimate pronouncement of God's judgment in their favor. They request the speedy fulfillment of Daniel's judgment scene:

*As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom (Dan. 7:21, 22; see also Deut. 32:43).*

The slain saints are still crying out today to God to fulfill His promises. Such persistent prayers for justice assume the faithfulness of God, "the Sovereign Lord, holy and true" (Rev. 6:10). The message of the seals implies that Christ determines those who are the rightful heirs of the kingdom of God, who are in His sight the true "saints, the people of the Most High," and to whom "the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over" (Dan. 7:27). That cardinal issue is the pastoral concern of the entire Apocalypse.

In the introductory vision to the trumpets, John saw how "the prayers of all the saints" on earth ascend before God with the smoke of heavenly incense (Rev. 8:3, 4). Heaven will respond to these prayers of the suffering saints by casting "fire" from the altar to the earth. This represents specific judgments that limit or incapacitate the world's persecuting powers until the global judgments bring final destruction. Daniel told the king of Babylon that Israel's God "changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them" (Dan. 2:21). This active rulership of God is symbolically set forth by the seven trumpets for the church age. The trumpet presentations especially recall the plagues of Egypt. God had sent the ten plagues in answer to the cries of His people: "I have heard them crying out . . ." (Exod. 3:7). This reminds us that the judgments of God are coming in defense of His covenant people. This is apparent especially if we compare the fifth trumpet with the fifth seal.

While the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-11) centers on the request of the martyred saints, the fifth trumpet portrays the judgments on the unbelieving world, on those only who "did not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4). The last three trumpets are even characterized as "woes" to "the inhabitants of the earth," the unregenerated world population (11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8). This basic contrast between the seals and the trumpets indicates that the two prophetic sequences focus on different people, while paralleling each other. Both series are complementary. Together they form a fuller picture of the church age. While the seals raise the anxious question why God appears to be so passive about the fate of His persecuted people, the trumpets assure that Christ is actively involved in the world. He reaches out to His enemies until His patience ends. His judgment becomes final with the seventh trumpet, that is, with the seven last plagues.

The trumpets point back to Israel's liberation from Egypt. The purpose of the plagues on Egypt was to convince Pharaoh that these signified "the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19), and that he should let Israel go free to worship their God (Exod. 10:7). Likewise, it is the purpose of the trumpet judgments to convince the wicked world that Christ stands by His people and calls all men to turn to Him with repentance. Michael Wilcock has pointed to this aspect of the trumpets:

*The Seals showed the suffering church pleading for justice to be done. But the Trumpets show the wicked world being offered mercy. The offer is not accepted, and the world will not in fact repent (9:20f.); but let it never be said that God has not done all in his power, even to the devastation of his own once perfect earth, in order to bring men to their senses (I Saw Heaven Opened, p. 95).*

This urging of repentance on the enemies of Christ's people is the theological significance of the seals and the trumpets.

## The Trumpets as Divine Fire Ordeals

The symbol of hurling fire from the heavenly altar to the earth, in Rev. 8:5, is challenging. This symbolism is repeated in Rev. 14 where the angel "who had charge of the fire, came from the altar" and announced that the grapes of the earth will be thrown "into the great winepress of God's wrath" (14:18, 19). This connection with Rev. 14 indicates that the introductory vision of the trumpets in Rev. 8 anticipates all seven trumpets until the second advent of Christ. Revelation 14 shows that God's wrath remains "outside the city" (14:20), that is, outside "Mount Zion" on which are standing the Lamb with the 144,000 sealed ones (14:1). The fire from the heavenly altar comes therefore not as indiscriminate destruction, but as a fiery ordeal to reject the unworthy and protect the faithful. Such ordeals by fire had occurred earlier, when God rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, while Lot's family was vindicated (Gen. 19:24-29), and again when "fire came out from the LORD" and consumed 250 guilty men of Korah, leaving the other Israelites untouched (Num. 16:35). Also Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego underwent a fire ordeal during which they were protected within the blazing furnace while the fire killed the soldiers (Dan. 3:19-23).

The burning of the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a fire ordeal (see Matt. 22:7) in which the rejecters of Christ experienced terrible calamities, while the Christian believers escaped punishment (Luke 21:20-23). Paul also describes the final judgment as an ordeal by fire regarding every one's work: "It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Cor. 3:13). For those who reject Christ, the apostles expect only a fearful judgment and a "raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb. 10:26-29), because "our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Heb. 12:29; also 2 Thess. 1:5-8).

We may then understand the casting of fire from heaven on earth in Rev. 8:5 as representing heaven-sent ordeals which discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. The ultimate purpose of these successive judgments is to disqualify the covenant breakers and to determine the legitimate heirs of the kingdom of God.

The symbolic portrayal of the trumpet judgments borrows the motif of Israel's exodus and her journey through the wilderness en route to the promised land. In particular, the seven trumpet blasts of Rev. 8-9 reminds us of Israel's conquest of Jericho. Then the issue was: Who are the rightful heirs of the promised land? Ellen White explained: "God was about to establish Israel in Canaan, to develop among them a nation and government that should be a manifestation of his kingdom upon the earth" (PP 492). According to the divine command, "they burned the whole city and everything in it" (Josh. 6:24). But Rahab and her family were spared because of her faith in Israel's God. In this way Israel inherited the "kingdom" of Jericho while the condemned were dispossessed of the land. Likewise, when God's enemies have been defeated during the apocalyptic trumpets (Rev. 8-9), the last trumpet announces:

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).*

This triumphant proclamation reveals the underlying motif of the entire series of the trumpets: Who is worthy to inherit the kingdom of the world? The cosmic shout of victory means the fulfillment of the reign of God's Messiah, as promised in the Messianic Psalms (e.g. Psalms 2 and 110). Before this goal of history will be realized, the "earth dwellers" must first be disqualified by the repeated downfall of their kingdoms through

divine ordeals. The trumpets present these judgments as historical ordeals.

### **The Trumpets as the Preliminary Plagues on a Hostile World**

The trumpets describe God's judgments by allusions to the ancient plagues of Egypt. The first trumpet blast sends "hail and fire mixed with blood to the earth (8:7). This alludes to the seventh plague on Egypt (Exod. 9:22-26), which was sent for the sake of Israel's liberation. The second trumpet sends a fiery mountain into the sea so that "a third of the sea turned into blood," killing all living creatures in it (Rev. 8:8, 9). This alludes to the first plague of Egypt, when Moses struck the Nile with his staff and "all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died" (Exod. 7:20, 21). The third trumpet sends a blazing star on "a third of the rivers and on the springs of water" so that they become bitter, killing many people (Rev. 8:10, 11). This bears some likeness to the fact that the Egyptians could not drink the water of the Nile (Exod. 7:21). The fourth trumpet causes the sun, moon and stars to be darkened for a third of the day and of the night (Rev. 8:12). This phenomenon reminds us of the ninth plague which brought total darkness over Egypt for three days (Exod. 10:21-23). The fifth trumpet causes hellish locusts to torture the people for five months (Rev. 9:1-11). This alludes to the eighth plague of Egypt when locusts devoured "everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees" (Exod. 10:13-15). The sixth trumpet sends a monstrous cavalry from the Euphrates river which kills "a third of mankind" (Rev. 9:13-19). Such a judgment corresponds to the tenth plague when Yahweh's angel of death caused all the firstborn in Egypt to die: "Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Exod. 11:7).

While we read after each plague on Egypt that Pharaoh's heart was hardened to let Israel go, so we read after the sixth trumpet: "The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood . . . Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts" (Rev. 9:20, 21).

The literary resemblance of the trumpets with Egypt's plagues tells us that the trumpets are in essence not natural disasters or general calamities, but God's covenant curses on His enemies. Ever since Christ's victory over Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4), Christ has been active to reestablish the kingdom of God on earth: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25). The intercessory ministry of Christ in heaven includes His redemptive forbearance with His enemies. The trumpets announce the limits of His patience and the ongoing overthrow of the evil kingdoms prior to His coming. The trumpets disclose the inadequacy of man's kingdoms and disqualifies them. Then the seventh trumpet will declare: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

### **The Creator Remains Ruler of the Earth**

The trumpets suggest the gradual undoing of the work of creation. Each trumpet judgment refers to a feature that corresponds to a day of the creation week: 1) earth; 2) sea; 3) rivers and springs of water; 4) sun, moon, stars; 5) locusts; 6) man; 7) Kingdom. From this perspective the trumpet judgments touch all the six days of creation. The progressive destruction of God's creation can be understood as a disqualification of the present



inhabitants of the world:

*The significance of these references to the creation [in Rev. 8-9] is no doubt to indicate that Christ is establishing His kingdom over every aspect of creation and that all false heirs, though temporarily exercising dominion, will be dispossessed. (E. M. Rusten. A Critical Evaluation of Dispensational Interpretations of the Book of Revelation, II: 370).*

Yet, Christ does not destroy His own creation. He only provides the opportunity for Satan, who is given the name in both Hebrew and Greek: "Destroyer" (Rev. 9:11)! Satan destroys what God has created. No passage in Revelation portrays more graphically this demonic character than the fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev. 9). We may expect this to happen increasingly in the course of history, especially in the time of the end.

John does not expect us to apply his portrayal of tormenting locusts and horses literally. He wants us to understand that God even uses the powers of evil and of Satan as His instruments of judgment in order to expose the hidden evil of His opponents.

The trumpets show that the church should not expect that the gospel will create peace in the world and dispel idol worship (see Rev. 9:20, 21). In fact, the second half of Revelation reveals that the gospel will be more and more obscured by evil spirits who proceed from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet (Rev. 16:13). The purpose of the activity of demonic spirits is to deceive all men through miraculous signs and to unite the world in rebellion against its Maker.

Both Jesus and Paul predicted that the end-time will be marked by the increasing manifestation of demonic deception through signs and miracles (see Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). This intensified activity of demonic spirits is placed in Revelation as the counterpart of the revived work of the Holy Spirit, as described in Revelation 18:1-4. Over against the darkening sky "by the smoke from the Abyss" (9:2) appears the angel of God who has great authority to illuminate the earth by his splendor (18:1). This contrast calls us to consider the last trumpets of Rev. 9 within the larger plan of God, as developed in the visions of the end-time in Rev. 12-20. The end-time visions of the Apocalypse reveal the hidden objective of the demonic spirits: to lead the whole world to its ultimate attack against the followers of the Lamb of God (Rev. 13:15-17; 20:7-9). In that final development of the great controversy between God and Satan, "All not occupied by the Spirit of God will become filled by the spirits of devils" (D. Ford, Crisis, 11:417).

The SOURCE MATERIAL of Chapter 16 is combined with that of Chapter 17.

# Chapter 17

## A Historical Application of the Trumpets

To begin, we wish to emphasize the symbolic nature of the visions that God gave to John, "to show his servants what must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1; also 4:1; 17:1; 21:9; 22:1, 6, 8). Apocalyptic language should not be forced into literal descriptions of our modern technocratic society. Its language rather requires us to determine what it symbolizes. To take the visionary descriptions as literal realities, just as the books of Genesis and Exodus describe history, is a basic misunderstanding of John's intention.

Nevertheless, commentators who favor the system of futurism, simply assume that the first four trumpets depict repeated collisions of meteors or asteroids with the earth. John's visions require us to ask, where and how does the Old Testament use these pictures in its prophetic perspective? We reject both the principles of literalism and of allegorism for Revelation's apocalyptic language as being speculative approaches. It is more in harmony with biblical thinking to view the trumpets as covenant judgments on the covenant breakers. John uses covenant language and symbols, not secular, soothsaying descriptions.

In the church age, Christ executes His preliminary judgments on the strongholds of the kingdom of darkness. The trumpet blast was the familiar symbol of holy war (see Num. 10:9; Zeph. 1:16; Jer. 4:5, 9, 21; Ezek. 7:14).

The trumpets depict how Christ as the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), or the Holy Warrior, begins to send preliminary warning judgments. He uses the traditional agents of holy war, such as fire, hail, the sword, plagues, darkening of the sky, locusts and scorpions, and earthquake, and even fallen angels, because all remain under His sovereign rule. In the trumpets Christ activates a series of limited warning judgments.

The historical application of the trumpets is notoriously difficult and controversial. Most commentators refrain from any concrete application to history. Nevertheless, we are obliged to carefully identify the historical realities to which the war trumpets refer. Our safest guide remains Jesus' master prophecy of Matthew 24, which is based on Daniel's apocalyptic outline (see Matt. 24:15). Jesus referred specifically to the Messianic judgment on Jerusalem and Judea by the Roman army between A.D. 66 and 135 (see Matt. 24:15-21; Luke 21:20-24). Paul applied Daniel's prophecies concerning the fourth world empire to Imperial Rome, which would be removed as "the withholder" or "restrainer" before the rise of the antichrist (see 2 Thess. 2:7). Paul expects the antichrist to be subsequently revealed within the temple of God, only to be judged and destroyed at Christ's return (2 Thess. 2:4, 8). For a detailed analysis of 2 Thess. 2, see above, Chapter 7.

Both Jesus and Paul pointed to God's coming judgments in the Christian age. As the sovereign Lord of history, Christ uses earthly rulers as His instruments of chastisement, as earlier God had used the kings of Assyria (Isa. 10:5, 6), of Babylon (Jer. 25:8-11), and of Persia (Isa. 44:28; 45:1) as His instruments. The prophets announced at the same time that God would also judge and punish the nations He had used, because they had

overstepped their God-appointed boundaries with cruelties and idolatrous self-exaltation (Isa. 10:5-7, 12; Jer. 25:15-26; 51:47-49, 55-56; Dan. 5:24-28).

God's style of executing justice is to begin with His own covenant people ("Begin at my sanctuary," Ezek. 9:6). Jeremiah declared that the cup of divine wrath would be handed first to rebellious Israel:

*See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you [the hostile gentile nations] indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the Lord Almighty (Jer. 25:29; see also Amos 3:2; Mic. 3:12).*

The Old Testament describes how terribly Jerusalem and all Israel suffered when the army of Babylon finally destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 586 B.C. (2 Chron. 36:15-19; Lam. 4:11). The same judgment was foretold by Daniel for Jerusalem's rebuilt temple, this time for the ultimate sin of putting the Messiah to a violent death (Dan. 9:26, 27). This was fulfilled, according to Jesus' application, when the Roman army destroyed city and temple in A.D. 70 and continued to devastate the land of Israel until the uprising of Bar-Kokhba was smashed in A.D. 135 (Matt. 23:32, 37-39; 24:1, 2, 15-21; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24).

Jesus borrowed a judgment image from Ezekiel which is also part of the trumpet symbolism: "For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? (Luke 23:31). Ezekiel announced that the God of Israel would "set fire to you [Jerusalem] and it will consume all your trees, both green and dry" (Ezek. 20:47). Jesus uses this tree symbolism to announce Jerusalem's impending judgment. The metaphor of "trees" stands clearly for people, for Israelites in particular (in both Ezekiel 20 and Luke 23:31). David E. Aune explains: "If Jesus, who is innocent, is about to be executed, how much more will those who are guilty (the Jews who rejected Jesus) pay that penalty" (Prophecy in Early Christianity, p. 177).

## **The First Trumpet Applied to History**

The first trumpet announces that "hail and fire mixed with blood" will be hurled down on the earth and burn up a third of the trees and the green grass (see Rev. 8:7). This unrealistic combination of blood with hail from heaven points to a symbolic portrayal of God's judgment on the first persecutors of the Messianic Israel.

In His prophetic discourse, Jesus first began to inform His disciples about "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt. 24:6), but in the parallel part He described the fall of Jerusalem and the afflictions of the Jewish people (24:15-19), together with the distress of the Messianic people of God (24:20-21). The Roman war against the Jews had not yet ended when John wrote his Apocalypse. The Roman army under Trajan and Hadrian continued to desolate Judea until the year 135, when 50 cities and 985 towns were destroyed and depopulated. John Wesley comments on the first trumpet: "Thus vengeance began at the Jewish enemies of Christ's kingdom" (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, p. 975).

Jesus had declared that He came "to bring fire on the earth" (Luke 12:49). To Him a barren fig tree on the road to Jerusalem represented the Jewish nation. His symbolic act of placing a curse on that tree (Matt. 21:19) functions as a type of the tree symbolism in the first trumpet. Both leaders and followers were held responsible for their unbelief in the Lamb whom God had sent to Israel. Christ warned: "They will dash you to the ground,

you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, *because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you*" (Luke 19:44).

## **The Second Trumpet Applied to History**

The second trumpet describes how "something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea," affecting a third of the sea to turn into "blood," destroying sea creatures and ships (see Rev. 8:8). This symbolic portrayal ("something like"[hos]), has borrowed its images from the fall of Babylon in Jeremiah 51. God had judged ancient Babylon, "for all the wrong they have done in Zion" (Jer. 51:24):

*'I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,' declares the LORD.  
'I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain' (Jer. 51:25).*

Thus the destroyer (Babylon) would be destroyed by Israel's God, by being cast into the sea. "Mountains" were used in the Old Testament as a symbol of nations (see Isa. 2:2, 3; 11:9; 13:4; 41:15; Dan. 2:35, 44, 45; Ezek. 35:2, 7, 8; Zech. 4:7). Jon Paulien observed: "In judgment passages, mountains as representing nations are always the object of God's judgments, never the agent (Isa. 41:15; 42:15; Ezek. 35:2-7; 38:20; Zech. 4:7)" (Decoding Revelation's Trumpets, p. 388). After A.D. 70, both Jews and Christians saw in Imperial Rome a new "Babylon", because Rome, like Babylon, had destroyed the temple and Jerusalem (in 4 Ezra 3; 2 Baruch 10-11; 1 Enoch 18). Peter even mentions "Babylon" as the cryptic name for Rome (1 Pet. 5:13). The second trumpet blast announces Christ's judgment on the blazing mountain or empire of Rome. After the fall of Jerusalem came the fall of Rome. John describes the fall of end-time Babylon in a similar image:

*Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again'... 'In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth' (Rev. 18:21, 24).*

This remarkable parallel between the second trumpet and Rev. 18 points to the same motivation of the judgments: the cry of the martyred saints! Paulien explains:

*The sea turning to blood in the second trumpet probably represents a prophetic reversal of the persecution of God's people by the wicked mentioned in Rev. 16:4-6 (cf. 18:24). They receive in kind for what they have done (Ib., p. 383).*

The second trumpet indicates that both the mountain and the sea are judged: "turned into blood". The "sea" was the regular symbol for the peoples of the earth (Isa. 57:20; 17:12, 13; Jer. 51:41, 42; Dan. 7:2, 3, 17). The second trumpet thus announces not only the fall of Rome but also the devastation of its economic and social order: "a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed" (Rev. 8:9).

## **The Third Trumpet Applied to History**

The third trumpet announces that "a great star," called "Wormwood," would fall from the sky like a blazing torch on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water, making them

"bitter" so that "many people died" (Rev. 8:10, 11). The Apocalypse began with John's inaugural vision of Christ holding "seven stars" in His right hand (1:16). These were interpreted as symbols of the "angels of the seven churches" (1:20). This symbolism of "stars" has a root in Daniel: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3). Jesus applied the star symbolism to all the righteous ones in the coming kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:43). Revelation 12 uses "stars" as a symbol of the leaders of God's people (12:1). The act of a falling star then portrays how the church leadership would fall collectively from truth into the darkness of error and apostasy. The poisonous, bitter "wormwood" was used by Moses as a symbol of idolatry (Deut. 29:17, 18 NKJV, NASB) and by Jeremiah as a curse of the covenant for idolatry: "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink" (Jer. 9:15 NASB). The New Testament gives a practical example of false teachers as "wandering stars," who are "shepherds who feed only themselves" and therefore fall under Christ's judgment (Jude 12, 13).

We may understand then that the third trumpet predicts the apostasy in the Christian church after the fall of Rome, when the spiritual leadership would fall away from Christ as the Source of light and living waters (John 4:14; 7:37-39). As a result, the doctrinal teachings and the religious way of life would become a bitter and deadly poison for the souls of men: "a third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter" (Rev. 8:11).

Both Jesus and Paul had warned the apostolic church against the coming of false prophets and their deceptive teachings that would draw the believers away from Christ "after themselves" (Matt. 24:4, 5, 24; Acts 20:26-31 NKJV). The most striking parallel to the third trumpet is Paul's apocalyptic outline of the church age in 2 Thessalonians 2! Here he periodizes the church age in two successive periods, first the phase of the restrainer, who delays the predicted apostasy, followed by the unrestrained rise of the antichrist within the church or the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:7, 8, 4). This order of events was fulfilled in history when Imperial Rome (the restrainer) fell away and was succeeded by Papal Rome and the medieval church-state. Both 2 Thessalonians 2 and the trumpets predict that the fall of Rome sets the stage for the great apostasy. This apostasy will cause "many people" to die. Paul explained: "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Perversion of the apostolic gospel brings inevitably spiritual decline and death. Nevertheless, both leaders and followers are held responsible for the prevailing heresies and idolatries in the Christian world.

### **The Fourth Trumpet Applied to History**

The fourth trumpet strikes the heavenly bodies, with the result that sun, moon and stars turn "dark" for a third of the time (Rev. 8:12). The issue of whether it meant a third of the intensity of shining or of the time of shining is problematic. Paulien concludes: "There is total darkness for a third of the time" (Ib., p. 414). This mathematical indication ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) points again to the divine control of the limited trumpet judgments. In keeping with the previous trumpets, we must also view the fourth one as a symbolic representation of a judgment that effects mankind and warns against a greater judgment to come. Again the symbolic meaning points to a more serious reality than a literal darkening of the sky for a third of

the day and night. The symbolic use of "darkness" in the Old Testament shows us the way to an adequate understanding.

Isaiah uses "darkness" as a metaphor for "disaster" in the holy warfare of Israel's God (45:7; also Amos 5:20). He also uses "darkness" as a symbol for ignorance or blindness regarding the saving truth of Israel's God. Israel is called to be "a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (Isa. 42:7; also Ps. 107:10, 11). Especially important is the prophet's identification of "light" with God's revelation in "the law and the testimony" (Isa. 8:20). All false teachers who do not speak according to this word "have no light of dawn" ("it is because there is no light in them," NKJV). Their destiny is to "be thrust into utter darkness" (Isa. 8:22). Micah explains God's judgment on Jerusalem in terms of spiritual darkness:

*Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination.*

*The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them . . . because there is no answer from God (Mic. 3:6, 7).*

The time comes when the whole world will be covered with "thick darkness" (Isa. 60:2), including a part of the land of Israel (Isa. 9:1, 2). The New Testament proclaims that Jesus began to preach His message of saving light in Galilee in order to fulfill what Isaiah had promised: "the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matt. 4:16; Isa. 9:1, 2; see also Luke 1:79). This shows that light and darkness in the New Testament are determined by the gospel of Christ. Paul even spiritualizes God's act of creating light in Genesis 1:

*"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).*

In the gospel God actually repeats His work of creating light. This sets the stage for the demonic aspect of concealing this light from the people who sit in darkness:

*For the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4).*

Idolatry is an expression of the "darkening" of men's foolish hearts (Rom. 1:21), of the perversion of the true knowledge of God, of the "blindness" of the Gentiles (Rom. 2:19). But by faith in Christ, God "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13, 14; also 1 Pet. 2:9).

This apostolic understanding of "light and darkness" is the fundamental motif in John's writings. They report the sayings of Jesus:

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).*

*"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:47; also vs. 35-36).*

The reign of darkness becomes visible in the persecution and capture of Christ (Luke 22:53). This was symbolized by a literal cosmic darkening of the sun for three hours during the crucifixion of Jesus (Matt. 27:45). In keeping with this apostolic light/darkness

symbolism, the fourth trumpet predicts that during the church age a temporary darkening of all light will come over much of the world. The gravity of this judgment can be understood better if this "darkening" is seen as the determined concealment of the gospel of Christ. Paulien explains: "The fourth trumpet results in the obliteration of these gospel blessings [of the third trumpet]. The truth that provides spiritual life is no longer visible . . . the very presence of these life-giving sources is removed in part" (Decoding, p. 415).

What time and situation match such an obscurity of the gospel light in the world? The fourth trumpet brings an intensification of the third trumpet judgment. The "dark ages" of the 1000-year supremacy of the medieval state-church ended with the rise of the great reformers in the 16th century. But the surge of other reactionary movements, such as rationalism, humanism, and theological liberalism, began to overshadow the gospel light in Christendom. The Renaissance man was born, the self-willed person that rejects every outside standard or restraint, and who questions all tradition and authority. The Peace Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 "ended the reign of theology over the European mind, and left the road obscured but passable for the tentatives of reason" (W. and A. Durant, *The Age of Reason Begins*, p. 572).

Charles D. Alexander described the rise of modern rationalism as "the last scourge of the church, the systematic denial of the Bible, contempt of all ideas of an inspired revelation of God, and the full acceptance of atheistic science to account for creation," even as the death of Protestantism (*The Mystery of the First Four Trumpets*, p. 166). The dreadful consequences of ignoring and denying the word of God would become evident during the subsequent trumpets.

### **John's Introduction to the Three Final Trumpets**

*As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels (Rev. 8:13).*

John makes an incision in the series of trumpets after the fourth one, similarly to what he had done in the series of the seals. The last three trumpets are marked specifically as three "woes" which succeed each other only after remarkable pauses between each (see 9:12; 11:14).

With these woes or covenant curses God allows an increase of the demonic manifestation and darkness on the earth, but not without assuring His worshipers that no harm will come to them. They stand under His seal of approval and protection (Rev. 9:4). The repeated passive phrase "was given" (9:1, 3, 5) indicates that Christ remains in control of the supernatural evil powers that are released, so that their dreadful work remains restricted to a third of mankind (Rev. 9:8). The long descriptions of the fifth and sixth trumpets are bewildering in both their graphic art form and historical application. Desmond Ford perceives their purpose as follows: "It represents the spiritual torment and death that come to those who persist in resisting the divine invitation to repent" (*Crisis!*, II: 442). John's description can be understood better in the light of Hosea's judgment oracle on an idolatrous Israel:

*"Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the*

*people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law" (Hos. 8:1).*

## **The Fifth Trumpet Applied to History**

*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev. 9:1-4).*

John's vision describes a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. This connects the fifth trumpet with the third trumpet, where John had seen "a great star," named "Wormwood," falling from the sky which had poisoned a third of the rivers and springs of water (8:10, 11). Now this star "was given" the key to the shaft of the Abyss, which stands for the region of Satan and his angels (Luke 8:31; Jud 6; Rev. 20:1, 3). This fallen "star" stands as a symbol of Satan, "the angel of the Abyss," whose name represents his work and character: "Abaddon" (Hebrew) or "Apollyon" (Greek), meaning Destroyer (9:11). This now becomes his assigned mission ("was given") and authority ("king," 9:11) by the One who holds "the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18). Christ thus remains the sovereign Ruler over all demons. Against the Creator appears the destroyer as the de-creator, the very opposite of Christ. The first task the destroyer performs is to open the Abyss so that the sun and the whole sky are obscured by a gigantic smoke from the Abyss. This blackening of the sky by the smoke from the realm of demons is at the heart of this woe trumpet.

While the previous trumpets announced the perversion and partial obscuring of the light of the gospel, the fifth trumpet shows a large eclipse of the gospel through the triumphant spread of satanic errors and heresies. The light of Christ now is publicly concealed. The lie triumphs over the truth.

John sees how "out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth" (9:3). He describes them as "horses prepared for battle," which will be victorious ("crowns of gold"), yet which have humanlike faces, women's hair and lions' teeth, and tails and stings like scorpions (9:7-10).

John's portrayal of these bizarre locusts is borrowed from Joel's poetic description of a locust plague (Joel 1-2), as is generally recognized. Joel used a literal plague of locusts that had devastated the land of Judah by eating all vegetation (Joel 1:4), as a symbol of the coming Babylonian army and its victorious cavalry (Joel 2:1-9). That coming day of judgment would be "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness." Jerusalem must be warned by blowing the trumpet in Zion (Joel 2:1, 2). Joel's locusts therefore "have the appearance of horses; they gallop like cavalry, with a noise like that of chariots . . . like a mighty army drawn up for battle" (Joel 2:4, 5; cp. Rev. 9:7, 9). They also have "the teeth of a lion" (Joel 1:6; cp. Rev. 9:8). While Joel portrayed the hostile army of Babylon, John portrays the hostile forces of Satan that will invade the world with soul-destroying philosophies that cause people to lose all hope and meaning of life. John particularly points to the psychological nature of the apocalyptic locust plague, by stating that "they were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five



months" (Rev. 9:5). The torture is caused by the poisonous sting of the scorpion's tails of the locusts. Jaques Ellul suggests that the dominant trait of these locusts is the mixture of different species of nature: "The evil that they do they do from behind, like the scorpion. Which means that they act by the power of the lie" (Apocalypse, p. 75). Satan's major tools of operation indeed are lies, deception and persecution (Matt. 24; 2 Thess. 2).

Jesus had used snakes and scorpions as metaphors for demons, but He assured His disciples: "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:19, 20).

The fifth trumpet likewise assures Christ's people that the demonic locusts have received authority only to harm those people that do not have the protective seal of God (9:4). B.M. Metzger comments: "Just as the Israelites had been exempt from the plagues of Egypt, so now the Christians who have God's seal upon their foreheads will be completely unharmed by these awful creatures of divine judgment (9:4)" (Breaking The Code, p. 65).

Those without Christ will receive the poisonous sting of deadly lies causing an unbearable mental agony and suicidal anguish (9:5, 6). The given period of torture of "five months" (9:5, 10) is explained perhaps best by Chr. Wordsworth: "As natural locusts have their season of five months prescribed and limited by God, so these spiritual locusts will not be able to exercise their power of injuring men beyond the period which is determined by Him" (The New Testament in the Original Greek, II:207). Here the message is again that Christ is the sovereign Ruler, who allows only one season for this curse of the destroyer. In this ordeal the unregenerate people are proven guilty of covenant breaking, while the sealed ones are vindicated.

To what time and to which destructive philosophies does this woe-trumpet point? While any historical application must remain tentative, a relevant application can be made to the time when the godless philosophies of the Renaissance or the Enlightenment swept Western civilization and caused the agonies of the meaninglessness of this life, and of the hopelessness for the future. The traditional God-centered theology was replaced by a man-centered philosophy, in which man is accountable only to himself. In the various forms of contemporary humanism we witness a religion without God, in which man himself is the measure of all things. Its arrogant slogan is: "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves" ("Humanist Manifesto II," in Humanist Manifestos I & II, ed. P. Kurtz, Buffalo: Prometheus, 1973, p. 16; see also N. L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism*). In this basic lie are rooted all mental agonies and suicidal desires. Joel asked, "Who can endure it?" (1:11), but he also presents God's way of deliverance: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning . . . Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (2:12, 13).

## **The Sixth Trumpet Applied to the End-time**

Because no repentance is foreseen, the sixth trumpet follows in a second woe. Now Satan is given more freedom to reveal his true character and to accomplish his devilish goal to destroy the earth and all who are earth-dwellers. However, God releases the forces of evil only at the precise hour of His own choosing (see Rev. 9:15, NIV, RSV, JB). This woe trumpet then leads to the final showdown between Satan and his armies on the one hand,

and Christ and His armies on the other hand.

*The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number (Rev. 9:13-16).*

This war trumpet first reminds the church of the merciful purpose of this judgment by pointing to its origin at "the golden altar before God," specifically its "horns." These horns represent the place where the Levitical priest sprinkled the blood of atonement for Israel (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25).

The heavenly voice is the divine response to the prayers of the oppressed saints (Rev. 6:9). The response comes in the command to release the four angels who were bound at the great Euphrates River (9:14). As a result an inconceivably huge cavalry of 200 million is released which goes forth to kill "a third of mankind." These four angels are clearly evil angels, the leaders of a demonic multitude. The Euphrates is an important symbol, because in the Old Testament it represented the archenemies of Israel, that invaded her land like an overflowing flood (see Isa. 8:8, 9; Jer. 46:2, 10). "Releasing the four angels" at the Euphrates in the time of the end signifies a worldwide warfare against the people of God. The number "four" symbolizes all directions of the compass (Rev. 7:2; 20:7). John describes the horses and their riders again as he had portrayed the locusts in the previous trumpet as innumerable demonic powers (9:17-19). They are at the same time the instruments of the divine judgment on a world united in rebellion against God. They kill a third of mankind (9:15, 18), by means of "fire, smoke and sulfur" that came out of the "mouths" of the horses (9:18, 19). The demonic quality of these three plagues is indicated by the repeated phrase that these hellish plagues "came out of their mouths" (9:18, 19; also 16:13, 14).

The significance of this judgment is in essence further unfolded in the second half of the Apocalypse where the Euphrates' river is portrayed again as the worldwide followers of the harlot "Babylon" (17:1, 15). These multitudes finally turn against Babylon and burn her with "fire" (17:16) to fulfill the divine purpose (17:17)!

The focus of the sixth trumpet is strictly on the overwhelming multitude (John only "heard" their number) of demonic forces who kill a large part of mankind. These people were assumably unprotected against the demonic doctrines and powers. They were without the protective seal of God, being worshipers of demons and idols (9:20). Desmond Ford explained:

*The multitudes who have rejected the blood of the atonement, the incense of Christ's righteousness, the refreshment from the divine rivers and fountains, and the light from the heavenly orbs, have no protection against the doctrines of devils, and ultimately no protection against the devils themselves (Crisis!, II: 458).*

The observation that the sixth trumpet presents a striking counterpart to the sealing of the 144,000 servants of God in Revelation 7, is enlightening. The important parallels are summarized by Jon Paulien:

*In both sections [Rev. 7:1-4 and 9:14, 16] binding and loosing are related to four angels. In both sections a people are being numbered: in Revelation 7 the people of God; in Revelation 9 their demonic counterparts. And these are the only two*

*places in Revelation containing the cryptic words, 'I heard the number [lekousa ton arithmon].'* If probation remains open through the sixth trumpet and then closes with the sounding of the seventh, the sixth trumpet is the exact historical counterpart of Revelation 7:1-8. It is the last opportunity for salvation just before the end (in *Symp. on Rev.*, I:196).

It becomes apparent that God has designed a basic plan according to which human history will run its course and shall reach its appointed goal. When God lets loose the reins of Satan, this foe can unite all his earthly and demonic forces. On the other hand, Christ bestows the full power of the Holy Spirit on His true followers, the faithful remnant (18:1). The 200,000,000 evil horsemen still cannot destroy the 144,000 servants of Christ because they possess the seal of divine protection. These remarkable parallel movements are further unfolded in Revelation 16:13-16. Here Christ encourages His faithful ones to be alert and to be clad in the armor of His righteousness so that His blessing remains upon them (16:15), while the worldwide followers of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, march to their "Armageddon" (16:13-16).

While the sixth trumpet shows an increased demonic destruction and deception, it still deals with time prior to the end (10:6). As the subsequent visions of Revelation 10-11 effectively teach, the sixth trumpet also includes the period of the final opportunity for all people to respond to the end-time testimony of the everlasting gospel of Christ (see 10:11; 11:7). Bruce Metzger points out:

*Dire though the imagery is, the overall intention of the sounding of the seven trumpets is not to inflict vengeance but to bring people to repentance. Although nothing is done to minimize the gravity of sin and rebellion against God, there is great emphasis on God's patience and mercy. Instead of total destruction, only a third (9:18) or some other fraction of the whole is affected. The fraction is symbolic of the mercy of God (Breaking The Code, p. 66).*

The time symbolism used in Rev. 9:15 indicating the release of the four angels of destruction "for this very hour and day and month and year" (NIV, cp. also NASB, NKJV, NEB) is significant and deserves special attention. The original has the definitive article [ten, the] before the entire phrase making all members a syntactic unit, without considering each part separately. This fact shows the deficient translation of the King James Version that has been corrected by the New King James Version. The traditional idea that Rev. 9:15 indicates four separate time periods cannot be assumed from the biblical phrase. It can also be legitimately understood as a divinely-appointed moment in time. In that view the sixth trumpet points forward to the close of probationary time when the seventh trumpet begins with its seven last plagues. That awesome moment of time can be identified with the prophetic declaration of Revelation 22:11, "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong . . . ; let him who does right continue to do right . . . " The sixth trumpet teaches therefore that God is in control of Satan's times and has set for him an absolute time limit. Roy Naden similarly comments on Rev. 9:15,

*The sixth trumpet ends at the appointed hour, on a day, in a month, in a year (note the fourfold description indicating the 'universal' significance of the moment). When that hour strikes, probation will close and there will be no further opportunity for any person to change allegiance... The Father will bring down the curtain on probation history at the very hour already determined (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p. 152).*

Before that moment arrives, God gradually removes His protection and restraints, showing

men the bitter fruits of their own idolatries and their hatred against the Creator and His faithful ones. These six trumpet judgments do not represent God as the direct executioner of divine decrees. Rather they demonstrate "Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control" (E. G. White, GC 36). Satan will persistently oppose God and the gospel proclamation until the very last hour of probationary time.

### **Specific Focus on the End-time Events**

The trumpets stress their increasing end-time focus through the declaration of a heavenly voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels" (Rev. 8:13). The last three trumpet-visions are thus intensified judgments or "woes" and form the transition from divine warnings to demonic woes. Paulien states with perception: "In these woes God, for His own purposes, permits the forces of evil to increase until they reach virtual dominance of the earthly scene" (Decoding, 417).

As is typical for the Revelation, the dark side is balanced by a bright vision for the end-time. Just as John had inserted a vision of victorious Israelites in Rev. 7 between the sixth and the seventh seal, so he now inserts some encouraging visions for the end-time people of God between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, namely, Revelation 10 and 11:1-13.

The particular literary device of an intermission between the sixth and seventh seals and again between the corresponding trumpets has a specific purpose. These interludes are expanding spotlights on the end-time events in connection with the sixth episode in each prophetic series. In this way Revelation 7 presents the sealing of 144,000 spiritual Israelites as the counterpart of the frightful judgment scene of the sixth seal (6:12-17). In the visions of Revelation 10-11 John inserts the positive counterpart to the demonic threats and woes of the last trumpets. This means that the visions of Rev. 7 and of Rev. 10-11 transfer the reader to the time of the end, that is, to the final events of the church age. These spotlight visions are designed to comfort and encourage the people of God in the end-time. The followers of Christ receive His special care and are called by a specific mandate to fulfill their mission in spite of fierce opposition and suffering (7:14; 10:1-11). They will receive extraordinary power for their witness when the contest between the antichrist and the remnant church intensifies. God will ultimately vindicate His true witnesses, who gave all honor and glory to Him (11:1-13).

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# Chapter XVIII

## Prophetic Spotlight On The End-Time People Of God

### Revelation X

Revelation 10 and 11:1-13 present visions attached to the sixth trumpet by way of an interlude. They direct the light of prophecy to the end-time Christian church before the seventh trumpet sounds. This focus of Revelation 10 is underlined by the solemn oath of the mighty angel: "There will be no more delay [*chronos*, "time"]! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets" (10:6, 7). This proclamation deals with the approaching seventh trumpet blast. It declares that now there will be no more delay, or more accurately, "no more time!"

The question rises, Is the "time" (*chronos*) mentioned here by the angel a reference to time in general or to a particular time period of persecution mentioned in the apocalyptic book of Daniel (Dan. 7:25; 8:14; 12:7)? It cannot be time in general, because time is extended with a new mandate to preach on a global scale (see Rev. 10:11). The description of the angel in Rev. 10, who raises his right hand to heaven to swear his oath (10:5, 6), has a striking parallel in Dan. 12:7. Daniel foretold that the antichrist would be allowed to persecute the saints for three and a half "times" (7:25; 12:7). The oath of the divine messenger in Dan. 12 was heaven's response to the question, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" (12:6). In John's Apocalypse we hear the constant cry of the martyred saints, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (6:10). While in Dan. 12 the answer to this question was to wait until "three and a half times" of persecution had expired, and in Rev. 6 the answer was to wait "a little longer" (6:11), in Rev. 10 the answer is finally the good news: "There will be no more time!" (10:6). We are, therefore, to understand the "time" of the angel in Rev. 10 as referring to Daniel's prophetic time periods. These will all expire before the seventh trumpet sounds. At that time it can be said there are no prophetic time periods left. The time of the end is now irrevocably set into motion. In this sense, there is "no delay!" André Feuillet expressed this basic idea:

*We feel compelled to conclude from this passage [Rev. 10:6, 7] of the Apocalypse that the history of salvation is in its last stage, the one immediately preceding the sound of the [seventh] trumpet (Johannine Studies, p. 220).*

The mighty angel is portrayed with Messianic characteristics: "Robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were 'like fiery pillars'" (11:1). As one commentator states: "He could be seen as the Prince of Light contrasted with the Prince of Darkness [in Rev. 9:1, 2]" (J. M. Ford, Revelation, p. 16). Reflecting the character of God, he appears as the ancient Angel of the Covenant. Some therefore call him "the covenant angel." He comes like Israel's God came to Mount Sinai, in a cloud, with thunder and lightning (Exod. 19:16), leading His people in a pillar of cloud and of fire (Exod. 13:21, 22). The rainbow over the head of this covenant angel reminds us of the rainbow that encircles the throne of God (4:3). The voice of the angel

sounded like that of "seven thunders" (10:3). The thunders in Rev. 10 were not to be revealed yet, but to be sealed up (10:4). The command to "seal up" the content of the seven thunders may indicate that no longer will there come warning judgments, in view of the foreknowledge that such judgments do not lead the people to repentance (see Rev. 9:20-21). The final judgments come only after probationary time has ended, as the seven last plagues (see W. H. Shea, in Symposium on Revelation, 1:294-298, 325).

The "mighty angel" of Rev. 10:1 corresponds with the "mighty angel" of Rev. 5:2. Both mighty angels point to heavenly scrolls that contain God's decrees for mankind, the first for the world (Rev. 5), the last for the church (Rev. 10). While the angel of Rev. 5 thus announces the beginning of the Messianic judgments, as revealed in the seals and the trumpets, the angel of Rev. 10 reveals Christ's plan for the final mission of His church (10:6), in preparation for the second advent (10:7). The special significance of Rev. 10 is to introduce the end-time visions of chapters 11-22. It announces to the world that a new epoch of time has been reached, the period called by Daniel "the time of the end" (8:14, 17, 19).

The angel of Rev. 10 will unseal Daniel's prophecies for the time of the end (Dan. 8-12). Standing on both sea and land, he "was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand" (Rev. 10:2). Within the setting of the sixth trumpet, this entire portrayal symbolizes Christ's commission to the end-time church to receive a final mission for all nations. His command to John, as the representative of the church, is to "take the scroll and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey" (10:9). Such imagery was used by Israel's prophets to symbolize their heavenly call to the prophetic mission (see Jer. 15:16, 17; Ezek. 3:1-3). Consequently, the followers of Christ must make the message of this open scroll their own mission. The new epoch of time brings an urgency, motivated by an increased knowledge of Daniel's end-time prophecies.

What is meant by the "little scroll" [biblaridion], also called "scroll" [biblion](!), which lay open in his hand? (10:2, 8). Is it the same as the scroll [biblion] that earlier was sealed in Revelation 5? Some new studies argue persuasively that the heavenly scrolls in Rev. 5 and 10 should be considered identical (see the studies of Bauckham and Mazzaferri, in Source Material). Both scrolls are introduced by a "mighty angel" (5:2; 10:1). This suggests a close parallel between both visions of a heavenly scroll. Further, both visions (Rev. 5 and 10) are modelled on the same throne vision of Ezekiel that commissioned him to deliver a prophetic message to Israel (Ezek. 2:9, 10--3:3). Richard Bauckham states:

*It is very important to notice that, when he closely echoes Ezekiel 3:1-3 in Revelation 10:8-10, John clearly still has in mind the description of the scroll in Ezekiel 2:10, which he echoed in Revelation 5:1. This strongly suggests that he means to refer to the same scroll in both places: he sees it in God's hand in 5:1, but does not receive it to assimilate as the content of his prophecy until 10:8-10. . . The point here is that the pattern of allusion to Ezekiel's prophetic commissioning in Ezekiel 2:8--3:3 shows that John intends Revelation 5 and 10 to tell a single story of his own reception of a prophetic revelation which is symbolized by the scroll (The Climax of Prophecy, p. 247).*

This view makes the identification of the heavenly scroll even more important. Undoubtedly it contains the divine plan of how God will establish His kingdom on earth. If the scroll can be unrolled only after all the seals have been broken, the judgments of the seals and trumpets (Rev. 6:1 till 9:21) must be considered as preliminary events that accompany the gradual opening of the scroll but are not its content. The real content

follows after Rev. 10.

The sealed scroll of Rev. 5 and 10 must also be connected with the sealed scroll of Daniel, which reveals something that was written in the "Book of Truth" in heaven (Dan. 10:21). Daniel's book was the only scroll in the Scriptures that was sealed to man's understanding until "the time of the end" (8:26; 12:4, 9). Also the oath of the mighty angel in Rev. 10:5-7 points directly to the oath of the angel in Dan. 12:7. The "open" scroll of Rev. 10 conveys to the end-time church a fuller understanding of what was predicted in Daniel. Revelation 10 reveals what Daniel himself could not understand (Dan. 12:8). This means that the scroll of Rev. 5 and 10 refers to that portion in Daniel's book that was sealed for the time of the end and pertains to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Bauckham explains:

*The combination of Ezekiel and Daniel enables John to characterize the scroll both as a prophetic revelation of the divine purpose, given to him to communicate in prophecy, and also as, more specifically, a revelation of God's purpose for the final period of world history, in which God will establish his kingdom on earth, a revelation which supplements and clarifies what remained obscure in the prophecies of the last days by earlier prophets, especially Daniel (Ib., pp. 252-253).*

Revelation 10 stresses that the little scroll will be opened during the sixth trumpet and will remain open (10:2, 8) to be effective for all mankind on land or sea (10:2, 8-11). It is of vital importance for the church to understand the content of this open scroll. It contains God's end-time message. It answers the crucial question, "What is the task of the Church in these troublous times?" (Beasley-Murray, Rev., p. 168). The answer is unfolded in two expanding visions in Rev. 10 and 11, "by which the church is instructed concerning its role during the final period of world history" (Mounce, The Book of Revelation, p. 205).

Because both Rev. 10 and 11:1-13 belong to the same interlude (attached to the sixth trumpet), we must consider both visions as complementary. Both end-time visions commission the church "to prophesy" with regard to the entire world population (10:11; 11:6) and to bear witness to the testimony of Christ with added power, until the hostile world quiets their testimony by capital punishment (11:1-10).

This should motivate the church to seek her specific end-time mission in the visions of Daniel and John's Apocalypse. G. B. Caird has rightly called attention to this fundamental connection, stating: "John believed that the prophecy of Daniel, along with other Old Testament prophecies, was about to have a new and richer fulfillment" (The Revelation of St. John, p. 127).

## **Significance of the Oath**

The central act of the mighty angel of Revelation 10 is his swearing an oath while raising his right hand to heaven, presumably holding the open scroll in his left hand. The oath is apparently related to the content of the scroll. This ceremonial swearing of an oath shows a distinct emphasis, different from the oath swearing in Dan. 12. While Daniel stated, "I heard him swear by him who lives forever. . . (12:7), John's vision reports the oath by God as the Creator of heaven and earth and sea:

*And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it . . .*



(Rev. 10:6).

This elaborate stress on God as the Creator of heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them, is an important indication for the end-time witness of the church. This emphasis is repeated in the enlarged end-time message in Rev. 14. This calls all people to worship God as the Creator: "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (14:7). The final religious issue in human history is thus defined as worshipping the Creator in truth and Spirit. Such worship had been the critical issue for the old-covenant people in relation to pagan worship. Israel was characterized by her praise of Yahweh as Redeemer and Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1-2; Pss. 8; 19; 136; 146; Neh. 9:6, 7; Isa. 40:28; Jer. 10:10-12). Also Paul emphasized the fundamental difference between the Creator and all created reality (Rom. 1:20-25; Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). The Creator has decided that all human rebellion, idolatry, and violence, will come to an end in the days when the seventh trumpet-angel will blow his trumpet.

Time is still given to respond with the worship of the Creator. Israel's worship of God as Creator and Redeemer is still the appointed way to give honor and glory to God. Jos. M. Ford has sharply observed that the sacred oath in Rev. 10:6 contains "an echo of the commandments; Exod. 20:11" (Rev., p. 160). A close comparison of the oath formula with the Fourth Commandment shows that both mention the three elements of heaven, earth, and sea. The oath of Rev. 10, however, puts an unusual emphasis on the all-comprehensive nature of God's created work, repeating three times the phrase "and all that is in them." This compels us to acknowledge an intentional pointer in the oath of the covenant Angel to the Fourth Commandment. This indicates where the concerns of heaven are for the universal church of Christ and for her worship of God in the time of the end. It contains the motivation for true revival and reformation.

### **The Mystery of God About to be Accomplished**

*But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets (Rev. 10:7).*

The angel now turns our attention to the certainty of the fulfillment of all end-time prophecies, as pronounced by the Old Testament prophets, in particular by Daniel. J. M. Ford comments on Rev. 10:7, "The Hebrew word *raz*, 'mystery,' is frequent in Daniel and the Qumran scrolls and refers primarily to the secret of the times, the sequence of the events and the consummation" (Ib., p. 163). The prime example is Daniel's reply to the king of Babylon: "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries [mysteria]. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come ['in the last days', Theod.]" (Dan. 2:28). Because Daniel's outline prophecies increasingly focus on the end-time (see 2:44, 45; 7:27; 8:14, 17, 19; 11:40--12:2), we must connect "the mystery of God" specifically with the historical end-time events and the completion of the plan of redemption outlined in Daniel and the Revelation. Raymond E. Brown explains the "mystery" in Rev. 10:7 as "the mysterious will of God for the end of time. . .the definitive establishment of God's kingdom" (The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery in the NT," p. 38).

The words of the angel of Rev. 10 point forward to the seventh trumpet as the definitive time for the accomplishment or completion of "the mystery of God." The events of the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15-19 are: 1) the triumph of God's visible rule and kingdom

(11:15); 2) the opening of God's temple in heaven and the outpouring of God's wrath in the seven last plagues (11:18-19; 15:1, 5); 3) the resurrection of the dead saints and the rewarding of all faithful ones (11:18).

These secrets of the plan of redemption will finally be revealed in historical reality when the seventh trumpet blows. Paul had earlier disclosed the "mystery" that "at the last trumpet" God will change the state of all the saints in the twinkling of an eye, by raising the faithful dead and by immortalizing the living saints (see 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; also 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). However, Rev. 10 takes a more comprehensive view of the divine reign. W. H. Shea states: "Three specific things about it will be revealed at that time: the great divine Ruler of it, the citizens who will inhabit it, and those who will be excluded from it" (in Symp. on Rev., I: 315).

## **The Guaranteed Triumph of the Everlasting Gospel**

*"The mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced ["preached", NASB; "announced in the Good News," JB] to his servants the prophets" (Rev. 10:7).*

Remarkable is the use of the verb *evangelizo* here to describe the end-time fulfillment of "the mystery of God." This verb denotes more than an abstract or formal declaration. It implies apparently the "good news" of God's judgments within the mystery of God, as attested by the Old Testament prophets (see Am. 3:7). Paul explained that "the mystery of Christ" in the apostolic gospel discloses that "the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6). This was the "mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him" (Rom. 16:25, 26). The "mystery of God" is thus decidedly Christ-centered and signifies the unchangeable gospel of God concerning His Son (Rom. 1:1, 3) on behalf of all peoples in the world. The fact that during the seventh trumpet this "mystery of God" will be "finished" or "accomplished" expresses the worldwide completion of this proclamation.

The end-time setting of Rev. 10 is reinforced by the literary and thematic connections with the angel of Rev. 14, who has "an eternal gospel to preach [*evangelisai*] to those who live on the earth" (14:6 NASB). The expression "another angel" in 14:6 suggests a connection with a previous angel, who is the covenant angel of Rev. 10. This relation appears also in the common use of the verb *evangelizein* (10:7 and 14:6). We appreciate therefore the statement of André Feuillet:

*We are quite sure that those two scenes correspond to each other. It is difficult to understand the beginning of XIV:6: "And I saw another angel," because this angel is the first of a series. This could be explained better if this "other angel, having an everlasting gospel" were to be considered identical with the "other angel" who carries the open scroll in X:1-2 (Joh. Studies, p. 227).*

This substantial connection of Rev. 10 and 14 confirms the proleptic nature of the scroll vision of Rev. 10, which is further unfolded in the threefold message of Rev. 14. By its setting in the sixth trumpet, Rev. 10 establishes also the end-time setting of Rev. 14. At that epoch of time the final period of the church age will begin.

The ultimate accomplishment of the gospel is guaranteed by the Son of God, in whose hands the Father has given all things (John 3:35; 5:27-29). Christ stated in His last prayer:

*"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, and the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24).*

Nothing can thwart this divine purpose of the risen Christ. This plan for God's people is the purpose of the oath of the covenant angel. The letter to the Hebrews clarifies the purpose of the sacred oath of God: "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath" (Heb. 6:17). Of this divine guarantee the church always needs to be reminded, especially when the apocalyptic time prophecies have ended and the shaking of the end-time crisis is about to begin.

### **The Final Commission to the Church (Rev. 10:8-11)**

Central to the experience of John in Rev. 10 is the newly opened scroll, which he was commanded, by a voice from heaven, to take and eat. Frederick D. Mazzaferri states:

*There can be no question that this is the climax of the entire scroll sequence commencing at 5:1. God's paramount prophetic scroll has been handed down progressively to Christ, then to the resplendent angel, and finally to the prophet who is God's crucial agent on earth for effecting his will (The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective. Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Aberdeen, Scotland, 1986, p. 339).*

Then he was told that he "must prophesy again" concerning the whole world (10:8-11). All this takes place before the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. Therefore quite some time is reserved for the fulfillment of this vision. John is called to act symbolically on behalf of the end-time church, that lives before the close of probation. Six trumpets have already sounded. The vision of Rev. 10 thus moves forward to the appointed "time of the end," foretold in Dan. 8-12.

The important question rises, What is the meaning of the heavenly initiative to bring the open scroll to the church of the end-time? Two Old Testament examples, the calling of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel, show that their symbolic act of "eating" the scroll of God's word imparted to them the heavenly commission to assimilate the message contained in the scroll and to proclaim its message publicly. For them the experience was first sweet and then bitter. They tasted the word of God with joy and delight but then felt acute pain when their message was rejected and when they were opposed by false prophets.

Jeremiah was set apart before his birth and "appointed as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). When God's words came to him: "I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jer. 15:16). But when Jeremiah was persecuted by King Jehoiakim (see Jer. 36) and when Judah suffered the judgment, his grief poured out in great lamentations: "Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing, for my virgin daughter--my people--has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow... (Jer. 14:17). The prophet describes the sad situation of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem. He especially blamed the false prophets and corrupt priests that therefore must all go into exile (Jer. 14:18). Nevertheless, God promised Jeremiah vindication against his enemies and supernatural power for his prophetic ministry (Jer. 15:11).

Similarly, Ezekiel was called to the prophetic ministry among a rebellious people in Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 2:1-8). Facing this difficult task, Ezekiel is charged to

thoroughly assimilate God's message before he speaks out as God's spokesman: "Open your mouth and eat what I give you. Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe" (Ezek. 2:7, 8). However, when Ezekiel ate this scroll (3:1-3), "it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (3:3). The prophet thus experienced first the sweetness of God's words, but afterwards, bitter disappointment when an obstinate Israel refused to accept the warning message (3:3-11). It is commonly overlooked that Ezekiel experienced a bitter aftertaste: "I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me" (Ezek. 3:14). It took him seven days to come to himself as he pondered the horror of what he had experienced in his vision (3:15). He was told, furthermore, that his mission would bring fierce opposition. Thorns would tear the prophet's flesh and he would sit upon scorpions (2:6). Nevertheless, Ezekiel was called to continue his mission with renewed visions of hope (Ezek. 11; 16:59-63; 37).

There can be no doubt that John's visionary experience of eating the open scroll in Rev. 10 is patterned after the same symbolic act of the prophet Ezekiel and must be interpreted in the light of this biblical prototype. This interpretative principle should guide us in our effort to understand the bittersweet experience of the end-time people of God in Rev. 10. Like Ezekiel, John receives an open scroll from heaven to eat. And again as in Ezekiel, he hears the commission to proclaim its message to all nations. This time the message is God's last warning, the consummation of all covenant promises and curses, "just as he announced to his servants the prophets" (Rev. 10:7). This points to the unsealed book of Daniel (Dan. 12:4). The end-time sections of Daniel's scroll (chapters 7-12) contain not only the sweet promises of the restored kingdom of God, the rescue and vindication of the faithful witnesses, the resurrection of the martyred saints, but also the final judgment of the false prophets and the persecutors of God's people. Daniel thus foretells both sweet and sour experiences in the end-time crisis. But together with this consoling content of the scroll, there will be also a rejection of God's warning message so that grief, persecution and disappointment will be part of the renewed gospel proclamation (see Rev. 11:7; 12:17; 13:15-17; 17:6, 14; 20:4).

The parallel vision in Rev. 11:1-13, shows how bitter the opposition to God's end-time witnesses will be. We may expect further clarification on this "bittersweet" experience of the end-time church in Revelation 11. John's symbolic act on behalf of the end-time church is explained by his commission from heaven: "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings"(10:11).

The scope of this commission connects Rev. 10 with the other end-time visions of Revelation. The fourfold formula that expresses universal extension occurs again in Rev. 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; and 17:15. The one variation in Rev. 10:11 is the substitution of "kings" for the term "tribes" or "multitudes." The fourfold formula is a stereotype expansion of Daniel's threefold phrase (3:4, 7, 29; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14). John is commanded to prophesy not only "about" many peoples, nations, languages and kings" but foremost "to" all these ethnic groups and classes (epi, is ambiguous: "in regard to," Rev. 12:17; 18:20; "to," Rev. 14:6; 22:16). The content of his prophesying is not disclosed in Revelation 10. This is gradually unfolded, first in summary form in Revelation 11 and then more in detail in Revelation 12-19. The expression "kings" in Rev. 10:11 recurs in 16:13-16 and 17:12-15, where its significance is unfolded in the setting of the end-time crisis of "Armageddon."

The connection between John's symbolic act of eating the scroll and the command to prophesy again about the nations of the world, is meaningful. The command explains John's act of eating the scroll. This connection between John's prophetic act and the

explanation continues that of its Old Testament types.

Jeremiah's act of eating God's words was explained in unmistakable terms: to destroy and to build nations (Jer. 15:16; 1:10). Ezekiel's act of eating the scroll (2:9; 3:1-3), was also explained in its meaning and purpose, so that no guessing was allowed (3:4). The parallel becomes obvious when the situations of Ezekiel and John are placed side by side:

EZEKIEL'S CALLING (EZEK. 3:3-4)	JOHN'S CALLING (REV. 10:9-11)
Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. <i>He then said to me:</i> "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them..."	He said to me, "Take it [the scroll] and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. <i>Then I was told,</i> "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

From Ezekiel's situation we learn that his act of eating the open scroll (Ezek. 2:9, 10) was not self-explanatory. The "eating" needed verbal clarification and special direction for its appointed audience. The words of the Lord to Ezekiel, "He then said to me: . . ." (3:4), intend to explain the symbolic act of the prophet. The content of the message for Israel is gradually unfolded in the subsequent chapters of Ezekiel as a twofold ministry of predicting judgment and new promises. Ezekiel also experienced both sweetness and bitterness. He said: "And I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me" (3:14). If Ezekiel's situation is clear with regard to his symbolic act and its divine clarification, then there is no reason to speculate about John's prophetic act and its divine clarification in Rev. 10. John is not supposed to misunderstand or misapply the end-time message of God.

The heavenly command to John to prophesy "again" about many peoples and nations (Rev. 10:11), most likely means that after John's initial call to convey Christ's messages to the churches (see Rev. 1:11), he now receives the commission to proclaim the everlasting gospel in the setting of the end-time prophecies. John must prophesy again, but with a new direction, about the end-time events of the divine plan of redemption.

The expression "again" in John's commission to prophesy implies that the end-time church will receive increased knowledge from Daniel's prophecies (see Dan. 12:4), so that the gospel can be proclaimed now in its appointed end-time framework. This is further amplified in the threefold message of Rev. 14. When John had eaten and digested the open book, he was told that he "must" prophesy again (10:11). New knowledge of Daniel's prophecies, confirmed by the ongoing fulfillments in the history of Christianity and of the world, obliges the church to announce the new insights and to warn the world about the danger of the final judgments soon to come, of the seven last plagues of Revelation 15-16 in particular. This proclamation is a divine "must!" Mounce explained the profound significance of Revelation 10 in these words:

*John's mission is to lay bare the forces of the supernatural world which are at work behind the activities of men and nations. His prophecy is the culmination of all previous prophecies in that it leads on to the final destruction of evil and the*

*inauguration of the eternal state (The Book of Revelation, p. 217).*

The relevant question is now, Has this ordained restoration of the gospel of God been fulfilled in our time?

## **Historical Realization**

Church history records that a fervent expectation of the second advent of Christ developed during the middle of the nineteenth century in both Europe and America. An epoch of revived prophetic study and preaching began around the year 1780 that lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century and is called the "Second Great Awakening." The historical theologian LeRoy E. Froom states:

*In both the Old World and the New there was a pronounced wave of simultaneous but independent prophetic interpretation, yet of similar import and with startling corresponding conclusions, culminating in the Great Second Advent Movement and message (Movement of Destiny, p. 47).*

Nothing is more powerful than a truth whose time has come. The social and political upheavals of the French Revolution in 1789 led many to study the end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Most American revivalists were millennialists, believing that the millennium of perfect peace was soon to begin. Such were in essence social reformers. When Pope Pius VI was dethroned by the French Revolutionary Government in 1798, many Bible expositors applied this event to the ending of the 1260-day prophecy of Daniel 7 and of Revelation 12 and 13.

After 1798 the focus of attention shifted from Dan. 7 to Dan. 8, and from Rev. 13 to Rev. 14, and concentrated on the 2300-day prophecy of Dan. 8:14. Thus arose the Millerite movement, started by the Baptist lay-preacher William Miller (1782-1849). Miller challenged the millennial vision and hope of mainline America by stressing that only the second advent of Christ would bring the end of evil and establish the kingdom of God. The peak of the Great Awakening came in the Miller movement. It had become Miller's conviction that the second advent would come "about the year 1843" to rescue His people and to cleanse the earth with fire. This conviction, he wrote in 1832, filled his heart with "joy," but it also laid on his conscience a duty to warn the world of coming judgment. When the set date of October 22, 1844, passed in bitter disappointment, a few Millerites received new courage by applying the call to "prophesy again" in Rev. 10:11 to their better understanding of the biblical prophecies. Their misunderstanding of the nature of the sanctuary's cleansing in Dan. 8:14 had not been in vain. It served the purpose of restoring the gospel in its fulness and of preparing a people to meet their God.

The prophetic mandate of the mighty angel of Rev. 10 is unfolded in the threefold message of Rev. 14. Revelation 10 and 14 are intimately related. Before the end-time message is disclosed in Revelation 12-22, we must pay attention to John's vision in Revelation 11:1-13

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# Chapter IXX

## The Prophetic Mission Of God's Witnesses

### Revelation XI

Revelation 11 may be understood as the further extension of Revelation 10 and not as a disconnected vision. What John experienced symbolically by eating the scroll is unfolded in his vision of the two witnesses. Many Bible commentators consider the vision about God's witnesses in Rev. 11:1-13 as the further development of the open scroll in Rev. 10. R. H. Mounce concludes: "It [Rev. 11:1-13] forms the contents of the 'little book' of chapter 10 which was sweet to the taste but made the belly bitter (10:9-10)" (The Book of Revelation, p. 218). Such a judgment is based on the fact that both visions are part of the same end-time interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpet. But there is also the same thematic development between Rev. 10 and 11. The proclamation of the open scroll is called to "prophesy"(10:11), which is described as the very mission of God's two witnesses in Rev. 11:3, 6, 10. Furthermore, the message of both the scroll and the two witnesses is directed to the same worldwide audience (10:11; 11:9). Revelation 10 is expanded in the subsequent vision of chapter 11. To detach chapter 11 from its introduction in chapter 10 is to dissect what God has joined together. Our first concern is , How does Rev. 11 develop Rev. 10?

### **The Symbolic Nature of the Vision of Revelation 11**

Just as the introductory vision of Rev. 10 was symbolic in its portrayals, so is the vision of Rev. 11. This chapter points directly to its symbolic portrayal when it states that the great city is "figuratively" [pneumatikos, "spiritually;" NASB: "mystically;" JB: "symbolic"] called "Sodom and Egypt" (11:8). The portrayal of Rev. 11 is distinctively Hebrew in character. It borrows its language and images from Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and also from the lives of Moses and Elijah. However, the portrayal of the death of the two witnesses, their resurrection and visible ascension, is obviously borrowed from the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

The apostles consistently used Hebrew terms and images as symbolic language to describe the mission of Jesus and of His church (see Part I, Chs. 3-4). A telling example is Hebrew 12:22-24, where "Mount Zion" is used to represent the church, because the Mediator of God's new covenant is now Christ Jesus. John's vision of the 144,000 Israelites in Revelation 7 must likewise be interpreted according to the gospel hermeneutic (see above, Chapter VIII). A literal application of the Hebrew symbols in Rev. 11 would deny the gospel and ignore the Christ-centeredness of the Apocalypse.

### **The Proleptic Nature of Revelation 11:1-13**

John frequently uses the literary style of prolepsis, that is, of anticipating a future event by introducing a new name or symbol, which is explained later on. In Rev. 1 he anticipates



the climactic event of the whole book: "Look, he is coming with the clouds . . ." (1:7). John develops this theme more in Rev. 6:12-17; 14:14-20 and 19:11-21. The divine promises in Revelation 2-3 are all brief, proleptic descriptions of what is developed at large in chapters 21-22.

Another example is Rev. 14:8, where he presents "Babylon" for the first time by way of a prolepsis. In Revelation 16-18 he develops its full meaning. The seven last plagues are briefly mentioned first in Revelation 15 and then developed at length in Revelation 16.

The entire Apocalypse is a coherent, indivisible, and progressive revelation in which all visions are intimately connected. Whenever we dissect a chapter from the total unit and try to apply it to world or church history, we are bound to misinterpret its meaning. A responsible exegesis of Revelation will honor the structural connection of all its visions. Many consider Rev. 11 one of the most difficult chapters in the book to interpret. Others regard it as a key to the rest of the Apocalypse, because they see Rev. 11 as a proleptic summary of Rev. 12-22.

Joseph S. Considine concluded in his instructive study on Rev. 11 that Rev. 10 and 11 "tell one continuous story, chapter 10 forming a solemn introduction to chapter 11", so that chapter 11 anticipates proleptically the events of Revelation 12 and 13. He noticed the parallel interludes within the seals (Rev. 7) and within the trumpets (Rev. 10-11), stating:

*But it is more than parallel; it completes what was told us in the episode between the sixth and seventh seal. What is left unsaid in the one is told in the other. These interposed visions give us a picture of the inner life of Christ's Church during the struggle . . . the interposed visions point to the work and faith of the true children of God. . . The events predicted in chapters 7 and 10-11:1-13 are necessary as preludes to the End (CBQ 8 [1946]: 378-79).*

If we recognize these structural connections, we can no longer treat these sections as unnecessary digressions, but rather as essential parts which fit exactly in the total structure of the book. No pericopes may be detached or dissected from what surrounds it. All the imagery of Rev. 11 is clarified by the Bible itself. This means that Rev. 11 must be interpreted by its immediate context (that is from the surrounding chapters that deal with the end-time) and by its wider context in the Old Testament, before any application to history can be undertaken.

Revelation 11 offers a preview of the last crisis of faith for the true believers on earth. It will be a worldwide religious crisis (the word "earth" is mentioned four times), brought on by the courageous testimonies of God's witnesses among a hostile population described by the stereotypical phrase, "the inhabitants of the earth" (11:10). For John "the inhabitants of the earth" are defined theologically as those who are deceived by the idolatrous worship of the beast (see Rev. 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2) and whose names are not written in the book of life (17:8). They are hostile to God's people and guilty of the blood of the saints (6:10). However, the apparent defeat of those that worship in the temple of God will finally be reversed by God's act. They will be vindicated by their resurrection from the dead and by their visible ascension to heaven "in a cloud" (11:11-12), just as their Lord had experienced in His life on earth. At that point the reward of the saints is accompanied by a severe earthquake, which compels many to give "glory to the God of heaven" (11:13).

It is evident that Rev. 11:1-13 is not an isolated prophecy about the Jewish people or about secular events in world history, but is inextricably woven into the fabric of John's Apocalypse. It establishes a decided connection with Revelation 12-13 by introducing

proleptically the prophetic time units of "42 months" and "1260 days" in 11:2, 3 (see 12:6, 14; 13:5). Revelation 11:7 abruptly introduces "the beast that comes up from the Abyss," without any further explanation of its identity until Rev. 13 develops its historical and theological connections with Daniel 7.

The rewarding of the martyrs in Rev. 11:11, 12 is mentioned again under the seventh trumpet (11:16-18) and enlarged in Rev. 14:1-5 and 20:4-6; 22:1-5. In short, the symbolic vision of Rev. 11:1-13 is a brief synopsis and anticipation of the progressive revelation in chapters 12-22.

### **Symbols of the True Church**

*I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:1-3).*

It is well to remember that John had represented the Christian church as "a kingdom of priests" to serve God (1:6), and as "seven golden lampstands" (1:12, 20), that are kept burning by the risen Christ (2:1, 5). Revelation 1 hands us the key for the new-covenant application of Israel's sanctuary symbols. This gospel hermeneutic is based on Jesus as the atoning Lamb and Priest of God (1:5). The apostolic church is portrayed as the new Israel of God, as the new-covenant people. The persecuting Jewish community, on the contrary, is characterized as a "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9). Christ remains the sustainer of His church and does not tolerate her corruption. He exposes the misleading teachings of the "woman Jezebel" in the church of Thyatira (2:20) and announces this judgment: "I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (2:33). On the other hand, Christ promises the church of Philadelphia:

*"Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (3:12).*

The risen Christ counts His followers as spiritual "pillars" in the temple of God, as those who carry the name "New Jerusalem." They are further represented as 144,000 spiritual Israelites who serve God "day and night in His temple" (7:14, 15). With this estimation of the church of Christ, we are prepared to understand the symbolic portrayal of the church and the Gentiles in Rev. 11.

John is handed from heaven a reed that serves as a "measuring rod," with which he must "measure" the temple [naos] of God and the altar [thusiasterion] and those who worship in it [NIV interprets: "and count the worshipers there"] (11:1).

The basic question is, What does the command to "measure" God's temple, the altar and its worshipers signify? Is there a similar portrayal in the Old Testament? Both Ezekiel and Zechariah describe visions in which the promised new temple and city of God are measured. Zechariah explains such measuring by the promise that the LORD has chosen Jerusalem and will return to Zion after the Babylonian exile to protect His people (see Zech. 1:16; 2:1-5). For him the "measuring" thus signified the promise of restoration and

of protection of the faithful remnant of Israel.

Ezekiel sees a divine messenger measuring with a rod the promised temple and holy city (chapters 40-48). This vision also conveys a promise of restoration of the pure worship of God for post-exilic Israel (44:15,16,24). It intends to motivate the exiled Israelites to repent of their sins and to be faithful again (43:10, 11). Ezekiel stresses the ritual purity and spiritual holiness of the worship in the new temple (Ezek. 44:9). Thus he separated "the holy from the common" (42:20; 44:23). The name of the capital city, with its twelve gates, will be called: "THE LORD IS THERE" (48:35). A river of life-giving water will flow from under the temple, with fruit trees on both banks of the river (47). It is widely recognized that Ezekiel's vision of the temple and its measurements is advanced as the New Jerusalem by John in Rev. 21-22.

In Revelation 11 John is told to measure "the temple of God and the altar and the worshipers in it" (v. 1). In the perspective of its Old Testament prototypes this "measuring" indicates John's responsibility to separate the holy community from the defilement of false worship and to restore their true worship in the "temple of God." The "temple of God" within the Revelation is primarily the temple in heaven where Christ ministers before the throne of God (Rev. 5:6-10; 7:14-17; 11:19). The saints on earth now enter by faith and prayer into this heavenly sanctuary and are, therefore, part of God's temple in heaven (see Rev. 8:3, 4; also Heb. 10:19). Because their names are written in the Lamb's book of life, they are no longer part of the (idolatrourous) "inhabitants of the earth." Although physically living on earth, their "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). They are "in Christ" and, therefore, already seated with Him "in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 2:6). The end-time church must restore this worship of the saints within the heavenly temple. This restored worship must include "the altar," which stood within "the court of the priests" (one of the inner courts in Herod's Temple) and represents the atoning sacrifice of Christ and His intercession for us. The fundamental difference between Israel's sanctuary worship and that of the heathen was Israel's understanding that God had given the "blood" of the sacrifice "to make atonement for yourselves on the altar" (Lev. 17:11).

The New Testament gospel teaches that God "sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10; see 2:2). This atoning work of Christ was the ultimate purpose of the incarnation and the love of God. Only true believers in Christ may partake of this "altar," which stands for the atoning cross (Heb. 13:10).

John must also "measure" the worshipers themselves. This means separating true worshipers from the universal apostasy in the end-time. This understanding is confirmed by the command to "exclude [literally: "throw out"] the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles" (Rev. 11:2). This "outer court" represents the territory of the inhabitants of the earth, where the Gentiles have established their idolatrourous worship. Just as Ezekiel was instructed to forbid any foreigner who was "uncircumcised in heart and flesh" to enter the temple (Ezek. 44:9), so John must now "exclude" or throw out (see John 9:34) all the worshipers who stay in the "outer court," that is, those outside of Christ who do not enter the inner court but rather worship the beast. Jesus had confronted the Jews with the absolute claim of His Messiahship: "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch [literally: "eblethe exo, "is cast outside"] (John 15:6, NASB). Revelation enlarges this separation to all peoples on a worldwide scale (Rev. 22:14, 15).

John had indicated that even in the local churches there were some who were merely nominal Christians or who were deceived by false prophets (Rev. 2:14-16, 20-25; 3:1-5,

16). If persistent in their lukewarmness or unbelief, they were going to be rejected by God (Rev. 2:23; 3:16). Evidently, God intends to restore and to set apart true worship in the end-time of the Christian age.

For further clarification of Rev. 11, we need to consider the context of Revelation itself. It proves fruitful to compare the end-time visions of the seals and of the trumpets. The sealing of the 144,000 spiritual Israelites in Rev. 7 must be placed side by side with the measuring of the temple worshipers of the holy city. This comparison brings the surprise of the essential unity of both end-time visions. One scholar points out: "Measuring the holy and excluding the outsiders precedes the seventh trumpet just as the sealing of the elect preceded the seventh seal" (J. M. Ford, *Rev.*, p. 177). Virtually all Bible commentators relate the "measuring" of the saints in Rev. 11 to the "sealing" of a certain number of saints in Rev. 7 and interpret both as God's special promise of protection and preservation during the end-time crisis of faith. Roy Naden concludes: "Thus the measuring of the Temple can be understood as a symbolic way of saying that God preserves or 'seals' His church during the final judgments poured on the wicked prior to Jesus' return" (*The Lamb Among The Beasts*, p. 172). Clearly, God wants to mark the true worshipers as His special people and to set them apart for a special service in the world. God's command to John to measure the temple (Rev. 11:1-2) is the result of eating and digesting the open scroll in Rev. 10. New knowledge brings a test of faith and commitment.

### **The Trampling of the Holy City**

*"They [the Gentiles] will trample on the holy city for 42 months" (11:2).*

This prediction of oppression unites two visions in the book of Daniel, chapters 7 and 8. Daniel had outlined the entire course of salvation history, from his time until the final judgment (ch. 7). From Babylon on he had forecast the major world empires, the last of which was the long-standing Roman Empire, which would "trample underfoot" all its victims (Dan. 7:7, 19, 23). But Daniel went beyond Imperial Rome when he saw how it finally broke up into smaller kingdoms (the "ten horns"). His main interest was the subsequent "little horn" (7:24), that asserted himself with religious and political claims and with a "mouth that spoke boastfully." The interpreting angel lists specific characteristics of this power that would exercise a reign of terror over the saints:

*He will speak against the Most High and oppress [literally: "wear down," NASB] the saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time (Dan. 7:25).*

This antigod power (the "little horn") will wear down the saints or "holy ones" for three-and-a-half prophetic "times" (or "years"). This equals 42 prophetic months and thus establishes a specific link between Daniel 7 and Rev. 11. In Daniel 8 the same "little horn" is portrayed as the archenemy of Israel, who invades the "Beautiful Land" and then tramples down the holy place and its worshipers (Dan. 8:9-13). Here is an obvious link between Daniel 8 and Rev. 11. While the saints worship God and His Christ, by entering the heavenly temple through faith, they still remain physically on earth. Regarding their earthly existence, the saints are portrayed as the "holy city," which can be trampled on by the hostile powers of "Gentiles." This wearing down of the saints is allowed ["given"] for a limited period only: for "42 months." This time unit is used also for the time given to the sea beast in Rev. 13, which will "blaspheme the name of God and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven" (Rev. 13:5, 6 NASB). Thus the trampling down of the holy

city of Rev. 11 is explained in Rev. 13:1-8 as the time of the persecution of the worshipers by the antichrist. This connection confirms the understanding that Rev. 11 portrays the saints of God as the "holy city" (cf. Rev. 20:9).

All this indicates that Rev. 11 is a prolepsis or anticipation of the subsequent chapters, while the book of Daniel constitutes the major taproot of Rev. 11-13. The Apocalypse transforms Daniel's prophetic language by the gospel, that is, it develops Daniel's forecast in terms of Christ and His followers as the true saints and worshipers of God.

The time units of Dan. 7:25 and of Rev. 11:2, 3 are characterized by spiritual oppression and persecution. In this respect there is correspondence with the 3½ years of Elijah's witness during the persecution by Israel's apostate King Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel (see Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17).

### **Does Revelation 11 deal with the Jewish People?**

André Feuillet represents those who assert that Revelation 5-11 deals specifically with "the unbelieving Jews" (including the two series of the seals and trumpets) and specifically with the divine judgment manifested in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He therefore concludes that the words of Rev. 11:8, "where their Lord was also crucified," refer not to Rome, but to "incredulous Jerusalem" (The Apocalypse, p. 61). This assumption also determines Feuillet's understanding of Rev. 11:2-3 and his historical application to the Jewish people. As his guiding norm to understand Rev. 11, Feuillet chooses Jesus' announcement in Luke 21, that "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (21:24). His conclusion then is: "Just as Jesus wishes to indicate by these words [in Luke 21:24] the future punishment of the guilty Jews, so too the part of the temple which 'shall be trampled under foot' must represent those Jews marked for punishment" (Johannine Studies, p. 236).

This reasoning from an analogy or correspondence between Rev. 11:2 and Luke 21:24 at first seems logical, yet it contains a hidden flaw of exegesis of the Apocalypse. According to Feuillet himself, the Apocalypse is a massive "Christian re-reading of the Old Testament." He fails, however, to relate Rev. 11:2 to the temple visions of Daniel 7 and 8. This connection requires that we must locate the "trampling of the holy place" (and of the worshipers in Rev. 11) within the historical flow of Daniel's prophetic outline. This correlation with Daniel 7-8 is indispensable for the proper understanding of Rev. 11, because Daniel 7 is the major root of John's Apocalypse. Daniel presents the successive world powers that will persecute the covenant people of God. This sequential order is of paramount importance for identifying the antichrist in the Apocalypse and for locating its peculiar time unit of "42 months" or "1260 days" within the church age. Only from the perspective of Daniel's sacred chronology can one avoid the pitfall of taking the prophetic time units in Rev. 11-13 as entirely allegorical for some indefinite time of persecution. The "42 months" or "1260 days" are not elastic or atemporal. These time units originate from the vision of Daniel 7, where they determine the tract of time for the despotic reign of the "little horn," after the collapse of the Roman Empire (A.D. 476, see Dan. 7:8, 23-25).

Isolating the Apocalypse from the book of Daniel is like cutting off the root (Daniel) from its fruit (Revelation). Daniel alone pins down each apocalyptic symbol to concrete events of history. Consequently, to ignore the chronological pattern of Daniel's prophecy in the

interpretation of the Apocalypse can be considered a fundamental mistake.

As a result of his failure to appreciate the relationship of Daniel to the Apocalypse, Feuillet chooses Luke 21:24 as his model to explain that Rev. 11:2 portrays the guilty "Jews marked for punishment" (Feuillet, see quotation above). The implication of the equivalence of Rev. 11:2 and Luke 21:24 is that the worshipers "in the temple of God" (of Rev. 11) are Christ-believing Jews and that the "holy city" and "the outer court" represent Christ-rejecting Jews, "unbelieving Judaism." Feuillet supports this conclusion by referring to Luke 13:25-28 as "the real parallel passage" (Joh. Stud., pp. 236-7).

The Apocalypse, however, does not focus on Jewish Christians in any of its visions or angelic interpretations. The "temple of God" is consistently the heavenly temple, where the risen Christ ministers before the throne of God (Rev. 11:19; 15:5, 8). Its spiritual "pillars" are all the believing members of the Christian church (Rev. 3:12). Through Christ true worshipers from all nations have become "a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6; also 5:10). All Christian believers enter by faith into the heavenly temple (Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4). They constitute the "kingdom" of God on earth (Rev. 1:6; 5:10) or the "holy city" (Rev. 11:2; cp. 20:9). The theology of worship in the Apocalypse does not allow any expositor to restrict "the worshipers in the temple of God" to Jewish people or to limit "the holy city" to Christ-believing Jews. These Hebrew terms are the apocalyptic symbols for the new-covenant people of Messiah Jesus, as described in the seven churches of Rev. 2-3.

Using the inspired "keys" of Scripture to unlock the meaning of John's Apocalypse, namely the Old Testament and the gospel of Christ (see above, Chapter 10), we must reject the speculative literalism that reduces the message of Rev. 11 to the punishment of guilty Jews, as in Luke 21:24. The Hebrew source of the "trampling of the holy city" in Rev. 11 is the trampling of the holy place and its host in Dan. 7-8. Daniel portrays how the temple of God and its true worshipers will be trampled underfoot, not by the Roman Empire but by a rebellious and idolatrous worship that causes desolation (see Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:11-13, NKJV, NASB; 11:31-35; 12:11).

John reserves the phrase "the holy city" for the New Jerusalem, the eternal abode of the saints (Rev. 21:2, 10), for "the city he [God] loves" (Rev. 20:9). The earthly Jerusalem John equates prophetically with Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). R.H. Charles explains:

*The inviolable security which the Jews attached to the Temple is reinterpreted by our author as meaning the spiritual security of the Christian community despite the attacks of Satan and the Antichrist. But such spiritual security does not exclude martyrdom, as 11:3-13 makes clear (Revelation, I: xc).*

## **The Two Witnesses**

While God gives the outer court to the persecuting Gentiles, He says: "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3). The connecting word "and" points to the development of verse 2. The period of the ministry of God's "two witnesses" (v. 3) is the same as that of the trampling of "the holy city" (v. 3). This implies that "its designation in days rather than months is no more than literary variation (solar months are thirty days in length)" (R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Rev.*, p. 223). The time reference for God's protective care of the symbolic "woman" in Revelation 12 is also helpful: "The woman fled into the desert to a

place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days" (v. 6).

Revelation 11:3	Revelation 12:6
And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.	The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

This comparison of both prophecies illuminates the character of the "1,260 days" and exchanges the "two witnesses" of God with the "woman" of God. God preserves the testimony of His own witnesses and sustains their courage in the wilderness of a dark world. The "two witnesses" thus function as a parallel symbol for the witnessing church.

The Apocalypse began with a vision of Christ ministering among the seven lampstands, which were said to represent the church, stretching from His resurrection until His return (Rev. 1:12-16, 20; 2:1). Christ can also "remove" any lampstand from an unrepentant people (Rev. 2:5). True apostolic succession is therefore decided not by antiquity, but by faithfulness to the word of God and the testimony of Christ. The light of Christ and His testimony about God's redemptive work will never cease until probation closes. Christ will always nourish His church with spiritual food so she can remain the light of the world and the salt of the earth (see Matt. 5:13, 14). His spiritually empowered witnesses will not keep quiet. When the disciples praised God "in loud voices" while Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, some of the Pharisees asked Him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" But He replied: "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40). When the end-time prophecy is fulfilled in history, God's witnesses will testify of it, under oath in court during persecution just as Christ had done before Pilate (see 1 Tim. 6:13).

During the reign of the antichrist and the trampling on the "holy city" by the Gentiles, God commissions His two witnesses to prophesy in "sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3). Christ had commissioned His apostles, and by extension their followers, to bear witness to His redemptive work until the end of time:

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8; see also Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:48).*

Why does John portray "two witnesses" of God in this symbolic portrayal? Some expositors apply the two witnesses, or the two lampstands, to the martyrs of the seven churches, that is, to those Christians who fearlessly give their gospel testimony in the world as true prophets of God and who will die for it. Others suggest two distinct individuals, such as Enoch and Elijah, or Peter and Paul who were martyred by Nero in Rome, or two future figures. Robert Mounce comments:

*Allegorically they could be the Law and the Prophets, the Law and the Gospel, the OT and the NT, Israel and the Church, Israel and the Word of God, the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia" (The Book of Rev., p. 223).*

The most helpful treatment is presented by Kenneth A. Strand in his article "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," (AUSS 19:2 [1981]: 127-135). He gives due consideration to the contextual setting of the two witnesses in Rev. 11, as applicable to the sixth trumpet in

the church age. He further observes that the two witnesses function as an unbreakable unit, experiencing everything together. The basic characteristic of their mission is their proclamation of God's word of warning. Most of all, Strand points to the two-witnesses theology that pervades the book of Revelation, as expressed in Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4. He explains this much overlooked characteristic:

*The foregoing makes clear that the "word of God" and "testimony of Jesus" provide a concept or theme that permeates, undergirds, and underlies the book of Revelation, the Revelation itself being said to proclaim this twofold divine message (1:2) (Ib., p. 132).*

This means that God's twofold testimony consists of the Old and the New Testaments as an unbreakable unit. This was also affirmed by the angel in Rev. 10:7, which unites the prophetic pre-verification in the Old Testament with the Christian gospel of the New Testament. This emphasis on both Testaments points to a revival of the Bible as the authority for true worship in the time of the end. The Apocalypse explains that the testimony of Jesus to the churches is inspired by the Spirit of prophecy, just as Israel's prophets were (Rev. 19:10; see 2:7, 11, 17, 29; etc., also 1 Pet. 1:10-11). The historic testimony borne by Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, comes with the same divine authority to the world as that of the Old Testament and will be the norm in the last judgment, as Jesus declared:

*There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it (John 12:48, 49).*

Strand explains the importance of this two-witnesses theology as follows:

*In the book of Revelation, faithfulness to the "word of God" and to the "testimony of Jesus Christ" separates the faithful from the faithless, and it brings about persecution that includes John's own exile and the martyrdom of other believers (see again Rev 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4; etc.) (Ib., p. 133).*

In this perspective, God's two witnesses are primarily the Word of God and the historic testimony of Jesus, "or what we today would call the OT prophetic message and the NT apostolic witness. . . even though secondarily there could be reference, as well, to the church in a derivative sense as the proclaimer of this divine message" (Ib., pp. 134, 135). We need to realize, however, that the Bible and the true church of Christ cannot be separated. The Bible, consisting of "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," constitutes the firm foundation and legitimation of the church. The biblical witness alone authenticates the true church and her apostolic succession. Faithfulness to the apostolic gospel message also identifies the faithful woman of God in Rev. 12, in contrast with the unfaithful woman in Rev. 17. The faithful church is Christ's appointed witness for the world (see Acts 1:8; Luke 24:48; Rev. 22:17). Jesus stressed that His gospel testimony must be preached by live witnesses before the gospel can be a legal witness in the judgment:

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony [eis martyrion, "for a witness," NASB] to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14).*

If God's witnesses are rejected, this implies that both Scripture and the faithful church are rejected and persecuted. The church of God will be characterized by her renewed stand on the Bible, as the united witness of two Testaments, for her mission and mandate in the



time of the end. The two witnesses of Rev. 11 are not the two Testaments in isolation from the living witnesses of God. These are the proclaimers of the divine message of the two Testaments. The essential union of both is illustrated in Rev. 10, where the open book was to be digested and proclaimed by John as the representative of the people of God!

The "two witnesses" of God in Rev. 11 will preach "clothed in sackcloth" (11:3), which signified in the Old Testament the expression of mourning or repentance of sin (Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Est. 4:1; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:8; Matt. 11:21). It was considered also a prophet's garment (Zech. 13:4), especially since Elijah had walked in a "garment of hair" (2 Kings 1:8) and later also John the Baptist (Matt. 3:4). The witnesses of God proclaim the urgent need for repentance, because "the great city" (Rev. 11:8, later called "Babylon") will soon be destroyed by divine judgments (Rev. 16-18). Such is their prophesying. It shall cause, however, a worldwide rejection and "torment" (11:10). Apparently, the earth-dwellers will find no rest from the accusings of their troubled consciences as long as God's witnesses testify to them.

### **Blessings and Curses from the Two Witnesses**

The mission of God's witnesses will be accomplished after "1,260 days," in spite of universal opposition. However, God will rehabilitate his faithful "prophets" by resurrecting them from the dead and rewarding them with a visible ascension to heaven in a cloud, similar to that of their Lord. Such a vivid portrayal inspires all the faithful when faced with an overpowering enemy. Alan F. Johnson comments: "This assures the people of God that no matter how many of its chosen saints are oppressed and killed, God's witness to Christ will continue until His purposes are fulfilled" (Revelation, p. 111).

The language which John uses in Rev. 11:4-12 is drawn from several Old Testament passages and shows John's style of merging symbolism. He takes the freedom to adapt the Hebrew portrayals. John describes the "two witnesses" as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" (Rev. 11:4) and portrays their divine powers in terms of those of Elijah, Jeremiah and Moses (11:5, 6). Such a confluence of Hebrew images tends to stress the basic continuity of God's covenant with His chosen ones until the end. It guarantees God's faithfulness to the new Israel, the witnesses of Christ, the "lampstands" in a dark world.

John borrows his next symbolic picture from Zechariah 4. That prophet used two olive trees to represent the two "anointed" Israelites in his time, who served "the Lord of all the earth," namely, King Zerubbabel and the High Priest, Joshua (Zech. 4:11-14). These olive trees provided "golden oil" for the lampstand with seven lights (4:2, 3, 12). Zechariah's pictorial message to the returning Israelites from the Babylonian exile was clear: God would provide His Spirit to Israel's religious and political leadership, so that they could complete the building of His temple (4:6-9). John describes a similar picture for the end-time church. He sees the two witnesses as two lampstands and as two olive trees "that stand before the Lord of the earth" (Rev. 11:4). Their symbolic significance must be understood, of course, in basic continuity with that of Zechariah 4. The church, as the royal priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10) must go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit to complete building the spiritual temple of God's people on earth, in spite of fierce opposition. The word "earth" is used four times in Rev. 11:4-10, stressing the worldwide mission of the church.

John then expresses the judicial authority of the two witnesses of God (11:5-6). The

Hebrew concept of retaliation is now revalidated. Because the two witnesses are directly authorized by God, their testimony is sanctioned and cannot be opposed without grave consequences. Earlier God's judgment on an impenitent Judah was described figuratively by Jeremiah: "I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes" (Jer. 5:14). A literal example of such power was Elijah's judgment on two royal regiments that came to arrest him and died instantly, struck by fire (2 Kings 1:10-12). Elijah placed a covenant curse on the land banning all rainfall from heaven. As Moses turned water into blood, so will the end-time witnesses receive supernatural power from the same covenant God (Rev. 11:5, 6).

Apparently the purpose of such judgments is to lead God's enemies to recognize His witnesses and to press home the need for repentance. We observe here an essential correspondence with the trumpet-judgments that were sent from heaven in answer to the prayers of the persecuted saints (Rev. 8:3-5).

### **Preview of the End-Time Persecution**

The warnings of the two witnesses are met with the same opposition as Jerusalem had treated Christ and His apostles. John predicts:

*Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them [lit.: "will make war with them," NASB] and overpower and kill them (Rev. 11:7).*

This text is the first reference to "the beast" [therion, "wild animal"] in the book of Revelation. It has its taproot in the fourth "beast" of Daniel 7, which makes war against the saints. But now the beast "comes up from the Abyss." G. B. Caird notes a fundamental principle: "Whenever men lay claim to despotic power, refusing to acknowledge that they are responsible to God for the use to which they put it, there the monster rises from the Abyss." (The Rev. of John, p. 137).

Revelation 11 focuses on the martyred saints that are left unburied "in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (11:18). John apparently refers to the city of Jerusalem, where Christ was crucified, "outside the city gate" (Heb. 13:12), and where the followers of Christ also were persecuted for their witness to the risen Lord (Acts 4-7). John now describes Jerusalem as a city that has become, in God's eyes, morally degraded like Sodom, oppressive like Egypt (see also Isa. 1:9; Ezek. 16:26; Jer. 23:14), and guilty of the crucifixion of Christ (11:8). John calls it "the great city," a phrase used seven times exclusively for "Babylon" throughout the rest of the book (Rev. 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-19, 21). This "great city" is placed in glaring contrast to "the holy city" (11:2). The range of both cities is worldwide in the end-time. Paul S. Minear interprets the constant conflict between the two cities, "the holy city" and "the great city" in Rev. 11:2 and 8, in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ:

*This event [of Christ] discloses . . . the presence of 'the great city' wherever men reject the 'word of God and the testimony of Jesus', and the presence of 'the holy city' wherever men are faithful to that word and testimony. . . The holy city is described as the temple of God, its altar, and those who worship there (xi. 1). The other is described as the place where the earth-dwellers serve and worship the beast (xi. 7). It is the enmity between the two lords which discloses the nature of both cities. . . The 'testimony of Jesus' thus enables John to discern the boundaries*

*between the two cities, as well as the true ultimacy of the one and the deceptive ultimacy of the other (New Testament Studies 13 [1966]: 98, 99, 100).*

The dynamic interplay of holy city (Jerusalem) and corrupted city (Babylon) in Rev. 11 is only a preview of the expanded visions of the pure woman and the harlot in Revelation 12 and 17.

## **The Christ-Imitation of the Witnesses**

It is remarkable that God permits His two witnesses to be killed after their mission has been completed, that is, after the 1260 prophetic days. We observe here an essential correspondence with the mission and death of the Son of God, who was crucified only after His mission was completed (John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). This Messianic model is extended further to the resurrection of the witnesses and to their heavenly ascension in a cloud of glory (Rev. 11:11, 12). Their mission is closely united with that of their Lord, whom John calls "the faithful witness, the first born from the dead" (Rev. 1:5; also 3:14).

We are justified to apply this symbolic portrayal to both the Scriptures and to the church that faithfully proclaims the Scriptures in the time of the end. We must realize, however, that many historical applications in the past have proved to be only partial fulfillments, so that we should remain alert to the complete fulfillment in the final end-time events.

John had announced earlier that many faithful ones would be "kept" from the final hour of trial (3:10). Still many witnessing saints will be killed in the end-time and their worldwide witness will be muted by the fanatical hatred of the "inhabitants of the earth." Now Jesus' words will be fulfilled globally: "They will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me" (Luke 21:16, 17). On the other hand, the whole world will rejoice and exchange presents when they feel relieved from the voice of reproof. A similar situation occurred in Egypt when Israel had left (Ps. 105:38). But their joy will be short-lived, only "three and a half days" (11:9, 11). This time period stands in conspicuous contrast to the 1,260 days of the ministry of God's witnesses. God will soon honor His witnesses with a spectacular vindication from heaven. John now borrows from Ezekiel's marvelous vision to describe the resurrection of the executed witnesses.

*But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on (Rev. 11:11, 12).*

We are struck by John's creative reinterpretation of Ezekiel's vision about Israel's restoration as a theocracy after the Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 37). John sees Israel's vision finally fulfilled in the witnesses of Christ at the end of time.

Ezekiel 37:10	Revelation 11:11
So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.	But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

As in "the valley of dry bones" of Ezekiel 37 where the bodies remained unburied, so the bodies of Christ's witnesses will lie on the earth unburied (Rev. 11:9). Ezekiel's vision promised that Israel and her worship of God would be restored after their captivity in Babylon. John also promises that the faithful witnesses of Christ, killed by Babylon during the church age, will be restored to life in the kingdom of glory. He adds their miraculous ascension to heaven in a cloud, just as Christ had ascended to heaven with a cloud (Acts 1:9). No secret, invisible rapture for the Christian saints therefore! This resurrection and visible rapture will rather be a worldwide shock that strikes terror in the hearts of the earth-dwellers (Rev. 11:11, 12). They will all witness God's reversal of the vilified saints.

"At that very hour," a great earthquake will cause the collapse of one tenth of the city, killing "seven thousand people" (Rev. 11:13). This terrifies the survivors to the extent that they feel compelled to give "glory to the God of heaven" (11:13). The 7,000 idol-worshippers, killed by the earthquake, appear to function as the counterpart of the 7,000 faithful worshipers of Yahweh who were preserved by God in the time of the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4). This suggests that God's judgment is limited in proportion to the total population, allowing still time for repentance and the acknowledgment of His glory. As part of the sixth trumpet, the earthquake of Rev. 11:13 is a limited forerunner of the last earthquake (of Rev. 6:12-14; 11:19; 16:17-21). Richard Bauckham comments:

*Verse 13 [of Rev. 11] certainly means that all the survivors genuinely repent and acknowledge the one true God. The description of their response corresponds to the invitation of the angel who, in 14:6-7, calls on all nations to acknowledge God. It also contrasts with 9:20-21 (cf. 16:9-11). . . Not the faithful minority, but the faithless majority are spared, so that they may come to repentance and faith. Thanks to the witness of the witnesses, the judgment is actually salvific (The Theology of the Book of Revelation, pp. 86, 87).*

This understanding of Rev. 11:13 views the witness of the martyrs as effective among the nations, especially in the way they face death with the same victory as Christ demonstrated. The testimony of the dying witnesses will not have been in vain. Their blood will become the seed for new believers, so that the end-time hope of Israel's prophets will be realized:

*All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name (Ps. 86:9).*

*God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him (Ps. 67:7).*

*"Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (Isa. 45:23).*

## **The Historicist Application**

Protestant interpreters applied the "two witnesses" of Rev. 11 to all who fearlessly preached the biblical gospel of salvation and who exposed the apostasy of the medieval church. They saw these witnesses as the positive counterpart of the antichrist, the beast rising from the Abyss of Rev. 11:7. Thus they established their Protestant mission and self-understanding. An instructive report of the history of exegesis of Rev. 11:3-13 is presented by Rodney L. Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days. The Theme of 'Two Witnesses' in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993). Among the symbolic witnesses were counted Savonarola, Wycliff, Hus, Jerome of Prague, Luther, Zwingli,

Melanchthon, Calvin, and many others. These were considered inspired by the Spirit, as was Elijah the prophet, to preach "the plain utterances of the Bible,--doctrines which they had been reluctant to present" (E.G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 606). They were all falsely accused and persecuted "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (GC 271).

At the end of the seventeenth century some influential expositors, as Pierre Jurieu (in 1687) and Drue Cressener (in 1689) applied the witnesses to the French Protestants who were slaughtered in 1686 (after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685), but who were restored again in 1890 (see R.L. Petersen, *lb.*, pp. 229, 250). Others, as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), saw the Reformation predicted in the rise and ascent of the witnesses in Rev. 11:11-12, because the Reformers came with the power of the Word of God, a power that is able to convert or destroy (see Petersen, *lb.*, pp. 230-232).

Later historicist interpreters applied the death of the two witnesses to the temporary outlawing of the Christian religion in France during the French Revolution. For about four weeks, from November 10 till December 6, 1793, the National Council of France was dominated by the excessive demands of some ultra-revolutionaries that publicly rejected the God of Christianity, set aside the Bible, and even abolished the week cycle of seven days. In this act of defiance France manifested a spirit of atheism. Many prophetic interpreters therefore began to apply Rev.11:7-8 to the war against the Bible during the reign of terror of the French revolution, all the more so because this took place near the end of the 1,260 days as reckoned from 538-1798. Ellen White devoted a special chapter to this historical application of Rev. 11, in *The Great Controversy* (1888, 1911), Ch. 15.

While the prophetic portrayal of Rev. 11 can be applied to one phase of the French revolution if the two witnesses are restricted to the two Testaments of the Bible, a number of features of Rev. 11 were not completely fulfilled, such as the worldwide extension of the witness of the martyrs (Rev. 11:9, 10), the time period of "3½ days" of refusal to bury the bodies of the two witnesses (11:9), the statement that the witnesses "have finished their testimony" and were then killed (11:7). For a more extensive evaluation of this historicist application, see APPENDIX B.

## **Summation of Revelation 10-11**

The visions of Rev. 10-11 direct their spotlight on the new mandate of the church in the end-time. They concentrate on the time of the sixth trumpet, the final phase of the Christian age, before probation ends with the seventh trumpet. The forecast of the end-time events in Rev. 10-11 stands in marked contrast with the dark picture of the trumpet visions (Rev. 8-9), of which it forms a dramatic counterpart. The visions of Rev. 10-11 correspond with the vision of Rev. 7, which also portray the end-time events within the series of the seals. Both spotlights (Rev. 7 and 10-11) are visions to encourage the saints to persevere till the end. While the trumpets represent increasing judgments on the persecutors, beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem and proceeding through the Christian age, Rev. 10-11 focuses on the mission of the revived church of Christ, enlightened by new insight from Daniel's scroll (Dan. 12:4) and empowered with the Spirit of God (Rev. 11:4-6). This implies that the conflict between God's revealed will and the powers of apostate religion will intensify as time progresses.

The sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:14-19) portrays the final confrontation between the demon-inspired worshipers and the Spirit-filled witnesses of Christ. The final conflict leads to legal prosecution, imprisonment, and execution of all who hold to the testimony of Jesus. The unholy war between the beast and the witnesses of Christ in Rev. 11 is amplified in Rev. 12-17. These expansions are characterized by deliberate repetitions of key symbols (such as time units, the testimony, the beast, the inhabitants of the earth), which serve as intentional linkages between Rev. 11 and the subsequent chapters.

While the symbolic images of Rev. 10 and 11 are borrowed from the Old Testament, they are all adapted to the gospel of Christ and to His witnesses. Revelation 10 and 11 therefore carry a strong anticipatory character. Their visionary messages function as a proleptic view of the end-time visions of Rev. 12-22. However, John wants to complete the trumpet series first with a brief description of the seventh trumpet.

### **The Seventh Trumpet**

*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:*

*"The kingdom of the whole world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15).*

Our first impression is that this final trumpet contains no "woe," because it only announces the beginning of God's visible rulership on earth. The seventh trumpet, however, covers a whole complex of scenes to accomplish God's "mystery" (10:7). Those scenes are mentioned by the twenty-four elders in 11:16-18. Their song of praise announces the execution of God's judgment for the dead and the living as the manifestation of His reign:

*"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.*

*The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great -- and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:17, 18).*

The expression, "The nations were angry; and your wrath has come" (Rev. 11:18) summarizes the theme of Psalm 2 and should be understood in the light of this Messianic Psalm. No secular wars were in the biblical focus of Psalm 2, but the rage of the nations against the God of Israel and His Messiah (see Ps. 2:6-9).

To understand the religious significance of the final events, we must look for their enlarged portrayals in the visions of chapters 12-22. George Beasley-Murray expressed this literary infrastructure of Revelation as follows:

*We shall not greatly err if we see the third woe reflected in verse 18a, referred to more explicitly in 16:19 (the seventh bowl) and in greater fullness in 17:12-18, sung in the dirge of chapter 18 and in the hymns of exultation in 19:1-10, and described in 19:11-16 (especially 19:15) (Revelation, p. 188).*

From Revelation 12-19 we learn that the "wrath" of God will be manifested in the seven last plagues (see Rev. 15:1). The seventh trumpet implies the woes of the last plagues of Revelation 16. The liturgical song of the elders in heaven presents a synopsis of Rev.

12-22. Revelation 12-14 describes the demonic efforts of the ruler of this world, Satan, to destroy the followers of Christ. The prophetic song of the elders in Rev. 11 comforts the threatened people of Christ that the time [kairos] has come for three final events: 1) for judging the dead; 2) for rewarding all the saints; 3) for destroying those who destroy the earth (11:18). The reference to the universal "destroyer" indicates that God's doom oracle against ancient Babylon (see Jer. 51:25) will find a global consummation. The judgment on Babylon, the destroyer of God's people, is the theme of gratitude in Rev. 18-19.

*"Rejoice over her [Babylon], O heaven!*

*Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!*

*God has judged her for the way she treated you" (Rev. 18:20; see also 19:2).*

The act of divine destruction of Babylon manifests an act of Christ's kingship. Its purpose is essentially constructive, the restoration of His creation. It provides the promised inheritance of the new earth to His people. The assurance of judgment and rewarding the saints recalls the main vision of Daniel, in which "the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22; see also v. 27). This keynote of Daniel is also the dominant theme of the book of Revelation. The announcement under the seventh trumpet that the time has come "for destroying those who destroy the earth" (11:18), confirms the vision of Daniel that the kingdom of God "will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end" (Dan. 2:44; also v. 45).

Revelation 11 concludes with a new vision: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of the covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm" (11:19).

This new visibility of the ark of God's covenant, combined with the instruments of divine warfare (earthquake, hail, thunder, etc.), dramatically assures the church that Christ will rise to fulfill God's covenant promises. The apocalyptic portrayals represent historical judgments for rebellious mankind. The covenant God is also the Lord of history. His kingdom of justice and mercy will be established on the earth. The fundamental assurance of Revelation 11 can be summed up in these words: "Judgment on God's enemies and vindication for the church have both been guaranteed. This is the great message of Revelation 11" (R. Naden, *lb.*, p. 179)

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## Chapter XX

# Interpreting the "1260 Days" in Revelation XI - XIII

John used three symbols of time ("days," "months," "times") in Revelation 11-13 to designate the period of trampling underfoot the holy city, of the two witnesses, of the woman in the wilderness, and of the domination of the beast. He uses the phrases "42 months," "1260 days," and "3½ times," as synonymous terms to serve as vital links between Rev. 11, 12, and 13. A comparison of two parallel verses within Rev. 12 is helpful.

Revelation 12:6	Revelation 12:14
The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be <i>taken care of for 1,260 days.</i>	The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be <i>taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.</i>

Revelation 12:6 and 14 apparently describe the same woman and the same time of persecution, with slightly different symbols. These stylistic differences are meaningful, because they provide the opportunity to combine a wider range of Old Testament models. This not only enriches the theological significance of the Christian church, but proclaims the continuity of God's faithfulness to His new-covenant people. Just as Yahweh "carried" Israel on "eagles' wings" from Egypt to Himself (Exod. 19:4), so God gives His church "two wings of a great eagle" to fly to a safe place (Rev. 12:14). The fact that the time symbol of "1260 days" and its equivalents are given seven times (in Dan. twice, in Rev. five times) indicates that it is a period of pivotal importance.

The question is, Where does this apocalyptic time symbol come from? The phrase "time, times and half a time" in Rev. 12:14 is borrowed directly from Dan. 7:25 and 12:7, as is generally recognized. But few commentators connect Rev.12 to its taproot in Daniel 7. Yet, here lies hidden the key to unlock the 3½ prophetic times in their connection with the "little horn" of Daniel's fourth beast.

### The Error of Dissecting the Time Symbol from its Context

Some expositors appeal to a Jewish tradition which uses the term "3½ years" as an idiomatic expression for an indefinite "long time," or "many days" (see Strack-Billerbeck, Kom.z.NT, III:761). The term functioned there to express "half a septennium," as others say "half a decade," without further precision. The passages of Luke 4:25 and Jas. 5:17 are interesting, because here the phrase "three and a half years" is used for the time of

drought in Elijah's days, while 1 Kings 18:1 only states that it lasted for "many days" (NASB) and that the drought would end "in the third year." This time designation could mean a minimum of 14 or 18 months, according to the rabbinic tradition (see Str-B, III:760), or possibly three years. The fact that both Jesus (Luke 4:25) and James (5:17) speak of this period as "three and a half years" could be their adaptation to the popular idiom of their time. However, one rabbinic document has the reading "three and a half years" (Str-B, III:761). While one may recognize the tension within the OT and the NT reading regarding Elijah's actual time of trouble, this all stands apart from the time designation in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Here the guiding principle is not idiom, but the immediate and wider contexts of prophecy.

The book of Daniel provides the source and location of the "3½ times" within salvation history. Failure to locate the 3½ prophetic times properly within the time-continuum of Daniel 7 ignores the ordained location of this time period in history. Because Daniel 7 applies its fourth symbolic beast to the fourth world empire or Imperial Rome, the "little horn," which grows out of this beast, cannot represent the Syrian king Antiochus IV, who persecuted the Jews and defiled the temple from December 167 - December 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:41-61; 2 Macc. 10:5). It is misleading to assert that Daniel's symbolic 3½ times "arose during the abomination of Antiochus Ephiphanes" (D. Ezell). His desecration of the temple lasted exactly three years (2 Macc. 10:5) and not "almost exactly three and a half years." Such conjectures regarding Daniel's time phrase fail because they dissect the time symbol from its original setting within Daniel 7.

### **Futurist Applications of the 1260 Days**

The Dutch Old Testament scholar G. Ch. Aalders was convinced that the 3½ times of Daniel 7 must be connected with the kingdom of the antichrist, which he saw rise out of the fourth beast as the Roman Empire. He rejected the "efforts" of some who applied the antichrist to the Papacy or to the Roman law (as forms of the continuation of the Roman Empire) as "worthless pottering" (Daniel, p. 165). Aalders also considered it irrelevant to expect some "revived appearance" of the Roman Empire in the time of the end. The antichrist will achieve an awful display of political power in the cultural world of the future. He will try to take over the world rulership from God's own hand by changing the "times" and the "law" (Dan.7:25; cf. 2:21). This means that the antichrist intends to ban every Christian foundation and "to clear away every religious element" from the cultural world, "in the spirit that motivated the French Revolution" or atheistic communist governments (lb., pp. 164, 167). Aalders thus identified the antichrist with some future atheistic political rule.

Regarding the "time, times and half a time" of Dan. 7:25, Aalders interpreted this phrase to mean that the oppression of Christian believers will occur in three stages: 1) first increasing persecution; 2) then a period of a longer and intensified oppression; 3) finally, a brief period of persecution that will be abruptly cut off by God for the sake of His elect (referring to Matt. 24:22). These unpunctual "times" of the antichrist he projected into the far future allowing an astonishing gap of more than 1500 years (from the fall of Rome until now) in the church age. On the other hand, he acknowledged that the antichrist's future kingdom is further amplified by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and also in Revelation 13:5, 6 (lb., p. 163).

The American Old Testament scholar Edward J. Young explained Daniel 7 in a similar

fashion to Aalders. He summarized: "Thus, in one remarkable picture, the entire course of history is given from the appearance of the historical Roman Empire until the end of human government" (The Prophecy of Daniel, p. 150). He applied the "ten horns" on the fourth beast in Dan. 7 as the kingdoms (10 is "the number of completeness") which "arise historically from the ancient Roman Empire . . . Modern Europe may in a very legitimate sense have arisen from Rome" (Ib., p. 149). But Young projects the antichrist (the eleventh horn) into the indefinite future, when he will "try to wear out (consume, afflict, humble) the saints of the Most High." "This tyranny will endure for a definite period, a time, times and the dividing of a time" (Ib., p. 161). Young rejects the dispensational belief that the 3½ years or 1260 days must be equated with the last half of Daniel's 70th week, the period of the great tribulation (Ib., p. 161). He states that Daniel's time phrase "is in itself a chronologically indefinite expression". Young concludes: "This period, a time, times and half a time, apparently stands for a period of testing and judgment which for the sake of God's people, the elect, will be shortened (cf. Matt. 24:22)" (Ib., p. 162). Both Young and Aalders project the antichrist exclusively into the future end-phase of the church age.

It is curious to notice that the church reformer John Calvin, in his popular Lectures on Daniel of 1561 (Corpus Reformatorum, Vols. 40, 41) suggested that the time phrase of Dan. 7:25 indicated three phases: first, a time period "something like ten years," then times, "something like fifty or a hundred years," and finally, "half a time", as an indication that God sets a sudden limit to the great distress. He refers to Jesus who had predicted a shortening of the tribulation in Matthew 24:22. Calvin, however, applied all the horns on the beast of Dan. 7 to various emperors of the Roman Empire (e.g. Julius Caesar, Nero, and Trajan).

In his Commentary on Daniel the Dispensationalist Leon J. Wood declares: "The fact that this beast had ten horns signifies that an extended time-gap must be recognized prior to this indication" (p. 94). Wood bases his tremendous time-gap on the mistaken assumption that the ten horns ("ten contemporaneous kings") must be part of a future revived Roman empire, "it may be a confederation of European states," with Rome as its main city (Ib., p. 95). Only then will the eleventh horn as "Satan's counterfeit world ruler" begin to persecute the Jews as the saints of God for three-and-a-half literal years (Ib., p. 98). This period of tribulation is identical to the last half of the seven-year tribulation period of Dan. 9:26, 27. This view only repeats the view of the New Scofield Reference Bible (pp. 909, 1362). The dispensational view is determined by its adherence to a strict literalism of all prophetic time symbols in spite of the fact that these time symbols are attached to symbolic images (Dan. 7; Rev. 11-13). Also the gap theory of futurism is in conflict with the historical continuum portrayed in Dan. 2 and 7.

### **Do the "1260 Days" Cover the Entire Christian Era?**

In the last decades a new interpretation of the "1260 days" has gained support. It declares that John by this time phrase aimed "to represent the 'spiritual wilderness experience' of the church during the period between the resurrection and the return of Christ" (D. Ezell, Revelations on Revelation, p. 70). The Baptist scholar Douglas Ezell asserts that John chose to recast Daniel's time designation as 42 months and 1260 days to symbolize the time the children of Israel were in the wilderness 42 years. "The new children of Israel will experience their wandering as pilgrims for a period picturesquely symbolized as 42 months" (p. 70). He refers to Rev. 12:6, 14. But the Old Testament never mentions 42 years for Israel's wilderness experience, only 40 years. We read that since the second

month after their departure from Egypt, "the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan" (Exod. 16:35; cf. Deut. 2:7; 8:2-4; 29:5; Neh. 9:21; Ps. 95:10; Acts 7:36). Nowhere in the Bible are these forty years stretched to 42 years. Furthermore, Daniel and Revelation do not connect the prophetic 3½ times with the messianic age or with the church age as such, but solely with the antichrist's reign of terror (Dan. 7:24, 25; Rev. 13:5-8). This exegetical connection has been recognized by the Baptist expositor George R. Beasley-Murray. He argues that the time phrases in Rev. 12 should not be dissected from their context in Rev. 13, because:

*It does violence to John's intention. The three and a half years are the time of the Antichrist's raging (13:5), and so of the Church's exposure to his attempts to crush it out of existence (11:1f., 3-13). This does not characterize the period of the Church between the ascension and the parousia of Christ (Revelation, p. 201).*

As set forth earlier, the apostle Paul in 2 Thess. 2 placed the predicted antichrist in his future, in fact, after the demise of the Roman Empire (see above, Chapter 7, p. 53). Consequently, the 3½ times cannot be applied to the persecutions of some Roman Emperors (Nero, Domitian, Decius, and Diocletian). The Danielic times of persecution are tied exclusively to the reign of the antichrist (Dan. 7:24, 25). And while the historic persecutors of God's people, like Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus IV, Nero and others, may be considered as representatives of the oppressive times of the Gentiles, they can still be considered only as prototypes or forerunners of the predicted antichrist.

The so-called "times of the Gentiles" (in Luke 21:24) may be regarded as covering the whole period of hostile supremacy over the covenant people of God, which ends only with the deliverance at the second advent of Christ. But Daniel's 3½ times or John's 1260 days constitute a restricted part of those general times of political subjection, the specific part of the supremacy of the biblical antichrist over the saints of God. And because the antichrist's reign does not extend over the whole Christian age, the 1260 days equally do not cover the entire Christian era.

### **The "Three and a Half Times" Within Their Context of Daniel 7.**

In Daniel 7 the 3½ times are connected exclusively to the "little horn," that is, the gradually rising eleventh horn on the fourth beast. Revelation continues to apply the 3½ prophetic times and its equivalent symbols of "42 months" and "1260 days" to the antichrist, portrayed as the sea beast of Revelation 13:1-8.

The antichrist had not fully developed during the apostolic age, as the apostle Paul declared in 2 Thessalonians 2. Even the aging apostle John stated that the predicted antichrist was still in the future (in 1 John 2:18). Instead they warned the church about the certainty of his coming during the church age (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thess. 2:3-8; Rev. 13). Remarkably, the church father Tertullian (c. A.D. 200) taught that the predicted antichrist (of Daniel) was not the Roman Empire but would arise after the demise of Rome and then take his seat within the church. Tertullian interpreted 2 Thess. 2 as teaching that the present existence of the Roman Empire delayed the rise of the antichrist. He wrote regarding the "restraint" in 2 Thess. 2:7, 8, "What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?" (On the Resurrection of the Flesh, ch. 24, in ANF 3:563; quoted in

L. E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, I:258). Also the respected Daniel Commentary by Jerome (A.D. 347-420) endorsed the standard exposition of the Christian Church, that the antichrist is portrayed in Daniel 7 as the eleventh king, who will rise only when the Roman Empire is shattered and ten kings have partitioned the Roman world among themselves (Jerome's Com. on Daniel, p. 77).

Even Augustine in 413 recommended Jerome's "erudite" Commentary on Daniel for the understanding of Daniel 7 (*The City of God*. Bk. 20, Ch. 23; quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, I:486). Tertullian and Jerome arrived at this understanding only because they went back to Daniel 7 as the taproot of all antichrist prophecies. This fundamental method to unlock the apocalyptic symbols of Revelation, by tracing their origin in the outline prophecies of Daniel, needs to be honored also for decoding the time symbols of Rev. 11-13.

If Daniel 7 is consulted as the taproot of Revelation, we learn that the antichristian "horn" will arise to persecute the saints of God for 3½ "times" only after the "ten horns" have divided the Western Roman Empire. This historic partition took place over one hundred years, until in A.D. 476 the last West-Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, was deposed. From Paul's apocalyptic outline in 2 Thessalonians 2 we may learn that no endless gap of time should be assumed for the unrestrained development of the antichrist and his kingdom (see treatment above, Part I, Chapter 7, Section "Paul's Historical Timing of the Antichrist").

The symbolic sea beast of Revelation 13 incorporates in itself all the four beasts of Daniel 7. Further, the names of blasphemy on its heads (Rev. 13:1) correspond with the marks of the little horn of Dan. 7. Also the times of its authority, "forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5), correspond with the three and a half times of Daniel's little horn (Dan. 7:25). This prophetic time symbol is thus attached to the antichrist that will rise on the world scene when Imperial Rome came to its end in the West, that is, after A.D. 476. Yet, the antichrist still represents the Roman Empire and its spirit of persecution. Ronald S. Wallace, a biblical scholar in Scotland, acknowledged that, if the fourth beast of Daniel 7 represents the Roman Empire, "The little horn would then refer to some great anti-Christian persecutor of the true church arising within the Christian era and within the civilization created by the Roman empire. This would fit in neatly with the interpretation given by the apostle Paul and the book of Revelation (cf. Rev.13)" (*The Lord is King. The Message of Daniel*, p. 129).

## **The Emergence of the State-Church During the Roman Empire**

During the first three-hundred years of Christianity, Christians were outlawed because the Roman Emperors, in their office as Pontifex Maximus ("Supreme Pontiff"), protected the state religion for the sake of civil unity in Roman society. "It is estimated that three million Christians perished in the first three centuries of the Christian Era" (U. Smith, *Daniel*, p. 135). Those persecutions had come in two major waves, under Decius and Diocletian. After the last great persecution had ended (303-312), Emperor Constantine suddenly reversed the whole situation with his famous Imperial Edict of 313, which allowed the Christian religion to exist legally beside the traditional religion. In 321 he imposed on all peoples the civil observance of Sunday, as the Dies Solis ("Day of the Sun"). As patron of the church (calling himself "the bishop of bishops"), Constantine summoned the first

ecumenical council of Nicea in 325. He introduced then the practice of subscription to the articles of a written creed and of civil punishments for a refusal to do so. It is the first occurrence of a civil punishment of heresy. This Roman emperor thus elevated the Catholic hierarchy and its exclusive orthodoxy as the state religion of the Roman Empire. All offences against the church were now regarded as crimes against the state.

The historian Edward Gibbon stated that Constantine "seated Christianity on the throne of the Roman world" (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1:576). Since Constantine, the church became the state-church. Rome was declared to be the supreme court of justice within the church to honor the memory of the apostle Peter (Canon 4). The emperor also enriched the church by donating to her all the heathen temples and their large estates, as well as the properties of the heretics. The church soon owned a tenth of all the real estate in the Roman Empire. The result of the alliance of church and state was an increasingly secularized church and a nominal Christian society. According to the church historian Philip Schaff: "This brought the conflict between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, Christ and Antichrist, into the bosom of Christendom itself" (History of the Christian Church, III:126). The time of Constantine witnessed the beginning of the never-ending struggle in Europe between the church hierarchy and the state, each trying to subject and master the other. This strife "ran through the whole medieval conflict between emperor and pope, between imperial and hierarchical episcopacy, and recurs in modified form in every Protestant established church" (Schaff, III:134).

The "Christian" Roman emperors summoned the general church councils, enforced the new creeds by law on all citizens in the empire, protected "orthodoxy" and punished "heresy" with the arm of secular power. This was considered by some (like Eusebius) as the restoration of the Davidic theocracy on Christian soil. But others, like the French law professor Jacques Ellul, consider the legislation and political enforcement of the dogmatic unity of the church by Christian emperors as the beginning of the subversion of Christianity and the chief form of anti-Christianity (Ellul, The Subversion of Christianity, Ch. 2). The political enforcement of human laws to establish the church or spiritual kingdom of Christ reveals a spirit that is in fundamental conflict with the Spirit of Christ (see John 18:36 NIV).

The dark side of this historic alliance of church and state since Constantine was the persecution of "heretics," because their departures from the state-church faith (Trinitarian Catholicism) were considered not just religious errors, but as crimes against the (Christian) state. Such heretics were punished with banishment, confiscation and, since Emperor Theodosius (380), even with death (Theodosian Code 16.1.2, see S.D.A. Bible Students' Source Book. No. 1202). Schaff states: "From Theodosius, therefore, dates the state-church theory of the persecution of heretics, and the embodiment of it in legislation" (III: 142). In 385 the "Christian" Emperor Maximus ordered the execution of the Spanish bishop Priscillian and five believers of his Manichean-like sect at Treves (Schaff, III:142).

Even Augustine became convinced after the year 400 that persistent heretics had to be punished for their religious errors. He even appealed to Jesus' words in a parable, "Compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23 NASB). In his classic The City of God, Augustine set forth the Catholic ideal of one universal church, or society of the faithful, in control of a universal society of the unfaithful. When the city of Rome was captured and sacked by the Gothic king Alaric in 410, the church as the body of the faithful survived. Augustine claimed that the millennium of Revelation 20 was now being fulfilled by the rulership of the church, whose bishops must judge others, on behalf of Christ (Ch. 20, 9). This

provided the theoretical basis for the church-state of the medieval papacy. The church hierarchy became more and more Roman, after Constantine had removed the capital from Rome to Constantinople in 330. "The Bishop of Rome, in the seat of the Caesars, was now the greatest man in the West, and was soon forced to become the political as well as the spiritual head" (A. C. Flick, *The Rise of the Medieval Church*, p. 169). Latin episcopacy, represented by the bishop of Rome, became the new ruler in the old Roman metropolis.

Leo I ("the Great," 440-461) was the first pope who publicly claimed a universal papacy. He rooted its primacy in divine right, the right of being the apostolic seat in Rome. For him, Christianity and the universal dominion of the Roman church were identical (Schaff, III:317). Schaff regards him "the first pope, in the proper sense of the word" (III:319), that is, in regard to his claims of supremacy.

During the Council of Chalcedon (451) Leo's dogmatic letter was read, and the bishops (only Eastern bishops were present) exclaimed: "That is the faith of the Fathers . . . and of the apostles! Through Leo, Peter has thus spoken!" (Schaff, III:744). From this historic exclamation, Leo and later popes derived a claim to their dogmatic authority over all Christians. But the same council fathers assigned to the patriarch of Constantinople an equal authority in the Eastern Empire as the pope possessed in the West. "Pope Leo confirmed the doctrinal confession of the council, but protested against the twenty-eighth canon, which placed the patriarch of Constantinople on an equality with him" (Schaff, III:747). Leo increasingly emphasized that the popes were the successors of the apostle Peter and thus possessed the *sedes apostolica* (apostolic see), in order to establish their ecclesiastical supremacy over Constantinople's patriarch. From now on the popes claimed to be the vicar of Peter and, therefore, at the same time also the vicar of Christ for the entire church.

Pope Leo was the first pope who asked the secular authorities to suppress with force all the heretical Christian churches in the city of Rome. The authority of the popes, although claimed for the entire church, could not be realized except in parts of Italy. The Eastern Church rejected Leo's claim to the primacy in the church and still rejects the papal primacy today.

Since the fall of the Western Empire in 476, the Roman bishops appropriated to themselves the function of the Western emperor as Pontifex Maximus, priest and temporal ruler, with the bishops as senators, and priests as leaders of the army. The renowned German church historian Adolph von Harnack saw the Roman Church as "the actual continuation" of the Western Empire. Henri Pirenne, the eminent Belgian historian, wrote: "In short, it was not because it was Christian, but because it was Roman that the Church acquired and maintained for centuries its control over society" (*A History of Europe*, p. 59).

Pope Gelasius I (492-496) developed the papal principle a step further by declaring in 494 that the emperor was subject to the pope and had the obligation to obey the discipline of the Catholic Church. The Roman bishop was the "supreme authority." This pope began to defend the policy of "non-interference" between church and state. Its purpose was to make the pope an independent religious-political ruler, entitled to rule over civil sovereigns.

## Justinian's Recognition of Papal Primacy

The policy of Justinian I (Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire from 527-565) sought to revive a universal Christian Roman Empire, ruled by the emperor of Byzantium (Constantinople). As the actual master of the Christian church, Justinian issued edicts with binding pronouncements, even in theology. Justinian's main doctrinal problem was the conflict between the orthodox view of the Council of Chalcedon (451)--the view that the divine and human natures co-exist in Christ--and the Monophysite teaching, which emphasized the divine nature of Christ. The latter view was favored by his wife, Theodora, and popular in the East. The view of Arianism (which rejected the eternal deity of Christ) was the common Christian belief among the Germanic peoples (except the Franks) which populated the Western Roman Empire, including North Africa.

Justinian decided to restore political and religious unity in the whole territory of the former Roman Empire. He sought the co-operation of the pope to establish religious unity in the Byzantine empire. First, he wrote his famous letter to Pope John II, in 533, in which he requested the pope's support for his imperial decision against the heresy of the Nestorians. His imperial letter to the Pope declared:

*"Therefore, we have exerted Ourselves to unite all the priests of the East and subject them to the See of Your Holiness . . . For we do not suffer anything which has reference to the state of the Church . . . to be discussed without being brought to the notice of Your Holiness, because you are the head of all the Holy Churches, for We shall exert Ourselves in every way . . . to increase the honor and authority of your See" (Doc. in Froom, PF I:931; italics added).*

The emperor then requested a reply with the same condemnation of the Nestorians by the pope as he had issued. Froom's assessment is: "This discloses the Roman bishop's full understanding of imperial recognition of the primacy of the See of Rome" (Ib. I:932). This recognition of the primacy of the popes had reference to their teaching authority and to their being "the corrector of heretics" (Justinian's letter to archbishop Euphrophianus, 533). Yet, more was involved. In his imperial letter to Pope John II, the emperor had formally recognized the precedence of the bishop of Rome over the bishop of Constantinople. This was legally enacted only twelve years later (545) in Justinian's Civil Code (in Novella 131; see Froom, I:513, 933). Froom summarizes:

*Thus Justinian not only codified the religious laws of his predecessors, but also specifically designated the bishop of Rome the head of the church and corrector of heretics, and made the canon law of the church up to 451 part of the civil law of the empire, thus consummating the union of church and state (PF I:935).*

The imperial recognition of the pope's ecclesiastical supremacy, codified in 545, was questioned by the patriarch of Constantinople, who himself assumed the title "Universal Bishop" in 587. While Justinian's Civil Code, with its new laws or novellae (534-565), can be taken as the beginning of the legalized power of the papacy over the entire church (in Novella 131), it was never realized in the Eastern Roman Empire. The gap between law and practice remained immense! The ecclesiastical authority of the popes remained limited to the former Western Empire. Moreover, the Civil Code still reserved the control of the entire church, not to the pope, but to the emperor! He was responsible for the extermination of the heretics (Novella 132), as well as the maintenance of the faith and discipline in the entire church (Nov., 6).

In 606 Emperor Phocas settled the dispute by his imperial decree that the Bishop of Rome was the apostolic head of Christendom. But still the ecclesiastical supremacy of the



papacy did not become effective in the universal church. Phocas' decree was a futile attempt to enforce the law of Justinian (Novella 131).

The practical ineffectiveness of Justinian's legal recognition of papal primacy in the Christian Church was due not primarily to some Arian Christian kings, but to Emperor Justinian himself and his autocratic rule. The Italian church historian Paolo Brezzi described the imperial obstruction to the claims of papal primacy as follows:

*This subservience of the pope to Byzantium remained a matter of fact, even after his access to the highest ecclesiastical office, and this implied obligations and ties which had the effect of obstructing the entire papal function . . . It is certain that insofar as the Byzantines were concerned, the true and only head of society was still the emperor, from whom all final decisions, even in religious matters, were sought (The Papacy. Its Origins and Historical Evolution, pp. 65, 66).*

Only when the King of the Franks, Pepin, donated Rome and parts of Italy to the "sacred See of blessed Peter" in the year 756, was the papacy released from the yoke of Byzantine rule and control. The middle of the eighth century therefore marks the beginning of the era of papal temporal power. From now on the papacy began striving after the realization of another papal principle: the domination of papal rule over all state powers. This goal would be realized only with Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) and his successors. Then began the centuries of the Inquisition, of violent persecution and torture of all dissenters.

It becomes apparent from the slow development of the papacy: "That the rise of papal power was a gradual process covering many centuries . . . continuing from about A.D. 100 to 756" (S.D.A Bible Commentary, 4: 838). The Adventist Bible Commentary draws this significant conclusion: "It is thus clear that no dates can be given to mark a sharp transition from insignificance to supremacy, or from supremacy back to comparative weakness" (Ib.). This implies that only approximate dates or turning points can be presented for the rise and decline of the papal primacy within the Church and of the papal supremacy over the State. Historicist interpreters in the past have chosen different dates as markers of the rise of papal power, such as 396, 455, 533, 538, 606, and 756 (see Fromm, PF II: 531,787; III: 252,744; IV: 390, 394-5, 846-7, 849, 850). The S.D.A. Bible Commentary concludes: "However, by 538 the papacy was completely formed and functioning in all significant aspects, and by 1798, 1260 years later, it had lost practically all the power it had accumulated over a period of centuries" (4: 838).

## **The Biblical Characterizations of the "3½ Times"**

To understand the divine intention of this symbolic time period in Daniel and Revelation, we must consider all the biblical references. The prophetic time symbol must be interpreted, of course, according to the biblical context. The time phrase is connected with the persecuted church and with the persecutor of the saints. In determining the theological quality of the 1260 days or 3½ times, we need to recognize that Daniel characterizes this period as the time of oppression or "wearing out" (margin NKJV) of the saints (Dan. 7:25; 12:7).

John's Apocalypse further explains Daniel's time phrase. It will be the time of a treading underfoot of "the holy city for forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2), adding that Christ's witnesses would persevere to testify for 1260 days (11:13). Revelation 12 mentions that the saints would receive divine protection during the stressful 1260 days or 3½ times (12:6,14). Revelation 13 discloses that the persecuting "dragon" would transfer "his power and his

throne and great authority" to the emerging antichrist-beast (13:1, 2). This will result in the self-exaltation of the beast who will pronounce "blasphemies" and act with arrogant authority for 42 months (13:5). And as it was said of the little horn in Dan. 7, so Rev. 13 reiterates of the sea beast: "And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (13:7). If the persecutions of the woman by the dragon represent those of the Roman Empire (Rev. 12), then the subsequent antichrist beast will rule with the same despotic spirit as pagan Rome did over the saints of God.

Revelation 13 further announces that the antichrist will receive a "fatal wound" with a sword, from which he will recover unexpectedly to the amazement of the entire world (13:3, 10-14). The consequences of this end-time recuperation for a brief "one hour" is revealed in Rev. 17. This will require our special attention later. Our present interest is to determine the biblical significance of the "fatal wound" of the antichrist in Rev. 13. This act of incapacitation of the beast clearly implies the conclusion of the 1260 days of oppression! Revelation 13 then presents both the beginning and the ending of the Danielic time of the antichrist's war against the saints. This time of persecution would begin after the transfer of the seat of power and authority of the Roman Empire to the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and would end with the infliction of a fatal wound by a "sword" to the medieval State-Church. For a historical application of the "mortal wound" of the beast in Rev.13, see below, in chap. 22.

## **The Symbolic Nature of the 1260 Days**

While all preterist and futurist interpreters take the time elements in Daniel and Revelation as literal time, the historicist interpreters since the 16th-century Reformation were united in accepting the time references as symbols, in which a prophetic day stood for a year of historical time. This is known as the "year-day principle". For our present purpose, we restrict ourselves to the 1260 days or the 3½ times of Daniel and Revelation.

We observe first that these time references function as constitutive elements in the long-range prophecies of the two apocalyptic books. They indicate the progress of historical time during the church age and thus count, to some extent, to identify the nearness of the second advent of Christ. As Thomas R. Birks, a professor at Cambridge, England, and champion of the year-day principle, wrote:

*Without the time prophecies we would be left to wonder whether the world had yet another weary millennium or two left to endure before Christ appears to banish sin and sorrow.*

*(First Elements of Sacred Prophecy, p. 416; quoted in D. Ford, Daniel 8:14, p. A-125).*

The long-range prophecies of Daniel reach until "the time of the end" (8:14, 17, 19). This predetermined period of time designates a certain period in which a number of final events must take place (see Dan. 11:40-45; 12:1-4). The prophetic time periods of the 3½ times in Dan. 7 and of the 2,300 days in Dan. 8 do not determine the end of time but the start of the "time of the end". If the 3½ times are not dissected from their context, but seen as part of a symbolic portrayal, they also possess a symbolic nature. The 3½ times are part of a symbolic figure, the "little horn". W.H. Shea explains:

*Thus the 3½ times of Dan. 7:25 belong originally, for example, to a symbolic horn, not to a person or persons described primarily as such. The same point can also be made about the symbolic contexts of the time periods mentioned in Revelation. These thoroughgoing symbolic contexts strongly suggest that we should also treat their time units as symbolic (Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, p. 61).*

The symbolic nature of the 3½ times is already suggested by the uncommon way of numbering time: "a time, times, and one half time" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14). Furthermore, if the symbolic beasts of Dan. 7 represent long-existent empires, each covering centuries of time, "it is most likely that the times mentioned are also presented to scale, with a small time unit representing a larger one" (D. Ford, Daniel 8:14, p. A-121).

### **Further Enlargement of the 3½ Times in Daniel and Revelation**

The 3½ times of the little horn of Dan. 7 are located again in salvation history by the interpreting angel of Daniel 11-12. We place the relevant passages side by side in the following Table:

CORRESPONDING TIMES OF PERSECUTION		
Daniel 7:25	Daniel 11:32-35	Daniel 12:7-10
<p>He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints . . .</p> <p>The saints will be handed over to him for a <i>time, times and half a time</i>.</p>	<p>He will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him (v. 32).</p> <p>Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time [lit.: "days," as in NKJV] they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered (v. 33).</p> <p>Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will come at the appointed time (v. 35).</p>	<p>It will be for a time, times, and half a time (v. 7).</p> <p>When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed (v. 7).</p> <p>Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked.</p> <p>None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand (v. 10).</p> <p>"The words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end" (v. 9).</p>

Daniel 12 should not be dissected from Daniel 7-11 because the angel in ch. 12 further clarifies the persecution of the saints described in 11:32-35 and 7:25. He connects the 3½ times of persecution in 12:7 with the persecution of the wise in 11:32-35. This gives the new information that the 3½ times will occur prior to "the time of the end" (see 11:35) and thus do not belong to the predetermined time of the end or thereafter. For a more detailed analysis, including the linguistic links between Dan. 11 and 12, see W.H. Shea, "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13", in Symposium on Revelation. Book I, Chapter 14.

Daniel's 3½ times of persecution of the saints of God (7:25, 12:7) are applied by John's Apocalypse to the Christian age, after the cross and exaltation of Christ (see Rev. 12:13,14). Revelation now equates Daniel's "3½ times" with "1260 days" (12:6), during which the symbolic woman must hide in the wilderness. This experience of the new-covenant saints is identical with the wearing out of the saints of the Most High described in Dan. 7:25. Edward Heppenstall commented:

*Since the Apocalypse is intended as a sequel to the visions in Daniel, the fulfillment of the apostate horn and power in Daniel and the dragon and the beast in Revelation must be sought in the Christian Era (Ministry, Oct. 1981, p. 18).*

If we acknowledge the three main phases of church history in Revelation 12 (vss. 1-5; vss. 6 and 14; vs. 17), we recognize that Rev. 12:6 and 14 describe the middle segment of church history, which denote the Middle Ages. We concur completely with the assessment of Shea about Revelation 12:

*The evidence is clear that this narrative presents a continuous historical flow through the Christian Era; thus, it is most compatible in its perspective with the historicist or continuous historical view (in Symp. on Rev. I:350).*

It is generally accepted by the expositors that the 1260 prophetic days represented the essence of persecution of the saints. This had led many to apply the 1260 days as a symbolic expression for the entire Christian age, during which the true saints are persecuted. Even some Adventist commentators begin to see more than one level of meaning of the 1260 days: one regarding the essential quality of the days and another regarding the numerical quantity of the days. Roy Naden states regarding the 1260 prophetic days or 3½ times:

*According to our hermeneutic, we assume these numbers first have a qualitative significance in interpreting the vision, and only second a possible quantitative application. (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p.170).*

This "qualitative" understanding of the 1260 days or 42 months is determined by taking the wilderness experience of the church as the antitype of Israel's wandering in the desert for some forty years and her staying at forty-two different stations (according to Numbers 33). The church will have to suffer hardship in the "wilderness" of the world during the church age, but will also receive "divine sustenance and protection during the entire earthly pilgrimage--like the forty two encampments of Israel--until it enters the promised land" (R. Fredericks, A Sequential study of Revelation 1-14 Emphasizing the Judgment Motif, p. 264).

While this "qualitative" interpretation of the church's wilderness experience is enriching and carries some convincing power, it leaves unexplained how the number of 1260 days also has a quantitative fulfillment in church history. To understand this application, we

turn to a study of the "year-day" principle.

### **The Day-for-a-Year Equation**

The Mosaic Law introduced the principle that a day can represent a year. The prime example is Leviticus 25, which prescribes that the seventh-day Sabbath was to be celebrated also as a "sabbath year" for the land, namely, each seventh year: "But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards ... during the sabbath year" (Lev. 25:4,5). Here the Levitical law extends the weekly Sabbath-day quality to an entire year. Shea sums up:

*There is thus a direct relationship between the "day" and the "year" since the same terminology was applied to both, and the latter sabbatical year was patterned after the former sabbatical day (Sel. Stud., p.71).*

Israel's law of the Sabbath year thus introduced the day-for-a year principle. The same principle is re-enforced in the law of the Year of Jubilee: "Count off seven sabbaths of years--seven times seven years--so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years" (Lev. 25:8). This law implies that after seven sabbaths of years comes the Year of Jubilee.

Again the weekly Sabbath day stands as the model for an entire year of rest and freedom in the Jubilee cycle. The Sabbath years, in their cycles of seven years, were prophetic of the coming Jubilee year. This way the principle of a day-for-a year became a practical forecast of redemption in Israel's worship rituals.

In Israel's prophetic outlook the year-day principle has been applied in different ways. In Numbers 14:34 we read: "For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you". Here past days (forty) are used to predict as many years of punishment for a rebellious Israel. In Ezekiel 4:6 we read how past years of rebellion are represented by as many days. Both times the same year-day principle is applied, but in different ways. The crown witness of the year-day principle, however, is Daniel's apocalyptic book. The prophetic "seventy weeks" in Dan. 9:24-27, by the unanimous consensus of Jewish and Christian interpreters, designate seventy weeks of years (see Dan. 9:24 RSV), or 490 actual years. This is equal to seventy sabbath years (70 x 7 years) or to ten jubilee year cycles (10 x 49 years). If Daniel intended with his phrase "seventy weeks," weeks of Sabbath years, then no year-day conversion is needed, because seventy weeks of years amount to 490 years. Only if the "seventy weeks" of Dan. 9:24 are taken as seventy literal weeks (70 x 7 days), would the application of the year-day conversion be necessary to result in 490 actual years.

However, the context in Daniel 9 points to the understanding of Sabbath years, because the prophet was pondering the meaning of the seventy years of Israel's Babylonian captivity, as foretold by Jeremiah (see Dan. 9:2). These seventy years were understood as years of punishment, because Israel had ignored the sabbath years for the land (see 2 Chron. 36:21; Dan. 9:10-14). The interpreting angel predicts a multiplication of such sabbath years (70 x) as the time to elapse before the second Temple would be destroyed. Desmond Ford commented on Dan.9:24,

*"Seventy weeks of years are decreed." Because this is part of the literal explanation of 8:1-14, we need not invoke the year-day principle, although it is true*

*that the 'years' are implied rather than stated in Hebrew (Daniel, p. 225).*

It is often overlooked that while Dan. 8 presents a symbolic prophecy, Dan.9:24-27 does not present a symbolic prophecy but an angelic interpretation of the symbols in Daniel 8, without another use of symbols. Therefore we should not expect the "seventy weeks" to be a symbol but rather a plain reference to seventy weeks of years (so RSV in Dan. 9:24). Jean Zurcher related the "seventy weeks" of Dan. 9 to their context and concluded:

*Everything in the text and the context refers to the message of the sabbatical and jubilee years. Jewish tradition, the Talmudists, the author of Seder `Olam, and Jewish interpreters in general have estimated that the weeks in Daniel's prophecy can only be weeks of years. There is evidence that the Church Fathers used the same basis to interpret the 70 weeks ("The Time Prophecies of Daniel 9", Adventist Review, Feb. 5, 1981, p. 9).*

We need to remember that the concept of a "Sabbath year" is rooted in Leviticus 25:1-7 and is already the result of a year-day conversion. Shea states: "Leviticus 25:1-7 is the first biblical passage in which the year-day equation is applied" (Ib., p. 87). But the "seventy weeks" of Dan. 9:24 are more likely rooted in the concept of jubilee cycles of 49 years each, for a jubilee period was also measured in terms of "weeks of years" (Lev. 25:8 RSV).

Daniel recognized the year-day principle by making the 490 actual years of Dan. 9 a part of the 2,300 days in Daniel 8 by stating that the seventy weeks were decreed or, literally "cut off," for the nation of Israel and the holy city! This correlation of Dan. 8 and 9 contains by logical necessity the equation of a day for a year for the 2300 days. In addition, Daniel describes the angel's interpretation of Dan. 8 in greater detail in Daniel 11! The "days" of Dan. 8 are interpreted in terms of "years" in Dan. 11:6, 8, 13, as part of the parallel time with that of Dan. 8.

In summary, the book of Daniel teaches the year-day principle twice: first in the correlation of chapters 8 and 9, and second in the parallel correlation of chapters 8 and 11. This conclusion leads us to apply the 3½ times or 1260 days of Daniel and Revelation to 1260 actual years, without being dogmatic about precise date-fixings in church history. L.E. Froom reports this interesting fact:

*True, the Protestant Historicists differed considerably as to when to begin and when to end the 1260-day period of the Antichrist, but they were all united in the conviction that a period of 1260 years had been allotted to him, and that it was drawing toward its close (Proph. Faith of Our Fathers, II:794).*

The apocalyptic prophecies will be fulfilled and understood only gradually, as history moves forward. A progressive fulfillment releases a progressive understanding. For a consideration of the historicist method of date-fixings, see APPENDIX C.

#### **SOURCE MATERIAL for INTERPRETING THE "1260 DAYS"**

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# Chapter XXI

## The End-Time Message in Historical Perspective

### Revelation XII - XIV

There is joy in the discovery of the architectural design of John's Apocalypse. This hidden design cannot be discerned by the usual approach of dissecting the book into separate parts or chapters. The Revelation is an indivisible, organic unit, an ingeniously balanced composition. The beauty of its parts and counterparts becomes visible only in the light of its total structure.

Early sections in Revelation are regularly developed more fully in later visions. A prime example is the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11, which is widely recognized as a preview of the subsequent visions in Revelation 12-20. One cannot understand the prophecy of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-19) adequately, except in the light of the expanding visions that follow (Rev. 12-20). No chapter in the Apocalypse must therefore be isolated from its context as an independent revelation.

### Literary Analysis

The central unit of Revelation, chapters 12-14, must be understood in the light of the subsequent chapters which clarify the earlier symbolic portrayals. For example, the term "Babylon" occurs for the first time in Revelation in chapter 14:8 (in the "second angel's message"), without any explanation or clarifying reference. However, the subsequent chapters 16-19 further elaborate the meaning of "Babylon." Other examples would be the visions of the red dragon with seven heads and ten horns in Rev. 12 and of the sea-beast with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 13. An informed interpretation of these symbols requires the input of the vision of the scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 17. In short, the proper approach to understanding Rev. 12-14 requires a contextual interpretation. To grasp their significance requires the larger context in which the same symbols are portrayed. This larger view leads to the conclusion that Rev. 12-20 constitute a structural unit which is characterized by a progressive revelation of the same controversy between good and evil.

In a similar fashion, the judgment of God on the persecutors of His people is gradually developed in the portrayals of the wrath of God in Rev. 14-19. While the third angel's message warns against the coming outpouring of God's wrath in "full strength" (14:10 NIV; *akraton*: unmixed, see RSV), the subsequent chapters disclose that this ultimate outpouring of God's wrath will consist in the seven last plagues, "because with them God's wrath is completed" (15:1; also 16:1-21). This contextual and structural approach of Rev. 12-14 is crucial for the discovery of the biblical meaning of the concept of "Armageddon" as the culmination of the last plagues. This method will prove to be the

corrector of popular, yet erroneous interpretations.

## **Theological Perspective**

Beyond this literary analysis, an understanding of the message of Rev. 12-14 also requires a theological perspective. This inquiry searches for the connections of every apocalyptic term and name with the Old Testament and its covenant promises and curses. More than any New Testament writer, John borrows Hebrew words and concepts to describe the theological significance of Christ's church. The Hebraic style of John's Apocalypse is now universally acknowledged. R. H. Charles established that John used not the Septuagint, but the Hebrew text of the Old Testament for hundreds of allusions to Moses and the Prophets (Studies in the Apocalypse, p. 88).

The fact that John also uses Old Testament passages in Rev. 12-14 is essential for the interpretation of this key section. The apocalyptic phrase, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great . . ." (Rev. 14:8), is borrowed from a fusion of two prophetic passages which predicted the fall of the Neo-Babylonian empire (Isa. 21; Jer. 51). Such literary correspondences prove to be indicators of a typological connection between Israel's history and church history. The implications of a biblical typology are often overlooked, yet are of crucial importance. Such a theological relationship foreshadows the high calling and failure of the Christian Church. The principles which ought to guide the Christian interpreter are determined by the gospel of Christ (see H. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy, and Chariots of Salvation*).

A further theological characteristic of the Apocalypse is its repeated phenomenon of contrasts. John clarifies the characteristics of truth by contrasting them with falsehood. He places the faithful remnant of God's people against their Babylonian opponents. Babylon is placed in stark contrast with the New Jerusalem, the Lamb in opposition to the beast, and the glorious woman in heaven (Rev. 12) is contrasted with the prostitute sitting on many waters (Rev. 17). In this contrasting imagery many have discerned an ironic parody or mimicry of the work of Christ. This style serves the purpose of creating a theological antithesis, a helpful method to determine truth and error.

## **Progressive Revelation in Revelation 12-14**

Revelation 12-14 is justly considered by many as the keystone or central vision of the Apocalypse. Leon Morris discerns "seven significant signs" in Revelation 12-14, which he calls "another series of visions" in the Apocalypse (The Rev. of St. John, p. 155). Others have found different subdivisions or scenes, yet maintain the unity of chapters 12-14. This idea of a central unit gains strength if one considers the infrastructure and the gradual progression to the end-time in this narrative.

Revelation 12 covers the whole covenant history of the Christian church. The purpose of Rev. 12 goes beyond warning the Christian believers against persecution by encouraging them to persevere until the end. This chapter presents as its central vision the heavenly acclamation of victory over Satan, combined with the celebration of the inauguration of Christ as the rightful King of heaven and earth (vss 7-12). Only in the light of the victorious death of Christ on the cross does heaven declare that the war has been won and that the accuser of Christ's people "has been hurled down" (Rev. 12:10). Naden rightly emphasizes:

*Verses 10, 11. . . are the central words of Revelation. In John's chiasm, all that*

*precedes builds toward this central certainty, and all that follows emphasizes its truthfulness and details how the last scenes in the drama will play out. The war has been won! (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p. 187).*

The excursus of Rev. 12:7-12 looks beyond earthly history to the origin of all hatred and cruelty against the woman of God. It reveals the depth dimension of all persecution of God's children by pointing out the real enemy of the church and of Christ. A war in heaven was inciting the earthly wars against God's people (12:7-9). Satan initiated a war in judicial terms in the heavenly court of law against God and His archangel Michael, the Guardian angel of Israel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Zech. 3:1; Jude 9). This war in heaven against Michael was a familiar theme in the Jewish apocalyptic writings of John's time (see Index in J.H. Charlesworth, *The OT Pseudepigrapha*. II:977-8; also SDA Bible Com., 7:809). It was expected that Michael would be victorious over Belial in the future, final battle over the world (so in the War Scroll [QM 17]). In this light it becomes very meaningful that John sees Michael's victory in heaven already in the present time, so that Satan "was hurled to earth, and his angels with him" (Rev. 12:9). This victory of Michael is now celebrated and attributed to Christ in the heavenly hymn of praise and jubilation (12:10-12). This assumes the identity of Christ and Michael (so also A. Satake, in his art. on Rev. 12, see Source Mat.). Revelation 12 thus sets the stage for the rest of the book, which progressively enlarges the conflict between Satan and the followers of Christ on earth (Rev. 13-19) until Paradise is restored (Rev. 20-22).

Revelation 13 portrays the temporal triumphs of the ancient dragon through the activities of his two earthly agents: the ten-horned beast from the sea and the two-horned beast from the earth. This raises the urgent question, How is Revelation 13 related to Revelation 12? The answer is of crucial importance in understanding the final events in the book of Revelation. One recent author asserts: "The events in Chapter 13 follow Chapter 12 in chronological order" (L. Wilson, *The Revelation of Jesus*, p. 230). Accordingly, he projects the visions of Revelation 13 into the future. This innovative concept requires close examination. The assertion that Rev. 13 follows chronologically after Rev. 12 is based on the assumption that "the story which began in Chapter 12 is continued without interruption in Chapter 13" (Ib., p. 230). But this assumption is not justified. In both Daniel and Revelation the order of visions does not intend to present chronological order. The literary structure of both apocalyptic books reveals a persistent pattern of parallel panoramas of covenant history. The visions of Dan. 2, 7, 8, 11 are to be understood as progressive parallel visions. This is confirmed by comparing the explanations of the interpreting angel of each vision. The parallel style of Daniel's visions is equally apparent in John's Apocalypse. The series of the seals (Rev. 6) ends with the final judgment of God. The following series of the trumpets (Rev. 8-9; 11) covers the church age with a progressive emphasis on the end-time (see above, Ch. IX). The vision of Rev. 12, where Christ receives all authority by virtue of His self-sacrifice (vss. 10-11), cannot follow chronologically after the vision of the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11: 15-18, where He has already begun to reign. Rather, Rev. 12 presents a review of the entire church age, starting with the first advent of Christ. The three visions within Rev. 14 apparently do not teach a chronological order of fulfillment. The threefold message of Rev. 14:6-12 obviously must be proclaimed prior to the vision of the Lamb with His victorious 144,000 followers (14:1-5). This vision of the 144,000 overcomers has therefore been called an interlude, a "scene of end-time assurance" (C. M. Maxwell). The visions of judgment in Rev. 15-16 only enlarge the vision of the world harvest in

14:14-20, where the righteous are redeemed and the wicked are destroyed. Likewise, Rev. 17 which further explains the punishment of Babylon (see verse 1), does not follow chronologically after Rev. 16, where Babylon has been destroyed already.

These examples should alert us against assuming that Rev. 13 follows Rev. 12 "without interruption." First of all, there are two indicators of an interruption between Rev. 12 and 13. Rev. 12 concludes with John's statement: "And he stood on the sand of the sea" (RSV; in NASB in Rev. 13:1). The NIV translates: "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea" (13:1). The statement of John about this new location on the seaside (cf. 12:4) explains why the dragon could spew water "like a river" at the woman to sweep her away (12:15).

The next vision (13:1-10) discloses the dramatic means by which the dragon will persecute the saints and blaspheme God's name. The closing statement of Rev. 12 also looks forward to Rev. 13. Revelation 13 begins with a new vision: "And I saw," which reveals some important connecting links with the panoramic view of Rev. 12. The first link is the time phrase for the period of persecution, forty-two months (13:5; cf. 12:6, 14). The same time symbol was used already in Rev. 11 to signify the predetermined period of "trampling on the holy city" (11:2; cf. v. 3). There is no legitimate reason to assume that the equivalent time symbols are different time periods. A new vision does not automatically suggest a chronological sequence with a previous vision. The immediate context indicates whether a new vision amplifies a previous one or continues the historical narrative. The equivalent time symbols in Rev. 11-13 indicate that all these chapters are parallel visions, which progressively illuminate each other. Therefore we must reject the assumption that the vision of Rev. 13 continues the narrative of Rev. 12 "without interruption."

### **War Against the Saints**

A second indicator that Rev. 12 is further expanded in Rev. 13 are the corresponding wars against the saints in both chapters. Revelation 12 forecasts two consecutive wars: the first in 12:6, 14-16 and the second in 12:17. The first warfare is characterized by the time symbol of 1260 days and 3½ times (12:6, 14), which establishes a definite link with Daniel 7:25. This Danielic connection requires the backdrop of the long-range vision of Daniel 7. It discloses that the 3½ times or 1260 days of Rev. 12 must be reckoned as the period of supremacy of the little horn of Dan. 7 and not of pagan Rome. These 1260 days refer therefore to the dark Middle Ages when many thousands of people were persecuted and perished for the alleged crime of "heresy."

Revelation 13 begins with the vision of a sea-beast with ten horns, which connects this vision unmistakably with the portrayal of Daniel 7! The sea beast incorporates all four beasts of Daniel 7 (Rev. 13: 1-2), indicating the progress of time until John's visions. The sea beast exercises its authority against the saints for "42 months" (Rev. 13:5-7). These two features (warring against the saints and the time period) correspond exactly with those in Dan. 7 and in Rev. 12. Therefore they must be identified with each other.

In Revelation 12 the final warfare against the saints is called the dragon's war against "the rest of her offspring, who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). The meaning of this brief statement of warfare is expanded further in the last vision of Rev. 13. This vision (13:11-18) shows how a two-horned beast came out of the earth as the second ally of the dragon. This land beast will exercise its authority to enforce the worship of the revived beast in all the world (13:12-14). This vision thus

enlarges the final war against the faithful remnant people of God (of Rev. 12:17). It predicts the worldwide enforcement of a special mark, "which is the name of the beast or the number of his name" (13:17). This final warfare against the remnant church in Rev. 13:11-17 is the amplification of Rev. 12:17. This persecution of Christ's followers is an unfulfilled prophecy. But its universal extent and climactic place in human history places this religious war at the center of God's end-time message in Revelation 14.

### Heaven's Final Appeal

The threefold message of Rev. 14:6-12 represents God's final appeal to a world in rebellion against its Creator. This message constitutes the central burden of the entire Apocalypse and conveys an alert to the end-time generation. Revelation 14 contains at the same time the most dreadful curse ever pronounced on mortal beings--the wrath of God without divine mercy (14:9-11), and the comforting assurance of the presence of Christ for overcomers (14:1-5). It is important to observe that the message of Rev. 14:9-12 corresponds precisely with the persecution of the land beast in Rev. 13:15-17. A comparison of both passages shows the historical parallel.

Revelation 13:15-17	Revelation 14:9-11
He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a <i>mark</i> on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the <i>mark</i> , which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.	A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his <i>mark</i> on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image or for anyone who receives the <i>mark</i> of his name."

These parallel passages teach that the threefold message of Rev. 14:6-12 does not follow chronologically after Rev. 13, but refers to the same time period. God responds immediately to meet the final challenge of Satan. In fact, He forewarns the church of the final test of faith. The vision of the harvest of the earth in Rev. 14:14-20 follows chronologically after the time of the threefold warning message of 14:6-12.

The vision of the 144,000 victorious saints, who stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb, fits at the conclusion of the final conflict. The literary composition of chapters 12-14 shows two parallel structures, as can be seen in the following diagram:

## THE PROGRESSIVE PARALLELISM OF REV. XII – XIV

REVELATION XII DRAGON wages war against the woman (vs. 1-5).		
The woman flees into wilderness for 1260 days (v. 6).	REVELATION XIII Dragon uses SEA BEAST with ten horns crowned to wage war against the saints for 42 months (vs. 1-10).	
<b>In heaven:</b> Celebration of Christ's enthronement (vs. 7-12).		
The woman is in the wilderness for 3½ times (vs. 13-16).		REVELATION XIV PREVIEW of victorious saints on Mount Zion (vs. 1-5).
Dragon wages war against the REMNANT of the woman's offspring, who " <b>obey God's commandments and hold to the Testimony of Jesus</b> " (v. 17).	Finally a LAND BEAST with two lamblike horns enforces MARK of BEAST on a global scale (vs. 13-18).	END-TIME WARNING produces overcomers over MARK of BEAST. They " <b>obey God's commandments and the Faith of Jesus</b> " (vs. 6-12 RSV).  The Double World harvest at the <b>Second Advent</b> (vss.14-20).

Reviewing the seven visions of Rev. 12-14, we conclude that these three chapters are interwoven indivisibly. They show a progressive emphasis on the end-time. The thematic correspondences between Rev. 12-14 show intentional linkages that repeat and expand previous visions. Revelation 13 does not cover the full panorama of chapter 12, but begins to enlarge the section of religious persecution of the 1260 days in 12:6,14 and then moves to the final conflict of 12:17, by enlarging it with the mark of the beast (13:13-18). Revelation 14 presents God's coded response to this end-time conflict of Rev. 12 and 13, by urging the saints to overcome the beast and its mark (compare 13:15-17 and 14:9-11). The summation of Rev. 14:12 shows a striking correspondence with Rev. 12:17. Both end-time passages identify the faithful saints as those that keep the commandments of God and persevere in the faith of Jesus (12:17; 14:12). These linkages indicate that chapters 12-14 are not intended as uninterrupted sequences, but as parallel compositions, each of which focuses more closely on the final events of the church age.

Only when this infrastructure of Rev. 12-14 is settled can we proceed with confidence to

relate these apocalyptic portrayals to the wider contexts of the Apocalypse (especially to Rev. 15-19) and to the larger contexts of the New and Old Testaments. This method may protect us against some of the misrepresentations that abound today. We concur with the conclusion of William G. Johnsson: "The interpretation of Revelation 12-14 will be largely determined by the decisions we have reached about the nature and structure of the book prior to examining these chapters" (in Symposium on Revelation, II: 7).

## **Divine View of the Church Age: Revelation XII**

The symbolic portrayals of Revelation 12 present a synopsis or summary of the entire course of the church of Christ till the end. The creative images of John's visions need to be understood against the background of Israel's covenant history. The church of Christ is a new Israel, the messianic people of God. Thus the conflict between Israel and her enemies is now applied to the people of the Messiah. The central vision in Rev. 12:7-12 even transcends the political sphere and hostilities. It explains the political persecutions of Christians as instigated by Satan's hatred against Christ and God, thus the earthly reflection of a heavenly conflict. In this way the oppression of the Messianic people is placed within the context of a cosmic war between heaven and earth.

The great red dragon as the symbol of evil is immediately identified as "that ancient serpent, called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray [the deceiver of the whole world, RSV]" (12:9). The reference to "that ancient serpent" alludes directly to the story of Gen. 3, where Eve was deceived by the serpent in paradise. The ferocious enmity of the serpent-dragon against the woman and her offspring in Rev. 12 should therefore be understood as the advanced application of Gen. 3:15 to the supernatural hostility against the Messiah and the Messianic Israel.

John further blends Moses and the prophets in his creative symbolism. He advances from the single woman, Eve, to a woman symbolizing Israel as God's covenant people, in keeping with prophetic tradition. Isaiah portrayed Israel consistently "as a woman with child and about to give birth" (Isa. 26:17; see also Isa. 54:1, 6, 13). Accordingly, John does not focus on the mother of Jesus, Mary, but on the covenant people of God. In particular, John dwells on the Messiah of Israel and on the new-covenant people of that Messiah, the church of Christ. Fundamental is the veracity of Jesus of Nazareth as the God-sent Messiah of Israel. If He is the Messiah of prophecy, then the church of Christ is the true Israel of God. This truth is the essential crux of this whole chapter and the premise on which the whole book of Revelation is based (see Rev. 1:1, 2, 9; 5:5, 6, 9, 10).

John also views the supernatural enemy of Christ and His church in the light of the prophetic tradition. He was well acquainted with this apocalyptic vision of Isaiah:

*In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea (Isa. 27:1).*

The visions of Revelation advance this prophetic tradition of Israel into the Christian faith and apply it to the end of the Christian age. Satan's end will come only at the end of the predicted millennium in Rev. 20 (see 20:10). Although Satan is able to inflict much evil on the world and on Christ's church in particular, the assurance of ultimate defeat of Satan and his allies has always encouraged the persecuted Christians.

Christ promised that "the gates of Hades [hell] will not overcome it [His church]" (Matt. 16:18). The church must therefore view her own history in the light of Israel's story. She represents the faithful remnant of Israel. Her risen Messiah shall return to slay the serpent-dragon. Revelation 12, however, brings the great surprise that the victory of Christ over the dragon has been accomplished already! How? By His victorious life, atoning death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne in heaven. This Christ-event constitutes the reason for Satan's ejection from the presence of God and the cause of the song of victory in heaven (12:7-12). W.G. Johnsson calls the interlude of Rev. 12:7-12 "the heavenly counterpart to Christ's victory on the cross." It "functions to explain the nature of the conflict between the woman and the dragon described [in Rev. 12]" (in Symp. on Rev., II: 19). We need indeed to connect the two following passages:

JOHN: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down [eblethe: "was cast"] (Rev. 12:10).

JESUS: Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out [ekblethesetai: "shall be cast out"] (John 12:31).

In the light of Jesus' own explanation of His death, we may understand that Rev. 12:7-12 announces the irrevocable defeat of Satan by Christ's victory on the cross. In the legal sense, before God, Satan's head has been "crushed" already. Revelation 12 thus centers in the cross, resurrection and enthronement of Christ. In this light John sets the cosmic battle for the sovereignty of the world between God and Satan, a conflict that began in the garden of Eden (12:7) and continues until the second advent (14:14-20). The role of the church is seen primarily as a spiritual warfare with the conquered forces of evil. Her seeming defeat in martyrdom is in God's view true participation in Christ's victory on the cross: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:11). The end-time church is even

presented as the army of the Lamb, the Messianic conqueror of evil (14:1-5). The church is triumphant over the beast through martyrdom and faithful witness.

## **The Continuous Salvation History of Revelation XII**

Although Rev. 12 can be subdivided in different ways, we discern in the chapter's historical continuum three distinct sections:

1) vss 1-5; 2) vss 6, 13-16; 3) vs 17. The common theme of these three sections is the dragon's warfare against the woman that remains faithful to God.

*A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth...She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne (Rev.12:1, 2, 5).*

The thrust of Rev. 12 is the continuous-historical progression of the three sections. First comes the dramatic portrayal of God's ancient covenant people, Israel, under the classical



Hebrew symbol of a woman, who brings forth many children and eventually the Messiah himself (see Isa. 54; 66:7-11). Isaiah's symbolic woman is clothed with the light and glory of Yahweh (Isa. 60:1,2,19,20; see Ps. 104: 2). Revelation 12 continues and develops this covenant symbol with the cosmic signs of sun, moon, and twelve stars so that the radiant woman of Rev. 12 "seems to be the earthly complement of the angel in Rev. 10" (J.M. Ford, *Rev.*, p.195).

Although the Roman Catholic tradition sees the woman of Rev. 12 as a symbol of Mary, the mother of Jesus, leading Catholic NT scholars now admit that the woman of Rev. 12 is "first and foremost a personification of the people of God" (Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, p. 276). Also Josephine Massyngberde Ford acknowledges: "Although the woman may be an individual, a study of the OT background suggests that she is a collective figure, like the two witnesses. In the OT the image of a woman is a classical symbol for Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel, e.g. Zion whose husband is Yahweh (Isa. 54:1,5,6; Jer. 3:20; Ezek. 16:8-14, Hosea 2:19-20..." (*Rev.*, 195).

Thus it becomes clear that John's symbolic imagery must be understood not from pagan mythology but from the Old Testament. In this borrowing of Hebrew images, John has creatively transformed the old-covenant framework in a new covenant setting, in which all the covenant partners and their enemies are religiously determined by Jesus as the Messiah. This salvation-historical progression from Israel to the Church of Christ proceeded from the same covenant God (see Heb. 1:1,2; Rev. 1:1). The essential unity of the Israel of God and the Church of Christ is the fundamental assumption for the Christian understanding of the book of Revelation. Jesus anticipated only "one flock" for which He as the Shepherd would lay down His life (Joh. 10:14-16), and only one final banquet (Matt. 8:11). Paul envisioned only one cultivated olive tree, in which all spiritual Israelites and Christians are united (Rom. 11:17-24). He described the church as a "pure virgin," whom he wants to present to her "husband, to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

The vision of Revelation 12 alerts the church to the fact that she is at all times the object of Satan's fury. He is portrayed here as a red dragon "with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads" (12:3).

This monstrous image in Rev. 12, repeated in Rev. 13 and 17, develops the fourth monster in Daniel 7. This implies that Dan. 7 is one of the main taproots of Rev. 12, 13, and 17. Daniel 7 is gradually unfolded and amplified in Revelation 12, 13 and 17 for the church age.

On the basis of Rev. 17:9, 10 it becomes clear that the seven heads of the dragon "represent kingdoms through which Satan has worked to oppress God's people throughout the ages" (W.G. Johnsson, in *Symp. on Rev.*, II:17). Hence the radical dualism that develops in John's Apocalypse between true and false worship and the emphasis on the twofold hallmark of the faithful people of God that hold fast the word of God and the testimony of Jesus: (1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4). John therefore places the faithful woman of Rev. 12 in glaring contrast to a fallen and bloodthirsty woman in Rev. 17. The full significance of both Rev. 12 and 17 will become clear only if these contrasting visions are compared in a careful study.

## **I. The Promised Messiah Has Come to Israel**

The first section of Rev. 12 leads Israel's history to the first advent of the King-Messiah (v. 5). The focus switches immediately from His birth to His enthronement as King in heaven.

John alludes specifically to the Messianic promise of Psalm 2, stating: "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (Rev. 12:5; cf. Ps. 2:9). At this point John points forward to the final consummation of this Messianic promise at Christ's second advent, which he again describes in Rev. 19:15. Earlier the apostle Paul had explained that Jesus' ascension to the throne of God was the inauguration of His spiritual reign as Messiah. He proclaimed to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch:

*What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (Acts 13:33; quoting Ps. 2:7).*

This fundamental truth of the apostolic faith about Christ's supreme rulership is restated in Rev. 12:5 as a guarantee for the coming endtime fulfillment of Ps. 2 in Rev. 19. The narrative of Rev. 12 continues to describe, in symbolic terms, the time of the church in the wilderness.

## **II. The Persecution of the Church of Christ**

*The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1260 days (Rev. 12:6).*

While Rev. 12 takes into view the whole sweep of the inter-advent period, the prophetic "1260 days" or "3½ times" (12:6,14) concentrate specifically on the times of persecution. These are the times when the faithful church has to flee from public view into the "wilderness" or uninhabited regions of the world. Although some have proposed that the 1260 days represent the entire Christian era between the two advents of Christ, others have pointed out that Rev. 13 uses the equivalent time symbol of "42 months" as the times of the antichrist's raging (13:5). G.R. Beasley-Murray therefore concludes: "This does not characterize the period of the Church between the ascension and the parousia of Christ" (Rev., p.201).

This conclusion is confirmed by a closer look at the location of the same phrase in Dan. 7. The "little horn" who will persecute the saints for "3½ times" arises only after the break-up of the Roman Empire, and after the "ten horns" have been established (see Dan. 7:8, 24-25). The Roman Empire was not divided until A.D. 476. Consequently, the time of the antichrist began after 476 and his 3½ times or 1260 days do not extend over the entire Christian age. The period of 3½ prophetic times does not begin in the apostolic church or even during the Roman Empire. It begins rather after Imperial Rome was succeeded by Papal Rome and its totalitarian reign began to hold sway over the nations.

The true church in Revelation 12 is characterized not by splendid cathedrals with exquisite art work or by an unbroken succession of ordained bishops. True apostolic succession is marked by faithfulness to the faith or teachings of Christ and His apostles (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). Ellen G. White has explained this concept with profound simplicity:

*Apostolic succession rests not upon the transmission of ecclesiastical authority, but upon spiritual relationship. A life actuated by the apostles spirit, the belief and teaching of the truth they taught, this is the true evidence of apostolic succession (Desire of Ages, p. 467).*

Worship acceptable to God can be found in the most simple houses of worship. God

looks primarily at the heart of man. He seeks those who worship Him in the Holy Spirit and in the truth of His word (see John 4:23).

Revelation 12 tells us that what matters most is to follow God's Word and to taste Christ's saving and sanctifying fellowship from day to day. This will be experienced where two or three are gathered in the name of Christ and in obedience to Him (Matt. 18:20; 28:18-20). Paul assures, "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Tim. 2:1).

The essence of the 1260 symbolic days is clear beyond doubt: the gospel of Christ was lost sight of because of the religious and political claims of the papacy. The increasing darkness in Europe has been described as follows:

*Faith was transferred from Christ, the true foundation, to the pope of Rome. Instead of trusting in the Son of God for forgiveness of sins and for eternal salvation, the people looked to the pope, and to the priests and prelates to whom he delegated authority. They were taught that the pope was their earthly mediator, and that none could approach God except through him; and further, that he stood in the place of God to them, and was therefore to be implicitly obeyed. A deviation from his requirements was sufficient cause for the severest punishment to be visited upon the bodies and souls of the offenders (E.G.White, The Great Controversy, p. 55).*

Remarkably, the prophetic emphasis of Rev. 12 is not on the persecution of the woman and her offspring but on their abiding loyalty and steadfast faith in God. The heavenly Shepherd will never be without His flock, the King never without His loyal servants. In every crisis Christ will provide a faithful remnant of His covenant people, just as the twelve apostles were the nucleus of a true remnant of Israel (see Rom. 11:5).

God provided a special help when the serpent dragon spewed "water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent" (Rev. 12:15). The threat of hostile and deadly forces under the image of torrents of water, or an overflowing river or flood, was an essential part of Israel's prophetic imagery (see Isa. 8:5-8; Dan. 11:40; Nah. 1:8; Jer. 47:1, 2). The promise is given, however: "But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river" (Rev. 12:16).

The full picture of all surviving believers in Christ and in His gospel during the Middle Ages cannot be recovered, because of the willful destruction of the records by the hostile powers in charge.

A valuable historical sketch of the popular sects and non-conformists movements in Western Europe between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries has been published by Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, entitled: Heresies of the High Middle Ages (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991). Also the books on the Inquisition by the Quaker Henry Charles Lea are a reliable source of information about the history of intolerance and persecution by the Roman Catholic Church.

Because of its emancipation from church domination, modern society has put an end to the legal prosecution and execution of people because of their personal faith or religion. The secular laws of various countries have "swallowed up" by and large the religious intolerance and excommunications of the medieval society. The "earth" has indeed come to the rescue of the Christ-following believers. Prophecy is being fulfilled for the time after the dark Middle Ages. But Revelation 12 predicts more than tolerance. A renewed, ferocious persecution of the end-time church of Christ is the concluding theme of Revelation 12.

### III. Preview of the End-Time Church

*Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17).*

This concluding passage of the general overview of Church history in Rev. 12 is of critical importance for the end-time people of God. It informs them that Satan has targeted them as his special object of hatred and reminds them of the basic testing truths which they must hold fast and safeguard. What then is the responsible interpretation of the phrase "the rest [hoi *loipoi*] of her offspring"? Most exegetes conclude that "the rest" defines all believers in Christ. This view implies that there is no focus on a final remnant people in the Christian age in Rev. 12:17. The term rest [*loipoi*] is used in Revelation indeed in the wider sense of the "others" or "remaining ones" (8:13; 9:20; 11:13), but also in the pregnant sense of a faithful remnant that stands the test of heaven (2:24-25; cf. also 3:4-5). There can be no doubt that the term "the rest of her offspring" in Rev. 12:17 fits precisely the category of a faithful remnant of God, because they are defined by the standard test of the faithful ones in the Apocalypse: "those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17; cf. 1:2,9).

Further, the final war of Satan against these faithful ones is expanded in Rev. 13-14. The expansion of Rev. 12 in chapters 13-14 reveals that the end-time Christians have to face the ultimate test of the antichrist (13:15-17) and that a worldwide remnant shall stand firm. These are characterized again as those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12 NKJV). The "rest" of the woman's offspring in 12:17 corresponds with the remnant people of God at the end of time in 14:12. This parallel of Rev. 12:17 and 14:12 places 12:17 within the immediate context of the end-time setting described in chapters 12-14. It provides the decisive argument for the understanding that Rev. 12 ends with a focus on the last remnant of God's faithful ones in this age, just before Christ returns in glory (in 14:14-20).

A question of importance is whether the last remnant people of God will be an institutionalized remnant people or merely an invisible group, scattered throughout the nominal Christian churches? Or are they a combination of both? The heavenly call of Rev. 18 to Babylon, "Come out of her, my people..." (18:4), suggests that God's children are scattered throughout a worldwide Babylon (18:1-4). However, this call at the same time points to a distinct voice, commissioned by heaven which gathers the scattered people of God from Babylon to Mount Zion (14:1-5), the traditional symbol of a community of faith. This end-time community is specifically represented by the three angels of Rev. 14:6-12. The worldwide outreach of this voice of revival and reformation requires a body of united believers who initiate and sustain a universal mission on the basis of a common platform of fundamental beliefs, as summarized in Rev. 12:17 and 14:12. Consequently, God's remnant people are at once a spiritual people and an organized church community.

The institutional aspect, however, never has been a guarantee for a spiritual church, as can be seen in Christ's letters to the seven churches in Rev. 2-3. The unspiritual attitudes of the churches in Thyatira and Laodicea in particular give reasons enough not to trust in any church membership as such. The faithful remnant people of God are in the final analysis characterized by their spiritual union with the Lamb of God (Rev. 14:1-4). Such a Christ-

centered spirituality does not exclude but rather includes the forming of a covenant community among all nations. Christ even prayed that believers in Him should become one and seek perfect unity among themselves (John 17:20-23). He gathers all his followers into a faith-community, into "one flock" under "one Shepherd" (John 10:16). Christ has endorsed the institutional nature of His church from the start by bestowing on it a communal mission and giving it authority for a certain discipline among its members (see Matt. 18:15-20; 28:18-20). But Christ's ultimate concern is for the reflection of His likeness in the individual members of His church (see Rev. 3:14-22).

Such a church can be known, not by any boasting claims of holiness or authority, but by two apostolic signs of true worship: obedience to God's commandments and holding on to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). People who worship with these two characteristics stand on a common platform and worship in basic harmony with the church of the apostles. The remnant church is bound to resemble the apostolic church in its fundamental belief and spiritual worship of God.

## **The Two Abiding Characteristics of the True Church**

John's Apocalypse mentions repeatedly that the true church of Christ perseveres in two basic tenets of faith and morality. These are described six times, with slight variations, in 1:2,9; 6:9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4. This twofold description of true worship functions as the divine standard to define the difference between true and apostate worship. The historical range of these texts covers the entire Christian era, not one exclusive segment of time.

A striking parallel of the twofold hallmark of the church can be seen in Isaiah's test for truth and error: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa. 8:20). This twofold phrase indicates that the final authority within Israel was the union of Moses and the Prophets (see 2 Kings 17:13). Jesus referred to this twofold authority in Israel in Matt. 5:17 ("Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets") and again in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them'" (Luke 16:29, see also 24:27). Christ announced that Israel's canon of authority reached until John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). Philip and Paul equally summed up the Old Testament as "the Law and the Prophets" (John 1:45; Rom. 3:21). These two constituent parts of the Hebrew Bible formed the canonical norm to distinguish between truth and error in ancient Israel. The unity of the Hebrew Scriptures could even be summed up in one term: The Law, as can be seen in Jesus' statement, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?" (John 10:34, quoting Psalm 82:6). However, the personal testimonies of Jesus to Israel enlarged the old canon of divine authority:

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Heb.1:1, 2).*

As the Son of God is infinitely greater than every prophet, so the testimony of Christ functions as the final authority to interpret the law and the prophets of Israel. Jesus declared of Himself: "The one who comes from heaven is above all, He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony" (John 3:31,32). The testimony of Jesus was the word of God, for God gave Christ the Spirit "without limit" (John 3:34; see Isa. 42:1). Jesus possessed the Spirit of prophecy in divine fulness. The testimony of Jesus therefore placed Israel before the ultimate test of faith in the progressive revelation of

God's word. This testimony of Jesus has been codified in the four Gospels of the New Testament. Also the apostolic letters contain the normative gospel interpretation, because they are Christ-centered and Spirit-filled.

Paul was the apostle who gave the phrase "the testimony [to martyrion] of Christ" its definitive gospel content and meaning. He wrote to the church of Corinth that "the testimony of Christ was confirmed" in them because of their many gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:6 NKJV). The phrase is used here by Paul "in the sense of the gospel, the proclaimed message of salvation in Christ" (A.A. Trites, in NIDNTT 3:1043). Paul identified this "testimony of Christ" completely with "the testimony of God" (1 Cor. 2:1). It was the apostolic "testimony" that had to be believed before God (2 Thess. 1:10). Paul was not ashamed to die for "the testimony of our Lord" (2 Tim. 1:8 NKJV).

John wrote that he was on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). Exegetical scholars, as I.T. Beckwith, H.B. Swete, L.A. Vos, R.H. Mounce, G.B. Caird, A.A. Trites, and G.R. Beasley Murray, understand the genitive expressions "of God" and "of Jesus" in Rev. 1:2, 9 as subjective genitives, that is, as self-revelations of God and of Jesus to the church. God's expanded testimony places the church before the authority of God's Son (Heb. 1:1, 2; 2:1-4; 10:26-31; 12:22-29). The book of Revelation confronts the church with the prospect of severe persecutions (see Rev. 11). A great number of believers were to be brought before the courts of men and be condemned, some even to death. For this reason Paul and Christ encourage them to hold fast the "testimony of Jesus," just as Christ had witnessed faithfully before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:12-14; Rev. 1:5, 9; 2:25; 3:11; 5:9; 12:11, 17). The entire "apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2) itself is a constitutive part of Christ's witness to the churches. It is His "testimony for the churches" in particular (Rev. 22:16; 1:2). Here, of course, we are dealing with the canonical testimonies of the Spirit, with the New Testament Scriptures and their gospel of Jesus Christ. For this "testimony of Jesus" John suffered on Patmos (Rev. 1:9) and countless martyrs sacrificed their lives in the course of history (Rev. 6:9). It is this "testimony of Jesus" which the remnant church will hold or maintain in faithfulness during the final conflict with the antichrist (Rev. 12:17), even when they are threatened with a death decree (Rev. 13:15-17). Such is the seriousness of the ultimate testing truth of "the testimony of Jesus" for the church universal. Revelation shows that to "have" the testimony of Jesus is not restricted to the end-time church, but is the essential characteristic of Christ's faithful followers during the entire Christian age. A comparison of the relevant passages demonstrates this essential point.

Rev. 1:9	Rev. 6:9	Rev. 12:17
I, John, ... was on the island of Patmos because of <b>the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.</b>	When he opened the fifth seal I saw... those who had been slain because of <b>the word of God and the testimony they maintained</b> [eichon: had, held, possessed, preserved].	Then the dragon ... went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who <b>obey God's commandments and hold to</b> [echonton: have, hold, possess, preserve] <b>the testimony of Jesus.</b>

The descriptions of God's people from the beginning till the end of the church age

indicate that each time the same authoritative standard of Christian faith is mentioned. The striking parallel passages of the "testimony of Jesus," which the apostles and the martyrs preserved in Rev. 1 and 6, function as the proper guideline for the exegesis of Rev. 12:17.

This testimony of God and Jesus, entrusted to the church of Christ, is perverted by the antichrist and replaced by his own standard of worship and morality. In the final conflict of the ages, God's church is called to stand firm on the everlasting gospel and law of God, in continuity with the church of the apostles and martyrs. The end-time church will again be known by her faithfulness to God's commandments and to the canonical testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17). Thus only will the end-time people of God remain in the line of true apostolic succession. Revelation stresses the example of Christ as "the faithful witness" (1:5), as "the faithful and true witness" (3:14), who apparently serves as the archetype for His faithful followers. They must maintain the same testimony of Jesus, even at the sacrifice of life itself. "The testimony" which the martyrs had or maintained in Rev. 6:9 parallels "the testimony of Jesus" which the remnant people of God have in Rev. 12:17. The verb "to have" [echein] in 6:9 and 12:17 includes the meaning of "to preserve" (see Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, p. 332). Beckwith, Swete, Caird, and Mounce all argue persuasively that the testimony which the martyrs had (in Rev. 6:9) is identical with "the testimony of Jesus" in 1:9; 12:17; 20:4. Gerhard Pfandl explains Rev. 6:9 in the same way:

*We concur with Mounce who says the martyrs' testimony was not primarily their witness about Jesus but the witness that they had received from him (cf. 12:17; 20:4). They had accepted it, they refused to give it up, and consequently, they were put to death. The "testimony", no less than the "word", was an objective possession of the martyrs (in Symp. on Rev., II:313).*

The question is, For what kind of objective "testimony" of Jesus were the faithful ones in church history willing to lay down their lives? Louis A. Vos describes it as "a deposit of teachings from the Lord, commandments and teachings which have specific content and form so they can be kept and held!" (The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse, p. 203). The martyrs in Rev. 6:9 and 20:4 thus died primarily for the sake of Christ's own testimony, and in a subordinate sense for their witness to Jesus' witness. The same perseverance in the testimony of Jesus is foretold for the final generation of God's people in Rev. 12:17. Beatrice S. Neall confirms this exegesis:

*'The word of God and the testimony of Jesus' must be understood as the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rev. 1:18), His power to save from sin (1:5; 12:10-11) and transform men into His likeness (14:1) through the blood of the Lamb (7:14; 12:11) (The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse with Implications for Character Education, p. 158).*

Revelation 20:4 even mentions "the testimony of Jesus" as the primary characteristic of faithfulness:

*And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus [literally: "because of the testimony of Jesus" NASB] and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands (Rev. 20:4).*

The remnant church is faithful to the "Lamb" in her heroic battle with the "beast". This crisis situation is not essentially different from the previous crises in Rev. 6 and 12. The issue is clarified by Kenneth A. Strand:

*In the book of Revelation faithfulness to the 'word of God' and to the 'testimony of Jesus Christ' separates the faithful from the faithless, and it brings about persecution that includes John's own exile and the martyrdom of other believers (see again 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4; etc.) (AUSS 19:2 [1981]:133).*

He explains elsewhere:

*The OT witness and the apostolic testimony . . . carry a message that afforded abundant comfort and hope for the first century Christians and have done so, as well, for all followers of Christ ever since (in Symp. on Rev., II:206).*

We may expect that the preview of the remnant people and their loyalty to God and Christ in 12:17 will be unfolded more fully. This occurs in Rev. 14, where a fuller picture of the remnant church and of the testimony of Jesus is presented. The summary statement of Rev. 14:12 functions as a perfect parallel to Rev. 12:17, as can be seen (in the NKJV):

Revelation 12:17	Revelation 14:12
He [the dragon] went to make war with the rest of her offspring, <b>who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.</b>	Here is the patience of the saints; here (are) those <b>who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.</b>

God's remnant people keep not only God's commandments but also keep the "faith of Jesus" (14:12). This "faith of Jesus," which His followers "keep" is not simply their subjective faith in Jesus, but the objective faith or teachings of Jesus, which formed the very substance of "the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Jude, the brother of James, urged the church "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3, also v. 20). The comment of William G. Johnsson on Rev. 14:12 is helpful:

*They keep the faith of Jesus. This expression does not mean that the people of God have faith in Jesus (although they do), because the faith of Jesus is something they keep. "The faith" probably refers to the Christian tradition, the body of teachings that center in Jesus. Jude 3 may provide a parallel: "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." When God's loyal followers keep the faith of Jesus they remain true to basic Christianity-- they "keep the faith" (in Symp. on Rev., II:38, 39).*

The expression "the faith of Jesus" in 14:12 serves as a clarifying equivalent to "the testimony of Jesus" in 12:17 and not necessarily as a third characteristic of the remnant church. To keep the faith of Jesus implies to bear witness to Jesus' testimony. It deserves mentioning that a small group of former Millerites in Battle Creek, Michigan, resolved in 1861 to associate themselves in a new church denomination, "taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ" (The Review and Herald, Oct. 8, 1861; J. White, ed.).

## **The Angel's Clarification of "The Testimony of Jesus" in Rev. 19:10**

*At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am your fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).*



Each text must be interpreted by its context. The contextual approach serves as a safeguard against unconscious manipulation of a text or phrase. Because the expression "the testimony of Jesus" occurs twice in Rev. 19:10 this text has received special scrutiny and careful exegesis by Louis Vos, David Hill, and Richard Bauckham.

A problem rises when the last sentence of Rev. 19:10 is dissected from its context and given a meaning that replaces the testimony of Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, by the abiding gift of prophecy. Such an understanding would make the testimony of Jesus in Rev. 12:17 exclusively a gift of visions to some chosen believers in the end-time. This concept is a dangerous restriction of the meaning of the testimony of Jesus in the book of Revelation. The angel does not intend to substitute the Spirit of prophecy for the historic testimony of Jesus. His last statement in 19:10 "is not so much a definition, as it is an explanation. It explains how the angel, John, and his brethren (the prophets) can be on the same level, as fellow-servants. This is possible in so far as all share the testimony of Jesus which even the prophets possess because the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Vos, *The Synoptic Trad. in the Apoc.*, p. 204). Bauckham explains:

*The divine Spirit who gives John the visionary experience in which he may receive revelation communicates not the teaching of an angel but the witness which Jesus bears. . . The equivalent of the reference to "the witness of Jesus" in 19:10 is now found in the words of the epilogue, in which the angel disappears from view and Jesus testifies directly: "I, Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches" (The Climax of Prophecy, p. 134).*

Christ explained that the Spirit of truth "will not speak on his own; . . he will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16:13, 14; see also 14:26). This has been accomplished by the Spirit of prophecy in the Scriptures of the New Testament, especially in the Apocalypse, which therefore convey to the church the testimony of Jesus with divine authority. What the Spirit says is what Christ says. This occurs seven times in the letters of Christ that conclude each time with the words "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, etc.).

The angel explains to John that when the Spirit inspires prophecy, its content and authority come from Jesus Himself (19:10). The Spirit of prophecy thus reveals the testimony of Jesus. All true prophets are "those who hold to the testimony of Jesus" (19:10; compare 22:9). The angel instructs John that he should not worship an angel, or any fellow servant of God for that matter, because they are merely the instruments of God and Christ. The book of Revelation is a worship-oriented book. The grand goal--"Worship God!"--is the central theme of the entire Apocalypse. Especially its end-time prophecies require the distinction between true worship and idolatry (14:6-12). The angel makes two appeals to John to worship God (19:10 and 22:9), one at the conclusion of the vision about Babylon the harlot (17:1--19:10), the other at the conclusion of the vision about Jerusalem the bride (21:9--22:9). Each time the angel reinforces the point: do not worship the beast, not even God's servants the angels, worship God!

The parallel verse Rev. 22:9 expands the group that holds the testimony of Jesus, to all the church members: "I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book." This enlarged circle of all faithful Christians that "have" the testimony of Jesus is also in view in Rev. 6:9 and 12:17. Bauckham draws this practical conclusion:

*This [Rev. 19:10 and 22:9] is an acknowledgment that the role to which Revelation*

*calls all Christians is, in essence, the same as that of prophets: bearing the witness of Jesus, remaining faithful in word and deed to the one true God and his righteousness (The Theology of the Book of Revelation, p. 121).*

This shared responsibility of the church does not deny the freedom of the Spirit to bestow on chosen individuals the spiritual gift of prophecy (see 1 Cor. 12:7-11) for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:1, 4). The angel teaches, however, that the already given "testimony of Jesus" is the testing truth for John, for his fellow prophets, for the church, and for the angels of God (see also 22:9). David Hill clarifies that the "testimony of Jesus" consists of Jesus' utterances in the visions of the Apocalypse as well as "in the witness of his life and death":

*Those who are later described as having the martyria Iesou [testimony of Jesus] (6:9; 12:17; 19:10) are those who, like John, stand by and preserve Jesus' witness committed to them by declaring it: and what they declare (and suffer for declaring) is not other than what Jesus discloses to his servants and attests (22:16, 20) in this book, namely, the judgments and the sovereign authority of the one, eternal God who is ruler of all and author of salvation, whose purpose will finally triumph over all opposing forces" (New Testament Prophecy, p. 80).*

The testimony of Jesus in the Apocalypse is the ultimate norm for all Christian worship and manifestations of the gift of prophecy (see J.D.G. Dunn, in NIDNTT 3:706). To hold and maintain faithfully this canonical "testimony of Jesus" is the sacred duty of prophets and angels. This is the teaching of the interpreting angel in Rev. 19:10.

In a time when John was struggling with a growing wave of false prophecy in the churches of Asia (Rev. 2:20; 1 John 4:1), some of whom were deceiving the believers in Thyatira with "deep secrets" (Rev. 2:24), John is reminded that the Spirit of prophecy mediates "the testimony of Christ". "The burden of prophecy, therefore, is the testimony which Jesus bore" (Beasley-Murray, Rev., p. 182). All inspired messages from post-apostolic prophets must be tested by the canonical testimony of Jesus (see Rev. 22:18, 19; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; 2 Pet. 3:2, 15, 16; Matt. 24:24).

The New Testament canon with its apostolic authority must never be obscured by the abiding gift of prophecy in the post-apostolic church. The point of the angel in Rev. 19:10 is simple and clear: the testimony of Jesus is and remains the message of the Spirit of God and the test of the gift of prophecy (see also Rev. 22:16). The testimony of Jesus received its final capstone in the book of Revelation itself:

*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).*

This testimony of Jesus will be the instrument to unmask the deceptive claims of "the false prophet" of the end-time (see Rev. 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10). Seen in this light, the remnant church in Rev. 12:17 and 14:12 is characterized by the restoration of the historic commandments of God and by the historic testimony of Jesus, that is, of the everlasting gospel. These two characteristics were the identification marks of the apostolic church (Rev. 1:9) and of the post-apostolic saints (Rev. 6:9). They constitute the abiding hallmarks of the true church of the ages. They draw the line between the faithful and the faithless in the book of Revelation. In view of the recognized fact, that the Apocalypse is united by its distinctive structure of a two-witnesses theology, we affirm with Kenneth A. Strand that "the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus" are the Old and the New Testaments (AUSS

19 [1981]:134).

For a consideration of the end-time manifestation of the Spirit of prophecy in the writings of Mrs. E.G. White and their relation to the Bible, see APPENDIX A.

The SOURCE MATERIAL for Rev. 12-14 is combined and follows at the end of Chapter 28.

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# Chapter XXII

## The End-Time Conflict Of Ultimate Loyalties

### Revelation XIII

The vision of the two symbolic beasts in Rev. 13 must first be related to the flow of church history in Rev. 12. This connection determines the place and location of each beast in history. As we learned in the preceding chapter, Rev. 13 sketches in detail two time periods in Rev. 12 by means of a progressive parallelism. This kind of recapitulation resembles the style of the book of Daniel. Revelation 13 expands in greater detail the warfare of the dragon against the woman of Revelation 12. Several links between the two chapters show their parallel structure.

Revelation 13 shows how the dragon wages his war against the saints. He will employ two religious world powers as agents in his service: a sea beast and a land beast. In this way the dragon forms his own triunity, or satanic trinity.

A special union exists between the dragon and the beast from the sea, because both possess the same seven heads and ten horns (12:3; 13:1). The fact that the dragon delegates his power and throne to the sea beast is an intentional imitation of how God has delegated His power and throne to His Son, Christ Jesus (see 5:12, 13; 13:2). This remarkable parallel marks the sea beast as the antichrist. Therefore Revelation 13 has sometimes been called "the antichrist chapter". The authorization formula which states that the beast receives authority "over every tribe, people, language and nation" (Rev. 13:4, 7-8) can be seen as an ironic counterpart of the authorization of the Son of Man who receives authority over "all peoples, nations and men of every language" in Daniel 7:14. The objective of both investitures of power is to receive the worship and allegiance of all humanity (Dan. 7:14, 27; Rev. 13:4, 8).

The dramatic imitation of the Messiah's death and resurrection is portrayed by the beast's own death from a "mortal wound" and its miraculous resurrection and ascension to universal and totalitarian rulership (Rev. 13:2, 12, 14; cf. 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8). This Christ-imitation suggests the idea that the beast functions as a counterfeit Lamb, as a pseudo-Christ. It has even been suggested that the 1260 days of blasphemy and persecution by the beast are an ironic parody of Christ's ministry of blessing and salvation which lasted also 3½ years or 1260 days (D. Ford, *Crisis*, II:582).

The surprising new revelation in chapter 13 is the forecast of a third agent in the satanic conspiracy against the Holy Trinity: "another beast, coming out of the earth. He has two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon" (13:11). This land beast is afterwards mentioned only as "the false prophet" (16:13; 19:20; 20:4). His task is to serve the sea beast by deceiving all earth dwellers with his signs and miracles (13:14, 15). W.G. Johnsson therefore infers: "The third member of the satanic trilogy apes the work of the Holy Spirit" (in *Symp. on Revelation*, II:21). In short, Revelation 13 rings the alarm bell for

the church of Christ. She will increasingly be deceived by an ingenious conspiracy of a counterfeit Christian religion, endorsed by supernatural signs.

Two stges of the threats can be distinguished. The first phase of the antichrist's rule is characterized by political supremacy and religious intolerance. The second phase follows after the "mortal wound" of the beast has been "healed." Only then can the "false prophet" begin his activities to help regain for the beast its former supremacy and church-state union, this time on a global scale.

The cryptic "mark of the beast" will become the decisive end-time test of ultimate loyalty to the antichrist, in apparent opposition to the "seal of the living God" which marks the willing submission to God's commandments (see 13:15-17; 14:1, 12).

Revelation 13 thus forms the necessary counterpart of the final warning message in Revelation 14. Both chapters constitute an unbreakable unit. Each chapter can be understood only in connection with its counterpart.

### **Links Between Revelation 13 with Daniel 7**

As Jesus had done in His prophetic discourse (Mark 13, Matt. 24), John sketches the future of the church with the symbols of Daniel. John follows the style of Daniel's apocalyptic outlines by again periodizing church history by means of successive world powers. As in Daniel's visions, so Revelation moves forward in history from John's own time until the very end of the church age. Both Daniel and John portray the same archenemy of God and of His covenant people. While Daniel had portrayed the "little horn" as an anti-messiah (Dan. 7-8), John now defines him as the antichrist (Rev. 13). Bible scholars today recognize "that Revelation 13 is modeled on Daniel 7" (G.K. Beale). Two examples can be seen in the following comparison:

Revelation 13	Daniel 7
He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them (v. 7). And to exercise his authority for forty-two months (v. 5).	As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them (v. 21). The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time (v. 25).

Seen From John's Place In History, Revelation 13 Advances Daniel 7 By Means Of A Christ-Centered And Church-Centered Application To The Church Age. The Primary Example Of This Continuous-Historical Advance Is The Composite Make-Up Of The Sea Beast In Rev. 13:2. This Beast Combines The Features Of All Four Beasts Or World Kingdoms Of Dan. 7. This Composite Monster Of Rev. 13 Indicates Unmistakably That Time Has Advanced Since Daniel.

The Fact That The Sea Beast Wears Simultaneously Ten Royal Crowns On Its Ten Horns, Alludes To The Ten Kings Or Kingdoms That Would Emerge From The Fourth World Empire (Rome), According To Dan. 7:7, 24. These Ten Crowns Are The Deliberate Signal In Rev. 13 That The Sea Beast With Its Ruling Ten Kings Has Proceeded In Time Beyond The Division Of The Roman Empire In A.D. 476.

The Visions Of Both Dan.7 And Rev. 13 Proceed Beyond Pagan Rome Into The Middle Ages Of Western Christianity. The Characteristic Feature Of The Sea Beast Of Rev. 13 Is A Mouth That Utters "Proud Words [Megala: "Great Things"] And Blasphemies (13:5, 6) Confirming The Conclusion That The "Little Horn" Of Dan. 7 Is In View. This Horn Equally Speaks "Boastful Words" [Megala: "Great Things"] (Dan. 7:8, 11) Against God (Rev. 13:6; Dan. 7:25). A Close Comparison Of Rev. 13 And Dan. 7 Shows That Rev. 13 Has Moved Beyond The Time Of The Undivided Roman Empire. This Historic Progression Is Foreseen In The Prophetic Declaration: "The Dragon Gave The Beast His Power And His Throne And Great Authority" (Rev. 13:2).

In Rev. 12 The Dragon Represented Not Only Satan, But Also, In A Secondary Sense, Pagan Rome, Which Had Persecuted The Messiah And His People (12:3-6). In Revelation 13 The Dragon Transfers His Persecuting Power To The Successor Of Pagan Rome: Ecclesiastical Rome. At That Point In The Church Age, The Sea Beast Begins To Play The Role Of The Little Horn Of Dan.7. Revelation 13 Begins With The Transfer Of Power And Of Its Throne (Capital) And Authority By Pagan Rome To Papal Rome (V.2).

The Other Link Between The Antichrist In Rev. 13 And The Self-Exalting Horn Of Dan. 7 Is The Same Prophetic Time-Period, Assigned To The Despotic Rule Of Both: 3½ Times Are Identical With 1260 Days. These 1260 Days Equal 42 Months (42 X 30 Days).

In Summary, In Order To Identify The Antichrist-Beast And Its Place In Church History, It Is Essential To Place The Long-Range Time Prophecy Of Daniel 7 At the foundation of Revelation 13.

### **Links Between Revelation 13, Matthew 24, and II Thessalonians**

We observe some important developments between Revelation 13 and the forecasts of Jesus and of Paul. Jesus applied the prophecies of Daniel to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Roman armies (Matt. 24:15, 16; Mark 13:14, Luke 21:20-24). He also alerted His followers to coming persecutions, and to a "great distress" that would be "cut short" through a divine act of providence (Matt. 24:21, 22; Dan. 12:1). Jesus especially warned His people against religious deceivers, that would falsely claim to be His spokesman.

*For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible (Matt. 24:24).*

This prophetic warning of Christ requires, of course, the right understanding of Daniel which specializes in the theme of apostasy and persecution and of the Messianic prophecies.

Paul set forth his understanding of Daniel's book with sufficient clarity in 2 Thessalonians 2. He argued that the future apostasy or the "man of lawlessness" had to precede the return of Christ in glory (see 2 Thess. 2:3 [Greek: protos, omitted in NIV]). Paul characterized this coming "apostasy" in terms of a false religious cultus within the temple of God, as had been described in Daniel 8 and 11. Thus, Paul warned specifically against the coming of an ecclesiastical antichrist. He placed this religious deceiver after the demise of the Roman Empire (2 Thess. 2:7, 8). This has been the historicist interpretation for many centuries.

Paul further taught that the apostate power would endure until the second coming of Christ in judgment (2 Thess. 2:8). He stressed especially that the antichrist would deceive the people by means of supernatural signs, which he appropriately called "counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). It is quite obvious that Revelation 13 is the further expansion of 2 Thessalonians 2. These apocalyptic chapters are complementary. When studied together, the historical emergence of the antichrist and his pseudo-Christian cultus can be identified with clarity.

### **The Roman Nature of Ecclesiastical Rome**

The medieval state-church tried to establish the kingdom of Christ by legal enforcement and physical coercion. In this respect the Roman Catholic Church clearly continued the totalitarian rule of Imperial Rome. The French law professor Jaques Ellul effectively exposed this fateful union of church and state since Emperor Constantine as the "subversion of Christianity" (*The Subversion of Christianity*, Ch. 2).

While church rulers claimed to be acting in Christ's stead, the "holy wars" of their Inquisition shed more blood than any other religion in the world. The historical scholar W.E.H. Lecky made this indictment: "It can surely be no exaggeration to say that the Church of Rome has inflicted a greater amount of unmerited suffering than any other religion that has ever existed" (*Hist. of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2:45). Even some Catholic theologians who became aware of the nature and the extent of persecution by the medieval state-church, are abhorred by the travesty of Christ's teachings by Roman Christianity. Thomas and Gertrude Sartory gave this judgment: "No religion in the world (not a single one in the history of mankind) has on its conscience so many millions of people who thought differently, believed differently. Christianity is the most murderous religion there has ever been" (*In der Hölle Brennt Kein Feuer*. Munich, 1968, 88-89; quoted by H. Kung, *Eternal Life?* Garden City, N.Y., 1984, 132).

The former Jesuit Karlheinz Deschner in Germany, on the basis of primary source material, has published several volumes on the bloody history of the church, entitled, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums* (*The Criminal History of Christianity*), published by Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbeck b/Hamburg. The first four volumes demonstrate the shocking policy of the Christian political rulers who massacred their opponents.

More than a thousand years of illicit church-state alliances and oppression could not possibly be overlooked in the prophetic forecasts of Daniel and the Revelation. The continuous-historical fulfillment of long-range prophecies point irrevocably to Roman Christianity for its shedding the blood of countless martyrs. The ultimate judgment of heaven, however, will reverse their human condemnation into divine vindication: "But the court will sit and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever . . ." "Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Daniel 7:26, 22).

### **The Literary Structure of Rev. 13:1-10 Determines Timing of the "Mortal Wound"**

Improper recognition of the literary style of the Apocalypse will lead to erroneous interpretations. This is especially the case when locating the mortal wound of the beast in

connection with the 42 months of the beast's dominion. The mortal wound is mentioned three times in Rev. 13 (vss 3,12,14). The pertinent question is, Will this deadly wound be inflicted before or after the 42 months?

Different views are defended, even within the historical school of interpretation. One view reads Rev. 13 as an uninterrupted continuous description of future events. Then the order of events would be: first the fatal wound (v.3), followed by the 42 months (v.5). This sequence has led some historicists to apply the fatal wound to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in A.D. 476. The "healing" of the wound is then seen in the rise of Papal Rome and its medieval rulership.

Another view considering the literary structure of Rev. 13:1-10 concludes that this unit consists of two distinct parallel sections: a) a summary description that climaxes in the universal worship of the dragon and the beast (13:1-4); b) an explanation that ends with the same universal worship of the beast (13:5-8). This view has been set forth convincingly by William H. Shea in Symposium on Revelation, Book I, Ch.14, pp. 353-359 (F.B. Holbrook, ed.). He summarizes his conclusions as follows:

*In the description section (vss. 1-4), the wounding of the beast comes toward the close of the passage (vs. 3). In the explanation section (vss. 5-10) this wounding is also alluded to at the end of the passage ("If any one slays with the sword, with the sword he must be slain", vs. 10; cf. vs. 14, "the beast which was wounded by the sword"). In both cases the literary structure and relations involved indicate that the authority that the beast exercises comes before that wounding (Ib., p. 358)*

This means the 42 months of the time prophecy should lead up to the deadly wound, not follow (p. 359).

The deadly wound of the beast (13:3) is clarified at the close of the unit (13:10) by "captivity" and "the sword". Thus the two sections form one whole. This view holds that the antichrist will suffer a stroke of death after it has raged against the saints for 42 months.

The "mortal wound" signifies a temporary freezing of the persecution of the antichrist. If the beginning of the time of oppression is marked by the union of church and state, then its ending may be understood as the dissolution of the church and state.

Allan F. Johnson refers to the apocalyptic use of the "sword" as a "symbol of divine judgment" in Rev. (1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21) and therefore sees the mortal wound as a divine "death blow to the authority of the beast" (Revelation, p. 129). He considers its fulfillment to be realized in the cross and resurrection of Christ and thus (with Irenaeus) a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. However, this antichrist-beast in Rev. 13 arises after pagan Rome long after the crucifixion of Christ. Therefore the mortal wound requires a historical application to the persecuting state-church of the Middle Ages. The popular application of the fatal wound to the suicide of emperor Nero in A.D. 68 is an effort to make the prophecy fit the Roman Empire and to apply the healing of the wound to the renewed persecution by emperor Domitian at the end of the first century.

There can be no doubt that the dragon employed the Roman empire to wage war against the "woman" and her Messiah (12:1-4). But the "sea beast", to which the dragon or Rome transfers its power, represents the successor of Imperial Rome. This becomes evident if Rev. 13 is connected with its taproot in Daniel 7. There we learn that the fourth beast will



transfer its dominion over the earth to the little horn.

### **Fatal Wound to the Totalitarian State-Church**

Historically speaking, the medieval state-church received several blows, which gradually decreased its persecuting power. H. Grattan Guinness, who applied the historical method of prophetic interpretation, mentions three "fatal blows" to Romanism: 1) the Reformation of the sixteenth century; 2) the French Revolution of 1789-1799; 3) the political unification of Italy in 1870, which once again took from the papacy its temporal rule over the papal states (Romanism and the Reformation, p. 234).

L.E. Froom mentions first the Reformation, then the papal annulment of the Society of Jesus in 1773, an organisation endorsed by the papacy to wage war against Protestants (Prophetic Faith, II: 731). He regards the major blow to the papacy to be the forced banishment of the pope and the abolition of the papacy by the French Revolutionary Government in 1798. Because Pope Pius VI in 1791 had denounced the French Revolution and its Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790), and had also participated in the first coalition of European powers to help destroy the French Revolution, the French Directory retaliated by annexing papal territories in southern France, capturing the papal states in Italy, and establishing a republic in Rome. The Directory told Napoleon in a letter (1797), that "the Roman religion would always be the irreconcilable enemy of the Republic. It must be struck in France; it must be struck in Rome." The Republic had "to destroy, if possible, the centre of unity of the Roman Church" (documentation in A. Aulard, Christianity and the French Revolution, p. 151). In 1798 the French troops, under General Berthier, invaded the Vatican, took the eighty-year old Pope Pius VI prisoner. With the approval of the Italians, France established in Rome an independent Roman Republic, "under the special protection of the French army" (doc. in Froom, Ib., II:756). The aim of the French Directory had been to destroy the papacy and "to deliver Europe from the papal supremacy" (Froom, Ib., II:750). C.M. Maxwell describes the unique significance of the year 1798 this way:

*Although during the 1260 years, the pope was often defeated and several times imprisoned, his treatment in 1798 was qualitatively different. In 1798 he was overpowered and imprisoned with the purpose of terminating his religious significance (in Symp. on Rev., II:125).*

Also the Inquisition was abolished in France in 1798. No wonder that the shock of the French Revolution caused many Protestants to believe that in 1798 the reign of the papacy had come to an end by the fatal blow of the French Revolutionary Government. Many believed that these events fulfilled the prophecies of the book of Revelation, chapters 11 and 13 (see Froom, Ib., II:741-48). The famous historian Leopold von Ranke declared: "Indeed, it looked like the papal power was done with forever" (Die Römische Päpste, IX: 756). The New Catholic Encyclopedia states:

"After stripping Pius VI of his temporal power, the French deprived him of his liberty. His death while a prisoner marked a low point in papal fortunes not plumbed for centuries and gave rise to a prophecy that the apostolic succession had come to a close with the demise of 'Pius the Last'" (Vol. X, 1967, p.965).

And the contributor to the article "French Revolution" reports:

*"On this day [when Pius VI died a prisoner] the total destruction of the Holy See seemed to many to be accomplished" (Vol. VI, p. 191).*

These are impressive witnesses to an historic, fatal wound of the papacy! "In fact, half of Europe thought 'the Papacy was dead'" (see Froom, lb., II:763). The French Directory had prescribed that no successor to Pius VI was to be elected to the papal chair (in Froom, lb., II:750).

Napoleon, however, began to resurrect the papacy with his Concordat of 1801, because he felt that the pope held the key to restoring religious peace to France. This Concordat "permitted an unprecedented exercise of papal power" (New Cath. Enc., X:966). In fact, "Many historians maintain that the Concordat of 1801 has been as decisive for modern church history as the conversion of Constantine had been for ancient church history" (Encycl. Brit. 15:1015). In 1814 Pope Pius VII restored the Society of Jesus. And the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) officially returned to the pope the States of the Church, except for the land in France. This restitution formed the basis for the recovery of the Roman Catholic Church during the 19th century.

In summary, the year 1798 has been recognized unanimously by Catholic and Protestant church-historians as the time of "the ultimate humiliation" of the papacy in modern history (Encycl. Brit., 15th ed., 15:1015). This unprecedented, historic abolition of the papacy in Rome, by "the sword" of the French Revolutionary Government, can be understood as a fitting fulfillment of the predicted "fatal wound" of the papal church (in Rev. 13).

### **The "Healing" of the Deadly Wound Still Future**

While Adventist interpreters have mentioned different dates in the past as the fulfillment of the predicted "healing" of the deadly wound inflicted on the papacy, such as 1800, 1815, 1929, and other years, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary states more cautiously: "The prophet. . . saw the wound completely healed, as the Greek implies. . . This is still future" (7:817).

The interpretation of George McCready Price, who appropriately united the prophetic perspectives of Rev. 13 and 17, is significant. He identified the period of the "mortal wound" (Rev. 13) with the "is-not" phase of the beast in Rev. 17 (v. 8). He stressed the distinction between the "woman" and the "beast", that is, between the Roman Catholic Church and the state power, in his application of the mortal wound and its healing. The beast, not the woman, received its deadly stroke! "Obviously the wound means the taking away of the beastly power to dominate the world and deal with 'heretics'. This deadly wound will not be healed until the old power of persecution is restored" (Time of the End, p. 74).

Price thus applied the mortal wound of the beast not to the Catholic Church as such, but to the dissolution or separation of church and state. This was brought about not simply by the dethronement of Pope Pius VI in 1798, but by the powerful ideology behind the American and French Revolutions: "the two basic principles of civil and religious liberty, characteristic of true Christianity" (p. 71). Price viewed these ideas of the two freedoms, civil and religious, as the "real cause of the deadly wound, and the continuing cause of its

still remaining unhealed" (p. 70). Although he recognized some signs of "shifting attitudes" in Christendom in favor of the Church of Rome, these of themselves "are far short of the prophesied healing. Not until Rome again has the power to make her will and doctrines effective through cooperating legislative enactments and judicial decrees will the wound be healed" (p. 75).

This penetrating analysis redirects the focus of prophecy away from any speculative date-fixing of a local event to the ideology behind the persecution of the saints. Price argued: "The fact that a quarter of a century before 1798 'persecution had almost wholly ceased' (The Great Controversy, p. 306) is good proof that the primary cause of the deadly wound was something preceding and vastly more important than the French Revolution" (pp. 72, 73). For Price the time since the French Revolution is identical with the prophetic "time of the end" in the book of Daniel. It is the time when "persecution on a worldwide scale has not been seen for nearly two centuries" (p. 106). The "wound" will be healed, however, "when this restoration of the power to deal with 'heretics' does take place" (p. 76). E.G. White stated similarly: "Prophecy foretells a restoration of her [the papacy] power [quoted Rev. 13:3]" (GC 579). "Rome is aiming to re-establish her power, to recover her lost supremacy . . . She is silently growing into power" (GC 581).

The views of White and Price thus hold that the papal "wound" is healed only when Rome will have achieved again the supremacy of the church to the effect that she promotes religious state laws which bring persecution. Such an expectation has not yet been fulfilled and discredits any date-setting.

Louis F. Were has pointed out that the "paramount part" of Revelation 13 and 17 "is concerned with the healing of the 'deadly wound' and with those things that will follow because of that wound being healed. The Revelator, having pointed to the wounding of one of the heads of the beast, immediately passes to the healing of this wound,... saying: 'All the world wondered after the beast'" (The Woman and the Beast in the Book of Revelation, p. 59). This end-time outlook is the specific focus of Revelation 17.

### **The Emergence of a Two-Horned Beast**

*"Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon" (Rev. 13:11).*

This earth beast cannot be properly understood in isolation from the sea beast. In fact, this land beast must be considered as the last in a series of three hostile worldpowers, the third of which joins the first two. It is striking that the sphere of influence of the three monsters together embrace the entire cosmos: the dragon was from heaven, the first beast from the sea, the second from the earth. John repeatedly used a three-part division of the cosmos (Rev. 5:3,13; 9:1; 10:6; 12:12; 21:1). The intimate association of all three apocalyptic monsters (see Rev. 16:13,14) unites them in their divine punishment: the fiery lake (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). But within their unity and opposition to the Holy Trinity, each partner remains distinct from the others, each playing a specific role.

The "earth" specifically is characterized in Revelation as the place of the abominations of Babylon (17:5). From the "earth" the 144,000 must be redeemed (14:3; cf. Heb. 11:13). After all, the earth, as the fallen creation, was placed under the curse of God (Gen. 3:17).

The designation that the two-horned beast "came up out of the earth" (13:11) has become an occasion, however, for various speculative interpretations. Some expositors see no particular significance in this phrase other than John's way to distinguish the two beasts from the start (I. Beckwith, A. Johnson). They point to the fact that even the beasts in Daniel 7 are said to rise not only out of the sea but also "from the earth" (Dan. 7:3, 17). A few take "the earth" as a symbol of satanic inspiration, "from beneath", from the underworld (J.A. Seiss, W. Hendriksen). Others take "the earth" in a restricted geographic sense: 1) Palestine (J.M.Ford); or 2) Asia Minor (R.H. Charles; H.B. Swete; Jerome Bible Com.); or 3) America (the Sabbatarian Adventists since 1851, see Froom, PF IV:1118). But such geographic restrictions remain conjectures. Even the general inference that "the earth" in Rev. 13:11 refers to "a sparsely settled region", in contrast to the multitudes of people ("the sea") is admitted to be not more than a "reasonable assumption" (S.D.A. Bible Com., VII:820).

The immediate context of Rev. 13 itself uses the term "earth," however, in a worldwide sense, for all the worshipers of the antichrist (13:3, 8), and places the "earth" in contrast with "those who live" or "tabernacle" in heaven" (13:6). This religious contrast is also presented in Revelation 12,

*Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! (v.12).*

Here the earth is placed as the complement of the sea, without any geographic restrictions (see also Rev. 10:2). Both "earth" and "sea" apparently have a worldwide range.

The description that "the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth" (Rev. 12:16), is interesting. Here one can make a historical application to the safe refuge areas in the mountains of Southern Europe, where the Waldenses survived the medieval persecutions of Rome. By extension one may include North America as the largest sanctuary for the refugees from an intolerant Europe. It is understandable therefore that American Adventists since 1851 saw peaceful-looking America as the fulfillment of the beast with the "lamblike" horns of Rev. 13. They even interpreted its two horns as signifying the Republican civil power and the Protestant ecclesiastical power, that is, a democracy and religious freedom (see Froom, PF IV:1118). This interpretation was the expression of their view that the contemporary American democracy and its Protestant character fitted the first phase of the apocalyptic scenario of Rev. 13:11-17. This innovative application of the two-horned beast of Rev. 13 to America had far-reaching implications for the Adventist understanding of "the mark of the beast" and its forecast of universal Sunday laws.

If we evaluate all these efforts to make Rev. 13:11 relevant to the church universal, we need to realize first of all that the critical point of Rev. 13:11-17 is clearly not in what region of the earth the second beast (or "the false prophet") arises--the text only states that the beast rose up "out of the earth"--but at what time he will rise, and how he relates to the first beast (the antichrist), and by what characteristics he can be recognized in the end-time. Because the activity of the false prophet is to deceive "the inhabitants of the earth" (13:14), which is evidently worldwide, we concur with the judgment of W.G. Johnson:

*A Sunday law applicable only to the United States clearly is inadequate . . . Let us frankly acknowledge that the full understanding of the fulfillment of this prophecy of the land monster's deceptions are not clear, however--especially the miracles that cause many to be led astray, and the 'image' to the sea monster. Further, the vision indicates a stage of action which embraces the whole world . . . How the entire mass of humanity will be drawn into the vortex of deception is not apparent at present (in Symposium on Rev., II:29).*

We need to realize that history alone provides the final interpretation of prophecy. Fulfillments of Bible prophecies have usually been realized in unsuspected and surprising ways.

### **The Earth Beast as Apologist of the Antichrist**

*Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived (Rev. 13:11-14).*

This portrayal also shows progression in history. In the time of the end apostasy will advance from bad to worse, as Paul already indicated: "evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). The development of the two beasts in Rev. 13 means that the threat of deception will dramatically increase, not merely for non-Christians but especially for Christian believers and churches all over the world.

The earth beast appears with "two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon". This contrast accentuates its beguiling character. The "lamb" is the symbol par excellence in the Apocalypse. Twenty-eight times it portrays Christ as the Lamb of God, making it the central symbol and coordinating principle of the entire book. The lamblike appearance of the earth beast indicates the nature of the ultimate deceit in the final test of faith. The earth beast wants to be taken as Christlike, but its words reveal the lies, the heresies, and murderous plans of the dragon and of the antichrist-beast. One could detect in the "speaking" of this beast "like a dragon" (or serpent, 12:9) a reference "to the seductive and deceitful character of the serpent in the Garden of Eden" (Charles, Rev., I:358), as well as a reference to the dragon as a destroyer. Such a contrast of appearance and essential nature had been already the subject of Jesus' earlier warning: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matt. 7:15). Christ had extended this advance notice to all future generations: "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24). This forewarning of Jesus in Matthew 24 is now elaborated in Revelation 13. The earth beast shall perform "great and miraculous signs" (Rev. 13:13) and is characterized as "the false prophet" (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

The Apocalypse thus discloses that the Christian age will develop two antichrist figures, that will operate in a close union. Revelation 13 depicts an end-time scenario with a false Christ and a distinct false prophet, each with his own role to play, in order to achieve one common goal: to unite the whole world in rebellion against God (see Rev. 16:13,14).

The false prophet of Rev. 13:11-17 claims to be the last spokesman for God. He appears on the scene of history only after the sea beast has ruled for 42 months and has received its mortal wound (13:12). This timing in history of the false prophet is of church-historical importance. Its activity signifies the start of the final act in the drama of the ages, which leads to the ultimate showdown between Christ and the antichrist: "Armageddon".

God's Spirit had been manifested in miraculous signs after Christ had completed His mission, for the purpose of bringing more glory to Christ (John 16:13,14; Heb. 2:3,4). Its counterpart appears in the false prophet, inspired by the spirit of demons to perform "miraculous signs" (Rev. 19:20). Their purpose is to delude the world and to induce all peoples to worship the antichrist, "the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed" (Rev. 13:12-14). To accomplish this, the false prophet will "order" the people "to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived" (13:14).

Many interpreters have recognized in this picture of Rev. 13 an essential correspondence with the story of the Hebrews in Daniel 3. As in Daniel's time the setting up of a literal image in honor of the king of Babylon was immediately followed by a legislative decree to worship the image (Dan. 3), so will this procedure be repeated on a global scale in the end-time:

*He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (Rev. 13:15).*

It is important to recognize the essential typology between Dan. 3 and Rev. 13! With this historical parallel to Daniel 3, Revelation 13 discloses the basic line-up of the final conflict in the church era (see Rev. 13:16,17). The two parties will again be determined by contrasting worship rituals, either by the faith of the followers of Christ or by the idolatrous state-cultus of the antichrist. Both religious groups employ "fire" from heaven to convince the world of their claims. The antichristian "fire from heaven" (Rev. 13:13) evidently functions as "the satanic counterpart to the signs performed by the two witnesses (11:5)" (W.G. Johnsson, in Symp. on Rev., II:28).

One evangelical scholar makes this perceptive comment: "The land beast is the antithesis for the two prophets of Christ symbolized by the two witnesses in chapter 11" (A.F. Johnson, Rev., p.133). If the sign of "fire" of God's witnesses refers to their gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:3,4; Heb. 2:4), then the use of "fire" by the false prophet "would be a reference to pseudocharismatic gifts that create a counterfeit church community whose allegiance is to the Antichrist" (A.F. Johnson, lb., p.134).

We may derive from the supernatural signs of the false prophet that he will directly confront the true witnesses of Christ. This coming confrontation should raise our awareness that much that poses for true Christianity is false at heart. Paul Minear has rightly sounded the alarm: "The readers are called to discern the criteria which will enable them to separate the lamb-like beast (13:11) from the Lamb himself (14:1)" (I saw a New

Earth, p.119).

In order to be "conquerors," as required in each letter of Christ to the churches, the believers must be true and faithful witnesses, willing to lay down their lives for holding and preserving "the Testimony of Jesus", even before the tribunals of the antichrist (see Rev. 11:7; 12:11; 20:4). While the whole world will worship the seemingly invincible beast with ultimate devotion (Rev. 13:4), the Apocalypse of Jesus assures the church: "But the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers" (Rev. 17:14). This Christological title in Rev. 17:14, "Lord of lords and Kings of kings", applies God's own title in the Old Testament (Deut.10:17; Ps. 136:2,3; Daniel 2:37,47; 4:37, in the Greek Version) to Christ at His second coming (see also Rev. 19:16).

### **The Function of the Mark of the Beast**

The recipients of the mark (Greek: *charagma*) are "the inhabitants of the earth" (the earth-dwellers), that are consistently described as the followers of the antichrist-beast and those who rejoice at the death of the two witnesses (6:10; 11:10; 13:8,12,14; 17:2,8). This apocalyptic formula ("those who dwell on the earth") does not describe the world in a neutral sense, but designates those who follow the antichrist. These earthdwellers are not located in one region or continent of the earth. They represent the universal hostility of the earth against God. All kinds of people are involved:

*He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead (13:16).*

This Á followers of the antichrist enforce a social boycott on Bible believers who refuse the mark of the beast, "so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast" (Rev. 13:17). The saints will be denied their civil rights and become liable to legal prosecution and sentencing (13:15). The saints will find comfort, however, in Christ's offer "to buy" from Him "gold refined in the fire", "white clothes", and "salve to put on your eyes so you can see" (Rev. 3:18). This offer can never be blocked by human legislation or social boycotts.

This style of contrasting social groups points to universality (also in 6:15; 19:18). John puts his readers on notice that the final events are not provincial or national in scope, but of global proportion. The jurisdiction of the two beasts is apparently the entire world population.

The function of the mark of the beast stands in glaring contrast to the seal of God. The basic function of both is to symbolize a religious commitment: to Christ or the antichrist. Both the seal and the mark contain the inherent motifs of ownership and protection (Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:2,3; 9:4; 13:16,17; 1 Pet. 2:9; Mai. 3:17-18; see Fitzer, in Kittel's TDNT VII, art. "sphragis", section D2c). The mark is a demonic travesty of the seal of God. On a deeper level both signs represent the character that corresponds with the mind of Christ or the antichrist. Both symbols represent the names or reputations of the respective givers (see Rev. 14:1; 22:4; 13:17; 17:5). John thus intended a contrast of mentalities and loyalties, an insight often ignored in commentaries.

Both are religious signs of loyalty. This is signified by the placement "on the foreheads" (the

place of mental assent and conviction) or "on the hand" (the place of external conformity). The "seal" on the foreheads of the faithful is a religious sign of loyalty, because it is explained as the names of the Lamb and of the Father written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). They apparently reflect the character of God and of His Son (see John 15:10). In parallel, we may understand the "mark" of the beast as a religious sign that represents the mind and character of the rebellious antichrist. The mark stands for "the name of the beast or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17), which symbolizes the self-exalting character and the autonomous spirit of the antichrist.

The crucial point of Rev. 13 is that all people are forced to pledge their loyalty and to reveal their character one way or the other without the possibility of remaining neutral. All must make up their minds and identify themselves with either the truth of God in Christ or with the creed of the antichrist. The full significance of the mark of the beast becomes evident, however, only in Revelation 14. John stresses that just as the Lamb was the incarnation of God in man, so is the beast the incarnation of the serpent-dragon in humanity. This is the spiritual background of the final showdown between heaven and earth in Revelation 13.

When Revelation 13 is understood within its inalienable context of chapters 12-14, we notice that "the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus" are the explicit standard of loyalty to heaven (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). This implies that the covenant law of God, the Decalogue, will be internalized in the hearts of the saints through the Spirit of God. Transformed by the gospel of Christ, their characters will reflect Christ and harmony with the will of God. The saints of God are followers of the Lamb (Rev. 14:1-5).

The mark of the beast stands in flagrant opposition to both God's commandments and Jesus' testimony in Holy Scripture. This implies that the followers of the beast obey a counterfeit moral law and follow a pseudo-messiah. They will reflect the intolerant fanaticism of the antichrist. The line of demarcation is not merely an external compliance with a moral or civil law, but the union of heart and mind with Christ or with the antichrist.

While the true followers of Christ are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of Jesus' Testimony as the final Word of God, the followers of the antichrist enforce a social boycott on Bible believers that refuse the mark of the beast, "so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast" (Rev. 13:17). The saints will be denied their civil rights and become liable to legal prosecution and sentencing (13:15). The saints will find comfort, however, in Christ's offer "to buy" from Him "gold refined in the fire", "white clothes", and "salve to put on your eyes so you can see" (Rev. 3:18). This offer can never be blocked by human legislation or social boycotts.

## **Interpreting the Number 666**

*This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666 (Rev. 13:18).*

The great variety of efforts to decode the mysterious number 666 can be divided in two main categories. One group utilizes the method of gematria, which assigns a numerical value to every letter in a chosen language, thus adding up the letters of a word. The word "Nero Caesar" has been widely accepted as the meaning of 666. This historical application would fit only the time of the apostle Paul. However, the possibilities of the



method of gematria are almost unlimited. While the phrases Italika Ecclesia (Italian Church) or He Letana Basileia (The Latin Kingdom) or Vicarius Filii Dei fit the number 666, also words for Luther (Loutherana, Saxoneios) or Muhammad (Maometis) or Napoleon (Nabonaparti) or Hitler fit the number 666. One scholar observed, "Looking back, it has been possible . . . to identify the number 666 with the names of the majority of tyrants who in the course of history have persecuted the Church" (J.J. von Allmen; quoted in D. Brady, see Source Material, p. 301). The early-church father Irenaeus (died in 202) already warned that only the fulfillment of the prophecy would give certainty, because "many names can be found possessing the number mentioned" (Against heresies, V, 30,3).

Those who accept the Papacy or the Roman Catholic Hierarchy as the historical fulfillment of Rev. 13, see in the number 666 a confirmation for their understanding of the beast and of the number of his name: "Vicarius Filii Dei," which is the claim to be the Vicar of Christ.

Because John nowhere in the Apocalypse uses gematria as a method, most Bible scholars prefer the symbolic interpretation of the number 666, just as John uses the number 144,000 and 1,600 in Revelation 14. It is generally believed that John attached to certain numbers a symbolic character, which was familiar to Hebrew thinking. As the number 4 stood for universality or totality, 7 for rest and perfection, 12 for God's covenant people or the church, so 6 may have been perceived as standing for man without God and His rest.

The number six points to the day of the creation of man (Gen. 1:27, 31). The king of Babylon made a golden image measured "60 cubits high and six cubits wide" (Dan.3:1), to be worshiped at his command. In this light the number 666 would suggest the antichrist's effort to exalt a man to the place of God and Christ. John states specifically that the number 666 "is man's number" (Rev. 13:18 NIV).

The multiplication of sixes implies a repetition of the beast's efforts "to have itself taken for God" (J. Ellul), yet to fail persistently. The information that the saints will triumph "over the beast and his image and over the number of his name" (Rev. 15:2), is important. Victory over the number 666 does not suggest a victory in mathematical ingenuity but rather victory over the beast's name or character of self-deification. The beast carries many "blasphemous names" (13:1; 17:3). This means that the beast asserts "names and honorific titles which belong to God or Christ alone" (H. Bietenhard, in NIDNTT 2:653). This requires the wisdom of divine discernment more than intellectual acumen, of spiritual biblical knowledge more than human philosophy.

John points to its deeper meaning when he stated: "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight . . ." (13:18). Alan Johnson comments: "Believers need to penetrate the deception of the beast. John's reference to his number will help them recognize his true character and identity" (The Expositor's Bible Com., 12: 534). Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars today prefer this interpretation. Beatrice S. Neall explains that man's number six is legitimate only when it leads to seven, to the glory and sovereignty of God:

*Six hundred sixty-six, however, represents the refusal of man to proceed to seven, to give glory to God as Creator and Redeemer. It represents man's fixation with himself, man seeking glory in himself and his own creative powers without God--the practice of the absence of God. It demonstrates that unregenerate man is persistently evil. The beast of Rev. 13 represents man exercising his sovereignty apart from God, man conformed to the image of the beast rather than to the image of God. Man apart from God becomes bestial, demonic (The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse with Implications for Character Education, p. 154).*

William G. Johnsson equally declares that 666 "points to a parody of perfection: imperfection upon imperfection, despite the beast's monstrous claims" (in Symp. on Rev., II: 31; see also K.A. Strand, *Ib.*, p.202). Roy C. Naden offers a thoroughly gospel understanding:

*To be identified with 6 is to experience conflict without the rest of the Lamb. The beast and his image have the number that identifies ceaseless striving modeled by their leader Satan. Thus 6 is the numerical symbol of the restless lost. Without the Lamb, they can never find rest (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p. 200).*

We need to realize that Rev. 13:11-17 describes symbolically the final deception of the world in the future. The formation of "the image" of the beast is still an incomplete fulfillment. Also the mark of the beast has not yet been imposed on humanity. This realization should prevent any interpreter from being dogmatic regarding the future fulfillment of Rev. 13:11-17.

## Chapter XXIII

### Identifying the Antichrist

The popular interpretation of the Preterist School identifies the sea beast as the Roman Empire. The "seven heads" on the beast are applied to seven successive emperors (out of the eleven) during the first century A.D. This view depends heavily on a certain interpretation of the seven heads on the scarlet beast of Revelation 17. Of this particular beast the interpreting angel said: "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills [ore,"mountains," see NKJV, NASB] on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come . . ." (Rev. 17:9, 10).

Kenneth A. Strand has recently re-examined the evidence for this preterist application of Rev. 13 and 17 to pagan Rome (in Symposium on Revelation. Bk II, Ch. 5, "The Seven Heads: Do They Represent Roman Emperors?" His method is the contextual approach, by which he effectively refutes the identification of the sea beast with Imperial Rome.

He relates Rev. 13 first to its literary context, that is, to the larger framework of Rev. 12. This larger scope contains a three-step historical sequence: "The dragon opposes first the man-child (Christ), then the woman, and finally the remnant of the woman's seed or offspring" (II:183). The connection of the specific time periods in Rev. 12 (vss 6, 14) and 13 (vs 5) indicates that the beast of Rev. 13 persecutes the saints during the second stage of Rev. 12, that is, during the post-apostolic era. The church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Jerome expected the rise of the antichrist only after the demise of pagan Rome. They did not even mention Nero as fulfilling any prophecy in Revelation!

Strand also evaluates the assertion that the seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills of the city of Rome. He points out that the proper translation of ore is not "hills," but "mountains," just as elsewhere in the Apocalypse (see 6:14-16; 14:1; 16:20; 21:10). As a symbol, a "mountain" never represents an individual ruler, but a nation or empire (see Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; Jer. 51:25). The second term in Rev. 17:9,10, "kings," equally functions as kingdoms or empires (see Dan. 2:38-40). Both Daniel and the Revelation make no abstract separation between kingdoms and their kings.

Strand explains that the seven heads on the beast are said to be successive world empires, being the executioners of Satan's plan in all ages. The heads are not seven static, neutral hills. He concludes therefore:

*The reference in that text [Rev. 17:9] to "seven mountains," immediately alerted John's Asian parishioners to the fact that the symbol represented a series of successive world empires (II:191).*

But the "seven hills" of the city of Rome are, of course, not chronologically successive. The Roman Empire, however, clearly was one of the seven heads on the beast. The ten crowned horns on the beast indicate that this particular head represents a world power that would succeed pagan Rome and would rule over ten kingdoms simultaneously.

The preterist application of the "mortal wound" of the beast to Nero and its resuscitation to Domitian (the traditional "Nero revivendus" myth), has been re-examined and thoroughly refuted by Paul S. Minear (in JBL, Vol. 72, 1953; see Source Material) and also by K.A. Strand (in Symp. on Rev., II: 191-200). We conclude therefore that even the persecutions of Christians by pagan Rome were not those of the antichrist in Rev. 13. Even more conclusive is the fact that Rev. 16:13-16 indicates that the antichrist-beast will play a major role in the final events that lead up to the judgment of the seven last plagues and Armageddon. The beast cannot be restricted, therefore, to ancient Rome and its imperial cult.

This awareness has led some Roman Catholic and Futurist expositors to project a revived pagan Roman Empire in the future (see Froom, PF 2: 486-505; 3:733-37, for Ribera till Manning). George E. Ladd represents those who combine the preterist and the futurist applications, thereby accepting a wide gap of many centuries of church history (Com. on the Rev., pp. 13,14). He views pagan Rome as an historical forerunner of the Antichrist. But this moderate futurism ignores the apocalyptic style of an historical continuum in the books of Daniel and Revelation and keeps the Christian era largely outside the focus of prophecy.

### **The Historicist Approach**

The problem of the interpretation of Revelation is basically one of application to church history. One Baptist Bible scholar pointed out: "The legacy of time is the most difficult part of the book. To what time do the symbols refer? And this is where, of course, the battle takes place. Does the symbol refer to the past? Does it refer to the present? Does it refer to the future and if so, when?" (Ray F. Robbins, in Revelation: Three Viewpoints, p. 154).

With respect to the timing, we need to remember that John's Apocalypse is built on the foundation already established in the book of Daniel. In particular, Revelation 13 is the enlargement of Daniel 7, as several unique links between the two chapters confirm. One evangelical scholar even demonstrated the same structural pattern in both chapters. He concluded that "Revelation 13 has been shaped primarily according to Daniel 7 . . . Revelation 13 is modelled on Daniel 7" (G.K. Beale, The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apoc. Lit. and in the Rev. of St. John, p. 247). Preterist expositors do not recognize this essential point.

The Roman Empire did not exhaust the profound symbolism and global conflict of Revelation 13. The futurist or dispensational expositors, on the other hand, completely ignore the relevance of Revelation for the church of the ages, because they apply Rev. 13 exclusively to a future world government and to the head of a future apostate church.

If Daniel presents the perspective of an historical sequence, then the more adequate approach would be the continuous-historical fulfillment, which the historicist school attempted to follow.

### **Defining Testing Truth and Heresy**

Heresy was understood by the Church as a fundamental contradiction and deviation from the true faith. It was characterized as a work of the devil, to be exterminated by all

available means. Such a work was a sacred duty according to Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.11, a. 3). Popes from Leo I onward justified capital punishment for heresy and some urged the issuing of imperial edicts to annul the civil rights of heretics, until the Council of Constantinople introduced the punishment of burning alive the Bogomils or Albigenses in France.

The canonical laws of the Roman Church stress the duty of worldly rulers to eradicate heresy and to obey the church laws, under threat of excommunication. Consequently, rulers saw it as their duty to fulfill the requirements of the church, especially from the 13th till the 17th centuries. Untold numbers of non-conformist Christian believers were massacred as outlaws by the papal inquisitions in various countries of Europe, such as the Albigenses, the Waldenses, and the Huguenots. Especially horrible was the St. Bartholomew Massacre on August 24, 1572 in Paris and other parts of France, when some 70,000 Protestants were butchered within two months, with approval of Pope Gregory XIII. All these sacrificed their lives "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (see E.G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 271).

Voices from both outside and within the Roman Catholic Church began to accuse the worldly Papacy of behaving like the predicted antichrist (from Archbishops Arnolf of Orleans in A.D. 991 and Eberhard II of Salzburg in A.D. 1241; Dante, Petrarch, Savonarola, Wyclif; see Froom, *PF II*:21-31; chs. 2 and 6; I:796-806). However, it was not until Luther and Calvin that the conviction that the Roman hierarchy was the Antichrist or Babylon reached massive proportions and was expressed in several creedal confessions (see the *Book of Concord. Confessions of the Evang. Lutheran Churh*. T.G. Tappert, ed., Fortress Press, 1959; "The Heidelberg Catechism" [1563], Q. 80, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*. A.C. Cochrane, ed., Westminster Press, 1966).

Luther and Calvin both discovered Christ and His gospel of unmerited grace first. Only then, after they were confronted with the authoritarianism of the popes, who denied their freedom to preach the gospel and who condemned the essence of their gospel message, did they recognize the Antichrist.

Calvin explained this at length in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Book IV, Chapter 7, sections 24 and 25 (see "Library of Christian Classics", 2 vols. Vol. XXI. J.T. McNeill, ed. Westminster Press, 1967). He stated in 1543,

*He will be no vicar of Christ, who, by persecuting the gospel with furious efforts, openly professes himself to be Antichrist, will he?...It is clear that the Roman Pontiff has shamelessly transferred to himself what belonged to God alone and especially to Christ (Inst. IV,7, 24,25).*

For both reformers the antichrist was not a distant figure in the past or one in the remote future, but a devilish imitation of Christ in their own times. They declared that the contemporary ecclesiastical and religious apostasy was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, especially of Dan. 11:36-39 and 2 Thess. 2:4. The essential point for them was that the antichrist was a present reality. This created for the Protestants an existential menace as if they faced the ultimate test of faith.

G.C. Berkouwer acknowledged "that the Reformers' intuitive conception of an actual and active antichrist is a New Testament emphasis" (*The Return of Christ*, p. 264)!

John identified the "many antichrists" in his time by their essential deviation from the original apostolic gospel, both doctrinally and morally (see 1 John 2:18, 19, 22; 4:2-3). John's specific standard was the apostolic teaching about Jesus as the Messiah and His

atoning death. This Christology formed the cornerstone of the apostolic gospel of salvation (see also Rom. 1:1-14; Acts 17:2,3). John emphasized the difference between the apostolic faith which was "from the beginning," and the errors of the innovators that arrogantly claimed to have a higher knowledge of God and Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:2,3; 2 John 7).

John's pastoral letters were concerned exclusively with the contemporary church crisis in his region. He did not hesitate to call any that taught a different gospel "false prophets" and "antichrists". He called on churchmembers to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). This appeal remains the responsibility of every church member. This assumes not only a basic knowledge of the apostolic gospel but also the anointing of the Spirit. John assured the members: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth" (1 John 2:20, see also v.27).

From John's application of the predicted antichrist, we receive a new appreciation for the efforts of the Protestant reformers to identify the antichrist of prophecy in their times. The reformers applied the same test which John had used in his First Letter: the original, apostolic gospel message of the New Testament.

On this basis the reformers, as both pastors and exegetes, identified the antichrist of prophecy as the medieval Papacy, in its self-exaltation above all others in church and state, and by its dogma of a different way of salvation (by a new priesthood with seven sacraments).

The Roman Catholic reaction to the gospel of the Protestant Reformation became solidified in the Creed of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and in the Roman Catechism of 1566, issued by Pope Pius V (Catechism of the Council of Trent. Christian Classics, Westminster, Md, 1974).

The Protestant reformers fulfilled their responsibility by alerting all Christians to the false gospel teachings of their contemporary state church. They did it with the same earnestness as is evident in John's Epistles. Their extensive creeds concerning Christ, sin, salvation and the apostate church, still convince millions that the Protestant understanding is a restoration of the original gospel.

The urgent question arises, Is the sixteenth-century reformation of church and doctrine complete or has it become stagnated in creeds and traditions?

The Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus has proposed that each generation of Christians must be on the alert to identify current corruptions of the gospel and to confess Christ's Lordship in every religious polarization. Past historic confrontations serve as types of recurring threats, just as John's Apocalypse saw ancient Babylon, Edom, and Tyrus as prototypes of the enemies of the church age (see Rev. 18, applying the prophecies of Isa. 13; 34 and Ezek. 27). "The expectation of the antichrist has an immediate actuality . . . The church must always seek the antichrist as a reality in her present situation or consider him as a threatening possibility in the immediate future" (Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge*, p. 283; own tr.). According to Althaus, Luther's identification of the Papacy as the antichrist was not an "error" or incorrect, because the Papacy functioned in his time as a threat to the gospel.

The Protestant slogans of sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solo Christo, all functioned as battle cries in a warfare between faith and unbelief in the gospel. Althaus does not approve any dogmatizing of the antichrist-identification in a creed, because recognition of the antichrist must relate to an actual antichrist in the present, not to one in the past or in

the future: "The recognition of the antichrist is always deadly serious" (Ib., p. 285). It is of little value to recognize the antichrist in the past or future, because that requires no personal involvement. Althaus warns the church--any Protestant church--that she is in constant danger of becoming antichrist herself. Any church that supplants Christ or usurps His authority or seeks worldly power, "it is all anti-Christianity, that is, competition with Christ, the will to supersede or to replace Him: opposition to Christ in the form of similarity to Him, of 'taking the place of Christ'" (Ib., p. 284).

Althaus' concept of recognizing the essence of an antichrist as a Christian power that usurps Christ's authority and replaces Christ and His gospel is always valid. He acknowledges that Luther's identification of the medieval Papacy as the antichrist was in harmony with the method of John's First Epistle: to recognize the antichrist as a false gospel teacher and as a counterfeit Christian community. Nevertheless, the Protestant approach also needs a continuous test with historical reality. It requires both the gospel test and that of the end-time perspective of Scripture.

Only from the perspective of a continuous-historical development can the antichrist of Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, and the Apocalypse be located in the stream of history. This approach is often ignored by modern theologians and exegetical scholars. To them any secular totalitarian system or atheistic state can be the antichrist. But while there are many antichristian powers in the world, there is only one antichrist in Dan. 7-12; in 2 Thess. 2; and in Rev. 13. It remains a reality that the medieval antichrist has altered and still opposes the covenant law of God and the apostolic gospel of salvation which is the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus.

If the antichrist is presently prevented from persecuting the saints, this does not change the presence and nature of the antichrist. Prophecy indicates repeatedly that the medieval antichrist and his persecutions will be revived in the final generation on a worldwide scale (in Dan. 11:40-45; 12:1; Rev. 13:15-17). That regained supremacy will be cut short by the return of Christ (Dan. 12:1,2; Matt. 24:22; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 17:12-14; 19:11-21). Revelation 13 "emphasizes the revivification and rejuvenation of the beast" (Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 273). That should put every church on the alert, especially in the time of the end.

Revelation 12-14, in its composition as a closely knit unity, requires serious attention. In this central part of the Apocalypse we come face to face with the historic test of discipleship: faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His testimony. For the sake of Jesus' testimony Paul was beheaded in Rome and John was banished to Patmos. For Jesus' testimony the martyrs sacrificed their lives (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). God's appointed test focuses on Christ's words as attested in the New Testament. This is of paramount significance in the light of recurrent tendencies to replace God's testimony with church creeds and doctrinal formulas.

# Chapter XXIV

## The Last Companions of the Lamb

### Revelation XIV:1-5

Revelation 14 functions as the positive counterpart of Revelation 13. Here the saints that endure the brunt of the antichrist powers receive a glorious reward for their faithfulness. We see the Lamb of God standing among His followers (14:1), in glaring contrast to the beast and his followers in Rev. 13.

While the beast-worshippers bear the mark of antichrist, the companions of the Lamb wear the seal of the living God on their foreheads (14:1). Revelation 13 foretold the maturing of the apostasy with its number 666. Revelation 14 assures us of the judgment of Babylon and the reward of God's people with their number 144,000. Revelation 14 obviously functions as the complement of chapter 13. One German critical scholar was so impressed by Rev. 14 that he called it "the formal and substantial high point of the Apocalypse" (E. Lohmeyer)! While Protestant reformers and modern reform movements appeal to Rev. 14 for their divine calling, Ellen White recognized that its full significance was still not yet grasped:

*The fourteenth chapter of Revelation is a chapter of the deepest interest. This scripture will soon be understood in all its bearings, and the messages given to John the revelator will be repeated with distinct utterance (Review and Herald, Oct. 13, 1904; in S.D.A. Bible Commentary, 7: 978).*

### The Vision of the Church Triumphant

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Rev. 14:1-5).

This vision of the triumphant church reveals the final generation of Christian believers, that survive the final threats of the antichrist. The 144,000 followers of the Lamb are victorious because they persevere in their loyalty to Christ Jesus. By their refusal to submit to idolatry, they conquer the beast. They demonstrate that the antichrist does not succeed in his goal to establish universal dominion. But heaven will intervene dramatically at the end of the age. The powerful Lamb will conquer the beast on behalf of His covenant people. This assurance is given explicitly by an interpreting angel:



*They [the beast and the kings of the earth] will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers (Rev. 17:14).*

Its fulfillment is portrayed in an astonishing symbolic picture of divine rescue:

*I saw heaven open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war (Rev. 19:11).*

This majestic vision constitutes the Christ-centered fulfillment of Daniel's end-time deliverance:

*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book - will be delivered (Dan. 12:1).*

Both Daniel and Revelation center the final deliverance of God's covenant people on Mount Zion, "the beautiful holy mountain" (Dan. 11:45; Rev. 14:1). The same mountain of attack and rescue is presented in the book of Joel:

*And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said . . . (Joel 2:32).*

Ever since King David placed the Ark of Yahweh--the symbol of God's Presence and Throne--on Mount Zion, this mountain was called "holy." It became the symbolic place of deliverance in the prophetic tradition (see Psalms 2; 46; 48; 110). It is very meaningful that John's Apocalypse pictures the 144,000 followers of the Lamb standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion:

*Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1).*

Mount Zion or the holy city (Jerusalem) is placed in contraposition to Babylon, mentioned in 14:8; 16:19; 17:1-6. Zion and its sanctuary worship constitutes the norm of saving truth, by which Babylon, its religious cultus and followers, are measured in the court of heaven. Both Zion and Babylon are names that are deeply rooted in the salvation-history of Israel. They represent religious arch-opponents involved in deadly combat (Jer. 50; 51; Dan. 1).

## **The Old Testament Background of Zion**

In Israel's prophecies "Zion" is the symbol of the city of God, the place of God's presence and protection, especially for the Messianic time (Isa. 40-66; Zech. 1-9). The issue is not a geographic "holy" place, but the presence of God among His faithful covenant people. Zion was the symbol of blessing and deliverance (see Isa. 37). This Zion-theology was made prominent by Isaiah in his conflict with a corrupt priesthood and kingship that claimed the protection of God as belonging unconditionally to literal Zion and Jerusalem (Isa. 28-31).

For Isaiah, "Zion" represented a spiritual people, those that seek the Lord and have God's law in their hearts (51:1,7). God said to this "Zion, 'You are my people'" (51:16). Isaiah used marriage as a symbol of God's faithfulness to Zion, in spite of His temporary

abandonment of her ("for a brief moment") when she behaved more like a "harlot" in her relationships with other nations (Isa 31:1-3). This dual meaning of Zion is expressed by Isaiah:

*For your Maker is your husband --  
the LORD Almighty is his name--  
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;  
he is called the God of all the earth (Isa. 54:5).*

*See how the faithful city has become a harlot!  
She once was full of justice;  
righteousness used to dwell in her  
but now murderers! (Isa. 1:21).*

This twofold characterization of Zion as both faithful wife and as harlot, at different times, forms the theological background for understanding the two symbolic women in the Apocalypse of John. Revelation portrays the faithful church as a radiant wife (Rev. 12:1) and the apostate church as the great harlot "Babylon" (17:1-5).

### **Who are the 144,000?**

In Joel's prophetic perspective the remnant people are those that are filled with the Spirit of God (2:28) and worship the Lord (2:32). The creation of this new-covenant people could come only after the Messiah had received the fulness of His anointing (Isa. 11:1,2; 61:1-6; see Matt. 3:16,17). The apostolic church received its baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

But the perspective of Joel 2:28-32 clearly moves forward to the time of the end, when the final separation of the faithful ones will be realized on Mount Zion:

*And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:32 NKJV).*

The church age was described in the Apocalypse first in Revelation 2-3 in the letters of Christ, but the end-time saints are portrayed in Rev. 7 as 144,000 true "Israelites" from all tribes (12 x 12,000). This is the language code of God's covenant of redemption. Their "sealing" as "servants" of God by the angels marks them as those who have stood the test of the antichrist by rejecting his "mark." They are victorious, however, only because of their trust "in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). Their characters are Christ-centered and Christlike. They stand in direct contrast to those who have the number of the beast, 666, "a cryptic number signifying parody and imperfection" (W.G. Johnsson, in Symp. on Rev., II:32).

### **Old Testament Prototypes**

Two prototypes in the Old Testament enlighten our understanding of the 144,000. From Ezekiel we learn the often overlooked truth that only the sealed covenant people of God will stand protected in the day of judgment. Those without the seal of God are marked for condemnation (see Ezek. 9:5,6). In God's final analysis there will be no "undecided"

people. Revelation 14 shows that the time is coming when the whole earth will be brought to "ripeness" or decision, either for good or for evil, then the angel will announce: "the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. 14:15). The catalyst of this collective ripening forms the high point of Rev. 14: the Three-Angels' Messages of verses 6-12, which are discussed in the following chapters.

Another vital link between the 144,000 in Rev. 14 and Israel's prophecy is the forecast of Zephaniah. Between the years 630-625 B.C. Zephaniah preached the judgments of God on Judah and Jerusalem because of their compromises with Baalism (1:4-6). He announced the nearness of God's judgment, the Day of the Lord (1:7, 14), but also included the surprising hope that a faithful remnant would remain loyal. They will be sheltered on "the great day of the LORD" (2:3,7). He called them the "humble of the earth" (2:3), those that worship God with purified lips and call on the name of Yahweh to serve Him on His holy hill (3:9,11). Zephaniah described true worshipers in these words:

*The remnant of Israel will do no wrong, they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid (Zeph. 3:13).*

The remnant of Zeph. 3:13 and the 144,000 of Revelation are identical: "No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless" (Rev. 14:5). To understand this characterization of the 144,000 adequately, we must first probe its meaning in Zephaniah 3. This Old Testament prophet does not apply Israel's "blamelessness" and "perfection" in an abstract way, but to her worship of the LORD through obedience to His covenant law free from the lies of idol worship, false miracles, and false prophecy (see also Deut. 18:9-13).

Paul also characterized the apostasy of the man of lawlessness as "the lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). The 144,000 in Rev. 14 are intentionally contrasted with the beast-worshippers and their religious cultus. This understanding corresponds with John's other description: "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure [literally: "for virgins they are," see NKJV]. "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev. 14:4). Both sentences form one unit, and are self-explaining. The symbolic 144,000 (both men and women) do not follow the fallen "women" or apostate-worship communities, later called Babylon or "the mother of prostitutes" (Rev. 17:5). They follow the Lamb of God exclusively.

The term "virgin" was the Hebrew title for Zion or Jerusalem in her covenant relation with God (2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 14:17; 18:13; 31:4; Lam. 1:15; 2:13; Am. 5:2).

The terms "adultery" and "committing adultery or fornication" are used in both the Old Testament and the Apocalypse as symbols of idolatry or false worship (see Exod. 34:15; Judg. 2:17; 1 Chron. 5:25; Rev. 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2). The symbol "virgin" [parthenos] in 14:4 stands in contrast to "prostitute" [pornè], and is therefore equally religiously determined (cf. G. Dellings, "Parthenos," in TDNT 5:836). J. Massyngberde Ford offers this helpful comment on the 144,000 :

*In the light of the metaphorical meaning of virgin it would seem that Rev. 14:4 refers to faithful elders of Jerusalem or all the faithful who have not defiled themselves with idolatry, the lust (Gr. thumos) of Babylon's harlotry, as in vs. 8. Not being defiled with women may look back to the female monster in ch. 13, but much more probably it looks forward to the harlot in Rev. 17, 18 (Rev., pp. 242-3).*

There is no justification for literalizing an isolated apocalyptic symbol and to characterize the 144,000 as celibates. The apostle Paul already had used the term "virgin" [parthenos]

symbolically for the apostolic church which belonged to "one husband, to Christ": "so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Cor. 11:2). For Paul the church functioned as the exclusive bride of the risen Lord (see Eph. 5:31, 32; also Rev. 19:7).

The Apocalypse shows the 144,000 as emerging from their final conflict with the antichrist, in which they proved their supreme loyalty to Christ. They recognize Christ only, as sheep follow their trusted shepherd (John 10:4; Rev. 7:17). They do not follow the beast-power. In their final wrestling with God they receive a deeper experience of intimacy with Christ which they express in a "new song" before the throne of God. This song "no one could learn except the 144,000 who had been redeemed [lit. "purchased"] from the earth" (Rev. 14:3). The "new song" in Rev. 14 reminds us of the "new song" which the 24 elders sang before God, in Rev. 5:9, 10. It praised the Lamb for His sacrificial death by which He "purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation". This praise of Christ as the redeeming Lamb of God will undoubtedly be the theme of the song of the 144,000 after they have experienced a deliverance greater than Israel experienced under Moses (see Exod. 15). We may identify their new song then with "the song of Moses and of the Lamb" in Rev. 15 which celebrates their victory over the beast, his image, and over the number of his name:

*They sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:  
Great and Marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways King of the age.  
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,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed (Rev. 15:3-4).*

John further described the 144,000 in another symbolic way: "They were purchased from among men [and offered as] firstfruits [aparche] to God and the Lamb" (14:4). Israel's agricultural law required that the firstfruits of the harvest be dedicated to the Lord in His temple (Lev. 23:9-14; Exod. 23:19). These firstfruits were by definition also the first in quality, "the finest" of the harvest (Num. 18:12, 13; Ezek. 44:30). Jeremiah had called Israel a devoted "bride" of the Lord, "the firstfruits of his harvest" (Jer. 2:3). Thus God considered faithful Israel as the firstfruits of His harvest of the world. In a similar way we may see the 144,000 spiritual Israelites counted as the firstfruits of the harvest of humanity at the end of the age. The quality of their devotion or holiness is manifested in their unwavering following of Christ during the final test of faith (see Rev. 14:4,5). They stand "with" Jesus (Rev. 14:1; 17:14). Paul had called Christ "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20,23), indicating Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of the believers' resurrection.

As the last companions of the Lamb in the church age, the 144,000 spiritual Israelites are sealed for eternity (Rev. 7:1-4). They are the end-time Enochs because they also "walk with God" and will be "taken" away without experiencing death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). They are the end-time Elijahs because they stand courageously against the powerful end-time Baals and will be "taken" by chariots of salvation and translated into glory (2 Kings 2:10, 11; Rev. 19:14). This implies that the 144,000 through their sealing as the end-time firstfruits, are "purchased from the earth" as the beginning of the world harvest described in Rev. 14:14-16 (see also B.S. Neall, in Symp. on Rev., I, Ch. 12).

The order of events in Revelation 13-14 corresponds to Matthew 24: first the desolating

abomination in Jerusalem, then the distress of the saints, followed by their rescue through Christ and His angels. The pertinent question now rises, What produces these 144,000 true Israelites? How do they come on the stage of the end-time? The first answer comes in the vision of Rev. 10 , where John saw "another mighty angel coming down from heaven," commissioned to deliver a special end-time message to the world during the period of the sixth trumpet (see above, on Rev. 10). It is this end-time message of Rev. 10 that is further unpacked in the Three Angels' Messages of Rev. 14:6-12.

# Chapter XXV

## The First Angel's Message

### Revelation XIV:6-7

The placement of the final warning message of Revelation 14:6-12 is meaningful. It stands between the threats of the antichrist in chapter 13 and the judgment scene of 14:14-20. The threefold message conveys God's ultimatum to a world united in rebellion against Him.

*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:6, 7).*

The expression "another angel" (v. 6) connects this messenger with the previous angel in the Apocalypse, "the mighty angel" of chapter 10. The threefold message of Rev. 14 apparently functions as the expansion of the mission of the "mighty angel" during the sixth trumpet (Rev. 10:5-7). In both chapters 10 and 14 the end-time warning from heaven is intended for the entire earth. The angel's "flying in mid-air" (the zenith of the sky) in Rev. 14 symbolizes the worldwide reach of its message, just as the mighty angel had planted its feet on both the sea and on the land. This universal scope is emphasized by the emphasis: "he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live [lit. "sit"] on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people" (14:6). This proclamation of the "eternal gospel" of God is the true awakening message for the end. It develops Christ's earlier promise:

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14).*

The adjective "eternal" [Gr. *aionios*] applied to "gospel" in Rev. 14:6 carries special meaning. It affirms that the end-time gospel is the unchanged gospel of the apostles of Jesus. The end-time gospel is not a different gospel, but the gospel as set forth by Paul in his letters to the Romans and to other churches. The delicate structure of the gospel of God's sovereign grace (see Eph. 2:4-10) can never be altered, not even by an angel or an apostle. Such an innovation would fall under the curse of God (see Gal. 1:6-9).

The "everlasting gospel" becomes increasingly relevant when viewed in its setting of Rev. 13, where the antichrist demands allegiance to his counterfeit or "different gospel" (compare 2 Cor. 11:4). Referring to the Decrees of the Council of Trent, Bishop Chr. Wordsworth commented:

*Yet in spite of that Apostolic anathema twice repeated [in Gal. 1:6-9], the adherents of the Beast have pronounced their anathema on all who do not receive the new*

*doctrines which they have added to the Gospel of God (The NT in the Orig. Greek, p. 238).*

Some modern commentators have taken the position that the phrase "eternal gospel" of Rev. 14:6 does not mean the apostolic gospel but rather the news that the final judgment is imminent (14:7). Others have pointed out that judgment has been an essential part of the gospel from its inception (see Matt. 7:22, 23; 16:27; 25:41; Rom. 2:15, 16). The coming of God's righteous judgment always meant the good news of rescue and vindication to His covenant people (see Ps. 96), and a day of reckoning for their persecutors (Jer. 50 and 51).

Jesus predicted that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached as a (legal) testimony to all who dwell on the earth until the end (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10). We may therefore accept Rev. 10 and 14:6-12 as the end-time application of Jesus' prediction in Matthew 24.

As Jesus had done in Matt. 24, the Apocalypse makes the worldwide proclamation of the gospel the pre-eminent sign of the times. G.C. Berkouwer has pointed out a popular error:

*Too often, reflection on the signs has been cut loose from the Kingdom, their concentration-point. The results are always disconcerting . . . But the primary concern is the universal spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 13:10) . . . Usually those who have catalogued the signs of the times have included this, but frequently it has been seen as just another element in the 'narrative account' . . . In the last days the preaching of the gospel is the focal point of all the signs. In it all the signs can and must be understood (The Return of Christ, pp. 250, 251).*

The central importance of the everlasting gospel must be honored. It is no exaggeration to conclude that a new grasp of the apostolic gospel in its end-time setting of Rev. 10 and 14, creates a new remnant people! They are commissioned as messengers to preach the gospel in its apocalyptic setting of Rev. 13-14. Because of this final appeal to humanity prior to the judgment, the whole world will ripen for that judgment. This does not imply that the approaching enddate can be calculated. The revival of the unadulterated gospel is central to the determined plan of God (Mark 13:10). It is a "part of God's end-time acting" (D. Bosch, *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu*, p. 167). To proclaim the threefold message of Rev. 14 is the church's final mission! The fulfilling of this mission is the greatest sign of all that the end-time has begun!

Scripture does not make the second coming of Christ conditional on the success of the gospel preaching, but on the actuality of the worldwide preaching. The threefold message of Rev. 14 intensifies Jesus' earlier appeal: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 4:17).

## **The Content of the Eternal Gospel**

Jesus Himself went about "proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1, literal tr.), which indicated the arrival of the promised Messiah. It included His birth (Luke 2:10,11; "good news and great joy"), His life (Matt. 11:5), His atoning death (Mark 10:45; Eph. 2:14-17; Acts 10:36), His resurrection and enthronement in heaven (Acts 2:30-33). "His appearance, not just His preaching, His whole work is indicated by 'preaching the good news' [evangelizesthai]" (G. Friedrich, in Kittel's TWNT 2:716, German ed.). The apostolic gospel centered therefore in the good news that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah

of prophecy (Acts 5:42; 8:35; 17:3,18). Consequently, the gospel includes also the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (see 1 Pet. 1:10, 11; Rom. 1:2; 16:25, 26).

As the King of Israel, Christ personifies the Kingdom of God. To preach the gospel of Christ means an effective proclamation in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit (see Heb. 2:4). Such preaching conveys salvation and creates peace and joy (Acts 8:8, 30). Paul received the gospel through a direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). He explained the content of the gospel systematically in Romans 1-8. It centers in the truth that Jesus is the Christ (Rom. 1:1-4) and that salvation is ours through justification by grace, through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:28; 4:25; 5:1; 8:1, 33-34).

Paul summarized his understanding of the gospel in 1 Cor. 15:3-5, where he mentions the atoning death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the risen Christ. In short, the essence of Paul's gospel can be summed up in the confession: Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the risen Lord (see Rom. 10:9, 10). As part of the gospel Paul also reckoned the Day of Judgment (see Rom. 2:16; Acts 17:30,31). This is his broader view of the gospel. Proclamation of judgment and the good news are bound inextricably together, like repentance and rebirth (Mark 1:15; Isa. 57:15). God's judgment is essentially good news for the believer, because Christ is both Judge and Savior (John 5:22). Gerhard Friedrich recognized that gospel and judgment are indissolubly connected:

*Because the gospel is God's appeal to man . . . , it calls for his decision and requests obedience (Rom. 10:16; 2 Cor. 9:13). Man's present position to the gospel is decisive for him in the last judgment (2 Thess. 1:8; cf. 1 Pet. 4:17) (TWNT 2:729).*

The gospel proclamation offers the joy of present salvation to those that accept it by faith (Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:2; Rom. 1:16; 8:15-17). In his enlightening article "Justification and Judgment," Ivan T. Blazen states:

*In terms of the actual data of Scripture, it is a fiction to believe that justification does not relate us to the rule of Christ as Lord or that the judgment does not relate us to the work of Christ as Saviour . . . .When the end comes, the judgment assesses and testifies to the reality of justification evidenced by the faithful witness of God's people. In this flow, justification and the judgment do not stand in the relation of tension or contradiction, but in that of inauguration and consummation (in 70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy, pp. 343, 344).*

## **The First Angel's Message**

*He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and springs of water (Rev. 14:7).*

This heavenly messenger speaks with a "loud voice," which suggests that all earth-dwellers must hear his message. The words in which the message is expressed are borrowed from the Old Testament and repeat God's covenant claim on Israel to worship Him alone as Creator of heaven and earth. In fact, a specific echo of the Fourth Commandment of Israel's covenant law can be heard in the motivation to worship God as the Creator:

Revelation 14:7	Exodus 20:11
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Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and springs of water.	For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
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The answer to the question "How should people worship God as Creator?" is implied in the continuity of God's covenant between Israel and the Church: by honoring the seventh-day Sabbath as the "blessed" memorial of the creative and redemptive work of the covenant God of Israel (see Exod. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15).

Celebration of the Sabbath of the Creator-Redeemer identifies the one true God. The Sabbath was not made for the Hebrew race alone, but for mankind from the beginning till the end of time. Correcting a Pharisaic legalistic misconception, Christ declared: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28). The universal importance of the Sabbath was expressed by the gospel prophet Isaiah:

*And the foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:6, 7).*

Isaiah foresaw how God would invite all Gentiles to worship in His temple on Mount Zion on the Sabbath days. Isaiah extended this perspective to the new earth and the new heavens:

*As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD (Isa. 66:22, 23).*

The Apocalypse contrasts heaven's call to revive true worship, with the worship of the beast imposed by the false prophet (Rev. 13:12, 15). The call for true worship in Rev. 14 becomes a test of loyalty to the Maker of heaven and earth: "Fear God and give him glory . . ." (Rev. 14:7). This exhortation is borrowed from Moses' appeal to Israel just before they entered the promised land: "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only . . . Do not follow other gods . . . Be sure to keep the commandments of the LORD your God" (Deut. 6:13, 14, 17; see also 10:12, 20; 13:4).

Many among all nations will respond to this final call by God's instruments, as we hear in the song of Moses and of the Lamb:

*Who will not fear you, O LORD, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you for your righteous acts have been revealed (Rev. 15:4).*

During the religious crisis in the days of Ahab and Elijah, the true followers of Yahweh described themselves as "fearing Yahweh" (1 Kings 18:3, 12; 2 Kings 4:1 NKJV), in contrast with those that followed Baals.

This Old Testament taproot of a future showdown shows that the "fear of God" implies the obedience to the will of God. Through the Old Testament there are indications that the "fear of God" is inseparably united with willing obedience to God's commandments (see

Gen. 22:1, 12; Exod. 20:20; Deut. 6:13-17; 10:12; Pss. 112:1; 119:63; 128:1). This connection is expressed in the book Ecclesiastes:

*Now all has been heard; there is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (12:13).*

Man's religion is placed under the judgment of God (12:14). Modern Old Testament scholars admit that they have advanced to a different understanding of law or "Torah," and no longer consider true devotion to the Torah as a merit-seeking legalism (doc. in Theol. Dict. of the O.T. [TDOT] 6:314). It has become clear that the book of Deuteronomy was Israel's grateful response to the Exodus deliverance. The priority of God's redeeming grace was written in the preamble of the Decalogue: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exod. 20:1). Redemptive grace is the essential core of the Torah. The Decalogue is embedded within the grace of God and is a gift of God. The apostolic gospel also knows that the fear of the Lord is the evidence of gratitude for such a great salvation (see Acts 9:31; Phil. 2:12).

The first angel's message seeks to restore the essence of true worship as it was experienced by the prophets and apostles. One can hear the ring of Elijah's appeal to return with heart and soul to God: "If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21)! Elijah's call to worship the Creator-Redeemer is the burden of Revelation 14. Josephine M. Ford has captured this continuity of true religion:

*The herald angel in 14:6-7 announces the reaffirmation of the decalogue and the worship of one God, in opposition to the worship of the image (13:15) which violated the commandments. The reference to God as creator is understandable in the light of the reference to heaven, earth, and the water under the earth in Exod. 20:4. Further the reference to the hour of judgment (vs.7) bears affinity to Exod. 20:5, God's declaration of jealousy and vengeance on those who hate Him (Rev., p. 248).*

## **The Creator Also the Judge of All Men**

The first angel adds as a special motivation to his appeal to worship God: he announces that the hour of God's judgment has come (14:7). The association of worship and judgment is not new. The Old Testament often taught that the Creator is the Judge. Significant is Abraham's confession of faith: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The Decalogue contains the connection between God as Creator and Judge (Exod. 20:4-6,11). The Exodus deliverance is explained as God's judgment on Egypt and Babylon (Exod. 7:4; 15:8-12; Deut. 4:32,33; Isa. 11:10-16). God's judgment is manifested as the redemption of His covenant people through divine forgiveness (Isa. 43:25; 51:9-16; Mic. 7:18; Ps. 89:9-14; 103; 136). God's judgments in history show two motivations: punitive and redemptive (Exod. 6:5, 6; Isa. 33:22). Israel's worship songs express the thought that God is the Judge because He is the Creator of all things:

*For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens . . .  
Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity . . .*

*he comes to judge the earth.  
 He will judge the world in righteousness  
 and the people in his truth (Ps. 96:5, 10, 13).  
 Does he who implanted the ear not hear?  
 Does he who formed the eye not see?  
 Does he who disciplines nations not punish? (Ps. 94:9, 10).*

This truth of Israel's religion--that the Creator is the Judge of all men--also applied to the covenant people themselves. They were facing their own day of reckoning during the annual Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month, which was announced by the Feast of Trumpets ten days earlier (Lev. 23:23-32). While the high priest cleansed the sanctuary from the guilt of Israel (Lev. 16), it was a life and death issue for each Israelite. "On that Day it is proclaimed that Yahweh and sin have nothing in common. Sin is then transferred to its source, i.e., Azazel" (A.M. Rodriguez, Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus, p. 307). It is interesting that the Mishnah considers the Feast of Trumpets as a time of judgment:

*On New Year's Day all that come into the world pass before him like legions of soldiers (or flocks of sheep), for it is written, He that fashioned the hearts of them all, that considereth all their works (Ps. 33:15) (The Mishnah. H. Danby, p. 188).*

The Jewish Encyclopedia reports the development of an investigative judgment in heaven:

*The fate of the thoroughly wicked and the thoroughly pious is determined on the spot [on New-Year's Day]; the destiny of the intermediate class is suspended until the Day of Atonement, when the fate of every man is sealed (R.H.16a) (Is. Singer, ed., 1911, Vol. II, p.286).*

Meaningful is the Rabbinic statement: "On the Day of Atonement I will create you a new creation" (quoted in S. Schechter, Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, p.304). Because Israel's Day of Atonement connected the Creator with His work of judgment, Jacques Doukhan regards the Day of Atonement as a "specific background against which the message of Revelation 14 is outlined" (Daniel: The Vision of the End, p.64).

This perspective is fascinating and opens up a level of deeper understanding of God's call to worship Him "with fear and trembling" in the end-time. To give glory to Him as the Creator (Rev. 14:6,7) is a fitting reminder of Israel's worship on their Day of Atonement. This may remind the Church of the truth that salvation is not based on race or church membership, but on being "in Christ", by personal faith (Rom. 5:1; 8:1). Unrepentant sinners in Israel or Christianity are not recognized by the covenant God (Amos 5:18-24; Ezek. 9; Matt. 7:21-23). The evangelical New Testament scholar Leon Morris pointed out:

*It is worth noting that the people who will be surprised on that day are not the rank outsiders, but those who think themselves safe in the church (The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment, p.64).*

### **"Because the hour of his judgment has come" (Rev. 14:7).**

The announcement of the first angel that "the hour" of God's judgment has come, serves as heaven's response to the persecution by the beast. In God's plan the time has come for the day of reckoning. This judgment can be understood in two complementary ways.

The phrase "the hour of his judgment has come" can be applied to God's executive judgment, as described in 14:14-20. The perfect tense "has come" functions then as a "prophetic perfect" (a past tense to describe a future event, frequently used by Israel's prophets), in order to emphasize the absolute certainty of its fulfillment (see e.g. Jude 14 RSV, NASB).

John had also used the prophetic perfect ("men worshiped the dragon") twice in Rev. 13:4 (W. Shea, in Symp. on Rev., I:358). In this view, the first angel announces the coming judgment at the second coming of Christ portrayed in the subsequent vision (14:14-20). This view interprets "the hour of God's judgment" as the execution of judgment at the second coming. Ellen White acknowledged this application when she connected the "harvest of the earth" with the first angel's message: "The first of these warnings [in Rev. 14:6,7] announces the approaching judgment" (GC 311).

The second view looks first at the connection with Daniel 7. Joyce G. Baldwin reminds us: "The setting of Daniel 7 is judgment" (Daniel, p. 149). Daniel had watched the court session in the heavenly throneroom (7:9,10) after the "little horn" had completed its persecution of the saints (7:25, 26). Only when this heavenly judgment was concluded, would "One like a son of man" come "with the clouds" to receive the dominion over this world (Dan. 7:13, 14). Even the phrase "One like a son of man" in Rev. 14:14 is adopted directly from Dan. 7:13 and not from the Gospels. This indicates that John specifically had Dan. 7 in mind when he wrote the judgment visions of Rev. 14.

A close comparison indicates that the angel's proclamation, "the hour of God's judgment has come", parallels Daniel's vision of the judgment scene in heaven, when "the court was seated and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:9, 10). Both judgment visions form the preliminary scene before the Son of Man comes. We concur therefore with Doukhan's observation:

*The vision of Dan. 7 and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 are then situated at the same level in the prophetic line. The judgment in heaven predicted in Daniel 7 and the shout of the three messengers of Revelation 14 coincide. (Daniel: Vision of the End, p. 60).*

Daniel's shifting focus in 7:8-14 (from earth to heaven, back to earth, back to heaven) indicates that the judgment session in heaven "commences while the little horn is still active and thus precedes the end" (A. Ferch, The Son of Man in Daniel Seven, p. 152). In short, Daniel predicts a so-called pre-Advent judgment in a heavenly court of justice where thrones are set and books are opened. The purpose of this celestial tribunal is also clear from the Danielic context. The verdicts are rendered "not only with regard to the persecuting force but also concerning the saints" (Ferch, lb. p. 177). The saints maligned and condemned by the nefarious horn, enter the judgment for vindication: "The Ancient of Days ... pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22). How reassuring to the suffering saints is the prospect of this vindicating judgment!

When the end-time message of Rev. 14:6-12 was activated in church history, the final epoch of time began: "the hour of His judgment has come [Greek: elthen]." If the judgment is taken to refer to the celestial tribunal of Dan. 7:9, 10, then the past tense, "has come," fits well in its literal sense. It would announce that God has begun the final phase of salvation history, that He has begun the court session in heaven. The literal meaning of the phrase "the hour of his judgment has come" in Rev. 14:7 announces the initiation of God's pre-advent judgment in the heavenly throneroom.

This new event in heaven must be proclaimed on earth! This finds an analogy with the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. From that day the apostles announced with boldness that Jesus of Nazareth was enthroned as King and Priest in the heavenly courts (Acts 2:33, 36). As the convincing evidence of this heavenly enthronement of Christ, they pointed to the undeniable outpouring of the Spirit of God on the Christ-believing Israelites (Acts 2:33, "what you now see and hear"). This dramatic manifestation on earth was the evidence of Christ's work in heaven. It initiated the apostolic mission with supernatural power. This pattern of heavenly cause and earthly effect at the beginning of the church age, is to be repeated on a worldwide scale in the end-time (Rev. 10; 14; 18:1-8).

The visions of Revelation 12-14 regularly shift their focus between heaven and earth, as is the case in Daniel 7. Doukhan observed four steps or alternate movements between heaven and earth in Rev. 12-14 (Ib., pp. 57-59). This means that earth's history is associated with corresponding movements in heaven. The threefold message of Rev. 14 coincides with the heavenly court session of Dan. 7, which concludes with the coming of "one like a son of man" "with the clouds" to receive everlasting dominion over the earth (Dan. 7:13,14). At the completion of the mission of the three angels there appears the Danielic "one like a son of man," seated "on a white cloud," to harvest the earth and execute the verdicts of God's judgment (Rev. 14:14-20).

This striking parallelism between Dan. 7 and Rev. 14 has not been taken seriously by many modern apocalyptic studies. Yet, this correlation is the key to the discovery of the end-time message and mandate. The first angel's announcement that "the hour" of God's judgment "has come" must be related to the court session of Dan. 7. This is the critical point for understanding the urgency of the threefold message.

The final proclamation of the everlasting gospel is irrevocably connected with the beginning of God's pre-advent judgment as portrayed in Daniel 7. This is bad news only for the persecutors of the saints. However, as W.G. Johnsson explains, "for the believer, the knowledge that we are in the time of the judgment signals hope and the prospect of our everlasting home. Revelation 14:6,7 is good news to us--it shows God acting as moral arbiter of the universe" (in Symp. on Rev., II:38).

Present truth is no longer just the prospect of the coming day of judgment, as Paul preached it (see acts 24:25; 17:31). The first angel announces that the "hour" of heavenly assessment precedes the "hour" of the harvest of the world (14:15). Both "hours" in Rev. 14:7 and 15 designate different and successive periods of time in God's judgment: first comes the preliminary judgment in heaven (Rev. 14:7; Dan. 7:9, 10), followed by the executive judgment at the coming of the Son of Man (Rev. 14:15; Dan. 7:13, 14). The translation of the living saints into glory and the resurrection of those who died in Christ thus follow the verdict of the preceding judgment. This sequential order is presented again by Daniel in his conclusion:

*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book --will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:1, 2).*

Daniel's perspective reaches beyond the judgment session as the day of reckoning, to the grand restoration of the Kingdom by means of the resurrection of the dead. Gerhard F. Hasel observed:

*Accordingly, the grand climax of the book of Daniel is not the judgment, as important as it is, for the redemptive purposes of God's people. Rather, everything leads up to the resurrection and the new age with the everlasting kingdom being in existence by itself. In God's plan the judgment before the coming of the new age is designed to bring salvation to those who are truly His (in Symposium on Daniel. F. Holbrook, ed. , pp. 460-1).*

Daniel 12:1-3 thus proceeds from describing the final judgment (the same record books in 12:1 and 7:9,10) to the ultimate vindication of the saints, their resurrection to everlasting life and joy in the kingdom of heaven.

### **New Testament Confirmation of a Pre-Advent Judgment**

The sequential order: evaluation and execution in God's judgment, is implied also in Jesus' promise of the resurrection of the dead:

*Those who have done good, to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:29 RSV).*

Jesus hereby indicated that people will be resurrected not in order to be judged but as the result of the verdict of God's judgment. The resurrection to life and the resurrection to condemnation are clearly two different resurrections, representing those that have been separated previously by God's evaluative judgment. Jesus pointed to this sequence when He explained that the participants of the resurrection from the dead had been "considered worthy" first (Luke 20:35). The resurrection to life or to death is the execution of God's earlier judicial consideration. When Christ returns in divine glory, He comes "to reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt. 16:27), "to execute judgment on all" (Jude 15 RSV, NASB, NKJV).

Paul's descriptions of events during the second coming of Christ in 1 Thess. 4:16, 17 and 2 Thess. 1:7-10 do not suggest any judicial process. Samuele Bacchiocchi has made this valid inference:

*The coming of Christ is followed immediately, not by a trial process but by Christ's executive act in resurrecting and transforming believers and in destroying unbelievers. Any process of evaluation and determination of each human destiny has already taken place. ("The Pre-Advent Judgment in the NT", Adventists Affirm, 8:2 [1994], p. 36).*

The rationale for a pre-advent judgment is found in the fact that the dead are judged "according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12). The dead do not need to be present in person to be judged in the court of heaven.

In the Adventist understanding the pre-advent or investigative judgment of Daniel 7:9-11, 13-14 is identified with the predicted "cleansing" or justification of the heavenly sanctuary during the time of the end (Daniel 8:14, 17, 19). This connection provides the timing for the pre-advent judgment, so that the last generation, which will be judged during their lifetimes, can be forewarned! For a further study of this particular aspect of Christ's concluding ministry in the heavenly temple, see Seventh-day Adventists Believe. Min. Assn. of the Gen. Conf. of S.D.A., Wash., DC: Rev. and Her. Pub. Assn., 1988, Ch. 23.

What is of vital importance for the church today is not an abstract acknowledgment of God's final judgment or of its timing in salvation history, but the conviction that a saving faith in Christ will be ratified by the last judgment. This gospel understanding of the final

judgment was expressed by Paul, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies" (Rom. 8:1, 33). Only those without Christ will be condemned. The thought of this divine judgment is the most solemn thought of the human mind. Fortunately, the angel of Rev. 14 centers our attention foremost on the everlasting gospel because this alone guarantees man's vindication in the heavenly court.

# Chapter XII

## The Second Angel's Message

### Revelation XIV : 8

*A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 14:8).*

This angel "followed" the first one, not in the sense of substituting him, but in the sense of accompanying the first angel (as in 14:4). This additional message mentions "Babylon" for the first time in Revelation. She is described as the great adulteress that has seduced all the nations with her intoxicating wine. The second angel's message cannot be understood properly if Rev. 14 is isolated from the subsequent context of chapters 16-18 where more information about Babylon is given. The other approach to understanding "Babylon" is to recover its Old Testament connections. The name "Babylon" is chosen intentionally to disclose the theological connection of type and antitype with Israel's archenemy during the old covenant. The historic fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, as predicted by Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, is ordained to be the prototype of the fall of end-time Babylon. This typological connection clarifies the understanding of end-time Babylon and its "fall". When the continuity of the theological essentials of both Babylons has been established, the Apocalypse provides the end-time application. Revelation 17 calls Babylon a "mystery" (v. 5), which suggests that end-time Babylon is the apocalyptic renewal of the ancient city, which sat on the "many waters" of the Euphrates (Jer. 51:13). A close comparison reveals the intentional correspondence:

END-TIME BABYLON: Revelation 17:1	HISTORIC BABYLON: Jeremiah 51:13
Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, <i>who sits on many waters</i> .	You <i>who live by many waters</i> and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off.

This essential correspondence of the two Babylons is described by the S.D.A. Bible Commentary:

*As the ancient city of Babylon was situated upon the literal waters of the Euphrates (see on Jer. 50:12, 38) and dwelt figuratively "upon many waters," or peoples (Jer. 51:12,13; cf. Isa. 8:7,8; 14:6; Jer. 50:23), so modern Babylon is represented as sitting upon, or oppressing, the peoples of earth (cf. on Rev. 16:12) (Vol.7, p. 850). [See also the "Additional Note" on Babylon, Vol.7, pp. 867-9].*

The phrase "Babylon the Great" (mentioned five times, 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,21) is a direct allusion to Nebuchadnezzar's self-glorification in Dan. 4:30 (see also Rev. 18:7). Phrases about the fall of Babylon and intoxicating wine in Rev. 14:8 are borrowed from Old Testament doom oracles against Babylon (Isa. 21:9; Jer. 51:7):



END-TIME BABYLON'S FALL	HISTORIC BABYLON'S FALL
"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 14:8).	"Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!" (Isa.21:9). "Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD'S hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad" (Jer. 51:7).

Just as ancient Babylon was the persecutor of Israel, so "Babylon" in Revelation is the persecutor of the Israel of God in the time of the end. Louis F. Were stressed the theological character of Babylon: "Babylon is mentioned in the prophecies of the Apocalypse only because of her opposition to Jerusalem" (The Fall of Babylon in Type and Antitype, p. 14). A. Farrar remarked similarly: "Babylon is the parody of Zion" (A Rebirth of Images, p. 213).

The contrast between "Israel" and "Babylon," portrayed as two women in Rev. 12 and 17, becomes even more striking when attention is paid to their detailed descriptions. While the woman of God in ch. 12 appears "in heaven," enlightened with the sun and stars, the unfaithful woman of ch. 17, adorned with the fabrications of man, "sits on many waters" and "on a scarlet beast" (17:1-3). While the woman of ch. 12 bears a child to whom she gives birth, the woman of ch. 17 holds a cup filled with the blood of the other woman's seed. The first woman is protected, the other destroyed.

Babylon cannot be identified as Imperial Rome. The great "prostitute" that sits "on a scarlet beast" (17:3) distinguishes Babylon (the woman) from the political power (the "beast"). From the start the essential characteristic of Babel (lit. "gate of the gods") has been to climb up to the heavens in order to usurp the place and the ruling power of God (see Gen. 11:4; Isa. 13:13-14; Jer. 51:53). Babylon's basic intention to represent God on earth "according to his own will" (Dan. 11:36 KJV), is a most fundamental evil. This demonic aspiration is emphasized in Daniel's forecast of the "little horn" (Dan. 7 and 8), and of the "king of the North" (Dan. 11:36-45). The pernicious aim to replace both God and His Messianic redemption is unmasked in the horn's war against the "Prince of princes," the true High Priest of God, and against His all-sufficient sacrifice (Dan. 8:11,25). Doukhan grasped this connection of Babylon with Daniel's book with keen perception:

*The ambition of Babel is identical to that of the little horn. It is of a religious nature and is aimed at the position of the High Priest in connection with Kippur and the Judgment. Thus it is the power to forgive sins and ultimately to decide about salvation (see Lev. 16:19, 32) that both are striving for (Daniel: The Vision of the End, p. 66).*

The second angel announces that God has now judged Babylon and her religious claims to represent God on earth. The sudden fall of Babylon is the judicial verdict of God. Its proclamation intends to warn the followers of the beast and the worshipers of its image to leave Babylon. This is repeated by the angel of Rev. 18:1-5. Babylon must be defined theologically by its opposition to Israel, the true people of God. This implies the assumption that the end-time Israel is created by the first angel's message (14:6, 7). The prophetic messages of Rev. 14 anticipate a renewed conflict between "Israel" and "Babylon" for the end-time, with the basic understanding that both the true and the false

worshippers of God are identified theologically by their relation to the everlasting gospel.

Israel's captivity by ancient Babylon, Babylon's sudden fall, followed by Israel's exodus from Babylon and her return to Zion to restore true worship in a new temple, all this will be repeated in principle on a global scale. God will call his scattered people out of Babylon in the time of the end:

*Come out of her [Babylon], my people, so that you will not receive any of her plagues, for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes (Rev. 18:4, 5).*

This call is God's initiative to re-establish His remnant church, the people mentioned in Rev. 12:17 and 14:12. The true worshipers must leave "Babylon," the unfaithful church, which uses "kings" or political powers to persecute the "witnesses of Jesus" (see Rev. 17:3-6; 18:24). The saints must flee from Babylon before the hour of her destruction comes, that is before the judgment of God strikes all that have the mark of the beast (Rev. 16:1,2). This "fleeing" from Babylon parallels Jesus' earlier counsel to His disciples to "flee" from the doomed city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15,16). Babylon is explicitly equated with idolatrous worship at the end of the church age (see 16:1,2,19; 18:4,8). Babylon's destruction is described as a retributive judgment, because of her crime of prosecuting and executing the saints of God:

*Rejoice over her, O heaven!*

*Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!*

*God has judged her for the way she treated you (Rev. 18:20).*

*Hallelujah!*

*Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,  
for true and just are his judgments.*

*He has condemned the great prostitute  
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.*

*He has avenged on her the blood of his servants (Rev. 19:1, 2).*

The prophetic announcement of the second angel, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!" (14:8) is borrowed from Isaiah's prophecy against ancient Babylon:

*"Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: 'Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'" (Isa. 21:9).*

Babylon's fall was God's judgment on her usurpation of divine rule and cruel persecution of the covenant people (see Isa. 14:12-15; 13:11, 19; 14:3). Isaiah's doom prophecies were enlarged by the prophet Jeremiah, which set forth God's legal charges against Babylon (Jer. 50-51).

Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted the fall of Babylon as a prophetic truth. Their announcement of God's verdict, however, became a present truth for Israel in captivity. Likewise, Daniel explained the handwriting on the wall of Babylon's palace: "Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting" (Dan. 5:27). This judicial verdict

was a present reality for Daniel and Babylon! The prophet experienced the demise of Babylon which he had announced (Dan. 5:30).

God's verdict in heaven had been the effective cause of the subsequent fall of Babylon. Jeremiah had mentioned that God's condemnation of Babylon was motivated by His covenant faithfulness to Israel, even when His people were also guilty:

*For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the LORD Almighty, though their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel...*

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: "The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well. All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go. Yet their Redeemer is strong; the LORD Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon (Jer. 51:5; 50:33-34).*

God's verdict on ancient Babylon, an act of His covenant faithfulness, finds a parallel in the end-time message of Revelation 14:8. John adds to the declaration that "Babylon has fallen" a prophetic call to flee from Babylon in order to escape the doom of Babylon (see Rev. 18:4,5). The interim period between the proclamation and the destruction of end-time Babylon is the time for Israel to escape from Babylon. Thus Israel's ancient history provides the source and background for the understanding of the end-time messages of Revelation.

The coded message, which announces that Babylon the Great has fallen, will only be activated after the apostolic gospel has been revived in the time of the end (14:6). The interaction between the first and the second angels of Rev. 14 extends gradually to all nations. These angels draw the battleline between Israel and Babylon. Babylon is identified by her opposition to the first angel's message, that is, opposition to both the everlasting gospel and the sacred law of the Creator.

Babylon's fall can be understood on two levels. First as the judicial verdict in heaven and second as her doom in history. End-time Babylon falls morally when she rejects the everlasting gospel. This act will make her a "home for the demons" (Rev. 18:2). At that point her sins will "pile up to heaven" and reach the limit of divine grace (Rev. 18:5; Jer. 51:9). The heavenly tribunal will then decide the punishment of Babylon (see Dan. 7:9-12).

While the second angel calls attention to the verdict, pronounced in heaven concerning Babylon's guilt, the time of probation still lingers. The "wine" of Babylon, by which all the nations of the earth have been intoxicated, apparently refers to Babylon's doctrinal teachings, by which she has corrupted the everlasting gospel and the commandments of God (see Rev. 14:12).

It is helpful to consider through what immediate cause Babylon of old fell. King Belshazzar had ordered the use of sacred golden goblets of Israel's temple for his imperial banquet (Dan. 5:2, 3, 23). In this act of profanation the Babylonian rulers "praised the gods of gold and silver" and of wood and stone (Dan. 5:4). This idolatrous act of defiance of Israel's God marked the end of probation for Babylon and brought the verdict of her doom (Dan. 5:24). The Apocalypse shows that end-time Babylon holds a golden cup in her hand "filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries" (Rev. 17:4).

And because she will finally make "all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" she will fall from the protecting grace of God (Rev. 14:8). When people drink this "wine," the fundamental distinction between the Creator and creation, between the

holy and the profane, becomes blurred in the people's minds. The worshipers of the beast will honor the creature more than the Creator. This is the essence of idolatry (see Rom. 1:25; 1 Thess. 1:9). In their confusion about the distinctions set by the Creator, men are led to rely on human traditions and political power to secure peace.

The retributive judgment of the seven last plagues is still a future judgment for Babylon. The warning of the second angel (Rev. 14:8; 18:1-5) has its final relevance for the generation alive when Babylon's plagues descend (see 18:4, 5). The three angels thus have an explicit end-time setting.

# Chapter XXVII

## The Third Angel's Message

### Revelation XIV: 9-12

*A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev. 14: 9-12).*

This solemn warning is directed to each believer. It summons each to stand firm against the death-threats of the antichrist. This warning develops the second angel's announcement that all nations were compelled to "drink the wine" of Babylon (14:8 NKJV): "If anyone drinks the wine of the wrath of Babylon, he will have to drink also the wine of God's wrath!" The symbolic "cup" of God's wrath (14:10; 16:19) was a traditional image in Israel's judgment prophecies. The "cup of wine" in God's hand served as the symbol of His punitive righteousness.

Even a covenant-breaking Israel had to drink the wine of His wrath (Jer. 25:15,16,27; 49:12; Ezek. 23:31-34; Isa. 51:17,22; Pss. 60:3; 75:8). But Israel experienced the cup of wrath only temporarily (see Ps. 60:3; Isa. 51:22). Some enemies of Israel had to drink the cup of wrath, however, until their extinction: "They will drink and drink and be as if they had never been" (Obad 16); "Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more . . ." (Jer. 25:27; also v. 33).

Jesus' acceptance of the cup of divine wrath from God's hand in Gethsemane belongs to the core of the gospel (Matt. 20:22; 26:39, 42). E.W. Fudge states, "Because He accepted that cup, His people will not have to. The cup He leaves for us [the communion cup] is a constant reminder that He has taken our place (Matt. 26:27-29)" (The Fire That Consumes, p. 296).

The worshipers of the beast have to drink God's wrath in "full strength" [Gr. *akratou*, "undiluted"; RSV: "unmixed"]. This cup of wrath is no longer mixed with mercy. It is poured out as the seven last plagues (Rev. 15:1). This means that all the plagues of Revelation 16 constitute an integral part of the third angel's message. One Hebrew expression in these verses has challenged interpreters:

*He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who*

*receives the mark of the beast (Rev. 14:10, 11).*

The phrase "burning sulfur" [lit. "fire and sulfur"] is part of the covenant curse of extinction or annihilation (Deut. 29:23; Ps. 11:6). This judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah resulted in a "dense smoke rising from the land" (Gen. 19:23, 28). It also was God's judgment on Edom, one of Israel's archenemies (Isa. 30:27-33; Ezek. 38:22):

*Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate no one will ever pass through it again (Isa. 34:9, 10).*

It is apparent that the third angel in Rev. 14 borrows his curse formula specifically from Isaiah 34. Edom's historic desolation and extinction is the model or type of Babylon's fate (see Jude 6,7). The nature of this punishment lies not in an eternal torture, as can be seen at Edom today, but in the eternal consequence of the fire: "the smoke rises forever" (see Isaiah 34:10 and 66:24). The fire is unquenchable until it has completed its work. In the words of E.W. Fudge: "The wicked die a tormented death; the smoke reminds all onlookers that the Sovereign God has the last word. That the smoke lingers forever in the air means that the judgment's message will never become out of date" (Ib., p. 298).

The curse that the beast-worshippers will have "no rest day or night" is borrowed from a particular covenant curse on a rebellious Israel: "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest'" (Ps. 95:11). While the original meaning referred to Israel's rest in the promised land, the New Testament applies the promised rest of God to the rest of grace, into which each believer must enter now (Heb. 4:3). This divine rest has been available since God rested on the seventh day of the creation week (Gen. 2:2, 3)! "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9, 10). The ultimate punishment will be God's refusal to give His rest to the worshipers of the beast. On the other hand, a heavenly voice announces that those that have died "in the Lord from now on, will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev. 14:13). This beatitude refers to those who die in Christ during the end-time persecutions of the antichrist. Their perseverance will be rewarded. The third angel delivers God's response to the threat by the beast, as the following comparison shows:

Revelation 13:16	Revelation 14:9, 11
He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a <i>mark</i> on his right hand or on his forehead.	"If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his <i>mark</i> on the forehead or on the hand,...There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the <i>mark</i> of his name."

These verbal and thematic correspondences between Rev. 13 and 14 indicate that the threefold message of Rev. 14 is dependent on the proper understanding of Rev. 13. The full information about the beast is unfolded, however, in the judgment vision of Revelation 17. This means that Rev. 17 equally constitutes an essential interpretative part of the warning message of Rev. 14.

## The Mark of the Beast

Our present concern is to understand the theological significance of "the mark of the beast". It is the identifying mark of the cultic worship of the beast. "The mark cannot be had without the act of worship" (R.H. Charles, *The Rev. of St. John*, I:360). The ambition of the antichrist-beast to receive divine worship is the mentality of Babylon. Its self-deification conflicts with Israel's call to worship the Creator and Judge of all men (Rev. 14:7). The third angels' message is heaven's appeal to humanity to return to the Creator, the Covenant God of Israel, as revealed in the Scriptures.

The fundamental issue is not to identify the mark in isolation, but to see the mark as an act of worshiping the beast and thus as an attitude of idolatry. The third angel "indicates the nature of the usurpation; the beast takes to itself the prerogatives of the God-Creator, and it is worshiped" (Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End*, p. 69).

This usurpation of divine prerogatives by the beast is followed by its demand for recognition by means of "a mark on the forehead or on the hand" (14:9). Its meaning becomes clear when considered in the light of Israel's duty to tie God's commandments "as symbols on your hands and to bind them on your foreheads" (Deut. 6:8; cf. 11:18). Its spiritual meaning for Israel was obvious: to act and think in harmony with the will of God and to remember daily their exodus redemption (see Deut. 6:5; Exod. 13:8, 9).

Gerhard von Rad comments on Deut. 6:8: "Probably we still have to do here with a figurative mode of expression, which was then later understood literally and led to the use of the so-called phylacteries" (Deuteronomy, p. 64). In fact, Moses himself explained the moral purpose of the binding of God's commandments to their hands and foreheads:

*Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oath in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will turn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. . . Be sure to keep the commandments of the LORD your God (Deut. 6:13-15, 17).*

The commandment of the Lord included also the ritual observance of Passover and the eating of unleavened bread, to commemorate their exodus deliverance:

*This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year (Exod. 13:9, 10).*

This background of Israel's worship clarifies the purpose of the mark of the beast "on their foreheads or their hands" (Rev. 20:4, Greek has "and" instead of "or"; see NASB). The mark suggests the intentional antithesis to Israel's worship. It represents the essence of counterfeit worship as usurpation and substitution. The beast threatens to take away life if there is disobedience to its totalitarian commands (Rev. 13:15-17). It promises life--but only temporary life--to all that wear its mark. R.H. Charles commented: "Both [the seal and the mark] were intended to show that the wearers of the marks are under supernatural protection--the former under the protection of God, the latter of Satan" (Ib., I:363). B.S. Neall explains this more:

In the Apocalypse, the seal of God protects from the wrath of God (Rev. 15:2-3; 16:2) but not from the wrath of the beast (13:15, 17). Similarly, the mark of the beast protects from the economic sanctions (v.17) and death decree (v.15) of the beast, though it makes its owners eligible for the wrath of God (14:9-11) (The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse, p. 151).

Both Christ and the antichrist desire the undivided allegiance of their worshipers, the complete devotion of their thinking (the "forehead") and their acting (the "hand"). The antichrist may be satisfied with the mark on either the hand or the forehead, as Rev. 13:16 and 14:9 suggests (see, however, Rev. 20:4 NASB).

A basic difference between the rival systems of worship is that the beast uses coercion, while the Lamb uses persuasion. The ultimate test of true worship is not to believe because of miracles, which can be deceptive (Rev. 13:14; 19:20; Matt. 24:24), but to believe in the "Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4).

The truth of both Testaments is the revelation that Israel's God is the Almighty Creator and that He ordained the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of His creative work (Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:12-17). This creation ordinance was enriched as the sign of Israel's redemption from bondage (see Deut. 5:12-15). Celebration of the Sabbath identifies the living Creator Who remains faithful to His creation (see 1 Pet. 4:19). It equally offers participation in His redemptive grace (see Ezek. 20:12, 20). This truth becomes especially relevant in the time of the end, when the evolution dogma has become the hypothesis of science (since 1859). Thus the threefold message of Rev. 14 takes on increasing relevance. It calls for a restored Sabbath celebration, as "the concrete expression of faith in Creation, the sign of one's dependence on heaven . . . that salvation is only from above" (Doukhan, *Ib.*, p. 71).

### **Emergence of the Remnant People of God (Rev. 14:12)**

*In the conflict between the rival worships, God preserves those that cling to Him with loyalty. The third angel concludes with a special appeal to persevere in the faith:*

*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev. 14:12 NIV).*

The more literal translation is:

*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12 NJKV).*

This text led J.M. Ford to comment:

*There seems to be no middle way; either one adores the beast and is doomed or one accepts with patient endurance the persecution of the beast, obeys the commandments of God, dies in Him, and receives reward for one's good works (vs 13). (Revelation, p. 249).*

Some dispensational authors take the saints of Rev. 14:12 as Jewish believers whose "part is not in the body of Christ" (Ironsides), simply because they "keep the commandments of God." But this shows how a preconceived dogma influences exegesis. A comparison of 14:12 with 12:17 and 1:9 proves that the characteristics of the saints in 14:12 are those of the apostolic church and of John himself. John's First Letter defined sin as breaking the law, as anomia or lawlessness (1 John 3:4). It exhorts all Christian believers to obey the commandments of God, including God's command to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in Christ's command to love one another (1 John 2:3-6; 3:21-24).

The final threat to life for the saints requires patient perseverance [Greek, *hupomone*].



Jesus had mentioned this characteristic as being essential for the time of the end: "But he who stands firm [hupomenein] to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:13). But "standing firm" is the fruit of faithfulness to the will of God, to both the gospel and the law of God. The admonition of the Letter to the Hebrews is also to "persevere [hupomone] so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (Heb. 10:36; see 12:1-3). Hebrews points to the examples of those saints that lived "by faith" [Heb. 'emunah, "faithfulness"] in an earlier crisis (Heb. 10:37, 38; Hab. 2:3, 4).

James explains that "the testing of your faith develops perseverance" and the maturity of stability (1:3-8). He encourages all saints: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (1:12). A telling example is Job, who kept trusting that God would vindicate him against his false accusers (Jas. 5:11). Not understanding why he had to suffer so much as an innocent man, Job still expressed faith: "I know that my Redeemer [or Defender; or Vindicator, NEB] lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth ["to speak in court", NEB]" (Job 19:25).

The last generation of Christian believers may have to endure a similar trial of their faith as did Job. Persevering faith is expressed in keeping "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12 NKJV). They obey both the law and the faith of Jesus in their lives (see above, on Rev. 12:17 and 19:10).

## **The Biblical Significance of the Sabbath of the Lord**

Many theologians deny that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. They insist that the Sabbath was made by Moses for the nation of Israel only (Exod. 16; Deut. 5:12-15). The deeper issue at stake in this theological debate is the credibility of the creation record in Genesis 1-2 and its reflection in the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20. One American theologian gave this valid assessment of the origin of the Sabbath:

*According to the canon of Scripture, the "creation interpretation" of the Sabbath is affirmed to be theologically prior to the "redemption interpretation." This means, therefore, that the Sabbath commandment is always binding upon all men - whether they obey it or not! In the redemption of Israel from Egypt, the Sabbath is not established for the first time, but is reestablished; the moral law is not first published at Sinai, but is republished there. Hence, because the law of the Sabbath is grounded in the order of creation itself and pertains to all creatures, the traditional Christian interpretation of the Sabbath as a ceremony now abolished by Jesus Christ is incorrect (Herbert W. Richardson, Toward an American Theology, p. 115).*

The basic motif of the threefold message of Rev. 14 is that of restoration! It serves the same purpose as Isaiah's call to a backsliding Israel:

*"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1).*

*"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorers of Streets with Dwellings" (Isa. 58:12).*

For Isaiah the test of true worship was the restoration of covenantal righteousness among

God's people. This meant love for the weak ones (58:6, 7) and obedience in praising God on His "holy day" (58:13, 14).

In the time of the end, heaven pleads one more time with His backsliding people to meet the challenge of usurpation and substitution with the call for restoration and restitution. It calls for a revival of the commandments of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rev. 14:12). This is the final call for a return to Biblical truth and authority. Scripture must have the last word in determining the will of God. All certainty of religious truth depends on whether the Scriptures are accepted as the authoritative revelation of God's will. "They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience" (E.G. White, GC vii).

### **The Preparation Message for the Second Advent**

The messages of Rev. 14 urge all worshipers to listen attentively to the voice of God, and to seek a better understanding of the gospel and the testimony of Jesus. This appeal points to the fundamental difference between the Bible and church tradition. It urges us to accept personal responsibility to distinguish between Biblical authority and church authority and to subordinate all extra-biblical prophets to the supreme authority of Scripture.

The essential issue of the threefold message of Revelation 14 is the question of what ultimately binds the human conscience before God! Heaven's appeal in Rev. 14 reminds us that creation and redemption cannot be separated, that the Redeemer is the Sustainer of creation.

The Sabbath of the Lord can never be abrogated or changed, because it is a creation ordinance of the Creator-Redeemer. It is the memorial of a perfect creation by a trustworthy Creator. This Creator will never abandon the work of His hands (Ps. 138:8). He appeals to us, however, to respond to Him as the "faithful Creator" (see 1 Pet. 4:19).

*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them--the LORD, who remains faithful forever (Ps. 146: 5, 6).*

### **The Call of the Last Elijah**

The connection of the threefold message of Rev. 14 with the promise of Malachi that God would send "Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" (Mal. 4:5), is of dramatic significance. It is evident that the last Old Testament prophet predicts a final call for revival and reformation among God's covenant people before the apocalyptic Day of Judgment (see Mal. 4:1, 2).

This call corresponds in essence to that of Elijah to Israel: "If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The last call of God in the Apocalypse is presented in His appeal to "Worship Him" as the Creator and not to worship the beast and his image (Rev. 14:6-9).

To understand better the meaning of the end-time Elijah, we need to read the narrative of Elijah's mission in 1 Kings 17-18. Malachi elevated Elijah's historical mission, with its dramatic showdown of Yahweh in combat with Baal on Mount Carmel, as a theological type for the end-time. A detailed analysis of this type-antitype correspondence of the Elijah promise of Mal. 4 is offered in my book Chariots of Salvation. The Biblical Drama

of Armageddon (Ch. 11).

The essence of this historical type can be summarized in three points: 1) Elijah was sent by God in a time of Israel's religious and moral apostasy (1 Kings 16:30-33; 18:18; 21:25); 2) Elijah was sent with a message of restoration of God's covenant, which meant a new commitment of Israel to her God and a repair of His sacred worship cultus and moral commandments (1 Kings 18:18,21,30-31); 3) Acceptance or rejection of the Elijah-message meant life or death and was therefore a matter of eternal consequences (see 1 Kings 18:39-44).

The key for the end-time application is offered in the mission of John the Baptist, because his message to prepare the way for the advent of the Messiah contained the essentials of the Elijah message (see Luke 1:11-17). Jesus acknowledged that John was the Elijah of prophecy, even when contemporary Judaism did not recognize him (Matt. 17:10-13). John's mission was to prepare Israel for the Messiah's coming (1 John 1:23) and to "restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). His presence was the visible sign of the imminent advent of the Messiah (see John 1:29; Matt. 3:10-12). John denied that he was a reincarnation of Elijah (John 1:21), but affirmed that he was the message of Elijah "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (see John 1:23; Luke 1:17). John was sent at the right time, with an urgent message of repentance to awaken Israel to God's will and to His imminent visitation. His message created a new remnant people within the nation of Israel. Jesus accepted the baptism of John and became part of this remnant. He chose His first apostles from the followers of John the Baptist.

The message of Rev. 14 is the preparation message for the end-time. Its activation creates a people who are prepared to meet their Maker. Like Elijah, they are faithful to the original covenant law of God. They have chosen to be on the side of God, the Creator. They have turned their hearts to the God of their spiritual forefathers and maintain a continuity with the Old Testament Israel (Mal. 4:6).

The Elijah message for the end-time is unpacked by the Spirit of prophecy in Revelation 14: 6-12. Its worldwide proclamation will be followed by the second coming of Christ as the King-Judge (see verses 14-20). This defines the threefold message of 14:6-12 as the final awakening call to prepare a people for the second advent of Christ. It brings the hour of decision, just as Elijah and John the Baptist led apostate Israel to a new commitment.

The Elijah message today summons all people to return from idolizing creation to worshiping the Creator (Rev. 14:7). Such a message is timely considering the rise of the evolution hypothesis and the triumph of a materialistic philosophy. This call of God has wide-ranging applications:

*In the exaltation of the human above the divine, in the praise of popular leaders, in the worship of mammon, and in the placing of the teachings of science above the truths of revelation, multitudes today are following after Baal (E.G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 170).*

The voice of Elijah is increasingly needed in our decadent civilization. It will reverberate throughout all society and is reflected in a world-wide movement of Christian Sabbath-keepers. They have made a commitment to the God of Israel and His Christ in this time. They accept as their creed, the Bible and the Bible alone.

# Chapter XXVIII

## The Double Harvest Of The Earth

### Revelation XIV:14-20

*I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested (Rev. 14:14-16).*

This symbolic representation of the second advent of Christ as the King-Judge of the earth unites two separate judgment scenes in the Old Testament. The "white cloud" on which is seated "one like a son of man" are phrases adopted from the judgment portrayal in Daniel 7.

The call to harvest the earth with a "sharp sickle" is taken directly from the judgment scene in Joel 3. The command of an angel, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time [hōra, the "hour"] to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (14:15), is a deliberate expansion of Joel 3:13.

The merging of previous judgment prophecies demonstrates how John considered these Hebrew forecasts as complementary to each other. With creative ingenuity in Revelation 14 John restructures the judgment concept around Christ as the Judge of all mankind. This Christo-centric reinterpretation of the Judgment was introduced first by Jesus:

*At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens (Mark 13:26, 27; compare Matt. 24:30, 31).*

During His court hearing before the High Priest Caiaphas, Jesus declared under oath that He was indeed the Messiah and therefore the final Judge: "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). What Jesus predicted is portrayed visually in Rev. 14:14. The expression "One like a son of man" (14:14) is borrowed, not from the Gospels but directly from Daniel 7:13. This clearly indicates that the judgment vision of Dan. 7 is the immediate background of Rev. 14:14. It is a discovery of fundamental significance to understand that Daniel 7 and Revelation 14 relate to each other as prophetic and present truth! The core issue in this progressive revelation is the Christological fulfillment of Daniel's Messianic prophecy (Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 14:14; also 1:7, 13).

This declaration of Jesus was a shocking statement to the High Priest (Matt. 26:64) and even to Jesus' own apostles (Matt. 24:30-31). John's judgment vision of Rev. 14 confirms Jesus' new disclosure as an ever-present truth for the Church of the ages.

Daniel's sequence of historical events in chapter 7 is also repeated in Revelation 13-14: Persecution, Judgment, Messianic Kingship. Just as God's Kingship included His right to judge all men, so Christ's Kingship (the royal "crown of gold") is united with the final judgment (the "sharp sickle"). John the Baptist pictured the coming of Israel's Messiah as a harvest that separates the wheat from the chaff:

*His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).*

This picture language suggests that the Messianic judgment provides redemption for the saints. They will be gathered as wheat into the eternal garner of God. J.M. Ford explains the harvest of Rev. 14 accordingly: "This harvest [of Rev. 14:14-16], therefore is one of protection rather than of destruction and therefore follows naturally after the exhortation of the saints (vss 12-13)" (Rev., p. 250).

Revelation 14 began with the 144,000 companions of the Lamb as the "firstfruits" to God (14:4). The chapter concludes with a vision of the total harvest of mankind. The angel signals that "the harvest of the earth is ripe" (14:15). A very important question is, What has caused the worldwide ripening so that the entire earth is ready for the harvest? The answer can be found in the effective proclamation of the threefold message, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that will illuminate the entire earth, as described in Rev. 18:1-5. Such a universal gospel preaching, with the voice of Elijah, will turn the entire earth into one "Mount Carmel," into one "Valley of Jehoshaphat" or "valley of decision" (Joel 3:12,15).

In His parable of the weeds (Matt. 13), Jesus extended the field to a global extent:

*"The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels" (Matt. 13:38, 39).*

Next, Jesus emphasized the final separation between the wicked and the righteous with respect to their eternal destinies:

*"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:41-43).*

The judgment vision of Rev. 14:14-20 serves as the dramatic confirmation of Jesus' parable of the weeds. The vision of the great vintage in Rev. 14:17-20 expands the portrayal of the grape harvest in Joel 3:13 and redefines it as a Christ-centered judgment.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes [Gr: "the vine of the earth"] and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (Rev. 14:17-20).

The key to unlock this coded vision is to recover the old oracles. The following tables

reveal a striking parallel of themes and images between Joel 3 and Rev. 14. Both prophecies contain a divine summons

to the nations to appear before the judgment seat of God (Joel 3:9-12; Rev. 14:6,7). Both present heaven's legal charges in God's lawsuit (Joel 3:2-6; Rev. 14:8). Both portray the deliverance of the faithful remnant people on Mount Zion (Joel 2:32; 3:16; Rev. 14:1-5,12). Both predict the doom of the persecuting enemies in the valleys around Mount Zion (Joel 3:2,12; Rev. 14:20).

THE DIVINE SUMMONS IN JOEL	AND IN REVELATION 14
"I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel..."(3:2).	"To every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come...' (14:6, 7).
THE CHARGES	
for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land (3:2; see also verses 5, 6).	"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (14:8; see also 17:5, 6).
DELIVERANCE OF THE SAINTS	
And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved, for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance...(2:32; also 3:16).  "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe" (3:13).	Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (14:1; cp. verse 12). "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe"... (14:15, 16).
DOOM OF THE PERSECUTORS	
"Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow -- so great is their wickedness!" (3:13).	The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath...(14:19; also verse 20).

Three important lessons can be learned from this progressive unfolding of Joel 3 in Revelation 14, lessons which teach us how the gospel of Christ Jesus determines the end-time fulfillment of Joel.

First, we notice that the Judge is no longer Yahweh but Messiah Jesus. As the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13, 14 Christ is the King (the "crown") and the Judge (the "sickle") Who executes the verdicts of the celestial Court of Justice. Revelation 14:14 teaches the Christological fulfillment of the end-time judgment in Joel 3. The second advent of Christ introduces the time of the world harvest.

Second, the faithful remnant of Israel, gathered on Mount Zion in the holy city (Joel 2:32; 3:16), is redefined by the apostles as believers in the Lord Jesus (see Acts 2:21; 9:14, 21; Rom. 10:13) and in Rev. 14:1-5 as the followers of the Lamb, the faithful end-time church.

This is called in the science of theology the ecclesiological fulfillment (ecclesia, "church"). The gospel of Christ has removed the national restrictions of the old-covenant people. The church of Jesus Christ is a universal community of faith, called by Paul "the offspring of Abraham" (Gal. 3:26-29) and "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16; compare Hebr. 12:22-24).

Third, the Valley of Jehoshaphat around Mount Zion in Joel 3:2,12,14 is now enlarged to the entire earth in Rev. 14. This global extension is unmistakably taught by the intentional repetition (six times) of "the earth" (three times for the grain harvest; three times for the vintage, 14:15-16, 18-19). This worldwide expansion of Joel's local valley is called the universal fulfillment. The old imagery of the Middle East city of Zion and her valleys is retained in John's Apocalypse (as in Heb. 12:22-24), but the ethnic and geographic restrictions are now removed by the gospel. Such is the transforming effect of the gospel of the new covenant. For an in-depth analysis of the territorial fulfillment of Israel's promises see my *The Israel of God in Prophecy. Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*. Chapter 9.

The "great winepress of God's wrath" is explicitly located "outside the city" (Rev. 14:19, 20). Only from the background of Joel's portrayal can we know with certainty that this "city" of refuge is the holy city where Israel's God delivers His true worshipers (see Joel 2:32 and Rev. 14:1).

The apocalyptic winepress of Rev. 14 corresponds to the winepress of Joel 3, which was described as "full and the vats overflow--so great is their wickedness" (3:13). Joel had already given the winepress a moral application with regard to the wicked persecutors that were under indictment by Israel's covenant God (Joel 3:2-6). They were declared ripe for the judgment. Joel presented Yahweh Himself as the executor of His verdict:

*I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat [name means: "Yahweh judges"]. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land (Joel 3:2).*

The charge of God against the nations was their cruelty to His covenant people (3:3, 6). Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of the judgment on the wicked was more than a display of justice. Hans Walter Wolff comments on Joel 3:17,

*The recognition of Yahweh as the Covenant-God of Israel is the final goal of Yahweh's acts with respect to the world of nations (Joel and Amos, p. 81, italics added).*

The same charge of cruelty against God's people is renewed in Revelation against Babylon (Rev. 16: 5, 6; 17:5; 18:20, 24; 19:2), but this time the saints are the followers of the Lamb, and Christ will be their Vindicator and Liberator (17:14; 19:11-21).

The treading of the winepress was a prophetic symbol to illustrate God's judgment of doom (see Isa. 63:2-6; Jer. 25:30, 33). Isaiah compared Edom and Israel to a vineyard that would be trampled underfoot by the judgment of God (Isa. 5:1-7; see also Ps. 80:8, 12, 13, 16). The vision of Rev. 14:14-20 is further expanded in the vision of Christ's second advent in Rev. 19:11-21. This expanding vision shows how the Royal Messiah will "tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (19:15). This final mission of judgment by Christ is symbolically portrayed by His robe "dipped in blood" (Rev. 19:13; compare Isa. 63:3).

It is instructive to compare the two visions of the second advent of Christ in Rev. 14:14-16 (on a cloud) and 19:11-21 (on a white horse). Apparently the point of these visions is not

to present photographic pictures of the second coming but to teach a fundamental truth about the judgment: Christ will return to fulfill all the Hebrew prophecies of the last Judgment and to separate those that are His from those that perish.

Revelation 14 concludes with the stunning declaration that the blood that flows out of the winepress "outside the city" will "rise as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia" (v.20). Again this is Hebrew pictorial language with a clear message. Wisdom requires a grasp of the basic meaning of apocalyptic numbers. Just as Rev. 14 began with a number (144,000), so it ends with a number (1,600). Both passages (vss. 1 and 20) form symbolic counterparts, describing opposite destinies for the righteous and the wicked. The true Israel stands with the Lamb on Mount Zion inside the city of God, the wicked persecutors are all gathered outside the city of God. Thus Rev. 14:1 and 20 expand the imagery of Joel 2: 32; 3:1-16. Just as the number 144,000 for the spiritual Israel reveals its theological significance through its key number 12, so does the symbolic number 1,600 disclose its meaning through its key number 4. "Four" symbolizes the four corners of the earth (see Rev. 7:1; 20:8), the four quarters of the earth (Isa. 11:12), or the four winds or directions of the compass (Matt. 24:31). The multiplication of the number 4 in Rev. 14:20 points comprehensively to the universal territory of the battle field, in harmony with Jeremiah's prediction: "At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere--from one end of the earth to the other" (25:33).

The paramount significance of the second advent of Christ, as the culmination of the worldwide war against His faithful servants, is amplified by the subsequent visions of Revelation 15-19. The progressive unfolding of "Armageddon" in chapters 16:13-16 and 17:12-14 and 19:11-21 enlarges the decisive importance of the saving and consuming power of the second advent of Jesus Christ. Drawing again on the Hebrew imagery of the prophetic language, John's last vision of the second advent describes Christ coming with an invincible army from heaven:

*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:14-16)*

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# Chapter XXIX

## The Significance Of The Seven Last Plagues

### Revelation XV - XVI

Our first task in understanding the seven last plagues is to consider them within their immediate and wider contexts. The sanctuary vision of Revelation 15 explains their supernatural origin: they are ordered from the throne room in heaven and express the faithfulness of God. The plagues are not the blind forces of natural catastrophes. Their crucial importance becomes apparent when we learn that they constitute the "wrath of God" in the third angel's warning:

*A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:9, 10).*

### The Contextual Approach

This warning message identifies the wrath of God with the wrath of the Lamb. Its manifestation will strike terror in the wicked when probationary time has ended (Rev. 6:16, 17). Revelation 16 unfolds the wrath of the Lamb as the seven last plagues. These plagues also fulfill the symbolic crushing of the "vintage of the earth" in "the great winepress of God's wrath" of Rev. 14:19, 20. Being called the "last plagues" (15:1), these plagues must therefore be compared with the earlier judgments of God in the seals and the trumpets (chapters 6; 8-9). The dramatic escalation over the preliminary judgments appears in their globalization. The theological difference is, however, the nature and purpose of the last plagues.

While the seals and trumpets are aimed at awakening repentance in an apostate church and world, and thus serve a merciful purpose, the last plagues fall on an impenitent world after the close of probation, when everyone's eternal destiny has been fixed in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 15:8; 16:1; 22:11).

The purpose of the last plagues is to execute God's verdict on His enemies, in order to rescue Christ's followers from their oppressors. A German commentary states: "At a certain appointed time God ends His delay and intervenes quickly and with finality. That is the goal of the bowl judgments. At their conclusion it is announced: 'It is done' (16, 17)" (A. Pohl, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 148; own tr.). The last plagues serve as the substance of the seventh trumpet. This calls for a brief review of the origin of all Messianic judgments in the Apocalypse.

## Heavenly Origin of Messianic Judgments

The seals, trumpets and last plagues are all ordained from the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 5; 8:3-5; 15:5-8). All three septets are preceded by a vision of the victorious saints in the kingdom of heaven (5:9, 10; 7:9-17; 15:2-4). This literary arrangement shows that the primary concern of God's judgments is the salvation of His people. At the same time He is the God of justice Who "cannot be mocked" (Gal. 6:7). This twofold aspect of God's holy character--His saving and His punitive righteousness--was revealed already to Moses (see Exod. 34:6, 7). His threats are as trustworthy and real as His promises (see Rev. 22:18, 19). Both manifestations of divine righteousness originate from the risen Lord (Rev. 5).

The literary composition of the Apocalypse shows that the plagues follow after the last call for repentance (Rev. 14:6-12) and after the sealing of the saints (7:1-4). The judgments climax in the battle of "Armageddon," that is, the destruction of Babylon (16:13-19). Chapters 17-19 constitute the detailed explanation of the fall of Babylon (see below, Ch. XXIII).

## Old Testament Types Foreshadow Divine Protection

Some commentators assume that the followers of Christ will be raptured to heaven before the plagues are poured out so that they will not be affected by God's wrath. But the assumption of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church is not warranted by careful exegesis. The analogy of the plagues with the earlier plagues on Egypt shows that Israel remained in Goshen so that Pharaoh could see the "distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Exod. 11:7; 8:22, 23). Israel even participated in this distinction by applying the blood of the Passover Lamb as "a *sign*" on their houses: "when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (Exod. 12:13).

The end-time people of God are also called to separate themselves from "Babylon" and to attach themselves to Christ: "so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4; 14:1). Just as ancient Israel was protected by the "sign" of the blood so end-time Israel will be protected by a special seal of the living God, that the angels of God will place on the foreheads of each chosen individual (Rev. 7:3; 14:1).

Another parallel is Ezekiel's vision of the sealing of the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. The seal of God guaranteed their preservation. So it will happen in the antitype! For a more detailed study of the last plagues, see LaRondelle, "Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues", in Symposium on Revelation. Book II, Ch. 3.

## The Plagues Commence The Day of the Lord

Popular theology identifies the "Day of the Lord" with the second advent of Christ. The Apocalypse includes the war of Armageddon in "the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). This "great day" is called the day of His wrath or the day of God's vengeance (Isa. 34:8; Zeph. 2:2; Rev. 6:17). The day of God's wrath begins with the seven last plagues (see 15:1; 6:17). When the seven golden bowls are filled with the wrath of God, "no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed" (Rev. 15:7, 8).

Since probation ends with the seven last plagues, the close of human probation may be identified with the time that "Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise ['stand up' NKJV]." After He rises, "there will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Dan. 12:1).

The Day of the Lord will end when the heavens and the earth are cleansed by fire and a new heaven and a new earth are established as the home of righteousness (see 2 Pet. 3:10-13). This promise will be realized only at the end of the Millennium (see Rev. 21:1-5). The full extension of the Day of the Lord can be visualized in the following chart:

THE TIME OF THE END	THE DAY OF THE LORD	THE DAY OF THE LORD
Close of Probation after the Threefold Message	The Seven Last Plagues	Second Advent and Millennium
Rev. 14:6-12	Rev. 15-16	Rev. 19-20

For a study of the "Day of the Lord" and the "Last Plagues" in Scripture and in the writings of E.G. White, see W.E. Read, "The Great Controversy," in *Our Firm Foundation*. 2 vols. Vol.II (Wash. D.C.: Rev. and Her. P.A., 1953) pp. 239-319; esp. 265-68.

## The Exodus Motif of the Plagues

There seems to be a universal consensus that the basic motif of the Apocalypse is that of the exodus. The portrayal of Christ as the Passover Lamb sets the stage for the church as the new exodus people. When the elders sing: "With your blood you purchased men for God" (Rev. 5:9), they unite the Passover-Lamb motif with the exodus theme. From the start Revelation calls the church of Christ a "kingdom of priests" (Rev. 1:5, 6). The "new song" of the elders looks forward to a more spectacular exodus in the future, that of the Church Triumphant: "and they will reign on the earth" (5:10). This future outlook is developed in the vision of the new earth and the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22.

The seventh trumpet declares: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15). That future kingdom of God and Christ will be preceded by the seven last plagues, because the earth is still dominated by an oppressive "Egypt," or "Babylon".

The historical reality of the plagues and of the subsequent exodus of the church depends on the power of the Messiah and on the worthiness of His death as the Passover Lamb. He alone is worthy and able "to open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5) and to fulfill the blessed hope. Nowhere in the Apocalypse is the exodus typology used more explicitly and systematically than in the seven plagues.

The purpose of the last plagues corresponds essentially to that of the ten plagues which fell on Egypt in Moses' time: to reveal God's righteousness in subduing and removing a persecutor. Both the past and the future liberations of God's people are manifestations of the faithfulness of the same covenant God. Already Revelation 15 begins to connect both series of plagues. John sees those victorious over the beast and his image standing "beside [or "on", NASB] the sea," which looked red ("glass mixed with fire"), in other words, they were standing beside a "red sea" (15:2). Second, they held harps and sang "the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb . . ." (15:2, 3). This singing of "the song of Moses" re-enacts the theme of deliverance of the song of Moses in Exodus 15. The song of Moses praises God's dramatic intervention as a manifestation of

his Kingship: "The LORD will reign for ever and ever" (15:11, 18). This historic act of deliverance by Israel's God constitutes the type of all subsequent holy wars of the Lord. Moses sang: "The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name" (Exod. 15:3).

John now exalts Christ as the One who will bring about a greater deliverance than did Moses. The end-time Israel will sing "the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3). Christ will accomplish a global and eternal deliverance for the faithful remnant at the end of the Christian age. They will be supernaturally delivered from the attacking antichrist, of which Pharaoh was only a pale anticipation.

A further reference to the days of Moses is the deliberate remark of John regarding the temple in heaven, that it is "the tabernacle of the testimony" (Rev. 5:5; cf. Exod. 38:21). This expression centers the attention on the "testimony" or sacred law of God, which was kept in the "ark of the testimony" (see Exod. 40:3, 20, 21). This apocalyptic focus on the law of God within His heavenly temple is appropriate in view of the final conflict of God's people with the idolatrous antichrist (see above, on Rev. 13:15-17). Faithfulness to "the commandments of God" is re-emphasized in Rev. 15:5 (see also 11:19). The "commandments of God" in Rev. 12:17 and 14:12 are now identified as the Decalogue within Israel's "tabernacle of the testimony." This is of paramount importance for the last generation of God's people.

Finally, the announcement that the temple in heaven will be "filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power" so that no one could enter (Rev. 15:8) points back to the coming of God's Presence as both Redeemer and Judge (Exod. 40:34, 35; 1 Kings 8:10, 11). Beasley-Murray points to this twofold significance:

*The duality of exodus as judgment and redemption is maintained in chapters 15-16, and to ensure that this is understood by the reader, the positive element of redemption is placed first (Rev., p. 233).*

John does not reverse the historical order in Rev. 15-16, as if he would place the plagues (ch. 16) after the deliverance of Israel (ch. 15). Rather he places the certainty of the exodus-redemption up front in Revelation 15, as the purpose of his apocalyptic message. He is impressed by the assurance that the end-time people of God will sing about deliverance from their oppressors through the power of Christ:

*They. . . sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:*

*"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.*

*Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.*

*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, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (Rev. 15:3-4).*

John unfolds this final manifestation of God's righteousness in Revelation 16. Elmer M. Rusten has drawn this parallel:

*Just as the army of Egypt was found guilty in the water ordeal and were drowned (Ex. 14:26-30), so the antichrist and his followers in Revelation 15 are about to be found guilty in the final ordeal of wrath (Rev. 16) (A Critical Eval. of Disp. Interpr. of the Book of Revelation, II:531).*

Christ assures His followers that their faithfulness to Him, that is to God's commandments

and the testimony of Jesus, will be honored by His rescuing them in their hour of utmost emergency. The song of victory in Rev. 15 will be sung after the plagues have dissolved the "Babylonian empire." Revelation 15 does not warrant the popular expectation that each martyr will sing the song of victory in heaven isolated from others, because all victors will sing it together at the same time, just as Israel sang the song of Moses after their collective deliverance. In fact, all martyrs of the Christian age will triumph together (see Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-17). The fact that the song of Moses and the Lamb is composed of citations from Moses (Exod. 15; Deut. 32:4) the Psalms (Pss. 110:2; 138:14) and the Prophets (Am. 4:13; Jer. 10:7), shows that the future song of Christ's people is the "genuine revelation of one God and of one Spirit and a testimony of one faith" (A. Pohl, *ib.*, p. 150). The song does not rehearse their own virtues. It praises God's holiness, righteousness and rulership. This praise is the ultimate purpose of the plan of redemption and the history of salvation. Such Christ-exaltation is significant, especially in view of the seeming victory of the beast over all who dwell on the earth and have bowed down and worshiped the antichrist (Rev. 13:4, 8, 12). When the church faces the death threat of the powers that be, it should remember the future song at the sea of glass before the throne of God.

### **The Moral Purpose of the Wrath of God**

The apocalyptic expression "the wrath [orge] of God" needs careful attention, because it has been misunderstood by well-meaning interpreters. The phrase is used 375 times in the Old Testament (TDNT 5:395) and remains an essential characteristic in the New Testament gospel and in its prophetic outlook (Matt. 3:7; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18, 2:5-8; 5:8-11; Rev. 6:16, 17).

Moses revealed that Israel's God was "slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness", yet who "does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Exod. 34:6,7; Num. 14:18). He interpreted God's anger as holy wrath, free from any human imperfection. It was only aroused to oppose sin and provoked to punish rebellion against God's sovereign will (2 Kings 17:16-18; 2 Chron. 36:16; Dan. 9:4-16).

The proclamation of the wrath of God as His punishing righteousness is not in conflict with His love. Rather recognition of God's holy wrath against sin creates a new appreciation of His mercy to all who are objects of His wrath (see Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Rom. 5:8-10). The wrath of God is just as real as the love of God.

The seven punitive judgments of Rev. 16 are not a vindictive outburst of an offended God, but the well-ordered demonstration of the final covenant curses, destined for a persistently apostate covenant people. Already in Leviticus 26 God had warned Israel that her continuous idolatry and willful rejection of His Torah would evoke a sevenfold punishment, even a holy war of Yahweh against the rebellious people themselves (vss. 18, 21, 24, 28-33)! J.M. Ford even counts exactly seven punishments in Lev. 26:18-34 (Revelation, p. 255). But what is the intention of the pouring out of His "unmixed" wrath during the last plagues, if it no longer is to evoke repentance?

The plagues aim first to awaken the recognition of Babylon that she has opposed the Creator with her imposition of the mark of the beast, her worship of the beast's image, and her outlawing of the rejectors of the mark. Babylon's reaction, however, is the opposite: she curses God and refuses to repent and glorify Him (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21). This reaction demonstrates Babylon's hostility against God and His people. This threefold



repetition emphasizes the mysterious hardening of heart, even more obdurate than the ancient Pharaoh, which reveals the shocking inability of man to come to repentance by himself. Heinrich Kraft pointed out: "The stubborn continuation of sin punishes itself, because it bars its own way to repentance" (Die Offenbarung des Johannes, p. 207, own tr.). The wicked impute to God the evil that befalls them and curse Him, as if He were a tyrant (Rev. 16:9,11). Thus they reveal their rejection of the love of God and His atoning sacrifice. Babylon will hereby condemn herself and declare herself lost. The plagues are intended to disclose the hearts and the works of man in their attitude to Christ. The judgments will correspond to the persecution chosen by Babylon herself. Babylon will suffer the consequence of what she has done. She is judged according to her own works.

### **The Appropriateness of the Seven Judgments**

Dressed like the High Priest Christ (15:6), the seven angels carry seven golden bowls which are no longer filled with incense, as earlier the twenty-four elders had carried the bowls "full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints"(5:8). Now the angels use the bowls to pour out "the wrath of God" (15:7). E. Schüssler Fiorenza points to the appropriateness of this divine response:

*The bowl plagues are an answer to the prayer and outcry of the Christians for justice. They are also a warning to Christians and non-Christians alike not to become members of the imperial-cult community (Invitation To The Book of Revelation, p. 157).*

Like the first four trumpet plagues in Rev. 8:7-12, the first bowl plagues are poured out equally on the earth (16:2), the sea (v.3), the rivers and springs (v.4) and the sun (v.8). The final judgments, however, follow in a more rapid pace and severity. The entire earth has become like ancient "Egypt," that is, the oppressor of the Israel of God.

The first plague of "ugly and painful sores" affects all "who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image" (16:2), wherever they are on earth. This proves that God's people will not suffer this or any subsequent bowl-plagues! The appropriateness of this plague is seen by some in the outward marking with ugly sores on those who have the mark of the beast.

The second plague turns the sea "into blood like that of a dead man" (16:3). This destroys a major portion of creation for mankind and undeniably shows "the finger" of an offended Creator. The "blood" of the apocalyptic plagues show God's condemnation of the bloodshed of the martyrs. The angel explains: "for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve" (16:6).

The third plague turns the rivers and springs of water into blood (16:4). Now the drinking water of all men is turned into a curse. According to God's last warning message the earth-dwellers have refused to acknowledge the Creator of the sea and of the springs of water (14:7). The third plague is a fitting answer to those who have ignored God as the source and sustainer of human life. The angels "in charge of the water" and of "the altar" in heaven respond with praising "the Holy One": "You are just in these judgments" (16:5, 7). It is apparent that these plagues follow quickly after each other in a very short time, or no one would survive the first three plagues.

The fourth bowl parallels the fourth trumpet in that the sun is affected, although now no longer "a third of the sun was struck" (8:12). A scorching heat will cause the people to curse the name of God, because "they refused to repent and glorify him" (16:9). The

contrast becomes evident. While heavenly voices praise God for His final judgments (16:5-7), earthly voices curse Him for His judgments. This reaction indicates how obstinate and obdurate the worshipers of the beast have become against Him "who had control over these plagues" (16:9). It is a similar attitude as ancient Egypt showed during the plagues under Moses. When people persistently refuse to repent, the time comes when they no longer can repent!

The fifth bowl is poured out "on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness" (16:10). This plague is similar to the ninth plague of Moses, when Egypt was covered with total darkness for three days: "No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived" (Exod. 10:23). During the fifth plague the "kingdom" of the beast will be paralyzed by a supernatural and impenetrable darkness, an appropriate verdict of heaven for those that have refused Christ as the Light of the world and have "loved darkness instead of light" (John 3:19).

The kingdom of the beast will be worldwide, because it extends to all peoples and nations (Rev. 13:8; 14:8). Instead of acknowledging their sin, they curse God, "because of their pains and their sores" (16:11). Apparently the last plagues fall quickly on the same generation, because the sores that came during the first plague continue under the fifth plague. We hear the refrain: "they refused to repent of what they had done" (16:11). This suggests an increasing hardening of heart, as the plagues continue (see also 16:21). Beasley-Murray explains this perceptively:

*These, therefore, who curse God for his judgments are the obdurate. The mark of the beast on their bodies has penetrated their souls, instilling in them the hostility towards God and his holiness which is characteristic of the beast himself (Rev., p. 243).*

## **Rationale for Applying the Plague Portrayals**

Confusion exists regarding the hermeneutics of applying the plagues of Rev. 15-16 to future historical realities. Are they to be applied all literally or figuratively? Some have tried it one way or the other, without real satisfaction. The key to decode the Apocalypse is not the rigid application of literalism or allegorism. From start till finish this apocalyptic book weaves literal and symbolic language together into one cloth (see Rev. 1:16; 22:14, 17). In Rev. 12 the "woman" of God brings forth "a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (v. 5). Here figurative and literal language are blended to convey a message with sufficient clarity. This clarity comes by considering the larger context of Scripture and the use of salvation history in the language of the prophets. The "woman" in Rev. 12 is symbolic because it was used as such by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others, to designate God's covenant people (see above, on Rev. 12). The "male child" is a plain reference to the promised Messiah (see Isa. 9:6). This example shows that one should not create one's own rule, merely for the sake of an abstract consistency. Scripture must lead the way for the applications of its apocalyptic language. In regard to the last plagues we must be tentative because they are not yet fulfilled. It is safe, however, to say that the seven plagues are all literal or historical judgments of God, although their portrayals are in more or less symbolic images. The first and fifth plagues describe the objects of God's wrath in symbolic terms, as those that have "the mark of the beast and worship his image," or "on the throne of the beast" (16:2, 10). The sixth and seventh plagues describe their objects as "the great river Euphrates" and "Babylon the

Great" (16:12, 19). Again the context of Scripture points to a symbolic use of Israel's salvation history, to be fulfilled in a greater historical antitype in the end-time. The issue is, whether the historical effects of the plagues are described in literal or in allegorical language. It is interesting that Uriah Smith insisted that his interpretation of the two last plagues accepted also "literal" judgments:

*These plagues, from the very nature of the case, must be manifestations of wrath and judgments upon men . . . All that is here insisted upon, is the literality of the judgments that result from each vial, which are literal in this case [the sixth plague] as in all the others, though the organizations which suffer these judgments may be brought to view in their symbolic form (Rev., pp. 692, 694).*

The decisive rationale for the application of the plagues is, however, their theological meaning. Roy Naden applies his Christological view of the last plagues to those that reject Christ as the Lamb of God:

*Those who reject Him will experience the inevitable consequences of sin, and lacking a substitute, they will personally experience God's wrath in the seven last plagues. This is the primary significance of Revelation 16 (The Lamb Among The Beasts, p. 234).*

### **The Exodus Motif in the Last Plagues**

It is essential to understand the covenantal character of all the plagues. The exodus motif, which unites all bowl judgments, serves the higher purpose of the liberation of the oppressed Israel. The character of the plagues as covenant-curses becomes evident when the typological connection of the last plagues with the ten plagues on Egypt is recognized.

No less important was God's act of "holy war" to deliver His people from Egypt's persecuting army: the sudden drying up of the Red Sea. Egypt's plagues were recognized by Pharaoh's officials as the "finger of God" (Exod. 8:19), because of the oppression of the Israelites (Exod. 10:7). The last plagues raise the world's awareness to its maltreatment of the followers of Christ. This is finally accomplished by the sixth and seventh plagues. These final plagues provide the exodus deliverance of the Israel of God. Remarkably the last plagues are not patterned after the Egyptian plagues but after the historic fall of the Babylonian Empire.

### **The Sixth and the Seventh Bowl-Judgments**

The sixth bowl is poured out on "the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East" (16:12). During the seventh bowl-judgment "Babylon the Great" is destroyed (16:17-19). The Euphrates is obviously the river of Babylon (see Jer. 51:63,64). Its sudden "drying up" points back to the historical sequence in Israel's history: the sudden drying up of the Euphrates, followed by the fall of Babylon and the coming of the kings from the East. This requires a careful reconstruction of the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire as foretold by Isaiah (chs 44-47) and Jeremiah (chs 50-51). Isaiah had already used Israel's exodus from Egypt as a type of Israel's exodus from Babylon. He assured them that God would once again dry up the waters that formed an obstacle to Israel's return to the promised land:

*The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so*

*that men can cross over in sandals (Isaiah 11:15-16).*

The drying up of the Euphrates demonstrates God's judgment on Babylon! It resulted in its sudden downfall and thus "prepared the way" for Israel's deliverance from Babylon (for an in-depth analysis of the sixth and seventh plagues, see my chapter "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh plagues", in Symposium on Revelation. Book II, Ch. 12. See also my Chariots of Salvation. The Biblical Drama of Armageddon).

The Apocalypse transforms the ancient plot of Babylon's fall by means of the drying up of her Euphrates waters into a prophetic type for the church age. Just as Yahweh and His covenant people stood at the center of the fall of Babylon, so Christ and His new-covenant people will stand at the center of the fall of modern Babylon. Israel's history of salvation will be fulfilled by Christ's church as its antitype. To understand this impressive typology, we must define the theological function of each party:

1. Babylon functioned as the oppressor of Israel.
2. The Euphrates was an integral part of Babylon, protecting it and thus hostile to Israel.
3. The drying up of the Euphrates indicated God's judgment on Babylon, causing its sudden downfall. It functioned as preparation for Israel's deliverance.
4. Cyrus and his allied kings of the Medes and the Persians (Jeremiah 50:41; 51:11, 28) came to Babylon as the predicted "kings from the east," to fulfill God's purpose. They were the enemies of Babylon and the deliverers of Israel. Cyrus was "anointed" by the Lord to defeat Babylon and to set Israel free (Isa. 45:1).
5. Daniel and the Israel of God constituted the repentant, faithful covenant people of God within Babylon (see Daniel 9).

These theological characterizations are the essentials of the fall of Babylon. In the book of Revelation, Babylon represents the archenemy of Christ and His church. In the time of the end both Babylon and Israel will be universal, their territorial scope worldwide. The gospel is explicitly sent out "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Revelation 14:6). This fourfold emphasis stresses its universal extension. The subsequent announcement that "Babylon the Great has fallen" is founded on the fact that she has "made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (verse 8). The whole world has finally come under her spell (Rev.13:3, 4, 7).

In harmony with this worldwide range of Babylon, the angel of Rev. 17 applies Babylon's river, the Euphrates, also worldwide: "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages" (Rev.17:15). Those that insist the apocalyptic Euphrates represents only the people living in the geographic location of the Euphrates are bound to follow the same interpretation with Babylon, Israel, Mount Zion, etc. These interpreters fail to grasp the Christocentric character of biblical typology. The gospel of Jesus Christ delivers us from the restrictions of ethnic and geographic literalism for the Christian Era.

## **The Interpretative Role of Revelation 17**

The angel's universal application of the Euphrates in Revelation 17 serves to guard us

against a relapse into the Middle East application of Babylon's river. Wherever God dried up a literal body of water or a "flood" of enemies in Israel's history--like the Red Sea or the Jordan River or the flood of invading Euphrates people (Isaiah 8:7, 8)--it always signified a providential judgment on the enemies of God's people. The drying up of Babylon's great river during the future sixth plague (Rev.16:12) will be no exception!

This divine judgment is set in motion when the political rulers and the multitudes of all nations suddenly realize God's condemnation of Babylon and withdraw their support from Babylon. They will reverse their loyal support into active hatred and destroy Babylon:

*The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (Rev. 17:16).*

This results in the sudden dissolution of Babylon, which in God's providence will destroy Babylon. Rev. 17 provides a dramatic explanation of the sixth and seventh plagues of Rev. 16.

### **The Armageddon Vision: Revelation 16:13-16**

*Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty...Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Rev. 16:13, 14, 16).*

This interlude vision is not a part of the sixth bowl. Rather it explains the background forces involved in the final plagues. Some have jumped to the conclusion that these words predict a world war between an eastern and a western bloc of nations. Such speculation can only rise when one dissects the words of Scripture from their biblical roots and contexts. No war between nations is in view here. The climax of John's Apocalypse deals with a far more serious evil in God's sight: apostate religious forces will lead all political powers on earth to unite in one common cause, waging war against God's people! Here is the murderous plot of the last demonic war in the Apocalypse. Here is the cause of evil that will trigger God's dramatic involvement, the judgment of His holy war against Babylon.

War against God is war against God's people. This was the experience of Israel in Scripture and the reason God intervened to deliver His people. The fact that Christ's people will be at the center of the apocalyptic battle can be inferred already from Christ's warning: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Rev. 16:15). This counsel of Messiah Jesus is an ever-present truth for the Church, yet has a special urgency for the remnant. They must walk in the armor of His righteousness by a living faith (see Rev. 3:18).

Apparently the saints have not yet been raptured to heaven during the seven plagues. The opposite is true. They will play an active role in the final conflict because the universal war against God takes the form of a war against the followers of the Lamb! They need to be alert to the threefold message of Rev. 14, with its everlasting gospel and testimony of Jesus. The church of Sardis was aroused by these words: "If you do not wake up, I will

come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (Rev. 3:3).

Beasley-Murray placed Christ's counsel in the proper perspective: "It is precisely because the followers of the Antichrist are not awake to God and his gospel that the day of God for them is a day of doom instead of a day of redemption" (Rev., p. 245).

In summary, the prophetic perspective of the last plagues in Revelation 15-16 intends to reveal God's pre-ordained plan for the triumph of His faithful ones. The God of Israel will intervene through His most spectacular Messianic deliverance in all history. He will overrule the Babylonian determination to exterminate the Israel of God by His dramatic intervention of the fifth plague. This judgment will suddenly enshroud the attacking multitudes with an impenetrable, supernatural darkness (Rev. 16:10). This sign will not only bring the persecutors to a grinding halt, but also will awaken the deceived multitudes to their rebellion against the Creator himself! It causes them to withdraw their support from Babylon. Such an abrupt withdrawal of the allegiance of all peoples and nations from Babylon is signified by the sudden "drying up of the waters" of Babylon, the Euphrates, as the sixth plague (Rev. 16:12). This abrupt reversion of their loyalty to their destruction of Babylon is explained by the angel in the subsequent chapters 17-19.

### **The Seventh Plague in Preliminary Summation: Revelation 16:17-21**

*The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pound each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible (Rev. 16:17-21).*

The outpouring of the seventh bowl "into the air" is ordered by a "loud voice," coming from the throne in the temple in heaven, declaring: "It is done!" (v.17). This means that God Himself completes this judgment plague as the culmination of a heavenly liturgical action. This corresponds with Isaiah's prediction of divine retribution from the heavenly temple: "It is the sound of the LORD repaying his enemies all they deserve" (66:6). The seventh plague is of such dramatic importance and impact that chapters 17-19 further develop this bowl-judgment on Babylon (see 16:19; 18:6; 19:2, 17-21). The final plague is introduced by cosmic signs, which traditionally accompanied Yahweh's holy war against the oppressors of His people: lightning, peals of thunder, and "a severe earthquake" (v. 18).

The "earthquake" played a distinctive role in the Old Testament theophanies and in the apocalyptic outlook of the Day of the Lord (see Exod. 19:18; Pss. 68:8; 77:17-18; 114; Isa. 64:3; Hab. 3). A universal quake is part of God's holy war (Isa. 13:13; 24:18-23; 34:4; Joel 2:10). Richard Bauckham, in his ground-breaking article "The Eschatological Earthquake", states:

*The identification of the eschatological theophany as a new Sinai theophany belongs to the apocalyptists' understanding of salvation-history, whereby God's*

*redemptive acts in the future are portrayed on the model of his past acts (The Climax of Prophecy, p. 201).*

The unprecedented earthquake of the seventh plague is not a preliminary sign of the day of judgment but part of God's judgment on Babylon itself (see 16:18). The voice of God that shook Sinai will again shake heaven and earth when He comes to judge (see Heb. 12:25-29). John had mentioned this cosmic quake in his sixth seal (6:12) and in the seventh trumpet (11:19).

While John added "a great hailstorm" in the last trumpet (11:19), now he elaborates on the "huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each" that will fall upon men during the last plague (16:21). This final characteristic connects the seventh plague with Ezekiel's end-time judgment on Gog, when he attacks the Israel of God. Ezekiel likewise stated that God's judgment on Gog would be a manifestation of divine "wrath" (38:18). He also portrayed Yahweh's war with features of a storm theophany, earthquake and hail, which all correspond to Rev. 16:17-21.

EZEKIEL 38:18, 19, 22	REVELATION 16:18, 21
This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign LORD. In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a <i>great earthquake in the land of Israel</i> ...I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down <i>torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him</i> .	Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a <i>severe earthquake</i> . No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake...From the sky <i>huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each</i> fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

John writes explicitly:

*The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath (Rev. 16:19).*

The "cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath" is a distinctive metaphor in Rev. 14:8-10; 16:19; 17:2, 4, 6; 18:3, 6. This is based on the prophetic language of the Hebrew oracles against Israel's archenemies (see Jer. 25:15,16; 51:7) and even against a rebellious Jerusalem herself (Isa. 51:17)! Thus the "cup" of the wine of God's wrath signifies divine judgment, upon an apostate Jerusalem. J.P. Ruiz has captured the basic meaning of this metaphor:

*In using the prophetic metaphor of the cup, John shows that the tables are turned on Babylon the Great. She is made to drink from the cup which she herself poured (18, 6), the golden cup filled with the abominations and impurities of her fornication (17, 4), with which she intoxicated nations and their rulers (14, 8; 17, 2; 18, 3). For this she must drain the cup of the wine of the fury of God's wrath (Ezekiel in the Apocalypse, p. 276).*

While Babylon as an apostate Jerusalem is forced "to drink" from the "cup" that contains God's holy vengeance for the blood of his servants (19:2), the saints by contrast are

invited to the "wedding supper of the Lamb!" (19:9).

The higher purpose of God's plan to sweep the entire old creation away (16:20), can be seen in the forward movement of the Apocalypse: from Babylon's collapse to the descent of the New Jerusalem, the pinnacle of the new creation (21:1, 2). Thus all eyes are increasingly riveted on God's City, in contrast to all "the cities of the nations" (16:19).

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# Chapter XXX

## The Seventh Plague: The Messianic Retribution On Babylon

### Revelation XVII

Today an increasing number of apocalyptic scholars recognize the architectural design of the last Bible book. Appreciating this new insight, C.M. Maxwell promises, with regard to the final plagues in Revelation: "Once again, acquaintance with literary structure is going to help us considerably in understanding the message" (God Cares, II:423). He discerns the following arrangement of a contrasting parallelism (p. 423):

- A Description: The plagues (Rev. 15-16)
- B Narration: Circumstances related to the plagues (Rev. 17:1 to 19:10)
- B<sup>1</sup> Narration: Circumstances related to the Holy City
- A<sup>1</sup> Description: The Holy City (Rev. 21:9 - 22:9)

This inverse parallel structure means that chapters 15:1 - 19:10 deal with divine punishment, and chapters 19:11 - 22:9 with divine rescue and reward. Remarkably, both the section about Babylon (17:1 - 19:10) and that about the New Jerusalem (21:9 - 22:9) are introduced by the same plague angel. Each major division begins with the angel's invitation: "Come, I will show you . . .":

REVELATION 17:1	REVELATION 21:9
One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me: "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."	One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

After each of these major visions John became overwhelmed, fell down to worship the interpreting angel, and received the same reproof:

REVELATION 19:10	REVELATION 22:8, 9
At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."	And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

With this literary arrangement, John correlates both the destruction of Babylon and the descent of the New Jerusalem with the climactic events of the seventh plague. The comprehensive scope of Rev. 16-22 no longer allows any view that dissects Rev. 17 from the end-time, and from its unbreakable connection with the last plagues of Rev. 16.

The visions of Rev. 17-19 constitute a cohesive unit which further amplifies the seventh plague (16:17-21). The proper understanding of the seventh plague therefore must relate to the angelic interpretation in chapters 17-19. This literary style has been called "interlocking" (Y. Collins) or "nesting" (Ruiz). What Rev. 17-19 explains is all comprised within the action of the seventh bowl!

Thus John has carefully anchored chapters 17-19 to the last plagues. The basic theme of Christ's holy war of liberation continues to unfold in Rev. 16:13-16; 17:12-14; 19:11-21. The "holy war" theme not only structures the entire unit of chapters 15-19, but moves forward to the possession of the "promised land" in chapters 20-22. This is the positive goal of Christ's holy war. The Apocalypse thus contains its own implicit hermeneutic.

### **The Relationship of Revelation 16 and 17-19**

The seventh plague (Rev. 16:17-21) is enlarged in the subsequent chapters 17-19. The seventh plague contains the summary statement: "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath" (16:19).

This judgment on Babylon is the theme of Rev. 17-19. These visions give a detailed expansion of the seventh plague. The seventh bowl thus functions as the introduction to chapters 17-19. Some scholars therefore call Rev. 17-19 an "Appendix" or a "Close-Up" to the bowl judgments. Charles Griblin refers to the section of Rev. 17:1 - 19:10 as the "Angelic Interpretation of the Fall of Babylon."

We need to recognize the pointer in the introduction of Revelation 17:1, "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters'" (17:1). This angel of Rev. 17 is therefore connected with the bowl judgments of Rev. 16. Jean-Pierre Ruiz described this as follows:

*There is no literary indication of distance between 16:17 and 17:1, an indication that what follows is comprised, in a manner of speaking, within the action of the seventh bowl. The specification of the angelic guide in 17,1 as one of the bowl angels reinforces this link (Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16, 17 -19, 10, p. 247).*

The interrelationship of the last plague in Rev. 16 and the angelic interpretation in Rev. 17-19 is also of a substantial nature. The divine retribution on end-time Babylon remains in focus (see 16:19; 17:1, 5; 18:1-6, 21; 19:1-3). The brief statement in Rev. 16 that "God remembered Babylon the Great" (v. 19), is further expanded by an angel who shouted that Babylon the Great has fallen, "for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes" (18:2, 5).

Revelation 17 and 18 explain how God's judgment will be realized on Babylon. These remarkable chapters show two stages. In the first God employs the beast and its horns as His instruments to dissolve Babylon's unity and cause its collapse. The interpreting angel said:

"The beast and the ten horns you saw, will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (Rev. 17:16).

Thus the prostitute, portrayed as the last apostate power, is the first to be judged and lamented by the world (Rev. 18:9-19). In the second stage of divine retribution, a picture is painted of the second advent of Christ in the symbol of a victorious rider whose name is the Word of God, and who conquers the beast, the false prophet, and their armies (Rev. 19:11-21). This portrayal of Christ as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16) presents the enlarged vision of "Armageddon," as was anticipated in the sixth and seventh plagues of Rev. 16:13-16. The plagues of Rev. 16 are amplified in chapters 17-19.

### **The Prostitute: the Central Characteristic of Revelation 17**

We pay attention first to the vision and John's reaction to it (17:1-6), and then consider the angel's interpretation (17:8-18).

*One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:*

*MYSTERY*

*BABYLON THE GREAT*

*THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES*

*AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Rev. 17:1-6).*

We discern three major motifs in John's vision: the prostitute, the beast, and Babylon. While the beast and Babylon were mentioned already in Rev. 13-16, the prostitute is the new and central theme of Rev. 17. The question is, What historical reality corresponds to this bloodthirsty harlot during the church age? Is it Imperial Rome, hostile Jerusalem, the persecuting Church-State of the Middle Ages, or some fearsome reality in the future?

The contextual approach may open up a new perspective on this mysterious chapter of the Apocalypse. Consider the context of chapters 12-13, we notice there a pregnant woman and a seven-headed beast. This calls for an evaluation of the two symbolic women in Rev. 12 and 17 which stand in an intentional contrast with each other. As we saw above (Chapter XIV), the pure woman of Rev. 12 represents the faithful people of the old and the new covenants. This "woman" gave birth to the Messiah of Israel (12:1-5), was subsequently persecuted and fled into the wilderness to hide from public life and society for 1260 symbolic days (12:6,14).

If the prostitute of Rev. 17 is viewed as the counterpart of the pure woman of Rev. 12, we must conclude that the harlot represents the unfaithful church, that has entered into an

illicit relationship with the political rulers of the world, "the kings of the earth" (see 17:2). This clarifies the fact that the prostitute is able to persecute all dissenters. She is seen by John "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus" (17:6; also 16:6; 18:24).

The medieval church did not execute any heretic, but delivered those condemned by the church Inquisition to the worldly rulers in order to execute the ecclesiastical verdicts of death.

The conclusion that the symbolic prostitute represents the apostate church is shocking. It requires confirmation from the biblical context. Such validation comes in essence from the Old Testament prophets that portrayed Israel or Judah as a "prostitute," as the unfaithful woman of Yahweh.

## **Old Testament Prototypes of the Apocalyptic Prostitute**

Hosea began to indict the ten Northern Tribes of Israel stating: "A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD" (5:4); "they consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God"(4:11).

Jeremiah adopted this same symbolism for Judah and Jerusalem: "You have lived as a prostitute with many lovers" (3:1); "Why do you dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life" (4:30). There can be little doubt that Ahab's pagan wife Jezebel stood as a model for Jeremiah's picture of an apostate Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 9:30). Isaiah even exclaimed in horror about Jerusalem: "See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her--but now murderers!"(1:21). Ezekiel delivered the most elaborate indictment of Jerusalem, which serves as the major source for the harlot imagery in Revelation 17. Ezekiel's harlot portrayal and that of John's Apocalypse deserve serious comparison.

## **The Apocalyptic Prostitute: Antitype of Apostate Israel**

Leading apocalyptic scholars today, such as A. Vanhoye, J.M. Vogelgesang, J.P. Ruiz and others, have shown convincingly that the prostitute imagery of Revelation 17 is dependent on Ezekiel 16; 20; 23. More than any other, Ezekiel portrayed Israel (including Judah and Jerusalem) as the unfaithful covenant partner of Yahweh, a bloodthirsty, self-glorifying prostitute. This biblical prototype is fraught with significance for the understanding of its antitype in Rev. 17 during the church age. A careful analysis of Ezekiel 16; 20 and 23 is essential for the understanding of Rev. 17, with its end-time focus.

Both Ezekiel and John use the harlot symbol to indict God's unfaithful covenant partner for: sexual immorality or idolatry, oppression and murder of her own children. After the legal charges are presented, both Ezekiel and John proceed to present the same punishment of the impenitent. It is helpful to place the pertinent passages side by side, although there is no substitute for a personal reading of these chapters.

EZEKIEL 16 AND 20 JUDGMENT ON THE PROSTITUTE	REVELATION 17-18 JUDGMENT ON THE PROSTITUTE
"I adorned you with jewelry . . ." (16:11). "You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen" (16:13).	"Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn'" (18:7).
"But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute . . . You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places when you carried on your prostitution" (16:15,16). "And you took your sons and daughters who you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols" (16:20,21).	I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus (17:6). "In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth" (18:24).
"You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!" (16:32).	"With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (17:2).
"Therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, . . . I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness. . . Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. They will . . . stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses" (16:37-40).	"The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (17:16).

The correspondence of the portrayals of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse is so apparent that Josephine M. Ford stated: "The text that influences the author of Revelation most is Ezek. 16, which is a prophetic attack on Jerusalem . . . His description is as graphic as in Rev. 17-18" (Rev., p. 283). One may prefer to speak here not of an "attack" but of divine retribution. Albert Vanhoye argued that Rev. 17:15-18 reflects a large-scale utilization of Ezek. 16 and 23 (see his article in Source Material, esp. pp. 440-442). R.H. Charles sees Ezekiel 23:25-29 in essence "reproduced" in each of the actions taken by the beast and its horn against the prostitute (Rev. II:73). Jeffrey Vogelgesang also sees John borrowing directly from Ezekiel 16 and 23 in the Babylon visions of Rev. 17-18. He states: "The general sense of Rev. 17 corresponds to Ezek. 16 and 23, where there is a consideration of the evil deeds of the whore, then a verdict reached, and punishment proclaimed" (The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation, p. 30).

One point that professional exegetes regularly ignore is the question of how Ezekiel 16 and Revelation 17 relate to each other theologically, that is, how the acknowledged correspondence between Ezek.16 and Rev. 17 indicate a biblical typology. For the interpretation of Rev. 17 it is crucial to define the typological structure between the two harlot figures and their judgments by God. There can be no question that a structural analogy exists between the legal charges and the retributive punishment of the prostitutes

in Ezek. 16 and Rev. 17. The conclusion is inevitable that Rev. 17 depends on Ezek. 16 because both passages deal with the professed but apostate covenant people of God! This painful conclusion has been systematically avoided by most Christian theologians and exegetical scholars, just as rabbinical scholars were so shocked by Ezekiel's severe language that they forbade the reading of Ezek.16 in the synagogue (see Megillah 4:10, in the Mishnah. H.Danby, p. 207).

The divine charges in Ezek.16 are of a moral nature: idolatry and marital infidelity. Both are interconnected, because Jerusalem's figurative adultery with Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia involved her worship of the foreign gods of these rulers (2 Kings 17:13-20; Isa. 30:1-5; 31:1). Jerusalem's apostasy in worship is disclosed especially in Ezekiel 23:

*They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them... At that same time they defiled my sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths.... That is what they did in my house (Ezek. 23:37-39; see also 20:21).*

Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel, exposed the same practices of sacrificing children to idols (Jer. 7:10, 30-34). When he announced the destruction of Solomon's temple, "the priests and the cult prophets and all the people seized him and said, 'You must die!'" (Jer. 26:8).

The end-time prostitute of Rev. 17 is charged with the same crimes of cultic apostasy, sexual infidelity and bloodthirsty idolatry (17:2, 4, 6, 14). Just as ancient Jerusalem had turned into an enemy of Yahweh, so would the institutional Church become unfaithful to Christ, apostate in her worship cultus, and bloodthirsty for all who refused to bow down for her and her cultic "mark."

The punishment of the prostitute in Ezek. 16 and 23, as well as in Rev. 17, is the same in essence: the former lovers are called by God to carry out the punishment for the prostitute (Ezek. 16:37, 39; 23:22; Rev. 17:16, 17).

Walter Zimmerli summarized the punishment in Ezek.16: "The very powers from whom the community of God seem to profit will strike back and execute God's judgment upon them . . . as a judgment, beginning at the house of God (9:6)" (Ezekiel I, p. 349). Jean-Pierre Ruiz therefore concluded: "What we find in Rev. 17,16 is a fresh and conscious reappropriation of the language of Ezekiel 16 and 23, a real transformation of prophetic language" (Ezekiel in the Apocalypse, p. 377). The interpreting angel stresses that the destructive action of the beast and its horns against the prostitute in Rev. 17:16 is the fulfillment of God's will:

*"For God has put into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled" (Rev. 17:17).*

A closer look at the judgment oracles of the old and the new prostitute reveals a literary and thematic correspondence:

EZEKIEL 16:39	REVELATION 17:16
Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare.	They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

THEMATIChe theological relation between the two punishments of the old and the new prostitute is apparently one of type and antitype. This inspired typology contains the key to decode John's baffling end-time vision: the end-time prostitute represents the unfaithful, worldly church, which will briefly regain supremacy over political rulers. J.P. Ruiz has called our attention to some remarkable connections of the prostitute's punishment in Rev. 17, "they will eat her flesh" (v.16). He sees a "close verbal similarity" between this phrase of Rev. 17:16 and that of 2 Kings 9 which describes Elijah's prediction of the death of Jezebel, the Queen of Israel: "On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh" (v. 36). Ruiz states: "The context of 2 Kings 9,36 also corresponds to that of Rev. 17,16" (Ibid., p. 367). The basic correspondence of the historic Jezebel and her prophetic antitype within the Church was indicated already in Christ's Letter to the Church in Thyatira:

*Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20).*

The church of Christ would allow within her bosom a new Jezebel, with her false claims as a prophet of God and with her false religious cultus (Rev. 2:20-23). The bitter results are the same in the old and in the new Jezebel: the political, legalized murder of the saints of God.

Just as Jezebel of old used her husband, King Ahab, to persecute Elijah and the followers of Yahweh, so will the apocalyptic Jezebel use the political rulers to persecute the followers of Christ. Apostate Christianity will receive the same avenging judgment from Christ as Jezebel received: "He has avenged on her [the prostitute] the blood of his servants" (Rev. 19:2; cf. 2 Kings 9:7). This is the larger context of the angel's phrase, "they will eat her flesh" in Rev. 17:16. The final covenant curse on the apocalyptic prostitute is expressed as: "they . . . will burn her with fire" (17:16; see also 18:8). In the law of Moses this punishment was reserved only for the sexual immorality of the daughter of a priest:

*"If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire" (Lev. 21:9).*

While the traditional punishment for adultery by a married woman was stoning (Deut. 22:23,24; John 8:5), in case of prostitution by a priest's daughter the penalty was burning. The apocalyptic punishment of the end-time prostitute points once again to the priestly nature of this fallen "woman". John reports his reaction to the vision of 17:1-6, "When I saw her, I was greatly astonished" (17:6). He was, in fact, "dumbfounded" or "greatly perplexed." This is hard to follow if John had seen only the persecuting Roman Emperors or a hostile Jerusalem. That was all familiar to his own experience. However, if he had seen the change that would take place in the institutional church of Christ, that the pure woman would become intolerant and bloodthirsty, that would have been truly dumbfounding.

### **Apostolic Warnings Against the Predicted Apostasy**

The church of Christ is going to repeat the history of ancient Israel, which by and large was a history of apostasy. The apostle Paul had warned against a repetition of Israel's apostasy in the institutional church:

*Now these things occurred as examples [lit. "types"] to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were. . . So,*



*if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Cor. 10:6, 7, 12).*

Paul also used the prophetic metaphor of a woman to describe the church, when he wrote:

*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, 3).*

He expressed his justified fear in this ominous prediction when he addressed the church elders of Ephesus:

*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! (Acts 20:29-31).*

He even characterized this coming apostasy [apostasias] within the church as a rebellion of "the man of lawlessness" [anomias] (2 Thess. 2:3), that would continue and remain all the way, until the second coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8).

John's Apocalypse, however, develops the theme of the apostasy systematically in Rev. 12 through 19. Here the institutional post-apostolic church is pictured as a "prostitute," because being the "woman" of Christ, she would unlawfully unite herself with the kings of the earth:

*With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries (17:2).*

One historicist interpreter commented:

*The fact that Babylon is distinct from, though unlawfully united with the kings of the earth, is positive proof that Babylon is not the civil power. The fact that the people of God are in her midst just before her overthrow, proves that she is a professed religious body. We think it must be apparent, therefore, that the Babylon of Rev. 17 symbolizes the professed church unlawfully united to the world (J.N. Andrews, Three Messages of Rev. 14, p. 48).*

## **The Imperative of the Gospel Hermeneutic**

Some acknowledge that the harlot of Revelation 17 represents the professed covenant people of God and their unfaithfulness to the covenant God. Josephine M. Ford explains: "It is the covenant which makes the bride, the breaking of it which makes the adulteress" (Rev., p. 285). Reading the Apocalypse against the background of the Old Testament has been a fundamental breakthrough in the approach to the book of Revelation, the importance of which many still fail to appreciate. Nevertheless, this Old Testament key is not a guarantee of the historical application of Rev. 17. One needs to be aware also of the Christian typology which the New Testament reveals in its application of the Hebrew covenant language (see my *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, Ch. 4).

Rejecting the popular application of the harlot to Imperial Rome, this Roman Catholic scholar literalizes her application of the harlot of Rev. 17 to "faithless Jerusalem" and its priesthood. She states: "These texts [of the Qumran scrolls] together with the OT ones

indicate that the harlot in Rev. 17 is Jerusalem, not Rome" (Rev., p. 285). She therefore considers "the old, defiled Jerusalem", rather than Rome, as the true counterpart of the New Jerusalem (p. 286). But this principle of literal application is a fundamental violation of the gospel hermeneutic, because it is not oriented to Christ and His new-covenant people (see above, Part I, Ch. 5).

The Apocalypse is built almost entirely with Hebrew terms and images, as is acknowledged by all exegetes. It is therefore essential to apply the gospel hermeneutic consistently to all the Hebrew covenant language in the Apocalypse, in order to avoid speculative interpretations. The language and symbolism in Revelation remains covenantal, but in terms of the new covenant of Jesus Christ. This Christ-centered covenant language was firmly established in Revelation 1 (see above, Chapters 2-3).

### **The MYSTERY of Babylon the Great**

The prostitute has a title written on her forehead: "Mystery: Babylon the Great" . . . (17:5). This "mystery" is not restricted to the identity of the prostitute. The angel said explicitly: "I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns" (17:7). J.P. Ruiz therefore states:

*All of 17,7-8, not just vv. 15-18, has to do with the Woman whose judgment John is invited to witness. The repetition of guné in vv. 7, 9 and 18 serves as the literary reminder that Prostitute and Beast belong to the same mustérion (Ezekiel in the Apocalypse, p. 349).*

This means that the "Mystery" of Babylon the Great includes John's vision as a whole, the understanding of which "calls for a mind with wisdom" (17:9). Wisdom was required earlier for the understanding of the "number of the beast" (13:18). It demanded the intellectual activity of calculating the number of the beast (13:18). The same mental activity is needed in Rev. 17, because it suggests the historical application of the seven heads of the scarlet beast and of its ten horns:

*The seven heads are seven hills [more correct: "mountains", ore] on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while (17:9, 10).*

*The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast (17:12).*

The entire imagery is part of the "mystery" of Babylon the Great. Wisdom suggests that we trace the whole imagery back to the Hebrew prophetic language before we endeavor to apply the symbols to the church age. While we have detected an undeniable correspondence of the apocalyptic prostitute with the prostitute in Ezekiel's doom oracles (chapters 16 and 23), we observe that the beast with heads and horns in Rev. 17 depends essentially on the beast with ten horns in Daniel 7. We must relate Rev. 17 therefore to Daniel 7. Both apocalyptic visions are indissolubly connected. Ruiz recognized this in his analysis of Rev. 17,

*Yet it is a unified message offered in OT terms, for the Beast motif is drawn from Daniel; while the motif of the Prostitute, her activity and her fate, is drawn from Ezekiel (Ibid., p. 359).*

## **The Timing of the Resurrected Beast**

The second motif of Revelation 17 is the scarlet beast, on which the prostitute is seated. John is carried "in the Spirit into a desert." There he saw "a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and having seven heads and ten horns" (v.3).

At this point we remember that the dragon (12:3) and the sea beast (13:17) likewise have seven heads and ten horns. Still each of the three animals has some unique features which differ from the others. The dragon had seven crowns on his heads (12:3), while the sea beast had ten crowns on his horns (13:1). The scarlet beast has no crowns but carries the prostitute. Consequently, the scarlet beast of Rev. 17 is not identical with the sea beast of Rev. 13 or the dragon of Rev. 12. On the other hand, the seven heads and ten horns of the scarlet beast establish a definite connection between the sea beast and the dragon.

The interpreting angel asks for a special exercise of wisdom to understand the seven heads of the revived beast (17:9). Apparently the proper timing of the last two heads, the sixth and the seventh, in the church age is crucial to maintain an accurate awareness of God's plan for our time.

From our analysis of Revelation 12-14 we learned that these chapters progressively unfold the entire range of the church age. While Revelation 12 focuses primarily on the beginning of the church age (the birth and enthronement of the Messiah, 12:1-5) and on the post-apostolic centuries (the woman hides in the wilderness for 1260 symbolic days, 12:6,14), Revelation 13 and 17 shift their main focus of prophecy increasingly to the end-time of the church age (in 13:15-17; 17:12-14), enlarging more and more the final conflict of Rev. 12:17.

The seven heads are explicitly described as successive "kings" or worldpowers, of which "five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come" (17:10). It is clear that the demonic beast exercises its oppressive rule through one head at a time in the course of history. The seven heads belong equally to the dragon (Rev. 12), to the sea beast (Rev. 13), and to the scarlet beast from the abyss (Rev. 17). We may not assume that there are twenty-one heads, but only seven which represent the entire span of Satan's warfare against God's people. This implies that the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast each represent one particular head or world power. Relating each animal to the central time period of the "1260 days" (12:6) or "42 months" (13:5), we concur with John Andrews:

*The proper period of each seems to be this: the dragon before the 1260 years, the beast of chap. 13 during that period, and the beast of chap. 17 since the deadly wound and captivity at the close of that period (Ib., p. 78).*

The seven heads on each of the three beasts of Rev. 12; 13; and 17 express the continuity of persecution by these evil world powers. They are all essentially connected by the same spirit of hatred against Christ Jesus and determined to outlaw and execute the companions of the Lamb of God. Each "head" of the ruling state powers in the church age is motivated by the same dragon, or Satan (Rev. 12:9).

## **The Seven Heads on the Scarlet Beast**

The seven heads have been the subject of much discussion in commentaries. Recently Kenneth A. Strand has examined the arguments of the popular preterist view, which applies the seven heads to seven specific Roman emperors (in Symp. on Rev., II:177-206;

see Source Mat.). Louis F. Were examined the old Protestant view, which applied the heads to seven different forms of Roman Government, the seventh of which purportedly was the Exarch of Ravenna (The Woman and The Beast, Ch. 21). C.M. Maxwell has presented a clear and comprehensive interpretation of this section of Rev. 17 in God Cares, II:471-478.

All these investigators arrive at the conclusion that the seven heads do not refer to specific kings or forms of the Roman government but are symbolic of successive world powers which have opposed God's people through the ages. All interpret the term "kings" as personified kingdoms or empires, not as isolated individuals (see Dan. 2:37-39; 7:17, 18, 23). The "mountains" are likewise seen as symbols of kingdoms, as was customary in the prophetic language (Dan. 2:44,45; Jer. 51:25). With regard to the "seven heads" of the beast Louis Were commented:

*The number 7 is employed in reference to heads in a symbolic sense and that it is not incumbent to find an exact number of 7 enemies of the people of God. The number 7 is employed in the Apocalypse in a symbolic sense for perfection or completeness (Ibid., p. 188).*

After reviewing various proposals to identify the seven heads, the S.D.A. Bible Commentary concludes: "that evidence is insufficient to warrant a dogmatic identification of them" (VII:855). There is a challenging indication in Rev. 17 that invites us to identify the major kingdoms tentatively:

*Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he comes, he must remain for a little while (v. 10).*

If one reckons the first five hostile heads as kingdoms which were past in John's own day, we must begin with: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, in order to have five kingdoms that were fallen in John's time. The "head" which "is", would then be Imperial Rome. The "head" yet to come then would point to Papal Rome during the Middle Ages. But there is a problem with this position. It has ignored its coordination with the three phases of the beast: "The beast who once was, and now is not . . ." (v. 11). This means that the identification of the sixth head ("which is") with Imperial Rome does not square with the angel's explanation that the beast "now is not!"

It seems therefore wiser to adopt the eschatological point of view presented by the plague-angel himself. K.A. Strand states: "The vision itself [Rev. 17:1-6] is from the perspective of eschatological judgment when the beast 'is not'" (Interpreting The Book of Revelation, p. 55).

The symbolic picture that the sixth head is alive, while the beast "is not", calls for some explanation. The expression "is not" regarding the beast indicates most likely that the beastly or persecuting nature of the beast is not active during the sixth head. The sixth-head period would then apply to the time of the modern democracies since the French Revolution (1798), when state and church began to be separated. C.M. Maxwell views the scarlet-beast vision also "from the end time rather than from John's day". He explains:

*It sees the five "fallen" heads as Babylon, Persia, Greece, Roman Empire, and Christian Rome. The sixth head (in the end-time) "is" Christian Rome in its wounded state, to be followed soon by the seventh head that "has not yet come", Christian Rome in its revived condition. The "hour" when the ten kings reign with the beast is a brief period at the very end of time when with dictatorial intensity they aid the beast in reviving harsh persecution (God Cares, II:472).*

We may visualize the coordination of the scarlet beast with its seven heads, in the following diagram. It accepts the vision of Rev. 17 as looking backward into the church age from the time of the end, when the sixth head is present.

REV. XVII -- PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
<b>HEADS</b> FIVE HAVE FALLEN: Bab; M-Persia; Greece; Pagan Rome; PAPAL ROME	THE SIXTH IS PRESENT: <i>during the end-time.</i>	THE SEVENTH HAS NOT YET COME
<b>HORNS</b> Crowned:Medieval Monarchies	Uncrowned: Democracies since French Revolution.	Crowned for One Hour:They unite with Resurrected Beast
<b>BEAST</b> Once WAS: Persecuting	IS NOT: Does not persecute, because it suffers a mortal wound.	YET WILL COME: to wage war against the Lamb and His followers (17:12-14). SUDDEN REVERSAL: Beast and Horns destroy Prostitute (17:16).

The new revelation of Rev. 17 concerns the perplexing disclosure that the antichrist (the sea beast) of Rev. 13, after its deadly wound has been healed, shall rise once more to power in order to orchestrate an all-out assault on the saints in the time of the end. This final persecution takes the nature of a religious-political war of the beast, in alliance with ten horns, against the Lamb and His followers:

*The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings -- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers (Rev. 17:12-14).*

The comforting message of Rev. 17 is the brief time of the final terror and the sudden deliverance from the last tyranny for the Israel of God. The remarkable stress on the end-time in Rev. 17 requires special attention. The repeated time indicators of past, present, and future, in Rev. 17 need to be related properly to the three-stage history of the beast in Rev. 13. Revelation 17 must be considered as one of the most important visions of encouragement for the people of God in the end-time.

### The Time Progression Between Revelation 13 and 17

Although Rev. 17 has been considered by some as nothing more than a repetition of Rev. 13, a close comparison of the seven-headed beasts in both chapters shows that Rev. 17 is not just a doublet of Rev. 13. Three distinct features indicate a historical progression between the sea beast of Rev. 13 and the scarlet beast of Rev. 17.

- 1) The names of blasphemy, restricted to the heads of the beast in Rev. 13:1, now cover the whole body of the scarlet beast (17:3). This indicates the continuous

- increase of the antichrist's boastful claims over time;
- 2) The ten horns on the scarlet beast no longer wear royal diadems (as in Rev. 13:1), but they will once again rule as kings with the beast "for one hour" (17:12).
  - 3) The scarlet beast does not rise out of the sea (as in Rev. 13), but from the Abyss or realm of death (17:8; see Rom. 10:7). This suggests a resurrection of the beast's rule. This renaissance, or rebirth of the antichrist on a universal scale is the unique disclosure of Revelation 17.

### **The Three-Stage Existence of the Antichrist**

John discerns three successive phases of the antichrist-beast. First the beast was to wage war against the saints for 42 months (13:5). Then the beast was struck with a mortal wound (13:3). Finally he saw the resurrected beast resume its war against the saints for only "one hour" or "a little while", and immediately go to his destruction (Rev. 17:8, 10-11). The interpreting angel describes the three successive stages of the beast repeatedly (three times):

*The beast which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction . . . the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come (Rev. 17:8).*

*The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction (Rev. 17:11).*

The angel thus stresses three times that John's vision pertains to that period when the beast "is not," that is, when it is not ruling as a persecutor of the saints, while the beast is "about to come up [mellei anabainein] out of the abyss" (Rev. 17:8 NASB). This description determines the time viewpoint of the vision of Rev. 17. It views the final events from that future standpoint in time of the vision of Rev. 17, when the beast "is not," that is, when it will have received its "mortal wound." G. McCready Price stated: "There seems no possibility of denying that this 'is not' stage of the beast is meant to correspond to the time of the deadly wound of Revelation 13:3" (The Time of the End, p. 106).

Revelation 17 reveals, however, that the persecuting woman was not inflicted with the mortal wound. The apostate church herself would remain, she will be only like "a widow" because the beast will no longer be available to execute her dictates. During its mortal-wound period the beast "is not" (17:8; 18:7), meaning that it is not persecuting.

To sum up the time viewpoints in Rev. 12; 13; and 17: the dragon wars against the saints during pagan Rome (Rev. 12:1-5); the sea-beast continues this warfare during the Middle Ages (Rev. 13:1-10); while the scarlet beast of Revelation 17 portrays the threat to the saints as viewed from the time since the French Revolution. This conclusion implies that Revelation 17 does not point to Imperial Rome or the Middle Ages, but to the time of the final events. We concur therefore with the conclusion of Kenneth Strand:

*To seek a fulfillment in history, for example, for the "is not" phase of the beast of chapter 17, when that phase is obviously a view of judgment, is illogical. Or to treat the whole of chapter 17 as having historical, rather than eschatological fulfillment is to miss the very point of the chapter and of the whole second part of the book of Revelation in which it occurs (Interpreting the Book of Revelation, p. 54).*

## The Future Seventh Head

It seems quite clear that the angel's statement: "Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come" (17:10), indicates consecutive world powers. The emphasis of the angel is neither on the first five heads that have fallen, nor on the head that "is," seen from the plague-angel's viewpoint. The angel's interest is specifically in the last or seventh head. He proceeds by giving the resurrected beast the number eight!

*The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction (17:11).*

This numerical designation of the revived beast is very meaningful. He is "the eighth" while belonging to the seven heads (17:11)! Since he is one of the seven, one must not assume that the beast suddenly adds on an eighth head. The dragon of Rev. 12, the beast of Rev. 13, and the revived beast of Rev. 17, are all depicted with no more than seven heads. The angel makes three parallel statements concerning the revived beast:

*He "will come up out of the Abyss" (17:8a).*

*"And yet (he) will come" (17:8c).*

*He "is an eighth king" (17:11).*

Combining these declarations, we see that his being counted as an "eighth" applies to the beast's emergence from the Abyss, that is, to its resurrection. Several NT scholars see an ironic parody in the assignment of number "eight" to the restored beast. They view the resurrection day of Christ as "the eighth day," because it followed His stay in the tomb on the seventh-day Sabbath. Alan Johnson states: "The eighth was the day of the Messiah, the day of the new age and the sign of the victory over the forces of evil (Expositor's Bible Commentary, 12: 561). But Satan challenges this victory of Christ by resurrecting his own kingdom to new world power:

*In order to recruit as many as possible for his side of the war, the beast will imitate the resurrection of Christ (he "is an eighth king" [v. 11]) and will give the appearance that he is alive and in control of the world (cf. Luke 4:5-7; Johnson, *ib.*).*

The counting of number "eight" to the seventh and final head of the beast indicates not only that this is a resurrected beast, but also alerts the church to the deceptive claims of a powerful false Messiah. He will imitate the death and resurrection of Jesus, as "an eighth king" (17:11). The fundamental contrast will not escape the discerning mind. Louis F. Were concluded his in-depth analysis of Revelation 17 with this perceptive comment:

*By knowing that the number 8 is the Bible symbol of the Lord's resurrection and triumph over His enemies, we can grasp the meaning of Rev. 17:11 . . . As Jesus triumphed over His enemies and arose in glorious power to use that power to save His people, so this beast will emerge from its place of death to a position of even greater power, which it will seek to employ for the destruction of the people of God (The Woman and the Beast in the Book of Revelation, pp. 113, 114).*

But the seventh head will remain in power only "for a little while" (17:10). Then it will suddenly go "to his destruction" in his warfare against the Lamb and His followers (17:11,

14). This will occur through the impact of Christ's glorious advent:

*But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet . . . The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed by the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse (19:20, 21).*

Albert Vanhoye, in his classical study on the use of Ezekiel in Revelation, concluded:

In fact, what is important to note is not only that the general sense of the passage [Rev. 17:1-6, 15-18], but its whole vocabulary corresponds to that of Ezekiel 16 and 23. From there comes the idea of a judgment of the prostitute; also both Ez. 16 and 23 are built in the form of a judgment ("L'Utilisation du Livre d'Ézéchiél dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica* 43 (1962) 436-472; citation from 441 (own transl.).

This correspondence between Ezek. 16 (and 23) and Rev. 17 establishes a Christian typology between an apostate Jerusalem and the apostate Church. End-time Babylon is an apostate Christendom that has adopted pagan forms of Christian worship, has changed God's covenant law, and has established alliances with the political powers. All such ecclesiastical unfaithfulness to Christ is condemned to self-destruction in Rev. 17:16. The civil and political authorities will ultimately expose the shame or guilt of Babylon and act accordingly as the agents of divine retribution (17:16,17). Revelation 17 functions thus as the ecclesiological fulfillment of Ezekiel 16 and 23.

## **The Victorious Remnant Church of Christ**

The higher purpose of Revelation is to urge the people of God to come out of Babylon and to follow Christ. This is explicit in Revelation 18. The companions of the Lamb are described as "his called, chosen and faithful followers" (Rev. 17:14). This description implies that the victorious Christians are not only called and chosen by God (Matt. 22:14), but that they also remain loyal to Jesus (Rev. 14:12). They hold on to "the testimony of Jesus" and of His lordship in the ultimate test of faith (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). Amidst the dark clouds of Babylon's judgment, we may discern the shining light of those that remain true to Christ until the very end, even to the point of martyrdom (see Rev. 2:10).

In Revelation the martyr, as the witness of Christ, is the real conqueror! Christ's followers know that their warfare is more than a physical battle. They are not political rebels, they respond to the death-threat of the beast with "patient endurance and faithfulness" (Rev. 13:10). This is their conquest of the beast. "To overcome" in the book of Revelation means primarily to confess the lordship of Jesus Christ in the midst of persecution, that is, "to remain true to my name" (Rev. 2:13). The possibility of failure is real and those who fail to keep the testimony of Jesus and choose the antichrist will face the judgment of God. Their names will be blotted from the book of life (Rev. 3:5; 22:19) and they will lose their share in the tree of life and in the holy city (Rev. 2:23; 22:19). This is John's solemn warning for Christian believers. Both Rev. 13:8 and 17:8 refer to "the book of life" in order to point to the certainty of eternal life for the overcomer. The prophecies of Daniel equally conclude with the assurance that "everyone whose name is found written in the book will be delivered" (Dan. 12:1).

(The Source Material for Revelation 17 and 18 is combined and follows after the next chapter).





# Chapter XXXI

## The Significance Of God's Verdict On Babylon

### Revelation XVIII

John's vision of Revelation 18 further expands the judgment of Babylon by dwelling on its significance for the church in the end-time. It contains a special message from heaven for God's people. This vision is remarkable for its concentric structure, which focuses on the central message: of the execution of God's judgment. The opening and closing sections focus first on heaven's charges and verdict on Babylon (vv. 1-3) and then on the future disappearance of Babylon (vv. 21-24).

Within this outer circle, two voices from heaven cry out messages of paramount importance for the saints and incite them to action. The first message has immediate relevance: it urges the people of God to flee from Babylon (vv. 4-8); the second voice calls on the saints in heaven and on earth to rejoice because of heaven's verdict on Babylon (v. 20). The central portion (vv. 9-19) describes the moment of execution of judgment, "in one hour" (vvs. 10, 17, 19). Kenneth Strand has observed a "well-balanced" chiasmic structure in Rev. 18 (in AUSS 24:1 [1986]: 38):

- A. Introduction (Babylon's Doom Pronounced; Her Internal Condition Described; Her Sinful Activities and Relationships Summarized), vss. 1-3.
  - B. "Interlude" (Appeal to "Come Out of Babylon"; Statement of Judgment on Babylon), vss. 4-8.
    - C. The Litany Proper (Mourning of Kings, Merchants, and Seafarers at Babylon in Flames), vss. 9-19.
  - B<sup>1</sup>. "Interlude" (Call for Rejoicing; Statement of Judgment on Babylon), vs. 20.
- A<sup>1</sup>. Conclusion (Babylon's Doom Graphically Expressed; Her Internal Condition Described; Her Sinful Activities and Relationships Summarized), vss. 21-24.

Strand presents a more detailed chiasm of Rev. 18 in a helpful diagram on page 46 of the same article. He further noticed: "The entire 18th chapter of Revelation represents a broad blending and merging of OT backgrounds" (p.44). The sources for Rev. 18 are the doom oracles against Babylon (Isa. 47; Jer. 50-51) and Tyre (Ezek. 26-28), and even against Jerusalem (Isa. 25:10). In these borrowings we may see more than an adoption of ancient language. In Revelation 18 we face the antitype of Israel's old enemies: the end-time collapse of the antichrist empire.

## The Heavenly Messenger and His Message

*After that I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor (Rev. 18:1).*

The descent of this angel from heaven to earth has an immediate, visible effect: "the earth was illuminated by his splendor [Gr. *doxa*, "glory"]." The background of this manifestation of divine glory is the promise in Ezekiel 43:2 to Israel in captivity that God would return to His new temple, from the East. In Rev. 18 the "glory" refers to the quality of God's presence through those sent by Christ; a quality that corresponds to the angel that comes from the East with the seal of the living God during the sixth seal in Revelation 7:2 and to the angel of Revelation 10. This display of splendor from heaven is connected with the end-time message that calls for faithfulness to the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus and on that basis the call to separate from Babylon.

The angel of Rev. 18:1 is commissioned with "great authority" and is particularly important for the Christian world. His "mighty voice" must reach all people on earth. The essence of his message is more than the imminent doom of Babylon, expressed by the announcement: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! . . ." (18:2). This message repeats the second angel's message of Rev. 14:8. Thus Rev. 14 and 18 are closely connected. This implies the identification of the "mighty voice" of Rev. 18:1-2 with the people that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus in Rev. 14:12.

The judicial verdict of the heavenly court brings urgency to the message. It connects the pronouncement of Babylon's fall with the court session of Daniel 7:9,10, where the purpose of the heavenly judgment is stated in positive terms: "The Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22). Already the expression "Babylon the Great" was adopted from Daniel 4:30. This Danielic background clarifies the covenant setting of Babylon's doom in Rev. 18. George Caird explained:

*This angel, notwithstanding the gloom of his proclamation, is an angel of the gospel. He comes, not to gloat over the fallen, but to announce the triumph of God's purposes and the final liberation of God's people from all oppression (The Revelation of St. John The Divine, p. 222).*

In this respect it is enlightening to discern how Revelation 18 complements Revelation 17. The visions are two sides of the same coin. While chapter 17 reveals Satan's final grasp for world dominion through the beast which "will come up out of the Abyss" (17:8), in chapter 18 God acts through the angel who comes down from heaven with great authority (18:1). Only by uniting Rev. 17 and 18 do we become aware of the urgency and timeliness of the final warning message. The comments of L.Were point out the concerted actions in both visions:

*One represents the power of evil, particularly of religious persecution, rising in strength until the whole world is taken in the snare; the other represents special power which Heaven will pour upon the remnant church in order to meet the rising power of evil (The Woman and the Beast in the Book of Revelation, p. 151).*

This end-time scenario reminds us of the beginning of the church at Pentecost, when power was given to meet the first wave of persecution. We may see a parallel situation in the end-time. E.G. White explained:

*The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel, are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close (The Great Controversy, pp. 611, 612).*

It is meaningful to remember that the angel's words, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon!" were shouted first by Isaiah when he announced to Jerusalem that Babylon had fallen into the hands of Cyrus, the King from the East (Isa. 21:9). That was good news for God's people then; it is the same good news for God's church now. Here is the typological connection of Rev. 18 with Israel. The ancient situation on a national scale is the prophetic type of the worldwide situation regarding Christ's church.

The angel now dwells on the desolation of end-time Babylon: "She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird" (18:2). The more accurate NASB reads: "She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird." This prophetic language is borrowed from Isaiah's predictions about the fate of two archenemies of Israel: Babylon and Edom (see Isa. 13:21, 22 and 34:11-14). Apparently John perceived a basic unity among the prophetic doom oracles against Israel and her enemies. John extends all God's ancient curses to the end-time power hostile to God and His people. The repeated designation "unclean" is added by John, however, to stress its contrast with the coming New Jerusalem, the holy city, into which "nothing unclean" will enter (see Rev. 21:27 NASB). The angel proceeds to detail the reason for Babylon's doom:

*For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries (Rev. 18:3).*

Three groups are distinguished as Babylon's partners: the nations, the kings of the earth, and the merchants of the earth. The charges against them are basically: the drinking of the intoxicating wine of Babylon's adulteries and the excessive economic enrichment, the "idolatrous worship of Mammon" (Caird). These charges imply that ecclesiastical Babylon is held responsible not only for her own sins but also for the crime of corrupting others in the civil world.

### **The Final Exodus Call to God's People**

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her my people . . ." (18:4). Some commentators ascribe this heavenly voice to Christ, because it addresses the saints as "My people." Be that as it may, this voice repeats the ancient exodus call to Israel for the end-time followers of Christ, as the following comparison makes clear:

JEREMIAH 51:6-9	REVELATION 18:4-5
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<p>"Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the LORD'S vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves. Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD'S hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad" (vs. 6, 7).  "Let us leave her ...for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds" (vs. 9).</p>	<p>"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes."</p>
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This correspondence of God's ancient exodus call and God's final call to flee from Babylon shows how God leads His wayward people out of a corrupt society, ripe for judgment, and invites them to proceed to the promised land. This awakening call intends to arouse God's children to the urgency of the situation and to separate from debasing worship. Some scholars realize the seriousness of the appeal of Revelation 18. Leon Morris states: "In a sense this appeal is the key to the whole chapter. John is not gloating over the city's downfall. He is appealing to Christians to see the realities of the situation and to act accordingly" (Ibid., p. 216). J.P. Ruiz comments: "Believers are urged to distance themselves from 'Babylon' so as not to be associated with the sins for which she is to be punished (in line with Jer. 51, 6)" (Ibid., p. 399).

The "sins" of end-time Babylon are listed in 18: 3, 23, 24 and 17: 2-6. They consist of adulterous relations with the kings of the earth; intoxication of the inhabitants of the earth through her wine; deceiving the people by her "magic spell" or sorceries; persecution of the prophets and saints, "who bore testimony of Jesus"; and boasting arrogantly in her wealth, luxury, and self-sufficiency. Together these sins have accumulated till they reached "the sky," signifying the limit of divine grace and forbearance. This implies the biblical notion that heaven keeps a record of Babylon's crimes (see Rev. 20:12!). Then comes the moment when God "remembers" His covenant and takes action! This divine "remembering" takes place during the seventh plague: "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath" (Rev. 16:19). The act of remembering is expressed in terms of a judicial verdict in heaven and of initiating the final warning message on earth.

There is a thematic correspondence between the final state of Babylon and Jerusalem of old. In his last address to the Rabbis and Pharisees, Jesus showed that Jerusalem stepped over the line of divine forbearance when she rejected His Messiahship:

*Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! . . .*

*Look, your house is left to you desolate (Matt. 23: 32, 38; see also v. 35).*

Jesus' verdict on Jerusalem was executed, however, only after the city had rejected His pentecostal appeals through His Spirit-filled apostolic messengers. So end-time Babylon will receive her judgment after the last appeal of Christ through His messengers (Rev. 14:6-12; 18:1-4).

The final issue will not be a divine commandment or cultic worship in isolation from Jesus and His canonical testimony. Testing truth is always "the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). In the final conflict between the followers of the Lamb and the followers of the beast, Christ will be exalted again with pentecostal power (Rev. 18:1). Then all peoples and tribes will hear the truth as it is in Jesus. Then no one can remain neutral any longer to the

claims of Christ, just as it was in Jerusalem of old. We accept therefore the description of Stephen M. Travis, when he states:

*Each person confronted by Christ has in fact made a fundamental choice. Each person has entered into, or refused, relationship with Christ. The direction of his life, and therefore his destiny, is set. And in the final analysis there are only two possible directions, and two possible destinies--each of them chosen in reaction to the revelation which Christ brings. But it must of course be stressed in addition that the purpose of warnings about condemnation is always to provoke repentance. Not until final judgment is anyone's condemnation final (Christ and the Judgment of God, p. 171).*

### **The Theology of Judgment in Revelation 18**

Both interludes in Rev. 18 convey a theology of judgment for Babylon that deserves attention:

*Give back to her as she has given;  
pay her back double for what she has done.  
Mix her a double portion from her own cup (Rev. 18:6).*

*Rejoice over her, O heaven!  
Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!  
God has judged her for the way she treated you (Rev. 18:20).*

Many commentators argue that Rev. 18 does not express vindictiveness or a sub-Christian ethic, but rather joy in the triumph of God's cause and of Christ's kingdom. The keynote of the heavenly choir in Rev. 19:1-8 is the justice, glory and reign of God. The prayers of the martyrs for divine justice during the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-11) will finally be answered. The response of the saints in heaven and on earth is a prophetic doxology:

*After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:  
"Hallelujah!  
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,  
for true and just are his judgments.  
He has condemned the great prostitute  
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.  
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (Rev. 19:1-2).*

Jacques Ellul sums it up well: "Not vengeance against other men, but destruction of the powers that alienate all men and whose malignant character is revealed in the massacre of the saints!" (Apocalypse, p.199). Kenneth Strand observed that God's judgment on Judah of old amounted to a double punishment: "She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:2; see also Jer. 16:18; 17:18). This double punishment is

now assigned to Babylon: "Pay her back double for what she has done" (Rev. 18:6). Strand draws this conclusion:

*What we appear to have in Rev. 18: 6b-c then, is an interesting reversal-of-roles type of allusion wherein it is now Babylon, not Judah, that is to receive a double measure of punishment ("Some Modalities of Symbolic Usage in Revelation 18", AUSS 24:1, 1986, 41).*

The theological significance of this "reversal-role" in Rev. 18 can be explained by considering that apocalyptic Babylon is doubly guilty, because she functions as the rebellious covenant partner of God. The harlot Babylon corresponds essentially with ancient Jerusalem, which deserved a double punishment. Babylon is likewise called to be the light of the Gentiles through the saving knowledge of God's covenant (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). The hymn of joy in 18:20 functions as the counterpart of the judicial verdict pronounced in verses 6-7: "God has judged your judgment [to kríma] out of her [lex autes]." What divine judicial act [kríma] is in view here? The verb krínein (to judge) is concerned with celestial justice, not with human vengeance. This envisions therefore a heavenly court or forensic setting. Morris explains: "Wrongs had been done to the saints and these are now put right" (The Rev. of St. John, p. 222). The most significant aspect is that God in His court of justice (Dan. 7:9,10) will reverse Babylon's verdicts on the saints. Caird comments: "'Your judgment' must be the sentence passed on the martyrs in Roman law court" (The Rev., p. 229). The divine Judge will rule, however, that Babylon's persecution of the saints was based on false accusations. Therefore the heavenly Judge can apply the covenant laws regarding murder (Gen. 9:5-6) and malicious witness (Deut. 19:16-19).

The New English Bible has captured the essential meaning: "For in the judgment against her he has vindicated your cause" (Rev. 18:20). Caird translates: "For God has imposed on her the sentence she passed on you!" He explains more fully:

*Babylon has brought a malicious accusation against the martyrs, which has resulted in their death. But the case has been carried 'before the Lord,' to the court of final appeal, where judgments are true and just. There Babylon has been found guilty of perjury, and God has therefore required from her the life of her victims, exacting from her the penalty she exacted from them (Ibid., p. 230).*

This is perhaps the most powerful incitement for the saints to remain steadfast till the end. Like Job, they may be assured of this majestic truth: "I know that my Redeemer [Vindicator, Defender, NASB margin] lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25). The New English Bible translates Job's testimony this way: "But in my heart I know that my vindicator lives and that he will rise last to speak in court; and I shall ...see my defending counsel, even God himself, whom I shall see with my own eyes." This assurance will carry each faithful follower of Christ through the final distress.

Strand has pointed out that the unusual phrase that God will inflict His judgment "out of her" is an allusion to Ezekiel's oracle against Tyre, Israel's trading partner: "So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you" (Ezek. 28:18; in AUSS 24:1, 1986, 43-45). The connection of the doom of Tyre and end-time Babylon is strengthened by the fact that Rev. 18 alludes to Ezekiel 26-28 thirteen times.

## **Old Testament Prototypes of Babylon's Judgment in Revelation 18**

The purpose of the literary link with Ezek. 28 becomes obvious if we read the entire prophecy against Tyre and its king. The reason for this prophecy was the self-exaltation and self-deification of the ruler of Tyre, who said in his heart, "I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas" (28:2). "Like the foundling Israel in Ezekiel 16, she founders on her beauty of which she has been proud" (W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2:94). But the injustice of Tyre's commercial activity, in connection with her sanctuaries, is presented as a legal charge (28:18). The actual execution of the judgment on Tyre occurs as "a spectacle before kings" (28:17). It will be a fire that "bursts forth from the very place of the sin itself and destroys it" (Zimmerly, Ibid.). All this discloses an essential correspondence between Tyre and end-time Babylon (in Rev. 17-18). It also contains lessons that are valid for every individual. The spirit of Babylon or Tyre is the very opposite of what Jesus Christ revealed in his self-sacrifice for others, as presented in Phil. 2:5-11.

Zimmerli has also called attention to the same motif of self-exaltation and of a subsequent fall into the pit regarding the king of Babylon, as presented in Isaiah 14:4-21. The fall of Babylon is set forth in greater detail in Isaiah 47. The parallel between Rev. 18 and Isa. 47 becomes apparent in the corresponding attitudes of self-glorification, self-sufficiency and boasting, of the two Babylons:

ISAIAH 47	REVELATION 18
You said, 'I will continue forever--the eternal queen!' (vs. 7) . . .Saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be widowed or suffer the loss of children' (vs. 8).	In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen. I am not a widow, and I will never mourn' (vs. 7).

History apparently has a tendency to repeat itself. The wayward human heart succumbs to the same temptations of self-exaltation throughout salvation history. Jesus exposed all self-justification, when He said to the Pharisees:

*You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable [bdelugma] in God's sight (Luke 16:15).*

The Apocalypse calls Babylon the "mother of the abominations [bdelugmaton] of the earth" (17:5). When all people in the world "highly value" Babylon's boasting claims and her deceptive "sorceries" and "potent spells," her end will come suddenly by divine decree:

ISAIAH 47:9	REVELATION 18:8
Both of these will overtake you <i>in a moment, on a single day</i> : loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.	Therefore <i>in one day</i> her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

In the end, God proves to be "strong" [ischuros], stronger than Babylon, "the strong city" [ischura] (18:9,10). "God is strong", states A.Pohl, "through His strong arguments in the fight for justice; and because He is right, He also irresistably establishes justice (see 12:8)." (Die Offenb. des Joh., p. 197; own transl.).



## The Actual Execution of Babylon's Judgment

Some expositors take the laments of the central part of Revelation 18 (verses 9-19) as a further unfolding of the threefold angels' message of Rev. 14:6-12 (Lohmeyer, Pohl). While this view recognizes the unity of the theme of Revelation 12-19, we may also notice a definite progression in history between Rev. 14 and 18. What the threefold message of Rev. 14 announces as coming soon, Rev. 18 presents as fulfilled! Nevertheless, the wrath of God occurs in progressive stages.

When the "harlot" has been judged, the partners of the prostitute are still alive and present their laments (18:9). Here Jesus' words will be fulfilled: "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25). The funeral laments of 18:9-19 indicate that three groups, the kings, merchants and seafarers of the earth are profoundly shocked by Babylon's doom. The S.D.A. Bible Commentary suggests that this "mourning" may imply "the realization that they must soon share Babylon's fate (cf. Isa. 47:13-15)" (VII:863).

Each of the three groups cries its own dirge. In verse 20 three other groups, "saints and apostles and prophets," are summoned to rejoice over Babylon's fall, as the counterpart of the three dirges. What is cause for mourning for the first three groups is cause for rejoicing among the last of these groups. The first group mourns out of self-interest (18:11), because they had "gained their wealth from her" (18:15,19). This group covers the whole expanse of the prostitute's influence. She was portrayed as dwelling "on many waters", which were interpreted as "peoples, multitudes, nations and language" (17:1, 15).

The three dirges function as announcements of judgment that has come unexpectedly. Each dirge intensifies the moment of Babylon's devastation in one hour (18:10,17,19), instead of the "one day" which was predicted (18:8; Isa. 47:9). All three dirges end with the cry, "Woe, woe!" (18:10, 16, 19). J.M. Ford has suggested that the list of Babylon's imports in 18:12, 13, which describes her immense luxury (v.17), represents the items used in the worship cultus of Jerusalem's temple (Rev., p. 304). She states: "Thus, the merchants in Rev. 18:11-17 may well have been those in association with Jerusalem, and the luxury described may have been that enjoyed by the holy city" (Rev., p. 305). We must recognize that the list of materials in 18:12-13 is modelled after the riches of Tyre in Ezek. 27:12-25. The most striking item is the "bodies and souls of men" (18:13), which is mentioned in the list of Ezek. 27:13 (LXX) as "souls of men," or "persons of men."

John applied five different items in 18:16 to the prostitute Babylon in Rev. 17:4. J.P. Ruiz comments:

*Among the making of Babylon's jewelry, precious stones and pearls appear in the vision of the New Jerusalem (21,11.19.21). This heightens the contrasting parallelism between the two cities, Babylon the Great and the New Jerusalem (Ezekiel in the Apoc., p. 435).*

Roy Naden makes this thought-provoking application of the catalogue of materials required for building a temple in Rev. 18:9-19,

*The symbol shows that while those in Christ are looking to the heavenly temple, where He sits on the throne, Babylon is bent on building and maintaining its opposition temple, where men and women will come to worship the dragon who wants to be God (The Lamb Among the Beasts, p. 254).*

It is noteworthy that the S.D.A. Bible Commentary favors a figurative interpretation of the merchants and the merchandise of Babylon in Rev. 18, as being symbolic of "those who have sold her doctrines and policies to the kings and peoples of earth" (VII:864). The 28 items of trade in 18:12, 13 "stress the comprehensiveness of her corrupt doctrines and policies" (Ibid.). This application makes the trade items a synonym for the "wine" of Babylon, by which the inhabitants of the earth are "intoxicated" (17:2). Babylon's devastation is finally described with a symbolic act of eternal consequences.

Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again" (Rev. 18:2).

There is no doubt that this spectacular act of the mighty angel is modeled after Jeremiah's request to Seraiah, a staff officer of King Zedekiah, to throw a scroll written with the doom oracles against Babylon, with a stone tied to it, into the Euphrates (see Jer. 51:61-64). In both situations, the casting of a stone into the water symbolizes the everlasting devastation of Babylon. Yet the differences between the two acts are also significant. The mentioning of a "millstone" twice, 18:21,23 and of the phrase "never to be found again" twice (18:21,22) is meaningful. The last phrase is echoed several times more in verses 22-23. Ruiz has pointed out that John's re-appropriation of the symbolic act from Jer. 51:63, 64 reflects the continuing influence of Ezekiel 26. A comparative table makes this clear:

EZEKIEL 26:12-13	REVELATION 18:22
"They will . . . throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more."	"The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again."

Ruiz states aptly: "The sea which was the source of Tyre's prosperity is also the watery chaos in which it is ruined (Ezek. 26,12; 27,3.4.26-27)" (Ibid., p.469). Ezekiel 26 concludes: "I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found, declares the Sovereign LORD" (v.21). This presents a clear correspondence with Rev. 18:21, where the angel declares that Babylon, the great city, will "never . . . be found again".

It is obvious that John united Jeremiah's model with Ezekiel 26-28. But other prophetic oracles of doom are also alluded to in Rev. 18:22, 23, as the following comparison shows:

JEREMIAH 25:10	REVELATION 18:23
"I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp."	"The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again."

Remarkably, this curse of God in Jer. 25:10 was directed against Judah and Jerusalem through the hands of the king of Babylon. God's justice is impartial. Revelation 18 concludes with the angel's own explanation of his symbolic act of verse 21. He mentions the charges of which Babylon has been found guilty:

*Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of*

*all who have been killed on the earth (Rev. 18: 23b, 24).*

This language shows an allusion to Isaiah's prophecy about Tyre in Isa. 23:8-9 and reveals the answer to the question, Who was responsible for Tyre's downfall?

The LORD Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth (Isa. 23:9).

So God is responsible for Babylon's downfall (see Rev. 16:19; 18:6-8). The reference to Babylon's deceptions through her "magic spell" (Rev. 18:23) is an echo of Nahum's indictment of Nineveh (see Nah. 3:4). The message of Jonah still implied divine mercy was available after repentance. But the judgment announcement of Nahum indicates the city had crossed the threshold of divine forbearance. This will be the situation of end-time Babylon in Rev. 17-18.

The reference to "the blood of the prophets and of the saints and of all who have been killed on the earth" (Rev. 18:24) is an allusion to Jeremiah's doom prophecy against Babylon:

*"Babylon must fall because of Israel's slain, just as the slain in all the earth have fallen because of Babylon" (Jer. 51:49).*

Jesus made a similar charge against Jerusalem when He pronounced:

*"Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world" (Luke 11:50; compare Matt. 23:35).*

Louis A. Vos commented: "That which Jesus prophesied concerning Jerusalem and its inhabitants (Matt. 23:35; Lk. 11:50), John applies to the symbolic desolation of the great city of his day" (The Synoptic Tradition in the Apocalypse, p. 163). While Vos finds it "difficult to determine" why John alludes to Jesus' saying (above), we suggest that the Apocalypse discerns an essential correspondence between Jerusalem of old that rejected Christ and His testimony, and the apostate church that is unfaithful to Christ and to His testimony (see Rev. 17:6; 18:24). We must remind ourselves that Revelation 18 concludes its doom songs with a shout of triumph:

*Rejoice over her, O heaven!*

*Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!*

*God has judged her for the way she treated you (Rev. 18:20).*

This appeal to rejoice finds an enthusiastic response in the hymns of Revelation 19:1-8. These hymns celebrate God's judgment of Babylon, which prepares the way for the wedding supper of the Lamb and His bride:

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God" (Rev. 19:9).

The four "Hallelujahs!" [literally: "Praise Yahweh!"] and the "Amen" of antiphonal choirs in heaven (19:1-4) and on earth (19:6-8) celebrate the progressive fulfillment of God's plan of salvation and the justice of God's sentence on the persecutors of His people.

The prayers of the martyrs (6:10) are finally answered (19:2). God is therefore praised with rejoicing by all the saints (see Rev. 18:20). The entire vision of Rev. 17-18 should be understood in the light of the coming "wedding of the Lamb" (19:7). This certainty is so

absolute that heaven already celebrates the future reality of God's reign over all evil. After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

*"Hallelujah!*

*Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,  
for true and just are his judgments.*

*He has condemned the great prostitute  
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.*

*He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."*

*And again they shouted:*

*"Hallelujah!*

*The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (Rev. 19:1-3).*

These "Hallelujahs!" look back to Rev. 17-18 in order to clear the way for a new Woman and a new City, the Bride and the New Jerusalem (19:7; 21:2,10). Ruiz summed it up well:

*Thus the doxology of 19, 1-8 makes it possible to read the prophetic language of Rev. 17-18 as a reaffirmation of the firmness of God's purpose and an assurance of God's victory (Ibid., p. 493).*

The doxological high point comes with the fourth "Hallelujah", when the heavenly chorus announces the wedding of the Lamb as the evidence of the triumph of God's reign:

*"Hallelujah!*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns.*

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:6, 7).*

The heavenly liturgy began with the reminder of the punishment of "the great prostitute" (19:2), but ends with the reward of the "bride":

*Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:8).*

The bridal dress stands in sharp contrast with that of the prostitute's (17:4; 18:16). It is a gift from the Lamb, because it "was given her to wear".

We are reminded of Jesus' parable of the "Wedding Banquet" in Matthew 22, in which each guest is offered special wedding clothes (v. 11). Christ offered especially to the church of Laodicea "white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness" (Rev. 3:18). The gift-character of the white robe is affirmed again in Rev. 6:11 for the martyrs. John sees the victorious saints in Rev. 7 all "wearing white robes" (v. 9), with this further explanation: "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Here we face each individual's privilege and duty to go daily to the risen Lord for purification of heart (see I John 1:7). A. Pohl commented in truth: "His grace today consists not only in good words, but also in power for good deeds" (Ibid., p. 216).

In this light we may also understand the phrase, "Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of

the saints" (19:8). This refers to the changed character of Christ's followers, who have been transformed from a self-centered mindset into a Christ-centered mind, through their union of heart and soul with Christ.

The "righteous acts [dikaïomata] of the saints" are mentioned as the counterpart of "the unrighteous acts [adikemata]" of the prostitute (see 18:5). The bride has "made herself ready" (19:7; see also 14:13). Both the bride and the prostitute are clothed with their deeds or character. Thus they are presented in a contrasting parallel. The announcement of the wedding of the Lamb in 19:7 anticipates the development of the Bride-Lamb-New Jerusalem motifs in Revelation 21-22. The kingdom of God is forever Christ-centered.

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# Chapter XXXII

## Understanding the Millennium

### Revelation XX

We must first determine the connections between John's vision of the "Thousand Years" and the immediate context of the Apocalypse, Revelation 19 and 21, before we can understand its significance. We must also ask what possible connections exist between Rev. 20 and the Old Testament prophecies. These exegetical questions have to be answered, before one establishes any dogmatic view of Rev. 20, one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. The contextual approach must always precede the dogmatic one in a responsible exegesis of Holy Scripture.

### The Context of Revelation 19

*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time (Rev. 20:1-3).*

The word "millennium" means literally "one thousand years" and the one thousand year period referred to as the millennium is mentioned only in Revelation 20. The connection of this passage with the preceding vision of Rev. 19:11-21 is clear and widely recognized. The Armageddon vision of Rev. 19 constitutes both the final expansion of Rev. 16-18 and the introduction to Rev. 20. Revelation 19 thus forms an essential part of the millennium vision.

The end-time enemies of Christ are the beast, the kings of the earth with their armies, and the false prophet (19:19, 20). At the return of Christ as the King-Judge of all the earth, "two of them [the beast and the false prophet] were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (v. 20). The "rest of them," apparently "the kings of the earth and their armies" (v. 19), were "killed" by the impact of the return of Christ (v. 21). Revelation 20 discloses that Satan, the mastermind of all rebellion, will be "seized," locked and sealed by an angel of Christ (20:1-3). After the millennium he will be "thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown" (20:10).

The continuity of Rev. 19 and 20 becomes even more apparent if one observes that the sequence in which the adversaries of Christ are judged, takes place in a reversed order of their first appearance in Revelation. The dragon was mentioned first in Rev. 12, next came the beast and the false prophet in Rev. 13, and finally Babylon in Rev. 14. Their ultimate fate is described in the opposite sequence: first comes the fall of Babylon in Rev. 16-18; then the beast and his false prophet are destroyed in Rev. 19; and finally, after a thousand



years, the dragon is executed in Rev. 20. This composition of the rise and fall of Christ's major enemies expresses the progressive order of Rev. 12-20 and its structural unity. These chapters show a "masterly development" (R.H.Charles) of thought and theme which moves steadily toward a climax, the consummation of the cosmic war between heaven and earth. The progression thus moves from the fall of Babylon to the punishment of Satan's agents, and ends with the elimination of sin and Satan himself.

### **The Chronological Sequence of Revelation 19 and 20**

Apparently the events described in 19:11 - 20:10 follow a chronological order. This is clear from the sequence of the visions in which the birds of prey are invited to come to the great supper of God (19:17-18), followed by the vision in which all the birds "gorged themselves on their flesh" (19:19-21). There is a noticeable progression of events in these two visions. The statement in 20:10 provides direct evidence of the chronological order of the visions of Rev. 19-20, namely "the devil was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown". This last reference to the judgment of the beast and its prophet was described in 19:20 as taking place earlier, at the second advent (19:19).

Another indication of a chronological sequence is the observation that the events described in Rev. 19:11 - 20:6 parallel the order of events in Daniel 7. In both Daniel and Revelation the antichrist is destroyed by fire when the Messiah comes in His glory from heaven (Dan. 7:11-14, 26; Rev. 19:20). In both books, immediately after the destruction of the antichrist, the kingdom is given to the saints (Dan. 7:22, 27; Rev. 20:4-6). Because the judgment of the antichrist at the second coming is still future, the millennial reign of the saints, which follows the destruction of the antichrist, must therefore also be future. We agree with the conclusion of Jack S. Deere, "Thus on the basis of Daniel 7 it is more natural to read Revelation 20:4-6 as part of a chronological progression in its larger context (19:11 - 20:15) than as a recapitulation" ("Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6", *Bib. Sac.* 135, 1978, 61). Even the Roman Catholic N.T. scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg acknowledged that "a reverting to the time before the Parousia in 20,1-3 is highly improbable" (*Gottes Herrschaft und Reich*, p. 241; own tr.). While we recognize the overall role of recapitulation in the structure of the Apocalypse as a whole, the section of Rev. 19:11 - 20:15 clearly presents a logical and chronological order.

In addition, Ezekiel presents a consecutive series of visions in which the Messianic kingdom (chs. 36-37) is followed by a war led by Gog from Magog (chs. 38-39). After that war comes the eternal kingdom centered in a new Jerusalem (chs. 40-48). George Ladd concluded: "Ezekiel's prophecy has the same basic structure as Rev. 20" (*A Com. on the Rev.*, p. 269). The apocalyptic scholar Jeffrey Vogelgesang stated, "John [in his order of Rev. 19:11 - 21:8] is following the pattern of Ezek. 34-48" (*The Interpr. of Ezekiel in the Bk. of Rev.*, p. 65). This means that a basic analysis of Ezekiel's order of future events (chs. 37-40) is essential for a proper approach to Rev. 19-21. This comparison is mandatory if one acknowledges that "John, the exiled Christian prophet, modeled his work on the Book of Ezekiel, the great prophet of the Babylonian exile" (*Ib.*, p. 72). The parallel structure of Revelation with Ezekiel led Vogelgesang to conclude: "This is conclusive proof that John utilized Ezekiel directly" (*Ib.*, p. 69; see his comparative list on p. 68).

In short, a study of the millennium of Rev. 20 requires an analysis of not only the immediate context, but also the wider context of Israel's prophetic books in the Old

Testament. From this twofold perspective, the immediate and the wider contexts, we discern John's intention to place the Messianic kingdom of the millennium after the second advent of Christ.

## **The Armageddon Vision: the End of Sinful Humanity**

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:11-16).*

Revelation 19 presents a most vivid presentation of the return of Christ and of the battle of Armageddon briefly anticipated in Rev. 16:13-16 and 17:12-14. Christ is portrayed as the victorious Warrior who descends from the heavens on a white battle horse leading an immense army of angels (19:11, 19; compare Matt. 24:31; 25:31). As the King-Messiah (see Rev. 5:5), He comes to claim our planet as His rightful domain. On His head are "many crowns" (19:12). Neither the dragon with his seven crowns (12:3) nor the beast with his ten crowns (13:1) have received authority from the Creator to rule mankind. Christ returns as the rightful "King of kings, the Lord of lords" (19:16). He alone is authorized by God the Father to govern the earth. He alone will execute the will of God, because He is "the Word of God" (19:13), the manifestation of God's will for mankind. In four symbolic descriptions, all borrowed from the prophets, Christ is described as the King-Judge of all the earth. The revelation that the risen Lord will execute the Hebrew judgment predictions is a stunning message.

- A. "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood" (19:13).
- B. "Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (19:15).
- C. "He will rule them with an iron scepter" (19:15).
- D. "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (19:15).

These four judgment portrayals indicate how the prophecies of God's retributive justice in Isaiah 11; 34; 63; Joel 3; and Psalm 2 will be executed at the end of the church age (for a detailed analysis, see H. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation. The Biblical Drama of Armageddon*. Ch. 8). John uses the metaphors of the prophets to express God's judgment on the Babylonian empire, a judgment that displays the "wrath of God" at the second coming. Revelation 19 stresses the end of all life on earth.

*And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and*

*the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great" (Rev. 19:17, 18).*

Heaven's invitation to the birds of prey to attend the great supper of God stands in deliberate contrast to the earlier invitation, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (19:9). Evidently God will provide both banquets--one for Babylon at Armageddon, the other for Israel on Mount Zion (Rev. 18:4; 14:1). The meals represent opposite destinies: the highest joy of fellowship with Christ in heaven and the unspeakable anguish of total separation from God on earth. This division of humankind in two classes was portrayed during the sixth seal (Rev. 6:15-17; 7:1-17). In other words, God will provide either eternal life or eternal death. It is man's inescapable responsibility to choose between the Lamb and the beast, between Christ and antichrist.

What is the meaning of an angel of God, "standing in the sun" inviting all birds of prey "flying in mid-air" to a supper of God? It suggests a universal proclamation, just as important as the three angels of Rev. 14:6-12, who also fly "in mid-air." Now the heavenly summons is issued to all who have ignored the earlier plea of Rev. 14 and who rejected God's invitation to come to the wedding supper of the Lamb. This summons to Armageddon follows the ancient Oriental style of entering into combat, "Come here,... and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" (1 Sam. 17:44). Moses even warned a faithless Israel, "Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away" (Deut. 28:26). Such a warning applies now to all who take sides with the antichristian powers.

The major Hebrew taproot of John's vision of Christ's judgment of the apostate world, however, is Ezekiel 38-39. This prophet had described the end-time assault of Gog and his allies upon the Israel of God in her homeland, as follows:

*You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. In days to come, O Gog, I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me when I show myself holy through you before their eyes....*

*In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel....*

*I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him (Ezek. 38:15-22).*

*On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals (Ezek. 39:4).*

*Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: "Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood.... You will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind," declares the Sovereign LORD (Ezek. 39:17-20).*

The Apocalypse of John now extends the description of those slain by the Messiah beyond the list of nations in Ezekiel 39. At Armageddon the vultures will feed on "the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great" (Rev. 19:18). John now pictures the slaughter of Babylon's multitudes, gathered for battle against God and His Messiah, as universal and total. The entire world will be one "mountain of slaughter", one Har Magedon (see LaRondelle, "The Etymology of HAR-MAGEDON [Rev 16:16]", in AUSS 27 [1989]: 69-73). The Apocalypse deliberately enlarges the battlefield in Ezekiel's forecast to a global scale. "All people" on earth will finally be involved. The birds "flying in midair" are called to gorge themselves on the flesh of all the slain warriors who fought against the Divine Ruler.

Many have observed that Revelation 19 does not describe an actual battle between heaven and earth. How could mortal beings offer resistance against the Divine Warrior when He descends from the eastern skies? The Apocalypse reveals that when the sky opens and the earth trembles from a universal earthquake, fear will paralyze all people.

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17).*

The impression is clearly that no rebellious human being will survive that day. John emphasizes in Rev. 19 that "the rest of them" were killed by the sword that comes from the mouth of the Rider on the horse (19:21). Daniel's prophecy of the Stone from heaven had expressed that the Messianic Kingdom would smite the metallic image of the world and grind all inhabitants to dust: "The wind swept them away without leaving a trace" (Dan. 2:35; also verses 44, 45).

### **The Larger Unit of Revelation 19-21.**

The words "*faithful and true*" [*pistos kai alethinos*] regarding Christ (19:11) and the Enthroned One in 21:5 express continuity between Rev. 19 and 21. Charles H. Giblin (*The Book of Rev*, p. 177) observed three interrelated units within the narrative of Rev. 19:11 - 21:8,

- A. The King of King's Victory over the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Kings of the Earth (19:11-21);
- B. The Victory over Satan at the Climax of the Millennium (20:1-10);
- C. Judgment from the Throne, with the Vanquishing of Death and Hades and the Advent of the New Jerusalem (20:11--21:8).

The focal center of these divisions is successively: (A) Armageddon, (B) the Millennial Kingdom, and (C) the Last Judgment. The overarching theme of all three sections is the Judgment, that unfolds the final outcome for both the faithful and the wicked (see 19:11; 20:4, 12-13; 21:7,8).

This literary arrangement of Rev. 19-21 reveals how dangerous it is to disconnect the millennium visions from their immediate context and then declare a dogmatic view on the millennium of Rev. 20. From the context we learn that Christ's judgment on the

dragon, or Satan, will take place only after He has executed the beast, the false prophet and the multitudes whom they led astray (see Rev. 19:19-21; 20:1 ,2, 10). This means that the coming of Christ will be followed by the binding of Satan in the Abyss at the beginning of the millennium.

The critical point here is the question whether Rev. 20 presents a recapitulation of the entire history of the church or only the conclusion of the plan of redemption. To answer this question, we compare Rev. 20 with Rev. 12, because chapter 12 presents a straightforward narrative of the church age.

### **Comparison of Revelation 12 and 20.**

The narratives of Rev. 12 and 20 deal with the dragon and the church of Christ. While chapter 12 shows how the dragon attacked the woman of God, tried to destroy the Messiah, then continued to wage war against the angels in heaven, and finally assaults the saints on earth, chapter 20 reverses this picture completely. William H. Shea briefly sums up this contrast:

*In Rev. 20, on the other hand [Rev. 12], the picture is reversed. The chapter begins with a picture of an initial defeat of the devil, and it ends with a picture of his final defeat, but between these two poles we encounter the victorious members of the church, especially the martyrs, whom the dragon had previously defeated in a limited physical sense. Now they have come to life in the resurrection and are reigning with Christ as priests to God ("The Parallel Literary Structure of Rev. 12 and 20" (in AUSS 23 [1985]: 37-54; quotation, pp. 46, 47).*

Joel Badina offers a more detailed comparison:

*First, in chapter 12, Satan is thrown down from heaven to earth, whereas in chapter 20 he is bound and thrown into the abyss (20:3). Second, in chapter 12 Satan is "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9), whereas in chapter 20 he can "deceive the nations no more" (20:3). Third, chapter 12 portrays the Christians as martyrs put to death (12:11), whereas chapter 20 is the time of their resurrection (20:4,6). Chapter 12 is a time of curse (12:12), whereas chapter 20 is a time of blessing (20:6). It is evident therefore, that chapters 12 and 20 do not describe the same period of time, and 20:1 does not go back to the first century A.D. as 12:1 does. Rather, 20:1-10 is to be located immediately subsequent to the Christian Era ("The Millennium", in Symp. on Rev., II:236).*

This comparative assessment of Rev. 12 and 20 leads to the conclusion that the millennium of Rev. 20 does not recapitulate the church age of Rev. 12. The millennium succeeds the church era. Shea and others have pointed out that Rev. 12 is placed within the historical series of Rev. (chs. 1-14), while Rev. 20 is placed within the final eschatological series of the judgment (chs. 15-22). Thus Rev. 12 reveals the devil's activity in church history, while Rev. 20 reveals God's judgment of the devil in the final consummation. This comparison confirms the earlier conclusion from the immediate context that the millennium follows the parousia in Rev. 19.

Another indication of the chronological order of Rev. 19-20 is found in the internal evidence of the millennium vision itself. During the "thousand years" the martyrs that have refused to accept the end-time mark of the beast and lost their lives (see Rev.

13:15-17; 19:20), have come to life again and reign with Christ as priests of God (20:4-6).

*I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years...This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6).*

This resurrection of the faithful saints takes place at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-16). Paul had taught that the second advent and the resurrection of the saints will occur simultaneously:

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thess. 4:16).*

The contextual approach to Revelation 20 clearly points to a future millennium, because the resurrection of the saints will take place at the second advent when the risen saints are immortalized.

### **Paul and the Millennium.**

Paul did not consider the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ as an isolated event but as the guarantee of the resurrection of the dead:

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor. 15:20-22).*

The apostle then goes on to teach that not all the dead are resurrected at the same time, there will be a certain chronological sequence in the fulfillment of the resurrection promises of God:

*But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (1 Cor. 15:23-24).*

The words "each in his own turn [*tagma*: group, class]" indicates different classes of people are involved: Christ the "firstfruits" already resurrected; then [*epeita*: afterward] "those who belong to Christ" will be resurrected at the return of Christ (compare 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Matt. 24:30-31). The temporal distance between Christ's resurrection and that of His people at the second advent, some 2,000 years later, is not mentioned but clearly implied. Elsewhere Paul declares that the living saints will be "changed" and receive immortality at the same time as the risen saints at the Parousia (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52). Then the apostle states that only after [*eita*] the resurrection of the saints will "the end [to telos]" come. Some interpret this as "the rest of humanity" (see Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 810), because it involves all those who do not belong to Christ. Christ will not hand over the kingdom to God the Father until after He has first destroyed "all his enemies", including the last enemy, "death":

*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:25, 26).*

Paul mentions no time interval between the resurrection of the saints at the Parousia and the end when death will be destroyed. Several interpreters acknowledge, however, that "a second undefined interval falls between the parousia and the telos" (G. Ladd, *A Theol. of the N.T.*, p. 559, also note 37). Paul declares that the third class [*tagma*] of resurrected people, apparently those who do not belong to Christ, follows after the second group. The transfer of the kingdom by Christ to the Father will take place not at the second advent, but after the destruction of death. In this respect it is legitimate to connect 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 with Revelation 20. Both passages are part of the canon of Scripture and deal with the same events after the second advent.

John's visions of the Thousand Years enlarge Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 15. The Apocalypse discloses that man's last enemy, death, will vanish only after Satan's destruction in the lake of burning sulfur at the end of the millennium: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death" (Rev. 20:14).

The destruction of Death and Hades is the final act of Christ's royal reign over all His enemies. This very act Paul saw as the climax of "the end" (1 Cor. 15:24, 26). In John's visions, death will vanish only after the millennium, when Satan has been destroyed (Rev. 20:10,14).

In summary, we conclude that while Paul does not explicitly teach a millennial rule of Christ after His Parousia, he makes room for such a future Christocracy in 1 Cor. 15:24.

## **The Expected Duration of the Messianic Kingdom in Judaism**

Some Jewish writings from before the Christian age contain the expectation of a temporary kingdom of God prior to the final judgment and the creation of a new world. This peaceful interim period is not connected with the Messiah and its duration is not clearly specified in these pre-Christian writings: "The Apocalypse of Weeks", in I Enoch 91: 12-17; 93: 1-10; Jubilees 23:26-31; Sibylline Oracles, Book 3: 46-62, 741-84. II Enoch 32-33 (about A.D. 50) contains the oldest passage in Jewish literature indicating the intermediate period of peace on earth will last for one thousand years (see J.H. Charlesworth, *The OT Pseudepigrapha*, I:156).

During the second half of the first century A.D. a distinction was made in the rabbinical writings between the Messianic age and the age to come. Some Jewish apocalyptic writings from around A.D. 100 declare that the Messianic reign is temporary and connected with the impending overthrow of Rome: the Apocalypse of Baruch (or II Baruch, 30) and the Apocalypse of IV Ezra.

The Fourth Book of Ezra contains the most definitive passage stating that the Messiah will die after four hundred years together with all other human beings. After that Messianic era the following events will occur:

*And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings; so that no one shall be left. And after seven days the world, which is not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it; and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them. And the most High shall be*

*revealed upon the seat of judgment (IV Ezra 7:30-33; in Charlesworth, The OT Pseudepigrapha I:537-538).*

During the Christian age the early rabbis discussed the duration of the Messianic age, agreeing only on the point that it would be a limited period between the present age and the age to come. The list of the suggested time periods ranges from forty or seventy years, to four or six hundred years, to one or two thousand years or even seven thousand years (see Strack and Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, III, 823-7 ; summarized in G. Beasley-Murray, Rev., pp. 288-9; and J.M. Ford, Revelation, AB 38, pp. 352-3). Apparently, there was "no orthodoxy of opinion" (G.F. Moore).

Some Jewish apocalyptists insisted, however, that history was a recapitulation of the week of creation. As God had worked six days and then rested on the seventh day (Gen. 1-2), so history will last for six "days" of one thousand years each, to be followed by the Sabbath of the Messiah's kingdom for one thousand years, after which would come an "eighth day" without end, the eternal kingdom (II Enoch 32-33). This pre-Christian Jewish idea is repeated in the Christian Epistle of Barnabas (ch. 15) and by later Christian writers.

Especially noteworthy is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (A.D. 90), who represented a tradition that taught the Messiah would rule for a thousand years (Str-B, III: 827). This is the oldest known rabbinic authority that reckons the Messianic period at one thousand years. Some modern scholars insist therefore that John meant a literal one thousand years in Rev. 20, because this fits well within Jewish contemporary thinking. Beasley-Murray, however, states that John wanted to indicate primarily the theological character of the millennium, "namely as the sabbath of history" (Rev., p. 289). While it is profoundly meaningful to interpret "God's sabbath-rest as a type of the kingdom" and that "creation prefigures new creation" (Ib.), this understanding should not obscure the new revelation of John's Apocalypse that the millennium is a Christocracy. The basic question remains therefore, How is Revelation 20 related to the Old Testament writings?

### **The Antecedents of the Millennium in the Old Testament.**

Some Old Testament roots of the millennium enlighten our understanding. The first literary connection with the Hebrew Bible is the word "Abyss," used twice (20:1, 3) to refer to the "prison" (20:7) in which the dragon will be detained for a thousand years. As a term by itself, abyss functions both in the book of Revelation (9:1,2,11 [cf. Ps. 88:11]; 11:7; 17:8) and elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 8:31; Rom. 10:7) as a synonym of the grave, death and destruction, and of the prison house of "the beast" and demons. When Christ cast out certain evil spirits from a demon-possessed man in Galilee, "they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss" (Luke 8:31), or the realm of the dead. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, abyss is used in Gen. 1:2 to describe the uninhabited earth before Creation week: "The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep [abyssos]." The New Testament seems to have taken this prehistoric description of an empty, chaotic earth as its prototype for the concept of abyss as a dark pit and prison for demons.

Further light on the Abyss in Rev. 20 comes from the prophetic perspective of Jeremiah:

*"I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone.... I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger" (Jer. 4:23-26).*



In Old Testament prophecy, the day of Judgment is generally characterized by a twofold perspective: the historical day of Yahweh for a particular nation, and Yahweh's final Judgment day for the entire world. This typological view of God's future reign, which has no concern for chronological distances or ethnic and geographic distinctions, presents the national judgment as a smaller model for the end-time judgment of the world. The focus is on the same God who, in both the present and the future, will act in the same way for judgment and salvation. George Ladd summarized this twofold perspective of prophetic outlook this way: "This historical Day of the Lord is painted against the backdrop of the eschatological Day of the Lord" (The Presence of the Future, p. 67).

Jeremiah's vision of the coming devastation of "the earth" has an apocalyptic dimension for the final judgment, when the devastation of earth and sky will reach its full universal range. In that apocalyptic day of Judgment the whole earth will return to its primordial state and become again an abyss: dark, formless, and empty (see Jer. 4:23, 28; compare Gen. 1:2). That apocalyptic Day, as the New Testament makes clear, is the second advent of Christ (see 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 6:12-17; 19:11-21). Then the entire earth will become one great abyss--the earthly condition for a millennium, a prison house exclusively for Satan and his demonic spirits. The judgment of the second advent of Christ leaves no person alive on earth, according to Paul's eschatology. The saints, either by resurrection or translation, will all be taken to the Father's house (see John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17); the wicked will all be laid in the dust of the earth by the consuming glory of Christ's appearing (see Heb. 10:26,27; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 2:8; Rev. 6:15-17; 16:17-21; 19:21). If no man remains alive on earth, it is evident that Satan, detained by God in the abyss of this ruined earth, is bound by a "great chain" of circumstances that Christ Himself has brought about by His advent. During the millennium, Satan will be kept "from deceiving the nations any more," because he can no longer influence either the righteous in heaven or the wicked in death.

### **Difference Between Gospel Experience and Apocalyptic Reality**

The imagery of Revelation 20:1-3 should not be confused with the reality of Christ's victory over Satan during His earthly ministry. It seems unwarranted to identify the apocalyptic binding of Satan in Revelation 20 as the gospel power to "bind" Satan whenever the Spirit of Christ releases individuals from his dominion (see Matt. 12:28, 29). If Satan's "binding" was realized in the cross of Christ, how could Satan be released from this bondage as announced in Revelation 20:7? We should be careful not to confuse Christ's work at His second advent with that at His first Advent.

The purpose of John's Apocalypse is not to repeat the four Gospels, which center in the first advent of Christ, but to convey a progressive revelation of Christ's rulership that culminates in His second advent. In Revelation 20, not only the time of Satan's binding is different from the Gospels, but also its nature. Anthony Hoekema stated that the binding of Satan in Rev. 20 means that Satan's influence "is... curtailed [so] that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world" and that "the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations" (in The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views, R.G.Clouse, ed., p. 164). But this view does not honor the radical nature of Satan's apocalyptic binding, his confinement in the abyss of a ruined world, "to keep him from deceiving the nations any more" (Rev. 20:3). To minimize the binding of Satan to the point that the millennium is an era of prosperous church development does not take seriously the unlimited nature of Satan's binding in the Apocalypse. G.C. Berkouwer

rejected any relativizing of Satan's binding in Rev. 20 (The Return of Christ, p. 305). Robert Mounce likewise sees "the complete cessation of his influence on earth" implied, rather than just a curbing of Satan's activities (The Book of Revelation, p. 353). The undeniable fact remains that centuries after the cross, Satan and his false apostles are still able to deceive the world by blinding the minds of unbelievers to the gospel (see 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13, 14); the devil still "prowls around like a roaring lion" (see 1 Pet. 5:8) and "is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Eph. 2:2). Even after his moral defeat at the cross (see Col. 2:15), Satan is still successfully deceiving the world (see 2 Thess. 2:9, 10), and is "leading the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 19:20). John even wrote, "The whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). The cross stripped Satan of all his rights before God, but not his power to deceive humankind. Only the second advent will deprive him of that power, as the visions of Revelation 19-20 portray.

### **The Millennium Preindicated in Two Hebrew Prophecies**

Two Old Testament passages cast light on the apocalyptic significance of the millennium: Isaiah 24:21-23 (within the Isaiah Apocalypse of chapters 24-27) and Ezekiel 36-39. Isaiah describes the final judgment as involving the whole cosmos and the entire earth:

*"In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously" (Isa. 24:21-23).*

Several features can be observed in this apocalyptic passage: (1) the prophet sees God's judgment passed not only upon men but also upon angels, "the powers in the heavens above" (compare Dan. 10:13,20; Ps. 82; Eph. 6:12); (2) all these rebellious powers of heaven and earth will be "herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon" ("pit", RSV, KJV); (3) being "shut up in prison," they will be punished "after many days," that is, after a long, unspecified period of imprisonment. One cannot fail to notice in these three facets of the Isaiah Apocalypse the germinal concept of the millennium with its binding of Satan in the abyss for a thousand years. G.R. Beasley-Murray acknowledges: "The essential idea of Revelation 19:19 - 21:3 is present in brief compass in Isaiah 24:21f." (Rev., p. 286). This connection of the millennium with Isaiah 24 is widely acknowledged by commentators.

Isaiah's declared that while the evil powers are in detention, the whole earth lies in a state of desolation: "The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken his word" (Isa.24:3; compare verses 19, 20). Here again is the picture of a worldwide abyss.

In Isaiah's vision, God's final judgment comprises several phases: the evil powers will first be seized but not immediately punished; they will be detained for "many days." This preliminary judgment will be followed by a final judgment executed by God Himself. The anti-godly powers are symbolized by a multi-headed serpent-dragon (see Isa. 27:1; LXX: drakon; compare Ps. 74:13,14), revealing another link with the imagery of Revelation 20 (verse 2).

The Isaiah Apocalypse reveals that the cosmic Judgment causes the resurrection from the dead of the faithful covenant people of God: "Your dead will live; their bodies will rise.... The earth will give birth to her dead" (Isa. 26:19). With the blast of a "great trumpet" God

will gather up, "one by one," the faithful so they can participate in the apocalyptic banquet of Yahweh "for all peoples" on the holy mountain (see Isa. 27:12, 13; 25:6-9; 24:23). In John's Apocalypse, this banquet is transformed into "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-9), when the Bride, the church of all ages, will be forever united with her Savior. This wedding feast is the central feature of the millennial kingdom of God in heaven, which takes place after the martyred saints have come to life in the first resurrection (Rev.20:4, 5).

The prophet Ezekiel also speaks of the end-time events in the apocalyptic language of successive periods. In Ezekiel's prophetic scheme Yahweh begins to resurrect a new-covenant people from Babylon and to restore this new Israel to the promised land (see Ezek. 36:24-32; 37:1-14). This faithful Israel of God will be ruled forever by the Messianic King, "my servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd" ( 37:24,25). The Shekinah glory will be among them forever, "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (37:27).

However, "after many days" (38:8) of the peaceful existence of this Messianic theocracy Gog, king of Magog, leader of the confederate nations of the world will attack the land of Israel. The Israel of God will not engage in combat at all. It does not need to, because Yahweh will be the Divine Warrior Who will fight this holy war alone with weapons from His storehouse: "I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 38:22,23; also 39:6). Ezekiel placed the ultimate rebellion of Gog after the Messianic kingdom in chapters 36-39. Only after this rebellion of evil forces has been squashed by divine intervention will the earth be purified and ready for the new Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-48). No wonder G. Ernest Wright declared: "The book which presents the clearest outline of eschatological events is that of Ezekiel" (in *Interpreter's Bible*, I:372).

## **John's Apocalypse Shows the Consummation**

The seven Judgment visions of John, found in Revelation 19:11 to 21:8, constitute a self-contained unit, patterned after the outline of eschatological events in Ezekiel 36-48. John's apocalyptic perspective portrays God's judgment on Babylon during the seventh plague (Rev. 16-18), which introduces the coming of the Messiah as the divine Warrior from heaven who will destroy the persecutors of His church, "the beast," "the false prophet," and "the kings of the whole world" ( Rev. 19:19-21; also 16:12-21). Christ then brings for His faithful ones deliverance and resurrection from the dead (see Rev. 20:4), the joys of the wedding banquet in the New Jerusalem in heaven (Rev.19:6-9; 21:2,7), and the authority to judge on heavenly thrones in His kingdom for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). This millennial kingdom will end with the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth. Satan will be released from his abyss, because now--at the end of the thousand years--the resurrection of the rest of humanity takes place (Rev. 20:5, 7; compare John 5:28, 29; 1 Cor. 15:24). This event sets the stage for Satan's final work of deception and the universal attack by God's enemies on the New Jerusalem, "the camp of God's people," according to Revelation 20:7-10.

To indicate the basic continuity of this apocalyptic war with that of Ezekiel's vision, John now identifies Satan's agents with "Gog and Magog" (20: 8). The following parallels show

how Ezekiel's and John's outlines correspond:

1. The resurrection of a spiritually dead Israel from the graveyard of Babylon to be a new covenant people (see Ezek. 36:24-28; 37:1-14). John sees the resurrection of the beheaded witnesses of Christ who refused to worship the Babylonian "beast or his image" (Rev. 20:4).
2. As the new theocracy, Israel lives peacefully in the promised land under the rule of the new David, the Messiah (see Ezek. 37:15-28). John sees the resurrected saints reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).
3. After "many days," the final attack against Israel from the north by the armies of Gog, king of Magog, receives a smashing defeat through fire from heaven (see Ezek. 38-39). John sees that after the saints' thousand-year reign the armies of "Gog and Magog" will attack the camp of God's people, the Holy City, from all directions, but are destroyed by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:7-9).
4. Ezekiel saw Yahweh's theophany in a new Jerusalem, which carries the name: "THE LORD IS THERE" (Ezek. 48:35). John sees the New Jerusalem descend from heaven to earth as the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21:1,2). Then will be fully realized: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. . ."(Rev. 21:3).

While the anti-Christian goal of the apocalyptic war is the same in essence in both Ezekiel and John, modifications can be observed that teach an important principle in apocalyptic interpretation. The ethnic and geographic restrictions of Ezekiel's old-covenant imagery ("my people Israel," "my land," Gog will attack "the land of Israel," the earthshaking theophany of Yahweh, et cetera) are all transformed by John's Apocalypse into a thoroughly Christocentric conflict. John's Apocalypse is a Christian Apocalypse, characterized by the integration of the gospel into the eschatologies of the Old Testament. This integration consistently places Christ and His true followers at the center of all the Old Testament prophecies. This is the essential newness of the Christian Gospels and of the eschatology of the New Testament.

The end-time perspective of the Old Testament is basic to understand the triumph of God's covenant in the controversy between God and Satan. Israel's forecasts of the divine punishment of all rebellious powers receive their Christological fulfillment in John's Apocalypse. Israel's king, "My servant David" (Ezek. 37:24), becomes Christ, the "King of kings" (Rev. 19:16; 22:16). The eschatological Messianic Israel (Ezek. 37:26-28; 38:11,12) becomes the church triumphant in Christ's kingdom (Rev. 20:4). Gog, king of Magog, and his political allies, become Satan himself and his earthly allies, that is, the rest of humanity raised in the second resurrection but deceived by Satan in order to unite them in a universal rebellion against Christ (Rev. 20:7-9; 21:2). Since Ezekiel's prophecy has the same order of events as chapters 20-22 of John's Apocalypse, we conclude that Revelation discloses the Christian understanding of the consummation of Ezekiel 36-48, beginning with the second advent and the resurrection of the faithful saints. John's vision of the millennium therefore conveys a message for the present: to the Jews that Jesus is the true Messiah and that His church is the true seed of Abraham and the Messianic Israel; to the Gentiles that Christ is the Judge of the world; and to the church that Jesus will vindicate His followers and reward them in His kingdom; to Satan and his angels that their execution is irrevocable.

## **The Theological Significance of the Millennium.**

John describes his main vision of the millennium in just three verses:

*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6 NASB).*

The temptation to read too much preconceived theology into this difficult passage is dangerous. We need to beware of a dogmatic exegesis that finds in a text what it is looking for. First of all, we must acknowledge the fact that there is no indication in this text that John is describing a reign over earthly survivors of the battle of Armageddon or their descendants who presumably would have been born during the millennium. In fact, as some have observed, "the passage [Rev. 20:1-6] says nothing about an earthly reign of Christ over a primarily Jewish kingdom" (A.A. Hoekema, in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. R.G. Clouse, p. 172).

The scene of John's vision of the millennial reign of the resurrected saints seems to be in heaven rather than on earth as is commonly assumed. John saw "thrones" on which were seated those to whom "judgment was given" (NASB) or "committed" (RSV). Leon Morris makes an important comment on Rev. 20:4, "He [John] uses 'throne' forty-seven times in all, and except for Satan's throne (ii.13) and that of the beast (xiii.2, xvi.10) all appear to be in heaven. It would accord with this if he here meant a reign in heaven" (*The Rev. of St. John*, p. 236). Anthony Hoekema agrees that "the locale of John's vision has now shifted to heaven . . . verses 4-6 depict what happens in heaven" (*The Bible and the Future*, p. 230). Hoekema touched upon an important characteristic of the structure of Rev. 20, namely the shift of scene from earth to heaven, which is so common in apocalyptic visions. William Shea, in an instructive article ("The Parallel Structure of Rev. 12 and 20", *AUSS* 23 [1985]: 37-54), has shown how the alternation of horizontal and vertical dimensions occurs in both Rev. 12 and 20. To be specific, the focal center of Rev. 12 shifts from earth (12:1-6) to heaven (12:7-12) and then back to earth again (12:13-17). This A-B-A pattern of sequential scenes can be perceived also in Rev. 20. This series of visions begins likewise with the earth (20:1-3), then shifts to heaven (20:4-6), and finally returns to earth (20:7-10). This view of a heavenly millennial reign of the resurrected saints is a minority view among premillennial interpreters and is incorporated in the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists (see *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. Chapter 26).

In an earlier vision John had seen God's throne in heaven, and "round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads" (4:4 RSV). This intriguing vision of Revelation 4 seems to suggest that God as Chief Justice has commissioned twenty-four representatives from among the earthly saints to reign and to judge together with Him now (see above, Ch. 5). But in Rev. 20 John sees seated on the heavenly thrones those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of faithfulness to "the testimony of Jesus" and to "the word of God" (20:4 NASB), especially during the final test of faith in regard to the mark of the beast (20:4). Here is a fundamental difference between the two throne visions of Rev. 4 and 20. The judgment thrones of Rev. 20 are connected in some way with the

vindication of the martyrs and their right to rule planet Earth. Mounce connects the throne scene in Rev. 20 with the heavenly throne scene in the vision of Daniel 7:13-14. He therefore suggests that the thrones of Rev. 20 represent "a heavenly court" (Ib., p. 355).

The connecting link between Rev. 20 and Dan. 7 is the theme of the divine vindication of the oppressed saints of God and their reward to rule the world. The fundamental difference between the two judgment scenes is that in Daniel's vision the persecuted saints are judged themselves and are vindicated by the Divine Judge : "The Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22). In Rev. 20, however, these saints are seated with Christ on heavenly thrones and are given the authority to judge: "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). Here is a clear progression in history and indicates that the heavenly court sessions in Dan. 7 and in Rev. 20 succeed each other. Progress in time is also evident in a comparison of the "souls" of those slain "because of the word of God and the testimony (of Jesus)" during the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9) and who request God's holy judgment and vengeance (6:10), and the "souls" of the same martyrs who have come to life and reign with Christ a thousand years in Rev. 20:4. These martyrs have enjoyed the first resurrection! No greater vindication could be imagined. The honor from God to reign with Christ is for the overcomers.

Christ had already promised that He would return to the earth and take His disciples to His Father's house in heaven (see John 14:1-3). He also promised that all overcomers would share in His throne in heaven (see Rev. 3:21; 15:1-4). These promises strongly suggest that the saints during the millennium are not located in a desolated world. Rather their reign involves the responsibility of sharing in God's reign and in His assessment of sin. This renewed assurance in Revelation 20:4-6 provides the consolation to the maligned saints that their "defeat" and "shame" will soon be completely reversed into triumph by God's tribunal. In fact, the executed ("beheaded") saints will become the judges of their persecutors. It is significant that the Apocalypse, with its passionate urge for justice, assures the saints that God will resurrect them to life and exalt them during the millennium as priests and kings to act as judges and assessors together with Christ. All the comfort for the persecuted saints concentrates itself on the most significant beatitude in the Apocalypse, "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection" (20:6). They will never die again. "The second death has no power over them" (verse 6).

### **Should Isaiah 65-66 be applied to a Millennium on earth?**

It has become a tradition in Dispensationalism to designate Isa. 65-66 as the time of "millennial blessings" during which the curse on earth "is only partly lifted as indicated by the continuance of death" (J.F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 317, 318). For those born during the millennium "salvation will be required" (J.D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 489), while those that become "openly rebellious will be put to death (Isa. 66:20, 24; Zech. 14:16-19)" (Walvoord, *Ib.*, p. 302). The assumption that Isa. 65-66, and similar promises of God's kingdom, must be applied to the millennium of Rev. 20 remains an inference that is not necessary and unwarranted if the New Testament is allowed to determine the kingdom promises. Isaiah must be understood in the light of the gospel of Christ. The new covenant has made the old covenant obsolete and set it aside (see Heb. 10:9; 8:13). This is a testing truth of Christian faith! To declare that the saints in the millennium no longer will celebrate the Lord's Supper but return to offer animal sacrifices

"in commemoration" of the cross of Christ is not only "the major obstacle" (Walvoord, *Ib.*, p. 311) but a refusal to accept the clear witness of Scripture in Hebrews 8-10 to defend a problematic dogma (for an extensive critique, see LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, pp. 114-123).

Seen in the perspective of the New Testament, Isaiah 65-66 must be accepted as the foreglimpse of God's plan couched in the language and limitations of the old covenant, the sacrificial cultus of animal blood and offerings of Levitical laws. This is not God's last word in salvation history and should not be isolated from Christ's new covenant and from the progressive revelation of God's will. Revelation 21-22 teach how Isa. 65-66 will be fulfilled: greater than any Jewish expectation of the old covenant. Rev. 21-22 transform Isaiah's predictions, applying them to the eternal state on earth in a better way than understood before. The prophets and the Apocalypse do not present two different outlooks that must be fitted side by side. They are one and the same. The risen Lord advances the old view to a better and more perfect promise in which death and sin no longer are part of the kingdom of God and Christ on the earth made new. The fulfillment will be greater than a literal reading of the old promises: "The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind!" (Isa. 65:17; also 1 Cor. 2:9). There is no requirement to force Isa. 65-66 in a literalistic way on the millennium of Rev. 20. For a further discussion of Isa. 65-66, see APPENDIX B, Section 1.

## **The Postmillennial Judgment**

Before the devil and his hosts are executed in a "lake of fire," God vindicates His maligned name in a majestic way before the universe, from the mouths of the wicked. The final court session arrives for Satan and his followers, human and angelic. Now justice is declared in forensic terms, good and evil are acknowledged, the origin, nature, and consequences of sin forever established.

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled away from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).*

This court scene, in which the Creator is the Judge, goes beyond all other descriptions of the final judgment in either the Old or New Testaments. The redeemed, who have been resurrected in the first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium (20: 6), are exempt from this final judgment of the world. The passage applies to the fullest extent what the Gospel of John teaches:

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).*

*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out . . . those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28, 29).*

The postmillennial judgment deals exclusively with the definitive rejectors of Jesus Christ. Although they are called to give an account for their lives "as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12; compare Isa. 65:6), John makes it clear that the decisive issue is their relation to Christ. He states, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15; see also 13:8). John "indicates that the only criterion of salvation is the fact that our name is written in the book of life. The decisive criterion in the universal judgment is that of belonging to Christ . . . The judgment therefore can be nothing else than the universal unveiling of decisions that have already been made" (M. Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19, 11-12, 15*; pp. 36-37). E.G. White commented:

*The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them (The Great Controversy, p. 668).*

God's wisdom, justice, and goodness are placed beyond question. The character of God is vindicated before the universe. All creatures in heaven and on earth, righteous and wicked, bow their knees at the name of Jesus and "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11). This means the final coronation of the Son of God, that exalts Him "above every name" (verse 9). All living beings in heaven and on earth renew the doxology "'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" (Rev. 5:12).

All are satisfied that God's "judgments are true and righteous" (19:2 NASB). In Israel's law a malicious witness who had falsely accused a brother of a crime was, after "thorough investigation" (Deut. 19:18), sentenced to receive the punishment he had sought for his brother (see verses 19, 20). Such a "thorough investigation" will take place in the saints' judgment during the millennium (see Rev. 20:4; 1 Cor. 6:2,3). No longer by faith alone, but by settled convictions, all men will join the angels' chorus "'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments'" (Rev. 16:7; also 19:1, 2; 15:3, 4).

This millennial view "places the emphasis not upon an earthly reign of glory for the redeemed, but upon the vindication of God, the clearing and honoring of His name in all the dealings with the sin issue" (J. Badina, in *Symposium on Rev.*, II: 242). The millennium of Rev. 20 then offers the ultimate theodicy of the Creator. Through the gift of His Son and by the self-sacrifice of Christ, God's love and justice stand forever as an unassailable union before the created cosmos. All Satan's charges against God's character and government are forever laid to rest. Christ's reign over God's enemies will reach this climax at the conclusion of the millennium. He will crush the head of the Serpent under His feet (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20). As the arch liar and murderer (John 8:44), Satan will be "thrown into the lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 20:10). Christ will excise all evil from the universe, so that "not a root or a branch will be left" (Mal. 4:1). All who have become one with sin will find their place in "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." "This is the second death" (Rev. 20:15, 14 RSV).

The ultimate issue of salvation or condemnation is whether one is "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). Those who are reborn from above may be absolutely sure of



this divine record (see Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:2, 3; 3:20; Heb. 12:22, 24). Salvation remains a gift of God, based not on sanctified works, but on the Lamb's work alone (see John 3:16; 5:24). Our works serve only as the evidence of our connection with the Lamb. "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26 KJV). At this time--after the millennium--Paul's apocalyptic perspective will be fully realized:

*Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom of God to the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. . .*

When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24, 28).

Now eternity can begin: "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13; also Rev. 21:1; Ps. 115:16). Christian salvation includes Paradise regained on earth as a universal, social and political reality.

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# Chapter XXXIII

## The Significance Of The New Jerusalem

### Revelation XXI - XXII

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Rev. 21:1-8).

This vision of John continues the series of visions ("I saw") which began with that of the second advent in Rev. 19:11. Some even consider Rev. 21:1-8 as "the most important part of his book" (G.B. Caird). Many links connect Rev. 21 with chapter 20. Both speak of "heaven and earth" (20:11 NASB; 21:1), of the "sea" (20:13; 21:1), of "the book of life" (20:12; 21:27), of the "throne" of God (20:11; 21:3), of the "second death" (20:14; 21:8), and of the "fiery lake" (20:15; 21:8). These connections confirm that the New-Jerusalem vision is the climax of the larger chain of visions in 19:11 - 21:8. In other words, the vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1) follows the second advent of Christ (19:11-16) and the millennium. The coming down of the undiminished Presence of God on the renewed earth is the purpose of God's plan and of His judgments on sinful humanity. Consequently, the vision of God's dwelling among men in Rev. 21:1-8 forms the culmination point of all John's previous visions, and the consummation of the martyrs' hope. Roy Naden may well say: "Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the last two chapters of his [John's] book form the most sublime anthem" (The Lamb among the Beasts, p. 289).

John now receives repeated visions of the New Jerusalem (21:1-8; 21:10-27; 22:1-6). They progressively reveal the splendor of the City of God. The fact that John again hears the voice of God from His throne, commanding him to write down words that are "trustworthy and true" (21:5), is significant. In this way God authenticates the reliability of what John saw. God's words are couched in familiar Old Testament promises to Israel. John uses these allusions to emphasize the continuity of God's covenant. He stresses their fulfillment by repeating seven times that God and the Lamb are inseparably united with the New Jerusalem (21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; 22:1, 3). John thus informs the church that his visions of the New Jerusalem are in essence different from the Jewish national hopes of his

times. His future hope centers in Christ Jesus and in His universal people.

By adopting the pictorial language of Isaiah and Ezekiel, John describes "the indescribable reality of heaven; . . . the most detailed picture ever given in Scripture of the surpassing reality God has prepared for His children" (R. Badenas, in Symp. on Rev., II:244).

### **The Religious Significance of Jerusalem in the Old Testament**

The names Jerusalem and Zion are used synonymously in the Old Testament (see Mic. 3:12; 4:8; Isa. 10:12). Jerusalem owed her holiness to David's transfer of the ark of Yahweh, the symbol of God's throne, to Mount Zion (2 Sam. 6; Ps. 132:13-16). Zion functioned as the center of divine inspiration, salvation, and worship (see Pss. 46, 48, 76). Psalm 46 does not glorify Jerusalem itself, except as the dwelling place of God:

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble . . . There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day (Ps. 46:1, 4, 5).*

Psalm 46 ends with an eschatological perspective of God's kingship:

*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted in the earth (Ps. 46:10).*

Enlarging upon this paradisiacal hope, the psalmist describes Jerusalem in ideal terms: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells" (vs 4). How could the psalmist say that Jerusalem has a "river" when it does not possess any stream, only a small spring near Gihon? His vision perceived the Messianic time of salvation. Several prophets also described the eschatological Jerusalem as possessing a flowing stream of water in a setting of Paradise restored (see Isa. 33:21; 35:6,7; Joel 3:18; Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8). Thus the historical city of David became in Jerusalem's "Zion theology" a symbol of eschatological hope, a prophetic type of the Messianic kingdom. Two prophets made Jerusalem the central part of their future outlook and therefore deserve our attention.

Ezekiel showed that God was not bound unconditionally to Jerusalem but would judge her for her religious and social-moral apostasy (chs 8-11). God would leave the temple and return only to a morally renewed Israel (Ezek. 36:24-28; 37:26, 27). This promise is enlarged in the description of the new temple in Ezek. 40-48. This visionary temple is of divine origin. It is "a heavenly reality created by Yahweh himself and transplanted to stand on earth" (W. Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 542). It will come on earth only when the Israel of God is purified and the Messiah has come to Israel (Ezek. 37:24-25). Characteristic of the new temple will be a life-giving river flowing from the temple (Ezek. 47:1-12). This feature forms a link with the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 2:8-14).

In his prophetic perspective, Isaiah saw how Gentiles would come to the new Jerusalem with the religious confession: "Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god" (45:14; compare 1 Cor. 14:25). All will be united by their Messianic faith rather than by ethnic or political bonds. Isaiah uses the symbols of precious stones and sparkling jewels to describe the beauty of her walls and gates (54:12). This design suggests the return of paradisiacal opulence (see Ezek. 28:11-15; Isa. 51:3). Although this points to a transcendent quality of the new Jerusalem, there is no indication in Isaiah that this city has an extraterrestrial origin. Its supernatural glory emanates from the presence of

God. The essence of her unique attractiveness is not so much her external beauty as the promise that Yahweh will return and be united again with His people (60:1-2, 19; 62:11). The city will therefore receive a new name (62:2). No longer will she need the light of the sun or moon, because "the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (60:19; compare Rev. 21:23; 22:5). Isaiah blends his image of the end-time Zion with his motif of a new creation using the realistic colors of an earthly paradise (65:17-25). Although he announced more explicitly than any other prophet the creation of "new heavens and a new earth" (65:17), his poetic description of the renovated Jerusalem remains in continuity with the historical context (65:20). It remains an earthly, although transformed reality. Her richest blessing will be not longevity or prosperity, but Yahweh's presence to answer their prayers (65:24). But the Messiah will also be present, because the Messianic Jubilee has arrived (61:1-3, 10; compare Luke 4:17-21).

From this brief analysis of the prophetic outlook for Jerusalem in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, we learn that the city of Jerusalem functions as a type of a future, more glorious Jerusalem. In John's Apocalypse we see how this promise will be fulfilled, far beyond the expectations of the Hebrew prophets, in the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21-22. Roberto Badenas has summed it up well:

*As a masterful recapitulation of human and salvation history, the New Jerusalem becomes the realization of God's ideal theocracy, the perfect symbol of the gathering of God's people, the place of perfect communion between the Creator/ Redeemer and His redeemed creatures. The New Jerusalem will be to the new heaven and the new earth what the old Jerusalem never succeeded to be to Israel and the world (in Symp. on Rev., II:252).*

After all, the New Jerusalem comes from above, as a new creation of God, and will be therefore entirely different from the old Jerusalem.

## **Jewish Hopes During the Intertestamental Period**

Shortly after the Maccabean revolt, the "Dream Visions" of the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch, around 165-161 B.C., predicted that with the appearance of the Messiah and the resurrection of the righteous dead a new Jerusalem would be built, "a new house, greater and loftier than the first one, and set [it] up in the first location which had been covered up . . ." (1 Enoch 90:29). Some Jewish apocalyptic writings after A.D. 70 expressed the hope for a new Jerusalem, "preserved" with God ever since He created Paradise (2 Baruch 4:3). This city "which now is not seen shall appear, and the land which now is hidden shall be disclosed . . . For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years" (4 Ezra 7:26-28). Apparently, some conventicles of pious Jews expected that God had "prepared and built" (4 Ezra 13:36) a Zion or new Jerusalem in heaven, which would come down to earth with the dawn of the new world. The author of the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch (2 Enoch 55:2) also suggested that the New Jerusalem was located in heaven.

Rabbinical literature does not continue this Jewish expectation, except in very late Midrashim (doc. in Strack-Billerbeck, III:796). The rabbis commonly believed that immediately after the judgment on the godless, God or the Messiah would build a new Jerusalem on earth (see Str-B., III:573). Eduard Lohse states: "But no rabbi says that the heavenly Jerusalem will come down to the earth", Art. "Sion", B,V, note 204, in Kittel's

TDNT 7). The gates and walls of the new Jerusalem will be built with sapphires and precious stones and her streets with pure white marble (Tobia 13:20, 21). The city will be so large that its great wall stretches as far as Joppa and Damascus, in order to accommodate "the heavenly race of the blessed Jews" in the future (Sib. Or. 5:250-2; Lohse, *Ib.*). God will live in the city that will carry the name of God (Str-B IV:922-3). The central feature of this rebuilt Jerusalem would be the new temple (Str-B IV:932-3). Strack-Billerbeck comments: "It was quite self-evident for Jewish thinking that the new Jerusalem would not lack the temple. The statement of the Christian seer, 'I did not see a temple in the city' (Rev. 21:22) would have been unthinkable in the old synagogue" (IV:884).

This summation of the various hopes in late Judaism indicates that John's apocalyptic hope of a new Jerusalem without a temple is a distinctively Christian hope, which centers in the presence of Christ.

### **Paul's Theology of a Heavenly Jerusalem**

Paul continued the teaching of Christ that Jerusalem and its temple were no longer the dwelling place of God (see Matt. 23:38; Gal. 4:25; also Heb. 12:22). Paul wrote that the apostolic church had become the earthly temple where God was present: "For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Cor. 6:16; cp. Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; also Eph. 2:19-21). This gospel truth does not compete with the efficacy of the new-covenant temple in heaven, where Christ serves as our High Priest and Intercessor and from where he sends His vivifying Spirit (Heb. 7:25; 8:1-2; 10:19; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Paul believed that the Jerusalem "that is above" is the "mother" of the Christian believers, because they are all reborn by its Spirit (Gal. 4:26, 29).

While in Rabbinic Judaism the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem was conceived in terms of an exact counterpart of the earthly Jerusalem in topography and furniture (Str-B, III:573), Paul views the heavenly Jerusalem as exempt from all ethnic and national-geographic notions. The heavenly Jerusalem is the Christian's homeland, where Christ is and all believers have their citizenship (*politeuma*) recorded in the book of life of the Lamb (Phil. 3:20; 4:3; also Heb. 12:22, 23; Rev. 21:27). In Rev. 21:27 it becomes clear that the Lamb's book of life is the list of those enrolled as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. The heavenly city is not an empty structure, it is a worshiping fellowship of the church on earth with the angels and saints in heaven (Heb. 12:22). Some have identified the New Jerusalem as the church. Nevertheless, the distinction between the heavenly city and the church on earth must be retained, just as Hebrews 12 declares that the church has come today already to Christ and to the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24). As Christ is at the same time in heaven and (through the Spirit) on earth, so there is an intimate spiritual relation between the heavenly Jerusalem and the church on earth. Just as Christ will descend physically from heaven to earth (Phil. 3:20), so the heavenly Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth (Rev. 21:2)! The object of the Christian hope is not simply "heaven," but the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Our citizenship in this Holy City already now, represents more than assurance of present salvation. It gives also certainty of our entrance into the City of eternal rest and joy (see Heb. 4:9; 11:13-16). Like Abraham, Christians are with absolute confidence "looking for the city that is to come" (Heb. 13:14). It will come after the final judgment.

It is striking that the hope of a heavenly Jerusalem is described in the context of an anti-

Judaistic polemic, not only in Galatians 4:26, 27 and Hebrews 12:18-24, but also in the book of Revelation 3:9, 12. John stresses the gospel truth that the risen Christ alone "holds the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut; and what he shuts, no one can open" (Rev. 3:7). In the light of its original meaning in Isa. 22:22, this statement teaches "that to Christ belongs complete authority in respect to admission to or exclusion from the city of David, the New Jerusalem" (R.H. Charles, *The Rev. of St. John*, I:86). Christ is the source of assurance for the faithful believers that they will inherit the heavenly city. He declares:

*"Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (Rev. 3:20).*

### **The New Jerusalem in Contrast to Babylon**

The New Jerusalem of Rev. 21-22 is portrayed with the same symbolic image of a "woman" or "bride" as the church had been in the New Testament (see 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27). John's vision of the heavenly Jerusalem as the "bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9), connects the coming Jerusalem with the beautiful "woman" in Revelation 12:1, 2. In the New Jerusalem the church no longer suffers from persecution or from apostate worship. Thus Revelation 12 and 21 represent two consecutive ages: the present church age and the age to come.

The New Jerusalem is placed in a contrast with Babylon, the harlot city. The prostitute has engraved on her forehead the words "Mystery-Babylon the Great" (17:5), and is portrayed in Rev. 18 as a doomed city. John states: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (17:18). This twofold imagery of Babylon (Rev. 17-18) matches the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22 through a perfect antithesis.

All the inhabitants of the earth that do not seek refuge on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1), belong to Babylon; their names are not written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 13:8). They are forced to drink not only from the cup of Babylon's wine but also from the cup of God's wine of wrath, unmixed with mercy (Rev. 14:10). This divine fury is symbolically portrayed with the image of the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah ("burning sulfur", 14:10; cp. Gen. 19:24) and of Edom ("the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever," 14:11; cp. Isa. 34:9, 10). This imagery expresses the finality of God's judgment. The impenitent will never enter into God's rest (14:11; cp. Ps. 95:11).

John's Apocalypse contrasts Jerusalem, as the city of the Lamb (Rev. 21:2, 9), with Babylon as the city of the beast (Rev. 17-18). Their identical introduction by the judgment angel is significant:

Revelation 17:1	Revelation 21:9
One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."	One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

This literary arrangement teaches that the New Jerusalem is the only alternative to



Babylon. Both visions develop more opposite correspondences (see 17:3-5 and 21:10-14). Both literary sections, on Babylon (17:1 - 19:10) and the New Jerusalem (21:9 - 22:6), conclude with the same assurance that these revelations rest not simply on the authority of an angel, but on God Himself and are therefore trustworthy and true:

Revelation 19:9	Revelation 22:6
Then the angel said to me, "Write: '...These are the true words of God.'"	The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true."

John's reaction of worshiping the angel after each vision receives the same exhortation: "Worship God!" (19:10; 22:8, 9). While both sections on Babylon and the New Jerusalem begin and end alike, their contents expand on the contrasts between the harlot city and the holy city.

## The Ultimate Assurance and Comfort of the Apocalypse

In Revelation 21-22 John reveals "the last of the last things," the high point of all his visions and of the entire Bible. The main disclosure is the appearance of a new creation and the descent of the New Jerusalem (21:1, 2). This will be the consummation of God's eternal purpose for planet Earth. God explicitly guarantees the trustworthiness of His promises (21:5). A voice from God's throne explains their significance for mankind:

*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Rev. 21:3, 4).*

These words sum up the essence of the hope of all the prophets and saints. One commentator has said:

*Indeed it is inexpressibly joyful, for here are depicted the ultimate goal of the suffering Church and the only reward which Christ's confessors really want, namely, God himself in the company of all who love him (G. Beasley-Murray, Rev., p. 305).*

John's words, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea" (21:1), point to a new creative act of God. This is confirmed by His pronouncement: "I am making everything new [*kainai*]!" (21:5). The Greek word *kainos*, "new", used four times in verses 1-5, means something fundamentally new and emphasizes, more strongly than the term *neos*, the character of eschatological fulfillment.

In his previous vision of the great white throne, John stated: "Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them" (20:11). John now declares that the old earth and its atmospheric heavens will be replaced by a new creation. The dominant new feature will be the holy city, the New Jerusalem. His view is riveted on this center of existence for the redeemed. This New Jerusalem is seen "coming down out of heaven from God". It is therefore not a rebuilt old Jerusalem in Palestine, but a new creation. It will fulfill the hope of Abraham, who "was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). Peter adds the hope of a transformed human society: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven

and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Both Peter and John base their expectations on Isaiah's predictions (see Isa. 65:17-19; 66:22, 23). The promise of God's covenant will be realized in the New Jerusalem on the earth made new:

*Now the dwelling [skene: tabernacle] of God is with men [anthropon], and he will live [lit.: tabernacle] with them. They will be his people [lit.: peoples], and God himself will be with them and be their God (Rev. 21:3).*

The expression that God will "tabernacle" among "men" is profound, because it recalls God's redemptive presence in Israel's ancient tabernacle [skene]: "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). Secondly, the verb "to tabernacle" recalls John 1:14, where the incarnation of the Word of God is expressed in the words, He "dwelt [tabernacled] among us." Thus the promise of the New Jerusalem connects the glory of God with the glory of Christ and assures the church that God will come to dwell among "men" in fulfillment of His covenant promise. This means that the first advent of Christ is the guarantee of the future coming of God with human beings. The expressions "men" and "His peoples" (plural, in the original text) indicate the inclusion of all believers in Christ in the future society. Even the boundaries of the church and all religious denominations will be abolished. The human race on the new earth will be God's people, because they are all "His peoples" (21:3). And He will be "with them" always as the "God-with-them" (see Jerusalem Bible). The result of this fellowship with God is: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4). Here the divine promises of Isa. 25:8; 35:10; 65:19 are repeated to indicate their dramatic fulfillment in the New Jerusalem. Then the highest hope of all saints will be fulfilled: "They will see His face..." (Rev. 22:4). This seeing of God by human beings was the hope of the Hebrew believers:

*And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness (Ps. 17:15).*

*And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! ( Job 19:26, 27).*

This was the explicit promise of Christ: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). This was the assurance of Paul: "Then we will see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). And of John: "We shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The trustworthiness of this promise is underlined by God: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End . . ." (Rev. 21:6).

Only the Creator can speak words that create a new reality (see Genesis 1). Christ said on the cross, "It is finished!" (Joh. 19:30), and His mission to offer His life as an atonement of the human race was complete. At the end of the seven last plagues God's voice will speak again, "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17) and then the judgment of Babylon will be completed. When the New Jerusalem descends to earth and God dwells among redeemed, He will speak again, "It is done" (Rev. 21:6)! Then the Lord's prayer will be fulfilled, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). As "the Alpha and the Omega," God is the initiator and perfecter of creation. He alone gives human history its beginning and its goal. The goal will be accomplished as sure as its beginning. Two other promises of God also affect us today:

*To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost [dorean] from the spring of the*

*water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev. 21:6, 7).*

The imagery of "thirsting" was familiar to the Hebrew saints (see Isa. 55:1). To them it meant communion with God. They placed a higher value on this fellowship with God than on physical life. David unburdened his heart in this poetic song:

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water . . . Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you (Ps. 63:1, 3).*

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Ps. 42: 1, 2).*

This experience of the soul was realized only intermittently and partially. By faith in Christ a new fellowship with God is available for those who seek it: "If any one is thirsty, let him come to 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" (John 7:37-39).

When God promises in John's Apocalypse that He will give us "to drink without cost" (Rev. 21:6), He offers us the Spirit of Christ Who paid the ultimate price for us. This communion is offered also to the overcomers "without cost" [dorean: freely], a term so important to Paul (see Rom. 3:24).

Paradise as the presence of God is offered to all overcomers by the grace of God. This grace-character is stressed again in the assurance that the overcomer will "inherit all this" (Rev. 21:7). An inheritance can never be earned, it can only be received by the will of the testator. Paul explained this heirship by connecting the future inheritance indissolubly with Christ as the greatest gift of God: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ". . ."He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:17, 32). Pohl observed: "The Revelation is no less christocentric than Paul" (Die Off. des Joh., p. 275). This is clear from the seven times the Lamb is mentioned in Rev. 21-22. Entrance into the New Jerusalem is given only to "those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). This is the pastoral purpose, which John had indicated also in his contrast between the two symbolic women, the harlot (Rev. 17:1-19:5) and the bride of Christ (Rev. 19:6-10; 21:1-22:17). John's pastoral concern for the present age is to alert each believer to remain faithful to the Lord. Elmer M. Rusten explains:

*The reason why such emphasis is devoted to the harlot and the bride is that in the seven letters written to the seven churches (Rev. 1:4, 11) the basic alternative facing them was whether to be part of the true church, the bride, or the false church, the harlot (A Critical Evaluation of Dispensational Interpr. of the Book of Rev., II:620-1).*

It is our privilege to listen to Christ's final testimony to the churches:

*"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7).*

*"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of*

*life and may go through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).*

### **John's Pastoral Concern for the Present Church**

John uses an interesting style to describe the newness of the future age. He defines the new creation in negative terms. Badenas observes it seven times: 1) no more sea (21:1), 2) no more death, tears, mourning, crying or pain (21:4), 3) no more temple (21:22), 4) no more need of the sun or the moon (21:23; 22:5), 5) no night, no closed gates (21:25; 22:5), 6) no more sin (21:27), 7) no more curse (22:3) (in Symp. on Rev., II:249). This refrain of things that will be "no more" in John's last vision indicates how much he relates his visions to the present needs of his church members. He writes with deep pastoral concern for his readers who are suffering from persecution and are threatened by the antichristian powers from the sea.

John does not just write to inform us about future events in the abstract or to satisfy our curiosity about future realities. His practical purpose is to encourage the tested believers to persevere in the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, in spite of fierce opposition. He urges every believer to make the ultimate choice between faithfulness and disloyalty to Christ Jesus. This claim was presented first in the seven letters of Christ (Rev. 2-3). The promise of reward was portrayed in the visions of the seals (Rev. 6:9-11 and Rev. 7) and of the trumpets (Rev. 11). John constantly assumes that the cause of Christ will triumph, because the Lamb of God is "the King of kings and the Lord of lords" (17:14; 19:16). The hour of the restoration of God's kingdom will come in God's own time during the last trumpet:

*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:*

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).*

John's purpose is to encourage each Christian to make a full commitment to Christ. He tries to accomplish this objective by contrasting the Lamb and the beast, the Bride and the prostitute, and the New Jerusalem and Babylon. This dilemma of belonging to the one or the other community, urges one to make an existential choice now, because eternal destinies are involved. Badenas has listed the striking contrasts between Babylon and New Jerusalem in their settings, description and fate (see his chart in Symp. on Rev., II: 256). He concludes:

*These parallels show that the human relationship toward God and the Lamb can be only one of fidelity (bride) or of infidelity (whore). Since God is at the same time just and gracious, salvation or condemnation are the only possible outcomes of human decision - either the heavenly city or the earthly town, New Jerusalem or Babylon (Ib., pp. 255, 257).*

John does not provide abstract information for speculative prognostications. He makes his pastoral concern clear when he stresses that there are only two classes of people, the saved and the lost, the overcomers and the losers (see 21:7, 8; 22:11, 14-15), those who "thirst" for the water of life and those who do not (21:6; 22:17). This last distinction points to the spiritual need of people rather than to their moral conduct. Those who seek God first to satisfy their spiritual thirst are paralleled with the conquerors:

*"To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev. 21:6, 7).*

It is illuminating to discover that the characteristics of those excluded from New Jerusalem are the same as those that define Babylon and its inhabitants: unclean (21:27; 18:2), abominations (21:8, 27; 17:4, 5), murderers (17:6; 18:24; 21:8), fornicators (17:1, 2, 5, 15, 16; 18:3, 9; 21:8), sorcerers (18:23; 21:8), idolaters (19:20; 21:8) and liars (19:20; 21:8).

Badenas sees these lists of vices (Rev. 21:8 and 22:15) as a pastoral warning "against those who prefer other relationships to a relationship with God. This is what excludes them from the holy city (cf. 21:27)" (in Symp. on Rev., II:263). In other words, John is not referring to isolated acts of sin but to the attitude of wickedness and idolatry that separates the sinner from God.

It should not escape our attention that John begins his list with "the cowardly" (Rev. 21:8). The "cowardly" are those that shrink back from confessing Christ in the hour of testing and thus fail to persevere in the faith (see Heb. 10:36-39). When Paul referred to the threat of "cowardice" [deilia], he immediately admonished Timothy, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord . . ." (2 Tim. 1:7, 8), and pointed him to the gift of the "spirit of power".

John mentions in Rev. 21:8 at least seven kinds of people that will be excluded from the holy city. As the eighth kind he mentions "all liars," which Pohl considers a summation of all the previous seven. John's list of losers functions as the dramatic counterpart to the seven kinds of overcomers mentioned in the letters to the churches in chapters 2-3. John's designation "liars" is significant, because it points to the religious lie that distorts the truth about God and the Lamb. Giblin calls the lie "the ultimate lie," because "the lie is the denial of truth, preeminently as the falsification of God and what is due him" (The Book of Rev., p. 196). The liars stand in glaring contrast to the 144,000 Israelites that follow the Lamb, so that "no lie was found in their mouths" (Rev. 14:5).

From the first characteristic (cowardice) till the last (the lie) John's concern points to the high calling of the believer to witness for Christ, to follow the Lamb, to confess His Lordship. The shorter list of vices in Rev. 22 again concludes with "everyone who loves and practices lying" (v. 15 NASB). This indicates that such people live the "lie" as a way of life, of character, and of worship. The lie as the counterpart of the truth was also Paul's summation of the final apostasy in 2 Thess. 2:9-12.

## **The Significance of New Jerusalem's Splendor**

Revelation 21:9--22:5 contains a description of the heavenly Jerusalem. The angel contrasts this with his interpretation of Babylon's doom in Rev. 17:1--19:10. The two sections are recognized as intentional counterparts. Fortunately, John's vision of the New Jerusalem is the longest and most elaborate vision of the Apocalypse. It expands the pictorial prophecies of a new Jerusalem in Isaiah 54 and 60 and Ezekiel 40-48.

Like Ezekiel, John sees his vision "on a very high mountain" (Ezek. 40:2; Rev. 21:10). The glory of God in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:11) corresponds to the coming of the glory of Yahweh from the East into the new temple in Ezekiel's vision (43:1, 2). The difference is that now God Himself is the undiminished glory of the holy city (Rev. 21:11). Ezekiel

focused on the new temple, but John describes an infinitely larger city without a particular temple (21:22).

John pays special attention to its massive walls and twelve gates. He uses the number "twelve," twelve times in Rev. 21, which is laden with meaning. The angel has a measuring rod of gold "to measure the city, its gates and its walls" (21:15). The city is described as a perfect cube each side measuring 12,000 stadia, which would be literally 1,500 miles in each direction, even upward, far above the stratosphere! No wonder responsible interpreters have cautioned against a dogmatic literalism in regard to the visions of Rev. 21 and Ezek. 40-48. In these pictorial prophecies "the degree of identity remains a problem for further interpretation" (S.D.A. Bible Com. 4:715; see also 7:892). Giblin states that John "intends to invoke the image of a gigantic 'Holy of Holies', which was a perfect cube, overlaid with gold (1 Kgs 6:20)" (The Book of Rev., p. 205). The City dimensions of a cube clearly suggest that the entire "Holy City" is the Most Holy Place on earth, the throne of God. This transcends the need for any local temple. John explains:

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. . . .*

*It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal (Rev. 21:22, 11).*

There can be no doubt that John's purpose in Rev. 17-18 is to place this city Jerusalem in direct contrast with the city of Babylon. The surpassing beauty of the New Jerusalem consists of God's presence and the redeemed. The mind-boggling dimensions of 12,000 stadia carry a clear symbolic meaning, the City contains the Israel of God of all salvation history. Badenas explains: "Surpassing Babylon and Rome, New Jerusalem is the true and the only universal city" (in Symp. on Rev., II:259).

The City wall measures in height 144 cubits (21:17), literally about 216 feet, stressing again the key number 12. A wall, by definition, not only symbolizes security but also separation from the "outside" (22:15), which basically refers to the place of "the fiery lake" (21:8). This symbol can be understood best as a reference to the postmillennial judgment of Rev. 20:7-15. The wall itself is made of crystalline jasper (21:18), shining like a diamond. It stands on twelve foundation stones, each made of one single enormous gem (21:19, 20), each inscribed with a name of "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (21:14). On the twelve gates, however, are inscribed the names of the "twelve tribes of Israel" (21:12). Taken together, this means that the prophetic Israel of God includes all the followers of Christ. This is the fundamental message of John's vision about life in the New Jerusalem.

The features of the twelve precious stones and the twelve pearly gates complement the basic message that God will unite all his children into one flock while recognizing that they also remain diversified in their individual characters. Each type of character will reflect the divine nature, just as each jewel will reflect the glory of God in its own way. Research shows, however, that "the stones of the Apocalypse cannot be correlated with specific tribes, apostles, zodiac signs or geographical directions" (W.W. Reader, see Source Material, quotation from p. 455). The twelve precious stones of the New Jerusalem basically "symbolize the presence of God, the divine origin of the city, and the new people of God" (Reader, lb., p. 456). The twelve gems also function as the counterpart of the jewels adorning the prostitute of Babylon (Rev. 17:4; 18:12, 16). From this perspective, the jewels of the Holy City are "an emblem to sustain hope in the final

victory of God" (Reader, lb., p. 457).

The splendor of the New Jerusalem, with the throne of God and the tree of life, delivers this message: Paradise will be restored with greater glory than the Garden of Eden, because the Creator will establish His presence and throne there forever. Every believer may take courage that Israel's covenant promises will be fulfilled in an inconceivably glorious manifestation in the future.

The emphatic forecast that "the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. . . The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it" (Rev. 21:24, 26), is challenging. This prediction uses the portrayal of Isaiah 60 but adapts it to the eternal state. Now the kings no longer will be paraded as conquered (Isa. 60:10, 11) or as bringing tribute (60:5-7). Rather they come as redeemed Gentiles to contribute their glory in their worship of God and the Lamb during a festival of praise and thanksgiving in the New Jerusalem. Ellul explains that "all that which had been the cultural, scientific, technical, aesthetic, intellectual work, all the music and sculpture, all the poetry and mathematics, all philosophy and knowledge of all orders, all enter into this Jerusalem, used by God to build up this final perfect work" (Apocalypse, p. 225). What an exciting concept! Who would not want to be part of this higher education in the future life for God's people?

*Christ and the New Jerusalem invite every person who seeks God to be part of the eternal state of bliss:*

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"*

*And let him who hears say, "Come!"*

*Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes,*

*let him take the free gift of the water of life (Rev. 22:17).*

For a discussion of problematic passages, as Rev. 21:1 ("and there was no longer any sea"); Rev. 22:9 ("the bride, the wife of the Lamb"); and Rev.22:2 ("And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations"), see APPENDIX B

## **SOURCE MATERIAL FOR REVELATION XXI - XXII**

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
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## Afterword

The key question in contemporary theology is, How do we know the meaning of Scripture? While the Holy Spirit illumines the believer's mind in its effort to understand the Bible, the need remains for a scientific method of interpreting Scripture. Only then can a purely subjective interpretation of the text and parochial thinking be avoided.

The purpose of this book is to investigate the theological unity of the Hebrew prophecies and the Christian gospel of the New Testament. Its specific focus is to bring to light the essential continuity of Israel's end-time prophecies in the prophetic outlook of Jesus, Paul, and John's Apocalypse. This approach, that distinguishes it from previous approaches, uses consistently the contextual method of exegesis, both the immediate and the wider contexts of Scripture. This means that the New Testament text must always be related to the Old Testament to discover the spiritual heritage of Christ and the apostolic writers. This counts with peculiar force for the Apocalypse, which is saturated with Hebrew terms and images.

This method implies that all church historical applications of the prophetic text are secondary to a contextual exegesis and must be subordinated to the authorial intent as determined by the immediate and wider contexts. History of the church and the world must never be allowed to become the norm of biblical exegesis. The Bible interprets history and not the other way around. The danger remains for the continuous-historical application of the apocalyptic prophecies to read certain important events of history into the sacred text. The historicist interpreter of prophecy needs self-discipline in his or her declarations of fulfilled prophecy. History itself has already taken care of many errors in this respect!

Rejecting the philosophical principles of literalism, allegorism, and idealism for prophetic interpretation, I urge the consistent use of the interpretative principles of Christ and His apostles as the master key to unlock the symbolic end-time prophecies of both Testaments. Their gospel hermeneutic can be established by analyzing the way Christ and Paul applied Daniel's prophecies to their own time and age. This requires a careful analysis of Matthew 24 (and parallels) and 2 Thessalonians 2 as essential to discover which specific rules they followed in their interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies. The decisive norm and guideline for their understanding of all the Hebrew prophecies was the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of prophecy. This fundamental belief made the future outlook of Christ and the New Testament writers thoroughly Christocentric. It caused them to reconstitute all the Hebrew prophecies as Christ-centered promises. This gospel fulfillment had as a consequence that the true people of Christ were constituted as the nucleus of the spiritual Israel, as the Israel of God. If Jesus is the Christ of prophecy, then the people of Christ, as His "body," are the center of all the end-time prophecies.

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consequence that the true people of Christ were constituted as the nucleus of the spiritual Israel as the Israel of God. Jesus is the Christ of prophecy, then the people of Christ, as His "body," are the center of all the end-time prophecies.

The gospel hermeneutic functions as the inspired guideline for the interpretation of the unfulfilled predictions of the apocalyptic prophecies. This procedure fully honors the "Sola Scriptura" axiom of faith that requires the allowance that Scripture interprets itself. Neither church tradition, nor history or an extra-biblical prophet of God are the final interpreters of Scripture. The Bible remains its own expositor, its own final interpreter, and the judge of all schools of prophetic interpretation. The contextual approach offers a critical look at any other method of prophetic interpretation, showing the way to distinguish between the authorial intent of the sacred text and the applications of extra-biblical commentators.

With regard to the book of Revelation, it is essential to recognize its chiastic structure as a key to its composition as a whole. This discovery points to its center, Revelation 12-14, as the particular burden of John's Apocalypse for the end-time people of God. This literary unit is the outworking of the anticipatory visions in Revelation 10-11 that tie the end-time to the sixth trumpet period. The visions of Rev. 10-14 reveal a specific connection with the book of Daniel and its end-time focus of prophecy in chapters 7-12. This fact makes Daniel's book, with Dan. 7 as its central burden, foundational to the understanding of the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse discloses how Daniel and all the other Hebrew end-time prophecies will meet their consummation in salvation history.

## Appendix A

### The Application Of Cosmic Signs In The Seventh-Day Adventist Tradition: An Evaluation

In 1840 William Miller explained the sixth seal of Rev. 6:12-17 in every detail as a symbolic expression of the French Revolution in A.D. 1789. For him and many others that was the fulfillment of the "great earthquake" in Rev. 6:12. The celestial signs and the falling of the stars he applied to the fall of "almost every king" when "all the nobility" in Europe "fell to the earth" (Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ about the year 1843. Boston: B.B. Mussey, 1840; p. 184).

Miller's lecture in 1840 listed 25 signs but not one of them referred to cosmic phenomena (ibid., pp. 288-300)! This in spite of the fact that some ministers in England and in America earlier and Josiah Litch in his own time saw the cosmic signs of Rev. 6:12-14 as having been fulfilled already literally (L.E. Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers. Wash. DC.: Rev. and Herald, Vol. IV (1954); Chapter 13).

Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, however, accepted the literal interpretation of the cosmic signs of the sixth seal in Rev. 6:12 (U. Smith, Revelation, Wash. DC.: Rev. and Herald P.A., 1944, p. 542). The reason for this literal application of Rev. 6:12-17 was not explained, but accepted as obvious by its historical fulfillments in natural upheavals at a time when "the spirit of persecution was finally restrained" (U. Smith, Rev., p. 437).

Seventh-day Adventists accepted the "striking fulfillments" of the prediction of the sixth seal in the historic earthquake of Lisbon in Portugal, on November 1, 1755. They further accepted the "inexplicable" darkening of the sunlight on May 19, 1780, as experienced for a few hours in some Eastern States along the seacoast of America, as the fulfillment of the prediction: "The sun turned black" (Rev. 6:12). The meteor shower on the morning of November 13, 1833, seen across North America, was interpreted as the most spectacular sign from heaven to warn mankind of the imminent coming of Christ as the Judge of the world. In fact, this event was considered by Ellen G. White as the last of the cosmic signs predicted in Matt. 24 and Rev. 6, and as the forerunner of the coming Judgment Day (see GC 334). Ellen White declared that all three upheavals (in Lisbon, the dark day, and the meteor shower) were fulfillments of Christ's predictions in Matt. 24:29 and Rev. 6:12,13 (GC 304, 306,333, 334). It seemed to her a "surety" that she was living in the last generation on earth (see DA 632). This belief confirmed the Adventist sense of mission and urgency. They were living in the last generation since 1833. With the zeal of this conviction "many were led to give heed to the warning of the second advent" (GC 334).

Uriah Smith commented on the significance of the meteor shower of Nov. 13, 1833, in the Review and Herald of May 20, 1862 (Vol. 19, No. 25, p. 196):

*The meteoric shower of 1833, cannot be accounted for on any natural and scientific principles . . .it did take place by an independent and direct exertion of omnipotent power, manifested because he had said he would do so . . .Many are the witnesses who have testified that they thought at that time that the last day had come.*

C. Mervyn Maxwell and others acknowledge today, however, that the so-called "dark day" of May 19, 1780, together with the appearance of a "red" moon, was caused not by a

direct act of omnipotent power, but by huge forest fires "raging in northern Vermont, northern New Hampshire, and in Canada, some set by settlers to clear the land" (God Cares. Vol.II. Pacific Press P.A., 1985, p. 197; see also M.E. Sprengel, *Adventist Review*, May 22, 29 and June 5, 1980). This was not known by the Adventist pioneers and by contemporary writers as N. Webster (see U. Smith, *Revelation Rev. and Herald*, 1944, pp. 441-3). Adventist expositors had ascribed the darkening of the sun and moon in 1780 persistently to a supernatural act of the Creator. To them it was a cosmic sign of the imminent end of time. However, that darkening of the sun and moon was not caused by the sun! Local forest fires had eclipsed the sun and the smoke covered 25,000 square miles in the eastern part of North America. Such a local darkening for just a few hours can hardly qualify as a cosmic sign. The real fulfillment of this apocalyptic sign will be observed during the last plagues, when the whole earth will be plunged into a supernatural darkness (Rev. 16:10), comparable in nature to God's darkening of the sun over Egypt for three days (Exod. 10:21-23). But the world population during the last plague will not react with repentance, only with cursing the God of heaven (Rev. 16:11).

The severe earthquake of Lisbon on Nov. 1, 1755, was still a local quake, the shock of which covered some 1,300,000 square miles, more than one-third of Europe. The loss of life in this quake was estimated to be about 15,000, most of whom were at church that morning at 9.30 a.m. for All Saints' Day mass. This earthquake had a lasting effect on 18th-century philosophy. "The very foundations of Western thought and culture were profoundly shaken . . . The self-assured stride of the Age of Reason acquired a permanent limp after the Lisbon earthquake" (B. Walker, *Earthquake*. Time-Life Books; Alexandria: VA, 1982, pp. 46, 48). The results of this European quake on humanity was not a spiritual revival of godliness but a scepticism that soon expressed itself in the violence of the French Revolution of 1789. Voltaire in his novel *Candide* ridiculed the idea that the quake of 1755 came as a punishment. Professional scientists report that throughout the centuries earthquakes have killed "on average, some 15,000 people every year"! Before 1755 three earthquakes were of even greater intensity: in 1456 the earthquake of Naples, Italy, killed some 30,000 lives. On January 23, 1556, the Shensu earthquake in China took more than 820,000 lives; on October 11, 1737, the quake of Calcutta, India, killed about 300,000 people. After 1755 the Tokyo quake took 200,000 people in 1803; in 1920 the quake of Kansu, China counted 180,000 deaths and the 1923 quake of Kwanto, Japan took 140,000 lives. In 1976 over 650,000 people perished by earthquakes in China alone. These are only some of a larger list (D. DeNevi, *Earthquakes* Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1977, p.67; H. Tazieff, *When The Earth Trembles*. New York: Harcourt, 1964; pp. 227-229; F.W. Lane, *The Elements Rage*. Phil. and New York: Chilton Co Publ., 1965, p. 218). Scientists in China have catalogued a list of 1323 major earthquakes over 3000 years, starting with 1831 B.C. Seismologists have now identified areas which are especially earthquake-prone (Japan, The Pacific Belt and others). Animals (pheasants, storks) are known to have given a brief warning of a coming earthquake. An earthquake, like a volcanic eruption or a tsunami, does not just happen, it is caused by certain laws of nature. In summary, one author concludes: "During recorded history, earthquakes, along with floods, fires, and landslides they have triggered, are estimated to have taken as many as 75 million lives" (Dan DeNevi, *Earthquakes*. Millbrae, CA, 1977, p. 66).

The earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 made a special philosophical impact on its generation, because it struck a cultural and religious center at a time when a spirit of optimism about the future prevailed in Europe and America. On both sides of the Atlantic, the Lisbon

quake of Nov. 1, 1755, was explained by Protestants as a sign of the approaching advent of Christ. It was generally seen as a fulfillment of Christ's prediction of the coming "perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea" (Luke 21:25). In England the Anglican Church proclaimed a special day of fasting for Feb. 6, 1756. Bishop Lavington of the Cathedral Church in Exeter declared with caution on that fast day:

*"I do not think that we have Light enough in these Matters to pin down this Prophecy to these events ; nor to determine how near or how far off Christ's second Coming may be. There seem to be other Prophecies not yet accomplished, which must be accomplished before this comes to pass. . ."*(doc. in Froom, PF II: 677).

Also in Boston, America, the Lisbon quake was given prophetic significance in the sense that it was interpreted as a forerunner of the destruction of the world, as mentioned by Christ in Matt.24:7 ("There will be famines and earthquakes in various places"). In 1756 the Congregational minister Charles Chauncy compared the loss of trade caused by the Lisbon quake to the condition predicted in Rev. 18 and cited it as a warning to repent, or experience similar judgments in the future (in Froom, PF III:191. The Puritan pastor Jonathan Mayhew in Boston explained that the Lisbon quake was a harbinger of the woes and plagues culminating in the great last earthquake soon to be visited upon Babylon (Froom, PF III:193).

These reactions to the natural disaster of Lisbon were religious responses. Christ had taught that the proper moral response to any disaster would be to repent. He replied to the question whether the people killed when the tower of Siloam fell were more sinful than all the others: "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:5). Christ did not mention the coming of any earthquake in connection with the "days of distress" or the 1260 years in Matt. 24, Mark 13, or Luke 21!

The question therefore rises, Does the sixth seal refer to a particular local earthquake? The sixth seal announces that a "great earthquake," together with celestial upheavals, will introduce the second advent. This momentous event of the sixth seal is further expanded in Rev. 11:19 and 16:17-21 where one cosmic-universal quake is described (see above, Chapter 7). In this larger context we may see the Lisbon earthquake as a partial fulfillment and timely reminder of the worldwide quake to come, at which time there will be no longer an opportunity to repent, as Rev. 6:14-16 shows. We therefore suggest that "the complete fulfillment of the sixth seal is yet future" (D. Ford, Crisis!, II:379).

On the night of November 13, 1833, a brilliant spectacle in the sky was seen for a few hours that made a deep impression on all who witnessed it. One observer stated that "the stars were falling as thick snowflakes." Estimates range from 10,000 to more than 60,000 meteors per hour visible. The year 1833 is now regarded as the birth of meteor astronomy as a science. Observers noticed that the meteors all seemed to stream from a point in the constellation of Leo. Gerald S. Hawkins, astronomer at Boston University, says of that event:

*If the scientists were bewildered by the Leonid storm, we can easily imagine how the nonscientists felt. We do not know exactly how many deaths from heart failures and suicide could be directly attributed to the Leonids, but many people in the southern states were panic-stricken, thinking that the Day of Judgment had surely arrived (Splendor in the Sky. New York: Harper & Row, 1969, p. 220).*

Later the American astronomer H.A. Newton of Yale discovered the natural cause of the Leonid meteor shower. Searching older records he found that a Leonid shower had been

seen practically every 33¼ years, starting in A.D. 902, a year known as "the year of the stars". Already in 902 an Italian observer in Salerno believed that it was the fulfillment of Luke 21:25. Outstanding Leonid storms had also been recorded in the years 1202, 1366, 1533, 1766 and 1799. Newton therefore suggested that the Leonids might return in 1866. Indeed a beautiful shower of meteors radiated from the constellation of Leo in 1866 with some 6,000 meteors per hour. Because of this scientific prediction, there was no widespread panic. It was proven that the Leonid storm, in various degrees of intensity, was recurring in a natural cycle along its large elliptic orbit around the sun of our solar system. In 1866 Wilhelm Temple in France discovered that a comet--later named the "Temple-Tuttle" comet--as responsible for the meteor showers from Leo when its tail of meteor particles entered the earth's atmosphere. Because the comet in the year 1899 passed close to Jupiter the gravitational pull of this planet deflected the course of the comet so that it missed the earth and the celestial display did not occur.

Many Adventist expositors today do not deny the natural cause of the celestial phenomena, but stress the intensity of the Leonid storm of 1833 (see in L.E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. Vol. IV (Wash. DC: Review and Herald P.A., 1954, pp. 1218-19; C.M. Maxwell, *God Cares*. Vol. II, Rev. & Her. P.A., 1985, p. 201). However, on November 17, 1966, a record number of meteors streaked over North America, seen best in the mountain states, with a visual rate of about 150,000 per hour! (G.S. Hawkins, *Splendor in the Sky*, p. 222). The Guinness Book of Records of 1992 declares: "The greatest shower on record occurred on the night of 16-17 Nov. 1966, when the Leonid meteors (which recur every 33¼ years) were visible between North America and eastern USSR." (D. McFarlan, ed.; New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1991, p. 12). But this fact did not impress any Adventist as being of any significance.

In retrospect today, the three natural upheavals in 1755, 1780 and 1833 are not inexplicable, supernatural events but rather the results of specific laws and movements in nature. The question becomes acute, Can these natural upheavals still be interpreted as signs of the times, as unique fulfillments of end-time prophecies?

Even some conservative Adventist Bible expositors are now convinced that the traditional Adventist interpretation of these historical phenomena has lost its convincing power and effectiveness. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi in his extensive study, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*. Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives 6, 1986) even omits the traditional view about 1755, 1780 and 1833 altogether. In his chapter (7), "The Nature and Function of the Advent Signs", he states:

*The signs of the End given by Christ in His Olivet Discourse (which included false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, worldwide Gospel proclamation, and tribulation), are all signs which cannot be precisely dated or fixed . . . On the contrary, Christ chose to give signs of a generic nature which could find a degree of fulfillment in every age. The reason for this is quite evident. Believers in every age need to see the Advent signs in order to experience the reassurance of the certainty and imminence of Christ's coming (pp. 114, 115).*

It is noteworthy that this Adventist expositor finds the reason for his view "quite evident." He explains that the generic nature of the signs was "designed to discourage date-setting sensationalism" (p. 117)! One thing has clearly changed in Adventist eschatology: the unanimous voice of conviction regarding 1755, 1780, and 1833 has disappeared. Lost is the self-evidence of these events as supernatural signs. On what basis then does Adventism defend the notion of a design in God's plan for these specific events in the

past? The appeal is to the timing and the sequence of these occurrences: "their appearance in connection with the closing years of the 1260 years of papal suppression both before and after 1798 (J. Paulien, in Symp. on Rev. I: 237). C.M. Maxwell explains: "As a series they came in the right order and at the proper time" (God Cares, I:214). "The series of signs [Matt. 24:29] that were to take place 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' has evidently been fulfilled" (Ibid., I:202). This conclusion is based on an exegesis of two passages: Mark 13:24 (more than Matt. 24:29) and Rev. 12:6.

*"But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky . . ."* (Mark 13:24).

*"The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days"* (Rev. 12:6).

It is assumed as self-evident that both passages deal with the same period of distress: 1260 year-days (counted from A.D. 538-1798). However, this assumption is not self-evident! Such an important connection needs to be demonstrated by a responsible exegesis of each text within its own context. The context of Mark 13:18-25 (and of Matt. 24:20-30) connects the "days of distress" for Christ's followers from A.D. 70 until the cosmic signs introduce the second advent. There is no indication of a restriction of the times of distress to 1260 years in the Mount Olivet forecast of Jesus (see section, "Christ's Prediction of Celestial Signs after End-time Distress", above in Chapter VII, "Understanding the Seven Seals"). Jesus even includes the end-time distress under the antichrist, because He refers specifically to Dan. 12:1 when He announced that the coming great distress would be "unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again" (Matt. 24:21; see also Mark 13:19). Daniel had declared that at the end of the unprecedented "time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then," Michael would arise and the resurrection of the dead would take place (12:1, 2). It is clear that "Daniel 12:1-4 actually comprises the end of the prophecy of chapter 11. . . When the king of the north comes to his end and no one is able to assist him, that is the time when Michael stands up" (W.H. Shea, Daniel 7-12. The Bible Amplifier. G.R. Knight, ed. Boise, ID: Pacific Press P. A., 1996, p. 214). Jesus undoubtedly referred to that end-time distress in His prophetic discourse and did not limit those "days" to the Middle Ages (see also Matt. 24:22).

The traditional Adventist application of the falling stars in Matt. 24:29 to the year 1833 is not consistent with its premise that the timing for the celestial signs must come within "those days," that is between 538 and 1798. The year 1833 came beyond those "days". The "proper time" is therefore not evident here! The exegesis of Jesus' reference to the distress of "those days" must take into account the total picture of all the days of distress as presented by Christ in the fifth seal of Rev. 6:9-11 and in Rev. 12:17; 13:15-17; 17:12-14. The "white robes" are given to all who "have come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14; also 6:11). This distress is not restricted to the Middle Ages or to 1260 years (ending in 1798)! More than that, Revelation 12:17 points specifically to the end-time distress of the remnant church, a distress further enlarged in Rev. 13:15-17 and 17:12-14. This distress will be cut short by Christ's divine intervention during the seven last plagues with the sudden darkening of the whole earth (Rev. 16:10) and the predicted cosmic-universal earthquake (Rev. 16:18-21). These cosmic signs fulfill the proper timing and function of "cutting short" the universal distress of God's people.

An increasing number of present-day Adventist expositors are admitting the problems with the old interpretation of the cosmic signs and of its ineffectiveness in our time. Mark Finley, speaker for the "It is Written" telecast series, turns the focus of attention away from any isolated event as a sign of the times:

*If we are looking for specific events to indicate the nearness of Christ's return we will either misinterpret events and try to squeeze current events into prophecy, or we will be disappointed looking for an event that doesn't transpire. But if we look at trends we will see an increasingly clear Bible scenario of the coming of Jesus (Adventists Affirm. Berrien Springs; Vol. 6, No.1, 1992, p. 13).*

This "modern-trends" focus is gradually replacing the traditional backward look to some specific events in nature in previous centuries. Today writers point to the increasingly global influence of the Papacy and of America; to the intensification of destructive disasters in the world and to the stage-setting for the final crisis and last distress for God's people. See also Marvin Moore, *The Crisis of the End Time* (Pacific Press, 1992, chap. 4); S. Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*. Berrien Springs, Mich., 1985, chaps. 8-10). These books no longer deal with the the traditional cosmic signs. In his recent book *What the Bible Says About The End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald P.A., 1994), the Adventist theologian Jan Paulien breaks new ground, stressing: "We need a sane approach to current events" (p. 157). He signals our inclination to date-setting or doom-saying: "Natural disasters are so gripping that it is almost instinctive for human beings to invest them with cosmic significance" (p. 157). In fact, it has become traditional to interpret the many signs of disaster in Matt. 24 as signs of the coming end. Paulien, however, states:

*The famines, pestilences, earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars are not listed as signs of the end in Matthew 24. Instead they are "signs of the age", events that would occur throughout the interim between Jesus' earthly ministry and the end. Jesus did not want those who observe such events to calculate their significance for the timing of the end. Instead, He wanted those who observe wars, earthquakes, and famines to keep watch (Ibid., p. 157).*

Paulien's final appeal is to Christ's own words in the New Testament (Matt. 24:42) and to their meaning within the biblical context. The latest Adventist exposition of Matthew 24, by George R. Knight, General Editor of the *Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, explains that the role of the signs in Matt. 24 is to reassure us "that the faithful, covenant-keeping God has not yet finished the plan of salvation" . . . "They are signs that the end is coming, but they are not the real signs of the end. . . The pattern of Matthew 24 appears to be that the real signs are not signs of nearness but signs of coming" (Matthew. Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Ass., 1994, pp. 236, 237).



## Appendix B

### Assessing The Historical School Interpretation Of Revelation XI

While we hold the fundamental principle that the Bible is its own expositor, we need to respect interpretations of responsible expositors in the past. Genuine Bible scholars build on the efforts of their predecessors and gratefully acknowledge their achievements and engage critically with them on the basis of a sound exegesis of Scripture. To ignore previous expositions of Scripture would express a spirit of self-exaltation and closed-mindedness. The revelation of God can be comprehended fully only when all the saints share their understandings together (see Eph. 3:18). Every group-thinking is unaware of its "blind spots" and is in danger of accepting its private understanding uncritically as truth. It is even possible that a school of thought unobtrusively or stealthily exalts its tradition into an extra-biblical, higher norm besides Scripture and rejects any different view as false on that basis alone. Protestants have regarded such elevation of tradition as "Babylonian wine" that enslaves the mind, making it unwilling or unable to let the Bible be its own interpreter.

Another danger is to allow current events explain Bible prophecy, or to read some dramatic historical event back into biblical prophecy. A typical example is the apocryphal book of Maccabees, written by a Palestinian Jew in about 100 B.C. He assumed that the desecration of Jerusalem's temple by Antiochus IV was the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of a coming "abomination of desolation" on the Jewish altar (Dan. 8:11-13; 11:31; 1 Macc. 1:52-55; Josephus, Ant. Jud. X, 11, 7). It was, however, only a partial fulfillment at the time.

We now inquire into the record of the so-called "historical school" of prophetic interpretation concerning Revelation 11, as presented by LeRoy E. Froom in his monumental work, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. 4 Vols (Wash. D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn, 1950-1954).

According to Froom, the Protestant expositors of the 16th century paid little attention to Revelation 11. The 17th and 18th centuries produce 37 European expositors of the Revelation. Only six interpret the "two witnesses;" five of which see them as a symbol of the church and only one sees them as the Old and New Testaments (see Chart in Froom II: 786-787).

Regarding the "earthquake" that destroys a "tenth of the city" (Rev. 11:13), seven interpreters apply this city to France and three apply it to one of the ten kingdoms of Europe. The "earthquake" is not applied.

Fourty three American expositors during the 17th and 18th centuries are listed by Froom (III:252-253). Few explain the "two witnesses," yet see the "1260 days" as 1260 actual years. Six out of the 43 interpreters apply the "earthquake" of Rev. 11:13 to France; one says it refers to one tenth of Europe, and four (writing between A.D. 1796 and 1812) apply it to the French Revolution which had just taken place before they wrote.

Froom lists 62 expositors of Europe during the first half of the 19th century (III:744-745). They all wrote after the French Revolution. Only six apply the "witnesses" to the Two Testaments. Five apply the "witnesses" to the living church. Forty-eight do not comment

at all on this symbol.

Fourteen expositors apply the "tenth of the city" in Rev. 11:13 to France; one to Christendom and one to the French Revolution. All others abstain from comment. Only one (the Irish scholar George Croly) offers an historical application of the 3½ days of the dead witnesses: from 1793-1797.

In America reprints of some European expositions were published between 1800-1845. Froom lists 13 American reprints that influenced American Bible students (including the Douay Bible) (see IV:394-395). Of these 13 reprints not one applies the "two witnesses" of Rev. 11 to the Bible. Nine of them refer to faithful ministers or living witnesses or to the Waldenses. Seven consider the "1260 days" as actual years. Three interpret the "earthquake" as fulfilled in the French Revolution; two as the Protestant Reformation. Only two view the "tenth of the city" as France.

Froom lists 48 expositors of Non-Millerite expositors in America from 1798-1844 (IV: 398-399). Only ten express any view regarding the "Two Witnesses" and they consider them as "living" witnesses to the truth rather than the Two Testaments. Only nine express their view of the "1260 days" as years, with only two giving the epoch of 533-1793, two others: 606-1866. Twelve apply the "earthquake" of Rev. 11:13 to the French Revolution which was the current upheaval in their time. Five of these 12 refer the "tenth of the city" to France. Only two apply the "3½ days" to 1792 (or -3)-1796 (or -7).

Froom lists 31 Millerite expositors in America from 1830-1844 (IV: 848-849). Sixteen of them view the "Two Witnesses" of Rev. 11 as the Two Testaments, while the others abstain from comments. Eighteen of them apply the "1260 days" to 538-1798. Only three apply the "3½ days" to 1793-1796. Seven of them apply the "earthquake" to the French Revolution and the "tenth of the city" to France.

Reviewing the complete record, we observe that the 17th and 18th centuries show no unity in the historical application of Revelation 11 in the "Historical School." Most abstain from a precise application to historical events. Some (four) see the French Revolution as the fulfillment of Rev. 11. After the French Revolution a small number of European expositors saw the political earthquake of France forecast in Rev. 11:13. Only the Irish George Croly dates the "3½ days" in France from "November 1793 - June 1797" (Froom III:546). This he stated in his commentary on the Apocalypse in 1827. He reckoned the 1260-year epoch from 533 till 1793. Apparently he believed that the events of November 1793 annulled Justinian's recognition of papal supremacy in his letter of 533, since he simply reckoned back 1260 years from the current events in 1793 (Froom III:545).

The great majority of the historical-school expositors in Europe between 1800 and 1844 do not apply the Two Witnesses to the Bible but to the faithful living witnesses as representatives of the Bible. The American (non-Millerite) expositors between 1798-1844 apply the Two Witnesses regularly to the living witnesses who are faithful to God's Word. Hardly 25% (11 out of 48) see the

French Revolution in Rev. 11:13.

Only the Millerite preachers (1830-1844) show an almost unanimous belief that the Two Witnesses symbolized the Two Testaments and reckoned the 1260-year epoch from 538-1798 (Froom, IV:849). Three of them (W. Miller, J. Litch, G. Storrs) saw the "3½ days" fulfilled from 1793 (or 2) - 1796(or 7). A small minority (7 out of 31) applied Rev. 11:13 to the French Revolution and to France. Regarding the "witnesses" and the "1260 years"

the influence of group-thinking becomes apparent. Within the Sabbatarian Adventists all the Millerite views on Rev. 11 are adopted without evaluation. Uriah Smith, their leading expositor, offers remarkably little exposition of his own on Rev. 11. He simply quotes at length passages from George Croly (England) and from George Storrs, a Millerite preacher, adopting Croly's assertion: "The Church and the Bible had been slain in France "from November, 1793, till June, 1797" (U. Smith, Rev. p. 540).

## **Assessment**

The concerns of the "historical school" are ignored by modern interpreters. The fact that there was no unanimity of historical applications among those who relate prophecy to historical events does not justify the cavalier dismissal of the duty to compare prophecy with history. Jesus related Daniel to His own time in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Paul did the same to the church age in 2 Thessalonians 2. The book of Revelation continues the progressive revelation with a special emphasis on the end-time. The historical school of interpretation follows the example of Christ and Paul as their inspired guideline for the end-time applications of Daniel and Revelation.

While it can be said that history is the true interpreter of prophecy, we also need to safeguard all historical applications of Scripture against a speculative exegesis. A prophecy may find some partial fulfillment in historical events, yet such an application can only serve as a partial anticipation of the future consummation of a biblical prophecy. Only when all the features of a prophecy are fulfilled can one speak with conviction of a complete fulfillment.

One cannot evaluate the French Revolution of 1789-1799 in its motivation, acts of execution, and religious-political consequences, if this period is dissected from the previous history of France.

The union of the Roman Catholic Church and the royal house of the Bourbons for centuries led the common people of France to despise the greed and the cruelty of the Roman priesthood and to resent the oppression of the aristocracy. The church-state union also successfully repressed the Protestant Reformation. The Huguenots were systematically sent as slaves to the galleys, burned at the stake, or driven to other countries. The Bible was prohibited for the common people from the decree of Toulouse in 1229. For more than five hundred years this decree was followed by "innumerable punishments, in which the blood of the saints flowed like water" (L. Gaussen, *The Canon of the Holy Scriptures*, II, 2, 7 and 13, 2; quoted in E.G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 684). Deprived of the Bible, the people of France gradually sank deeper in spiritual ignorance, superstition, and moral degradation. No other country rejected so decisively the advance of the gospel of Christ and treated the Protestants with so many breaches of political pacts as France. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which had promised the free exercise of the Protestant religion, was the last act of treachery by the French king, Louis XIV. This was the bitter fruit of the fundamental doctrine of Rome that an oath to or a treaty with Protestants is null and void, because these people are heretics and stand outside the law. The Pope claims to possess the right to absolve one from any obligation to a Protestant.

These historical events produced a bitter harvest in France, especially for her own religious and political leaders. The common people could not take their enslavement any

longer and began to reject all authority, both religious and political. One writer described the situation that led to the French Revolution as follows:

*Romanism they despised as priestcraft. They beheld the clergy as a party to their oppression. The only god they knew was the god of Rome; her teaching was their only religion. They regarded her greed and cruelty as the legitimate fruit of the Bible, and they would have none of it. Rome had misrepresented the character of God, and perverted His requirements, and now men rejected both the Bible and its Author (E.G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 281).*

There can be no doubt that the French Revolution, which began in 1789 and lasted until Napoleon took power in 1799, was a turning point in modern history. It was the beginning of the ideologies of democracy and nationalism and also the beginning of modern world wars. Little known is the fact that the leaders of the French Revolution did not teach or legislate atheism; they publicly rejected it, preferring to found the young republic on a deist morality and religion. Their hatred was directed primarily against oppression, superstition, and the Inquisitions of the Roman Catholic Church. L.E. Froom explains: "It is to be remembered, however, that this was a revolt against the Roman Catholic departure from the true faith, for the Papacy was the only religion they knew. This revolt was therefore against the caricature rather than against the genuine" (The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, IV:739). This distinction implies, however, that the persecution and outlawing of Christianity was aimed at the Roman Catholic Church, not at the saints of God. E.G. White describes the actual facts:

*A day of retribution at last had come. It was not now the disciples of Christ that were thrust into dungeons and dragged to the stake. Long ago these had perished or been driven into exile. Unsparing Rome now felt the deadly power of those whom she had trained to delight in deeds of blood (GC 283).*

This reality raises a pertinent question: If the French Revolution exiled and killed the antichristian priesthood, how can this persecution be interpreted as the fulfillment of the "Two Witnesses" of God in Rev. 11:7? The historicist interpreters answer that the National Council of France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible and the law of God, even the weekly cycle of seven days.

On October 5, 1793, the revolutionary calendar was introduced, motivated by a hatred against the Catholic religion of France, seen as a nursery of treason. The Christian calendar was associated with a Pope, Gregory VII, seen as an instrument of Roman Catholic propaganda. The Roman Catholic Church was considered an enemy of France. The bishops (130 out of 134) and priests (46,000 out of 70,000) refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new "Constitution of the Clergy" (July 12, 1790), because Pope Pius VI had condemned the Civil Constitution. Thus the political conflict became a religious one. The unpatriotic priests were persecuted. Thus dechristianization was a method of making war against the Catholic Church as national defense. The historian Charles D. Hazen offers this incisive evaluation of the brief excesses of the ultra-revolutionaries:

*The worship of Reason was not, as is often said, atheistic. Hébert and Chaumette and certain other individuals may have been atheist, but the mass of those who took part in these attacks upon Christianity were unquestionable deists, in a vague or in a vivid way, in the manner of Voltaire or in the manner of Rousseau. With them the worship of Reason was more or less the worship of the Supreme Being, or of the Fatherland. These various terms, indeed, were often used synonymously by the preachers, or rather orators, of the Temples of Reason. The movement was*

*primarily one which aimed at the dethronement of Catholicism, on the ground that it was the active and determined enemy of the Revolution, the ally of the foreigners, of the émigrés, of all reactionaries.*

Dechristianization was a method of making war upon the enemies of France, a method of national defense (C. Hazen, *The French Revolution*. 2 vols. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1932. Vol.2, p. 768).

Only some ultra-revolutionaries, under the leadership of Jacques Hébert of the Paris City Council and Pierre Chaumette of the Paris Commune, campaigned against Christianity and went to the excess of turning the Cathedral of Notre Dame into a "Temple of Reason" (on November 10, 1793). On November 23, 1793, the City Commune ordered all Christian churches in Paris closed. But the Committee of Public Safety, the executive branch of the Government led by Robespierre, publicly rejected atheism as an immodest assumption of impossible knowledge, and Catholicism as an organized exploitation of superstition (W. and A. Durant, *The Age of Napoleon*. Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1975, p. 73).

On December 6, 1793, the Convention restored freedom of worship (ib., p.74). The Committee forcefully condemned the extremist deputies and "their atheistic measures as liable to benefit the counter-revolutionaries" (Chr. Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*. N.Y.: W. Morrow and Co., 1980, p. 233). In March 1794 also the dechristianizers Hébert and Chaumette were executed by guillotine. Robespierre considered the excesses of the dechristianization campaign a political mistake. "At the beginning of December [1793], at Robespierre's suggestion, the Convention withdrew its anti-religious measures and restored the principle of religious freedom" (W. Grab, *The French Revolution*. London; Bracken Books, 1989, pp. 166-7). The whole period of war against Catholic "Christianity" lasted less than a month (from Nov. 10 - Dec. 6, 1793)!

Nevertheless, France had manifested a spirit of unbelief and defiance of the God of the Bible similar to the spirit of Pharaoh, who replied to Moses, "I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go" (Exod. 5:2). In this sense, the historicist application of Rev. 11:7-8 to the French Revolution pointed to a striking fulfillment of this prophecy at the end of the 1260 prophetic days.

### **Does the French Revolution Fit all the Features of Revelation 11?**

Certain features of this "beast that comes up from the Abyss" in Rev. 11:7 indicates, however, that this brief historic fulfillment in France was not yet the consummation on a worldwide scale that the prophecy required (see 11:9, 10). The literary connection of this beast in Rev.11 with the beast that "will come up out of the Abyss" in Rev.17:8 cannot be ignored and must be recognized as a further expansion. The question is, How can the "beast that comes up from the Abyss" after 1260 years in Rev. 11:7 refer to atheistic France, while the same beast that "will come up out of the Abyss" in Rev. 17:8 refer to the religious antichrist? Why is the definition of the "Abyss" in 11:7 explained as "no foundation" or atheism, and the "Abyss" in 17:8 as a state of "death" (S.D.A. Bible Com. 7:802, 854)? Is this consistent? According to Rev. 17 the beast will rise again from the Abyss in the time of the end. Then it will persecute the saints worldwide (see 17:12-14). This threat may be realized as part of a general spirit of anarchy, if we consider the following timely warning:

*The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enrichment of*

*the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; the worldwide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution--all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France (E.G. White, Education, p. 228).*

A further unanswered question is, How can the assertion of George Croly be verified: "The Church and the Bible had been slain in France from November, 1793 till June, 1797" (The Apocalypse of St. John. London: Rivington, 1827, p. 181; 1838 ed., p. 144) ? The S.D.A. Bible Com. states: "This period may be reckoned from November 26, 1793, when a decree, issued in Paris, abolished religion, to June 17, 1797, when, it is held [!], the French government removed restrictions against the practice of religion" (7:803). Lacking the historical verification, this Commentary adds the following relativizing remark to Rev. 11:9-11 : "Fortunately, however, the exact location of this time period is not vital to an over-all understanding of the great prophetic time periods of the Bible or to an understanding of the main theme of the prophecy of which it is a part" (7:803).

## **A Historical Inaccuracy**

The Millerite preacher George Storrs wrote: "The watch-word and motto of the French Infidels was, 'Crush THE WRETCH', meaning Christ. Thus it may be truly said, 'where our Lord was crucified'" (in U. Smith, Rev., p.538). The phrase "Écrasez l'infâme!" ("Crush the infamy!") was the battle cry of the deist Voltaire (1694-1778), who died before the Revolution. He never meant it to refer to Christ! Voltaire clearly explained what he meant by his war-cry: it was an appeal to crush the infamous superstition, censorship and inquisition that blocked the way to reason and liberty. Voltaire saw these vices primarily embodied in the Roman Catholic ecclesiasticism. He wrote in his "Sermon of the Fifty," in 1762:

*How from the Gospels could have come the incredible theology of Christianity, the easy, daily feat of turning a wafer into the body and blood of Christ, the innumerable relics, the sale of indulgences, the hatred and holocausts of the religious wars? . . .*

*Have not our fathers [the Reformers] taken from the people their transubstantiation, auricular confession, indulgences, exorcisms, false miracles, and ridiculous statues? Are not our people now accustomed to doing without these superstitions?*

*(Selected Works, Vol. 59; as quoted in W. and A. Durant, The Age of Voltaire. S. and Schuster, N.Y., 1965, p. 741, see pp. 736-744 for a full explanation).*

In 1765 Voltaire created the battle cry with which he ended each letter, *Écrasez l'infâme*, after a sixteen-year old boy, named La Barre, had been tortured and killed in the Catholic city of Toulouse, on the charge of having mutilated crucifixes. Voltaire stirred the soul of France against the abuses of the church by his slogan, "Crush the infamy!" He aimed at "the destruction of the ecclesiastical power in which intolerance had its root" (W. Durant, The Story of Philosophy. Wash. Square Press, N.Y., 1953, p. 237).

Voltaire distinguished sharply between superstition and religion. He accepted gladly Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount and pictured "Christ among the sages, weeping

over the crimes that have been committed in his name" (Durant, *Ib.*, p.242). He meant by his slogan solely to fight ecclesiastical tyranny. It is a serious misinterpretation of Voltaire's battle cry to conclude, with Storrs, that he meant to say, "Crush the Wretch, Christ".

### **The French Revolution Declares Separation of Church and State in 1795**

In November 1793 Robespierre, during his reign of terror (from September 17, 1793 - July 28, 1794), publicly condemned the dechristianizers. He rejected both Catholicism as superstition and atheism as a destroyer of morality. His power ended abruptly when he was accused of being a tyrant, and was quickly guillotined on July 28, 1794. By then, the Revolution had executed 16,594 people from all over France on political grounds only (Walter Grab, *The French Revolution*. London: Bracken Books, 1989, p.160). Historians do not report that anyone of these was killed for the sake of Christ or witnessing to the Bible, but exclusively for political reasons or contra-revolutionary suspicions.

On February 2, 1795, the French National Convention legislated the complete separation of church and state. From that date by law there was no further campaign against atheism, no further persecution, only freedom for Catholics, Protestants, and Jews to worship as had been promised in the Declarations of the Rights of Man (of 1791 and 1793). On May 30, 1795, a supplementary law was issued to provide free use of churches for public worship by all denominations. This law of religious independence and self-determination lasted seven years, until Bonaparte in 1802 made the Concordat with the Papacy (Hazen, *Ibid.*, II:822). The key to the understanding of Revelation 11 lies not in finding "fitting" world events, but in a contextual approach of Rev. 11 that relates this chapter to chapters 12-20.

## Appendix C

### The Historicist Method of Date-Fixing

The precise determination of the length of the 3½ times (or 1260 days or 42 months) of prophecy remains a matter of interpretation or inference, not of divine revelation. The systematic conversion of symbolic days into years increasingly became part of the historicist method of prophetic interpretation from the thirteenth century. It was built on two biblical precedents (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6), with a further appeal to the prophecy of the seventy year-weeks of Daniel 9. However, the elevation of this incidental year-day symbolism into a self-existing decoding "principle" for all apocalyptic time prophecies has led to multiple date-settings for many future events. Numerous failures in date-fixing have brought discredit on the historicist method. Scores of calculations for the end of the world, announced as the revealed word of God, have proved to be serious misunderstandings. This has led David Brady to conclude: "The Achilles' heel of historicism was the inherent danger of date-fixing. . . Only time could cure men of this credulity, since time was the frame on which the whole system hung" (The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Rev. 13:16-18. Tübingen: Mohr, 1983, pp. 295, 296).

Brady's reminder of the human fallibility of prophetic interpretation gives pause for a critical examination of all inherited date-fixings assumed to be of prophetic significance. The focus of Bible prophecies is persistently on salvation-historical events, that is, on events that pertain to God's people and their worship, not on specific dates of secular or church history. The effort to apply the "1260 days" of oppression of the saints to 1260 continuous years has been impossible to document. The "shortening" of the great distress, as predicted in Matthew 24:21-22, is often seen only in the restraining influence of the Reformation and of the Enlightenment with its concept of religious tolerance and freedom. There is no doubt some partial fulfillment of the prediction in European history. However, as has been explained more fully above (see Chapter 7, section "Christ's Prediction of a Great Distress for His Elect"), Jesus' words in Matt. 24:22 apply more fittingly to the global apocalyptic distress, as foretold in Dan. 12:1-2 and Rev. 16-17.

When the year-day conversion is applied to all apocalyptic time prophecies, it stands under the obligation of being compatible with both the original intention of prophecy and with the facts of history. When the year-day "principle" is used to date events in the future, it cannot be tested yet and then date-fixings are speculative. This has led to mass delusion.

One may conclude that the time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation were never intended to place faith in speculative future dates, but to trust and believe in fulfilled prophecy, in harmony with Jesus' words: "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he" (John 13:19; also 14:29; 16:4). We are reminded of Sir Isaac Newton's principle of prophetic interpretation:

*The folly of Interpreters has been to foretell times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also in contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters, be then manifested thereby to the world. (Observations Upon the*



*Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John. London, 1733, p. 251; in Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, 11:665-6).*

Not one expositor before 1798 was able to calculate the year of the mortal wound of the Papacy in advance. One English expositor, Drue Cressener (1638-1718), came surprisingly close when he suggested the Civil Code of Justinian as the basic beginning point of orthodox intolerance and persecution. In 1689 he published his remarkable conclusion:

*The first appearance of the Beast was at Justinian's recovery of the Western Empire, from which time to about the year 1800 will be about 1260 years (The Judgment of God Upon the Roman Catholic Church. London, 1689, p. 309; quoted in Froom, PF 11:596).*

How he related Justinian's conquest of the West to papal persecutions remains unclear. Cressener determined that the beginning of the 1260 years of papal rule would be Justinian's recapture of the city of Rome from Gothic rule (*Ibid.*, p. 312; in Froom, 11:596). Cressener's expectation for the end of the reign of the papacy "about the year 1800" was striking and confirmed for many historicist interpreters the correctness of their application of the year-day conversion to the 1260 days in Revelation 11-13.

## Appendix D

### Testimonies of Some European Scholars Regarding the Millennium

The Swiss theologian Hans Bietenhard has written a penetrating study on the Millennium, *Das Tausendjährige Reich* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955). He rejects the Augustinian and Protestant views that Rev. 20 would describe the time of the victorious church between the first and second advent of Christ, because Rev. 20 deals with a forecast of future end-time events which have been fulfilled neither in the past nor in the present time in any form (p. 68). He stresses the fact that the promise of Rev. 5:9-10, which states the faithful ones "will reign on the earth," is still an unfulfilled promise, and is explicitly presented in the future tense: "they will reign on the earth" (5:10). This stands in contrast to the past tense of the accomplished work of Christ: "you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God" (5:9). Also the promise of Rev. 20:6 states in the future tense: "they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years". This promise will be fully realized in the eternal kingdom of God: "And they will reign for ever and ever" (22:5).

Bietenhard insists that the "reign" of the saints in Rev. 5:10 and 20:6 should not be forced to mean solely the spiritual rule of the human heart over personal sin and evil. Rather it presents the promise that they will reign with Christ in the age to come (compare Eph. 1:21). Thus the reign of Christ extends beyond the millennium into all eternity. The number of a "thousand years" in Rev. 20 only limits the time of Satan's detention in his prison of the Abyss, not the rulership of Christ. Bietenhard therefore concludes:

This should be strictly maintained, however: Rev. 20 deals with the royal reign of Jesus Christ and of the saints only for the end of this age (p. 71).

Bietenhard admits to a problem, however, when he assumes that the millennial reign of Christ and the saints will be over sinful humanity and death on earth. He frankly states:

*The assumption of a life of resurrected and glorified believers on the old earth during the millennial kingdom certainly poses a great problem for our thinking and imagination (p. 64).*

The French New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann likewise is convinced that Rev. 20 points to an end-time kingdom of Christ. He views the promised millennial reign of Christ and of the saints as the introduction of the new age. He declares:

*Revelation thinks rather of a specifically eschatological kingdom to be realized only in the future. It is, so to speak, the very last part of Christ's lordship, which at the same time extends into the new aeon. Consequently, the thousand-year kingdom should be identified neither with the whole chronological extent of Christ's lordship nor with the present Church. That lordship is the larger concept; it has already begun and continues in this aeon for an undefined length of time. The thousand-year reign, on the other hand, belongs temporally to the final act of Christ's lordship, the act which begins with his return and thus already invades the new aeon (The Christology of the New Testament, ET 1963, p. 226).*

In the final act, Christ will be surrounded by those who formed his original Church. The

apostles will sit on twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28); they will rule with him (Rev. 5: 10; 20: 4; II Tim. 2: 12). The 'saints' (i.e., all members of the Church) will judge the angelic powers (I Cor. 6: 2 f.). The 'thousand-year kingdom' of Revelation will therefore be the Church of that time, the Church of the end time (Ib., p. 227).

The German New Testament scholar Adolf Pohl wrote an in-depth exegesis of the Apocalypse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*. 2 vols. (Wuppertaler Studienbibel. F. Rienecker und W. de Boor, eds. Berlin: Evang. Haupt-Bibelges., 1974). Pohl also stresses the end-time fulfillment of the millennium of Rev. 20. It will begin with the second advent of Christ (II:233). The fundamental significance of John's vision of the reign of the martyrs in Rev. 20 is "the vindication of the professing followers of Christ" (II:233). Their reign together with Christ unveils their true character, just as the return of Christ in Rev. 19:11-16 will disclose publicly who Jesus is. The second advent will not leave any human being alive on this world, except the risen and glorified saints. Pohl declares:

*The entire human race outside of Christ will experience only three things: a horrible wailing (I:7), a last revolt (19:19), and death itself (19:21). For the confessing church of all times--not just for the last generation!--the hour has struck for the resurrection (II:238).*

The millennium is completely dependent on the resurrection of the dead and will be populated by the risen saints only. The millennium does not belong to this church age at all. Pohl sees his conclusion confirmed by the fact that Rev. 20 is dependent on Rev. 19:11-16, that is, on the parousia of the Lord (II:238).

The Dutch theologian G.C. Berkouwer sees the basic dilemma of Rev. 20 as one of hermeneutics: it is either reporting new knowledge about future history or unveiling history about the triumph of the coming Lord Jesus. If one chooses to accept Rev. 20 as a sketch of a particular phase of history, then Berkouwer sees no justification for the popular church-historical interpretation popularized by Augustine. He declares that if one wants to interpret the millennium of Rev. 20 with regard to history: "It seems to me that he must include the first (bodily) resurrection in his concept of a future millennium" (The Return of Christ, ET 1972, p. 307). He rejects the traditional efforts to spiritualize the first resurrection of Rev. 20:6 as signifying regeneration through the rite of baptism. To Berkouwer the promise of the "first resurrection" of Rev. 20 is "a radical encouragement on the road to the future in the last days" (Ib., p. 314). He explains:

*"Apocalyptic comfort" is not spiritualization; it does not involve some kind of inner light. It is a view of reality seen in eschatological perspective in the last days. The vision of Revelation 20 is too clear and too compelling to allow interpretation of the millennium as a realm of peace "from which sin, suffering and death are not yet expelled" (Ib., p. 315).*

Berkouwer insists that the millennium of Rev. 20 does not represent just the best possible rule of Christ and the church over a sinful world. He expresses his objection to the various popular millennial views, stating:

*If it were in fact Scripture's intention to enrich the believer's "knowledge" of intrahistoric development with a new certainty, there would be every reason to expect a transcendentally inbreaking, supernatural millennium along with the first (bodily) resurrection. It would then not be possible--certainly not with an appeal to Revelation 20, which lacks these aspects--to go the route of "maximum development," but only to look for the reign of peace in all its strangeness and*

*wonder (Ib., p. 321).*

Berkouwer's predicament to choose between either "apocalyptic comfort" or "a strictly chronological narrative account" seems to pose a false dilemma. John had to write down his visions to report "what is now and what will take place later" (Rev. 1:19), "what must take place after this" (4:1), "the things that must soon take place" (22:6), as Christ's personal testimony for the churches (see 22:16). This testimony of the risen Lord was never intended to be a "strictly chronological account," but at once His preliminary judgments, admonitions, and comfort for the church universal (see the seven letters of Christ in Rev. 2-3). Christ's "illumination of history," together with the comfort of ultimate victory is not necessarily at odds with the predictive aspect of prophecy that provides new knowledge of future church history.

The well-known style of periodizing history in the apocalyptic perspectives of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Joel, shows that "apocalyptic comfort" and information about God's future actions are not incompatible with each other, but rather enhance each other. Instead of pitting two complementary aspects of apocalyptic revelation against each other, the real task is to ascertain the proper intention of John's visions through an unbiased, contextual exegesis.

In summary, the recent trend among independent Bible scholars in Europe is to respect more the contextual exegesis of John's Apocalypse and to acknowledge that the millennium of Rev. 20 refers to a strictly end-time event, initiated by the second advent of Christ.

## Appendix E

### Some Problematic Texts Regarding the New Earth

The predictions of Isaiah 65-66 have caused problems for those who try to apply Isaiah's descriptions of death, birth of children, and the presence of dead bodies (65:20, 23; 66:24), to the new earth in Rev. 21-22. These difficulties arise if one ignores the fact of progressive revelation between the Old and the New Testaments. As described in Part One, Chapters 3 and 4, Christ and His apostles announced that with Him the time of the antitypes began (see Matt. 12:6, 41, 42; Rom. 5:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:22). This theological concept implies that the consummation of Israel's hopes will be infinitely greater than what was predicted by the prophets. The New Testament proclaims that Christ Jesus is "the guarantee of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22). This means that "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they [the Hebrew faithful ones] be made perfect" (Heb. 11:40).

This gospel hermeneutic does not require that Revelation 21-22 repeat the old covenant restrictions. The Christian hope is better than Israel's ancient hope. The Apocalypse declares that in the eternal state there will be no more racial or ethnic barriers in the New Jerusalem (see Rev. 21:14), no more death (20:14), no more evil doers or impure things (19:20, 21; 21:27). None of the curses of God will remain. Everything will be made "new" (21:5).

The differences between Isaiah's and John's future outlooks reveal the progression of divine revelation. For a study of the principles of interpretation in the New Testament, see also the helpful essay in the S.D.A. Bible Commentary, IV:25-38.

### No Longer Any Sea

Another interpretative issue is John's remarkable statement: "and there was no longer any sea" (21:1). Commentators discuss at length whether to take it literally or symbolically. In order to see meaning in this prediction, we need to remember that the "sea" in Daniel and Revelation is the standard symbol of chaos, of the realm of restless and evil powers (Dan. 7 and Rev. 13; also Ezek. 28:8; Isa. 57:20), and of death (Rev. 20:13). Henry B. Swete comments:

*The Sea has disappeared, because in the mind of the writer it is associated with ideas which are at variance with the character of the New Creation (Com. on Rev., p. 275).*

He therefore points to the sea as the "divider of nations and churches." In this negative sense, John assures us that there will no longer be any "sea." Humanity no longer needs to fear separation or the rise of evil. In Psalm 104:25-26 the "sea" is mentioned as a part of God's original creation in Genesis 1:10, that remains under the full control of the Creator.

### The New Jerusalem as the Bride

Another seeming problem is caused by the fact that both the defective church and the New Jerusalem are called the "bride" of Christ. John called the church that has prepared herself to meet Christ, the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 19:7). Then the angel declares that the city is "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). This has caused some interpreters to conclude that the heavenly Jerusalem and the redeemed church of Christ are one and the same.

According to Jewish law an engaged woman was counted as a married woman who could be punished for adultery (Str-B, II:393; J. Jeremias, TDNT IV:1092-3). This would explain why the angel calls the New Jerusalem at the same time "the bride" and "the wife" of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9).

The identification of the church with the New Jerusalem contains an important point of truth, in the light of the apostolic teaching that the church on earth is one with the church in heaven. Yet, the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly communities is not abolished. The heavenly Jerusalem, as the city of the living God, remains the "mother" of the church on earth (Gal. 4:26). This heavenly city will come down out of heaven, as Christ promised to His church in Rev. 3:12.

The fulfillment of this promise takes place at the conclusion of the millennium (Rev. 21:2). The fact that the New Jerusalem is then called "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9), indicates that the saints are all within the New Jerusalem. This confirms the teaching of Christ (John 14:1-3) and of Paul (1 Thes. 4:16, 17), that the saints will be taken to heaven at the second coming.

In addition, the New Jerusalem on earth is portrayed at length in Rev. 21:9--22:5 as Paradise renewed. It has the throne of God and the Lamb and from it flows "the river of the water of life down the middle of the great street of the city." On the sides of this river stands the tree of life bearing fruit every month (22:1,2). This affirms the reality of this city.

## **Healing by the Tree of Life**

Finally, the statement that the leaves of the tree of life are used "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2) raises the question why there is a need for "healing" in the New Jerusalem. Our first observation must be that this description is an adoption of Ezekiel's temple vision: "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river . . . Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing" (47:12). Here the idea of "healing" fits well within the prospect of the restoration of Israel after her Babylonian exile. God expects the returning Israelites to "be ashamed of their sins" (Ezek. 43:10) and of their "humiliation" (16:63). God forbade any "foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites" (44:9).

John adapts Ezekiel's forecast to reveal its fulfillment on the earth made new in a way that exceeded even Ezekiel's expectation. John includes all Gentiles who have "washed their robes" and thereby obtained the right to the tree of life within the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2, 14; also 7:14).

This important new revelation omits the old rite of circumcision as the sign of access to the tree of life and replaces it by a living faith in the atoning blood of Christ Jesus (see Rev. 7:14). Here again we witness the progression of revelation in salvation history. The question rises, Why do the saints in the eternal state need to eat from the tree of life? The function of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden in Genesis (2:9; 3:22-24) provides the

answer: to perpetuate life (see Gen. 3:22). The tree of life in Revelation draws its healing properties from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1, 2). Ezekiel had explained: "Every month they will bear [fruits and leaves], because the water from the sanctuary flows to them" (47:12). God and the Lamb remain the living source of life and blessing in all eternity. Redeemed humanity needs to be reminded in all eternity that only God the Creator has inherent immortality (see 1 Tim. 6:16) and that the saints remain forever dependent on their Redeemer for life. We therefore concur with the following understanding of the need for the tree of life by E.G. White:

*The tree of life is a representation of the preserving care of Christ for His children. As Adam and Eve ate of this tree, they acknowledged their dependence upon God. The tree of life possessed the power to perpetuate life, and as long as they ate of it, they could not die (RH Jan. 26, 1897; in S.D.A. Bible Com. 7:988).*

The fruit of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden possessed supernatural virtue. To eat of it was to live forever. Its fruit was the antidote of death. Its leaves were for the sustaining of life and immortality (ST March 31, 1909; in S.D.A. Bible Com. 7:988-9).

Ellul explains this concept philosophically, stating that the "healing" by the leaves of the tree of life means "the healing of [man's] finitude" (Apocalypse, p. 230). Man will always be marked by finitude. He will never be divinized or become Christ:

*There remains an infinite distance between the Creator and the risen man . . . Constantly wounded, constantly threatened by his finitude which is in him, he is constantly revived, constantly healed, eternally. But this is not a status of inferiority imposed upon him, but the situation created by the relation of love and by the triumph of grace. For all is still grace. And this man lives for eternity from grace, in the grace given to him; he lives from the 'free gift' (Ib., pp. 230, 231).*

The ultimate purpose of John's portrayal of the coming City is to point beyond the images of the tree and the river of life to our eternal need of "a personal relationship with God at the centre of God's redemption and bestowal of grace" (Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 585).

## Appendix F

### The Time of the End and the Last Days

One feature of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy calls for special attention: the predetermined "time of the end" (Dan. 8:17,19; 11:35, 40). Daniel's book has been closed and sealed "until the time of the end" (12:4, 9). What is meant by "the end," which apparently determines the meaning of the phrase "time of the end"? From the internal evidence of Daniel's chapters, "the end" is characterized by the divine judgment on the "king of the north" (11:40, 45) and the deliverance of the saints which includes the resurrection of the dead (12:1, 2). This description of "the end" basically determines the phrase "the time of the end."

Daniel's "time of the end" does not take its point of reference from the first advent of Christ but from Christ's second advent, because at that time the establishment of God's kingdom and the resurrection of the dead takes place. This future point of orientation indicates that the Danielic "time of the end" is a specific period prior to the end. The phrase "the time of the end" is found in the Old Testament exclusively in Daniel, in chapters 8-12 in particular, and is said to start "at the appointed time" (11:35). Its start is connected with the termination of the Vh symbolic times of the antichrist's rule (see Dan. 7 (7:25; 12:4,7) and with the long-range time prophecy of the 2,300 symbolic "days":

*He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated." ...*

*As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end" (Dan. 8:14, 17, 19).*

Twice Daniel receives the heavenly command to "seal up" the vision or to close up the words of the prophecy (8:26; 12:4). Both the vision of Dan. 8 and the angelic interpretation in Dan. 12 relate to the "distant future" (8:26 NIV) or to "the time of the end" (12:2, 4). This is a strong indicator that the vision of Dan. 8 runs parallel to the structural outline of Dan. 11-12. This is an important conclusion! The 2300 prophetic "days" of Dan. 8:14 extend therefore into the Messianic or eschatological age, and reach to the final phase of redemption history, the apocalyptic "time of the end."

When the "time of the end" arrives in history, "many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase" (12:4 NASB). The original text speaks of "the" knowledge, that is, specific insight into Daniel's vision concerning the sanctuary truth and its restoration in the worship of God's people (12:3, 9-10). Taken in connection with the angel's command to seal the words of the scroll (12:4), this "going back and forth" of many, points to the scanning of their eyes to and fro, here and there, in the book of Daniel (see 2 Chron. 16:9 (NIV); Zech. 4:10). It has the sense of "thoroughly to search into it" (C. F. Keil). The result will be that "those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many" (Dan. 11:33). True worship of God will be restored among all the nations of the world.

At the proper time in the divine plan, the symbolic prophecies of the book of Daniel will be increasingly understood as the predicted events are taking place. This is in accordance



with the principle expressed by Jesus: "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe" (John 14:29).

During that "time of the end," the spirits of many will be aroused to search intensely for the meaning of Daniel's end-time prophecies: "Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (12:4, second part). This phrase has often been divorced from its context and applied to the technical advances of modern science. In his editorial "The Time of the End", in *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1880, James White pointed out that Dan. 12:10 referred to a spiritual understanding of Daniel's book and that "the increase of knowledge does not refer to the progress in scientific discoveries." Daniel stated explicitly: "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of these wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand" (12:10). The focus of the search of the wise is on the book of Daniel, which had been sealed.

LeRoy E. Froom's comment on Dan. 12:4 is valid: "It obviously is a forecast of a great revival in prophetic exposition that came under the simultaneous awakening in the nineteenth century, in both the Old World and the New" (*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 4, p. 1209). This prophetic awakening was evident most dramatically in America, led by the Baptist preacher William Miller, of Low Hampton, New York, between 1831 and 1844. His specific burden was the message that Christ's return was imminent and should be expected between 1843 and 1844. He based his conclusion especially on the time prophecy of Dan. 8, which promises that in "the time of the end" the defiled "sanctuary" will be restored to its rightful use (8:14). Unfortunately, he identified the predicted restoration of the sanctuary and its true worship of God completely with the second advent of Christ. Daniel's promise of the great restoration of true worship was, however, intended for "the time of the end."

The question rises, How is Daniel's apocalyptic "time of the end" related to the phrase "the latter (or last) days," mentioned 14 times by the classical prophets? Are both periods the same and thus co-extensive?

In the Old Testament times the prophetic term "in the latter days" (be '*acharith hayyamim*') had not yet developed into a fixed technical meaning. It is properly translated in the English Bible Versions (especially the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, The New American Standard Version, and the Jerusalem Bible) by "in the following days" or "in the future" or "in days to come" (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14). Some versions are inconsistent, however, when they translate the Hebrew phrase as "in days to come" or "in the future," and other times by "in the last (or latter) days." The Hebrew root '*achar*' means "afterward," and not "last" or "end." (The Hebrew word for "end" is *qets*, Am. 8:2; Ezek. 7:2; Dan. 8:19; 11:27 RSV, NKJV).

Several passages that use the phrase "the last days" do not refer to the Christian age but simply to either the immediate future (Gen. 49:1 and Num. 24:14) [see 2 Sam. 8:2] or to the coming Assyrian-Babylonian exile (Deut. 4:20; 31:29; Jer. 23:20; 30:24). Other passages reveal, however, a definite concentration on the Messianic hope or age to come (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1; Hos.

3:5; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14). In each case the context must decide what era is intended.

Likewise in Daniel, the phrase does not yet function as a technical term for the Christian era. Daniel 2 takes into view the whole sweep of history from Daniel's time until the

kingdom of glory. The New International Version translates Dan. 2:28, 44, 45; and 10:14 simply with "in days to come," "in the future" (two times).

It needs to be acknowledged that Daniel concentrates on the end-time and on the outcome of history. This apocalyptic meaning (Dan. 2:44; 12:1-2) is the intensified application of the "days to come." Daniel does not intend to predict the future in general, but the coming of the indestructible kingdom of God. For a detailed analysis of the Old Testament passages we refer to the article by John T. Willis (see Source Material).

The New Testament finally gives the expression "the last days" a definitive christological character, so that it now becomes a technical term for the Messianic or Christian age. The "last days" have begun in the first advent of Christ and with His Messianic rule (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3). They continue with increased tribulation for the church until the second advent of Christ (2 Tim. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:1). This apostolic view required a radical modification of the Jewish eschatological structure.

The era of the old covenant had come to an irrevocable end with the appearance of Christ. The cross of Christ signified the end or "the completion [*sunteleia*] of the ages" (Heb. 9:26 NKJV). The apostolic church began its existence only after "the ends [*ta tele*] of the ages have come" (referring to the old covenant times, 1 Cor. 10:11 NKJV, NASB).

Our conclusion therefore must be that both the terms "the last days" and "the ends of the ages" are defined by their orientation to the first coming of Christ. The "last days" begin with the incarnation of God's Son, "when the fulness of time had come [*to pleroma tou chronou*]" (Gal. 4:4 NKJV).

The phrase "at the last day" is reserved to designate the apocalyptic events of the resurrection of the saints at the second coming of Christ (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24) and the final judgment of unbelievers (John 12:48). In this sense Peter uses the expression for our future salvation "in the last time" [*en kairoi eschatoi*] (1 Pet. 1:5).

The phrase "this is a (or the) last hour" [*eschate hora*, without the definite article], which occurs only in 1 John 2:18, seems to be used by John to indicate the ultimate seriousness of the apostasy from the gospel truth within the apostolic church between A.D. 90 and 100. He interprets this apostasy as a fundamental heresy in which John recognized the false teaching of "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18; 4:3). This crisis placed every church member already then in an eschatological "hour" of decision, within the final phase of redemption history. Jude likewise reminds the church that "in the last time" [*ep' eschatou chronou*] there shall arise scoffers from within (Jude 18).

Daniel's apocalyptic phrase "the time of the end," however, signifies a specific time period, predetermined solely by a sovereign decree of God. The "end-time" constitutes the final phase of the Christian era or of "the last days," and is determined by Daniel's prophetic time periods. Although both terms finally overlap, they are not fully co-extensive. Each has a different point of beginning. The prophetic "last days" began with the first advent of Christ. Daniel's apocalyptic "time of the end" will begin only when the long-range time prophecies expire. The arrival of "the time of the end" will greatly intensify the hope of the church in the last days. It will bring about an international revival of prophetic studies, of Daniel and Revelation specifically (see Dan. 12:4).

This revival movement, foreseen by the prophet Daniel, is graphically portrayed by the mighty angel in Revelation 10. With a solemn oath, borrowed from Dan. 12:7, the angel declares that "time [*chronos*] shall be no longer" (Rev. 10:6). Although commonly

translated that there will be no more "delay," a comparison with the solemn oath of the angel in Dan. 12:7 indicates that neither the end of history nor the end of probationary time is in view, but the end of Daniel's prophetic time periods. The angel who instructed John appeared in heavenly splendor: "Robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars" (Rev. 10:1). Standing on both the sea and the land of the earth, He unseals the little book of Daniel, suggested by holding in His hand a little scroll that is now open (Rev. 10:2). The new understanding of Daniel's prophecies must be proclaimed to all peoples living on the islands and the continents of the earth (10:11). The essence of this final preparation message is summarized in the threefold message of Revelation 14:6-12. Its worldwide proclamation will be the greatest sign of all that the end is imminent.

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## Appendix G

### Relationship Of The End-Time Gift Of Prophecy To The Bible

This Appendix deals with the writings of Ellen G. White (1827-1915), which Seventh-day Adventists recognize as a genuine manifestation of the Spirit of Prophecy in the time of the end, as they relate to the Bible, "their only creed" (Preamble of Fundamental Beliefs). Its purpose is to answer the questions, Do Adventists accept the Sola Scriptura principle, meaning that the Bible must be allowed to be its own interpreter? Or are the writings of Mrs. E.G. White made the final interpreter of Scripture?

An excellent treatment of this question is presented by Ellen White in the "Introduction" to her book *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Ass., 1888, 1911, 1951). Here we read:

*In His word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience [quoted 2 Tim. 3:16, 17]. Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings (p. vii).*

Important is her biblical argument that God had promised to revive the prophetic gift in the "closing work of the gospel":

*In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit (Joel 2:28). This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel (p. ix).*

Ellen White interpreted her spiritual gift as another fulfillment of Joel's prophecy:

*As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed,--to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future (p. xi).*

The purpose of her book *The Great Controversy* was not to present new truths, but "to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events. . .illuminating the pathway of those who, like the reformers of past ages, will be called, even at the peril of all earthly good, to witness 'for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ'" (p. xii, emphasis added).

In the last sentence Mrs. White referred apparently to Rev. 12:17, in which prophecy she recognized a prediction of "the soon-coming conflict" at the end of church history (see GC 592). She viewed the coming conflict in essential continuity with the witness of "the reformers of past ages." All true witnesses of God would again stand up for "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." She declared:

*That which has been, will be, except that the coming struggle will be marked with a*

*terrible intensity such as the world has never witnessed. Satan's deceptions will be more subtle, his assaults more determined (p. xi).*

Ellen White included the Albigenses, the Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Protestants of the "Church of the Desert," among the witnesses who suffered for "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (see GC 271). It should be clear that Mrs. White did not understand the biblical standard phrase "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" as a reference to an end-time revival of the gift of prophecy, but as a reference to the Bible in its twofold witness of the Old and the New Testaments. She stated that Christ had spoken through the prophets of old, quoting 1 Pet. 1:10,11, and added: "It is the voice of Christ that speaks to us through the Old Testament. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10)" (PP 367).

For the biblical verification of her gift of prophecy, she referred to Joel 2:28 (see GC ix; see also EW 78). With regard to the end-time fulfillment of Rev. 12:17, she stated:

*But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms (GC 595).*

There is need of a return to the great Protestant principle,--the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty (GC 204-205).

As with the Reformers, likewise with Ellen White the acceptance of the Sola Scriptura principle meant to acknowledge the Protestant principle that the Bible is "its own interpreter" (GC 354), "its own expositor" (FCE 187), "The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture" (Ed 190). "We should make the Bible its own expositor" (TM 106).

The application of this fundamental principle is well described by Norman R. Gulley:

*True interpretation will take note of what church tradition and commentators have to say, but will pay more attention to what the Bible says about itself, and use the Protestant scripture principle of sola scriptura, allowing scripture to interpret itself. This is the only inerrant interpreter there will ever be this side of Christ's return (Systematic Theology. Vol. One, "Prolegomena." Unpubl. manuscript, 1997, p. 415. Used with permission).*

In this way alone can a Christian adequately test the essence of extra-biblical prophecies and "hold on to the good" (1 Thess. 5:19-21), "weigh carefully what is said" (1 Cor. 14:29), and thus follow "the Lord's command" (1 Cor. 14:37). Mrs. White stated without ambiguity:

*God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be heard from the pulpit (PK 626).*

When church leaders urged her to decide on their behalf in a dispute what understanding of a certain Bible verse was the correct one, she said: "He [God] wants us to go to the Bible and get the Scripture evidence" (MS 9, Oct. 24, 1888). This was in harmony with her belief: "The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine" (RH July 17, 1888).

George R. Knight, leading Adventist theologian and church historian, concludes: "Her writings had their purpose, but apparently they were not intended to provide an infallible commentary on the Bible" ("Crisis in Authority," Ministry Feb. 1991, p. 10). Robert W. Olson, retiring as secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, explained clearly:

*We cannot use Ellen White as the determinative arbiter of what Scripture means. If we do that, then she is the final authority and Scripture is not. Scripture must be*

*permitted to interpret itself. . .I think that there were times when she was an exegete, but those instances are extremely rare. I think usually she was a homiletician. She used Scripture as an evangelist would (Ministry Dec. 1990, p. 17).*

George W. Reid, director of the Biblical Research Institute of the Gen. Conf. of the S.D.A. Church, affirms that the traditional Adventist hermeneutic "did not use her [Ellen White's] statements to determine the final meaning of the Bible" ("Another Look at Adventist Methods of Bible Interpretation," in *Adventists Affirm* 10:1, Spring 1996, p. 51).

It thus becomes clear that it would be an improper use of the E.G. White writings to consult them as an exegetical referee or theological judge to ascertain the meaning of Scripture. This would violate the fundamental axiom of faith of Adventism: *Sola Scriptura*.

When her writings are accepted as a manifestation of the Spirit of prophecy, these should not be taken as a shortcut to a responsible exegesis of Scripture or be given "hermeneutical mastery over Scripture" (H.D. Weiss, "Are Adventists Protestants?" *Spectrum* 6:2 [1972]:69-78; see also J.J. Battistone, "Ellen White's Authority as Bible Commentator," *Spectrum* 8:2 [1977]:37-40; R. Rice, *The Reign of God*, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews Univ. Press, 1985, 199-201).

Mrs. E.G. White warned against a spirit of denominational self-satisfaction:

*"We are not safe when we take the position that we will not accept anything else than that upon which we have settled as truth. We should take the Bible, and investigate it closely for ourselves" (RH June 18, 1889). "There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No doctrine will lose anything by close investigation" (RH Dec. 20, 1892; quoted in CWE 34, 35).*

She even wrote:

*"The Testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. . .Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God" (Letter 12, 1890; quoted in Evangelism, p. 256).*

Mrs. White believed not only in the supreme authority of Scripture but also in the sufficiency of Scripture:

*The word of God is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it (Test. for the Church, vol. 5, p. 663).*

In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE* (Wash. DC: Review and Herald Pub. Ass., 1957), Adventist leaders, Bible teachers and Editors explained at some length the question of Ellen G. White's writings in relation to the Bible (Question 9). They declared: "We test the writings of Ellen G. White by the Bible, but in no sense do we test the Bible by her writings. . .We have never considered Ellen G. White to be in the same category as the writers of the canon of Scripture. . .We do not make acceptance of her writings a matter for church discipline" (pp. 90, 96).

Equally we read in the more recent exposition, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...A Biblical*

Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines. Ministerial Association, General Conference of S.D.A. (Hagerstown, MD: Rev. and Her. Pub. Ass., 1988), that this public declaration "represents an authentic exposition of Adventist beliefs" (p. viii). The exposition declares first: "Adventists have but one creed: 'The Bible, and the Bible alone'" (p. viii). In the extensive Chapter 17, "The Gift of Prophecy," we hear again this sound declaration: "Seventh-day Adventists fully support the Reformation principle of sola scriptura, the Bible as its own interpreter and the Bible alone as the basis of all doctrines" (p. 227). A convincing treatment is presented by LeRoy E. Froom, Emeritus Prof. of Historical Theology, Movement of Destiny (Wash. DC: Rev. and Her. Pub. Ass., 1971, chap. 5, "The Bible--Sole Rule of Faith and Practice").

Ellen White has stated the purpose of her visions and writings in unmistakable terms: "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the 'last days'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth" (EW 78). Thus Ellen White based her providential calling and mission on the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 as a sufficient and firm foundation. She never appealed to Rev. 12:17 to establish her prophetic calling. Important is her statement: "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light" (Colporteur Ministry, p. 125). Marvin Moore, Editor of Signs of the Times, explained this as follows:

*"If we interpret the Old and New Testaments in light of Ellen White, making her the final authority in our understanding of what the Bible means, we make her the greater light and Scripture the lesser light." ("Ellen White and the Historical Method of Interpreting Revelation," Unpub. art., 1992, p. 10; used with permission).*

We need to be aware of the fact that Mrs. White used Scripture in a great variety of ways. Raymond F. Cottrell distinguished twelve different categories of ways in which Ellen White used the Bible, in the 500 pages he investigated (see A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics. Prepared by the Biblical Research Committee of the Gen. Conf. of S.D.A's. G.M. Hyde, ed.; Wash. DC: Rev. and Her. Pub. Ass., 1974, chap. 9, "Ellen G. White's Evaluation and Use of the Bible").

Cottrell concluded that she often quotes from the Bible to draw moral lessons or to apply general biblical principles to the Christian life. She frequently borrows words or phrases from Scripture "without implying an attempt to explicate Scripture" (Ib., p. 157). Sometimes she gave an "extended application" to a Bible text, as with Nah. 1:9 and Hab. 2:3 (Ib., p. 159). She often uses a text "in context to illuminate a passage of Scripture in its historical setting, and often homiletically to apply a Bible principle to a modern situation" (p. 161, emphasis added). From these observations he inferred:

"She considered it her task to direct men and women to the Bible as the inspired, authoritative Word of God, to apply its principles to the problems the church and its members encounter in the world today, and to guide them in their preparation for Christ's return" (p. 161).

Further statements of Ellen White regarding the relation of her writings to the Bible, can be found in her Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 663-665; and in Selected Messages. From the Writings of Ellen G. White, Book Three (Wash. DC: Rev. and Her. Pub. Ass., 1980), chap. 4, "The Primacy of the Word."



