



**The Book of the  
REVELATION**

**THE  
BOOK  
PUBLICATION**

by Given O. Blakely

Word Of Truth Ministries, Associated Presents

The Study on the Book of

# The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

By: Given O. Blakely

Lesson 1

## JESUS HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO THE CHURCHES

### INTRODUCTION

The book of the Revelation has attracted the most prodigious thinkers. It has also caused many to fear. Multitudes of professing believers neglect this book because they feel they cannot understand its message. The novel interpretations assigned to this book have caused much of this--interpretations that do not harmonize with the remainder of Scripture. In view of these conditions, a few introductory remarks are in order.

First, God has no message for humanity that is dissociated from His great salvation, or is not harmonious with the Gospel of Christ. He has spoken in these last days through His Son (Heb 1:1-2), unfolding

His objective to draw everything together into one in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:10-11). The Revelation is not a departure from that objective. Nor, indeed, does it undertake to introduce things to us that are totally new.

Second, the rest of the Word of God is not to be read with the book of Revelation as its key. Rather, this book is to be read with the rest of Scripture in mind. Our approach to this book will be in light of an old aphorism : *“It is through the known, and only through the known, that we come to learn of things unknown.”* This is the reason for the voluminous quotations from, and allusions to, other Scriptures in this book. It is also the reason for the frequent references to Christ in His redemptive capacity, and to the hope of the saints. As we are introduced to God, Jesus, the Spirit, angels, the saints, and Satan, **they are to be considered in light of the rest of Scripture** . The same is true of subjects that are mentioned: i.e., the resurrection (20:13), the judgment (20:11-15), the demise of Satan (20:10), and the glorification of the saints (21:1-5; 22:1-5).

### **The Author and Date of Writing**

John declares himself to be the writer of this book (1:1,4,9; 21:2; 22:8). He received the Revelation while a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos (1:9). Herein is a marvelous testimony of the sufficiency of God’s grace. Though exiled by men, John the beloved was made privy to the revelation which God gave to Christ.

Students of the text have long haggled about the date of its writing. Opinions have narrowed down to two primary dates, easy to be remembered: 69 A.D. and 96 A.D. The earlier date assumes John’s exile by Nero, and sees it as being written prior to the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). This view sees constant references to earthly Jerusalem in the Book, and compels a basically Jewish interpretation of the text. The latter date assumes John’s exile to have been imposed by Domitian, and is considered the traditional view of the date of writing. This view

allows for a broader interpretation of the Book, lifting it from a merely provincial consideration.

**This study will view the book as having been written at the close of John's life in 96 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem.** I feel this provides a more global context for the message. The destruction of Jerusalem, while a significant event, is not the foundation upon which revelation is built. That was a temporal judgment, sent upon a certain people within a specific region. This condition, in my judgment, does not justify the size or message of this great Book. In addition to this, I find it difficult to grasp how the fall of Jerusalem would obtain a great degree of importance to the churches of Asia.

Several church fathers have written commentaries on this book, thereby confirming the general perception of its importance. These fathers include Hippolytus III (160-236 A.D.), Andreas of Caesarea, Arethas, Cecumenius, Tichonius, Victorinus of Pettau, Primasius, Cassidorus (490-585 A.D.), Baeda, Ansbertus, Berengaudus, and Haymo (1244 A.D.).

### **Our Approach to This Book**

This is a heavenly view of things, not an earthly one. It is a lofty view, portrayed in a vision of the ages. The vision itself is not the thrust of the book, but the **meaning** of it. Men are not to become enamored of the symbolism that is found in dreams and visions, although there is a strong tendency to do so. Imagine becoming enamored of the appearances associated with great dreams and visions throughout the ages: Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:12), Joseph's dreams of the shocks of wheat and stars (Gen 37:7,9), Ezekiel's visions of the valley of dry bones and healing waters (Ezek 37, 47), and Nechaddnezzar's dream of the stone that became a mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan 2). These dreams and visions were but containers

in which Divine insight was granted. It would have been the height of absurdity for those receiving them to have been distracted by the Divinely employed figures. **The message was the point!**

So it is with the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. An overriding message pervades this book. It is NOT one of doom and gloom, but of triumph and glory. Both origins and endings are traced back to God Almighty. With a high note, it confirms the word spoken by Daniel: ***“the heavens do rule!”*** (Dan 4:26). While there are repeated references to trial and opposition in this book, **the work of God is the emphasis**. The devil cannot overthrow His purposes, even though long periods of apparent dominance are credited to him. Whatever he does is under the rule of the Almighty! If he ***“makes war with the saints,”*** it is because God has “allowed him” to do so (Rev 13:7). If the Gentiles have dominated and corrupted the periphery of the kingdom by the Gentiles, which know not God, it is because of Divine allotment (Rev 11:2). You must not allow yourself to miss this perspective. It is a primary key to this book! This is not a lifeless history book, only written in advance of the events described therein. It is a proclamation of the Sovereignty of God, exercised throughout the history of the world through Jesus Christ and for the saints of the Most High God.

The dominance of Jesus Christ confirms this book relates to redemption. The ruling King of glory is declared to be the ***“Lamb”*** that was slain (Rev 5:6,12; 13:8). The ***“blood”*** of the Lamb is mentioned in three pivotal texts, It is related to our redemption (1:5; 5:9; 7:14), and the triumph of the saints over the evil one (12:11). The book is about the completion of salvation’s work by the Son of God. It is finished to the glory of God in the crucible of opposition and conflict. On the canvas of illumination, John was shown events that confirmed nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:37-39). Do not look for novelties in this book!

The aggression of Satan is delineated in graphic language. He is focused in his opposition, targeting the holy *“remnant”* who *“keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (12:17). What **he** does is not the emphasis of the message! Rather, the **futility** of his efforts is declared. Although he employs subtlety, violence, and even nature, his efforts fall to the ground in deference to a Sovereign God. His time is limited, his purpose will not be accomplished, and his destiny is sure! He will eventually be banished to *“everlasting fire,”* prepared for him and his angels (Matt 25:41).

Our approach to this book will not allow for distraction. Repeatedly, we will get our bearings at the Throne of the Almighty. We will see Him orchestrating the events of this world, and fulfilling His will, even though it is met with rejection and opposition. His people, even though facing a fierce and angry opponent, will gain the victory over all of their enemies. If we lose sight of these things, we will fall into the snare of the evil one. **Keep this in mind. Seventeen (17) direct references are made to Satan in this book ( 2:9, 2:10, 2:13, 2:24, 3:9, 9:11, 12:3, 12:9, 12:10, 12:11, 12:12, 20:1, 20:2, 20:3, 20:7, 20:8, 20:10). Two inimical powers termed “the Beast,” through whom Satan works against the saints, are mentioned 32 times ( 11:7; 13:2; 13:3; 13:4; 13:14; 13:15; 13:17; 13:18; 14:9; 14:11; 15:2; 16:2; 16:10; 16:13; 17:7; 17:8; 17:11; 17:12; 17:13; 17:16; 17:17; 19:20; 20:4,10)**

**One hundred and eight references (108) are made the Jesus Christ ( 1:4; 1:5; 1:6; 1:7; 1:8; 1:10; 1:11; 1:12; 1:13; 1:14; 1:15; 1:16; 1:17; 1:18; 2:7; 2:8; 2:18; 2:23; 2:27; 3:7; 3:9; 3:11; 3:12; 3:14; 3:18; 3:19; 3:21; 4:11; 5:5; 5:6; 5:7; 5:8; 5:9; 5:10; 5:11; 5:12; 5:13; 5:14; 6:2; 6:15; 6:16; 6:17; 7:9; 7:10; 7:11; 7:12; 7:13; 7:14; 7:15; 7:16; 7:17; 8:3; 8:4; 11:15; 12:10; 12:11; 13:8; 13:11; 14:1; 14:4; 14:6; 14:14; 15:3; 15:4; 16:15; 17:14; 19:6; 19:7; 19:9; 19:11; 19:12; 19:13; 19:14; 19:15; 19:16; 19:17; 19:18; 19:19; 19:20; 19:21; 20:1; 20:2; 20:3; 20:4; 20:6; 21:9; 21:14; 21:22; 21:23; 21:27; 22:1; 22:2; 22:3; 22:4; 22:5; 22:6; 22:7; 22:8; 22:9; 22:10; 22:11; 22:12; 22:13; 22:14; 22:15; 22:16;**

22:17; 22:20).

**Revelation contains only five (5) references to “demons” or “devils” ( 9:20; 12:7; 12:8; 12:9; 13:4). There are fifty-two allusions the saints ( 1:6; 2:7; 2:10; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 2:27; 2:28; 3:4; 3:5; 3:10; 3:12; 3:21; 7:3; 7:4; 7:9; 7:10; 7:11; 7:12; 7:13; 7:14; 7:15; 7:16; 7:17; 11:12; 11:18; 14:1; 14:2; 14:3; 14:4; 14:5; 14:13; 16:15; 17:14; 19:7; 19:8; 19:9; 20:4; 20:5; 20:6; 21:3; 21:4; 21:5; 21:6; 21:7; 21:9; 21:24; 22:4; 22:5; 22:7; 22:12; 22:14)!**

**That gives you a perspective of this message that will deliver you from much of the delusion of our time.** We will not spend the burden of our study on matters not emphasized by the Spirit--however novel they may appear. This is a message to the churches about the triumph of the Lord's Christ, and the consequent victory of His saints.

### **The Apocalyptic Gospel**

No totally new doctrine is taught in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Written in signs and figures, it confirms the nature of our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed as exalted and reigning. The devil is represented as a struggling, but defeated, enemy. We see the saints of God as washed in the blood of Christ, engaged in the good fight of faith, and destined for glory. The earth is seen as the locus of conflict, while the heavens are represented as the peaceful headquarters from which the will of God is being executed. The Gospel is declared in symbolism (12:1-16). In vivid imagery, the **“hope of glory”** is affirmed (21:1-4; 22:1-5). The effects of Christ's death upon the believer are again announced (1:5-6), and also His Sovereignty over the Kingdom (5:6, 9-14). Redemption and purity are related to following the Lamb (14:4). The culmination of faith is realized in being gathered to the Lord, dwelling with Him forever (22:5). The thrust of Genesis through Jude remains the emphasis of Revelation!

Pivotal aspects of Christ's coming and accomplishments are declared in this volume. We read of **His incarnation** (12:5; 22:16), **death** (1:5-6; 5:9-10,12; 7:14-15; 13:8), **resurrection** (1:5,18), **reign** (1:5-7,18; 3:7,14,21; 5:12; 6:2,15-17; 11:15; 12:10; 14:14; 17:14; 19:11-12, 15-16; 20:4-6), and **second coming** (1:7; 3:11; 16:15; 22:12; 22:20). The book proclaims the effectiveness of Christ's death and rule. It affirms His ultimate triumph over every opposing force, and does so with power.

## The Cycles

The book of Revelation is not, strictly speaking, a chronology of events. The reign of Christ in the midst of His enemies (Psa 110:2) is seen in several historical cycles. Each one shows Him to be Sovereign over people, circumstances, and the devil. Each one shows Satan's aggressive, but futile, efforts to overthrow the church Jesus has built. These are provided for the comfort of oppressed believers, and assure them of their ultimate triumph in Christ. Their faith and labor in the Lord are not vain. They will be rewarded!

In these cycles, the **thoroughness** of the Lord's workings is seen in the repeated use of the number "**seven.**" While I do not intend to emphasize numerology (an unsuitable container for stabilizing and comforting truth) I cannot escape the Spirit's use of this number of completeness.

We will read of "**seven churches**" (1:4,11,20), "**seven candlesticks**" (1:13,20), "**seven stars**" (1:16,20; 2:1; 3:1) "**seven Spirits**" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and "**seven lamps**" (4:5). There are also "**seven angels**" (8:2,6; 15:1,6-8; 16:1; 17:1), "**seven plagues**" (16:6,8), "**seven kings**" (17:10), "**seven horns**" (5:6), and "**seven eyes**" (5:6). The judgments of God are graphically depicted by "**seven seals**" (5:1,5), "**seven trumpets**" (8:2,6), "**seven thunders**" (10:3,4), and "**seven golden vials**" (15:7). There is a thoroughness that pervades this

intriguing book!

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1:1a). First and foremost, this is *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1:1). The point is, Christ has given this to us. It is a message the Lord Jesus wants His people to know--a message essential for their triumph over the wicked one. Here we read something Jesus has to say to the churches. It is a message to be taken personally, as seen in the message to *“the seven churches which are in Asia”* (1:4,11). However, the message is not confined to them. They are but custodians of this word from Jesus. It is for everyone who *“reads”* the words, *“hears”* them, and *“keeps”* them (1:3). It’s promises are addressed to *“whosoever wills”* (Rev 22:17), thereby obtaining relevance to every generation.

Those who suppose Jesus quit speaking when He ascended back into heaven, must contend with this book. Written at least 40 years after His ascension, and more probably nearly 66 years afterward, here is a word that confirms Christ’s interest in His people-- **today!** God speaks to us today through His Son, and here is an example of that Divine manner.

Note, this is a *“revelation,”* not a concealment. Things are opened to us in this sacred volume. Many people struggle with its contents because of the imagery contained therein. There is, however, a resounding message that can be received from this *“revelation of Jesus Christ.”* No less than eight times, we are challenged to “hear” what Jesus is saying in this book (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9). A blessing is pronounced upon those *hearing*, or perceiving, its message (1:3). An invitation is given to *“take of the water of life freely”* (22:17). A

solemn warning is also given to those taking the liberty to add to or take from its words (22:18-19). A revelation from Christ is to be heard, believed, and kept within the heart. It is given to be understood, and God's people can expect grace to do so. That understanding, however, will be of what Jesus is revealing!

## The Commonality of the Phrase

What an intriguing phrase: *“The revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Peter uses this phrase to denote the final appearing of Christ (1 Pet 1:7,13; 4:13 NKJV, RSV). Paul uses the phrase in the same manner (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). He also employs the phraseology to describe his spiritual insight (Gal 1:12). In each of these occurrences, *“the revelation of Jesus Christ”* means the revelation He makes, not that which reveals Him. In the book before us, John is the writer, but Jesus is the Author! This is, as I see it, a view of **the source of Apostolic writings**.

## A Revelation

One interesting note here. The term *“revelation”* uniquely applies to the Gospel of Christ. It refers to an **unveiling** of things *“kept secret from the foundation of the world”* (Matt 13:35; Rom 16:25). Here is the unveiling of Divine mysteries. As it is written, *“. . . how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets”* (Eph 3:3-5). The very concept of *“unveiling”* presumes a firm intention that has not been revealed. The idea involves infinitely more than shining a spotlight on the future. The point is not prediction, as ordinarily conceived by the world. Revelation, technically speaking, is not seeing what is going to happen, and declaring Divine intent. It is taking a Divine purpose that is obscured, and opening it up to our understanding. Our faith is

anchored in Divine determination, not a mere prediction of the future.

Here we are taken beyond the book of Revelation itself. Jesus is not revealing secrets about the future, but secrets about Himself. We must take care not to allow the Son of God to recede into the background of our thinking as we study this book. Be assured, there will be a temptation to do precisely that. As we progress through this sacred volume, Satan will attempt to divert us to the devil, the beast, the tribulation, or Babylon the great. We will read of Satan's binding and losing, of Babylon's rise and fall, of the beasts ascendancy to power and fall to perdition. Nevertheless, these are not the point of the book. They are small clusters of insight, served up to accentuate the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The revelation is not of their purpose, but of God's. It does not declare their triumph, but that of the Lord's Christ. These are but a temporal agitation upon the sea of Divine purpose.

### **Jesus, the Revealer**

Jesus is the "*Savior of the world*" -- that is why He was sent by the Father (1 John 4:14). Once the people are reconciled to God, however, Jesus is seen as a Revealer. While it is true He shows you yourself, that is not His primary work of revelation. He can unveil to your heart the nature of Satan and his diabolical intent--but that is not the thrust of His revelatory ministry. **He primarily reveals the Father!** As it is written, "*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*" (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22).

The revelation of the Father is an extensive work. Jesus elucidates **the character of God**. He also unveils **the purpose of God** regarding mankind. The Son of God reveals, through the Spirit, **the things God "has prepared for them that love Him"** (1 Cor 2:9-10). However, I do not want us to be diverted from the intention of Christ's

revelation in this book. Suffice it to say, Jesus did not step outside the circumference of these objectives in giving the book of the Revelation! It is but an extension of His confessed objective to reveal the Father. He will not shine the light of illumination upon novelties, but upon Divine intent. If we do not approach this book with these things uppermost in our mind, we will miss its message. We will also be tempted to either accept or concoct corruptions of its contents to our own judgment.

## GOD GAVE IT TO CHRIST

***“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him . . . ”***  
(1:1b). How perfectly this coincides with previous revelations of Christ’s message! ***“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel”*** (John 5:20). Notice, **God shows the Son what HE is doing, not what man is doing or will do!** When it came to the matter of what was within man, it is written, He ***“had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man”*** (John 2:25). God does not merely show the Son the history of the world in advance, but rather declares His intent and the fulfillment of the same!

Christ’s teaching centers around the will of God! The secret to understanding His revelation of that will, is a readiness on the part of man to become involved in that will. As Jesus said, ***“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority”*** (John 7:16-17). Jesus did not step away from this principle when He gave the Revelation to John! Here is a revelation of God ***“working salvation in the midst of the earth”*** (Psa 74:12). If what we see in this book does not interface with that truth, we will have wandered into the wilderness of delusion.

## The Supremacy of the Father

Even from heaven, Jesus continues to speak what the Father gives Him! As it is written, ***“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak”*** (John 12:49-50). God has commanded ***“eternal life”*** — that is His objective for us! Jesus is carrying out that objective, as is declared elsewhere in Scripture. It is also declared in this book! Here we will see that ***“eternal life”*** is being conferred in the midst of unspeakable opposition and difficulty.

The supremacy of the Father is frequently affirmed. It’s declaration is not intended to diminish the Lord Jesus Christ, but to reveal the objective of His indispensable ministry. ***“The Head of Christ,”*** we are apprized, ***“is God”*** (1 Cor 11:3). Again, it is affirmed, ***“Christ is God’s”*** (1 Cor 3:23). He is not merely ***“Christ,”*** but ***“the Lord’s Christ”*** (Luke 2:26; Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10). After ***“the end,”*** we are categorically told, ***“the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all”*** (1 Cor 15:28). In His redemptive capacity, the Lord Jesus is God’s ***“Servant,”*** not ours (Isa 52:13). God sent Jesus (1 John 4:14)! God raised Jesus (Acts 13:30)! God exalted Jesus (Phil 2:9)! God will send Jesus again (Acts 3:20)!

Jesus and His message are to be understood within the context of the Father! ***“The Word became flesh”*** to implement Divine intent. If God is ***“the Head of Christ,”*** you may be assured He is over Satan and all his hierarchy of evil (which are themselves under the Son)! Circumstances, regardless of their severity or longevity, are under the government of God Almighty. Deceivers, however crafty and influential, are all in subjection to Him. As it is written, ***“The deceived***

***and the deceiver are His***” (Job 12:16). The times of their influence are strictly controlled by God. They are limited in duration and influence. God is supreme! Read this book through that spiritual template!

That principle pervades the book of the Revelation! This volume is not about what Satan is doing, but what God IS doing! It is not a delineation of what an Antichrist will do, but what the Lord will do. **It does not proclaim what will happen in a world from which the Spirit and the people of God have been withdrawn, but how the Lord works in the world with both of them present.** If this were not the case, repeated references to the Lord Jesus, His atoning death, and the glorification of His people would lose their significance and ministry.

### **For His Servants**

***“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants . . . ”*** (1:1c). God gave the message to Jesus for Him to give to His ***“servants.”*** It is generally understood that the phrase employed here ( ***“His servants”*** ), refers to believers in general, and not just to officials. The term ***“servants”*** is used several times in this unique book. Jesus rebuked a false teacher for seducing His ***“servants”*** (2:20). God’s servants were ***“sealed”*** for Divine acceptance (7:3). The holy prophets were called ***“His servants”*** (10:7; 11:18). Those who had suffered martyrdom because of their testimony are also called ***“His servants”*** (19:2). Everyone who fears God are referred as ***“His servants”*** (19:5). The entire body of the redeemed, safe at last in glory, are also identified as ***“His servants”*** (22:3).

***“His servants”*** are those who are ***“joined to the Lord”*** (1 Cor 6:17). They have become involved in the Kingdom, and are participating in the “Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). They do not live for themselves, ***“but for Him who died for them and rose again”*** (2 Cor 5:15). **This book has been written for such people!** God gave it to

Jesus for them! It is not to be considered, therefore, as entertaining reading--like a novel or exciting fiction. **This book has relevance to the life of faith.** It is a Divine provision for our strength and encouragement. It has been given as an elixir to sweeten the cup of life, and cause the star of hope to rise in our hearts. What we read in the book of Revelation is something GOD wants those serving Him to know! It is something He gave to Jesus to give to His body, to give them an advantage in this present evil world!

### Imminent Things

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass . . . ”*

Here is language addressed to faith. It provides a focus for our thinking, and allows for the de-emphasis of earth and things pertaining to it. The servants of God are to live in the light of things declared in this book. This does **not** mean we are to view the revelation as a sort of Divine update that makes previous words obsolete. Rather, it affirms this message is in perfect harmony with the remainder of Scripture. God’s emphasis has not changed. His purpose, being *“eternal,”* has not been altered.

There are earthly events, generally related to interpersonal relationships, that are said to take place *“shortly”* (1 Cor 4:19; Phil 2:19,24; 1 Tim 3:14; 2 Tim 4:9; Heb 13:23; 3 John 14). The Word of God, however, also employs this word ( *“shortly”* ) in a manner accentuating **perspective** rather than time. *“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Rom 16:20). The phrase translated *“shortly come to pass”* is **dei genesqai en tacei** . The latter part of this phrase ( **en tacei** ) is translated *“shortly”* in this text. It means *“speedily, quickly, without delay, soon, or before long.”* It is used in Luke 18:8, where the answer of importunate prayer is in reference. There, God is said to *“bear long”* with the petitioner, yet answer *“speedily.”* This is **not** a term confined to time.

Two explanations of this phrase have been offered. First, that everything revealed by Jesus to John took place within a short time span. Second, that the phrase indicates **the things that would BEGIN to come to pass shortly**, though they would extend over a lengthy period of time. I will approach the text with the latter persuasion in mind. This, in my judgment is a Divine way of reasoning. It is the perspective of Peter, when referring to Joel's prophecy, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:30-31). It was also Christ's focus when commenting on events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:8; Luke 21:28). It must be remembered, the Kingdom of God is PURPOSE-driven, not event-driven! Events are certainly not inconsequential, but they occur because of Divine purpose.

**The Word of God expounds the PURPOSE, while mentioning the events.** Consider, for example, the view that the events in this book all occurred within a short time of its writing. We have, in that case, a considerable section of Scripture devoted to a small segment of people. Such an occasion finds Jesus speaking extensively about matters that do not have eternal relevance. It also sets the clear references to end-time events in the first or second century: i.e., Christ's return (1:7; 22:12), the resurrection (20:13-14), judgment (20:11-13), consignment of Satan and his false prophet to perdition (20:10), vindication of the martyrs (19:2), and glorification of the saints (21:1-5; 22:1-5). Such a thought is unthinkable! We will approach this book with God's "*eternal purpose*" in mind--a purpose that required a Savior, a redemption, and an Intercessor. I will briefly address this subject when we consider verse three.

### **The Involvement of An Angel**

*"And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John."* Remarkable details are given concerning **how** this revelation was given to John. First, God gave it to Jesus. Next, Jesus gave it to an

angel--a heavenly messenger. You will recall, the Law also was given by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Throughout the Word of God, holy angels were employed to bring messages from God to men. (Gen 16:9-11; 16:11; 21:17; 22:11; 24:40; 31:11; Num 22:32,34-35; Judg 2:1; 5:23; 6:12,20,22; 13:3,13,15-18; 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17; 24:16-17; 1 Kgs 13:18; 19:5,7; 2 Kgs 1:3; 1:15; 1 Chron 21:15; Dan 3:28; Zech 1:9,11-12,14,19; 3:5; 4:5; 5:5,10; 6:4-5; Mat 28:5; Luke 1:13,18-19,28,30,34-35,38; 2:10; John 12:29; Acts 5:19; 10:22; 11:13; 12:8,11,15; Rev 10:8,9; 17:7; 22:6).

Among other things, this confirms the vastness of the gulf between God and man created by sin. Although we are reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Rom 5:10), an Intercessor is required before we can have access to Him. When dealing with redeemed humanity, there is a sense in which God cannot do so directly. We see it in this text. John was not only an Apostle, but the one ***“whom Jesus loved”*** (John 13:23; 20:2; ; 21:7,20). The perception of this condition will promote a degree of sobriety that is not common among professed believers.

Another thing to see here: all of heaven is involved in Divine communications with men. In this text alone, we have God, Jesus, and an angel. Later the Holy Spirit and other angels will be called into activity. The magnitude of our salvation can be more fully appreciated as we see the extent of heaven’s involvement in it.

How gratifying it must have been for this angel to bring the Revelation to John! After all, angels do desire to ***“look into”*** these matters, and here was an opportunity to do so (1 Pet 1:12).

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

***“ . . . His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God,***

*and to the testimony of Jesus Christ . . . ”* (1:1-2). When John receives the Word, there is absolutely no dilution in it! Already, it has passed through two personalities, and is now coming to the third. God *“gave”* it to Jesus, and Jesus *“sent and signified it by His angel”* to John. Unlike messages passed from flesh to flesh, God’s Word maintains its purity en route to mankind.

Notice, the Revelation is called *“the Word of God,”* and *“the testimony of Jesus.”* “The Word of God” equates with *“which God gave unto Him”* (1:1), and *“the testimony of Jesus”* equates with *“Revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Like all Scripture, this is not John’s view of what was given to Him. As Peter affirms, *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”* (2 Pet 1:20-21). John passes along what was told him, not what he thought it meant. The power of the Kingdom is found in God’s Word and Christ’s testimony, not in man’s explanation of the same.

*“The Word of God”* speaks of the ORIGIN of the message, connecting it with Divine purpose. *“The testimony of Jesus”* relates to the relevancy of God’s Word and purpose to the children of God. The *“purpose”* is God’s. The implementation of that *“purpose”* is the work of the Son. Jesus testifies to what God has determined. This perspective is found throughout this book. **The reigning Son of God is orchestrating history for the fulfillment of God’s purpose.** If we miss this, the meaning of this message will become blurred and appear irrelevant.

## John Tells All

*“ . . . John, who bore witness . . . to all things that he saw”* (1:1-2). John is faithful, the preeminent requirement for stewards (1 Cor 4:2). He does not omit things that were mystifying (17:6). He gives the Word, even when it caused personal spiritual discomfort because of

its implications (Rev 10:9-10). He hid no part of the message out of fear for the churches or their leaders. He wrote ***“all things that he saw.”***

Daniel was told, ***“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase”*** (Dan 12:4). His role was not to clarify the Word. But this is not the case with John. He received a ***“revelation,”*** and passed it along. He is not providing an exposition, but conveying what he ***“saw.”*** He summons the churches to consider everything he ***“saw,”*** relying on Divine involvements to clarify and apply things made known in that vision. He did not pray we would also see the vision as he did, but rather declared what he saw! Suffice it to say, he is speaking about what he saw on the Isle of Patmos, not the events of Christ’s life, as he did in his Gospel.

Throughout my life, I have known men who have failed the test of faithfulness. Even though they were given to see some of the things of God, they did not pass them along. They held them back in deference to an institutional emphasis. Without being diverted by this consideration, such a reaction is out of harmony with everything we know about God. It renders the steward unfaithful, and subject to the judgment of God. What God reveals is to be made known! It is never to be withheld from those to whom it is sent! John proves himself faithful in communicating what he saw.

## A BLESSING TO THE READER

***“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near”*** (1:3). Our hearts must take hold on this promise! It tells us the message of this book can be received. It also declares it is to our advantage, because of the time, to expose our hearts and minds to this

message. Do not withdraw from it, as though it were reserved for a special segment of God's people. It is written to *"the churches,"* and those who are *"His servants."*

Observe that this is the pronouncement of a *"blessing."* It is like another beatitude! There are few blessings announced in Scripture just like this one. Specific blessings are pronounced upon the individual who lives in an orderly manner, listens, trusts, fears God, and endures temptation (Psa 1:1; 34:8; 84:12; 112:1; James 1:12). The well-known beatitudes address those who appropriate the grace of God at personal expense (Matt 5:3-11). But notice the simplicity related to this blessing: *reading, hearing, and keeping* the words of this book! Briefly summarized, those who expose their hearts and minds to the message.

### **Those Who Read**

Do not shun to read what will bring a blessing! Man lives by *"every Word of God"* (Luke 4:4), and this is expressly called *"the Word of God."* Jesus talked about reading *"what David did"* (Matt 12:3), and what was contained in the Law (Matt 12:5). He also asked if His hearers had read what God said about marriage (Matt 19:4). Many times, He interrogated men concerning their Scriptural literacy (Matt 21:16,42; 22:31; Mark 12:26). It comes across to me that one of the very elementary aspects of spiritual life is simply READING the Word of God!

However, our text does not approach such reading as an obligation, but as something of profit. It is a source of *"blessing."* This means God is near, or at hand, as we take these words into our hearts and minds. Our proximity to God is what brings the blessing, not our natural abilities to decipher Scripture! The point of this expression is that God blesses those who have a high regard for His Word, and freely subject themselves to it. **Exposure to the Word opens a bigger door of blessing than diagnosing the Word.** Do not stumble at this! To

read the Word is to step within the circumference of Divine influence. This is true of all Scripture.

### **Those Who Hear**

Hearing is also a fundamental activity in the heavenly Kingdom--hearing the Word of God! Faith, after all, ***“comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ”*** (Rom 10:17, NASB). This is how faith came to those who had killed Jesus (Acts 2:41), the city of Samaria (Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37), the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:17), and the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:34). There are heavenly influences experienced through hearing that are normally not otherwise appropriated.

Again, God draws near when we ***“hear”*** His Word, and the ***“testimony of Jesus.”*** This is particularly true of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet, how few people know this to be the case! Vistas of truth, and facets of Christ’s reign will be opened to us as we give ear to the message of this book. God gave it all to Jesus. Jesus gave it all to the angel. The angel gave it all to John. And, John gave it all to us. Now, a blessing is pronounced upon those who hear it in its entirety! Candidly, you will have difficulty finding a less complicated blessing. Seek to obtain it!

### **Those Who Keep**

Keeping ***“the things written in”*** this book is certainly not limited to commandments. In the first place, there are not that many commandments in this book. The ones that are there are more exhortations, calling men to recover lost ground, or give honor to the Lord (3:11,18,19; 18:4; 22:17). In this book, the word ***“commandments”*** is only used in phrases describing the faithful (12:17; 14:12; 22:14). This by no means minimizes obeying the commandments of God, a primary activity in Christ’s Kingdom (Acts

5:29,32; Heb 5:9). It does accentuate the nature of this sacred volume.

Keeping “*the things which are written*” in this book is retaining them in your heart. It involves meditation (1 Tim 4:15), consideration (2 Tim 2:7), and pondering (Luke 2:19). Those willing to think upon these words will experience blessing from the Lord! That means the message is pregnant with meaning and relevancy, else you could not be blessed in the consideration of the same.

### **The Shortness of the Time**

“ . . . *for the time is at hand.*” The nature of the message demands immediate attention. The purpose of this word is to enable the people of God to be ready. The Spirit is announcing a Satanic initiative. Unparalleled devastation will mark it, and many will be swept away in demonic delusion. It is important that saints recognized the “*signs of the time,*” avoiding the devil’s snare.

Again, this is language addressed to faith. There is not a child of God to whom this word of warning is not applicable. Satan is not going to delay his initiative, nor will the Lord postpone His determinations. “*The time is short.*” What this book reveals is pertinent. It is not to be placed on the shelf of neglect, as though it pertained to another age, either past or future. Life itself, though threescore and ten, is “*short*” (Psa 89:47). Satan himself is aggressive in his attacks against Christ’s body, because he knows “*the time is short*” (Rev 12:12).

Allow me to be more specific. The blessing promised to those reading, hearing, and keeping the words of this prophecy, must not be ignored! Procrastination is a thief, and delay is a murderer! The Judge is standing at the door (James 5:9). Everything is being readied for the consummation of all things! Jesus knows it! The angels know it! Even the devil and his forces of evil know it! Why should the church live as

though no end were in view?

The word “*at hand*” ( **egguj** ) is another one that mystifies the flesh. It is used to denote those about to be cursed by God because of yielding thorns and briars (Heb 6:8). It is also employed to describe the nearness of the Lord to all believers, thereby constraining their sobriety (Phil 4:5). The Spirit uses it to affirm the nearness of salvation’s fulness: “*And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11, NASB). The Divine schedule is not apparent to the flesh! Whether it is a matter of Ephesus leaving their “*first love*” (2:4), suffering saints at Smyrna (2:9-10), or believers like those of Pergamum, dwelling in a Satanic citadel (2:13), **the end is within view** ! If there are those tolerating false teachers like Thyatira (2:20), supposed prosperous groups like Sardis and Laodicea (3:3,17), or faithful ones like those in Philadelphia (3:10), “*the time is short!*”

From the perspective of faith, it is only “*a little while, and the wicked shall not be*” (Psa 37:10). From the standpoint of judgments being poured out, “*For yet a very little while and the indignation will cease . . .*” (Isa 10:25). So far as anticipating the coming of the Lord, powerfully declared in this book, “*For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry*” (Heb 10:37). This is how faith views the matter, even though the time is lengthy from the fleshly point of view, as unbelievers and scoffers affirm (2 Pet 3:4).

Some will object to this view, saying the events described in this book were to take place within a short period of time. The coming of a spiritual despot, the rise of Satanic delusion, a global battle, the mark of the beast, the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ etc., etc., etc., some affirm, are the point of the book. But they are wrong. **They are mentioned, but they are not the point!** The point is the Lord and His Christ! The point is the

triumph of the Lamb! The point is the victory of the saints! Faith anticipates the revelation of Christ, not the rise of an Antichrist (3:11; 22:7,12,20). It contemplates the resurrection of the dead, not plagues leading to death (20:12-13). Godly fear ponders the judgment of the world, not the evaluation of a spiritual tyrant (20:12-13). Believers anticipate the banishment of the devil, not the persecution of saints (20:10). They are refreshed by the consideration of their entrance into rest, not the beginning of a great tribulation (7:15-17; 21:1-5; 22:1-5).

**The fulfillment of these things is the object of their contemplation.** The *“things which must shortly come to pass”* (1:1; 22:6) cannot be limited to the trials contained in this book. Nor, indeed, are they to be confined to the judgments announced. The glorious promises must also be included, else believers can derive no comfort! Life is to be approached with the danger of delusion in mind, and also the blessedness of promise! To live without this perspective is to fall into the snare of the devil.

In this book Jesus declares, *“I come quickly”* (3:11; 22:7,12,20). He will appear unexpectedly to the flesh, and without warning. But this will not be the case for those who lived under the spiritual influence of *“shortly”* and *“at hand!”* That is the point of this powerful announcement. The closer you get to the Lord, the more time-lines are blurred. Faith moves everything closer to the heart--even the consummation of all things. The more we believe, the less prominent time appears.

## THE SALUTATION

*“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus*

*Christ . . .* ” (1:4-5). The thoroughness of this introduction underscores the seriousness of the book. Heaven and earth stand up to bear witness to its relevancy.

### **From John**

The general introduction shows how well known the Apostle was. **“John”** was a common name. In Scripture, there is John the Baptist (Matt 3:1), the young man John Mark (Acts 12:12), the father of Peter and Andrew (John 1:42), and a member of the Jewish council (Acts 4:6). Yet, when John mentions his own name, there is no need for further identification. He had distinguished the name by His faith in, love for, and service of, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for John’s reputation is owing totally to his identity with the Son of God. The philosophers of this world do not recognize him as great. In fact, in the world, he was considered **“unlearned and ignorant”** (Acts 4:13). But among the household of faith, his name is synonymous with greatness!

Even though the word was given to him by an angel, who received it from Jesus, Who received it from God, John says it is from him. He does so because he has taken the message into his heart. It is not his by origin, but by fellowship. Paul used the same reasoning when he referred to the Gospel of Christ as **“my gospel”** (Rom 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8). The man of God cannot divorce himself from the message he brings.

### **To the Seven Churches**

**“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia . . .** ” These are specific churches in a specific location. They are clustered together in the Western quadrant of Asia. This was a Roman province

embracing the greater part of Asia Minor. It was an area of significant size, wealth, and political influence. Yet, for all of its greatness, the Lord Jesus fastens on the churches in that area. He gives no message for the government or for the business sector. Saints are the ***“light of the world,”*** and the repository for the saving truth of God (Matt 5:14; 1 Tim 3:15). He does not address leading religious dignitaries in the region, but the churches!

God looks at regions in association with the godly dwelling there. Thus we read of Job as ***“a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil”*** (Job 1:1). Jacob is described as a ***“man in the land of Canaan”*** (Gen 42:13), and Moses is said to be ***“very great in the land of Egypt”*** (Ex 11:3). When Paul saw the city of Athens given over to idolatry, he first disputed ***“in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons”*** (Acts 17:16). Thus God, through Jesus, through an angel, through the Apostle John, sends a message to those bearing His name. That is the manner of the Kingdom. O, that it was more fully known in our generation.

### **From God**

The message originated with God the Father (1:1). Yet, God did not divorce Himself from the message. Although John gives it, it is to be read as coming from God Himself. He gave it to Jesus, but remained imminent. The Lord Jesus gave it to the angel, yet God remained prominent. The angel gave it to John, but the centrality of God remained. Now John gives it to the churches, affirming that although he delivered it, it was really from God.

The living God has an interest in His people. When addressing the churches, the Spirit affirms ***“grace and peace”*** still come from God (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2). Peace and ***“love with faith”*** are also declared to come from God (Eph 6:23). Like the seven churches of

Asia, when we read the Word of God, we are to receive it as a message ***“from God.”*** That is what makes the Word both personal and relevant-- it is ***“from God.”***

### **From the Seven Spirits**

Now, the symbolism of this book is introduced: ***“Grace to you and peace . . . the seven Spirits who are before His throne”*** (1:4). This also is the first reference to the language of the prophets. The allusion is to Zechariah 4:2-10. In the text of reference, a word of encouragement comes to Zerubbabel. An angel shows Zechariah a vision of ***“a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.”*** When interrogated concerning the meaning of this vision, Zechariah acknowledged he did not know its meaning. The angel unveiled the reference, associating it with the work of the Holy Spirit. ***“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts.”*** In elaborating on this matter, the angel declared a small thing was started, yet was not to be despised. He then referred to the seven lamps again, saying, ***“For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth”*** (Zech 4:2-10). Nothing is hidden from the eyes of the Lord.

Lest we fail to see the association of Zechariah’s vision with that of John the beloved, I point out additional references to ***“the seven spirits.”*** First, they are associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. ***“These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God”*** (3:1). Second, they are specifically called ***“seven lamps.”*** ***“Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”*** (4:5). Third, as in the book of Zechariah, they are called ***“eyes,”*** possessed by the Lamb of God. ***“. . . stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes , which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth”*** (5:6).

The “*eyes of the Lord*” is a phrase denoting omniscience; i.e., “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (Heb 4:13). Repeated references are made to “*the eyes of the Lord*” in Scripture, each confirming **that nothing is hidden from Him** (Gen 6:8; Deut 11:12;13:18; 1 Sam 26:24; 2 Sam 15:25; 1 Kgs 15:5; 15:11; 16:25; 22:43; 2 Chr 14:2; 16:9; 21:6; 29:6; Psa 34:15; Prov 5:21; 15:3; 22:12; Isa 49:5; Jer 52:2; Amos 9:8; Zec 4:10; 1 Pet 3:12).

**This is nothing less than a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit.** He proceeds from the Father and testifies of Christ (John 15:26). This is signified by the words, “*who are before His throne.*” The Holy Spirit does not operate independently, but in strict accord with God’s “**eternal purpose**” and Christ’s redemptive reign. In the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit operates in Christ’s behalf, implementing His reign among men. His ministry is universal, plenteous, and perfect--all denoted by the number “*seven.*”

Now, John tells us this book is from the Spirit. He is the One the churches will be required to hear (2:7,11,27,29; 3:6,13,22). He is the heavenly Animator of God’s witnesses (11:11), and the Proclaimer of the blessedness of those who die in the Lord (14:13). He also issues a universal invitation to partake of the great salvation prepared for all peoples (22:17). As in creation, when the Spirit brooded upon the face of a chaotic deep, He now broods over the new creation. He is the one Who convicts (John 16:8-11), enlivens (2 Cor 3:6), and illumines (1 John 2:20,27)! Blest Holy Spirit. The book is from Him! God gave it to Jesus. Jesus gave it to the angel. The angel gave it to John. The Holy Spirit enabled John to precisely recall and write everything He saw.

**From Jesus Christ**

***“Grace to you and peace . . . from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth”*** (1:4-6). Jesus has something to say to the churches. He does not say it, however, until He has conferred grace and peace upon them. He has a heart for the church, having loved it and given Himself for it (Eph 5:25). Strictly speaking, this is not the Revelation of John, but the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We do well to hear it.

### **The Faithful Witness**

A “faithful witness” is one who delivers the message he has been given. In the matter before us, this is a message ***“which God gave Him to show His servants”*** (verse 1). The Lord Jesus will deliver it in its entirety, with the proper emphasis, and with Divine objective. Later, the church at Laodicea is reminded the Savior is ***“the Faithful and True Witness”*** (3:14). Isaiah prophesied God would give the Messiah as ***“a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people”*** (Isa 55:4). Because of this circumstance, we must hear the message of this book! We dare not withdraw from it, fearful that it is too deep for us, or that we cannot appropriate the message given in it. God gave it to Jesus to show His servants, and He delivers it with characteristic precision and passion.

### **The Firstborn From the Dead**

Chronologically, Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead, and that is not the meaning of the phrase. The son of the widow of Zarephath was raised from the dead by Elijah (1 Kgs 17:17-26). The Shunnamite’s son was raised by Elisha (2 Kgs 4:32-37). On one occasion, the body of a young man was thrown into the grave of Elisha. Upon touching the bones of the prophet’s body, he stood up alive (2 Kgs 13:21). Jesus raised the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:12-15), Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:49-55), and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). When Jesus died, some saints resurrected (Matt 27:52).

There is a sense, however, in which Jesus is *“the first to rise from the dead”* (Acts 13:26). He *“has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Cor 15:20). The Spirit puts the matter in perspective for us. Jesus was the First of a new order of man--the First of the new creation. *“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming”* (1 Cor 15:23). Colossians 1:18 enlarges on this. *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”*

The point of the text is this. Jesus is speaking to His churches as **the First and preeminent one**. He is calling them into **involvement with the new creation**, and away from allegiance to the old creation. Being redeemed, the churches are His generation, destined to be conformed to His image.

## **The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth**

This book will introduce us to conflict--fierce conflict. Much of it will come from the kings of the earth. John himself is suffering isolation through one of these kings. The book will tell us of martyrs who died at the hand of earthly kings (Rev 6:10). Fierce persecutions will be mentioned that were instigated by vile kings (17:2,12-14; 18:3,9; 19:19). However, all of these kings are under the King of heaven. He is the *“King of kings, and Lord of lords”* (17:14; 19:16). He rules over the *“kings of the earth.”* The power these despots have has been given to them (13:7).

We will read of Satan's representative being given authority to overcome the saints. *“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation”* (13:7). The people of God will be slain, and their blood will be shed by their enemies. It will appear as though some generations were abandoned by Christ--but that is not the case! He

remains the ***“Ruler of the kings of the earth,”*** even when they run roughshod over His people. That is a critical message to be gathered from this text. Although they may prosper for a season, Satan and his entire hierarchy of evil will be overturned and put under Jesus’ feet! Believers are to live with this view. They are to anticipate their involvement in this glorious triumph! God will bruise Satan under their feet (Rom 16:20). We will participate in the revealed triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## ASCRPTION OF PRAISE

It is the manner of holy men to give praise to God. Whether introducing an Epistle, covering key doctrines, or delivering admonitions, praise to God and Christ for their Persons and accomplishments are common. It is as though the fountain of life is uncapped, and a flow of praise and adoration erupts (i.e., Rom 11:33). **The message of Christ does not obscure the Person of Christ!** We are not dealing with interesting or novel presentations that draw a veil over the Lord’s face. Rather, this is a book that exposes the Lord and His purpose to us. That is why praise can erupt in this manner.

### He Loved Us

***“To Him who loved us.”*** Notice, he does **not** say ***“To Him who LOVES us”*** — although He most assuredly does love us. With few exceptions, the love of God and Christ for humanity are consistently referenced in past tense, i.e., ***“LOVED us.”*** We are apprized that God ***“LOVED the world”*** (John 3:16,19). The redeemed are summoned to consider how God ***“LOVED”*** them (Rom 8:37; Eph 2:4; 5:2,25; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 John 4:10-11,19). On an individual basis, Paul recalled ***“the Son of God, who LOVED me and gave Himself for me”*** (Gal 2:20). By way of comparison, the use of the word love in the active tense ( ***“loves”*** ) is never sentimental, but doctrinal. ***“God loves a***

*cheerful giver*” (1 Cor 9:7). *“For whom the LORD loves He chastens”* (Heb 12:6).

What is the significance of this perspective? **God’s love for us is found in the atonement of Jesus Christ.** We are called to consider His love from that viewpoint. **This is His provisional love.** It is the undeniable confirmation of His interest in us. *“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us”* (1 John 3:16). This is the *“love”* that is *“shed abroad* (poured out, NKJV) *in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 5:5). Our consideration of the love of God and of Christ is seen from the cross. There is where we get our bearings, so to speak.

This book is given from the One Who *“loved us”* and *“gave Himself”* for us. That is a spiritual template through which this book is to be read. Not a few interpretations of the Revelation fail to view the text from that vantage point. You must carefully avoid such diversions. Read this book looking at the cross. Consider it in light of the atonement. Ponder it with the vicarious atonement of Jesus uppermost in your mind. *“He loved us!”*

## **He Washed Us**

*“To Him who . . . washed us from our sins in His own blood.”* No Word from God to His churches ignores or minimizes the death of His Son, and the expiation of our sin by that means. This is a pivotal consideration. It is one of the reasons Paul *“determined not to know anything . . . except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:2). Interpretations of this book that do not give the central place to redemption are simply wrong. God has bent the history of the world and all of His communication around His provision of remission. In view of this gift, sin is utterly unreasonable. Lest we forget, *“the blood of the Lamb”* is mentioned in this book (7:14; 12:11). It is associated with overcoming the devil.

## He Made Us Kings and Priests

The effectiveness of the death of Christ is not only seen in the removal of our past, but the transformation of our persons. Once ***“dead in trespasses and sins,”*** we have now become members of a regal race. The redeemed are ***“kings and priests TO GOD”*** (1:6; 5:10). They are the Divinely designated rulers of the world to come (Heb 2:5-9; 1 Cor 6:1-2; 2 Tim 2:12; Rom 8:17).

In this volume, we will read of earthly kings, tyrants, and despots. On the surface, it will appear as though they are invincible--at least for a while. But this book is not about the kings of this world, who are ALL destined to destruction. It is about those who have been ***“made kings and priests”*** to God by the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus. Even now, the saints will be depicted as participating in the government of God through their prayers. The triumph of the saints is the point of the Revelation, not the reign of an Antichrist!

## To Him Be Glory

Although Satan has extended his diabolical influence throughout the world, no glory will go to him! Even though he has raised and animated evil powers who run roughshod over the people of God, he will receive no glory! **This book will show us HOW the glory will go to Christ Jesus !** He will gain it by overcoming every power aligned against His people. He will frustrate the designs of those wicked powers, preserve His people at the peak of their power, and finally dash them and their structures of authority to the ground. The glory will all go to our Lord! Before Him ***“every knee will bow,”*** and ***“every tongue confess”*** (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10). We will view this book from that perspective!

## To Him Be Dominion

The rightful dominion belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is exercising it. From time to time, it may appear as though beastly powers are ruling, but they are not. The dominion belongs to Christ! It may appear to some as though Satan has the upper hand, but he does not. The dominion belongs to Christ! He has been exalted to the place of absolute prominence, and has the dominion! God has placed Him *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (Eph 1:21). We must ever remember that *“the heavens do rule”* (Dan 4:26). Spiritual beasts may rise and reign ruthlessly, but the heavens do rule! The saints of God may be slaughtered, and their blood flow like water, but the heavens do rule. The Lord Jesus Christ is bringing the purpose of God to a glorious consummation. This book is not about the dominion of the devil, the beast, or the false prophet. It is not a commentary on the reign of an Antichrist, but on the reign of THE CHRIST! The dominion BELONGS to Him, not figuratively or ideally, but REALLY! Our Lord is presently ruling. The Kingdom is His, and He is executing the Objective determined from all eternity. The fact that men cannot see it has nothing to do with its reality. This book confirms that Christ is ruling amidst His enemies, as foretold (Psa 110:2). Nothing is out of Divine control! Neither your faith nor labor are in vain! The Lord God Omnipotent reigns (Rev 19:6)!

## THE COMING OF THE LORD

At the very threshold of this book, we are reminded of the coming of the conquering King. This is a central consideration. For the people of God, it marks the conclusion of all opposition and suffering. This is when the glory of the King of kings will be made known, and the subservience of earthly kings will be revealed. As far back as David, this anticipation was articulated. *“For He is coming to judge the earth”* (1 Chron 16:33; Psa 96:13; 98:9). The saints are not in a hopeless state, even though from time to time it appears that way. Though Satan’s

representative *“shall wear out the saints of the most High”* (Dan 7:25), *“the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* when their Savior comes again (Matt 13:43). Then will be brought to pass the saying, *“Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation”* (Isa 25:9). This book will confirm that nothing shall cause that coming to be aborted or ineffectual! We will read of the worst Satan can do, and still *“Behold, He is coming.”*

### **He Is Coming With the Clouds**

*“Behold, He is coming with clouds . . . ”* Some have supposed this to be a reference to angelic hosts. In my judgment, this is not the point of the text. When Jesus ascended from Olivet to glory, He did so with the clouds as His chariot, and the winds as His steeds, so to speak. It is written, *“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight”* (Acts 1:9). Those beholding His ascent were told He *“will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11). It will be a visible coming, as surely as His ascent was visible.

The phrase *“coming with the clouds”* is an expression of judgment and judicial conclusion. It is an **apparent** coming, but a purposeful one as well. Daniel foresaw this coming, and recorded it in his prophecy. *“And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven ! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed”* (Dan 7:14-15). This parallels the statement found in Revelation, *“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”* (11:15).

When standing before an earthly tribunal, the Lord Jesus bore witness of this coming. ***“And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven”*** (Mark 14:62). Earlier, He told His disciples of His return in the same language. ***“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory”*** (Mark 13:26; Matt 24:30; Luke 22:69). When reading of this, you might recall Sinai, where God descended with surrounding clouds (Deut 4:11; 2 Sam 22:12; Psa 18:11).

That this is speaking of the **judgment** of those who rejected Christ and opposed His saints is clear from the language of the prophet Zephaniah. ***“That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers”*** (Zeph 1:15-16). Although Zephaniah’s prophecies related to the judgment of nations who opposed Israel, his words provide a Divine nomenclature or vocabulary. This is the manner in which God speaks of judgment-- ***“with the clouds.”*** It is as though all nature joins with the Son of God when He comes to ***“judge the world in righteousness.”***

BEFORE we read of the drawing back of the saints, their oppression, and even the shedding of their blood, we are told of a triumphant morning when the Judge of all the earth will return. **Read this book with that return in mind!**

### **Every Eye Will See Him**

***“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him . . . ”*** This is not a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, because every eye did not see Him then. Indeed, many of the Jews

made no association between that destruction and the judgment of the Almighty. But it will not be so when the Lord comes again! This phrase, *“every eye shall see Him,”* speaks of **discernment**, not merely seeing a phenomenon. The words that follow confirm to us that *“every eye”* will **know** Who is returning--particularly those who have oppressed His people. All of the saints will see Him as well (Rev 22:4).

There will be a universal recognition of the Lord when He comes again. The reason for mentioning this now, is to alert the saints to the necessity of recognizing Him now--whether in the best or worst of times. Acquaintance with Him in this world, will cause us to rejoice when *“every eye shall see Him.”* We will not read much in this marvelous bok without hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ. There are not lengthy periods when He is not mentioned. There are at least 108 references to Jesus in this book (see the section, **“Our Approach to This Book”**). They are calculated to acquaint us with, and endear us to, Him Whom *“every eye will see.”*

As with Job, every person shall see the Lord for himself. This will not be a vision interpreted by the discerning to the undiscerning! *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* (Job 19:25-27). Blessed contemplation!

### **Those Who Pierced Him**

Those who rejected the Lord's Christ, particularly those to whom He came, will ultimately confront Him, face to face! What an awesome consideration! Zechariah spoke of this. *“. . . they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him ”* (Zech 12:10). In His Gospel, John confirms that the Lord Jesus Christ the One to Whom the prophecy referred. *“They shall look on Him*

*whom they pierced*” (John 19:37). The day of reckoning is coming for those who rejected the Lord Jesus!

### **All the Kindreds of the Earth**

*“Behold, he cometh with clouds . . . and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”* This is not the wail of joy! It is the lament of those who refused to see God in nature, history, and the Gospel of His Son. In this world, they may have contented themselves to serve other gods, be caught up in the realm of the seen, and live in a state of covetousness. But that will all terminate abruptly when the Lord returns. Those who took it upon themselves to persecute the people of God will *“wail because of Him!”*

A miniature picture of the event is recorded in Revelation 6:15-17. *“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* This is an awesome scene! We are to enter into this book with this in mind! Again, we will read of the apparent triumph of Satan during certain periods. The Spirit will testify to us of a false prophet and church that will dominate the world, living in the lap of carnal prosperity.

Behind all of this the eminence of the Lord’s return! He will not come to be impressed by their works, but they WILL be impressed by Him! They will know Who He is, and seek to hide from Him. From every quadrant of the world, and every segment of society, all who have spurned Jesus will face Him, and know they are doing so. All who have tasted of His goodness, yet returned to the weak and beggarly elements of the world will confront the One from Whom they withdrew. People who have chosen the passing pleasures and

wealth of this world will see Him, and at that instant know they have squandered their lives.

**It is good to consider these things NOW. It will help to strengthen us in our determination to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Such consideration will arm us to resist the devil, and avoid being caught up in his religious fabrications.** How the saints long for the return of their Lord! When they *“turned from idols,”* they did so to serve the living God, and *“wait for His Son from heaven”* (1 Thess 1:10). This is a Kingdom trait. His return is the *“blessed hope”* His church (Tit 2:13). It is both blessed and prominent.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Tone Has Been Set**

We have set the tone for this book! It is not a concealment, but a revelation! It is not a commentary on the activity of Satan, but of the reign of the Lord Jesus. The purpose of this book is not to strike fear into our hearts because of the coming of a ruthless and diabolical ruler, but to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. The *“mark of the beast”* is not the primary mark delineated in this book, but the sealing of the servants of God. The reign of Antichrist is not the focus, but the reign of the Lord’s Christ!

Now, it is fitting for the Lord Jesus to shine the spotlight of consideration upon Himself. He is the focus of the Father, the engrossing consideration of angels, and the Objective of our faith. History revolves around Him, and He is the Ruler in the midst of it all. His purpose is being carried out, and His reign is the dominant and final one.

## **I Am Alpha and Omega**

*“I am Alpha and Omega . . . ”* Technically, these are the first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet. The expression, however, conveys a message that faith must grasp. Everything is encompassed in Jesus, the Lord’s Christ! It starts with Him and ends with Him. Nothing begins without Him, and everything is concluded in His time and at His word. God has nothing to say that does not come through Him, and is doing no work that does not require Him.

He is also the *“Alpha and Omega”* of this book! The Revelation begins with Christ Jesus (1:5-8, 11-20), and concludes with Him (22:16-22). His words open the book (1:17-20), and His words close it (22:16,20). Before ever history is unfolded, John is focused on the Son of God (1:12-17), and after the unfolding he again is looking to Him (22:16-21).

Between these climactic revelations, we will see the Lord working out His purpose in a war zone. The saints of God will be persecuted, and even killed. Satan’s false church rises to prominence, appearing invincible. However, in all of this, the Lord Jesus is maintaining His cause, Word, and people. No Divine undertaking is left unfinished, and no devilish undertaking will be ultimately successful. This is God’s world, and He is the Governor among the nations. The final proof of His rule does not lie in the temporary well being of His people, but in their final triumph over all foes.

The enemies of God may scoff, pointing to their prosperity, and the seeming demise of God’s people. But in the end, God will be justified in all of His sayings, and His purpose will be achieved. In that day, we will find it was completed in an orderly and deliberate manner, right under the devil’s nose.

## I Am Very Active

*“I am . . . the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come . . . ”* The ungodly, whether absorbed by false religion or the passing pleasures of this age, do not see Jesus Christ as **active**. But He is! He is evaluating the churches! He is unfolding the future! He is monitoring and controlling the oppression of His people. Satan in all of his representations, whether earthly government or corrupt religion, is operating under the Government of Jesus!

The Lord **“IS!”** — that is the first perspective He provides. He IS near! He IS saving! He IS ruling! Things neither begin nor end without His express approval and control! Tribulation cannot begin outside of His Sovereignty, and will conclude at His word. The reign of spiritual despots cannot commence apart from His Word, and will be brought down when His purpose has been served.

## I Am the Almighty

*“I am . . . the Almighty.”* Some read “the Revelation of Jesus Christ,” and are unduly impressed by the *devil*, the *“beast”* and the *“false prophet.”* They behold a corrupt and worldly *“church”* and marvel at its rise. For them, the things described in this book are bloodcurdling. Their vision is dominated by famines, pestilence, and the shedding of blood. All of these things are recorded in *“the Revelation,”* but they are not the aim of the book. The judgment of the ungodly, overthrow of Satan, demise of the beast, and destruction of the false prophet are also declared. The entrance of the godly into the joy of the Lord is described in glorious detail.

Throughout Scripture, Jesus Christ is affirmed to be the King of kings. God has placed the government of everything upon His shoulder. The book of Revelation shows HOW that government is being

executed. Amidst persecution, delusion, and tumult, the will of the Lord is being done! Nothing is out from under His control. Get that message, and you will have received what God intended by this book. Believe it, and you will be sustained by the marvelous truth it confirms to us, namely that the Lord, He is King!

Word Of Truth Ministries, Associated Presents

The Study on the Book of

# The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

By: Given O. Blakely

Lesson 2

## THE GLORIFIED CHRIST SPEAKS

### INTRODUCTION

The book before us is *“the revelation of Jesus Christ,”* sent to His churches by the hands of John the beloved. It reflects the heart of the Lord, Who is the *“Head over all things for the church”* (Eph 1:22). This is not a book of novelties, written to awaken the curiosity of men, or to entertain those enamored of fantasy. Rather, in this volume we are exposed to the manner in which the Lord of all is reigning. His is not a coercive reign, although He is fully able to forcibly subdue His enemies in an instant. Indeed, He will do this in the *“last day.”* Now, however, He rules to ensure the salvation of all living by faith. According to the *“eternal purpose”* of the Father, He is working *“all things”* together for the good of those who love God, and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

The rule of the Lord Jesus is ***“in the midst of His enemies”*** (Psa 110:2). Although, from the fleshly point of view, things may appear chaotic and out of control, that is not at all the case. The enemies of the Lord and His people do not have free reign, although it often appears as though they do. When the blood of the saints is shed, the approach to God corrupted, and a false church dominates, things can seem hopeless--but they are not. The reign of Jesus is being meticulously executed for the glory of God. It is currently seen in the preservation of all who put their trust in Him. It will ultimately be displayed in the complete overthrow of His enemies with a mere word--***“the spirit of His mouth”*** (2 Thess 2:8).

Until His enemies are openly made His ***“footstool”*** (Heb 1:13; 10:13), the Lord Jesus informs His churches He knows their condition. They are to engage in zealous and consistent efforts to maintain their faith, resist the encroachments of the devil, and keep what they have received from Him. As wicked as the devil and his false prophets are, Jesus will not tolerate the rise of wickedness in His church. Though weak, they are to hold on their way, standing in the midst of adversity and corruption. To assist them in this effort, the Lord will unveil the future to His people. He will show them the nature of Satan’s opposition, its seeming effectiveness, and the sure outcome of it all.

In this revelation, the saints will be apprized of the futility of trying to understand the future apart from the Lord Jesus. He, and He alone, can unlock the mysteries of Divine purpose, and clarify the execution of God’s will. It is He who has ***“prevailed,”*** and, consequently, Who sits upon the throne. He has not, nor will He ever, yield to our adversary, or abdicate His place of universal authority. From on high, He will lead His people all the way to glory, bringing ***“many sons to glory”*** (Heb 2:10). The path will lead through treacherous terrain, through deserts, and through fiery trials. But we are to believe and understand that He will ***“cause us to triumph”*** in every circumstance and difficulty (2 Cor 2:14).

Those who imagine earthly prosperity and well being are the pinnacle of blessing do greatly err. This was the state of the rich man, son of Abraham, whom, Jesus said, went to hell when he died (Luke 16:19,22). Of old time, there were saints, living by faith, who ***“were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy.”*** ***It is said of these holy ones, “They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”*** (Heb 11:37-38). Who would dare to declare those believers deficient in faith!

Yet, some will affirm that, because these lived prior to the ***“day of salvation,”*** they did not have access to the blessings of prosperity and dominance. This, again, betrays a fundamental ignorance of the nature of both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the one that promised physical blessing and prosperity (Deut 28:1-13). Exclusion from these promises was declared as the result of disobedience (Deut 28:14-68). Yet, we are told the grievous circumstances of those who lived by faith, and were not disobedient to the Word of the Lord. Job not only prospered and enjoyed the blessing of God, he also lost all that he had, and endured great grief and pain. Joseph not only sat upon the throne, but also languished in prison. Moses not only received the Law and led the people of God, but lived in solitude on the back side of the desert. The Almighty God was Ruler in all the extremes of human experience!

Those in Christ Jesus also experience the extremities of both hardship and blessing. They pass through things that, because of the reigning Christ, are incapable of separating them from the love of God. As it is written, ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘or Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these***

*things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rom 8:35-37). This perspective would be meaningless were there no tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword! The Sovereign Christ is bringing His people to glory through these experiences, not in exclusion of them. That is the manner of His reign. **This is the truth that will be portrayed in this book!**

The true nature of spiritual life is scarcely known in the professed church. The common views of salvation are grossly deficient, leading people to the conclusion that the elimination of trouble and hardship in this world is primary. This is not the truth. Rather, it is in sharp conflict with the truth of the matter. Because we are being oriented for another world, we ought not expect freedom from difficulties in this one. Jesus will take us through floods and fire on the way to glory.

## WRITING AS A COMPANION

When John addresses the church, he does not do so as an Apostle--although he was one of the primary ones. Nor, indeed, does he speak as one placed over them in the Lord--although he was a heavenly prince. He does not remind that he was the *“disciple whom Jesus loved”*--although he was precisely that (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). The capacity in which he addresses the churches confirms the nature of the Kingdom of God! If the Holy Spirit Himself is known as a *“Helper”* (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7; Rom 8:26, NKJV), what more notable work than that of giving advantage to the people of God!

### Your Brother

*“I, John, both your brother and companion . . . ”* There is no closer relationship in Christ Jesus, than that of a *“brother and*

*companion.*” It transcends that of a teacher and a disciple. It is greater than an earthly king and his subjects. This puts the writer along the side of those engaged in the good fight of faith. He does not speak to them as one dwelling high above them, or as one buried beneath them. No! He is by their side! John is a *“brother”* by virtue of his identity with Christ! He is a *“companion”* because he is under the yoke with them. The holy Apostle places himself in the category of those identified as Christ’s *“brethren”* (Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11-12,17). He addresses them as one being brought to glory, and being conformed to the image of God’s Son!

### Tribulation of Jesus Christ

*“ . . . and companion in the tribulation . . . ”* It is one thing to talk about tribulation, it is quite another to be in it! John does not write from a flowery bed of ease to those in the crucible of conflict! He writes as one entering into the Kingdom *“through much tribulation”* (Acts 14:22). With the suffering ones, like a camel going through the eye of a needle, he too was entering into the glorious reign of Jesus! As it is written, *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all”* (Psa 34:19). There are no troubles from which the elect are not delivered.

Still, they are more than mere afflictions, or unusual difficulties. These are a residue of sufferings, left behind by the Lord Jesus for His church. As it is written, *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister . . . ”* (Col 1:24-25). These are not meritorious sufferings, nor an appointed means for the expiation of sins. This is a suffering of fellowship--one in which unparalleled intimacy with the Lord Jesus is realized. In Christ, we participate in the good will of God, experiencing Divine acceptance, as did the Son Himself. Yet that is not all. We also experience the rejection of this world--obtaining a first-hand knowledge of the other-worldly nature of Kingdom life.

John is writing from the perspective of a sufferer: one who has ***“suffered for righteousness sake”*** (Matt 5:10-12). God has given him a word for oppressed believers, and he will declare it with power. He will see suffering as transient, and the activity of our opponents as temporary. Ultimate blessing will be affirmed for the faithful, and final separation for the fearful and unbelieving. He writes as a fellow-sufferer!

### **Kingdom of Jesus Christ**

***“ . . . companion in the . . . kingdom . . . ”*** The flesh cannot conceive of being a companion in a Kingdom, while experiencing persecution and rejection on a barren Isle in the Aegean Sea. But such is the ***“Kingdom of Jesus Christ.”*** Like all saints, John had been ***“translated into the Kingdom of”*** God’s ***“dear Son”*** (Col 1:13). John will write like a Kingdom-man. He will see things from a heavenly perspective, and address the difficulties of the saints from Christ’s vantage point. He will not look at the flaws of the church as a mere critic, but as a member of the Kingdom of God. Nor, indeed, will he look at the ravages of Satan as a natural man. He writes as a companion in the Kingdom and one in the tribulation. He will see Satan as an enemy fighting a losing battle. He will declare the church as ultimately triumphant, and will summon the saints to drink of the water of life.

### **Patience of Jesus Christ**

***“ . . . companion in the . . . patience of Jesus Christ . . . ”*** This is ***“patience endurance,”*** and not mere tolerance. It is keeping the faith under duress, and making progress in difficulty. This is the nature of spiritual life--life in Christ Jesus. Those who ***“eat”*** Christ’s flesh and ***“drink”*** His blood (John 6:53-57) become capable of enduring the world’s worst, and receiving heaven’s best. As Christ ***“endured”*** even the cross, despising the shame (Heb 12:2), so those who walk with Him are empowered to keep the faith while enduring a ***“great fight of***

*afflictions*” (Heb 10:32). John writes as one experiencing this sustaining power, urging the saints to participate in the same.

It is interesting to note that this book has been a great consolation to those in the crucible of suffering. Historians tell us believers in tribulation especially love this book. By way of comparison, the church of Asia, particularly after the prosperous time of Constantine, had a low opinion of this volume. The African church, by comparison, which was more subject to persecution, highly esteemed it. Ah, effective work of tribulation, that ushers the saint into the blessed room of consolation and good hope. Here is something of which those who brag of their well being, have very little knowledge! Tribulation has a Divinely assigned objective, and is governed by Christ Jesus Himself.

## THE SETTING

John does not hide his circumstance from us. Indeed, he has no cause for shame. Admittedly, this is not a book to be written by someone in the lap of prosperity, experiencing popularity and well being! Of course, we have very few books of Scripture give under such circumstances. That condition alone should alert us to the danger of embracing a frothy and surface view of salvation which has God’s people publically dominating every circumstance.

### On the Island

*“ . . . I, John . . . was on the island that is called Patmos . . . ”* Patmos has become significant to us because of this book. However, it was not so with those of John’s day. Note, he does not say *“in Patmos,”* as Luke would say *“to Cyprus”* (Acts 13:4). He says *“in the isle that is called Patmos.”* Those knowing of this location tell us it was a small island, mountainous and almost barren. The whole island was about 30

miles in circumference, and was a politically suitable place for banishment from society--a practice common in that day.

How blessed to know that heaven was brought nearer to John as the world was thrust farther from him. To the degree, because of our faith, the world rejects us, we are drawn more close to the bosom of the Father. Those who live in the wake of human acceptance, do not ordinarily receive unusual benefits from God. That accounts for the revelation given to John on Patmos, the insights granted Paul in Arabia, and the writing of a number of the Pauline epistles from prison. The Law was given in the wilderness of Sinai, Moses received his commission at a burning bush on a mountain of separation, and John the Baptist prepared for his unique ministry in the wilderness. A lack of social contact by no means restricts one from hearing from God! It was in exile that Jacob encountered God at Bethel (Gen 35:6-15). In exile Moses confronted God at the burning bush (Ex 3:2-5). Elijah was in exile when he heard God's "*still small voice*" (1 Kgs 19:11-13). And, in exile by the river Chebar, Ezekiel saw "*the likeness of the glory of God*" (Ezek 1:1-28). Who but God can bring such blessed things to those in such unpleasant circumstances!

### **On Account of the Word Of God and Testimony of Jesus**

*" . . . I, John . . . was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."* John does not hide from us the reason for his presence on the desolate isle of Patmos. He was there because of what he had said-- "*on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*" (RSV). Here we see the basic enmity of this world against God. John was not exiled because of abusing his fellow man, crusading against the government, or refusing to pay his taxes. Rather, it was because he had conveyed to men the words of Almighty God. He had openly proclaimed the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of lost humanity.

Some have concluded John meant he was on Patmos TO RECEIVE the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. While I do not question there is a sense in which this was true, the fact that he was a companion in tribulation seems to point to his **exile** as the cause to which John points. From the higher view, God now turns this curse into a blessing. The Sovereignty of God and His Christ are seen in the ease with which this message is communicated to John. The worst that the world can heap upon the saints cannot stop the flood-tide of heaven! If men are thrust from society, and placed in a desolate place, still they can receive gracious ministrations from the Lord. Many of us can confirm that such occasions have often proved superior in both content and benefit to things learned in relatively peaceful times.

Prior to this, what John had received, he had faithfully proclaimed. Now, the world takes his freedom from him, showing their enmity against the King of kings. Because of his faithfulness, and in fulfillment of His Word, the Lord now gives John ***“more.”*** As it is written, ***“For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance . . . ”*** (Matt 13:12). As the eyes of the Lord scanned ***“throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His”*** (2 Chron 16:9), they found faithful John. Here was a trustworthy servant to whom the vision of the ages could be committed! He was not young, nor was he free — but he could be trusted with the message! It was with John as with Abraham. ***“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,”*** declared the Lord (Gen 18:17). Just as Jesus divulged to John who would betray Him (John 13:23-26), now He opens to the same Apostle His message for the churches, the nature of His reign, and the outcome of human history.

### **In the Spirit**

***“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day . . . ”*** This is a marvelous expression, showing the power of faith, and the recognition of godly recollection in heaven. Because I am taking the position that the phrase ***“Lord's Day”*** refers to the first day of the week, the

following review has been developed. It is not intended to be the cause of variance, but to show that the view is not a strange one, but has been the commonly accepted view throughout history. I will show that there is good reason for this conclusion.

Although the perception of this passage, from the first century, has been that it is a reference to the first day of the week, some have chosen to view this from a different perspective. Certain interpreters of the text believe this means John was *“in the Spirit”* on the day the Lord spoke to him. *“The Lord’s day”* would, in this case, mean the day the Lord made the revelation known to John. The difficulty with this view is that it does not recognize John as being *“in the Spirit”* PRIOR to the revelation, as the text plainly states. The voice of the Lord did not speak to him until AFTER John was *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”*

Others, perceive no distinction in days whatsoever, basing their opinion on Romans 14:5-6. *“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.”* However, this particular text is speaking of distinctions specified under the Law, not of a general perception of days. A discrimination of meats and days belonged to the Old Covenant. Still, many converted Jews continued to honor those days, and maintained the view of meats specified in the Law (Lev 11:1-17; 20:25; Acts 10:14; Gal 4:9-20; Col 2:16-17). The point of this text is not the recognition of the first day of the week.

The *“First day of the week”* is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and always with a note of approval. This is specifically said to be the time when Jesus rose from the dead. *“Now when He rose early on the first day of the week . . .”* (Mark 16:9). This is also the day on which Jesus, following His resurrection, first appeared to His

disciples. ***“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’”*** (John 20:19). It is also the day on which He appeared the second time to His disciples. John refers to it as eight days following the first appearance, which would put it on the first day of the week. ***“And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’”*** (John 20:26).

In addition, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. This feast took place 50 days after the high Sabbath of the paschal week (Lev 23:15-16). The Sabbath from which the count was made occurred the day after Jesus was crucified, and was the reason why His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:31; Mark 15:42). It was also the Sabbath honored by the women who came to anoint Jesus’ body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54-56). Fifty days from that Sabbath day was the first day of the week--the Day of Pentecost, on which the Spirit was poured forth.

We are categorically told that the early disciples came together to break bread ***“on the first day of the week”*** (Acts 20:7). When instructing the Corinthians on setting aside special monies for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul specified that it be done on ***“the first day of the week”*** (1 Cor 16:2). As the church progressed, from Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) onwards, we *“have a complete chain of evidence that The Lord’s Day became the regular Christian name for the first day of the week.”*

1:

. Randall, Pulpit Commentary

Suffice it to say, there is solid ground for perceiving as

***“the Lord’s Day”*** the first day of the week. This was the day on which natural light was created (Gen 1:3-5). It was the day on which Christ Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). His two recorded appearances to His disciples occurred on this day (John 20:19,26). The day of Pentecost took place on this day (Lev 23:15-16), and the early church is said to have gathered together on the ***“first day of the week”*** (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). This is not simply *another day*! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul.

Though exiled from society, and away from his brethren, John was ***“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”*** The day was too laden with sacred memories for him to be otherwise. If David, in his exile, could recall the house of God with joy (Psa 84:3-4), how much more could John recall the blessed of the events associated with the first day of the week. He was in a state of spiritual ecstasy, or spiritual elation. His heart and mind were filled with the good things of God, the flesh was subdued, and he was dominated by the consideration of heavenly things. He was in a frame of spirit to receive from God!

A word is in order concerning the advantage of being in the proper frame of mind on the Lord’s day. Over the years, I have observed a pitiful lack of this in the churches. Too many people come to the assembly ***“in the flesh”*** instead of ***“in the Spirit.”*** Their minds are not obsessed with the consideration of the things of God. Their attention too often seems to be fixed on the passing things of ***“this present evil world.”*** The highest that some people appear able to get, is to think of someone sick that needs our prayers. But they are not thinking of God, Christ, the benefits of the New covenant, or the glories of the world to come. The ***“exceeding great and precious promises”*** (2 Pet 1:4) are not prominent in their thinking. The consideration of Christ’s return does not seem to have a place. Their speech is too earthy, and their ears are too dull. Is it any wonder they are not able to receive from God? Until this general condition is changed, *church meetings* will yield little benefit to anyone. Until our

spirits are tuned to hear, communication from Him will seem little more than thunder (John 12:29).

But it was not so with John! His heart was filled with considerations of a resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Savior. He knew the world had been reconciled to God, and the door of heaven had been opened! He was banished from men, but had access to God. He was on a desolate island, yet companied with a vast assembly in heavenly places. The rocky isle of Patmos did not restrict his spirit! Though surrounded by a murky sea, he was free to drink from the river of the water of life freely. **He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.** His sufferings were great, but his blessings were greater! Domitian had passed judgment against him, but God was for him! **He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day!**

### **I Heard a Loud Voice Behind Me, Like A Trumpet**

While John is in deep meditation, his cogitations are suddenly interrupted! He hears a ***“loud voice,”*** like the blast of a mighty trumpet! Every wandering thought is summoned to the center of his consideration, as he is ushered into the realm of Divine contemplation. There is a solemnity on this occasion that transcends all purely earthly experience. The crashing waves of the sea can be heard no longer. The circumstances in which he finds himself recede into the background as though absolutely insignificant. He again hears the voice that once stilled the tempest and quieted the raging sea--but now it has greater power than was ever heard on the sea or shores of Galilee!

It is no low muttering voice that John hears, but one that is ***“loud.”*** It is a voice like that described by the Psalmist. ***“The voice of the LORD is over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The LORD is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; The voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes***

*them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness ; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, And strips the forests bare ; And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"* (Psa 29:1-9). Nature bows prostrate before the “*Voice*,” as the Sovereign of the universe speaks to the exiled Apostle and prophet.

The voice was “*as a trumpet*,” laden with significance, relevance, and supremacy. Of old time, the trumpet had often been connected with the Lord. It was associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai (Ex 19:6). Festivals instituted under the Old Covenant were inaugurated with trumpets (Num 10:10). The Davidic prophecy of the ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven mentions “*the sound of a trumpet*” (Psa 47:5). Also, the Lord shall descend from heaven accompanied by the sound of a trumpet (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). What John heard was not merely a piercing sound, but a heavenly alert to what he was about to hear! The message would be more significant than the giving of the Sinaitic Law. It would have more gravity than the feasts observed by the ancient people. He was about to hear words that would be the objects of contemplation for centuries to come! These words would define the real *King* , the real *enemy* , the real *battle* , and the real *outcome* .

## THE COMMISSION IS GIVEN

The words uttered to John are those of the King! They are arresting words, drawing attention to the Person and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not take for granted that John knows Him, but draws immediate attention to His Person and position in the Divine economy.

## Alpha, Omega,

## First, and Last

***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last . . . ”***

Jesus introduced Himself earlier by saying, ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”*** (verse 8). The point of the reference is to define the locus, or center, of Kingdom activity. Everything is managed from the Throne of all power. Absolutely nothing is initiated or concluded without the direct involvement of the King of kings and Lord of lords! Nothing can begin independently of Him! Because of this situation, in the end, ALL ***“glory and honor and power”*** will go to Him (Rev 4:11; 5:13).

## What You See, Write In A Book

***“What you see, write in a book . . . ”*** Solomon once said, ***“Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh”*** (Eccl 12:12). Those words, however, have no application to THIS book! Solomon spoke of the books of men--books that contained human philosophies and observations. Revelation is not such a book! John was not commissioned to write his THOUGHTS about what he saw, but what he would see! Mind you--not what He heard, but what he SAW! This places Revelation in another category! **This is a message visualized!**

No less than **36 times** , John records, ***“I SAW!”*** (Rev 1:12; 1:17; 4:4; 5:1; 5:2; 6:1; 6:9; 7:1; 7:2; 8:2; 9:1; 9:17; 10:1; 10:5; 13:1; 13:2; 13:3; 13:11; 14:6; 15:1; 15:2; 16:13; 17:3; 17:6; 18:1; 19:11; 19:17; 19:19; 20:1; 20:4; 20:11; 20:12; 21:1; 21:22).

The extent of the vision of Divine working is staggering. John sees the glorified Christ, personalities around the Throne of God, the workings of God in a book, a strong angel, the Lamb opening the future,

and the souls of those slain for their testimony.

The aged prophet is shown four angels controlling the affairs of the world, the commission to protect those with the Divine seal upon them, seven angels with seven trumpets of judgment, and the opening of the bottomless pit. John beheld horses with their riders working awesome judgments in the earth, a mighty angel loosing seven awesome thunders, and also announcing the conclusion of all things.

How extensive the vision given to John! He saw a beast rise with great authority, the nature of that beast, and its setback and resurgence. The beloved Prophet sees another beast with a less abusive appearance, a flying angel with the everlasting Gospel for all the world, and a great and marvelous sign in heaven of seven last plagues. He saw those who overcame all wicked opponents, a Satanic initiative to deceive the world, and a blasphemous woman parading as the bride of Christ. How extensive the vision!

John saw a religious entity drunk with the blood of the saints, the announcement of the fall of spiritual Babylon, and the smiting of the nations by the glorified Christ. He saw the judgment of God upon His enemies, the resistance of wicked forces, the binding of Satan, and the reign of the saints of God. John was given to see the Throne of judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of small and great, a new heaven and a new earth, and the eternal bliss of the saved!

It is difficult to imagine such an extensive vision! What is the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2) to John's vision? How does Jacob's vision (Gen 28:12) compare with it? Or the "**visions of God**" seen by Ezekiel (1:1; 8:3; 40:2)? Holy men had received visions previous to this, including *Abraham* (Gen 15:1), *Nathan* (1 Chron 17:15), *Isaiah* (2 Chron 32:32; *Isa 1:1*), *Daniel* (Dan 2:19), *Obadiah* (Obadiah 1:1),

*Nahum* (Nah 1:1), and *Habakkuk* (Hab 2:2-3). But their visions are not to be compared with that of John on the Isle of Patmos. They were shown segments of history, portions of the Divine working, and insight into a fragment of God's purpose. John, however, is caught up high, where an overview of God's "*eternal purpose*" is provided.

**God shows John that both causes and outcomes are under the control of His Christ!** This is a message that the churches must hear! **John must write what he SEES!** The people of God must not be deceived by circumstance, and thus led to erroneous conclusions! **John must write what he SEES!** Saints must see their opponents from the Divine perspective! **John must write what he SEES!** Believers' view of the reigning Christ must be correct! **John must write what he SEES!**

This book is not written for novel reading! It is not intended to be the catalyst for the development of new theologies! There is a message to be found here, and it is essential for our triumph in this world. This is a vision, not a set of laws! It is something seen, not a dialog. That means we are dealing with an overview. Specifics are involved, but they are not the point! If we comprehend what John SAW, we will begin with Christ (1:1), and end with Him (22:20). We will start with a blessing (1:3), and conclude with one also (22:21). History will not be perceived as the triumph of Satan. Rather, it will be perceived as a record of the meticulous overthrow of him and all of his wicked devices! We will see that both God and Satan use means.

### **The Seven Churches**

*“ . . . send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”* We see the heart of Jesus in this text! He does not send the vision to the governors to convict them, but to the churches to awaken and comfort them! The message is not sent to the

enemies of the church to tell them of their soon demise, but to the churches to inform them of coming victory! **Times of oppression call for a message to the churches!** *Periods of spiritual decline require a message for the churches!* Let those who deride an emphasis upon a message for the saints bow before Jesus! He has a message for the churches! The vision He gives to John is not for the world. It is not a message of evangelism, or a mandate to influence the lost. The vision pertains to the churches . . . flawed ones, struggling ones, and commendable ones. But why is it sent to ***“the seven churches which are in Asia”***?

### **A Practical Point of View**

From a practical point of view, these are no doubt churches John himself had visited. The order in which they are listed reflects a circuit, starting with Ephesus, the metropolis. Then the costal city of Smyrna, followed by the inland cities (Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea), and ending at Ephesus. Church history affirms John to have been a leader at the church at Ephesus, which would have given him a personal, as well as a commissioned, interest in it and the other churches.

### **From the Standpoint of Need**

We will find from Christ’s word that these very real churches required a word from Him. As the Good Shepherd, He would not let their condition continue without a word from Him. For some, spiritually disarming conditions had formed, requiring a stern word of warning. Some were allowing the enemy to infiltrate their ranks, and needed to be awakened to vigilance. Still others were oppressed, and demanded a word of comfort from their King. While this book speaks to every generation, it spoke specifically to the needs of the ***“seven churches in Asia.”*** The King is addressing His subjects.

## A Spiritual Perspective

The breadth of spiritual experience reflected in these seven churches is challenging. You will find it difficult to identify a spiritual condition that is not covered in the description of these churches. Because of this, throughout the ages, this message has maintained its relevance. Think of the conditions described in these churches. **(1)** Punctilious approaches to life in Christ without a love for Christ (2:1-4). **(2)** Oppression for Christ's sake, and a lack of recognition in the world (2:9). **(3)** In the heart of Satanic influence and, consequently, embracing a worldly point of view (2:13-14). **(4)** Unusual activity for God, yet a tolerance of false and debilitating doctrine (2:19-20). **(5)** Appearing to be flourishing and godly, yet dead toward God (3:1-2). **(6)** Keeping the faith under duress, and ready to be used by Christ (3:8). **(7)** Spiritually indifferent, yet unusually prosperous in religion, while reprehensible to the Lord Jesus (3:15-17).

## A Picture of Church Ages or Periods

Some feel as though these churches are representative of seven church ages. These are seen as consecutive, leading to the consummation of the ages. They would include Orthodoxy, Oppression, Compromise, Ungodly Tolerance, Dead Religion, Faithfulness, and Lukewarmness. Without going into this further, it is possible to show a remarkable parallel to these stages in church history.

## JOHN SEES THE VOICE

John is *“in the Spirit on the Lord's day,”* and thus does not faint at the sound of the *“loud voice.”* His spirit is already tuned to the heavenly frequency. Because he is more at home with God than with men, He turned *“to see the voice that spoke with”* him.

John is now given a glimpse into the domain of the spirit! In beautiful language, one has said, *“Though the eagle is reported to have a keen and far-reaching eye, and has borne its pinions into the region of sunny azure, it has had no glimpse of the spirit-domain; whereas a man who may be even sightless and deaf has the power of seeing wonderful things and hearing wonderful things.”*

2:

Revelation

D. Thomas, Pulpit Commentary,

## Seven Golden Lamp stands

Here is an arresting sight! The first thing John sees . . . ***“seven golden lamp stands!*** (candlesticks, KJV) ” Later, these will be defined by the glorified Christ Himself: ***“the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches”*** (Verse 20). The ***“churches,”*** as the ***“pillar and ground of the truth”*** (1 Tim 3:15), are the first thing John sees. He is writing a message to them, and therefore is confronted with them. From a practical point of view, if Jesus is to be seen, it will be in His people! It is there that His nature and character have been distributed, each member being ***“given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ”*** (Eph 4:7). Although men may despise the church, yet Jesus ***“loved the church, and gave Himself for it”*** (Eph 5:25). God does not consider Jesus in separation from His church, and neither can we! The people of God have been ***“joined to the Lord”*** (1 Cor 6:17). That is why John could be confronted with such a site when he ***“turned to see the voice”*** speaking to him.. Let those who despise ***“the churches”*** take note of the vision! He has a particular interest in particular churches. In this case, seven of them in a specific geographical area!

The depiction of ***“the seven churches”*** is arresting! He does not behold candles, but ***lamp stands*** --something that holds, or contains, the light. He does not see a single lamp stand with seven lamps, as in

the tabernacle, but seven independent lamp stands--each one established to give light. And, they are not merely lamp stands, but **golden** lamp stands. They are a valuable source of spiritual light--an appointed conduit of illumination! Like their Lord, they shine **“in the darkness”** (John 1:5). These seven golden lamp stands reflect the nature of the New Covenant. There is more liberty and individuality than existed under the Old Covenant. There, the tribes (a parallel to **“the churches”**) were sanctified by their identity with the group.

The light provided by the churches is not their own--that is why they are called **lamp stands**. The light they have is from the Lord, who commands the light to shine into the hearts of the regenerate (2 Cor 4:6). Churches, like individuals, are sources of spiritual illumination to those about them. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, **“now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”** (Eph 5:8). The Philippians were also told, **“you shine as lights in the world”** (Phil 2:15). Individual congregations, like those of Asia, are sources of spiritual light. They are part of a vast body of saints who are custodians of the truth of God.

Jesus will address the churches in their ordained capacity. He will not speak to them as social reformers, champions of the family, or those who correct political disorders. They have been chosen **“out of the world”** (John 15:19; 17:6,15). In a real and unique sense they **“are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Pet 2:9). They will be measured by the Lord in association with that distinction.

### **One In the Midst of Seven Golden Lamp stands**

**“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man . . . ”** John’s attention does not rest upon the golden lamp stands--the churches. He is drawn to the One around Whom they are gathered. The message is to them, but the center of attention is the One

Who sends the message. John is seeing the reality of the case. There is **One** in the *“midst”* of the churches! This dominating One appears as *“the Son of Man.”* Though glorified, He retains His identity with humanity. It is necessary that He do so, for He is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). Too, we are being conformed to His image in order to eternal fellowship with Him (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3). He became one of us, that we might be joined to Him and the Father (John 17:20-21). Jesus sends a message to the churches from this perspective--as He who stands in the midst of the churches: the One to Whom they are to hearken, and into Whose image they are being conformed.

As we progress in this section of the Book, we will find some of the churches were unaware of this situation. They were not conducting themselves in an acute awareness of the One in their midst! However, the message will be given in view of the **real** situation, whether the churches are aware of it or not. Whatever may be said of accommodation, it must be noted that we are obliged to conform ourselves to the truth, rather than seeking to accommodate the truth to the fickle notions of men. That is how Jesus made Himself known to John. He first provided the proper perspective, then gave the message!

Under the Law, God made provision in the tabernacle to *“dwell among”* the people (Ex 25:8). That, however, was a typical dwelling, a mere shadow of the substantive indwelling accomplished in the New Covenant. In Christ, both the Father and the Son dwell within the sanctified (John 14:23). Here, however, the glorified Son is seen in the middle of *“the churches.”* He is their appointed Focus, Shepherd, and Provider. He is in the *“midst”* of them, even as He promised He would be among those gathering together in His name (Matt 18:20). He is among the churches to feed and direct, and to even orchestrate their labors with Him. It is a tragedy of our time that this is too little known among the churches. I would venture to say that few, indeed, have taken the time to ponder Jesus dwelling in the midst the churches of our town, as He did among those of Asia. But we are obliged to consider this fact, for it is how Jesus has revealed Himself. It is how He is to be

known--One who stands in the midst of His churches! He is their rallying Point, Source, and Vision. They are only as strong as their awareness of Him. The brightness of their light is in direct proportion to their cognizance of His dominating Presence!

### **Clothed With A Garment, Down to the Feet**

*“ . . . clothed with a garment down to the foot . . . ”* We have been introduced to such a garment in Scripture. When, for example, Aaron appeared before the Lord, he was to wear *“the robe of the ephod,”* with *“pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about”* (Ex 28:30-35). John is beholding the glorified Son in a High Priestly vestment, typified in the Aaronic priesthood. He appears before the Father in behalf of the redeemed, representing them and ministering to them.

The glorified Christ is a regal High Priest! He is Moses the Lawgiver/prophet, Aaron the High Priest, and David the King all in One! He rules over the enemies of the churches. He speaks to the churches. He dispenses heavenly manna to them! This is the capacity in which He speaks to the churches. It is He who blesses the people in God’s name, and stands as their Representative before the Father.

### **Girded About the Chest With A Golden Band**

*“ . . . and girt about the paps with a golden girdle . . . ”* The value of Christ’s indispensable ministry is seen in the golden band that encircles His High Priestly robe. Daniel saw a similar vision in his time. *“I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude”* (Dan 10:5-6). This is a vision of the heavenly Communicator, whose communication is more

valuable than gold!

Under the law, the high priest had a girdle around the the ephod, which was made of gold, of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen (Ex 28:8). How vastly inferior to the band of GOLD worn by the Lord. This is a depiction of the superiority of His priesthood to everything before it. There is no aspect of His ministry that is not precious and valuable!

There is another facet of His High Priestly office that should be noted. While it is His current work, it is not an exhausting work like that of the old priesthood. This is seen in Ezekiel's rather vivid description of priestly attire. ***“They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat ”*** (Ezek 44:18). Our Lord reigns in regal splendor, with unabated strength. There is no dissipation in any form associated with is ministry--no ***“sweat,”*** so to speak! He needs no one to hold up His arms as did Moses (Ex 17:12).

### **Head and Hair White As Wool/Snow**

***“ . . . His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow . . . ”*** The vision again parallels that of Daniel: ***“ . . . and the hair of His head like the pure wool ”*** (Dan 7:9). These are the attributes of One who has been glorified. Peter, James, and John were introduced to this view when Jesus was transfigured before them (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36). That occasion was but a faint glimmer of what John now sees. The glow of the transfigured Christ faded, and was never seen by the other nine disciples. But the glory John now beholds will never fade.

This is not only a picture of Christ's purity, but of the maturity of His glorified Manhood. Remember, this is the ***“Son of man.”*** But it

is the glorified ***“Man, Christ Jesus”*** (1 Tim 2:5). He entered into the defiled realm, living out the prime of life amidst corruption and deterioration. However, He now glorified, retaining His spotless purity.

He is also characterized by wisdom and prudence, as depicted by the whiteness of His hair. We are apprized that the ***“treasures of wisdom and knowledge”*** are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). There is no aspect of the Kingdom, no promise, no directive, no resource, that is not made available in Him! It is because of His ministry that believers can ***be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”*** (Col 1:9).

In the Lord, antiquity and glory are brought together for the support of the saints. ***“Antiquity”*** speaks of His tenure in the world, when He was tempted in all points like as we are. Thus was He qualified to carry us victoriously through temptation in our pilgrimage to glory. ***“Glory”*** speaks of the total absence of conflict and struggle, and the removal of every form of inferiority. Jesus speaks to the churches as the Resource of all wisdom and knowledge. He presents Himself in all of His purity and excellence, summoning them to come up higher, where salvation has qualified them to dwell.

### **Eyes Like A Flame of Fire**

***“ . . . and His eyes were as a flame of fire . . . ”*** Twice more in the vision, the Lord Jesus will identify Himself as the One with ***“eyes as a flame of fire”*** (2:19; 19:12). The prophet Daniel also saw a ***“a man”*** and declared ***“his eyes like torches of fire”*** (Dan 10:6). What is the meaning of the description?

Two of the unique properties of fire are heat and light, warmth and illumination. This nonpareil description declares **Christ’s awareness of his church in the world**. Remember, this message is to

the churches, making them aware of the heavenly assessment of their situation, and alerting them to the Divine manner and agenda. Christ not only sees His people, the sight is exact and thorough. The churches are to live with an acute awareness that ***“all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”*** (Heb 4:13). His vision is penetrating, even discerning the ***“thoughts and intents of the heart”*** (Heb 4:12-13). The facade of human pretension gives way to the burning vision of Jesus! For those who are receptive and committed to Him, however, the consciousness that Christ Jesus sees all brings the warmth of consolation and comfort.

The Lord’s flaming eyes of fire will threaten the indolent and lukewarm. They will strike fear into the hearts of the complacent and those tolerant of defective teaching. However, those same eyes will bolster the confidence of those involved in the good fight of faith. To saints whose strength is nearly gone, they will produce a resurgence of confidence and spiritual energy. Jesus speaks to the churches as the One who sees all, rebuking or comforting as is appropriate. He knows all of the circumstances in which His people are found. If He can get our attention, those eyes like a flame of fire will guide us safely to the heavenly harbor (Psa 32:8).

### **Feet Like Fine Brass**

***“And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace . . . ”*** ***“Fine”*** or ***“burnished”*** (NASB, RSV) brass is highly polished and unusually precious. Authorities on the subject say it was a compound of copper and gold and silver.

3:

Robertson’s Word Pictures.

I cannot but comment on the difference between this description and that of Nebuchadnezzar’s image. You may recall the impressive image of the king’s dream had ***“feet partly of iron and partly of clay”*** (Dan 2:33). That vision denoted the weakness and vulnerability of the best of earthly kingdoms. However, King Jesus is seen from quite another

perspective. His feet are characterized by beauty, permanence, and strength. His feet will finally trample all foes, openly and decisively (1 Cor 15:25-27; Psa 2:6-9; 45:3-6; Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; Eph 1:22; Heb 1:13; 10:12-13).

Our Lord shall publically bring to a conclusion all of His enemies. Those who have trampled on the church will be trampled by Him! He will do so as the glorified ***“Man, Christ Jesus”*** (1 Tim 2:5) Who has passed through the fiery trials of this world. He confronted the devil in all of his subtlety and craftiness, and put him to flight. He has grappled with unparalleled temptation and remained ***“without sin”*** (Heb 4:15). He endured the curse of God, Divine abandonment, and the drinking of the dreadful cup of man’s iniquity.

Jesus speaks to the churches as One who has survived the worst and attained the best. He addresses them as the One under whose feet all enemies will be subdued. He once tread the winepress of the wrath of God alone, bearing the sins of the world (Isa 63:3). He shall yet trample ***“the vine of the earth”*** into eternal oblivion in the ***“great winepress of the wrath of God”*** (Rev 14:18-19). The churches do well to listen to Him!

## **Voice Like the Sound of Many Waters**

***“ . . . and His voice as the sound of many waters . . . ”*** John is on the Isle of Patmos, surrounded by the Aegean Sea. The term ***“many waters”*** speaks of tumultuous cataracts, or mighty waterfalls. This compares with the noise of the Aegean Sea that surrounded Patmos. Those surging waters spoke of opposition, trouble, and isolation. But they were drowned out by the voice of Jesus! The comparison of the Lord’s voice to ***“many waters”*** speaks of His word dominating over all competing interests. The Psalmist spoke of it this way, ***“The LORD on***

*high is mightier Than the noise of many waters, Than the mighty waves of the sea. Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever”* (Psa 93:4-5).

This also speaks of the directness of the message--it is coming from heaven to the sons of men! Ezekiel provided the language for this expression. *“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory”* ( Ezek 43:2). This is a majestic voice, wafting the heart and mind of the listener into heavenly realms. What Jesus has to say must be seen from the heavenly places, not the Isle of Patmos!

One small notation here, especially for those who deem it necessary to compare the truth of God with contemporary events. **There is little of the scenery of Patmos in this book!** The language employed comes from the Scriptures. The likenesses are served up in the language of Moses and the Prophets. Men should learn from this not to close their Bibles when they speak of heavenly things!

**Jesus speaks to the churches with dominating tone!** His voice is like that of a thunderous waterfall next to a mountain stream. If the church does not hear Him, it is not because He is not speaking! It is because they have become *“dull of hearing”* (Heb 5:11), or have *“uncircumcised ears”* (Acts 7:51).

### **Seven Stars In His Right Hand**

*“And He had in His right hand seven stars . . . ”* It is written, *“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches”* (1:20). These are the messengers to whom the *“book”* is to be sent, who are responsible for making it known (2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,1,7,14). Here is a verse that does not easily fit into traditional views of Christ and the

church. If the word “*angel*” is taken in the sense of a heavenly messenger, we have a most peculiar circumstance on our hands. We have God giving Jesus a message to give to an angel, to give to John, to give to another angel. We have frequent occasions in Scripture where angels brought messages to men. I do not know of any, however, where men brought messages to angels. I do not believe such an opinion can be upheld from any point of view.

It has been the stance of the church through history that these “*messengers*” were individual men who presided over the assemblies of reference. Some have considered them “*bishops*” of the churches. Others consider each “*angel*” to be the “*leading elder*” of the particular assembly.

I well know this does not constitute an infallible interpretation of the text. I am not at all inclined to trust in men for the meaning of God’s Word. However, I have shared this brief excerpt to confirm the view I have taken is not strange. The message was not sent to the elders of the churches, or the church board, or some other office in a hierarchal or political structure. Each message was sent to a “*messenger*” — one bearing a word! Those proclaiming the Word of God are set forth as preeminent in the body of Christ. This can be seen from the priority set forth in the gifts of the Spirit. “*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles , second prophets , third teachers , after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues*” (1 Cor 12:28). The book of Hebrews also affirms this to be the case. “*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you . . .*” (Heb 13:7). The word “*angel*” is used in this manner--i.e., of a human messenger. The Galatians received Paul as “*an angel of God*” (Gal 4:14). John the Baptist was called a “*messenger*” ( *aggelon* , *angelos*, Matt 11:10).

The messenger’s of the churches are in Christ’s hand. It is He

who uses them, and not them that use Him! They speak for Him. Now He gives them a word for those to whom they speak. For some, it will be a word of rebuke. For others, it will be a word of comfort. Still others will receive a word of challenge. Whatever you may think of this passage, it places a great responsibility upon those who speak to the churches. What they say must come from the Lord. It must be His message, not something contrived by mere men. Anywhere and everywhere men speak to the churches in Scripture, it is God-centered. The Lord Jesus Christ and His redemption are the dominant themes. The saints are addressed as those who are being oriented for glory. There is a perfect consistency in this matter. Whether it is James commenting on the acceptance of the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-21), Barnabas and Paul encouraging continuance in the faith (Acts 14:21-22), Apollos exhorting the disciples (Acts 18:27), or Paul addressing elders (Acts 20:17-28)--a word from the Lord was always given. All of the epistles reveal the same pattern, whether to individual congregations, clusters of them, or specific individuals like Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Gaius, or the elect lady. They were all used of Christ to bring a message to His people. That same procedure is seen in *“the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

### **Out of His Mouth, A Sharp Two Edged Sword**

*“ . . . and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword . . . ”*

This sword is mentioned again in the second chapter (2:12,16), and again in the nineteenth chapter (19:15,21). This is a reference to the Word of the Lord, which, like a *“sharp two-wedged sword,”* cuts and penetrates. This perspective of the Word is necessary for *“spiritual understanding.”* Jesus accomplishes His work with His word. *“The mouth of the Lord”* is to be held in utmost regard by the people of God! Spiritual life is sustained by every word that proceeds out of *“the mouth of Lord”* (Deut 8:3). Those who proceeded on their own wisdom are described as not seeking counsel from *“the mouth of the Lord”* (Josh 9:14). Disobedience was assessed as against *“the mouth of the Lord”* (1 Kgs 13:21). Jeremiah’s words are said to have come from *“the mouth of the Lord”* (2 Chron 36:12). The fulfillment of prophecy

is traced to the fact that it was spoken by *“the mouth of the Lord”* (Isa 1:20; 40:5). What the Lord says takes the precedence over everything else. There is nothing with which it can be compared.

A poignant view of the Word of the Lord is provided in Hebrews 4:12. It also associates that word with a sword. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb 4:12). The cutting action of the Word is spiritual. It is more operative than destructive. There is no issue to which Christ cannot effectively speak; no conflict His word cannot resolve. With His word He can illuminate His people or destroy His enemies.

Why does Jesus reveal Himself in this manner to the churches? It is because He is going to pronounce judgments concerning the churches. For some, they will be stern warnings to repent. For others, they will be a gentle word of comfort and encouragement. If they do not give heed to His word, He will come quickly *and “fight against them with the sword of My mouth”* (2:16). Penetrating words of both blessing and condemnation will be uttered. The churches do well to take them seriously. They are not to be diagnosed academically, or critiqued by self-appointed censors of the Word. They are to be heard and believed.

### **Countenance Like the Sun Shining in It’s Strength**

*“ . . . and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength . . . ”* This was the *“Sun of righteousness”* prophesied by Malachi (Mal 4:2). The Lord Jesus, in His exaltation, had risen to the zenith of His glory. God, because of the Son’s voluntary humiliation and obedient death, *“has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name”* (Phil 2:9). The fact that men cannot see Him in this state has nothing whatsoever to do with the situation. The

extent of Christ's exaltation cannot be overstated. God ***“raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”*** Everything has been put under His feet, and, in that exalted capacity, He has been given ***“to the church”*** (Eph 1:20-23).

This book is not about the future exaltation of Christ. He has already been exalted. God will ***“show,”*** or manifest Him openly in the last day. The Lord Jesus will, however, be manifested in the capacity He currently occupies; ***“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power”*** (1 Tim 6:15-16). John now sees Jesus as He already is, not as He shall be!

### **John's Reaction**

***“ . . . And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead . . . ”***

The vision is too much for John. This is not the Jesus He remembered on the shores of Galilee, or even the One transfigured before his very eyes on the ***“holy mount.”*** None of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances were on this wise, whether in the upper room, on the shoreline of Galilee, or the mount of ascension. Those appearances were all accommodations to the weakened disciples. On one occasion, the risen Lord ***“appeared in another form”*** to the two on the road to Emmaus ***“as they walked and went into the country”*** (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-32). The Lord Jesus was then risen, yet these two did not see Him as He was. It is written, ***“But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him”*** (Lk 24:16).

But this is not the case now! John sees the glorified Christ, and his flesh is not able to bear it. Like Daniel, his natural strength dried like a potsherd and departed from him. Of Daniel it is said, ***“when I***

*saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength*” (Dan 10:8). The prophet Ezekiel had a similar experience. *“So when I saw it, I fell on my face . . . ”* (Ezek 1:28). This is now the experience of John. The conflict of glory with flesh cannot be endured. Those who profess to have seen the glorified Christ do well to consider the experience of John. He really did encounter the exalted Christ! As he was directed, he recorded what he saw, and his reaction to the sight. It is good to ponder what he wrote.

## JESUS SPEAKS

Jesus’ appearance is not a mere novelty, but an occasion for communication. What will follow is the message of the exalted Christ to the churches. John will be told to write what he sees in a book, hiding nothing from the people. He must be awakened to his task, even though his initial reaction to Christ’s appearance nearly induced his death. He must stand in the presence of the King of kings, fearful though it may be.

### Do Not Be Afraid

*“But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid . . . ’”* Although the Lord was exalted and glorified, it was the same gentle Master John had heard, seen, and handled (1 John 1:1). How often the aged Apostle had heard these words before: *“Do not be afraid!”* (Matt 14:27; 17:7; Mark 6:50; Luke 5:10; John 6:20). There was power in that word--power to keep fear from rising in the heart of John.

Notice, Jesus laid His *“right hand”* on John — the same hand in which the seven stars, or messengers of the churches, were found

(verse 16). This reveals the Lord's care for John, known as "***the disciple whom He loved***" (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). Although the initial sight deprived John of his natural senses, a touch and word from the Master will make him able to see and write the message to the churches. When Jesus says, "***Do not be afraid,***" there is no justifiable reason to be dominated by fear--none at all!

### **The First and Last**

***" . . . I am the First and the Last."*** Again, the glorified Christ draws attention to His all-encompassing ministry. Nothing is to be considered before Him--He is "***THE FIRST.***" And, nothing is to be considered after Him--He is "***THE LAST.***" Isaiah had also been given this revelation: that the Lord is "***the First,***" and "***the Last***" (Isa 41:4 44:6 48:12). To summarize, this expression is a depiction of Christ's eternal nature, His Kingship, and His superiority. It declares that everything is wrapped up in the Lord's Christ. In creation, Divine purpose, and salvation, God does nothing without Christ. Everything was made "***by Him and for Him***" (Col 1:16). If the church departs from Jesus, they leave everything God has to offer. Their beginning is, under such a condition, pointless, and their end will be destruction. On the other hand, when the churches trust in the Lord Jesus, even though their lot in this world may appear base and without merit, He will finish the work begun in them, bringing them to His throne.

### **Lives, Was Dead, and Alive Forever More**

***"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen."*** The eternity of the Son is unique. While He has no beginning of days, having come into the world from eternity (Micah 5:2), He also passed through the "***valley of the shadow of death.***" Indeed, His death was not like that of any other man. No man took His life from Him. He laid it down, dismissing His spirit, and then took it up again (John 10:18; Luke 23:6). His death was a vicarious one--in the behalf of sinners. Salvation and destruction of the devil

required the death of Jesus.

Note **how** the risen Lord states the matter. He ***“lives”*** now, ***“WAS dead,”*** and forever is ***“alive.”*** This is the redemptive way of saying, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”*** (Heb 13:8). The significance of this is found in God’s ***“eternal purpose.”*** It is as though Jesus said, ***“The reason for my current Presence before the Father, my death, and my reign is single. I am here because of the Father’s intention, conceived before the world began. I died because of that purpose, and I will continue my ministry because of it.”***

The total reason for the condescension of ***“the Word”*** and the exaltation of the Son relates to the salvation of mankind. The message for the churches will link immediately with that salvation, and the need for human involvement in the process. No part of the Son’s ministry, from His entry into this world to His enthronement in the unseen world is disassociated from that salvation. He has never, no will He ever, be moved from commitment to that ***“great salvation.”*** As tragic as it may appear, that perception is not common in our day.

## **The Keys of Hades and Death**

***“And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”*** Of old time, a Messiah was promised Who would have keys. Isaiah prophesied, ***“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open”*** (Isa 22:22). Jesus reveals Himself to the church of Philadelphia in the precise language of Isaiah: ***“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”*** (Rev 3:7). This is an expression of Divine authority--authority that dominates over all other authority. No person on earth or dark personality from the unseen world can lock a

door Jesus unlocks, or unlock one He locks. That is another way of saying, ***“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”*** (Matt 28:18).

A particular use of these ***“keys”*** is mentioned in this text. They relate to ***“hades”*** and ***“death.”*** These are terms relating to the residence of spirits (hades), and the place where bodies are interred (death, or the grave). Before we are finished with this book, both hades and death, or the abode of spirits and the grave, will yield up their dead. As it is written, ***“. . . and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them”*** (Rev 20:13). Following the emptying of these temporary residences, both hades and death will be cast into the lake fire, as there will be no further need for them (Rev 20:14).

Not one spirit can leave hades, and not one body can leave the grave without a word from Christ Jesus. What is more, God has appointed a day when both places shall be emptied. It is then that body and soul shall be united together to stand before the Judge of all the earth. Believers live in anticipation of that day, when they shall be ***“clothed upon with their house which is from heaven”*** (2 Cor 5:1-5). For unbelievers, it will be an hour of dread and foreboding, when their unredeemed spirit will enter a redeemed body. For them, an eternity of dreadful incompatibility will begin.

### **Write the Things**

***“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”*** Now, to the work at hand! Jesus is going to pull back the curtain of the future, exposing John to the execution of eternal purpose. He is not simply to sit in awe of the vision, but to put it in a book for delivery to the churches. John will write it, but, like all Scripture, it will be writing given ***“by inspiration of God”*** (2 Tim 3:16-17).

He is to write ***“the things”*** which he has seen--i.e., the revelation of the Person of Christ Himself. He is to record the revelation he has seen of the churches and their messages, and their relation to the Lord of glory. ***“The things which are”*** include the Divine assessment of the churches--their condition before the Lord. ***“The things which shall take place after this”*** include what John will be shown--a vision of the ages. John is to hold nothing back! If the Lord Jesus criticizes the churches, John is to write it in the book. If He commends the churches, it is to be inscribed. When churches are warned, the Apostle must write.

John’s job is to write what he sees. The churches job is to read it. In this book, Jesus is making provision for the encouragement of the discouraged, the warning of the lethargic, and the awakening of the dead. Jesus WILL NOT ALLOW His people to be deficient. He will show them what He is doing, and what the devil is doing as well. He will reveal the outcome of both believing and not believing. God be praised for the giving, and the writing, of the ***“revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** It provides confirmation that Christ **is** RULING in the midst of His enemies--bringing many sons to glory through apparently impossible circumstances. His rule is effective for the accomplishment of God’s purpose, and you are a part of that intent.

## CONCLUSION

You have been exposed to the glorified Christ. He is a regal High Priest, viewing His churches, assessing their condition, and providing them guidance. If the eyes of your heart are open, you will see Him. If your ears are circumcised, you will hear Him. His voice will drown out all competing sounds. His appearance will overshadow all other personalities. His ministry will be excellent. The glorified Christ will not overlook your spiritual failings or progress. He will

clarify the way, gladden the heart, and feed the soul. O, give Him heed!  
If you have an ear to hear, then hear what He is saying to the churches!

Word Of Truth Ministries, Associated Presents

The Study on the Book of

# The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

By: Given O. Blakely

Lesson 3

# THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is precisely that--a revelation. It came direct from heaven, given to Jesus by God. Here is a message to the churches--something God wants them to know. The thought of the Father giving the Son something to say to the churches is arresting. It reveals the heart of the Father, and the critical importance of the churches. In the giving of this book, we see Jesus functioning as the Great High Priest, administering requirements to His people. Whatever your personal view of *“the churches,”* **consider their importance to the Father** : He gave a message for them to the Lord Jesus Christ. **Consider the closeness of them to the heart of the Son of God** : He faithfully delivered the message to them given by His Father. **Ponder the involvement of the angels of God** with them: a holy angel received the message from Jesus, and delivered it to John the Apostle. **Contemplate the role of the Apostles** with the churches: John wrote ALL that He was given to see, to be delivered to the churches. There is

no acceptable excuse for a disinterest in *“the churches”* among men, when such a high level of concern for them is found in heaven.

Now we come to a more direct word. After being introduced to the glorified Christ, a message will now be given to John for a specific church. **There comes a time when generalities must end** , and attention be given to particulars. While all *“churches”* are part of the vast body of the redeemed, their individual identity has not been lost. Particular congregations in particular cities, within particular provinces, are noted in heaven. We will find the Lord Jesus making personalized assessments of each congregation. He does not simply view them in association with all of the redeemed. They will not be viewed as part of a movement that has been sanctioned by heaven, but as specific groups. Their condition will be evaluated in distinction from the rest of *“the body.”* They will be commended for their virtues, and rebuked for their liabilities. The Lord Jesus will not look at their earthly identity, but at their spiritual activities and attainments.

In my judgment, it is exceedingly difficult to find a congregation that is conscious of this Divine manner. Many have become complacent in their corporate manners, resting in their identity with a movement, embrace of a position, or simply their longevity in the community. It is true that Jesus assesses each church, and has a particular view of it. It is in the interest of our eternal well being that due consideration be given to this reality.

Now, we will hear the assessment of Christ Jesus concerning the church at Ephesus. Like all of His analyses, Divine objectives will be the primary consideration. The church at Ephesus will be viewed in light of the purpose of God. Their activities will be assessed with the design of God’s great salvation in mind. The contribution of the church to community interests will not be mentioned. Their role in helping the needy and maintaining a keen interest in the political structure of their

area will not be referenced. The **exclusive** association that will be made will be between what the churches are doing, and what the Lord Jesus is doing: between what they are, and what salvation is intended to make them.

### Who Is Speaking?

*“These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands . . . ”* As we progress through chapters two three, you will see Jesus introducing Himself differently to each church. A careful analysis of each presentation will find the Son of God submitting Himself in a manner particularly relevant to the church being addressed. The assessment of the Ephesian church reveals they had forgotten the real identity of the Savior. Their approach to *religion* had actually driven a wedge between them and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus begins by drawing attention to Himself in relation to the churches. He holds the messengers in His hand, and they are His representatives. Were it not for Him, they would have nothing to do, and their position could not be justified. He is both the Author and Substance of their message. When the believers in Ephesus think of their *messenger*, they are to think of him as in the hands of the Lord. He is not, strictly speaking, their servant, but Christ’s messenger. His fundamental work is bringing the message of Jesus to the people. He is charged with making Christ’s Person and purpose dominant in the people’s thinking.

Too, Jesus *walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands* --the churches. He is in their presence, whether they realize it or not. He is not merely standing in their midst, but *walks in the midst* of them. He is acutely aware of them, and they do well to be equally aware of Him! The Ephesians are not to think of themselves as part of a group of believers in Asia, but as occupying a conspicuous position in the presence of their Lord. The awareness of His presence produces a sobriety that is essential to Divine approval. The world recedes into the background when Jesus occupies the foreground. A

proper sense of values is attained in the light of His glory. O, that this posture were more prominent in the churches!

## I KNOW . . .

Notice, Jesus does not ask the Ephesians what *THEY* know, but alerts them to what He knows. While earthly knowledge “*puffs up*” (1 Cor 8:1), the apprehension of what **Jesus** knows exercises a sanctifying effect upon the soul. The Lord will now give an assessment of the Ephesian church. It will be thorough, and will entertain no respect of persons. Here is a fulfillment of that word from God, “*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good*” (Prov 15:3). Again, it is written, “*For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes*” (Jer 16:17). And again, “*Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? says the LORD; Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD*” (Jer 23:24). This is an aspect of the Divine nature with which the church must familiarize itself. **Redemption has not changed the nature of God!** It is a provision for the change of man’s nature, in order to Divine acceptance.

## Your works

“*I know your works . . .*” The Lord Jesus is a Lord of **assessment**. He reviews the work He has begun, and does so with both a critical and expectant eye. He looks for spiritual productivity where He has planted. This is seen in the parable of the fig tree. Here our Lord portrays the manner of the Kingdom. “*A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'*” (Luke 13:6-7).

This was a revelation of the Divine nature. God is intolerant with a lack of productivity--particularly since He has made full provision for it to be found in His people. However, as with our text, that Nature also provides opportunity for recovery. This is seen in the response of the vineyard keeper. He besought the master to allow him to give some special attention to the tree, digging around it and applying some fertilizer. Then, he replied, ***“if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down”*** (verse 9). Surely, God ***“is not willing that any should perish,”*** be it individual or congregation (2 Pet 3:9).

However, and make no mistake about this, fruit is expected. The ***“fruit”*** must be spiritual in nature--fruit that brings glory to God. Our text exposes us to this facet of Kingdom life. The word ***“works”*** is more general than specific. It does not refer to particular deeds of kindness, or some social effort. It rather denotes *the whole life and conduct*

1:

obertson's Word Studies

This word is used sixty-one times in Matthew through Revelation. Its use confirms the definition just given. ***“ . . . that they may see your good works ”*** (Matt 5:16). ***“Men loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil”*** (John 3:19). ***“Who will render to every man according to his works . . . ”*** (Rom 2:6). ***“Who is wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom”*** (James 3:13). ***“ . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works ”*** (Rev 20:12).

What, then, is our blessed Lord saying to Ephesus? That **He knows everything they are doing** ! He knows how their persuasions have expressed themselves. In the case of the church at Ephesus, no

evil works are mentioned. As the all-seeing One, Jesus knew all of the works of His people at Ephesus. He knew WHY they did them, what principles motivated them to do them, and what objectives were sought through them. It was no cursory view of their works that Jesus had, but one which saw the works in relation to submission to and a love for Himself. He recognized whether they were performed in the **“strength of His might”** or in the energy of the flesh. Their connection with grace and faith were duly assessed, as well as how they contributed to His glory. **Indeed, Jesus did not say He SAW their works, but that He KNEW them!** He was not viewing them to be impressed but to judge them with righteous judgment. O, that churches today had this perspective of Jesus Christ! Surface views are faulty views, and are not to be entertained by those bearing the name of Jesus. He does not look upon the surface, and neither should we. Hear Him well as He speaks. **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”** (John 7:24). Such deductive reasoning is forbidden, because it is at variance with the Divine nature.

### **Your labor**

**“I know . . . your labor . . . ”** The word **“labor”** refers to toil, or arduous effort. The is not mere work, but **HARD** work, requiring extensive effort. There was nothing casual about the Ephesian efforts. This type of effort requires zeal, commitment, and resolution. Again, Jesus does not say He **SEES** their labor, but that He **KNOWS** it. He knows what has constrained it, and to what ends their indefatigable efforts are expended. The nominal *Christian* knows nothing of this sort of activity. The religion of convenience has taken hold of the Western Church with a vise-like grip. Congregational decisions are regularly made that studiously avoid inconvenience, toil, and extended effort. It was not so with the church at Ephesus.

### **Your patience**

**“ I know . . . your patience . . . ”** Not only were the Ephesians

engaged in extensive and toilsome activities, they **continued** in them, even when it was exceedingly difficult. Patience is *constancy, or patient continuance*. It can refer to continued effort in the face of opposition and a lack of popularity. In this case, it means the Ephesians maintained their works even though it was difficult and challenging to do so. Such patience is included in the appointed means of obtaining the promises (Heb 6:12). The Lord does not chide Ephesus for their works, labor, or patience, but rather commends them..

### **You Cannot Stand Them**

*“I know . . . you cannot bear those who are evil.”* Here is a quality rarely known in our place and time. The assessment of Jesus sharply conflicts with the *“hate the sin but love the sinner”* myth that has lately risen among those who name the name of the Lord. Keep in mind, the Lord is commending the Ephesian church at this time. He is speaking of their spiritual assets, not their liabilities. He does not say they cannot bear WHAT those who are evil DO. Rather, they cannot *“bear,” “endure” or “tolerate”* those who are evil. Again, not those who “DO” evil, but who *“ARE”* evil. Were anyone but Jesus to say this, much of the contemporary church would rebuke him. But, alas, now they can only stand silent before Him. What He commends, the flesh cannot congratulate! Evil persons were a burden to the Ephesians. They made life more difficult for them. It was not a weakness, but a strength the Lord Jesus Himself commends.

Often God has spoken of His view of the wicked, and we do well to give heed to His assessments. It is written, *“God is angry with the wicked every day”* (Psa 7:11). Jesus said the wrath of God *“abides”* on those who do not believe on the Son (John 3:36). Again, it is written, *“The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates”* (Psa 11:5). Among the seven things God particularly hates, individuals are mentioned: *“. . . A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren”* (Prov 6:16-19). Evil is not always an impersonal matter! It is good to remember

that iniquity in His own offspring moved God to say, ***“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them”*** (Gen 6:7, NKJV). He could not bear depraved men, and therefore removed them! On another occasion, when Israel did evil in God’s eyes, they provoked Him. The occasion was so serious, the Holy Spirit moved the Psalmist to write, ***“Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance”*** (Psa 106:40). His anger ***“smoked against the sheep of His pasture”*** (Psa 74:1).

Sin makes the sinner abrasive to God. With it comes a conflict between God and man that can only be resolved in Christ Jesus! The Ephesians had this in their favor: those who were evil were also abrasive to them! They did not seek to excuse the wickedness of the wicked, or to contrive reasons for the corruption of their nature. A rare quality, indeed, in this day of India-rubber theology and spineless convictions.

### Faithful Testers

***“I know . . . you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars . . . ”*** The writer of this book, John the Beloved, spoke in his first Epistle of those who went out from the company of the Apostles, but were of another spirit. ***“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us”*** (1 John 2:18-19). These came in the name of Christ, and claimed to be Apostles. The Ephesians, however, did not receive them upon the basis of their claim. They put them to the test, not willing to receive, without due examination, either the persons or the word of those who claimed to be of God.

Before leaving them, Paul; had told the Ephesian elders ***“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”*** (Acts 20:29-30). This had apparently happened, and the Ephesians had taken Paul’s words seriously. In keeping with the nature of the Kingdom of God, they were faithful to ***“test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”*** (1 John 4:1). If ever there was an appropriate word for our time, it is this one. How we need churches who are willing to ***“test those”*** who purport to have a message from God.

The Ephesians found these men to be ***“liars.”*** A worthy discovery, indeed! No nice assessment here, or savory language that dulls our sense of the enormity of misrepresentation! If God commanded that no one bear false witness concerning human relationships (Ex 20-16), you can imagine His view of those who are false witnesses concerning their relationship to Him. This was another commendable trait among the Ephesians.

Ignatius, early church father who succeeded Simon Peter at Antioch, also wrote to the church in Ephesus. His words reflect the same assessment as that provided in our text. ***“I ought to be trained for the contest by you in faith, in admonition, in endurance, in long suffering, for ye all live according to truth and no heresy hath a home among you; nay, ye do not so much as listen to any one if he speak of ought else save concerning Jesus Christ in truth, as indeed ye are not deceived, I have learned that certain persons passed through you from Syria, bringing evil doctrine; whom ye suffered not to sow seed in you, for ye stopped your ears, you were ever of one mind with the Apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.”*** (William Ramsey, Letters to the Seven Churches). The point to be seen here is that they labored to maintain an identity with the Lord Jesus Christ, not allowing the encroachment of

false teachers. That is a commendable quality the contemporary church would do well to restore. Even though trying the spirits can sometimes be exhaustive, the Ephesian church did not fail to insist that those coming in the name of the Lord be tested. This is a strong quality, and not at all common among contemporary churches.

## **You Have Persevered**

***“I know . . . you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary . . . ”*** This refers to the bearing of burdens--matters that weigh down the soul and make progress difficult. They were not ***“weary in well doing”*** (Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:13), but continued in their efforts. As a congregation, Ephesus excelled far beyond the average American church. It maintained an identity with Christ, laboring for His ***“name's sake.”*** The idea behind the expression ***“and have not become weary”*** is that the Ephesians **did not tire of toil**. They had become accustomed to arduous effort. Again, this is a most commendable quality, and not to be despised.

Some of the energy with which they approached the faith is seen in their initial reaction to the Gospel of Christ. ***“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”*** (Acts 19:17-20). How refreshing it would be to find such zeal today. No doubt, there are pockets of such spiritual fervor here and there. However, once again, it is not common. What is more, we will find it was not common in the day in which this message was given.

These believers abandoned their past with zeal, a most exemplary trait. Years later, they still possessed a zealous character, the Son of God Himself commending them for it. In this regard, they were fulfilling the mandate of the Spirit: ***“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”*** (1 Cor 15:58).

The nature of spiritual life demands such a posture! Those who do not bear up under stress and difficulty, continuing faithful in the face of opposition, and for the Name of Christ labor indefatigably, have no promise of completing the course set before them. Failure in these matters is most critical, even though it is common. Legion is the name of those who today have less fervency for the Lord than in prior times. Multitudes have experienced the abatement of their zeal and the dissipation of their labors. Such things ought not to be! Salvation provides for constancy!

This is a time when men have grown accustomed to a sword without an edge, and profession without commitment. However, the Lord Jesus had not grown accustomed to such things. He still holds a loss of ***“first love”*** against those no longer possessing it.

## NEVERTHELESS

Our Lord is exacting in His assessment. He will not fail to commend spiritual virtues. However, neither will He ***“wink”*** at spiritual departures. ***“Love will cover a multitude of sins”*** (1 Pet 4:8), but virtues will not hide serious spiritual flaws from the flaming eyes of Jesus. He will not knit-pick, so to speak, but will go to the heart of the matter. He has dealt with the ***“works”*** of the church at Ephesus, now He will look at the heart of that congregation. His assessment is arresting.

## I Have Something Against You!

*“Nevertheless I have this against you . . . ”* Notice, this is not simply a gentle criticism. This is something the Lord Jesus has **“AGAINST”** the church. It might appear from the language of the KJV that this is something of small consequence: i.e., *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee . . . ”* This, however, is not at all the case. The word **“somewhat”** compares their single liability with the many virtues they possessed. While it was quantitatively less than their many strong points, we will find it outweighed them all! The phrase **“I have this against you”** is an extremely strong phrase. It literally means, *“I have this grave thing against you.”* Even if we were not aware of this linguistic fact, the words that follow would convince us of its truth.

When I read this solemn warning, I think of the word of God to ancient Israel. **“For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God . . . ”** (Deut 6:15-16). That is a condition to be avoided at all cost! How frequently Scripture records the Lord saying, **“I am against thee!”** Jeremiah warned the people God was against them (Jer 21:13). Babylon also received the word God was against her (Jer 50:31; 51:25). Ezekiel cried out for God against **“Jerusalem”** and the **“land of Israel”**, **“I am against thee”** (Ezek 5:8; 21:3). Tyrus was also given this message (Ezek 26:3), and Zidon as well (Ezek 28:22). The same words were shouted to Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Ezek 29:3), the land of Egypt (Ezek 29:10), and God’s own people (Ezek 35:3). Gog heard the same warning (Ezek 35:8; 38:3; 39:1), and Nahum declared the same condition to Nineveh (Nah 2:13; 3:5).

These words are always attended by the greatest solemnity. If not heeded, they are a prelude to Divine cursing and judgment. While it is true, **“If God be for us, who can be against us”** (Rom 8:31), if the Lord is **“against us,”** or has something **“against”** us, there is no virtue or acquaintance that can offset the condition. Only a correction of the

situation will turn away Divine indignation. I am persuaded that many have never seen Jesus in this light. Some cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus being “*against*” anything, particularly in His church. But they are wrong--seriously wrong!

### **The Intolerable Condition**

And what is it that Jesus has against the Ephesian church? What has neutralized His view of them, provoking Him to issue this solemn warning? They have been hard workers, faithful testers, and consistent in their labors. What could possibly diminish the weight of those virtues? Here is the Divine assessment: “*you have left your first love.*” It did not leave them, they left it!

### **Critical Wording**

The wording here is critical. Jesus does not say they **LOST** their “*first love*,” but that they “**LEFT**” it! The RSV reads, “*You have abandoned the love you had at first.*” The NIV reads, “*You have forsaken your first love.*” The BBE (Basic Bible English) reads, “*You are turned away from your first love.*” The word from which “*left*” ( *abandoned, or forsaken* ) is translated is extremely strong. It is **afhkej** (af-ee'-ay-mes), and means *leave behind, forsake, neglect, let go, or dismiss*. It speaks of an act of the will — a choice to leave one thing in favor of another. It is the same word Jesus used when He said, “*And every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life*” (Matt 19:29). This is the word used to describe the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, when a fever “**LEFT**” her (Matt 8:15). Jesus used it when He said, “*the Father hath not left me alone*” (John 8:29). This is a strong and aggressive term!

Notice, Jesus does not say their “*first love*” left them. Rather,

they left it! Something moved them in a direction away from an affection for Christ. Rather than drawing near to Him, they actually withdrew while engaged in an unusual amount of correct religious activity. Their doctrinal purity, as essential as it was, allowed the dismissal of their first and fervent love for Christ. Even though they had tried false Apostles, finding them liars, they had abandoned their deep and abiding affection for the Lord Jesus Christ!

### **The Nature of Loving Christ**

This is a condition with which I am painfully familiar. By the grace of God, I have found deliverance from it, but remain acutely aware of the fragility of our love for the Savior. It can be upstaged by a penchant for doctrinal exactness that is only on the surface. Hearty efforts, wrought for His blessed Name's sake, can also wash away our *"first love."* Mind you, it is not that doctrinal purity, testing false teachers, and tireless labors are bad. God forbid! Jesus commended the Ephesians for those things, and, of themselves, they are necessary, noble, and good.. The Ephesians were not rebuked for their involvement in such activities. Like the Pharisees, it could be sad, *"These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone"* (Matt 23:23).

I have observed a condition in the religious world concerning which there are few, if any, exceptions. Those who maintain a **focus** on doctrinal exactness nearly always are unknown for their love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rarely is tenderness found among them, particularly as regards insight into the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point I am especially cautious. **Under no conditions can faulty doctrine be tolerated or condoned!** If Jesus commended efforts to maintain *"sound doctrine,"* we must be not be found despising or criticizing such endeavors. They are not, however, to be our **focus**, or the primary thing. The heart of our Gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our death to sin is traced to our unity with Him in His death (Rom 6:1-8). Our spiritual life is the result of God

raising us to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Rom 6:4; Eph 2:6). Jesus Himself is *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14:6).

Our love of the truth, indispensable to our salvation (2 Thess 2:10), is basically spiritual, not a mere intellectual preference. It is because of our love for the Lord Jesus that we have been drawn into affinity with the truth. That is one of the primary things revealed by Christ’s wonderful promise: *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him”* (John 14:21,23). Our love for Christ has a sanctifying effect upon the soul. It spreads its fragrance throughout every activity of our lives. Without it, the most noble engagements become ineffective as regards eternal issues. It is no wonder the Spirit declared, *“If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!”* (1 Cor 16:22).

Jesus does not upbraid the Ephesians, however, for NOT loving Him, but for leaving their *“first love.”* Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage reads, *“But you walked away from your first love.”* What is this *“FIRST love”* that they left, abandoned, forsook, and walked away from? We know it is no small and inconsequential thing, because Jesus was *against* them because of it. This was the love they had *“at the first.”* It is what constrained them to zealously abandon all competing interests, and *“cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.”* It moved them to burn their books of curious and occultic arts (Acts 19:19). But, alas, **they did not retain their ardent affection for the Person of Christ.** They could no longer say with Paul, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me ; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God , Who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). Their approach to spiritual life was ardent, fervent, zealous, and consistent--but it did not require intimacy with the Lord Jesus! Ah, many are the churches who have also embraced this dreadful approach!

Upon coming into Christ, everything becomes new (2 Cor 5:17). Unless, however, the heart remains focused on ***“the things that are not seen”*** (2 Cor 4:17-18), the luster of that beginning begins to fade. Like an object hurled up into the air, spiritual life begins with energy, focus, and fervent love. It is intended to increase, going from ***“strength unto strength”*** (Psa 84:7) as the saved are ***“changed”*** from one degree unto another (2 Cor 3:18). However, there is a spiritual gravitational pull exerted upon the soul, which causes life, like the object thrown into the air, to reach a peak, and then descend again to earth. That descent is slow at first, but increases in speed. So it is with those who abandon their ***“first love.”*** They get closer to earth and further from heaven with quickening pace! There is nothing inherent in eternal life that causes this. It happens when Jesus is no longer the heart and focus of our attention.

That ***“first love”*** is attended by a ***“joy unspeakable and full of glory”*** because of the preciousness of Christ Jesus (1 Pet 1:8; 2:7). There is an awareness of sins forgiven, and fear no longer dominates the heart. It is the time of the ***“first love.”*** There is an unparalleled tenderness of heart that makes the redeemed teachable--and how they love to be ***“taught by Him”*** (Eph 4:20-21). The commandments are neither ***“grievous”*** nor burdensome, and there is a genuine hatred of even the ***“garment spotted by the flesh”*** (1 John 5:3; Matt 11:29; Jude 23). O, the blessedness of the ***“first love.”*** There is nothing--absolutely nothing--in salvation that encourages or provides for a departure from that tender preference!

This is the language of a Bridegroom speaking with His bride--Jesus talking to the church. In just a few years, the preciousness of Christ had waned in the hearts of the Ephesians. He was no longer dominant in their affection. **They had become champions of precision but vacillating in affection**--a dreadful combination! Someone has said (I do not recall the name), *It is possible for all of the machinery of*

*the church to be in fine working order, while the spirit of love and zeal which first set it in motion is on the decline!*

### **What Caused the Departure?**

How is it that they *“left,”* or abandoned, their *“first love?”* Alas, this is not an easy question to answer, for the heart is complicated. With some, the failure to put away some lingering lust, a sin that *“so easily besets,”* causes the diminishment of the *“first love.”* For others, the mitigation of that early affection is caused by *“evil communications”* — unholy alliances with wicked people — which corrupt good manners (1 Cor 15:34). Some subject themselves to skeptical books, and views that challenge the authenticity of Scripture. But for the Ephesians, the departure appears to be caused by something even more subtle than these.

I see in the Ephesians something that is very prevalent in the circles in which I have companied. It is an academic approach to the things of God. The Ephesian church had a commendable penchant for exactness. They tested those who said they were Apostles, finding them to be liars. They appeared, however, to rely more upon their studies than upon the *“anointing,”* provided by God to assist us in deciphering the truth. In my opinion, they did not engage in this testing relying upon the Lord, but rather upon their own assessment and perception of the truth. This may seem like a small and inconsequential persuasion, but it is not. We know their activities did not ascribe the preeminent place to Christ, because they *“left”* their *“first love.”* This simply cannot be done while placing implicit dependence upon Him.

John wrote of the appointed means of detecting false teachers. Allow me to quote his rather lengthy treatise of this subject. It has great relevance to this discussion. *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out*

*from us, but they were not of us ; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One , and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it , and that no lie is of the truth . Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us; eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you ; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you , you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:18-27).*

The times were dangerous. There were teachers who had actually been with the Apostles, but had not tasted of the Lord as they had. They eventually left their company in order that God might expose them as liars, possessing the spirit of antichrist. John does not write to the people because they are ignorant of the truth, requiring correction. Rather, he writes to alert them to Divine provision. In receiving the Holy Spirit, they were thus equipped to distinguish truth from error. This could not be done by the human intellect alone, as gifted as some may be. **Error has a spirit to it, as well as content** --and it is the spirit of it that the Holy Spirit enables the redeemed to detect.

This anointing abides with us through our love for and affinity with the Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as our hearts become distant from the Savior, the Spirit no longer teaches us. He is, after all, *“the Spirit of Christ,”* and *“the Spirit”* of God’s *“Son”* (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6). It is my persuasion that the Ephesians did not rely upon the Good Shepherd in

their assessments. While they did, indeed, find the false Apostles to be *“liars,”* their approach allowed them to leave their *“first love.”* The *“anointing,”* however, does not allow for such a departure. Rather, it is written, *“but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”*

## Recovery Commenced

*“Remember therefore from where you have fallen . . . ”* These are startling words, awakening the slumbering spirit of those who have *“left”* their *“first love.”* The Ephesian church was in a *“FALLEN”* state! Say what you may about the precision of their teaching, they had *“fallen!”* Anyone familiar with Scripture cringes at the word *“fallen.”* This is the word used to describe the condition of Satan; *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!”* (Isa 14:12). Judas is said to have *“by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place”* (Acts 1:25). Those seeking justification from Law are said to *“have fallen from grace”* (Gal 5:4). From the standpoint of their activity, they had *“LEFT”* their first love. From the Divine viewpoint, they had *“FALLEN!”* Dreadful day, when the Lord Jesus says you have *“fallen.”* I wonder how many churches in our fair city, were they able to hear the Lord Jesus, would hear such words.

In the case of the Ephesians, they had fallen to their own ruin. It is as though they were in a deep crevice, having fallen from a place of safety. But they did not see themselves in this light. They had grown accustomed to living in the place of spiritual restriction, insensitive that they had *“left”* their *“first love.”* Now the Lord Jesus urges them to look

up to the cliff of safety from which they had fallen. It is as though He said, *Remember when you first believed, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise* (Eph 1:13). *Ponder that blessed occasion when, in a burst of zeal, you gathered the books of curious arts, and burned them*

*publically (Acts 19:19) . Contrast where you are now, with where you once were. Think of the joy and peace you have lost. Consider how you once “learned” Me (Eph 4:20) , and were possessed by faith AND love (Eph 1:15) . Remember! Remember! Such remembrances exert a powerful influence over the soul.--the recollection of times of blessedness, when the consciousness of the Lord was acute, and devotion was unquestionably to Him.*

Do not miss the strength of the Divine assessment! They had labored and endured, **but they had fallen!** They could not bear those who were evil, **but they had fallen!** They had tested those claiming to be apostles, and had found them to be liars, **but they had fallen!** This church had held up under great stress, **but they had fallen!** They had endured for Christ’s Name sake, and did not give up, **but they had fallen!** They had retrogressed, when everything about salvation is progressive. They excelled in secondary matters, but failed in primary ones! This is the church that was told, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:3-6). The blessedness of their former condition could still be recalled, even though they had FALLEN from it.

### **The Determined Objective, Repent!!**

*“ . . . repent . . . ”* The condition of the Ephesian church called for repentance! They had no choice but to turn from their present course, which was leading to destruction. When Jesus cries out **“REPENT,”** men do well to give heed. How many are the people you know, or even churches, whose fire has dimmed and affection for Jesus waned? They are all about us, and men have grown accustomed to such

things. I know of churches within a short distance of this very house whose love for Christ has waned. They are in a state of spiritual deterioration, drifting from their moorings, and leaving their *“first love.”* And yet, the religious structure in which they find themselves does not allow for a call to repentance, for their condition is not viewed as wrong! Such congregations must listen to what Jesus is saying to the church at Ephesus! **“REPENT!”**

Remember, Jesus has been exalted to the Father’s right hand *“to give repentance”* (Acts 5:31). He not only gives it initially, when one turns from the broad way and idols to serve the living God. Repentance is also *“given”* to those who once escaped the pollutions of the world, but again were captivated by the tempter (2 Tim 2:24-26). However, **He will not do it without the effort of the offender!** The church at Ephesus must **“REPENT.”** They must turn away from the course of action that has dulled the flame of their love for Christ--their *“first love.”* In spite of all of their activity, their Savior had been pushed into the background. They must REPENT of this condition, turning from it with zeal.

### **Do the First Works!**

*“ . . . and do the first works . . . ”* It is not enough to renounce flawed manners. Ephesus must again *“do the first works”* -- the works which were done out of a fervent love for Christ Jesus. In the Kingdom, *“faith works by love”* (Gal 5:6), and only works motivated by faith will be ultimately acknowledged. It is not that there was a separate class of works accomplished by the Ephesians at the beginning. Those earlier works sprang from higher motives. In them the saying was fulfilled, *“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”* (2 Cor 5:14-15). It is clear from our text that the Ephesian church was not being motivated by *“the love of Christ.”* They had left that love, and had taken a powerless approach to

spiritual life. Their works may have appeared extremely valuable to those about them, but they did not come up to the works they did at *“the first.”*

**Lost ground MUST be recovered!** The situation bears some resemblance to the time when Joseph and Mary lost the young Jesus. In their return from Jerusalem, they noticed after three days that Jesus was not with them. They had supposed He was *“with the company,”* and therefore went a day’s journey seeking Him *“among their relatives and acquaintances”* (Luke 2:43-44). In order to find Him, they had to return to the place where they lost Him ! It is written, *“they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him”* (Luke 2:45). It is like this with those who have left their first love. They must return to the place where they lost it, recovering *“the first works.”*

This is a most challenging requirement. Having *“left”* their *“first love,”* the sophist might suppose they should repent and love the Lord as they did at the first. But that is not Christ’s counsel. He cries out to them, ***“DO THE FIRST WORKS.”*** There is an aspect of the Kingdom that must be seen here. In the beginning of their walk with Christ, they were told, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). Walking in those works, however, is not mere activity. The Ephesians were intensely active. Yet, they were not walking in the works prepared beforehand by God.

The *“first works”* were accomplished in union with the Lord--that is what gave them their validity. God has made no provision for acceptable Kingdom activity that excludes Himself or His Son. Jesus referred to these works when He said, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matt 5:16). The *“light”* to which Jesus refers is not our own! It has been given to us by our Lord! The works of reference result from

a walk *“in the light, as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7). They flow out from intimacy with the Redeemer. Any work that is not performed out of such a glorious union is not acceptable to the Lord. He entertains no interest in theological precision without intimate association with Himself. Where an acute sensitivity of Christ Jesus is lacking, works are reduced to mere activity. They may count well with men, but not with the Lord.

### Avoid Divine Judgment

*“ . . . or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.”* In a day of religious sophistry, this aspect of Christ’s character is little known. However, if the church is to *“make herself ready”* to meet the Bridegroom (Rev 19:7), she must have a proper perception of Lord Jesus.

See how the One with eyes as a flame of fire speaks to the church at Ephesus! He does not suggest that His church repents: He commands it! In a straightforward and unmistakable manner, He reveals the consequences of failing to do so. He will personally come to the flagging church and *“remove”* its *“lampstand from its place.”* He will not allow them to wear His name and represent His cause to the world if they insist on remaining at a distance from Him! The church itself is threatened with removal. The Lord does not say HOW this will be accomplished, but Scripture teaches us to fear such judgment. **Their light was flickering, and their service was mechanical.** Jesus now fans the flame with a serious threat, seeking to bring the Ephesian church once again into intimacy with Himself.

When the Jews refused to receive Christ, He said, *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”* (Matt 21:43). And again, *“But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt 8:12).

The mighty man who revels in evil is told, ***“God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, And uproot you from the land of the living”*** (Psa 52:5). Think how God removed king Saul following his disobedience: ***“You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!”*** (1 Sam 15:26, NIV). Those who attempt to live in separation from the Lord, whether individuals or congregations, will be rejected by Him! Judgment ***“begins”*** with ***the “house of God”*** (1 Pet 4:17). Even though the Ephesians had tested false Apostles and found them to be liars, if they did not regain their ***“first love”*** and ***“do the first works,”*** the church would be removed. Her vigorous works were not enough to justify her existence. If her works did not flow from her fellowship with Christ, there was no need for her to continue. History confirms both the longsuffering and judgment of the Lord Jesus. All of the churches, saving for Smyrna and Philadelphia became extinct after 1,000 years. The church did NOT ***“repent,”*** else it would not have been removed.

During the last few years, I have become acutely aware of a great number of churches that have closed. Not a few of them had a noble beginning and a long history. Could it be that they too were ***“taken away”***? Such a consideration is rarely entertained these days, when institutionalism and humanly-devised organization reign. There is an abysmal ignorance of Christ Jesus in the professed church--an almost total lack of intimacy with Him. Where such a condition exists, the judgment of Christ will soon follow. How we need flaming evangelists to call the churches into fellowship with Christ! It is both pleasant and essential! Lord, give us such men!

## SOMETHING IN YOUR FAVOR

***“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”*** It is as though the Savior seeks for a reason to

speak well of the church. He has told them their indefatigable labors and constancy have been duly noted. However, when He speaks of an especially noteworthy virtue, He mentions something having to do with their affection. The Nicolaitans were the moral libertines of the day, giving free reign to fleshly appetites. *They committed fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness, had their wives in common, and also ate things offered to idols.* These were a sect of the Gnosticism against which John wrote in His First Epistle. Gnosticism taught that man's superior capacity was for knowledge. The primary source of its tenets was human philosophy. Gnosticism borrowed from a great variety of thoughts--a sort of philosophical conglomeration. Its approach to life was based on human, rather than Divine, satisfaction. Gnostics did not acknowledge the humanity of Christ, a matter specifically addressed by the Apostle John (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3). The rejection of Christ's humanity caused them to accentuate their own humanity. Thus, they indulged their fleshly appetites without restraint.

This sect had affiliated itself with Christ Jesus, but in a corrupt way. They viewed redemption as release from *matter* rather than sin. Thus they did not acknowledge immorality, or the indulgence of fleshly lusts, as wrong. They supposed themselves to have been delivered from such foolish restraints. A modern counterpart of Gnosticism is Christian Science, which rejects matter, and ascribes everything to patterns of thought. They provide *reading rooms* where people can *read away*, what they conceive to be, imagined difficulties, ranging from illness to sin. They also believe *the "blood of Jesus"* did more good in His veins than in being shed for the sins of the world.

This Gnosticism was the fountain in which Nicolaitanism was spawned. Their doctrine bore a great resemblance to that of Balaam, *"who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication"* (Rev 2:14). Two of the seven churches were succumbing to this corrupt doctrine: Pergamum (Rev 2:14-15) and Thyatira (Rev 2:20). The church at Ephesus **HATED** the *"deeds of the Nicolaitans."*

They could not abide the result of their teaching--and Jesus commended them for it. He did not call for a prayer meeting for this ungodly sect, but commended the Ephesians for their contempt for their deeds.

Jesus also declares **He** hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans: ***“which I also hate.”*** He declared the same thing to the church of Pergamum (2:15). Actually, all sin is hateful to Christ, and thus should also be to His church. One of the marks of our Savior is, He ***“loved righteousness, and hated iniquity”*** (Heb 1:9). In a startling revelation of the Divine nature, Jehu once said to king Jehosaphat, who had formed an alliance with the ungodly, ***“Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you”*** (2 Chron 19:2). Jesus insists that His church have the same regard toward sin as Himself--particularly something as reprehensible as ***“the deeds of the Nicolaitans.”*** In my judgment, there needs to be a revival of this type of hatred in the churches. There is altogether too much tolerance of sin.

## THE APPOINTED INCENTIVE

The One Who stands in the middle of the churches has issued a stern warning. Those who have abandoned their ***“first love”*** are threatened with removal. But the Lord does not stop here. He will provide a strong incentive for them to give heed to His words.

### Divine Counsel Must Be Heard

***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** This section is written to the messenger of the church at Ephesus, who was to faithfully deliver it. But the message is not confined to Ephesus. What God has written in a book is not only for a

specific person or group. Notice, He does NOT say, “*what the Spirit says to THIS church,*” but “*what the Spirit says to THE CHURCHES.*” If men live “*by every Word of God*” (Luke 4:4), we dare not take a provincial view of any Scripture. The books of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, for example, are not private letters intended for no one else. Neither, indeed are the books of Romans, Corinthians, Colossians, etc., intended only for those groups. Wherever there is a soul sensitive to the Word of the living God, the message is to be heard. “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Those who have ears to hear, have been given them by the Lord. To the hard-hearted Israelites the Spirit said, “*Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*” (Deut 29:4).

Every person possessing a sensitivity to God is obligated to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, even though they themselves are not immediately addressed. Notice, God gave the message to Jesus. Jesus gave it to an angel. The angel gave it to John. However, it is “*the Spirit*” Who is saying it to the churches. This is His sword (Eph 6:17), and He will quicken, or make alive, the Word to every soul giving heed to it. Those who are “*dull of hearing*” (Matt 13:15; Acts 28:27; Heb 5:11) are in a most serious condition. In that condition, they are cut off from the life-giving word of Christ!

### A Precious Promise

“*To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*” Here is the greatest of all incentives--the “*exceeding great and precious promises*” of God (2 Pet 1:4). This is the means through which we become “*partakers of the Divine nature.*” For the Ephesians, there was something to overcome--a spiritually deficient condition over which they must triumph! The Divine nature was slipping away from them. They, like many churches of our day, were operating in their own strength. Having “*left*” their “*first love,*” they were more academic than

spiritual! However, because of the “**great mercy**” (Num 14:18) and the “**great love**” (Eph 2:4) of the Savior, recovery was possible. The Lord has already told them they will be taken away, forfeiting their stewardship, if they do not repent. Now He will give them an exceeding strong reason to recover.

Observe how personal the promise is: “**to HIM who overcomes.**” Although the word is spoken “**to the churches,**” it is addressed to individual living stones. We will find this most personal approach throughout the messages to the churches. Here we are provided a perspective essential to acceptable living. Rather than being absorbed by the world, in Christ we are equipped to overcome it! While in the body, we are subject to the attacks and delusions of the wicked one. He is characterized by unparalleled ferocity, and cunning as well. The enemy had made inroads in the church at Ephesus--while they were intensely zealous and active. Mark it well, if in all of your doing you do not overcome, it makes little difference what you may have appeared to accomplish! The promise is not to those who TRY, but to those who overcome! You might say, those who CONQUER, or TRIUMPH--the victors! These finish the race, even though confronted with obstacles. They win the war, though often “**cast down.**” All such have tasted of “**the power of the resurrection,**” which enables recovery, excellence, and final triumph!

Here is a word particularly for “**the churches,**” and everyone with a spiritual capacity to hear! To the one who overcomes, Christ promises, “**I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.**” Sin cut mankind off from “**the tree of life**” (Gen 3:22-24). Uninterrupted communion with the Living God was no longer allowed, and death began its ruthless reign. This is a symbolic reference to immortality which awaits the faithful. It is a condition where “**Death is swallowed up in victory**” (1 Cor 15:54). It involves the total absence of decline in any form. No more deterioration, dissipation, or erosion. No more necessity for recovery. For the overcomer, death in all of its aspects will be finally vanquished! For

those who do not overcome, death will be perpetual.

By saying ***“I will give to eat,”*** Jesus means the overcomer will have constant and uninterrupted access to the life and fellowship of ***“God and the Lamb”*** (Rev 22:1,3). There will be no more ***“famine of hearing the Word of the Lord”*** (Amos 8:11)! Darkness in any form will be banished from the habitation of the saints. No more thirsting for God as in a ***“dry and thirsty land”*** (Psa 42:1-2; 63:1). The fruit will be found in abundance, with no hint of scarcity. No difficulty will be associated with its appropriation, and it will bring about full and total recovery from the fall. How beautifully this is portrayed in Revelation 22:2. ***“In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*** Such abundance will be for the overcomer! No permission will be required to partake of the blessedness of eternal life! No focused quest in the face of opposition will be experienced. Jesus will ***“give”*** the ***“right”*** to eat of the fruit.

Eating of the tree of life will not be a commandment, like eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood in this world(John 6:53-56). There will be no competing interests! The promise also assumes the fervent desire of the overcomer to enjoy eternal life in its fulness. An acquaintance with God will be realized by the conqueror that is longed for in the battlefield. Here, we develop the appetite. There, it shall be satiated. In this world the overcomer battles to keep his ***“first love”*** and obsession with ***“things that are above.”*** Jesus promises the fulfillment of those deep longings will be fully realized in the world to come.

The ***“tree of life”*** is ***“in the midst of the paradise of God.”*** What a glorious thought! If the overcomer is eating from a tree in the heart of God’s paradise, then he himself is at the center of God’s dwelling. No more experiential periphery! There are three immediate

references to ***“paradise”*** in Scripture, and one symbolic reference. It is assumed that man was originally placed in a sort of ***“paradise.”*** How wonderfully it is described. God ***“planted a garden eastward in Eden,”*** and placed man in it. ***“Every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food”*** was caused to grow for man. The ***“tree of life”*** was also placed ***“in the midst of the garden.”*** It is written that a ***“river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison . . . the name of the second river is Gihon . . . the name of the third river is Hiddekel . . . and the fourth river is Euphrates.”*** The areas through which these rivers flowed were noted for good gold, bdellium, and the onyx stone” (Gen 2:8-14). It was a marvelous place, indeed. But sin cause men to be thrust from that ancient paradise!

Jesus mentioned ***“paradise”*** to the penitent thief: ***“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”*** (Luke 23:43). Truly, a state of blessedness. Paul tells us of an occasion when he was ***“caught up to the third heaven,” “into Paradise,”*** where he heard words that could not be conveyed in human speech (2 Cor 2:2-4).

Now, in our text, Jesus promises the overcomer a place in ***“the paradise of God.”*** The glory of this paradise is the Lord’s presence (Rev 21:11,23). Here, the communion of Christ will be close and intimate. There will be, as the hymn writer affirmed, ***“nothing between.”*** There will be no prohibition in any form, no restraint of any kind, and no handicap. Nothing will be withheld from us, nor will we ever hear the words, ***“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”*** (John 16:12). Blessed contemplation, indeed, and worthy of hearty repentance and a vigorous pursuit of the ***“first works.”*** Such efforts will be honored in heaven, and assist in preparing churches and individuals to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Such are things are to be pursued!

## CONCLUSION

A sensitive soul will see remarkable parallels between the church at Ephesus and many churches of our day. Such parallels are not to be left in the room of observation. Those, whether individual or congregation, who have ***“left their first love”*** must recover it at all cost. They must repent of the grievous loss, and do the ***“first works,”*** when their heart was uncluttered with ways and manners that did not require the presence of the Lord Jesus. There is far too much *church* activity that is void of a strong and dominating love for Jesus Christ. It is inexcusable, and must not be tolerated. Whatever seeming good may be accomplished by those who have abandoned their ***“first love,”*** is invalidated by their spiritual condition.

Christ’s threat and promise assume that spiritual dulness robs the soul of a proper appetite for the things ***“God has prepared for those who love Him”*** (1 Cor 2:9-10). Those engaged in intense religious activities, but who have forsaken their ***“first love,”*** do not think about Jesus taking them away. Their minds do not consider that the Lord has something ***“against”*** them. And why is this so? Because their hearts have been desensitized by their religion! Too, the thought of having access to eternal life with no restraint is not at all appealing to them. They do not walk in communion with Jesus now, so have no thoughts of its expansion in the world to come. Though men have grown accustomed to such a condition, Jesus has not.

You must see Christ as calling His people back within the circumference of hearing, where the soul is acutely aware of its Lord. It is only within that boundary that salvation can be worked out ***“with fear and trembling.”*** May you take this message to heart, using it as an occasion to become more sensitive of the Lord. May you recover any ground you may have lost, and be found acceptable in Christ’s eyes.

The church at Ephesus has afforded us a glimpse into the nature of spiritual life. It has also acquainted us more thoroughly with the Lord Jesus Christ, and His assessment of the churches. He has a keen interest in their productivity, and longs for them to be in ***“the paradise of God.”*** But He cannot abide a departure from a love for Himself. No amount of activity, however arduous, can compensate for a loss of that. Thus He views them with a most critical eye, not to condemn them., but to save them.

# The Revelation Of CHRIST

Lesson Number 4

## THE MESSAGE TO SMRYNA

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,  
'These things says the First and the Last, who was  
dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation,  
and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the  
blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are  
not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of  
those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed,  
the devil is about to throw some of you into prison,  
that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation  
ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you  
the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear  
what the Spirit says to the churches. He who  
overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

” (Revelation 2:1-7, NKJV)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This book is a message to the churches! It is not a compendium of political and social information, or a prophesy of life on the earth with an absent church and a withdrawn Spirit. Such conditions would make the book irrelevant to the church. God is showing the churches what He is doing in the earth. He will also unveil the tactics of their adversary, the devil, alerting them to his subtlety. As intent as the old serpent is, however, he will not be able to proceed one millimeter beyond the boundary of Divine will! The nature of the heavenly reign will be made known, together with the effectiveness of the grace of God.

In view of God's eternal purpose, sin and spiritual retardation are utterly absurd and inexcusable. If the Law made sin *A exceeding sinful*. (Rom 7:13), the greatness of salvation in Christ Jesus has made it altogether intolerable. Therefore, sin is consistently judged and condemned by the Lord. He will not allow it to continue in His church without rebuke! Too, in view of the Divine objective, faith and patience are the only reasonable pursuits for the church. Therefore, these spiritual virtues are always commended and encouraged in the church.

### **Three Key Views**

We will be exposed to three primary perspectives in this revelation. (1) **Salvation is an aggressive enterprise, involving all of heaven.** The Father has undertaken an extensive work in reconciling the world to Himself. Having raised and exalted the Lord Jesus Christ, He has positioned Him as Head over all, in order to bring *A many sons to glory*. (Heb 2:10). The Son has marshaled all the host of heaven in His assertive reign, which is devoted exclusively to bringing us to the Father (1 Pet 3:18).

(2) **Satan has launched an energetic initiative to thwart this Divine purpose.** Having been soundly defeated by the Lord Jesus, the devil has turned his attention to the redeemed. He is making war against them with great ferocity, entering zealously into every opportunity to do them evil.

(3) **In the context of this consistent activity, the church must engage in strong efforts to *A lay hold on eternal life*.** (1 Tim 6:10). To fail to do so puts the church out of harmony with heaven, making it vulnerable to the wicked one. Casualness will bring sure death toward, and judgment from, the living God. Slothfulness will therefore be invariably rebuked, and faithfulness will always be applauded

**Jesus will be set forth as constant in the direction and protection of His people.** He will subdue their enemies, provide a haven for their spiritual nourishment, and keep vigil over them. Satan will be viewed as pursuing every opportunity afforded him to do evil to the saints, and to bring them down to perdition.

This book will take us behind the scenes, showing us how much is transpiring in the unseen world. It will call us into the battle, convincing us of the danger of slumber, and the sure reward for faithfulness.

The messages to the seven churches are to be viewed in this context. They will be provided a heavenly assessment of their condition C how they stand in relation to their Lord. They will not be measured by human standards, nor compared with other churches. They will be given a reason to be faithful. What Jesus says to them, he says to all churches.

## **THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA**

*A And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write . . . .* This is the only reference to Smyrna in the Bible (Rev 1:11; 2:8)! It was a seaport city, located approximately 35 miles North of Ephesus. This was an ancient city, having been established around 1100 B.C., and noted for being a trading-center and chief port for export trade.

Historically, it was a center of the imperial cult of Rome and emperor worship. A seal displaying the *A goddess of Smyrna* . helps to confirm the threatening environment occupied by this church. It was a city given over to idolatry, and devoted to the glory of the Roman empire. It also ranked as one of the most beautiful cities of Asia.

There is no reference to this city in the travels recorded in the book of Acts. No special epistle was addressed to it, as there was to Ephesus. Yet, it is duly noted by the Lord of glory. The eye of the Lord is ever upon the righteous!

Polycarp, who was martyred for Christ in 167 A.D. (86 years after his conversion), was known historically as *the bishop of Smyrna* . His dying words, as he stood within a devouring fire, are worthy of repetition. *A O Lord, Almighty God, the Father of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received a knowledge of Thee, God of the angels and of the whole creation, of the whole race of man, and of the saints who live before Thy presence; I thank Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy, this day and this hour, to share the cup of Thy Christ among the number of Thy witnesses! .* This spiritual giant was a disciple of John the beloved, and some even suppose him to have been the messenger to who this touching epistle was written.

We will see from the message addressed to this congregation that it did not rank high among men. Indeed, there is no record that it even ranked high among other believers. It would not have been considered *A successful* . by contemporary religious standards. To appreciate Smryna, we must turn away from the worldly mind-set, and obtain the *A mind of Christ! .*

These believers were under oppression, and were going to be tested. Unnoticed by the rest of the world, they had been seen by the King. He now addresses a word to them, to prepare them for extensive involvement in the *A eternal purpose .* of God. Their experience will be more for heaven's observation than earthly analysis. Principalities and powers in heavenly places will be afforded a gratifying view of God's wisdom in the trial of this assembly.

A glimpse of the manner of the heavenly kingdom is seen in this short, but uplifting, message. It will surely bring comfort to every obscure disciple. The life of this church will have a greater impact on succeeding generations than it did upon the one it served. Such a perspective is strange to a church that is solidly ensconced in this world, but there are still congregations that fall into this category. Their works will *A follow them* . by impacting future generations, in addition to being recognized by their Lord before an assembled universe (Rev 14:13).

We must not allow ourselves to become insensitive to the nature of spiritual life. It is **not** an effort to become acclimated to *A this present evil world,* . from which Jesus came to deliver us (Gal 1:4). The King of glory never fails to see our progress and our labors.

Efforts to keep the faith, however minuscule they may appear to men, are always recognized and encouraged by our Lord. He ever keeps vigil over His inheritance. We will find in the church at Smyrna, confirmation of the sanctifying power of faith.

## WHO IS SPEAKING

*A And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life. .* Remember, the Lord reveals Himself to each church in a manner appropriate for their condition. Three times in this book, Jesus refers to Himself as *A the First and the Last* . (1:18; 2:8; 22:13).

**Lord of Beginnings!**

He is the Lord of beginnings! C the ***A First!*** . With Him began remission, reconciliation, and Divine acceptance! He is the ***A First*** . to rise from the dead, the Beginning of a New Creation, in which the saved participate (Acts 26:23; Rev 3:14)! The New Covenant owes its freshness and effectiveness to Him. Because of the Lord Jesus, there is such a thing as the new birth, wherein we can begin again, becoming as a ***A child*** . (Luke 18:17). All of the richness and joy of ***A first*** . things can be again experienced in Him.

Beginnings are no further from us than the Savior Himself. Whatever God wants initiated is realized in Christ. He is ***A the First!*** . He is why our faith began. The beginnings of repentance and remission were because of Him (Acts 5:31). Our love of God and fervent desire to dwell in His courts found their beginning in Christ Jesus. He is ***A the First!*** .

### **Lord of Culmination**

But He is also ***A the Last*** . . What He begins is brought to culmination in Him! He is why it is said of God, ***A He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*** . (Phil 1:6). The work will be brought to completion to the glory of God (Heb 12:2). The people of God must never lose sight of their Savior. The appointed objective is that Christ may present them ***A to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*** . (Eph 5:27). That purpose will be realized in all who cleave to Him ***A with purpose of heart*** . (Acts 11:23).

The church in Smyrna must also see Jesus as the ***A Last*** . of the old and condemned order. He is truly ***A the last Adam*** . (1 Cor 15:45), bringing to an end the reign of death. He is the ***A end of the Law*** . (Rom 10:4), concluding the condemnation of that ***A ministry of death*** .

(2 Cor 3:7). Whatever God wants terminated is ended in Christ. He is ***A the Last!*** . This is how the Lord Jesus wants His church to know Him!

## **Lord of Revival**

***A Who was dead, and came to life.*** . Our salvation was accomplished by the Lamb of God absorbing the curse of God, **and then returning!** He endured the worst that men could inflict-- **and then returned!** The ***A power of darkness*** . was permitted unfettered access to Him for a season (Luke 22:53). He submitted to the grip of the ***A last enemy,*** . and he who ***A had the power of death*** . (Heb 2:14), **and then returned!**

This word -- ***A Who was dead, and came to life.*** . -- speaks of the ***A power of His resurrection*** . (Phil 3:10). This is a triumphant note! It is an experience for which the Apostle Paul joyfully abandoned every competing pursuit (Phil 3:8-14). This power enables the child of God to recover from sin, the debilitating effects of persecution, and ultimately from death itself, which is ***A the last enemy*** . (1 Cor 15:26). In this power the saying is fulfilled, ***A for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again*** . (Prov 14:14). Again, it is written, ***A Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all*** . (Psa 34:19).

This is the word Smyrna needs to hear; a word that assures them they will recover from their trials. The Lord will sustain them, and their enemies will not realize ultimate triumph over them.

## **I KNOW YOUR WORKS**

***"I know your works . . . .*** This is the same word addressed to the church in Ephesus, who had ***A left*** . her ***A first love*** . (Rev 2:4). For

Ephesus, this was a convicting word. For Smyrna, however, it was a comforting one. **The condition of the heart, and the level of involvement with the Lord Jesus, determine the effect of His Word upon us.** The very same word, spoken with differing effects!

In an effort to avoid an overestimation of *A works*, some speak disparagingly of them, as though they were of no value before Christ. We must take care not to be caught in this diversion. If it were true that *A works* were completely inconsequential, Jesus would not rebuke men for being deficient in them, or give commendation for excellence in them. It is true that we are not justified *A by works*. (Rom 4:2; Tit 3:5). It is equally true that we are *A created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*. (Eph 2:10). The Lord Jesus *A gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*. (Tit 2:14).

The Lord Jesus knows the works of His people from the vantage point of these texts. He compares the activity of His church with the works God has before prepared, and in which He has ordained they walk. *A I know your works* means, *I know whether or not you are walking in the light. I know if you are participating in the purpose for which you were called out of darkness!* The people of God are assessed in respect to the purpose of God, not the goals of men. That purpose has been disclosed by and in the Person of Christ and the message of the Gospel. Essentially, it has to do with taking a people out of the world for the name of the Lord (Acts 15:14).

The saints of God are being oriented for *A the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness*. (2 Pet 3:13). Jesus measures the churches progress in that orientation.

In our time, a great deficiency of this perspective dominates the

professed church. There is a crying need for those with ears to ***A hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*** . He is still speaking to the churches, and they are admonished to hear what He is saying.

The tendency of men to compare themselves with their peers is altogether too prevalent. How appropriate is the Word of God on this matter. ***A We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*** (2 Cor 10:12, NIV).

**Jesus knows our works!** He sees them from heaven's point of view! He assesses them within the context of Divine purpose! How comforting this is to the faithful, and how convicting to those who are drifting from their spiritual moorings. We will now see how Smyrna will be assessed by their Lord.

The message is not unrelated to the churches of our time. We, Like all previous and succeeding generations, are ***to A hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*** . That message is pertinent to our survival in the good fight of faith, and we do well to hear it with keen interest.

## **I KNOW YOUR TRIBULATION**

There is an interesting perspective to be seen in these words. The church of Ephesus was reminded of its ***A first works,*** . and urged to repent and again do them. Christ's words to Ephesus, by way of contrast, are arresting. ***A . . . you have tested those who say they are Apostles. . . and have found them liars . . . you have persevered . . . and have labored for My name's sake. . . you have left your first love.***

*Remember therefore from where you have fallen. . . . (2:2-5).*

**However, with Smyrna, there is not a single reference to the past** only to the present and the future. Read again our Lord's short message to this church. *A **These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. .***

**This is the language of fellowship!** These believers are in the crucible of trial, and thus the Lord speaks comfortably to them. *"I know your . . . tribulation . . . .* The eye of the sympathizing Lord is upon them! They may be, for a season, *A cast down,* . but they will not be *A destroyed* . (2 Cor 4:9). Jesus is near, and the knowledge of that emboldens the child of God to stand tall against the fiercest of opposing gales.

Faith inducts us into the realm of tribulation in this world. How well Jesus said it: *A **In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world** .* (John 16:33). And just what is *A tribulation?* . We all do well to have a working knowledge of this term, for *A **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God** .* (Acts 14:22). Tribulation is a *A must* . by the nature of spiritual experience and the design of Divine intent. It is the unavoidable result of living by faith.

*A **Tribulation** . comes from a word ( **qli/yin** ), which means A *pressure, or a pressing together* . . It is reflected in the pressing of*

grapes, in order that the sweet juice may be extracted. When applied to Kingdom experience, **A tribulation** . is the result of the sharp conflict that exists between the faith of God's people and the unbelief of the world. It occurs as the light of the redeemed exposes the darkness of an alienated world. Distress of spirit results, and often pain of body, as persecutions are endured. Make no mistake about it, there is undeniable conflict between **A this present evil world** . and **A the world to come** , . into which faith ushers us.

**Tribulation plays a key role in the preparation of believers for their reign with Christ.** It is the appointed means of developing perseverance. As it is written, ***A Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance*** . (Rom 5:1-3). The natural man is incapable of reasoning in this manner. **A Flesh** . perceives difficulty and distress as insurmountable hindrances to persevering, or remaining faithful. It seeks the way without conflict, seeking for a road without obstacles.

The sanctifying impact of faith, however, enables the believer to see the goal more clearly **because** of the world's opposition. **The rejection of this world accentuates our citizenship in the world to come.**

When Jesus says, **A I know your tribulation** , . it means infinitely more than a mere awareness of it. He beholds the suffering church with a mind to sustain and uphold it. He will not allow His people to be **A tempted above** . what they are **A able to bear** . (1 Cor 10:13). He will grant them power to stand, when others are falling. They will be given bread from heaven to sustain and nourish them in the battlefield. The church at Smyrna continued to stand in tribulation because of their Lord!

What a difference there is between the church at Smyrna and that at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus worked hard, but apparently did not suffer for righteousness sake. Yet, that church *A left . their A first love. .* The church at Smyrna is not commended for a lot of works or arduous labor, yet is not upbraided for any deficiency at all. They had kept the faith in *A tribulation. .* This church maintained their grip on eternal life when sorely pressed.

### **An Important Spiritual Principle**

An important spiritual principle can be seen here. **It is possible for a church or individual to be in such circumstances that productive activity is out of the question.** This is of no consequence to the institutionally minded, but has great relevance to those intent upon keeping the faith. There is more to spiritual life than impacting the lives of others!

There are times when **all** of our spiritual energies must be devoted to **STANDING!** As it is written, *A Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand .* (Eph 6:13). Kingdom initiatives are sometimes held in abeyance while the ground we have gained is maintained. There are times of special trials, like that of Job, when keeping the faith is **all** we can do. However, that is not to be despised. The heavens behold the redeemed in the crucible of conflict, often attacked by the forces of darkness with great ferocity. Such is the *A evil day .* when all of our ransomed powers are required to *A stand .* Blessed is the person who recognizes such a time, and throws his spiritual energies into keeping the faith and standing. Christ will surely bring comfort to such souls.

When Jesus agonized in prayer in Gethsemane, His sword was sheathed for a short season as He grappled with temptation and trial.

With care, He delivered His disciples to the Father, to be kept while He contended with the foe, preparing to have our iniquities laid upon Him. Hear His plaintive words. *A Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are .* (John 17:11).

The church at Smyrna was under assault, and the Savior knew their tribulation. He beheld to sustain and uphold them. His omnipotent hand will be upon them, and against their foes. Nothing shall befall them for which they are not made equal.

## I KNOW YOUR POVERTY

### *Wealth in Poverty*

*"I know your . . . poverty (but you are rich) . . . .* Ah, here is another exposure of the absurdity of the world's religion. It has become fashionable in some circles to speak of poverty in a derisive manner, calling it the curse of the Law, and saying the people of God have been delivered from it. But what will the propagators of such foolishness do with the church at Smyrna? **Here is a church in which no fault was found.** Not a single syllable of rebuke is uttered against it. The church at Smyrna is not urged to recover any lost ground, or return to a superior previous condition. Yet, Jesus declares He knows their **poverty** . She has been deprived of earthly conveniences, stripped of all good appearances. *A But, .* says her Lord, *A you are rich! .*

I recall this poignant word. *A Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? .* (James 2:5). Prosperity in this world is **not** a sure sign of the blessing of God! Like the Hebrew believers, they had no doubt experienced the plundering of their goods (Heb 10:34). This is

of particular note because of the city in which these saints resided. Smyrna was noted for its wealth B but the saints of God did not share in it. The conflict between the passing world and the eternal one was experienced in the church at Smyrna. The world heaped no praise upon this church! Its members were not held in high regard. In this fair city, highly regarded by men, the saints of the Most High God suffered tribulation and became poor!

I have often wondered what the contemporary church would have left to commend it, if stripped of all its earthly possessions. If it was found in *A poverty*, . like the church in Smyrna, what would commend it to the Lord? With great sorrow of heart, I must admit that too many assemblies have nothing more than a building, large budget, and professional staff. They do not feel comfortable in the Lord's presence, and heavenly hosts have no joy when standing in their presence.

### **You Are Rich!**

The exalted Lord now gives His personal assessment of this poor and oppressed church. ***A YOU ARE RICH!*** . Their real possessions were in abundance! The wealth they held was recognized in heaven! Like the Apostles, it could be said they were ***A as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*** . (2 Cor 6:10). Their riches were not mere figments of the imagination. Nor, indeed, were they inferior to the ***A uncertain riches*** . of this world (1 Tim 6:17).

**There are eternal treasures that enhance the worth of those possessing them!** James spoke of being ***A rich in faith*** . (James 2:5). Others are admonished to be ***A rich in good works*** . (1 Tim 6:18). There are also the ***A the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering*** . (Rom 2:4), and the ***A riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*** . (Rom 11:33). Who can forget ***A the riches of His grace*** . (Eph 1:7), ***A the riches of the glory of His inheritance in***

*the saints* . (Eph 1:18), and the *A riches of the full assurance of understanding* . (Col 2:2). Even the *A the reproach of Christ . is A greater riches than the treasures in Egypt* . (Heb 11:26), as Moses well knew. Who can forget the glorious proclamation, *A Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* . (Col 2:3). There are heavenly riches that enhance our lives in this world, sustaining us when all else fails. Rich, indeed, is the congregation that, like Jesus, has *A food to eat of which you do not know* . (John 4:32).

In summary, the church at Smyrna was *A rich toward God* . (Luke 12:21), having obtained and maintained heavenly resources. While They could not barter for worldly goods, they could traffic in heavenly commodities. They had access to *A the wisdom that comes from above* . (James 3:17), *A bread from heaven* . (John 6:32), and *A all spiritual blessings* . (Eph 1:3).

Jesus considered Smyrna to be *A rich!* . This church had availed itself of the things provided in Christ Jesus. She had chosen to traffic in heavenly realities, and to procure riches inaccessible to moth and rust. O, that such an assessment could be made of us, and of our churches! In the last analysis, no other view of the church is of any value. If a church has no heavenly abundance, it is wretched and poor, regardless of its claim.

The church at Smyrna needed to hear this word from the Lord. She was in the *tribulum* B the threshing instrument--experiencing hardship, difficulty, and rejection. This word would cause a resurgence of her strength! It was like good news from a far country, assuring the suffering ones they were not alone. She was rich in what really counted, and she needed to hear it! The Lord has a mind to comfort and encourage His people when they need it. It is on the part of wisdom for us to share His interest in their welfare. Never be fearful of telling God's people of their virtues. There are times when it is especially

important for them to hear such things. We need not fear such activity, for it is the nature of our Lord Jesus Himself to do so. Encouragers are a blessing to all in tribulation.

## **I KNOW THE BLASPHEMY**

### ***Savages in Religion***

***A . . . and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*** . Now Jesus identifies some of the oppressors of His people. He charges them with ***A blasphemy,*** . because they have dared to identify themselves with the God of heaven. They had put a holy name to an unholy thing, and the Lord has seen it! Here again, a great paradox is seen: ***savages in religion !***

Many are the souls that have suffered attacks from those wearing the name of the Lord. It started when Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:25). It continued in the persecutions Moses endured from the very people he was leading (Ex 17:4). The holy prophets were all opposed by the people (Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52). The Lord Jesus Himself was rejected by the Jews, who killed Him (John 1:11; Acts 3:15). With remarkable consistency, the people of God have experienced opposition from those claiming to be of God. Not a single abuse has gone unnoticed by the Lord of glory.

### **A Synagogue of Satan**

The strength of the Lord's word must not escape us. Here was a religious body Jesus said was ***A a synagogue of Satan.*** . The church at Philadelphia was also opposed by such a group (Rev 3:9) B a group of people through whom the devil himself worked!

And what is *A a synagogue of Satan* . ? It is a place where Satan works without restraint; a place where his diabolical desires are carried out in a religious setting. Is it not a dreadful thought that there are bodies of people who gather to do the will of the devil? They do not think themselves to be engaged in such wickedness, yet they are!

Those who take it upon themselves to oppress the saints of God are doing the work of Satan. They are carrying out his intentions, and shall be judged for doing so. Christ Jesus gives them no credit for sincerity. He does not mention their orthodoxy, or any supposed good they have done. They have cursed the people of God, and thus will incur His curse. Make no mistake about this: it will not go well for any body of people Jesus identifies as *A the synagogue of Satan!* .

The identity people claim with God becomes blasphemy at the point they oppose the saints of God. All claims of association with God are negated when His people are hated and maligned.

Elsewhere, the Spirit speaks of true Jews, i.e., those recognized by the God of heaven. *A For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God* . (Rom 2:28-29). It is what people ARE that compels them to do what they do! If they have not been transformed inwardly, they are not the people of God. If God does not praise them, and their hearts have not been circumcised, they are not recognized by the Lord as a people.

The Lord particularly identifies those who say they are *A Jews* . . These were the people who had been given every spiritual advantage. Of them it is written, *A who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;*

*of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen .* (Rom 9:4-5). Yet, in spite of these remarkable benefits, they not only rejected Christ themselves, but aggressively opposed those receiving Him. To them, *A Christ crucified .* became a *A stumbling block .* (1 Cor 1:23). With an aggressiveness that boggles the mind, they had Paul beaten *A five times .* with *A forty stripes save one .* (2 Cor 11:24). Their encroachments on the early church are vividly described in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. *A For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost .* (1 Thess 2:14-16).

Now, they prove obstacles to the believers at Smyrna, aggressive in their opposition to the Gospel. History tells us that when Polycarp was martyred, the Jews helped to gather wood to have him burned alive B so fierce was their hatred of the name of Christ! But in their zeal, they were pawns in the hands of the devil! What a dreadful identity: **The synagogue of Satan !** That is the Savior's own assessment of those *A Jews .* who made life more difficult for the church at Smyrna. Let us be zealous to encourage those in Christ Jesus, not adding to their sorrow. Our encouragements are a blessing.

## **DO NOT FEAR!**

### *The Righteous in Persecution*

*A Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. .* Here is another paradox: **the righteous are persecuted !** For some, this

is too difficult to comprehend. They imagine that because Christ has *A received us to the glory of God* . (Rom 15:7), all will go well with us. Ignorant of the nature of and reason for salvation, they equate well-being in the world with Divine favor. How appropriate is the word of God through Isaiah the prophet. *A The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil* . (Isa 57:1). The *A evil* . from which the *A righteous* . are *A taken away* . is in this world.

We are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom, and the nature of Christ's reign! If there remains in anyone the notion that Jesus rules in order to our temporal comfort and the possession of worldly gain, the message to Smyrna will be a hard lesson. Mind you, this is the King speaking to His people B even to a most favored people who are rich in His eyes. Already they have suffered, even being reduced to poverty. But there is more to come!

### **Divine Wisdom Being Shown**

Through the church, *A the manifold wisdom of God* . is being shown to *A the principalities and powers in the heavenly places* . (Eph 3:10). There are aspects of His character that have not yet been revealed as He desires. He has chosen to make these known in His work with His people B *A the church* . . He will set the church forth as superior to every circumstance created by wicked men, and the devil, with whom such have been joined. He will allow them to go through suffering, in order that the durability of what they have received may be seen by heavenly hosts. When they suffer, as they live by faith, they will lose nothing but dross B and the heavenly treasure they hold in earthen vessels will be enhanced and made more precious.

### **Made Worthy**

In persecution, the people of God are made worthy of the Kingdom

for which they suffer. This has a strange sound to those unfamiliar with Kingdom manners. Yet, it is plainly taught, and that for our upbuilding. ***A So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.*** (2 Thess 1:4-5). Suffering necessarily precedes reigning with Christ. As it is written, ***A If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.*** (2 Tim 2:12). And again, ***A and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*** (Rom 8:17).

### **The Considerate Jesus**

The rejection of this world confirms our acceptance in heaven, where our names are ***A written***. (Luke 10:20; Heb 12:23). The Lord does not leave His people to grope in the darkness on this matter. He tells them what is coming, and admonishes them not to fear. When He dwelt among us, Jesus spoke of a time when great calamity would strike the sons of men. Of that time He said, ***A men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.*** (Luke 21:26). But it is not so with His people! A deluge of trial is about to fall upon the saints at Smyrna! But with authority and grace He cries out, ***A Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.*** They have already endured poverty and blasphemy, but worse things are to come B perhaps prison and even death! Their hearts must be ***A established with grace***. at this time, and not shaken with or dominated by fear (Heb 13:9). God has ***A not given us the spirit of fear,*** and times of trial confirm this to be the case (2 Tim 1:7).

I think of the word Jesus gave to His disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem B a time of fierce opposition. ***A You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they***

*will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near . (Luke 21:16-20).* Even that dreadful hour was not to be executed without the controlling hand of Christ Jesus. His presence guaranteed that *A not a hair of their head .* could be lost!

So it would be with the church at Smyrna. What was to occur would be done within the circumference of Christ's will and reign. It would serve His purpose, and would have no power to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. They were not to fear because their trial would not impact upon their standing with God! It would not diminish their inheritance or put them beyond His sustaining grace.

When we hear the words *A fear not, .* we must know that saints will be tempted to fear in times of trial. It is then that we must take hold of the words of the *A sweet Psalmist of Israel. .A Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You . (Psa 56:3).* Fear can be thrown off by faith, and that is what the Lord is exhorting the church at Smyrna to do. This is not psychological hype. Fearlessness in the face of great difficulty is possible because of the great Shepherd of the sheep. He that keeps us will not slumber (Psa 121:4). It will require effort to *A not fear any of those things .* Smyrna was about to suffer. But the word of the King comes with power to do what He urges.

## **TESTING IS COMING**

### *Commitment in Trial*

*A Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison . . . .*  
What a candid word! How it reminds me of Christ's word to Peter. *A*

***Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren .*** (Luke 22:31-32). Perhaps, because of the strong faith of the brethren at Smyrna, Satan had asked for some of them also. He is of a mind to do this, even as he did with Job (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5).

The Lord speaks to His people with ultimate reality in mind. He does not say the governor will cast some of them into prison, or that the Jews will have some of them incarcerated. No! It is ***A the devil*** . who is about to do this! He is their adversary, and they must arm themselves to resist him, ***A steadfast in the faith*** . (1 Pet 5:8-9).

### **How Free Is Satan?**

For some, this introduces a problem, for it is written, ***A We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*** . (1 John 5:18).

Because of a misapprehension of the nature of spiritual life, some have assumed they can simply dismiss the devil, and he will cease to harras them. What will they do about the saints at Smyrna? Jesus does not say Satan MAY cast some of them in prison, but that he will do so!

By ***A toucheth him not*** , . Scripture means Satan does not have free access to those in Christ Jesus. They are not accessible to him ***A at his will*** , . as is the case with those in unbelief and disobedience (2 Tim 2:26). The devil cannot accomplish his intent with believers. He cannot take their faith from them or drag them into hell, so to speak. He can tempt, buffet, and sift the people of God, but only when given leave to do so by God. He cannot touch their real life, or alienate them from God. When the last word is said, those living by faith ***A overcome the wicked one*** . (1 John 5:18).

Every believer will have to contend with the devil, but it will always be within the framework of the Divine will. Although the old serpent desires that we perish, God ***A is not willing that any should perish*** . (1 Pet 3:9), and will not permit Satan to bring His people down.

Notice how the reign of Christ is made known. **All** of them would not be thrown into prison -- although that is how the devil would love to have it. Only ***A some of you*** . will be accessible to the old serpent. He does not tell them which ones, for they must all arm themselves with a sober mind and ***A Whole armor of God.*** . You may rest assured, however, it will only be those who can survive the assault.

The church at Smyrna may rest assured none will be tried above their ability. The Lord will not permit this to happen. As it is written, ***A God is true, who will not let any test come on you which you are not able to undergo; but he will make with the test a way out of it, so that you may be able to go through it*** . (1 Cor 10:13, BBE). Every trial is controlled and monitored by the Lord of glory! He does not tell the church that some of them will be thrown into prison by Satan because there is nothing He can do about it. He is going to be with them in the trial, like the angel of the Lord was with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. They will not go into prison alone!

The saints of God must realize there are higher purposes being served than their own selfish interests. Angelic hosts are beholding the faith of the elect with great wonder. They see the divers wisdom of God in the sustaining of believers under great duress. They have a ***A treasure*** . in those frail earthen vessels that prison cannot take from them. They will come forth as pure gold Job 23:10).

**TESTING WILL BE MEASURED**

*A . . . and you will have tribulation ten days. .* Their affliction will be temporary, and in strict accordance with the will of the Lord. It will be for a measured time, and will be brief. A Sovereign Lord will see to that. It is still true, *A My times are in Your hand. .* Therefore, the saints may pray, *A Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me .* (Psa 31:15).

The Lord has placed boundaries around the sea. As it is written, *A The waters stood above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them. You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth .* (Psa 104:6-9). If this is the case with nature, how much control must exist in the *A great salvation .* which Christ Jesus is managing! There are boundaries around your sufferings, just as surely as there are around the seas!

Not simply would only *A some .* of them be cast into prison, they would have tribulation for only *A ten days. .* That is another way of saying **brief**. Often we read of this perspective of suffering in Scripture. There will be hardship, and even tears, but joy will follow. *A Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning .* (Psa 30:5). Ultimately, all trials will come to a grinding halt at the return of our Lord. *A For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry .* (Heb 10:37).

From the perspective of faith, we are grieved by trial only for *A a little while. . A In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials .* (1 Pet 1:6). Even then, the trial serves a higher and eternal purpose. Such tests are in

order ***A that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ . (1 Pet 1:7).***

As we proceed through the book of Revelation, we will find frequent references to periods stated in terms of ***A days***. . God's witnesses are said to prophesy ***A one thousand two hundred and sixty days*** . (11:3). When the witnesses of God are rejected and slain by the world, ***A nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days***, . after which the spirit of life will again enter into them (11:9,11). Under the figure of a woman, the church is said to be fed by God in a prepared place for ***A one thousand two hundred and sixty days*** . (12:6). In each of these, the precise length of time is not the point. The Spirit is developing a perspective for us in His use of ***A days***. . In the case before us, ***A ten days*** . means a brief period. It is brief in comparison with the blessedness of the reward. It is precise in the sense of being strictly controlled by the Lord.

Whether the looming trial consummated in the death of those being tested, or was abruptly ended so they could return to normal life, is of no consequence. The point is that Satan was not going to realize his objectives. His purpose would end, but God's would not!

Now, you must learn to take the truth of God for your own, applying it to your case. This is why we are to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches B because it has relevance to our present condition. If you are being tested, it is only for a short while, and you will not be forsaken during its heat. Be of good cheer, then, and hold on your way. The glories of the world to come will wash away the recollection of these fleeting hardships. Here is the word of the Lord to us. ***A Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far***

*more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (2 Cor 4:16-18). As the old camp-meeting song says, *A We'll soon be done with troubles and trials!* . God be praised the Lord Jesus is with us in the midst of them all!

## THE PENETRATING PROMISE

### *Triumph in Death*

*A Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* . Beneath the city of Rome, there is a massive collection of underground routes. They are tunneled in rocky strata, and are even today open to the public. But these are an epitaph to the cruelty of this world, for they are actually cemeteries, known as the Catacombs. Here lie the remains of countless numbers of martyrs, slain for the word of their testimony. Some bodies were taken there from torture racks, and others from arenas where believers offered their last sacrifice in a shroud of flames. In these dark areas, we are told, Christian art was birthed. The saints of God took hold of hope as their comrades remained faithful until the death. Numerous accounts have been recorded of brave souls that refused to deny their Lord, keeping the faith until required to die because of it. Some of those saints were from Smyrna, not the least of which was Polycarp. In those days, believers did not always die of old age, or some crippling disease.

Jesus has apprized His people at Smyrna that some of them will be thrown into prison. They will be put to the most severe test, and will be required to stand under the most oppressive circumstances. The Lord gives the heavenly requirement, then speaks of the sure reward. This word has been passed down through the generations, and every believer has at some time heard it. *A Be faithful until death!* . That is the word!

Christ will now allow vacillation. No wavering under stress. Faithful until death, whether that death be by natural causes, or under the merciless hand of persecutors.

And what does *A faithful* . mean? It means *A believing, true, trustworthy, and sure* . It means the grip on eternal life will not be forfeited for anything or anyone. The eyes will not be turned from the heavens, nor the heart from the Savior. No lure, however cunning, will cause the one who is faithful until death, to remove his hand from the plow. This world, at its best and at its worst, is perceived as temporary, and therefore unworthy of making shipwreck of the faith.

Now death is a sure appointment, for as it is written, *A It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment* . (Heb 9:27). When that appointment is, we do not know, but all shall keep it. Our Lord does not ask us to be faithful until the end of the day, or until the trial is over. Our vision must reach further than the moment. Faithfulness is a requisite as long as we are *A in the body* . (Heb 13:3). When times are good, let us be faithful, and when times are oppressive. When we soar on eagle's wing, or when we walk in sore drudgery, faithfulness is the word! Even if our faith leads to our death, may it be kept fervently!

Living for Jesus requires that kind of determination! It is so vital, that even when some of the number are about to be cast into prison by Satan, they are reminded *A Be faithful until death!* . This is another way of saying, *A they loved not their lives unto the death* . (Rev 12:11). It is *A enduring to the end* . (Matt 10:22), and in your patience possessing your souls (Luke 21:19). This is hating your life *A in the world* . in order that you might *A keep it unto life eternal* . (John 12:25).

We do not hear much of this kind of devotion today B at least not in our country. Some have failed to be faithful over far less consequences

than death!

## The Crown of Life

To those who are *A faithful until death*, . the glorified Christ promises *A a crown of life*. . James also spoke of this crown, promising it to the individual that endured temptation. *A Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him* . (James 1:12). What is the *A crown of life*, . and why does it provide a strong incentive to be faithful until death?

A *A crown of life* . involves the **triumph of life over death** ! Those receiving such a crown shall personally experience death being *A swallowed up of life*, . thereby losing all of its presence and power (2 Cor 5:4). Never again will they be subject to trial. That is an experience reserved for those who occupy a domain of jeopardy! While they were in the world, the *A Seed* of God remained in them, bringing connection with the unseen realm and vital union with the Living One Himself (1 John 3:9). The *A crown of life* is given when our total persons have been swept into vitality with the Living God B when spirit, soul, and body are in joyous and productive harmony with the Savior. No part of us will be recalcitrant or withdrawing. Nothing will have to be subdued within us. Glad day, when the *A crown of life* is granted!

A *A crown of life* . also speaks of a **reign** . Those who are *A faithful until death* . will be required to *A suffer with Christ*. They will taste the bitterness of apparent defeat, as they may appear to have lost. As Jesus was *A crucified through weakness* (2 Cor 13:4), so many who follow Him go through valleys of unspeakable depth and frailty. But that will not be the case when they receive *A the crown of life*. That will be a kingly crown, and they, according to the promise, *A will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ* (Rom 5:17). Of that grand and

glorious reign it is written, *A There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever .* (Rev 22:5). Thank God for that kingly *A crown of life!*

One other aspect of *A the crown of life .* that is refreshing. **This is another view of our glorification** , when the good work of God will be brought to culmination before an assembled universe. The Divine appointment is, *A and whom He justified, these He also glorified .* (Rom 8:30). This is when the likeness of Christ shall characterize every aspect of our persons, praise the Lord! As it is written, *A we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is .* (1 John 3:2). That will be the crowning glory of Christ's work, the rich reward of our faith, and the commencement of uninterrupted communion with our Lord.

All of this will be given to those who are *A faithful until death .* B and the half has not yet been told! Such a prize is worthy of your best effort under every circumstance of life!

## **HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS!**

*A He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . . .* Again, the nature of Scripture is perceived. Here is a word to the messenger of the church at Smyrna, to be given to that congregation. In a broader sense, it is declared to *A the churches .* collectively. In a more specific sense, the individual who has the capacity to hear is to take the message personally. The Word of God deals with eternal issues, not mere provincial challenges. If *A Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God .* (Matt 4:4), then hearing should be one of our chief strengths. We live by *A every word .* that comes from God, because it is

relevant. It addresses our situation, and contains nourishment for our soul.

An *A ear to hear* . is a circumcised ear (Acts 7:51), sensitive to the voice of the Lord. It involves a heart that is alert to the will of God, and delights to know His will. The individual with such an ear is comfortable in the presence of the Lord, and thrives in His court.

To *A hear what the Spirit says* . involves more than merely exposing ourselves to His word. By an act of our will, we expose our hearts to the Word. We take the words into our thought processes, to contemplate and ponder. The Word is thus hidden in the heart, that we might not sin against our Lord (Psa 119:11).

Those who hear what the Spirit says to the churches pledge to guard themselves against the intrusion of Satan's devices. They determine to lay hold of the promises made to the overcomer.

### **The Final Promise**

*A . . . He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.* .  
Again, a glorious promise is given to build the confidence of the hearers. The promise assumes a vital interest in the world to come. It will have no meaning to the person who is not engaged in the good fight of faith. However, for those who have taken up their cross daily, and are running the race with patience that is set before them, it is a promise to obtain. It is spoken to suffering saints, some of which will lay down their lives because of their testimony. The smoke of spiritual battle is in the air, and the clash of contrary forces is felt.

This is the first time in all of *the Bible* that the phrase "*second death*" is mentioned. It is not defined until much later, but the sense of its meaning is apparent to the sanctified soul. There are two senses in

which both life and death may be experienced. In both cases, one is optional, and one is not. Everyone is involved in the first, not everyone in the second. There is life in the body, and there is eternal life. There is also death in the body, and a second death. One has well said, *If we are born twice, we will only die once. But if we are only born once, we will die twice.*

The *'second death'* is a different kind of death - a second type of death. The first death, common to all (Heb 9:27), is a separation of the spirit from the body. The *"second death"* is a separation of the individual from God Almighty. The *"second death"*, is described in soul- words. *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death"* (Rev 20:14). *"But the cowardly unbelieving, abominable, murderers' sexually immoral, sorcerers idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death"* (Rev 21:8). While men have taken upon themselves to

philosophize about the second death, the sensitive soul determines to avoid it. Whatever you may think about *"the lake of fire"*, and *"the lake which burns with fire and brimstone"* you do well to make every effort to avoid being cast here!

This is the ultimate punishment, the final curse. It is being *"punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (2 Thess 1:9). Jesus spoke of it as a place where *"their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,"* to be avoided at all cost (Mark 9:44-48). From this death there shall be no recovery!

Speaking of the second death, Jesus once said, *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt 10:28). How appropriate for those in Smyrna, who were being harshly opposed by those who could kill the body! Jesus told *them* not to fear any of the

things they were going to experience. They were *to* keep their faith, even though their enemies appeared to triumph over them.

Those who suppose faith insulates us from hardship in this world are in serious error. The landscape of this world is cluttered with the graves of faithful saints whose blood was shed because *of* who they were. Their enemies seemed superior, and took delight in ridding themselves of the saints of God. But there is a day of reckoning on the horizon. How men stand in that day is the most critical consideration *of* all!

The "*second death*" will bring *no* dread to the one who keeps the faith. For faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). On Mount Sinai, Moses exceedingly feared and trembled, though a holy man (Heb 12:21). But he will not do so when the lake of fire is opened to receive the condemned! Nor, indeed, will any soul that has continued to believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5:5).

If you have ever feared being condemned, take hold of this promise! If you overcome and you can, by the grace of God - you will have nothing to fear from the second death. It will have "*no power*" over you (Rev 20:6). If you continue to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, He will stand by you in the day of judgment! Then, the second death will not hurt you!

I realize it is not fashionable today to talk of or contemplate the day of judgment and its consequences. It is essential, however, that those *who* wear the name of Christ give attention to such considerations. It will prove to be a deterrent to ungodliness, and a strong incentive to godliness.

## CONCLUSION

In every age, the church of Jesus Christ has suffered the reprisals of an unbelieving world. While this has taken different forms, it has always revealed a sharp and undeniable clash between those who believe God and those who do not. It has always confirmed that those who live by faith are not of the world, and do not fit into its patterns. By the same token, it has demonstrated the alienation of the world from God.

The church at Smyrna stands as a constant source of consolation to everyone who has suffered for righteousness sake. The message given to it has doubtless calmed many a soul who has stood condemned before the devil's crowd, and bowed the neck before the enemy's sword. The world has never been worthy of such noble saints, yet has always had to contend with them.

When the struggle becomes intense, and holding our ground is about all we can do, the Lord speaks comfortably to us. He does not lay upon us burdens we cannot bear, but exhorts us to keep the faith. We will not be asked to endure anything beyond our capacity, and in it all, the Lord Jesus will be with us. Our responsibility is to give fear no place in our hearts. We are also to look at our afflictions as short and brief-only for a moment. Soon, we shall be with the Lord. with all adversity behind us. Until then, our afflictions will be the occasion for Divine consolation, when hope shines more brightly!

# The Revelation Of CHRIST

Lesson Number 5

## THE MESSAGE TO Pergamum

“” And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.' ” “”  
(Revelation 2:12-17, NASB)

## INTRODUCTION

As the Head of the church, **the Lord Jesus remains involved with His people** . The book of the Revelation is a wonderful example of this truth. The churches to whom this book is written had all been exposed

to the Gospel of Christ, and were duly instructed in the manner of the Kingdom. They had been in place for several years, and were all noted for some form of religious activity. From the viewpoint of many, there was no need to provide a message for these churches. Such people imagine that the **thrust** of Divine activity is the evangelization of the lost. The book of Revelation is a contradiction to this distorted view of the Kingdom! **The salvation of the lost involves a process that extends from the new birth to the removal of the individual from the natural order.**

It is not enough to merely profess identity with the Savior. There is a Divine insistence that the people of God avail themselves of the benefits provided in Christ Jesus. A profession of faith is not enough! There must be spiritual life in order to Divine acceptance. That is why judgment ***“begins with the house of God”*** (1 Pet 4:17). This judgment is not to be equated with condemnation. It refers to Divine evaluation, which may result in approval as well as condemnation. For the church in Ephesus, the judgment of Jesus resulted in a stern rebuke. For the church in Smyrna, it resulted in a word of comfort. Now, for the church in Pergamum, another rebuke will be issued.

We must see that this is the manner of King Jesus-- **to evaluate the churches.** Before He unveils the determination of the heavens to them, He will assess them. Our hearts must not miss this perspective. When, from His regal throne, Jesus determined to give a final message to the sons of men, He addressed it to ***“the churches.”*** He then admonishes every person who has been renewed (he with ***“ears to hear”***) to hear what the Spirit is saying ***“to the churches.”***

These considerations must ever be kept before us as we review this book. Our approach must not be a novel one, characterized by fleshly curiosity. This is a message to the churches, designed to alert them to Divine assessment, and the absolute requirement for being pleasing in

the sight of the Lord. If we lose sight of this, our perceptions of the Revelation will degenerate to that of mere men. In such a case, all value will be lost, and no spiritual gain will be realized.

All of heaven is involved in the giving of the message: God, Jesus, the Spirit, and an angel. Now, **every one** with a spiritual capacity to discern the voice of the Lord, is to hear what is being said. That means we are being confronted with a relevant and pertinent message--one that is not to be ignored. Man lives **“by every word of God”** (Luke 4:4), including the book of the Revelation of Jesus. The fact that so many believers ignore this book, thinking it to be beyond them, indicates a spiritual deficiency that must be addressed and resolved.

## WHO IS SPEAKING

In a north-easterly direction from Smyrna in the Caicus Valley, some fifty-five miles away, in Mysia, on a lofty hill, a great political and religious centre. Ramsay ( *Op. cit.* , p. 281) calls it "the royal city, the city of authority." Eumenes II (B.C. 197-159) extended it and embellished it with many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria. The Kingdom of Pergamum became a Roman province B.C. 130. Pliny termed it the most illustrious city of Asia. Parchment (carta Pergamena) derived its name from Pergamum. It was a rival of Ephesus in the temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysos, in the great grove Nicephorium (the glory of the city). Next to this was the grove and temple of Asklepios, the god of healing, called the god of Pergamum, with a university for medical study. Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar). Hence in the Apocalypse Pergamum is a very center of emperor-worship "where Satan dwells." (*Robertson's Word Pictures* )

**“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum (Pergamos, KJV) write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this.”** The KJV uses the word “Pergamos,” which is a transliteration of the Greek term ( **Pergamoj** ) – translating the Greek letters into English letters, rather than translating the word. This is the same approach taken in

using the word “*baptize*” ( **baptizw** ).

The city of Pergamum was a significant and highly regarded one. It was a political and cultural center, noted for its beauty and scholarship. Jesus, however, makes no reference to the political, educational, or social structure of the city. Nor, indeed, does He send a message to its political officials, or endeavor to correct its decadent morals. He selects “*the church in Pergamum*” as the target of His message. Those who bear the name of Jesus must catch the significance of the church, to which they belong. It is not a mere institution, or a secondary consideration to some preconceived work of greater prominence. Because Jesus “*loved the church and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25), He first addresses it, striving to bring it into accord with Divine purpose.

Jesus again addresses the church in one of His revealed capacities: as “*The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.*” Earlier, when John saw the glorified Christ, he said “*out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword*” (Rev 1:16). **The Lord Jesus discloses and corrects conditions with His Word.** It is what comes out of His mouth that makes the difference. He does not say, *The One Who has wrought great miracles says this* — although He did, indeed, work magnificent and revealing miracles. But when He sought to correct or encourage a church, He did not work a miracle, but speak a word. The sword comes out of His mouth!

**A deficient church does not need Jesus to do something for them as much as they need to HEAR what He has to say!** Also, the Lord does not need a church to do something for Him as much as He needs one whose ear is tuned to the heavenly pitch, where a love for the truth is found.

## OVERVIEW

WHO CHRIST IS: “ ” *“The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this.”*

WHAT HE SEES : *“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”*

EXHORTATION: *“Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”*

PROMISE: *“To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”*

The Word of the King will cut to the heart of the matter. Both diagnosis and remedy are found in His Word—in what He has to **say** to the churches. One might suppose that since the rest of the Bible had already been written, the study of the Scripture would be sufficient. What further need for Jesus to speak? It must ever be remembered that salvation involves being **“joined to the Lord”** (1 Cor 6:17), not merely a book. Let none suppose for a moment that the Scriptures may be neglected with impunity. That is not at all the case. It is only, however, as that Word is related to the Lord Jesus in our perception that it obtains power for the individual.

Do not forget it! **What Jesus accomplishes is by means of His Word.** That is how He created the worlds (Gen 1:3,6,14). It is the means through which all of nature is held together in dependable precision (Heb 1:3). And, that is how He nurtures and leads His people. Through His word the Gospel is brought to the alienated, and that is how our minds are brought into accord with our God. As it is written, **“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”** (Heb 4:12, NASB).

Jesus not only sustains the entire creation with *“the word of His power”* (Heb 1:3), He deals with His churches by means of His word. He does not correct them by psychoanalysis. He does not comfort them by means of physical ease and social tranquility. The sword that fights for us or is against us proceeds *“out of His mouth!”* It is no wonder this picture is placed so vividly before the church in Pergamum

That same *“sword”* is also *“the sword of the Spirit”* (Eph 6:17). Just as Jesus speaks the word to the churches, the Holy Spirit brings it home to the heart, convicting or strengthening. It proceeds from the mouth of the exalted Christ as to its source. It is utilized by the Spirit as regards its effectiveness. **The church in Pergamum is confronting Deity!**

The descriptive phrase *“two edged sword”* refers to the effectiveness of Christ’s Word. Of His words Jesus said, *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). This is a declaration of the ability of Christ’s words to quicken the soul, making it sensitive to both God and His will. Christ’s words are also the appointed vehicle through which illumination and sanctification come.

When, therefore, Jesus identifies Himself as the One from Whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword proceeds, He is alerting the church in Pergamum that **He will address their situation** . He will deal with them not only to divulge their condition, but to correct it. He will provide the means to recovery. Herein is seen the greatness of our Savior, as well as His desire purify us from all iniquity.

**I KNOW THY WORKS and WHERE YOU DWELL**

***“I know your works . . . ”*** It is arresting to consider that every church is greeted with these words, ***“I know your works”*** (2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15). **This ought to tear us away from the notion that our works are of no consequence to Jesus!** While we are not justified by works, it is the ordinance of God that we are created in Christ Jesus ***“for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”*** (Eph 2:10). The people of God have been separated from the world for the Lord Himself. In regards to our activity, no posture is acceptable but one in which we are ***“zealous of good works”*** (Tit 2:14).

The spiritual environment in Pergamum was such that Satan could raise up and empower governmental opposition to the church. Here was an environment in which he could work more freely than is ordinary. The persecution leveled against that church was instigated by Satan, though carried out through the government.

This ordained circumstance is why Jesus first looks at what His churches are doing—their ***“works.”*** We must not allow an institutional mind-set to rob us of this perspective! On the whole, most churches are not recognized for their works. In fact, many of them are self contained, keeping much to themselves. The thought has not occurred to them (at least not with any apparent power) that they have been called into the fellowship of Christ to engage in arduous and God-glorifying activity. Their ***“works”*** are to be characterized by the subduement of the flesh and a kingdom initiative that, to some degree, neutralizes the works of darkness.

### **Where Satan Dwells**

***“I know . . . where you dwell, where Satan's throne is . . . where Satan dwells.”*** There are places dominated by Satan, where ***“the works of darkness”*** are found in apparently unrestrained abundance. Such

places are citadels of wickedness, where unusual influence to engage in iniquity is brought to bear upon the soul. Just as there are holy places, associated with Divine activity, so there are wicked places, identified with the work of Satan. I recall many business trips to New York, Los Angeles, and other similar cities, where the power of darkness was especially evident. During my first trip to India, I have vivid memories of the rule of Satan that swept over my soul as we landed in Bombay. This is a very real condition.

Here was an *“inner city”* church. Christ’s assessment of their location is worthy of our consideration: *“where Satan’s throne is.”* It was a place where idolatry and immorality prevailed. Jesus tells the church why—because Satan’s throne was there! It was an area in which the devil could work more freely, and where his influence was more prominent. The *“power of darkness”* (Lk 22:52; Col 1:13) was in this place in a disproportionate way. The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia (the only churches of the *“seven”* that had no fault against them) confronted *“synagogues of Satan”* (2:9; 3:9). Both of these churches were faithful, neutralizing the power of darkness in their area. The old serpent’s throne was not there as it was in Pergamum. In this city, the saints did not confront the *“synagogue of Satan,”* but the *“throne of Satan.”*

### **Satan Is Behind the Opposition**

Pergamum was a center of imperial worship and authority. Here was built the first Asian Temple of the divine Augustus, which for more than forty years was the one center of the Imperial religion for the whole Province. Ramsay tells us, *“The authority over the minds of its Asian subjects, possessed by the State, and arrayed against the Church, was mainly concentrated in the Temple.”* This political situation, however interesting, is not identified in these terms by Jesus. He calls the city *“the seat [or throne] of Satan.”*

There is a principle here that is reflected throughout the book of Revelation. ***Satan is behind all opposition to God's people!*** In a vivid description of opposing political power, John is told that Satan is the one animating that influence. ***"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority"*** (Rev 13:1-2).

The spiritual environment in Pergamum was such that Satan could raise up and empower governmental opposition to the church. Here was an environment in which he could work more freely than is ordinary. The persecution leveled against that church was instigated by Satan, though carried out through the government.

### **A Cultural Seat**

Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was not noted for its trade and commerce. It was a place of culture and refinement. Adorned with cathedrals and dignified by a university-climate, some would have thought this a good place to live. But it was not. The throne of Satan was there! He disseminated his corruption from that place, and pioneered the spread of spiritual blindness, fleshly indulgence, and ***"science falsely so called."***

There still remain cities where Satan is dominant in an unusual way—cities that are Satan's headquarters. Los Angeles, New York, Chicago – they are citadels of Satanic influence. It is not unusual for such places to

also be cultural centers, with purported educational and scholastic superiority. Nevertheless, like Pergamum, they are the place of Satan's throne.

As Satan's seat, here was a city where **culture itself became a deterrent to godliness**. The discipline of the mind thus became a means to carnality rather than godliness. The philosophies of men not only contradicted faith in Christ, but was aggressive in its opposition to it.

Where Satan's throne exists, danger is imminent. Those who dwell in such places must be strong in faith, and armed with the whole armor of God. Slovenly spiritual manners will not allow survival in such realms!

There still remain cities where Satan is dominate in an unusual way—cities that are Satan's headquarters. Los Angeles, New York, Chicago — they are citadels of Satanic influence. It is not unusual for such places to also be cultural centers, with purported educational and scholastic superiority. Nevertheless, like Pergamum, they are the place of Satan's throne.

The awareness of this circumstance should alert the people of God. **They are not to trust in what flourishes where Satan's throne is found!** Those who seek to authenticate their work for Christ with credentials attained in the realm of Satan's throne do well to rethink their quest. Such a procedure is far more serious than commonly perceived.

Paul was from Tarsus, also an educational and cultural center. It had an outstanding university in which men of renown taught (Antipater, Archedemus, Nestor, Athenodorus surnamed Cordylion, Tiberius, Plutiades and Diogenes, Artemidorus, Diodorus, etc.). Yet, in all of his recounting of the past, not a single reference is made to the cultural

climate of Tarsus! He referred to himself as *“a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city,”* and *“a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia”* (Acts 21:39; 22:3, NIV). He knew that whatever advantages he held in the Kingdom were not owing to Tarsus or its purported culture.

This was also the case with the church at Pergamum. Whatever few advantages they held were certainly not due to the cultural resources in Pergamum. With all of its social advantages and scholarly superiority, Jesus identified it as the city where **“Satan’s throne”** was situated. May the Lord restore this kind of perception in His people. It will protect them from the evil one, and bring to the the blessing of the Lord.

## HOLDING FAST CHRIST’S NAME

*“ . . . you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith . . . ”* Three other times our Lord uses this expression ( *“hold fast”* ) in this book. To the church at Thyatira He said, *“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come”* (2:25). The church in Sardis was told, *“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast , and repent”* (3:3). Jesus also told the church in Philadelphia, *“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”* (3:11).

**This is a Kingdom manner of life!** The Thessalonians were admonished, *“Test all things; hold fast what is good”* (1 Thess 5:21). Young Timothy was exhorted, *“ Hold fast the pattern of sound words . . . ”* (2 Tim 1:13). Our identity with Christ requires that we *“ hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end”* (Heb 3:6). Perceiving that we have a great High Priest Who is passed into the heavens, we are to *“ hold fast our confession”* (Heb 4:14; 10:23). We are, then, speaking to a subject most pertinent to the life of faith.

The church in Pergamum is commended for holding fast to Christ's name. What does this mean? First, it confirms believers are presently in the realm of struggle. Forces of darkness continually try to take from us what Christ has given to us. They make every effort to move us beyond the boundary of confidence and assurance. They cannot do this by force, so they employ delusion, or "***cunning craftiness.***" Holding fast relates to the believer's effort to keep what has been received, and maintain an identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers are presently in the realm of struggle. Forces of darkness continually try to take from us what Christ has given to us. They make every effort to move us beyond the boundary of confidence and assurance. They cannot do this by force, so they employ delusion, or "***cunning craftiness.***" Holding fast relates to the believer's effort to keep what has been received, and maintain an identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This aggressive term postulates intense opposition and a determination to take hold and keep hold. From the word **krateij**, this term has *a basic meaning. of being strong or possessing power; (1) take hold of forcibly, seize, grasp; (2) take into custody, seize, arrest; (3) take control of, hold fast; (4) hold back, restrain from, hinder, prevent; (5) of following a doctrine, creedal confession, or course of life hold fast to, keep hold of, continue firmly in ; of causing a state to continue retain, keep .* <sup>1</sup> Jesus vividly described this Kingdom manner in these words. "***And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force***" (Matt 11:12). More literally, the kingdom of heaven is "*gotten by force.*"

The church in Pergamum had been aggressive to keep the Name of Jesus. They maintained a tenacious grasp on it even though influences were brought to bear upon them to loosen their grip. But what does it mean to hold fast the Name of Christ? **Even when they were subjected to peril, they refused to abandon their allegiance to Christ.** It is one thing to claim to be a *Christian* when it is not vigorously opposed by those around you, and it does not thrust you into danger. It is quite another thing to keep your profession when it is dangerous to do so. In the very citadel of Satanic power, they insisted on being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ!

The faithful in Pergamum did not DENY the Son of God, even when pushed to do so. Remember, Jesus said, ***“But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven”*** (Matt 10:33, NKJV). To hold fast the name of Christ is NOT to be ashamed of Him (Luke 9:26)—even when faced with scoffing, persecution, or even death.

### **Did Not Deny My Faith**

Jesus also commends this church for NOT denying His faith. Here is an concept we would do well to incorporate into our thinking—**denying Christ’s faith** . To ***“deny”*** is *to contradict, i.e. disavow, reject, abnegate:--deny, refuse*. Scripture speaks of those who **deny** the power of godliness (2 Tim 3:5) and the Lord (2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4). With great solemnity the Spirit testifies, ***“If we deny Him, He also will deny us”*** (2 Tim 2:12). It is said of those living in glaring contradiction of the new creation, ***“but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work”*** (Tit 1:16).

Like ***“holding fast,”*** denying is not casual, but aggressive. It requires the assertiveness of the human will. It took considerable effort and determination for Peter to deny Jesus three times in one night (Matt 26:69-75). Conversely, it required a significant exertion of the will for

the church in Pergamum to “*not deny My faith.*”

One might suppose Jesus would have said they had not denied His name, or His Person. But He says they have not denied “**MY FAITH.**” Paul wrote of the person who refused to provide for his house as one who had “*denied THE faith*” (1 Tim 5:8). But Jesus says “**MY faith.**” The KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, Darby’s, and Young’s, translate the expression “**MY faith.**” The NIV and NRSV versions translate it “*your faith in me.*” What is the difference between the two expressions?

One is objective, and the other subjective. The objective view shows in Whom the faith resides: *faith IN Me.* The subjective view shows the experiential aspect of faith: received from Christ, i.e., “*My faith.*” In the latter case the faith was Christ’s by origin. In this case, the church in Pergamum did not repudiate or abandon the faith given to them by Christ. In the former case, they did not repudiate their faith in Christ, or refuse to trust Him because of oppression.

Both views are correct, thus providing us a full view of the faith. While it is received, or “*obtained*” (2 Pet 1:1), it evidences itself in personal and conscious reliance upon the Lord’s Christ. Jesus commends this congregation for not denying His faith, even when pressed to do so. O, there needs to be a return to this set of values! Those who, under stress, do not deny the faith given to them, retaining their reliance upon Christ Jesus, are to be commended! Such retention is a great accomplishment. That is why Jesus commends it—even in those with major deficiencies.

## MY FAITHFUL MARTYR

A word concerning the nature of spiritual life is in order at this point. Those who insist on lives of relative ease, and cannot stand the opposition of their peers, will not be able to keep Christ's faith or hold fast to His name. What we have received in Christ Jesus is contrary to the world. The reason many people do not experience much opposition from the world is that the world cannot see any difference in them. It is not threatened by their presence, and thus is quite willing to leave them alone.

*“ . . . even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you.”* The commendation just given to the church in Pergamum was especially meaningful in view of the circumstances. They were living in a time of fierce and bloody opposition. They did not merely argue with philosophers, but encountered those who were *“able to kill the body”* (Matt 10:28). In the beginning, the church was found *“praising God and having favor with all the people”* (Acts 2:47). But, alas, those days soon passed. Even in Jerusalem, persecution broke out against believers. It is written, *“time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles”* (Acts 8:2). Throughout history, the latter condition has been more the norm than the former. So it was in Pergamum. There was blood shed because of the testimony of the saints.

A word concerning the nature of spiritual life is in order at this point. Those who insist on lives of relative ease, and cannot stand the opposition of their peers, will not be able to keep Christ's faith or hold fast to His name. What we have received in Christ Jesus is contrary to the world. The reason many people do not experience much opposition from the world is that the world cannot see any difference in them. It is not threatened by their presence, and thus is quite willing to leave them

alone. But it was not so in Pergamum, seat of political power, source of unspeakable beauty, and in possession educational superiority.

A single saint is mentioned—and this is the only mention of him in the Bible: Antipas. Even church history ignores this man, as though he were hidden from their view by Divine providence. From an earthly perspective, we do not know why Antipas was martyred or who instigated his death. Jesus provides a different view of the situation—a heavenly view. He refers to a specific time in which perseverance was particularly noteworthy: *“those days.”* He identifies the person martyred as *“Antipas . . . My faithful martyr.”* Some of the versions say *“Antipas my witness, my faithful one.”* This good brother held on to his faith at the cost of his life—and Jesus saw it all! He was *“faithful until death.”* He was a witness in his death as well as in his life. Jesus put his name in the Bible!

Those who suppose consistent protection from the enemy is guaranteed by a strong faith will have a lot of trouble with Antipas (not to mention Isaiah, James, Stephen, Paul, and Peter). There is a time when God’s witnesses *“finish their testimony”* (Rev 11:7) and *“finish their course”* (2 Tim 4:7). At that time, we have no revelation about how we will make our exit from *“this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4). Occasionally, Jesus has revealed to strong brethren particulars about their death. He told Peter, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.”* Having revealed this, however, *“Jesus said to him, Follow Me”* (John 21:18-19). Peter was crucified, church history apprizes us, in fulfillment of this prophecy. Such revelations, however, are exceeding rare. We are not promised the particulars of our death.

Note that Antipas was “*killed among*” the church in Pergamum. There was an onslaught leveled against this church by the devil himself, and Antipas was “*killed*” in that initiative. But, here is something of special significance. Jesus does not identify Antipas as one of them, but as His own: “*MY faithful martyr!*” He was “*among*” the Pergamum brethren, but he belonged to Jesus! This is a true Kingdom view of the faithful. Spiritual kindred with whom we fellowship are our brethren, and we cherish their presence, **but they belong to Christ!** This is why the Romans were admonished not to judge one another inconsiderately. “*Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand*” (Rom 14:4). The relationship one sustains to the Lord of glory is always the dominate one. This is how Jesus views the matter, and it is how we must view it also.

A word about the relative anonymity of some saints is in order. There are a number of God’s children who are mentioned only one time in God’s Word. Antipas is among that number, although more is known of him than of many of the others. I want to list some of them in tribute to their faith, and in anticipation of their exaltation in the world to come.

One final note on the martyrdom of Antipas. Jesus does not identify the depraved ruler responsible for the final decree. Nor, indeed, does he mention the reason for the aggression against the church. The credit is traced directly to Satan: “*Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*”

This is the second time “*where Satan dwells*” is mentioned. The first time Jesus says the church dwelt where Satan’s throne was. This time, however, He says Satan dwells among them: “*who was killed among you, where Satan dwells!*” The NIV softens the statement by saying,

*“Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.”* It is doubtless true that the city of Pergamum itself was a dwelling place for Satan. We will soon find, however, that the adversary had also found a place within the church itself. When a church is located where Satan’s throne exists, it should be expected that he will launch an initiative against that church, which is a threat to his kingdom of darkness. Further, he will make every effort to do so from within the church.

A word about the relative anonymity of some saints is in order. There are a number of God’s children who are mentioned only one time in God’s Word. Antipas is among that number, although more is known of him than of many of the others. I want to list some of them in tribute to their faith, and in anticipation of their exaltation in the world to come. Crescens, Carpus, Andronicus, Junia, Amplias, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodion, Narcissus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas (Rom 16:7-15; 2 Tim 4:10-13). Antipas stood among this number, *“unknown”* in the world, but *“well known”* where it counts (2 Cor 6:9)! Every seemingly obscure disciple should draw comfort from Antipas. They too are duly noted by Jesus!

## I HAVE A FEW THINGS AGAINST YOU!

*“ . . . But I have a few things against you . . . ”* The carnal mind will find it difficult to believe a church like Pergamum could have something *“against”* it. After all, the Lord Jesus Himself had commended them. They had held fast to His Name where Satan’s seat, or throne, was positioned. Under great duress, they did not deny His faith, but kept it with commendable zeal. They had even experienced the martyrdom of one of their members, and had chosen to side with the Lord in that martyrdom, rather than be intimidated by it. While it is

true that *“love will cover a multitude of sins”* (1 Pet 4:8), arduous activity will not.

The nature of Christ remains constant, and is unchangeable. This is the true meaning of the expression, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever .”* This does not mean Jesus always does the same thing, for He does not. He allowed James to be killed at the threshold of the church , and permitted his brother John to outlive all of the other Apostles. Also, at the same time Herod killed James, seeing that it pleased the Jews, he determined to kill Peter also, who was miraculously delivered. For that matter, although Peter was delivered from prison then, yet in the end, he was martyred while in prison. God’s people do well not to be spiritually naive, failing to see that **our Lord rules in a discriminating way.**

The nature of Christ remains constant, and is unchangeable. This is the true meaning of the expression, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Heb 13:8). This does not mean Jesus always does the same thing, for He does not. He allowed James to be killed at the threshold of the church (Acts 12:1-2), and permitted his brother John to outlive all of the other Apostles. Also, at the same time Herod killed James, seeing that it pleased the Jews, he determined to kill Peter also, who was miraculously delivered (Acts 12:3-10). For that matter, although Peter was delivered from prison then, yet in the end, he was martyred while in prison. God’s people do well not to be spiritually naive, failing to see that **our Lord rules in a discriminating way.**

Have you thought of the gravity of the words, *“But I have a few things against you . . . ”* There are people who, under the influence of the evil one, cannot believe Jesus looks critically upon His people. They delight in thinking of Him as never saying anything bad about

anyone. But that is only a delusion. Judgment does begin at the house of God (1 Pet 4:17). When the Lord finds things that are contradictory of His nature and impede the truth, He will not overlook them. Such things, if not crucified, have the potential of cutting people off from the Source of life.

## The Teaching of Balaam

*“ . . . you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.”*

This is a difficult word for those who say doctrine is of no consequence. I have often heard people say, *“We do not deal with doctrine, that is the source of too much division.”* That may sound good to the mind of the flesh, but it is absurd to the spiritual minded.

Here is a church that was allowing things to be taught that Jesus could not tolerate. In this matter, He was *“against”* them! You cannot get more serious than that!

Note the first thing Jesus had against this church. They had held fast to His name, and had not denied His faith. Yet, they tolerated teachers who caused people to sin! This was not the persuasion of the entire church, only of some within it. These subversive teachers held to *“the doctrine of Balaam.”* Here is one of the mysterious men of Scripture who proved to be a contradicting dichotomy. He lived during the time of Moses, and was a prophet of God. One of the most poignant expressions of the Divine nature was uttered by this strange prophet. Read it and marvel. *“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a King is among them.*

*God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain”* (Num 23:19-24, NKJV). Yet, he fell under the condemnation of the devil because of a covetous spirit.

Balak, king of the Moabites, saw how God was with the Israelites, and what they had done to the Amorites. He, together with all of Moab, was stricken with fear, and sought the demise of Israel. They determined to seek out a prophet in Israel, and pay him a reward to exercise divination against Israel, bringing a curse upon them. Balaam was selected as the target for the reward. Upon confronting these people, Balaam told Balak he could not curse those God had blessed, and that no divination against Israel could be successful. In a stern word to the servants of Balak, Balaam said, ***“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.”***

Rather than dismissing the men, Balaam told them, ***“Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me.”*** In a test of his faith, God appeared to Balaam that night saying, ***“If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you; that you shall do.”*** In the morning, Balaam did not wait for the men to call him, but rose, saddled his donkey, and went with the men. Scripture tells us ***“Then God’s anger was aroused because he went.”*** The Lord then sent an angel to obstruct Balaam’s way. The well known incident of the donkey talking to Balaam occurred at that time.

In spite of this clear word, teachers arose who actually promoted what was here forbidden—within the church!

To teach what is wrong, men are required to ignore the truth. Their contradictions are not innocent, but deliberate. Indulgence in immorality and idol worship is never inculpable when found among the people of God. It always requires a denial of the truth.

After a series of good words, Balaam, desirous of the rewards brought from Balak, succumbed to the wicked one. He told Balak there was no way he could curse those God would not curse. However, he reasoned, if some beautiful women from Moab could entice the men from Israel to commit fornication, and thus lure them into idolatry, God would be against His own people (Num 22-23). The ploy worked, and Israel was judged for their sin.

Peter said Balaam was one *“who loved the wages of unrighteousness”* (2 Pet 2:15). Jude refers to the false prophets of his time as those who *“have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit”* (Jude 11). In our text, Jesus says of him, he *“who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”*

In this case, fleshly indulgence and the recognition of idols was taught for personal advantage. Like the false prophets of old, these men had nurtured people for destruction by making provision for the fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh. **Their doctrine allowed people to maintain theoretical identity with Christ, while doing the things He hates.** Their teaching allowed for honor to be given to other gods, eating meat that had been offered to them.

Some at Pergamum might have said they did not agree with what was being taught by these messengers of Satan. But Jesus holds against them their toleration of the condition. It is imperative that the church see this aspect of Christ’s nature. **The people of God are to view what is taught among them with great sobriety.** They are to be able to *“try*

*the spirits,*” determining whether they are of God (1 John 4:1). Note, Jesus does not say this to only the elders or leaders, but to all the believers in Pergamum! This was not a matter to be settled by church politics! The people were apprized that the Lord of glory had something against them! They were allowing things to be taught that angered Him and made the people spiritually destitute.

Earlier in the history of the church, an edict was issued by the Jerusalem leaders concerning both fornication and eating things sacrifice to idols. ***“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood . . . That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well”*** (Acts 15:20,29). In spite of this clear word, teachers arose who actually promoted what was here forbidden—within the church! To teach what is wrong, men are required to ignore the truth. Their contradictions are not innocent, but deliberate. Indulgence in immorality and idol worship is never inculcable when found among the people of God. It always requires a denial of the truth.

### **The Teaching of the Nicolaitans**

***“ . . . Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”*** There appears to have been a tolerant spirit among these people. Not only were some holding to the doctrine of Balaam, teaching corrupt things for wages, there were some in their number who held to views that were utterly false. For the sophisticated church of our time, one might suppose this was all right. After all, if they hold their doctrine privately, it is of no harm to us. But that is not the case, for Satan works through false doctrine, just as Jesus works through the truth. Whether the false doctrine is entertained privately or taught publically, it still has a leavening influence.

The church in Pergamum is not upbraided for teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but for having some in their number that had embraced such teaching. If this is how Jesus looks at the churches (and it most assuredly is) it would be interesting to know how He views many contemporary churches that are very familiar to us all.

The truth of the Gospel is abrasive to doctrinal error, and to those who hold to delusions, as *“some”* did in Pergamum. Even when an aggressive effort is expended to hold fast to the Name of Christ, and not deny His faith, doctrines can be held by some within the church that alienate people from God, anger Jesus, and quench the Spirit. They may not promote them, but Jesus knows they are being held by some in His churches. He does not treat the matter lightly. The existence of those who had embraced Nicolaitan teaching was something Jesus had AGAINST the church at Pergamum.

The church in Pergamum is not upbraided for teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but for having some in their number that had embraced such teaching. If this is how Jesus looks at the churches (and it most assuredly is) it would be interesting to know how He views many contemporary churches that are very familiar to us all.

You will recall that Ephesus was commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which things Jesus also *“hated”* (Rev 2:6). The KJV and NKJV include these words in the message to Pergamum, *“Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate .”* The fact that Jesus hates what some people do and teach is too difficult for the squeamish to receive. However, it is far better to acquiesce with the judgment of the Lord on this matter, than to be rebuked by Him for having some in our number who embrace such permissive teachings.

We do not know a lot about the Nicolaitans. They did promote the indulgence of the flesh, reasoning that the fleshly appetites came from God, and thus could be gratified without fear of Divine reprisal. Briefly stated, their doctrine allowed those who were converted to return to their immoral ways. We live in a time when this should not have a strange sound to us. We have “*gay and lesbian*” churches throughout the land, a sort of modern representation of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

As a matter of principle, when our religion salves our conscience concerning unacceptable behavior, the Lord Jesus is against us. When a church has within its number those who embrace such folly, whether they teach it or not, Jesus has something against that church. Whether aggressively taught or passively embraced, doctrines that do not discourage sin bring the individual under the judgment of Christ.

## REPENT!

***“Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”*** When John the Baptist came preaching, he cried out ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*** (Matt 3:2). As soon as Jesus began His public ministry, it is written, ***“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*** (Matt 4:17-18). Repentance stands at the threshold of Kingdom experience. Initially, it is turning away from what has alienated us from God, and turning to our Savior. The Athenian philosophers were told that God ***“now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained”*** (Acts 17:30-31). In obedience to his calling, Saul of Tarsus declared in Damascus and throughout all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, ***“that they should repent, turn to God, and do***

*works befitting repentance*” (Acts 26:20).

Once a person is *“in Christ,”* he is not finished with repentance. This is the means through which recovery from *“the snare of the devil”* is realized (2 Tim 2:25-26). Repentance is more than simply a change of mind—although it surely involves a change of mind. It is an AGGRESSIVE change of commitment and direction. The individual who repents zealously turns from the offensive way to the sanctified One. In repentance, there is an abandonment of one way in order to the embrace of another. The repenting one experiences a hatred for the old way because it has disqualified him for the way of blessing. The *“broad way”* always leads to **“destruction”** (Matt 7:13).

Should the church in Pergamum choose to ignore the counsel of the One with the two edged sword proceeding out of His mouth, there will be consequences. Our Lord’s admonitions are never mere suggestions. They are to be taken seriously, and acted upon with zeal and determination.

Only two of the seven churches to whom this letter is addressed (Smyrna and Philadelphia) had nothing against them. The other five were told that Jesus had something against them, and all of them were told to *“repent”* (2:5,16,21,22, 3:3,19). In Christ, recovery is both possible and imperative. Salvation makes no provision for backward motion, a lack of progress, or disinterest. When men sin, they must repent. That is the law of the Kingdom!

Satan has deluded many into believing recovery is possible without renouncing what has offended Christ. That is a delusion. Others imagine they can grow without initiative or effort. That also is a

distortion. The church that was tolerating those who taught doctrines that not only permitted, but encouraged, sin, were told to ***“repent.”*** Those holding these views, whether they taught them or not, were to ***“repent.”*** They were to let go of the offensive thing, turn around, and eagerly embrace the Lord they had offended. This involves thinking differently and abandoning the manner of life rebuked by Christ. In my judgment, we are in need of a wave of repentance in the churches.

### **“Or Else!”**

Should the church in Pergamum choose to ignore the counsel of the One with the two edged sword proceeding out of His mouth, there will be consequences. Our Lord’s admonitions are never mere suggestions. They are to be taken seriously, and acted upon with zeal and determination.

The Lord does not allow a lot of time for the people to consider His admonition. ***“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”*** The thought of Jesus being your opponent, engaging in an initiative against you, is sobering, to say the least. At all costs this circumstance must be avoided.

Lest we casually dismiss this warning, we should consider what Jesus has done **with** His word. It is a powerful sword, indeed! The worlds were created by His word (Gen 1:3,6,14). Winds were calmed and seas were stilled by the words coming from Christ’s mouth (Mark 4:39). Once He ***“rebuked”*** a fever, and it left Peter’s afflicted mother-in-law (Luke 4:39). Demons inhabiting a man in a synagogue came out of the man at the command of Jesus (Mark 1:25-26). When soldiers came with Judas to arrest Jesus in the garden, He asked them, ***“Whom are you seeking?”*** When they said ***“Jesus of Nazareth,”*** He simply said ***“I am He,”*** and ***“they drew back and fell to the ground”*** (John 18:4-8).

The point is that when Jesus *FIGHTS AGAINST* us with His mouth, an inevitable curse will ensue. Those living by faith have Christ's word working for them. He intercedes for them thereby effecting their salvation (Heb 7:25). His words, in such a case, are "*spirit and they are life*" (John 6:53). But when He *FIGHTS AGAINST* people with His Word, He opposes them, frustrating their cause, and making Himself their enemy. Candidly, it is dreadful to contemplate such a circumstance! To have Jesus speak and fight against us must be avoided at all cost.

There appears to be an allusion to Balaam, who, in his quest for self gratification, confronted the angel of God, who had a sword (Num 22:23). In fact, in the end, Balaam himself was slain with the sword (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22). Since Pergamum had some who taught the "*doctrine of Balaam,*" they are threatened with the judgment of Balaam. They must take Christ's assessment serious. He has not overlooked their toleration of what He hates. Yet, in His compassion, He first warns them, lest they lose faith altogether and be separated from Him.

## THE GLORIOUS INCENTIVE

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."*

There is a condition that will become increasingly obvious in the messages to the churches. **Jesus provides unusual promises to draw those in unusual sin to Himself.** We have a good example of this in our text. Jesus has just threatened to come and fight against this church with the sword proceeding out of His mouth. However, He does not

leave the matter with a threat. We do not become “*partakers of the Divine nature*” through threats, but through promises (2 Pet 1:4). There is a condition to be overcome in Pergamum. After telling them what He will do if they do not “*repent,*” the Lord now provides a glorious incentive for them to overcome the Satanic initiative to which they have been succumbing.

Lest we forget, **this message is not confined to the church in Pergamum!** Again, Jesus speaks to every individual reading this book. Remember, a blessing has been pronounced upon “*he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein*” (1:3). There are circumstances in this book that perfectly parallel that of contemporary churches and individuals! We will hear threats that can be taken personally by both congregations and individual personalities. Now we will consider another promise that applied not only to the church in Pergamum, but to all of the churches. It also applies to individuals as well, “*He who has an ear.*” Thank God for the personal and profitable nature of His word!

Do not read this book as something pertaining only to a church and time in the past. The Spirit not only gave this book, He is speaking today through it to everyone with a capacity to discern the Word of the Lord. The promise is not merely to Pergamum, but to “*he who overcomes.*” That brings every believer into the picture. Here is something God wants to give to all of His children!

### **The Hidden Manna**

This speaks of unimaginable privilege, and is to be compared with the dreadful practice of eating things “*offered to idols.*” Whereas that eating brought the judgment of Christ, eating the hidden manna will bring the blessing of God.

There are circumstances in this book that perfectly parallel that of contemporary churches and individuals! We will hear threats that can be taken personally by both congregations and individual personalities. Now we will consider another promise that applied not only to the church in Pergamum, but to all of the churches. It also applies to individuals as well, ***“He who has an ear.”*** Thank God for the personal and profitable nature of His word!

The allusion is to the pot of manna that was placed in the ark of the covenant. ***“And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations”*** (Ex 16:33). ***“The ark of the covenant . . . wherein was the golden pot that had manna . . . ”*** (Heb 9:3). This manna was NOT to be eaten. It was HIDDEN from the people. While it was of the same substance as the manna eaten by the Israelites for 40 years, it was not accompanied by the same privilege. Too, it did not stink and breed worms, as manna that was retained in the wilderness beyond the allotted time (Ex 16:20). That golden pot of manna was indicative of the remarkable advantages to be given those living in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

There is spiritual sustenance that is NOT available to those who allow Satanic influence in their presence— ***“hidden manna.”*** There is food for the soul that may only be possessed by walking in the light, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit (1 John 1:7; Rom 1:17; Gal 5:16). The sweet things of God simply cannot be possessed by the carnal and spiritually undisciplined mind!

This is the nourishment of which David spoke. ***“The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant”*** (Psa 25:14). This does not speak of the mere conveyance of information—like a heavenly library. This is life-sustaining revelation! Hidden manna is more nourishing than public manna! Allow me to put

it another way. Knowing the significance of Scripture is more precious than just knowing the text of it, although such knowledge is imperative! O, if people only knew what a great price they pay by allowing Satan to work in their midst! They are thus deprived of the hidden manna, through which they could become acquainted more thoroughly with their precious Lord.

David again spoke of this hidden manna. ***“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures”*** (Psa 36:8). The ***“hidden manna”*** equates to the ***“fullness”*** of God’s house. Later, the Spirit would refer to this fulness as ***“the fulness of Christ”*** (Eph 4:13), accentuating the means through which it is received. The church at Pergamum could have access to this ***“fulness”*** if they will repent of their godless toleration.

Of this sustaining manna, Jesus said, ***“I have food to eat of which you do not know”*** (John 4:32). This food was ***“hidden”*** to the disciples at that time. It sustained Jesus, while they became hungry. ***“Hidden manna”*** is superior food of which those who are not offended by Satan and this world are totally ignorant. It simply is not available to them.

Solomon even spoke of this blessing. ***“His secret counsel is with the upright”*** (Prov 3:32). You cannot appropriate the things of God academically. Such things are hidden from the wise and the prudent, who insist on anchoring themselves to this world (Matt 11:25). Regardless of the intellectual abilities and mental disciplines of the church in Pergamum, if they did not repent of their wickedness, they could not eat the nourishing manna that is hidden in Christ Jesus. Spiritual nourishment requires separation from the world.

Isaiah contrasted the blessedness of this privilege with the curse of walking in darkness. ***“Behold, My servants shall eat , But you shall be hungry; Behold, My servants shall drink , But you shall be thirsty; Behold, My servants shall rejoice , But you shall be ashamed; Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart , But you shall cry for sorrow of heart, And wail for grief of spirit”*** (Isa 65:13-14). It is alarming how common it is for professed believers to imagine they can be blessed while occupying the room of cursing! One who is at variance with Jesus will not sit at His table! They will not have ***“the mind of Christ,”*** know the richness of Divine fellowship, or experience God being for them (1 Cor 2:16; 1 John 1:3,6,7; Rom 8:Rom 8:31). I am convinced there are churches all about us who need to hear this word. Within them, there are people with ears to hear—a capacity to sense the voice of the Lord. May they hear this glorious promise!

Of this sustaining manna, Jesus said, ***“I have food to eat of which you do not know”*** (John 4:32). This food was ***“hidden”*** to the disciples at that time. It sustained Jesus, while they became hungry. ***“Hidden manna”*** is superior food of which those who are not offended by Satan and this world are totally ignorant. It simply is not available to them. Many a soul is spiritually starved because they live too close to the world, and too readily imbibe its manners.

Ultimately, the Lord Jesus Himself is the ***“hidden manna.”*** Having ***“passed into the heavens”*** (Heb 4:14), He is no longer accessible to those living in the flesh. Only those

who come away from the course of this world will be afforded the privilege of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:48-58). To put it another way, they will have transcendent fellowship with Him.

Finally, there is a reference here to the world to come, in which the

saints shall have their hungers and thirsts thoroughly satisfied. They will no longer see *“through a glass darkly,”* but will know *“even as they are known”* (1 Cor 13:12). The experience of spiritual satisfaction that is begun here will be culminated there! Blessed is the person who hears this promise, and sets himself to appropriate it by repenting of all that has deprived him of the blessing of God.

### A White Stone

This *“stone”* is thought to be an allusion to various customs of the times. Some suppose the reference to be to a Grecian custom, which used white stones to mark special days. Others say it portrays the Roman custom of giving white stones to conquerors in the Olympic games. Others think it refers to the Roman Judicial custom of giving white stones indicate to absolution, as compared to a black stone which depicted condemnation. There are, of course, apparent parallels in each of these references. We could see in the white stone the guarantee of special and blessed days throughout eternity. We will also be recognized as conquerors in the race of life and conflict with Satan. There will also be a personal awareness of complete exoneration from all guilt, and relief from all handicaps.

I do not choose to accept these views as the intention of the Spirit, Who is speaking to the churches. There is a principle I recommend for those who delve into the various terms and figures employed in Scripture. You can look to the social customs of the day to find the significance of the reference, and yet, as Paul would say, *“I show you a more excellent way.”*

One of the primary ministries of the old Scriptures is the development of a spiritual nomenclature in which God communicates with His people. **Whenever possible, the significance of symbolic language should be sought in Moses and the Prophets.** That is one of the primary functions of their writings. The effects of such perceptions will

be more edifying and lasting than mere earthly parallels, particularly those conspicuously absent from Scripture.

The fact that this is a **“WHITE stone”** is significant. This is a depiction of purity, as God counts pureness. It is also a color associated with Divinity and Divine acceptance. The word **“white”** is used 19 times in this book, and ALWAYS relates to the Lord Himself, or those in association with Him. We read of Jesus’ **“white”** hair, riding a **“white horse,”** sitting on a **“white cloud”** and occupying a **“white throne.”** Holy personages around the throne of God are declared to be **“clothed in white robes.”** The **“armies of heaven”** are said to ride **“white horses”** and are seen wearing **“fine linen, white and clean.”** Overcomers are promised a **“white stone,”** the blessing of walking with Christ **“in white,”** and being clothed in **“white raiment.”** Those whose blood was shed for Jesus are said to be clothed in **“white robes,”** together with all who came out of **“great tribulation.”** The seven angels which came out of heaven’s temple with the seven last plagues were **“clothed in white.”** The glorified church will be granted to be arrayed in **“fine linen, clean and white”** (1:14; 2:17; 3:4,5,18; 4:4; 6:2,11; 7:9,13,14; 14:14; 15:6; 19:11,14; 20:11).

One of the primary ministries of the old Scriptures is the development of a spiritual nomenclature in which God communicates with His people. **Whenever possible, the significance of symbolic language should be sought in Moses and the Prophets.** That is one of the primary functions of their writings. The effects of such perceptions will be more edifying and lasting than mere earthly parallels, particularly those conspicuously absent from Scripture.

**“White”** is a heavenly color representing heavenly recognition and honor. A **“WHITE stone”** comes from heaven as a token of Divine

acceptance, recognition, and reward. It denotes the Father's ***“Well done!”*** **Heavenly approval and participation are promised to those who overcome!**

But this is a ***“stone,”*** not a scepter, crown, or sword. What is more, it is stone with a name written in it. I cannot help but recall the imagery of the tabernacle, so often used in this book. Stones were a prominent part of the ***“service”*** ordained in the tabernacle activities. An intricately woven ephod was worn by the priest. It had two shoulder pieces that were joined together. This ephod was held upon the shoulders of the high priest with ***“two onyx stones.”*** With remarkable precision, names were written upon each of those stones. ***“Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone, and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. “And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial”*** (Ex 28:9-12).

The identity of the people of Israel with God Himself is seen in this arrangement. He knew them and thought upon them. The same thoughtfulness is seen in the stones placed in the ***“breastplate of judgement.”*** There twelve stones were placed, each one bearing a name of one of the twelve tribes (Ex 28:15-21).

Note that no individual names were on the stones, only the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The individual was not recognized, but the tribe to which he belonged. This was the arrangement under the old covenant. How different from our text! Jesus promises a stone, upon which is written the name of the individual overcomer! More precise

recognition, more personal reward! The **“white stone”** is a token of **the personal recognition and blessing of the Lord of glory**. This aspect of the Divine nature was duly revealed in the shadow of the tabernacle.

### A New Name

As I have already indicated, the blessing of recognition is personalized in Christ Jesus. The overcomer will not receive a white stone with the name of the congregation to which he belonged engraved upon it! His family name will not be there. Nor will his earthly name be found inscribed upon it. It will be a personal **“new name.”** That is, it will be a **new kind** of name, one that perfectly matches his character and ministry in the world to come.

the blessing of recognition is personalized in Christ Jesus. The overcomer will not receive a white stone with the name of the congregation to which he belonged engraved upon it! His family name will not be there. Nor will his earthly name be found inscribed upon it. It will be a personal **“new name.”** That is, it will be a **new kind** of name, one that perfectly matches his character and ministry in the world to come.

Scripture introduces us to the Divine manner of giving new names. Abram was given the new name of Abraham (Gen 17:5). Sarai was given the new name of Sarah (Gen 17:15). Simon was given the new name of Peter (Mark 3:16). Jesus gave the new name Boanerges to James and John (Mark 3:17). In each of these cases, the new name revealed their character and ministry. Abram became **“the father of many nations,”** and therefore had his name changed to **“Abraham.”** Sarai became the **“mother of nations,”** and was therefore called **“Sarah.”** Simon became a rock, and was therefore called **“Peter.”** James and John were **“sons of thunder,”** and were therefore called

**“Boanerges.”** These were all NEW names. In them the person and work of the individual were seen.

That will also be the nature of our new name. It will strictly accord with what we will be doing and will precisely portray who we are! No one will be dissatisfied with their name, and there will be absolutely no association of that **“new name”** with wickedness. Judas so defiled his name, that it is forever associated with iniquity—even though it was also worn by one of Jacob’s sons (Matt 1:3), a brother of James (Lk 6:16), another Apostle (John 14:22), and Barnabas (Acts 15:22). But no such associations will be made with your new name! Praise the Lord!

### **Which No Man Knows**

Here we see the personalness of our relation to Jesus in the world to come. In this world, the individual is often lost in the masses. A specific Israelite was ordinarily lost in the identity of his tribe. Individual Israelites that came out of Egyptian bondage were swallowed up by national distinction. Contemporarily speaking, many a precious individual is lost in the crowd of the assembly to which they belong. Such identity- handicaps will forever be removed in glory!

There will be a closeness to Christ, experienced by all who overcome, that is only fully realized by the one possessing it. Jesus will know us personally, and interface with us personally. A sense of Divine acceptance will be realized that will belong alone to you. In this world, it is possible for a discerning person to know more about your relationship to Christ than you do. This very truth occasioned many Apostolic admonitions. Through the Spirit, they knew more about the believers heavenly associations than they did.

But that condition will not exist in the world to come! You will know more about **your** relation to Jesus than any one else knows. Let us state

this in words which the Holy Spirit teaches. ***“Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known ”*** (1 Cor 13:12). The joyful satisfaction that will be realized through this knowledge is too great for us now! What confidence, assurance, and boldness will result from this experience transcends the boundaries of both language and conception now.

Do you not see what powerful incentives Jesus has given the church in Pergamum to repent? History confirms they did not take the word of the Master seriously. Yet, I cannot help but believe there were some—a remnant—who heard what the Spirit was saying to the churches. Such people repented, and once again pressed forward to obtain the prize. Today, those triumphant souls are with another of their number, Antipas, who lost his life that he might forever gain it. How blessed the soul who listens to the Lord! Eternal blessings will be realized, and cursing avoided.

## CONCLUSION

We have just considered a church that attempted to join delusion and illumination, wickedness and righteousness, indulgence and crucifixion. Such a joining is not possible! Well did the Spirit say, ***“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people. Therefore Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty”*** (2 Cor 6:14-18). No earthly relation, however seemingly precious, is worth the forfeiture of Christ’s

approval. The toleration of wicked teaching is not worth the rebuke of Jesus, which it will surely bring! Every believer, as well as individual congregations, are to take religious associations seriously. Those who are living at enmity with God cannot be allowed to be our close associates.

Note also that it is possible to hold fast to a formal identity with Jesus without being perceptive of our surroundings. With apparent zeal, the church in Pergamum held fast to Christ's name, refusing to disown Him during persecution. They would not deny His name! Yet, the same people tolerated those who taught damning doctrines, and encouraged people to live in immorality and idolatry. Listen, those imagining that spiritual life is simplistic, not requiring much effort from us, are living in a state of delusion. If we learn nothing else from Pergamum, let us learn that alertness is as much a requisite to spiritual life as formal identity. If we allow the old serpent to lull us into spiritual sleep, we will inevitably fall into his snare and incur the rebuke of Jesus.

Last, let us rejoice in the character of our Savior. Though He saw an intolerable situation, against which He would surely fight if need be, yet He opened a ***“door of hope”*** to the people. Here is an example of a ***“way of escape”*** provided in the hour of temptation. The fact that He is ***“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”*** (2 Pet 3:9), is not a mere doctrinal detail. This is a true representation of the case, designed to provide an incentive for recovery from falling. The Lord Jesus views ***“the churches”*** with a mind to their recovery and spiritual stability. He wants His people to be with Himself in the world to come, arrayed in white, and standing triumphantly upon the sea of glass. If they will listen intently to what the Spirit is saying to the churches, they will surely receive the blessing!

# The Revelation Of CHRIST

Lesson Number 6

## THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'; as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev 2:18-29, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The book of the Revelation is addressed to the churches—those who have been *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17). Here we are exposed to the heart of Christ Jesus, and His deep concern and desire for His people. Forever remove from your mind any notion that our relationship to the King is a static one, entailing neither unusual danger nor blessing. Those who teach believers can never fall away, or incur

the judgment of Jesus, will do well to digest the words of this book. With great power, it devastates the imagination of a Lord that lovingly overlooks departures from Himself and His will.

Here we are exposed to the current reign of Jesus—a reign that has been set in motion for the people of God. As it is written, “***and He (God the Father) has put all things under His (the Lord Jesus) feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the church***” (Eph 1:22). Jesus reigns over everything and everyone in order to the salvation of “***the elect.***” His reign, however, involves the participation of the redeemed. The reign itself is not conditioned upon that participation, but the benefits of it are. The Lord Jesus reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, whether we are in fellowship with Him or not. However, the benefits of that reign will not accrue to the individual or church that is not maintaining a lively association with the King.

Any approach to *the Christian life* that focuses upon the people, thrusts them into jeopardy. Satan and all his emissaries appeal to individual, rather than Divine, interests. Our introduction to Satan’s work in Eden confirms this to be the case (Gen 3:1-6). The concentration of the heavenly Kingdom is the Lord Jesus Himself. His accomplishments are the primary achievements, and His activity is the central consideration. There are no exceptions to this. All who are in harmony with Jesus are approved, and all out of accord with Him are rebuked. In this book, the Lord Jesus evaluates the churches from this perspective. The works of the churches are assessed from an eternal viewpoint, without regard to their outward appearance. We here behold how Jesus thinks about His people, and it is arresting. You will find His words conducive to the greatest degree of sobriety, a condition corely needed in our time.

## THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

## OVERVIEW

WHO CHRIST IS: “ ” The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze ” (NASB).

WHAT HE SEES : “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols ” (NASB).

EXHORTATION: “ Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

PROMISE: “ 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star” (NASB).

There is only one other mention of this city in Scripture, and it is a significant one. Perhaps you will remember it. ***“And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us”*** (Acts 16:13-15). Our acquaintance with this city begins with an introduction to a godly women. It concludes with an introduction to an evil one.

+ This is the longest of the seven letters, and we will soon see why. Thyatira and Pergamum were the only churches of the seven that were corrupted with the Nicolaitan teaching. In both letters, the Lord Jesus expresses an utter hatred for that teaching. Men may be indifferent concerning the teaching of corrupt leaders, but the Lord is not.

Whereas Ephesus and Smyrna were cities of commerce, and Pergamum one of culture and politics, Thyatira was a military city.

Before going further, it is good to note how the Gospel penetrated all levels of society. This is a powerful testimony to its relevance and efficacy for all people. The glorious Gospel of the blessed God provides a **“common salvation”** (Jude 3) for the universal dilemma of sin. The great salvation of God is for all people and all time, and needs to be proclaimed in power.

## WHO IS SPEAKING

**“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this”** (NASB). The Lord continues to reveal Himself in the capacity that is most appropriate for the situation. The Ephesians had left their **“first love,”** pushing Christ, as it

At the point a church—any church—is out of synch with the heavenly agenda, it is in serious jeopardy. Conversely, whenever the church is in accord with the Divine objective, it will always be commended. There are no exceptions to this rule.

were, into the background. Therefore Christ revealed Himself to them as **“He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”** (2:1). The Ephesian church had forgotten this, and therefore neglected and left their tender and sensitive preference for the Son of God. The church in Smyrna was a suffering church, battling to keep the faith and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Therefore, the Lord revealed Himself to them as **“the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”** (2:8). Because He Himself had went down into the shadow of death, He was able to succour and strengthen those in trial. The church in Pergamum had endured some

opposition, and at least one of their number was even martyred. Notwithstanding, they had were tolerating the dissemination of false doctrine, and some of their people held to false and damaging teachings. Therefore, Christ revealed Himself to them as ***“He who has the sharp two-edged sword,”*** cutting to the quick, and ready to fight against those who will not hear Him (2:12).

This characteristic of our Lord is what makes Him and His Word relevant. To the spiritually uncultured mind, relevancy has more to do with carnal likes and dislikes than the human condition, as perceived by the Lord Jesus. Kingdom relevancy, however, has to do with bringing us into accord with God. It deals with what is required to stand or recover—whichever is appropriate. Neither God nor Jesus ever depart from their objectives to deal with us from a purely worldly point of view. If this perception was embraced by the contemporary church, it would so radically alter its manners that one would scarcely be able to recognize it. At the point a church—any church—is out of synch with the heavenly agenda, it is in serious jeopardy. Conversely, whenever the church is in accord with the Divine objective, it will always be commended. There are no exceptions to this rule.

The church at Thyatira is seriously deficient. Although it has increased in the area of deeds, it has allowed a wretched teacher to flourish in its presence. Therefore, the Lord speaks to this church in the capacity of ***“the Son of God, Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass”*** (2:18).

## **The Son of God**

This is the first church to which Jesus reveals Himself as ***“the Son of God.”*** In fact, in every major translation, this is the **ONLY** time the phrase ***“Son of God”*** is mentioned in this book! Yet, in this term we find the premier revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ! This is what the Father revealed to Peter in ***“the coasts of Caesarea Philippi”*** (Matt

16:15-17). It is how the Father wants Jesus to be seen! On the threshold of Christ's ministry, when Satan was allowed to tempt Him, this is the truth he chose to challenge: i.e., that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 4:3,6). When Jesus came into *"the country of the Gergesenes"* he faced a legion of demons housed in a single depraved wild man. The one thing the demons recognized was that they were facing *"the Son of God"* (Matt 8:29). When He rose from the dead, Jesus was *"declared to be the Son of God with power"* (Rom 1:4). The perception and embrace of this truth—namely, that **"Jesus is the Son of God"** --makes a person an overcomer (1 John 5:5). When, therefore, Jesus addresses the church in Thyatira as the Son of God, He speaks in His loftiest and most powerful capacity. He will show them they have failed to consider Him in this station, and have thus fallen into contemptible toleration. They were **His** church, but the knowledge of this was quickly slipping from them.

*"The Son of God"* is Jesus in His commissioned capacity. It declares Him as fulfilling the purpose of God the Father. The objective of all spiritual gifts is to bring believers *"to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God"* (Eph 4:13). He comes as *"the Son of God"* to give us an understanding of God, inducting us into an experience of Divine familiarity that strengthens the soul, equipping us to be spiritual in an unspiritual world (1 John 5:20). The Lord addresses the church at Thyatira as the One Whom they have contradicted, and whose purposeful ministry they have ignored.

### **Eyes Like Unto A Flame of Fire**

John had seen the glorified Christ, and *"His eyes were like a flame of fire"* 1:14)—piercing and revealing. One man has said of these eyes, *"seeing into, discovering, and exposing the horrid actions and wickednesses of men done in the dark."*<sup>1</sup> Later, near the close of this book, the Lord Jesus is again seen in this manner: *"His eyes were like a flame of fire"* (19:12). This view is shown to be a militant one, where the Lord is set against something or someone, and comes to make war.

As it is written, *“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire . . . ”* (19:1-2a, NKJV).

In the capacity of a man, Jesus has passed through the Refiners fire, and has exited without flaw. He maintained His commitment to Divine purpose when among us, and He does so now. Here is Strength that will trample down all opponents, bringing them into subjection.

The church at Thyatira does not receive a message from One conceived to be loving and tender. They have countenanced conditions that are deplorable to their Savior, and He comes to them as warrior with an unsheathed sword. It is a frightening picture, calculated to awaken lethargic souls to the jeopardy in which they have been found.

### **Feet Like Burnished Bronze**

*“ . . . and His feet are like burnished bronze . . . ”* This speaks of firmness, and a total lack of vacillation. In the capacity of a man, Jesus has passed through the Refiners fire, and has exited without flaw. He maintained His commitment to Divine purpose when among us, and He does so now. Here is Strength that will trample down all opponents, bringing them into subjection. As it is written, *“then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet”* (1 Cor 15:24-25). Satan has deluded many a church into associating this revelation only with those who are avowed enemies of Jesus--those who obviously are

set against Him. The church in Thyatira, however, will find it applies to anyone and everyone who is operating in contradiction of the Divine program. This includes all who, for whatever reason, are competing with Jesus by perpetrating, or allowing to be perpetrated things conflicting with the salvation of God. Make no mistake about this, **those who are at variance with Jesus will be trampled under His feet!** Jesus said it this way: ***“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed”*** (Luke 20:18, NIV). Whether individuals or churches, those who insist on remaining at variance with the King of kings will be crushed beneath His feet.

In one of his great songs to the Lord, David mentioned the role of His feet in overcoming his enemies. ***“They looked, but there was none to save; Even to the LORD, but He did not answer them. Then I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I trod them like dirt in the streets, And I spread them out”*** (2 Sam 22:42-43). Here Jesus is revealed as a righteous Judge, trampling His foes uprightly and justly. He does so as One Who strictly seeks the will of the Father. We will now be given a view of the wrath of the Lamb, and its threatening consequences to those who obstinately continue in a displeasing state. Suffice it to say, when a church confronts the Savior in this capacity, it is time to take a serious look at what it is doing.

The Lord Jesus Christ is both meek and mild, but that is not all He is! Behold how He speaks to scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-29), as well as Sadducees and lawyers (Luke 11:46-52). The most fearful utterances in the Bible came from the Savior Himself. A single example will suffice to confirm this to be the case. ***“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame,***

*rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt” (Mark 9:42-49).*

Those who insist upon remaining in sin will eventually face a fierce and merciless King. When He returns, those who have lived contrary to His Person and purpose will behold **“the wrath of the Lamb”** (Rev 6:16). While we do not enjoy dwelling upon such things, it is essential that we consider Him in this capacity. Far better for sinners to ponder the indignation of Jesus now, and find incentive to turn from their sin, than to face an angry Christ! Remember, this is a message the Spirit is speaking to the churches. Additionally, the individual who **“has an ear”** is to give heed to what the Spirit is saying.

## THE COMMENDATION

The searching eyes of the Lord will first find something commendable. This approach is designed to awaken their slumbering spirits. It is an appeal to the new creation, which is about to be smothered by a goodwill towards wickedness. **“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first”** (NASB). The churches must maintain a lively awareness that Jesus knows what they are doing. That precious knowledge will prove a deterrent to involvement in prideful pursuits that are at variance with God’s **“eternal purpose.”**

This church would have been in the top ten, and probably written up in religious journals. This church retained what it had received at the first, holding it fast. But that is not all. In an exceedingly rare display of fortitude, they increased in their works.

Your love and faith and service and perseverance

Here is quite a commendable list of spiritual qualities! **Love and faith** are often coupled in Apostolic accolades, and rank high in the Divine agenda. Philemon was commended for a faith and love that focused on Christ and benefitted believers. *“I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints”* (Philemon 4-5). The Galatians were told of faith working through love. *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love ”* Gal 5:6). Both the Ephesians and Colossians were commended for their faith in Christ and love for all saints. *“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints ”* (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4). The Thessalonians were commended for their work of faith and arduous labor of love. *“ . . . remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”* (1 Thess 1:3). They were also urged to protect themselves with faith and love. *“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love . . . ”* (1 Thess 1:5).

Both of these indispensable virtues come from God. Neither are originated in human energy or summoned into the heart by mortal wisdom. *“Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 6:23). *“And the grace of our*

*Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 1:14). What comely qualities these are! Love and faith produce considerate ministry, or “*service.*” Perseverance, or patience, endures tribulation and hardship. On the surface, it is difficult to conceive of a more commendable condition. Surely, there will be no fault with a church that had faith and love, exhibiting it in service to both God and man, and continuance in the faith in the face of opposition! But there is more!

### **As For Your Works . . .**

A most unusual condition existed in the church at Thyatira. They were increasing in their works: “*And as for your works, the last are more than the first.*” The NIV reads, “*you are now doing more than you did at first.*” This church would have been in the top ten, and probably written up in religious journals. This church retained what it had received at the first, holding it fast. But that is not all.

It is wonderful, and absolutely essential, that Jesus commend us. His approbation, however, must not be mixed with disapproval--a condition that appears contradictory and impossible. Yet, this is precisely what we see in five of the seven churches: a Jesus that commends, yet has something against the churches.

In an exceedingly rare display of fortitude, they increased in their works. This is most unusual in the churches with which I am familiar. It is not uncommon for congregations to regress in their works to a point where strong stimuli is required to awaken them to activity. But it was not so with the church in Thyatira.

Actually, increase is the manner of the Kingdom. The productive seed, Jesus said, is seen in the growth of the individual ***“who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”*** (Matt 13:23). Observe that fruitfulness started with ***“A hundredfold,”*** and went down to ***“thirty times what was sown”*** (NIV). Mark reverses the order, saying, ***“It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times”*** (Mark 4:8). While fruitfulness of this magnitude is surprising to the contemporary believer, it is not amazing to heavenly hosts. Scripture speaks of the righteous going from ***“strength to strength”*** (Psa 84:7), being changed ***“from one degree of glory to another”*** (2 Cor 3:18, RSV), and the righteousness of God being revealed ***“from faith to faith”*** (Rom 1:17). **Increase is the manner of the Kingdom!**

If the church is commended for their works being greater now than they were in the beginning, you can be sure an absence of this characteristic makes one subject to Divine judgment. It is of great concern that all too often spiritual stagnation is present in the churches. There is no acceptable excuse for this condition. Nothing about salvation will contribute to that state. Fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) will not yield such a condition. Thus, the Lord Jesus commends this church for its increase of ***“the fruits of righteousness”*** (Phil 1:11).

Yet, we will find this condition is not sufficient to gain the total approval of the Lord Jesus. He did not die and rise from the dead to merely thrust us into activity. The church at Ephesus was threatened with removal because they had ***“left”*** their ***“first love,”*** even though intensely active. The church at Pergamum was told Jesus would fight against them if they did not repent of their godless toleration, even though they too were holding fast and active. It is wonderful, and absolutely essential, that Jesus commend us. His approbation, however, must not be mixed with disapproval--a condition that appears contradictory and impossible. Yet, this is precisely what we see in five

of the seven churches: a Jesus that commends, yet has something against the churches. Among other things, this reveals the impartiality of Jesus, and His lack of respect for persons.

## THE DREADFUL FAULT

***“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (NASB).*** Jesus refers to the prophetess in question according to her character-- ***“Jezebel.”*** You will doubtless recall this wicked woman, wife of contemptible Ahab. She vigorously opposed Elijah after he had killed 450 prophets of Baal, following a contest of gods (1 Kgs 19:1-2). Jezebel was ***“the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians,”*** and was married by Ahab as he walked in the sins of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 16:31). This wicked woman instigated a slaughter of the ***“prophets of the Lord,”*** during which Obadiah hid one hundred prophets in two caves, taking it upon himself to sustain them (1 Kgs 18:4). The unusual wickedness of this woman is seen in the Divine commentary on her husband, Ahab. ***“Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him. And he acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel”*** (1 Kgs 21:25-26, NASB).

Jezebel, then, provides us an example of someone dwelling in the presence of the people of God, teaching, and even urging, conduct that was reprehensible to God. It all happened because Ahab, king over Israel, added to his unspeakable iniquity by marrying this wicked woman. He attempted an alliance with those God hates! He did it within a nation that had been separated unto the Living God, and in flagrant contradiction of His revealed will.

Notice, the wicked teaching had not caused any diminishment of their good deeds. We must see that good deeds, however beneficial, are not viewed as a substitute for the proclamation of the truth. Nor, indeed, can they avert the judgment of Christ against those who dare to tolerate what He hates.

Now Jesus upbraids the church in Thyatira for allowing the same condition to arise in it. An enemy had penetrated their ranks, and was exercising an unholy influence among the people whom Jesus had separated unto holiness (Tit 2:14). No church of any age can allow itself to think it is beyond such a thing as this! We face an adversary that is fierce and cunning. In the case before us, he managed to find an open door into which he aggressively entered. There, he positioned a teacher who influenced those in the church to be immoral and idolatrous! As if that were not enough, those not caught up in the rebellion allowed it to continue without rebuke or opposition. Of the condition, Jesus says, ***“I have a few things AGAINST you.”***

Jesus does not say they *encouraged* this false prophetess, or gave her any *sympathy*. They just left her alone, leaving her iniquity unchecked. This reminds me of incident for which Eli was rebuked. His sons were committing despicable iniquity before the ***“temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.”*** God rebuked him ***“because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them”*** (1 Sam 3:13). Solemnly the people of God are told, ***“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”*** (Eph 5:11). Other versions translate the verse ***“expose them,”*** rather than ***“reprove them.”*** The exposure, however, is to come through reproof, not merely by a contrast with the a righteous life. Iniquity unrestrained will increase!

Notice, the wicked teaching had not caused any diminishment of their good deeds. We must see that good deeds, however beneficial, are not viewed as a substitute for the proclamation of the truth. Nor, indeed, can they avert the judgment of Christ against those who dare to tolerate what He hates. It is possible to imagine that legitimately good deeds can outweigh bad ones--that men are evaluated on a plus-minus basis, so to speak. If they have more good deeds than bad deeds, some are deceived into thinking they are approved by God. But this is not at all the case. The church in Ephesus were punctilious in their quest for proper teaching. They were persevering, and had an appropriate hatred for the perpetrators of immorality and idolatry. But all of that did not outweigh the fact they had *“left”* their *“first love.”* Now Thyatira is told their faith, love, service, perseverance, and increasing works have not outweighed their toleration of a false prophetess. When propagated or embraced, a lie neutralizes the goodness of our works. The incident of Ananias and Sapphira proves this to be the case (Acts 5:1-10). It was good to give to the work of the Lord. However, when that giving was built upon a lie, it became a curse to Ananias and Sapphira, not a blessing. This was the experience of the church in Thyatira. It was not only involved in works, but had increased in this aspect of Kingdom life. Notwithstanding, its toleration of this wicked woman had incurred the indignation of the Master. We all do well to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

It may come as a surprise that such contradicting manners could be found simultaneously. It must be remembered that we have the *“treasure”* of salvation in an *“earthen vessel”* (2 Cor 4:7). The *“law of sin”* still remains in our flesh, ever present, even when we desire to do good. As it is written, *“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good”* (Rom 7:21). While it is true, we have been liberated from enslavement to this depraved principle (Rom 8:2), we still have to contend with it. If we do not aggressively *“crucify the flesh,”* denying it prominence, it will soon lead us into bondage to sin. The church in Thyatira had not developed a sufficient hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitans, and thus tolerated that wicked prophetess to continue to teach among them. Too, because of the presence of

*“another law”* within every believer, this teacher was able to seduce some of them, appealing strongly to that old nature.

There is another thing about this incident that is worthy of comment. Jesus does not rebuke this church for allowing a woman to teach, but for allowing her to teach His servants to commit fornication and eat meat offered to idols.

Those imagining we are locked into salvation, with no danger of being drawn into the flesh, must take a second look at Thyatira. Jesus said this wicked woman *seduced* HIS servants to commit fornication, and eat meats in honor of idols--HIS SERVANTS! As if that were not enough, the church, by not stopping it, consented to the continuance of the practice. They probably did not make this a *tenet of their faith*, so to speak, or that such conduct was officially condoned by them. They did not, however, oppose it with godly zeal, forbidding it to continue. Jesus said this was something He had *“against”* them: *“You TOLERATE the woman . . . ”* Once again, those who imagine doctrine is of no consequence, or that doctrinal correctness is an unworthy objective, need to consider this church. Teaching error is never right, even when it is done with a supposedly excellent spirit, or when it is tolerated in purported love.

There is another thing about this incident that is worthy of comment. Jesus does not rebuke this church for allowing a woman to teach, but for allowing her to teach His servants to commit fornication and eat meat offered to idols. Those who choose to believe women are strictly forbidden to teach in the church, according to 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, must reckon with this text. Had this rebuke been

delivered by many self-appointed interpreters of the Word, the church at Thyatira would have been rebuked for allowing a woman to teach, regardless of what she taught. The fact that Jesus did not speak in this manner should constrain men to re-evaluate their interpretations. Some, seeking to preserve their exegesis, have suggested this has no reference to a woman at all—that it is a figure of speech. If this is the case, it is an example of Jesus referring to a false prophet as a **“woman”** and a **“prophetess.”** It requires an extraordinary imagination, in my judgment, to take such a position. It is enough to say, our views of Scripture are always to be found in strict harmony with the statements of our Lord. They are never to be found in conflict with His words.

### **She Misrepresented Herself**

Of this spiritual intruder Jesus said, **“who calls herself a prophetess.”** But, she was no prophetess, unless speaking for the devil so qualifies a person. Many souls have been deluded because the person teaching them claimed to be something they were not: a prophet, preacher, Apostle, elder, etc. Remember, the church in Ephesus excelled in this regard: **“you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false”** (2:2). But the church in Thyatira was not as noble. It tolerated falseness rather than putting it to the test! It makes no difference who proclaims himself to be from God, we are to **“test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1, NASB). This activity distinguished the Bereans as being **“more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so”** (Acts 17:1, NASB). O, that there was a revival of this type of spirit in the churches! It would soon produce a great deal of spiritual traffic between heaven and earth!

### **WHEN JESUS GIVES SPACE**

*“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.” “And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality” (NASB).* Again, note Jesus did not give her time to repent of teaching, but of her immorality, or fornication (KJV). Here is a token of the graciousness of

One other consideration is necessary. This woman subverted the servants of Christ with words--teaching. She did not make His servants commit fornication and eat meat in honor of idols. Rather, she *“taught”* them to do so. Never underestimate the power of words! As it is written, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”*

our Lord: He gave the one perpetrating fornication and idolatry *“time (or space) to repent.”* In the words of Ezra, this was *“a little space”* in which grace was shown to this false prophetess (Ezra 9:8)—a time when recovery was possible. This surely confirms the Lord *“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). Nineveh was given *“40 days”* to repent of its sin, even AFTER its wickedness had come up before God’s face (Jonah 1:2; 3:4). When the whole earth was filled with violence and abomination, the longsuffering of God *“waited”* in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:20). It is God’s nature to provide ample time to recover from sin, although men dare not exploit such Divine consideration. Scripture affirms, and experience confirms, that *“the sentence against an evil work”* is not always *“executed speedily.”* For this reason, *“the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”* (Eccl 8:11). One man has said, *God does not always punish summer sins in the next winter.* Indeed, the longsuffering of God, although designed to lead us to repentance, becomes the occasion for continuance in sin when the heart is calloused. Notwithstanding, *“space to repent”* is a genuine provision for the

wicked to turn from their ways. Divine extension is not to be taken for granted, exploited, or ignored. Rather, it is to be acted upon quickly. Those so responding will be faced with a gracious God Who is ready to forgive.

We are not told how much time was given for this teacher to repent, but it was an adequate amount of time for her to turn from her wicked ways. It was longer than a convicted soul thinks himself worthy, and shorter than the hard heart supposes is deserved. But make no mistake about this, when the Lord Jesus gives *“space to repent,”* it is always adequate for repentance to take place.

### **Jezebel Does Not Want to Repent**

Even though the Lord was considerate of this woman, she was not considerate of Him. As it is written, *“she does not want to repent of her immorality”* (NASB). The NIV reads, *“I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.”* Jezebel despised the riches of Christ’s forbearance, refusing to respond to the gracious space given her to repent. As it is written, *“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”* (Rom 2:4). It is a dangerous thing to spurn the overtures of the Lord, particularly when they are wrapped in time allotted for repentance. Yet, this evil teacher took no advantage of the Lord’s grace, lightly esteeming it in preference for her wicked ways.

Sin has an anaesthetizing quality about it, desensitizing the soul to the Lord. Eventually, those willingly souls, who choose to live within sin’s grip, become hardened and calloused. Little wonder the Scripture reads, *“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy”* (Prov 29:1, NASB). Iniquity,

particularly that which is of a religious sort, lulls the sinner into foolish thinking. ***“He says to himself, I shall not be moved; Throughout all generations I shall not be in adversity”*** (Psalm 10:6). As we shall soon see, nothing could be further from the truth.

One other consideration is necessary. This woman subverted the servants of Christ with words--teaching. She did not make His servants commit fornication and eat meat in honor of idols. Rather, she ***“taught”*** them to do so. Never underestimate the power of words! As it is written, ***“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”*** (Prov 18:21). The false prophetess of Thyatira was promoting spiritual death by what she taught.

### **Time Does Not Equal Recovery**

In the flesh, time is against us, not for us! Sinners do not recover by outgrowing their love for sin. Wicked tendencies do not go away with the passage of time. Here was a Divinely allotted period of time wherein full recovery could be realized--yet it was not. If the heart is not tender toward the Lord, taking advantage of ***“space”*** to repent and draw near to the Lord, it will become hardened ***“through the deceitfulness of sin”*** (Heb 3:13). Many a soul has drifted into a state from which recovery was not possible simply because they, like this Jezebel, were unwilling to repent. In matters pertaining to the soul, procrastination is lethal!

## **THE LOOMING JUDGMENT**

The warning issued to this church is one of the most stern in all Scripture. The language jars upon the soul, and reveals an aspect of Christ with which we do well to become familiar. There is a harshness here that is conducive to great sobriety. ***“Behold, I will cast her into a***

*bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (NKJV).* When the Master warns of casting people “*into a bed,*” “*into great tribulation,*” and killing “*her children with death,*” the soul must awaken from slumber, and rise to a condition of sobriety and alertness! Mind you, these are words written to the church. They are not addressed to the corrupt politicians in Thyatira, or to the idolaters and whoremongers within the heathen community. These are words for Christ’s church, into which intolerable corruption had crept. He had been forbearing with the situation, but the forbearance now comes to a grinding halt. He will not allow the condition to continue!

The language of this text reminds us of the ancient Jezebel, and the effectiveness and result of her teaching. Jezebel so effectively taught her son Ahaziah that he trusted more in idols than in the living God. Toward the end of his life, he fell

The warning issued to this church is one of the most stern in all Scripture. The language jars upon the soul, and reveals an aspect of Christ with which we do well to become familiar. There is a harshness here that is conducive to great sobriety.

through a lattice in his upper chamber, and became confined to a bed of sickness. Because of the instruction of his wicked mother, he sought counsel of “*Baalzebub, the god of Ekron,*” as to whether he would recover from the sickness. God sent word to king Ahaziah through his prophet Elijah, “*You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!*” (2 Kgs 1:1-4). This incident provides the language now used by Jesus against the church in Thyatira. Once again, we behold the Divine manner, a

manner that is consistent throughout Scripture. In preference to contemporary occurrences, Scriptural incidents are nearly always used to buttress sound teaching. Now, in our text, Jesus will hurl the false prophetess of Thyatira and her followers into a bed of affliction, even as Ahaziah fell from a lattice, and eventually died in a bed of sickness.

Both the teacher, and those receiving her teaching would be judged together. They had committed fornication against the Lord. Now He will hurl them into a bed together--but it will not be for the satiation of sinful lusts. No pleasure will come from this circumstance. Because forbearance failed to awaken this false prophetess, she will now experience the ***“severity of God”*** (Rom 11:22). As Robertson says, the word ***“severity”*** means *“to cut off, properly denotes excision, cutting off, as the gardener cuts off, with a pruning knife, dead boughs, or luxuriant stems.”* We are not talking about mere chastening here. This activity will result in the removal of this blight from Christ’s church! As those seduced were joined together with the seductress in unholy departure from the Lord, so together they will be cut off from the body of Christ. As Jesus said elsewhere, ***“If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch”*** (Matt 55:14).

If Jesus was ***“put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, that He might BRING US TO GOD”*** (1 Pet 3:18), how serious is it for people to be led AWAY from God? There is no earthly language capable of adequately describing the seriousness of such a situation. That is why the Lord Jesus speaks so harshly of the condition. His opposition will be direct, unmitigated, and effective. One has well said, *“the chamber of voluptuousness shall become the chamber of torture”* (D. Thomas, 1950) .

The text proclaims that Jesus was going to

visit the teacher, those who had joined in her teaching, and those who were deceived by her teaching, with sickness and death. To be more precise, they would die of sickness, like King Asa, who died of a disease in his feet, because he sought the physicians and not God

The occasion is strikingly like that associated with Phineas, a righteous man of old who stayed a corrupting and spreading plague from consuming Israel. It is said of him, ***“he turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy,”*** and was therefore granted God’s ***“covenant of peace”*** (Num 25:11,12). The manner in which this man turned away God’s wrath is arresting. On one occasion, Israel began to mingle with the cursed Moabites, bowing down to their gods, and committing fornication with their women. God’s anger rose up, and He commanded those who had joined themselves to Baal to be slain. Phineas, in his zeal for the Lord, arose to do His bidding. Here is what is written of his deed. ***“He arose from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked”*** (Num 25:7-8, NASB). Of this event, Psalm 106:29-31 says, ***“Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds; And the plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and interposed; And so the plague was stayed. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, To all generations forever”*** (NASB). Sin, like a cancerous growth, must sometimes be cut out of the people of God. Here was such an occasion.

Once again, the bed of sin becomes the bed of suffering. This is Divine retribution, and it is sure for those who refuse to repent. The language is also similar to that spoken against wicked Ahab, who had

Naboth killed so he could take his vineyard. ***“In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs shall lick up your blood, even yours”*** (1 Kgs 21:19).

The harsh judgment of God is also seen in His dealings with the Corinthians. Scripture apprizes us this church was inconsiderate of the Lord Jesus at the Lord’s table. Rather than focusing their attention upon Him, and declaring His death until He come, they used the occasion to satisfy their own fleshly appetites, even practicing inconsideration of their brethren. For this, they were chastened severely by the Lord, some of them even dying at His hand. The solemn judgment is reflected in these words, ***“For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world”*** (1 Cor 11:30-32). Our conduct in Christ’s Kingdom is to be attended with the greatest sobriety, lest we are led astray by, or become tolerate of, the communication of things He hates.

Another observation is necessary. Those who partook of the sins of this false teacher, forsook the works and word of God to do so. You must relinquish your hold upon the truth to take hold of a lie. You cannot respond to Satan without ceasing to respond to God. It is not possible to give allegiance to a false god without abandoning the true God. This is involved in our Lord’s words, ***“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other”*** (Matt 6:24). Competing spiritual influences cannot be heeded simultaneously. We do have two ears, but can only concentrate on one directing voice at a time.

### **Kill Her Children with Death**

What a stern and awakening word! Here again we recall God’s judgment against Jezebel and Ahab. It was swift and thorough, as will

be the case with the wicked clan of Thyatira. Jezebel's two sons were killed, as well as the seventy sons of Ahab (2 Kgs 10:1-7). The language of our text indicates that the perpetrator and recipients of the false doctrine lurked in the shadows, so to speak, spreading their venom to the hurt of Christ's servants. But Jesus, with eyes as a flame of fire, will pry into their wickedness, and find them out. He will obliterate their name, cutting them out as God did "*memory of Amalek*" (Ex 17:14).

The sternness of Christ's language is mandated by the severity of the transgression. He will not allow those embracing the very thing that required His death to go unpunished. Those who sow to their flesh will, of the flesh, reap corruption

The text proclaims that Jesus was going to visit the teacher, those who had joined in her teaching, and those who were deceived by her teaching, with sickness and death. To be more precise, they would die of sickness, like King Asa, who died of a disease in his feet, because he sought the physicians and not God (2 Chron 16:12-13). John would call their sin, "*sin leading to death*" (1 John 5:16-17). Judas committed such a sin--one that led to his own death (Acts 1:17-20,25). In the siege of Jericho, Achan also committed a sin which resulted in his death (Josh 7:1-24). Those who imagine no sickness or death can come from God do well to consider this solemn text.

The sternness of Christ's language is mandated by the severity of the transgression. He will not allow those embracing the very thing that required His death to go unpunished. Those who sow to their flesh will, of the flesh, reap corruption (Gal 6:8). The person who seeks to gain the world, whether by the satiation of base appetite, or committing to

false gods, will do so at the expense of their own soul. Jesus asks this poignant question, ***“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Mark 8:36-37).

### **The Outcome of the Judgment**

***“ . . . all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”*** It is obvious that knowing this aspect of our Lord is essential to living acceptably before Him. And why is this so? It is more than a mere matter of Law. Spiritual life requires an awareness of and sensitivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible to live with our heads bent toward the earth and, at the same time, receive the blessing of the Lord. The less our consciousness is of Christ, the least capable we become of pleasing Him or receiving good things from Him. His Divine power will NOT sustain the one who chooses to live in without considering the Son of God--and there are no exceptions to this rule. The churches need to know this! Legion is the name of supposed *Christian* people who are really not hearing or following Christ. They have been subverted by erroneous teaching, into doing and believing things that are offensive to the Savior. They will not go undetected!

If we are sensitive to the Lord, we can learn from the experience of others. The churches could benefit from the awful judgment about to be exacted upon some in the church in Thyatira. Their view of Christ could become more precise, and their persuasion of His nature more discerning. In my judgment, we are living in a time when the real Christ is little known. Corrupted views of Him have been so effectively spread throughout the professed church that people appear incapable of discerning Divine judgment. These are truly ***“perilous times***, requiring a clear presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## TO THE FAITHFUL

***“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them . . . ” (NASB).*** The Lord Jesus does not fail to speak to the faithful! Regardless of the spiritual tumult and abuse that is around them, He breaks through the chaos to strengthen His people. It is something you can count on. The term ***“the rest”*** equates with the word ***“remnant,”*** elsewhere used to identify those who keep the faith under difficult circumstances and Satanic attack (Gen 45:7; 2 Kgs 19:30-31; 2 Chron 34:21; Ezra 9:8; Jer 50:20; Rom 9:25; 11:5). These are those who, like the three Hebrew children, do not bow the knee to false Christ’s and gods. Such ***“do not hold”*** to the false teaching of Satan’s ministers. They are bold to ***“hold fast”*** when it is not fashionable to do so. Jesus now recognizes them, and speaks comfortably to them.

First, he recognizes their refusal to embrace the lies that have been taught by Jezebel. Because of that refusal, they have not ***“known the***

Refusing to imbibe the elixir of the devil takes more effort than you may be disposed to think--particularly when the offer is made by a false prophetess in the assembly, as was the case at Thyatira! It is a welcome sound to hear the Savior say He will not add to the already-heavy burden.

depths of Satan.” These were teachings presented as ***“depths,”*** a claim to superior knowledge and experience. That is why the text reads, ***“the depths of Satan, as they call them ”*** (NASB). The ASV reads, ***“as they***

*are wont to say.*” The NIV reads, *“Satan's so-called deep secrets.”* Jesus relates the condemned teaching to Satan. That was not, of course, the way the false prophets represented it. The Gnostics called their teaching *“the depths of God,”* and *“the depths of Bythos.”* But this teaching came from the depths of hell, and was truly of Satan. Other similar doctrines are appropriated called *“doctrines of demons”* -- master pieces of Satan’s craftiness and subtlety. (1 Tim 4:1). This is an aspect of Satan’s activity of which we must be aware. The devil is a prodigious teacher, but it is always for evil. He endeavors to make sin reasonable and attractive, often in the name of scholarship as well as license. His teachings, however, anchor people to the cursed order, and incite the anger of the Lord against those who embrace them. Thank God for the remnant that refused to take hold on such doctrines! Jesus will always find and console the remnant!

### **No Greater Burden**

*“ -- I place no other burden on you.”* There are times when holding your ground takes all of your spiritual energy. Forging forward into new Kingdom ground is not common during such seasons. Jesus does not tell *“the rest,”* who have not given heed to the false prophetess to get out and *“win others.”* Nor, indeed, does He urge them to engage in some new Kingdom initiative. They are being assaulted by enemies forces, and therefore He will *“place no greater burden”* upon them. That is a comforting word to the oppressed!

This is the same word given to early Gentile believers. Having newly escaped from the pollution of the world, they were told, *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell”* (Acts 15:28-29). The Apostles and elders did not burden those early Gentile believers with distracting requirements. The Lawyers, professed experts on the Law of Moses, on the other hand,

were masters at laying burdens on people. Jesus said of them, ***“Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers”*** (Luke 11:46, NASB). By contrast, the Lord Jesus is especially mindful of the burdens of His people. He will not put upon them something that will deter their progress to glory, or make it more difficult for them to stand against the wiles of the devil.

This is a consideration Law does not give--it is a concession of grace! Those who insist on being justified by works lose the capability (if ever they had it) of hearing these compassionate words. We are saved ***“by grace through faith,”*** and that not of ourselves, ***“it is the gift of God”*** from beginning to end (Eph 2:8-10). Never is this more evident than when we are under great trial.

Also, refusing to imbibe the elixir of the devil takes more effort than you may be disposed to think--particularly when the offer is made by a false prophetess in the assembly, as was the case at Thyatira! It is a welcome sound to hear the Savior say He will not add to the already-heavy burden.

***“Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come”*** (NASB). It will require all of their effort to do this, but it must be done. This solemn word would not be necessary were it impossible to lose the good things we have from Christ. To be sure, they cannot be lost inadvertently, nor snatched from our hands by the enemy while we retain a preference for them. Notwithstanding, we must remain resolute in our determination to maintain our grasp upon them. It is possible for believers to be lulled into complacency by the enemy, allowing them to lose their crown (Rev 3:11).

The requirement is to maintain a firm grip on what we have from

Christ until He comes. At that time, the warfare will cease. Until then, we are in the war zone. A similar word was given to Timothy: ***“Keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1 Tim 6:14, NASB). Christ’s appearing is the ultimate line between time and eternity. Until then, and as long as we are in the world, we must extend ourselves to maintain our stewardship and keep in conscious possession what Christ has given to us. Anything threatening that relation is our enemy!

## A STAGGERING PROMISE

Here is one of the most awesome promises in Scripture--and it is for EVERYONE who overcomes and keeps Christ’s deeds, or works, until ***“the end.”*** Our hearts must be stretched and enlarged to embrace this promise, for it is by no means an ordinary one.

“And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him will I give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces,, as I also “ . . . have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star” (NASB). Here is one of the most awesome promises in Scripture--and it is for EVERYONE who overcomes and keeps Christ’s deeds, or works, until ***“the end.”*** Our hearts must be stretched and enlarged to embrace this promise, for it is by no means an ordinary one. The Psalmist said, ***“I shall run the way of Thy commandments, For Thou wilt enlarge my heart”*** (Psalm 119:32, NASB). If this heart enlargement was required to live in synch with the commandments, how much more is it necessary to live in harmony with, and anticipation of, the promises, by which we become

***“partakers of the Divine nature”*** (2 Pet 1:4).

As reprehensible as the sin of the church in Thyatira was, it did not shut the mouth of promise! In fact, an extraordinary promise is given to enable the church to overcome extraordinary sin. This is a consistent factor in Christ’s appeal to the churches for recovery and establishment in the faith. We must not shrink back from strong and effective references to the promises of God. Jesus sandwiched His exhortation between an awesome threat and a staggering promise. May He give us the ability to be experts in the use of these two means for recovery and advance.

### **He Who Overcomes**

Consistently, the fulfillment of the promises are held out to those who overcome (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). In his first epistle, John specifically identifies the overcomer. ***“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*** (1 John 4:4-5). It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to save the soul. This is accomplished in a two-fold sense. First, faith apprehends the Person of Christ in all His saving efficacy. Second, He dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17), and we have peace with God by faith and through Christ Jesus. Learning Christ (Eph 4:20-21), or assimilating His Person into the fabric of our being (eating His flesh and drinking His blood, John 5:54-60) insulates the soul. Satan is not able to penetrate the walls of salvation that surround the individual in Christ!

Overcoming has to do with maintaining our proximity to, and affiliation with, the Lord Jesus Christ. Victory is more related to keeping the faith, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, and resisting the devil. We actually overcome the devil, the world, and the flesh, indirectly. By focusing upon the Lord Jesus, sin loses its

attractiveness, and Satan loses his effectiveness. Just as God is repulsed by the lie, so Satan is driven back by the truth.

The church at Thyatira, by allowing the perpetration of “*damnable heresies*” (2 Pet 2:1) were rupturing their association with Christ. They willingly remained in the presence of something intolerable to their Lord. As it is written, “**what harmony has Christ with Belial**” (2 Cor 6:15). The closer we are to error, the further we are from the truth. The less distance there is between the believer and the devil, the more distance there is between him and Christ Jesus. The more tolerant we become of sin, the less tolerant Jesus becomes of us! Overcoming involves keeping a distance between our hearts and the delusions of our adversary. When our “*affection*” is set “*on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:2), sin and its perpetrators become offensive to us. That is the posture that enables us to be overcomers.

The closer we are to error, the further we are from the truth. The less distance there is between the believer and the devil, the more distance there is between him and Christ Jesus. The more tolerant we become of sin, the less tolerant Jesus becomes of us! Overcoming involves keeping a distance between our hearts and the delusions of our adversary.

The promise that follows is only for those who successfully resist the encroachments of the devil—overcomers! It is designed to strengthen the determination of the believer to continue in the faith. It is also calculated to awaken the spiritually lethargic, and engage them once

again in the good fight of faith.

### Keeps My Deeds

***“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end”*** (NKJV). Note this expression: ***“keeps My works . . . ”*** The NIV and NRSV take unusual liberty in translating the text. ***“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end”*** (NIV). ***“To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end”*** (NRSV). For those who are interested, the Greek phrase translated ***“keeps my works until the end”*** is **τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου** . Literally, it would read, *he that keeps until the end my works* . Obedience and doing what Christ desires are surely involved in this expression, but they are not the kernel or whole of it.

First, these ***“works”*** are in stark contrast to the deeds of Jezebel. It is said of her, ***“she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray . . . her immorality ”*** (v 20-21, NASB). Her doings were extended in those who embraced **her** wicked ways. When her followers chose to be identified with her, they began to do her works, carrying out her will and ceasing to do Jesus’ will. The Lord is speaking primarily of identity, not merely a classification of deeds. It was their identity with this spiritual imposter that made the deeds reprehensible. In this phrase, the emphasis is placed upon what the leader does, not what the followers do. At least two times, Jesus referred to His enemies as engaged in the doing the works of the devil. ***“I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father . . . You do the deeds of your father . . . You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do”*** (John 8:38,41,44, NKJV).

When Jesus says, ***“he who . . . keeps My works until the end,”*** He refers to maintaining fellowship with Himself. The works that are ***“kept”*** are primarily His redemptive works, and secondarily those relating to

sanctification, or participation in His present reign. After all, this is why He has cleansed us from all iniquity—to engage us in His work. As it is written, ***“Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father”*** (Rev 1:5-6, NKJV). The designation ***“kings and priests”*** has to do with Kingdom ACTIVITY— ***“works,”*** or ***“deeds.”***

Jesus referred to His own works as being those of His Father. ***“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish; the very works that I do; bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me”*** (John 5:36). ***“Many good works have I showed you from my Father”*** (John 10:32). ***“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him”*** (John 10:37-38). In the language of our text, Jesus ***“kept”*** the works of His Father by keeping in accord with Him. He maintained His fellowship with the Father, thereby enabling His (the Father’s) ***“works”*** to be exhibited through Himself.

In the same way, keeping Christ’s works involves Him ***“dwelling in our hearts by faith”*** (Eph 3:17), dining with us (Rev 3:20), and manifesting Himself to us (John 14:21). By allowing a false prophetess

Although political power is ordained of God (Rom 13:1-3), it is not intended to be lasting, nor is it holy, in the strictest sense of the word. This is not an area that is to occupy the preeminence in our thought or devotion.

to promote sin in their presence, the church at Thyatira was pushing Christ out of their presence. Light and darkness cannot mingle, nor will Christ remain where the devil is prominent. It simply will not happen. With strong and compelling words, therefore, Jesus pleads for a return to accord with Himself. He calls them to intimacy with Himself, where His vicarious work is kept in continual memory, and accord with Himself is maintained

at all cost. This must be done ***“until the end,”*** or the consummation of all things. From the perspective of our natural environment, ***“the end”*** is when the heavens and earth are burned up (2 Pet 3:10-12). From the outlook of our life in Christ, ***“the end”*** is the return of the Lord (Col 3:4). If we consider ***“the end”*** from the stance of our warfare, it is when we have finished our course, and are freed at last from all contradiction (2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1-2). The promise that follows is ONLY for those who finish the race, who maintain fellowship with Christ, remaining suitable vehicles for the fulfillment of God’s will.

### **Give Authority Over the Nations**

A hero Tyrimnos represents the Thyatiran conception of the city’s function in the world. He goes forth on horseback with the battle-ax over his shoulder, the fit representative of a military colony, to conquer, and to dash his enemies in pieces.

The very statement assumes a fundamental variance between ***“the nations”*** and those in Christ Jesus. ***“The nations”*** represent competing bodies of people, organized and functioning with their own interests being dominant. Although political power is ordained of God (Rom 13:1-3), it is not intended to be lasting, nor is it holy, in the strictest sense of the word. This is not an area that is to occupy the preeminence in our thought or devotion.

Nine times ***“the nations”*** are mentioned in Revelation. At the beginning of the book, they are consistently viewed as our enemies. We will, as here promised, be given authority over them (2:26). They are depicted as being ***“angry”*** at the favor given to the righteous by God (11:18). ***“The nations”*** are said to ***“fall”*** in the wake of God’s wrath (16:19), and to eventually be ***“smitten”*** by the conquering Jesus (19:15). The devil is said to have ***“deceived the nations”*** (20:3,8).

Over and above these are ***“the nations of those who are saved”*** (21:24), to whom the dominion will be given. These shall bring all

honor to the Lord, in contrast with the nations of the world, who sought to rob Him of His glory (21:26). For them— ***“the nations of those who are saved”***—complete recovery will be realized (22:2). But until then, ***“nations”*** are a repository of people in which saints are found, but who actually oppose the saints now (7:9; 10:11; 11:9).

There may be an allusion to the political situation at Thyatira. This city had a hero named Tyrimnos, who represented their conception of the city’s function in the world. An image of this hero was found on one of their coins, pictured in this section. He rode on a horse, carrying a battle-axe, and was perceived as dashing his enemies to pieces. All of that, of course, was merely the imagination of the political entities in Thyatira. What Jesus has to say is absolute truth! He is the real conqueror, and has no real competitors (Rev 6:2).

The extent of our involvement in the reign of King Jesus is far larger than ordinarily conceived. The saints are told, ***“If we endure, We shall also reign with Him”*** (2 Tim 2:12, NKJV). This is an aspect of being ***“joint heirs with Christ”*** (Rom 8:17), and is precisely what is here promised. Having ***“authority,”*** or ***“power”*** (KJV), over the nations equates with being made ***“the head, and not the tail”*** (Deut 28:13). It is the opposite of having ***“tribulation”*** in the world, the current experience of believers (John 16:33). It is true that we ***“enter”*** the Kingdom ***“through much tribulation”*** (Acts 14:22), but that condition will be brought to a swift conclusion in the fulness of time! Currently, a sharp conflict exists between ***“the nations”*** and the people of God. Because we are yet ***“in the body”*** (Heb 13:3), we often appear to be inferior in this war. But that is only because our day has not yet come.

As Christ triumphed over His enemies, so will we triumph over ours! Our triumph will be an

obvious one—a public one, if you please. While the particulars of this reign are not provided, we do have some key information about it. It is apparent that the judgment of the world is included in this reign, and perhaps is even the whole of it.

The outcome of the conflict between *“the nations”* and the people of God is vividly depicted by Daniel. He foretold what is here promised by Jesus. *“But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever . . . and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom . . . Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him”* (Dan 7:18,22,27, NKJV). The language is so lofty, it requires strong faith to embrace it. Those who envision the next world as being relatively inactive, must adjust their thinking. In Christ, we are being cultured for an eternal reign of staggering proportions. When the Spirit says, *“the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One,”* it is meant to challenge our hearts, thrusting us into more consistent involvement with *“the Highest One”* now!

This promise, then, speaks of a complete cessation of opposition from the world—from its *“nations”* in whom the saints were dispersed. Even more, it declares the superiority of the saints will become evident in dominion and rule. We will not longer be subject to the laws of men, but adversarial men will, in a decisive way, be subject to the saints of God. We must be willing to wait for this dominion, and not attempt to seize it prematurely. Remember, that was a temptation Satan leveled at Jesus (Matt 4:8; Lk 4:5-7). Life in this world, therefore, can never be

given preeminence in the hearts of God's people, regardless of the form it takes. Our lives are ***"hid with Christ in God,"*** and our ***"citizenship is in heaven"*** (Col 3:3; Phil 3:20). That condition does not allow us to be dominated by the world in any form!

## **He Shall Rule Them**

The ***"kingdoms of this world,"*** which govern ***"the nations"*** will eventually be swallowed up by the ***"Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ."*** Later, this is announced with power in this book. ***"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"*** (Rev 11:15). It is edifying to note that the same language used of Christ Himself, is also used of His people in the promise to the faithful of Thyatira. ***"She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne"*** (12:5) . . . ***"Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron"*** (19:15). The promise, therefore, again confirms we are ***"joint heirs with Christ,"*** and shall ***"reign with Him."*** This is all according to the Psalmic promise which foretold Christ's ultimate and apparent dominion. ***"Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel"*** (Psa 2:8-9).

The rule is to be a forceful one— ***"He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels."*** It is also to be a strict accord with the rule of Jesus— ***"as I also have received from My Father."*** As Christ triumphed over His enemies, so will we triumph over ours! Our triumph will be an obvious one—a public one, if you please. While the particulars of this reign are not provided, we do have some key information about it. It is apparent that the judgment of the world is included in this reign, and perhaps is even the whole of it. Here is fulfilled the affirmation of the Spirit, ***"Do you not know that***

*the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?"* (1 Cor 6:2-3). The conflicts of *"the nations"* with *"God's elect"* (Rom 8:33) have not yet been finalized. While the *"spirits of just men made perfect"* have been removed from the arena of conflict, they have not yet been vindicated. Later in Revelation, we will confront

Jesus will accomplish the judgment through His saints, who, in salvation, were effectively joined to Him! Imagine the trials of earth being resumed, with the saints presiding: Stephen and the rulers of the people, Peter and John before the counsel, Paul before Felix and Agrippa . . . etc. In that climactic hour, the saints shall prevail!

"the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (6:9). They are seen as crying out for vindication: ***"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*** (6:10). They are not told such recrimination will never take place, but that they must wait for it (6:11). **The promise before us is the time when what they requested will be fulfilled—and it will come through the saints themselves.**

The judgment of the world will be accomplished by God Himself—this is the declaration of Scripture (Rom 3:6; Heb 12:23; 13:4). That judgment, however, will be executed ***"through"*** Christ Jesus the Lord, Whom God has appointed for that purpose (Acts 17:30-31; Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1). Now, it is proclaimed that Jesus will accomplish the judgment through His saints, who, in salvation, were effectively joined to Him! Imagine the trials of earth being resumed, with the saints presiding: Stephen and the rulers of the people, Peter and John before

the counsel, Paul before Felix and Agrippa . . . etc. In that climactic hour, the saints shall prevail! They shall strike down every argument, misrepresentation, and excuse. Truth shall triumph through them, to the praise and honor of the Lord and His Christ. But only the overcomers will participate in this grand judgment. All who have themselves been overcome, will be struck down as with a rod of iron.

Ultimately, this speaks of our triumph over the wicked one himself, the devil. It is written, ***“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”*** (Rom 16:20). That glorious victory will be carried out to the finest detail! All who have lived under the dominion and influence of Satan will be included in the crushing! All iniquity shall be judged together, as it were. Whether it be the devil himself, his angels, or ***“the nations”*** who submitted to his rule, the saints shall play a determined role in their demise! Praise be to the Lord for a promise so great! The hosts wickedness shall be completely disassembled by means of the saints judgment. When it is through, they will be ***“broken to shivers.”*** Neither cause nor unity will be left! Every vestige of opposition will be shattered to pieces. There will be no more amalgamation of wickedness—none at all. As Solomon said, ***“Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished”*** (Prov 11:21).

### **The Morning Star**

The greatest of all promises, indeed— ***“THE MORNING STAR.”*** At the conclusion of this book, Jesus identifies Himself as this Star. ***“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star”*** (22:16). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, spoke of Jesus as ***“the Dayspring from on high”*** (Luke 1:78), or the ***“Sunrise,”*** or ***“Dawning of the day”***—the Source of all illumination and refreshment. Malachi referred to Him as ***“the Sun of righteousness”*** with total healing efficacy (Mal 4:2). Peter called Him ***“the Day Star”*** (2 Pet 1:19).

The ***“Morning Star”*** is **Jesus Himself**, in all of His effulgence. The overcomer will be given the Son of God Himself in a personal and effective way transcendent to anything previously experienced. Now, Jesus ***“dwells in our hearts by faith”*** (Eph 3:17). Then, He will give Himself to us in His fulness. This is described in breathtaking language by the Lord Himself. ***“Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them”*** (Luke 12:37). We are not presently capable of discerning the fulness of this promise. The Lord Jesus will not serve us as His superiors, but as those being rewarded for their faithfulness. He will not ***“serve”*** us in the sense of giving us our whims, but granting us the ***“desires of our heart”*** (Psa 37:4). There, in the glory, we will be satiated with Christ Himself, with nothing between. There will be no second-hand knowledge, or sense of deficiency. His service will result in our joy and His praise. Since He is the ***“heir of all things”*** (Heb 1:3), to have Jesus is to have everything!

He is called the ***“Morning Star”*** because of the nature of us spending eternity with Him. The fresh rush of joy and satisfaction will never be lost! There will never be a sense of depletion or dissipation. Eternity with Jesus will be like an ever increasing morning, growing brighter and brighter. New vistas will be beheld, new works enjoyed, new aspects of His Person perceived. For those willing to ***“hold fast,”*** and ***“keep”*** Christ’s ***“works”*** until the end, there will be no disappointment. There, amidst an incalculable gathering of perfected personalities, you will enjoy a personal union with Jesus that you can scarce imagine. There will never be a sense of aloofness or distance experienced! No darkness in any form, or inadequacy will ever again be experienced. God be praised for the coming Gift of ***“the Morning Star!”***

**IS ANYONE LISTENING?**

***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (NASB).*** This is no mere history book, nor is it a lifeless forth telling of events to come! This book is personal, and its promises for the individual are real. Again, this is a message to the churches, but the individuals are to hear it personally. That is because the warnings are really on a personal level. If any individual is tolerating things Jesus hates, they are to hear the words the Spirit says. If there is one who longs for a personal word from Jesus, there **is** one in what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

We have heard Jesus say to a congregation, ***“Nevertheless I have a few things against you.”*** To Ephesus Jesus said, ***“I have this against you”*** (2:4), but to Pergamum and Thyatira He said, ***“But I have a few things against you”*** (2:14,20). His judgment is thorough, and is executed strict accord with His nature and purpose. It is our business to make sure Jesus does not have anything against us or the church with which we are identified. Now, may you be given grace to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

# The Revelation Of CHRIST

Lesson Number 7

## THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS

“ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Rev 3:1-6, NASB)

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is a commissioned book, charged by the glorified Christ Himself to be written and sent to the seven churches in Asia. ***“Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea”*** (Rev 1:10, NASB). These churches, we will find, represent bodies of professed believers from all ages and in all places. In them conditions are found that are by no means confined to Asia. There are strengths

mentioned that can be found wherever the name of the Lord is embraced. There are also deficiencies that are common in all ages--deficiencies that are the direct result of succumbing to delusive assaults of the wicked one.

Because of these common circumstances, the message to all seven of the churches is solemnly concluded with the words, ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*** (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). This exhortation is even found in the very heart of the book (Rev 13:9). No believer is excluded from the blessing of this book. Its message is pertinent to all churches, regardless of their condition, and to every individual with a capacity to hear what the Spirit declares in Scripture. Let no one fear to take up this book because of the symbolic terms and figures found there. **The heart of the message is not found in symbolism, but in the spirit of the book.**

This is a revelation God gave to Jesus, to give to an angel, to give to John, to give to the churches! It is not a novel, but a revelation. There is a most serious tone throughout the book. You will also find a remarkable number of promises, and references to the future of the righteous.

Later, we will read of a ***“dragon”*** (12:3,4,7,9,13,16,17; 13:2,4,11; 16:13; 20:2), two ***“beasts”*** (11:7; 13:1-4, 11-18; 15:2; 16:2,10,13; 17:3,7,8,11-17; 19:19-20; 20:4,10), and a ***“false prophet”*** (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). There will be reference to a prostitute enjoying apparent unrestrained success (17:1,15,16; 19:2), and a corrupt city that has forged an alliance with the wicked kings of the earth (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). We will read of ***“trumpets”*** (8:2,6), ***“thunders”*** (10:3,4), and ***“vials”*** of Divine judgement (16:1; 17:1; 21:9). The Spirit will tell us of the

**“dragon”** spewing out a destructive **“flood”** designed to destroy a **“woman”** (12:15-16). The book contains reference to a **“bottomless pit”** (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3), **“locusts”** (9:3,7), and four horses with riders (6:2-8). We will be exposed to the **“souls”** of those beheaded because of their testimony (6:9). There is even reference to **“the mark of the beast”** (13:16; 16:2; 19:20), and a dreadful exhibition of Divine wrath that results in a flow of blood from a winepress that is up to the horses’ bridles (15:19-20). We will read of miracles being wrought by the enemy of the saints (13:14-15), and authority being given to a blasphemous beast to make war with the saints and overcome them (13:5).

For many, this makes the book irrelevant. However, we must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by these figures. **This is a message to the churches** --a needful message. This is a revelation God gave to Jesus, to give to an angel, to give to John, to give to the churches! It is not a novel, but a revelation. There is a most serious tone throughout the book. You will also find a remarkable number of promises, and references to the future of the righteous. The first part of the book (chapters 1-3) are calculated to capture our attention, producing introspection and a hearty appetite for fellowship with our Lord. The special words to the messengers of the seven churches confirm the relevance of the rest of the book, which is the bulk of the message given to them.

Throughout this book, the message is addressed **“to the churches”** (1:4,11,20; 2:7,11,17,23,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16). The entirety of this communication relates to the relationship of the churches to the Lord Jesus Christ. It also has to do with preparation for eternity, the resistance of the devil, and the good fight of faith. We will read of the end of all things, and the events that attend that grand conclusion, i.e., **1** - the coming of Christ (1:7; 3:11; 16:15; 22:12,20), **2** - the resurrection of the dead (20:13a), **3** - the judgment (1:7; 6:15-17; 11:18; 20:11-15; 22:12), **4** - the reward of the righteous (21:1-5; 22:1-5), and **5** - the punishment of the wicked (6:15-17; 11:18; 14:9-11; 20:15). But this is

not the heart of the book. In Revelation, Jesus is urging the churches to **PREPARE** for these things, i.e., to *“prepare to meet thy God”* (Amos 4:12). He alerts them to the nature of Christ’s reign, and the tactics of their adversary, the devil. If, in our approach to this volume, we fail to remember these things, we will fall into the snare of Scripture-perversion.

With great solemnity, the Lord Jesus Himself warns those who dare to tamper with the words of this book. *“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book”* (22:18-19, NASB). That should provide sufficient incentive to keep a godly focus in our review of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

This book is for churches who are meticulous in their approach to teaching, who will not allow false doctrines to creep in--but who have left their first love (Ephesus). It is also for churches that are under severe persecution, a condition requiring everything they have to stand (Smyrna). Churches who have become complacent in the teaching they allow must also give heed to this book (Pergamum), together with assemblies that tolerate the perpetration and holding of doctrines that are reprehensible to the Lord Jesus Christ (Thyatira). Now we will confront a church that appears to be successful and flourishing, but is actually spiritually dead and insensitive to its Lord (Sardis). The message is also for them, from chapter one through chapter twenty-two. Here is a word from Jesus to the saints of all generations, under all conditions, and in every spiritual state.

## WHO IS SPEAKING?

***“These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars . . . ”*** (3:1). Four times ***“the seven***

## OVERVIEW

**WHO CHRIST IS:** “ ” He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this ” (NASB).

**WHAT HE SEES :** “I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ” (NASB).

**EXHORTATION:** “ 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.’ ” (NASB) .

**PROMISE:** “ 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ’ ” (NASB).

Spirits of God” are mentioned in this book. (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). We are told these stand before the throne of God: ***“there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”*** (4:5). They are also associated with the Lord Jesus Christ and His activity: ***“having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth”*** (5:6). This is the heavenly view of the Holy Spirit of God.

In this book, the term ***“seven spirits of God”*** is contrasted with Satanic influences. ***“And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the***

***Almighty***” (16:13-14). The clear implication is that Divine power is superior to that of the devil: ***“seven spirits”*** versus ***“three unclean spirits.”*** On the one hand, the Spirit of God is impressing redemptive truth upon the people of God, sanctifying and readying them for the world to come. Conversely, Satan’s ***“spirits”*** send a flood of delusion into the world, ***“working miracles”*** that beguile and set those who receive them against the God of heaven.

The Holy Spirit, in His convicting and sanctifying work, is before the throne of God. That is, He is executing the will of God in the earth. The Spirit is also portrayed in association with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is ***“He who has the seven Spirits of God”*** (3:1). Here we see the Spirit working in strict accord with the ***“great salvation”*** being accomplished by the Son of God. He never departs from that salvation, and never work independently of it.

When Jesus identifies Himself as the One who ***“has the seven Spirits of God,”*** He is declaring He holds the history and destiny of the churches in His hand. They will either fall or be exalted by Him! He is the Fulcrum and Director of the churches, whether they are aware of it or not. The Lord Jesus controls the Divine action taking place in the churches. If they are not in accord with Him, there is no possible way for the Spirit to work in or through them.

The expression ***“seven Spirits of God”*** emphasizes the completeness or thoroughness of this work through the Holy Spirit, and perfectly accords with the rest of Scripture. To refresh your mind on the glorious comprehensiveness of the Spirit’s working, consider the following.

1 — The church is made a habitation of God ***THROUGH THE SPIRIT*** (Eph 2:22).

2 — Sanctification, or being set apart for Divine use, is an

accomplishment ***OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*** (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).

3 — ***THE SPIRIT*** fortifies the human spirit so Christ can dwell within (Eph 3:16-17).

4 — We abound in hope through the power ***OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*** (Rom 15:13).

5 — The effectiveness of the Word of God is traced to the ***WORKING OF THE SPIRIT*** (Eph 6:17).

6 — The circumcision of the heart is accomplished ***BY THE SPIRIT*** (Rom 2:29).

7 — ***THROUGH THE SPIRIT*** , we put to death the deeds of the carnal nature (Rom 8:13).

8 — The children of God are led ***BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD*** (Rom 8:14)

9 — We are alive to God ***BY THE HOLY SPIRIT*** (Gal 5:25)

10 — ***THROUGH THE SPIRIT*** , we anticipate the hope of being righteous (Gal 5:5).

11 — ***BY THE SPIRIT*** , we were washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).

12 — The presence of Divine attributes within the believer is actually ***“THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT”*** (Gal 5:22-23).

When Jesus says, ***“These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars,”*** He is alerting the church in Sardis to Divinely appointed means. First, He will work in the church **through the Holy Spirit** , convicting, strengthening, and activating. Second, He will do so through His messengers, who are His representatives. The Spirit will work through the message of the messengers upon all who hear ***“what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”***

The Holy Spirit is always before the Throne of God, executing His good pleasure in accordance with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. No aspect of the Kingdom which we have **“received”** (Heb 12:28) functions independently of the Holy Spirit: He is **always** before the Throne. God accomplishes His purpose through the instrumentality of His Spirit. The Lord Jesus governs the Kingdom by means of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Administrator. No person or church can afford to ignore the One Who stands before the throne, and Who works in strict concert with the reigning Son of God.

The Church of Sardis, then, is addressed by Him who controls and directs the Divine action in the Churches as they exist in the world, and who holds in His hand their messengers, with their history and their destiny. Their response to Him will determine where and how they will spend eternity.

## THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

SARDIS-- the capital city of Lydia in the province of Asia, in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The church at Sardis was one of the seven churches mentioned by John in the Book of Revelation <Rev. 3:1-6>.

Sardis was situated on the east bank of the Pactolus River about 80 kilometers (50 miles) east of Smyrna; it occupied a rocky spur of Mount Tmolus and a valley at the foot of this mountain. In ancient times Sardis was well fortified and easily defended. It became the capital of the ancient Lydian empire, then passed successively to the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans during their respective dominance of the ancient world.

During its days as a Roman city, Sardis became an important Christian center. However, the church at Sardis was evidently affected by the complacency of the city and its reliance on past glory: "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" <Rev. 3:1>. Sardis, the dead church, was like "whitewashed tombs which... appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones" <Matt.

23:27>. Its thriving, healthy appearance masked an inner decay.

The most impressive building of ancient Sardis must have been its magnificent Temple of Artemis, built in the fourth century B. C. The temple was 100 meters (327 feet) long and 50 meters (163 feet) wide and had 78 Ionic columns, each 17.7 meters (58 feet) high. Some of these columns remain standing until this day.

*(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)*

*(Copyright (C) 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)*

The book of the Revelation is the only place in the Bible we read of the city, or church, of Sardis, and the words of Jesus are the only assessment of it we have. Perhaps it would be better for all of us if this were the case with every church. I fear men have plagued us with extraneous and highly biased information about contemporary churches.

We do not know how or when this congregation was established, but Jesus was acutely mindful of it. Heaven and earth are rarely, if ever, in synch in their assessments. We have a classic example of that in the church in Sardis. Church history has largely walked around the church in Sardis. Some mention is made of one Melito, who was the bishop of Sardis in the second century, during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180). He was a prodigious writer and theologian, giving himself fully to the work of the Lord, and remaining single all of his life. He is credited with providing the first list of Old Testament canonical writings, in which he eliminated the Apocrypha writings.

This message accentuates the involvement of the Lord Jesus with His churches—whether anyone else recognizes them or not. We have no idea how large this assembly was. But for the condition in which they were found, they were too large—miserable representatives of the King of kings. Unfortunately, many churches have followed their example, and are altogether too prominent in our land.

The city of Sardis joined with Ephesus in abominable idolatry. They worshipped common goddesses, as represented by the figure #8. This

condition made Ephesus' abandonment of their ***"first love,"*** and the spiritually ***"dead"*** condition of Sardis, especially reprehensible. God's people are the solitary source of light among heathen cultures. As it is written, ***"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain"*** (Phil 2:12-16, NKJV). We will find the church in Sardis was NOT working out its salvation with ***"fear and trembling."*** God was NOT working in them ***"to will and to do,"*** and they were NOT without fault in the midst of a corrupt generation. We should therefore expect our Lord's analysis of this church to be stern, and with sharp tones and convicting.

## A NAME THAT YOU LIVE

***"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead"*** (3:1b). ***"You have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead!"*** (TEV). What a tragic assessment! Those who object to candid words will be offended by this one--but this is the way the Lord Jesus speaks. He recognizes the reputation of the church in Sardis, but declares it to be a false one. Here was a church that had all of the marks of a thriving organization. Stated in contemporary terms, they probably met in an impressive structure, and had a complete "staff." Imagine them with a "senior minister," "youth minister," "senior's minister," "counseling minister," and "events coordinator." Parallel them with a congregation supplying an abundance of activities for a wide variety of people: a weight loss program, ladies aide society, full range of athletics, and regular outings for retirees. They would be like a modern church that had youth programs, financial counseling, divorce recovery programs, and a multiplicity of training courses. Parallel them

with a congregation having an upbeat “praise” service, and offering provisions for people of all persuasions. *Mind you, it is not that such things are inherently wrong--God forbid! It is that they can all be done without Jesus, without the Spirit, and without being alive to God!* The church in Sardis wore the name of Christ in a manner approved by the world, and were probably viewed as religious innovators. They had **“the reputation of being alive.”** But the Lord Jesus denies the validity of this distinction. It was an erroneous one--they were not alive at all!

Think of these jarring words, and ponder them with great sobriety: **“but you are dead!”** It is alarming that this could be said to Christ’s own church! Those who imagine you can lose nothing when once you come into Christ do well to consider these solemn words. This church was not always dead! It started out like all true churches begin, with spiritual life! **“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead”** (Rom 6:11,13, NASB). **“But God . . . even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus”** (Eph 2:5-6). There are no still-births in the Kingdom of God! Everyone begins the same way. **“And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him”** (Col 2:13). Everyone in Christ begins with sensitivity to God, a purged conscience, and a determination to please the Lord. God gives us that beginning, and we are strictly charged not to depart from it (Heb 3:14).

The church in Sardis did not maintain their status. They did not protect their affiliation with Deity! They had a name they were **“alive,”** but did a miserable job of fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). They did not continue to **“walk in the Spirit”** and **“live by faith”** (Gal 5:16,25; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:39). They did not quit doing things, but ceased to pursue **“this ONE thing”** (Phil

3:13). They had become like the Pharisees who provoked Jesus when He dwelt among us. Their pious looks and manners were deceiving, for they were ***“like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.”*** On the outside they seemed to be devout, but those looks were misleading. They were ***“like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness”*** (Matt 23:27,28).

Jesus is speaking about appearance without spiritual reality. This is promise without performance, and an outward show of strength that lacks both vigilance and assurance. Our Lord spoke of this condition when He ***“dwelt among us.”*** His blistering words to the Pharisees provide insight into the effect such a state has upon the Lord of glory.

Of old time, before the coming of Christ, Israel also fell into this grievous transgression. The Lord indicted these people through Isaiah. ***“Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness, And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God”*** (Isa 58:1-2). There is no acceptable excuse for the church in Sardis, or any other church, becoming dead toward God. The examples of Israel as a nation, and the Pharisees as leaders, have been provided to show the possibility of going backward. The Lord has also clearly articulated the effect of such a condition upon Himself.

Having the reputation of being alive, yet being dead to God, is having a ***“form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5). It is, as the Spirit says of sensuous widows, ***“being death while she lives”*** (1 Tim 5:6). This is a circumstance where an unacceptable contradiction exists between appearance and reality, between the outward and the inward man. Actually, every person is dead and alive at the same time. For those choosing to live by faith, they are ***“dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Rom 6:11). For them, ***“the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness”*** (Rom 8:11, NASB). But the condition at Sardis was quite different. They had a name of being alive to God, but were actually dead to Him--two conditions that it are impossible to have simultaneously. When we were accepted by God in Christ Jesus, we were ***“made alive”*** to God, being delivered from a state of death toward Him (Rom 6:13; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). In the new birth, individuals are delivered from the world, wherein they were ***“dead,”*** and transferred into the kingdom of God’s Son, wherein they are alive and sensitive to God (Col 1:13).

But Sardis had returned to their alienated and dead state! Jesus does not say they are nearing death, but that they ARE dead! The chord of life between them and heaven had been severed, according to their own will. God no longer heard them, and they no longer heard Him! O Sardis! You have mothered many a church! Our generation is cluttered with the spiritual wreckage of dead churches--congregations who live oblivious of Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25). Their programs are all in place, and the institutional machinery is well oiled and functioning impressively. Their names are in lights, so to speak, and the brotherhood looks up to them. But they are really ***“dead.”*** God is not using them, and they are not seeking Him. They are an institutional blotch on the canvas of Divine purpose, attempting to live apart from the Lord Jesus, though ignorantly doing so.

Jesus is speaking about appearance without spiritual reality. This is promise without performance, and an outward show of strength that

lacks both vigilance and assurance. Our Lord spoke of this condition when He *“dwelt among us.”* His blistering words to the Pharisees provide insight into the effect such a state has upon the Lord of glory. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (Matt 23:27-28, NASB). Luke’s Gospel states the condition in arresting words, showing that men did not detect the corruption of these pretended leaders. *“Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it”* (Lk 11:44, NASB).

The church in Sardis looked good, but was corrupt. It appeared to excel, but had lapsed into a state of spiritual death. It wore the name of Jesus, but had incurred His indignation. It existed outwardly, but was void of the life of God. It is particularly important that we consider this church because of the popularity of outward display in our time.

The church in Sardis looked good, but was corrupt. It appeared to excel, but had lapsed into a state of spiritual death. It wore the name of Jesus, but had incurred His indignation. It existed outwardly, but was void of the life of God. It is particularly important that we consider this church because of the popularity of outward display in our time. Our Lord has spoken to this subject frequently, and with great clarity. First, things that rank high with men are an abomination with God. *“That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15b, NASB). We must never forget that natural men, or those who are not born again, are alienated from God. They are not capable of making a proper assessment of things pertaining to God. Their thoughts are foolishness, and they cannot please God in their thoughts, words, or deeds (Rom 8:5-8). It is easy enough to gain a name for being *“alive”* before such

people. They are too easily impressed, because they consider only what they see with their eyes. The solemn confession of those who live in the Spirit is quite different. ***“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”*** (2 Cor 4:18, NASB).

Those who are ***“alive”*** are being transformed by their spiritual vision. As they ***“look to Jesus”*** (Heb 12:1-2), they are changed by the sight. This is the process described in Second Corinthians 4:6. ***“For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*** A moral and spiritual change takes place as we focus upon the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ. That transformation is accomplished by the Spirit. As it is written, ***“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”*** (3 Cor 3:18). Those involved in this process are ***“alive.”*** They are in communion with the Lord, and are being oriented for the world to come.

The church in Sardis, however, was ***“dead.”*** They were not concentrating on Christ, and were ***not*** being ***“transformed by the renewing of their mind”*** (Rom 12:1-2). Their eyes were slanted toward the earth, and thus they incurred the wrath of the Lamb. Jesus did not die, nor was He exalted, in order that a mere appearance of religiosity might be maintained by His people. He is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18). That task, however, cannot be accomplished in insensitive souls. Where individuals are anaesthetized toward God, the channel of Divine communication is broken. O that this were more fully known by the professing church. Legion is the name of those who are dull and obtuse concerning spiritual things, but have an acute awareness of ***“the world and the lust thereof!”***

I am reminded of the word to some spiritually lethargic Ephesians. ***“Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light”*** (Eph 5:14). Mind you, spiritual life begins by being quickened, or made alive, from the dead. As it is written, ***“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins . . . even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:1-6, NKJV). I cannot conceive of a more serious condition than one which requires that the Savior, in consideration of one of His own churches, says, ***“YOU ARE DEAD!”*** The church in Sardis had lapsed back into the state from which they were once recovered! What a tragedy! There is nothing—absolutely nothing—about salvation that contributes to such retrogression. It is the result of neglect and slovenly spiritual manners. Those in such a condition are not given a lengthy period to recover. They must rise from the dead spiritually like Jairus’ daughter, the widow of Nain’s son, and Lazarus.

Men have grown accustomed to ***“dead”*** churches, but Jesus has not. Some theology would say the church

Was a revivification of this church possible? Indeed it was! That is why this message is sent. They still had some vestiges of spiritual life. Although they were ***“ready to die,”*** they could again be brought forward. They could once again ***“hold fast”*** and ***“repent,”*** if only they would do so. Jesus sends no message to those who cannot be recovered!

in Sardis was ***“dead”*** because it was never really alive. But that is only a contrived explanation required by a flawed theology. This was a legitimate church, with a legitimate messenger. Jesus declares Himself to be walking ***“in the midst”*** of the churches, in which Sardis was found. They had ***“received”*** and ***“heard”*** the blessed Gospel, and were

numbered among *“the churches”* to whom the Spirit spoke.

The word translated *“dead”* (nekros, νεκρός) is used 132 times from Matthew through Revelation. It consistently means a state of separation and inactivity, referring to the condition from which all men will be raised in the last day, the death of Jesus Himself, a state of spiritual alienation from God, and the spiritual relationship of the believer to sin (;Mat 8:22; 10:8; 11:5;14:2; 17:9; 22:31,22,32; 23:27; 27:64; 28:4,7; Mk 6:14,16; 9:9,10,26; 12:25,26,27; Lk 7:15,22; 9:7,60; 15:24,32; 16:30,31; 20:35,37,38; 24:5,46; John 2:22; 5:21,25; 12:1,9,17; 20:9; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:2,10; 5:10; 10:41,42; 13:30,34; 17:3,31,32; 20:9; 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:8,23; 28:6; Rom 1:4; 4:17,24; 6:4,9,11,13; 7:4,8; 8:10,11; 10:7,9; 11:15; 14:9; 1 Cor 15:12,13,15,16,20,21,29,32,35,42,52; 2 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20, 2:1,5; 5:14; Phil 3:11; Col 1:18; 2:12,13; 1 Th 1:10; 4:16; 2 Tim 2:8; 4:1; Heb 6:1,2; 9:14,17; 11:19,35; 13:20; James 2:17,20,26; 1 Pet 1:3,21; 4:5,6; Rev 1:5,17,18; 2:8; 3:1; 11:18; 14:13; 16:3; 20:5,12,13). I have taken the time to list these references to underscore the seriousness of the condition in Sardis. Recovery was imperative, else they would forever be cast away from the *“presence of the Lord and the glory of His power”* (2 Thess 1:9). **There is not a single optimistic word in all of Scripture given to those who are spiritually dead--who are unresponsive to the Lord.** Those who imagine a departure from the Lord will only bring the loss of a few rewards are in the grip of Satanic delusion. To a measurable degree, their very position has been produced by the spiritual death they presume to analyze.

Was a revivification of this church possible? Indeed it was! That is why this message is sent. They still had some vestiges of spiritual life. Although they were *“ready to die,”* they could again be brought forward. They could once again *“hold fast”* and *“repent,”* if only they would do so. Jesus sends no message to those who cannot be recovered! There is no word of exhortation or hopeful message for the devil and his angels. They are unrecoverable! When Jesus delivers a word to a person or a church, it is accompanied by Divine power.

Remember, He said, ***“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”*** (John 6:63, NKJV). That word only needs to be embraced to become effective in the recipient. This is a Kingdom principle that opens a ***“door of hope”*** (Hos 2:15) in the most grievous of circumstances.

## THE EXHORTATION

Long ago, the Divine nature was revealed in the Lord’s attitude toward recalcitrant Israel. ***“Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD”*** (Jer 31:20, NKJV). Now, with stirring words, the Lord Jesus calls this ***“dead”*** church to rise from the ash-heap of spiritual demise. He speaks in the capacity of the searching and empowering One, Who holds the messengers in His hand, and determines the destiny of the churches.

### Be Watchful

***“Be watchful . . . ( “Wake up,” NASB) ”*** (3:2a, NKJV). Because of ***“adversary the devil,”*** who ***“walks about, seeking whom he may devour”*** (1 Pet 5:8), watchfulness and alertness are imperative. It is not possible to survive the attacks of the evil one in a state of slumber, to say nothing of death. The church in Sardis was not doing well. It had fallen into the ***“sleep of death”*** (Psalm 13:3). Unless they recovered from this disgraceful condition, they would be pruned from the Vine (John 15:1-8). They had to awaken, get the ***“eyes of their heart”*** (Eph 1:18) opened, and recover themselves from the snare of the devil. **No one will dwell forever with the Lord who dwells outside of the circumference of hearing.** Already, they had drifted into treacherous waters, making recovery extremely difficult. Many a soul, and church

as well, has lingered in a state of spiritual obtuseness and lethargy too long!

The church in Sardis had digressed into a condition that would condemn them if they did not recover.

By Christ's own assessment they were "*dead,*" even though they had a reputation for being "*alive.*"

One, and only one, alternative was open to them. The name they had among men was not recognized in heaven.

The Word of God speaks to this situation, sounding the alarm before professed believers digress into an unrecoverable state. "*And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*" (Rom 13:11-12). This admonition equates to "*Be watchful!*" or "*Wake up!*" The alarm sounded to the Romans is much like the one given to the church in Sardis. **Watchfulness is required because of the imminent coming of the Lord!** Already, they had succumbed to the artifices of the devil. They had been lulled into a state of spiritual insensitivity, where the return of the Lord was no longer prominent in their thinking! They must recover from this condition!

Watchfulness is frequently linked to the subject of Christ's return. "*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*" (Matt 24:42). "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*" (Matt 25:13). Because of the events that will accompany our Lord's return, faith "*looks*" intently for it to occur. "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious*

*appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). The posture that must be found in all believers is that of “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7, NASB). Jesus has apprized humanity that those who are not watching for Him will have their possessions plundered when He returns. They MUST be ready and watching. “But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matt 24:43-44).*

Salvation is calculated to prepare the individual for the return of Christ! The Gospel proclamation produces and maintains an environment of spiritual illumination. Those who walk in that light will not be caught unawares by the return of their Lord. As it is written, *“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake (living in the body) or asleep (have died), we may live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:4-10).*

The church in Sardis had digressed into a condition that would condemn them if they did not recover. By Christ’s own assessment they were *“dead,”* even though they had a reputation for being *“alive.”* One, and only one, alternative was open to them. The name they had among men was not recognized in heaven. They MUST recover, and rise from their spiritually dead state. As it is written, *“Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you” (Eph 5:14).* They did not need to develop a strategy for recovery, but to wake up and be

watchful! The Lord was approaching, and they were not aware of it. Their assembly, whatever may be said of it, was not marked by an acute awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ. They stood like the man with the withered hand before the Lord's Christ. For them, waking up was equivalent to that man stretching out his withered hand at the command of the Lord.

## **Strengthen What Is About To Die**

There is nothing about salvation that would cause or encourage such a dissolution. The death of such things would certainly dishonor the Lord Jesus and prove offensive to all who walk in the light as He is in the light. No valid reason can be adduced for the things in reference to be *“ready to die.”*

*“ . . . strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die . . . ”* (3:2b, NASB). There is a remarkable resilience to life given by God. This is seen in the effects of the tree of life, even after men were excluded from it. Adam lived 930 years, Seth 912 years, Enos 905 years, Cainan 910 years, Jared 962 years, Methuselah 969 years, and Noah 950 years (Gen 5:5,8,11,14,20,27; 9:29). There is also a remarkable durability to the aspects of spiritual life. The nature of life in Christ demands that this be the case. This stamina enables the believer to withstand fierce assaults by the evil one. Extended persecution has been remarkably endured by those in Christ Jesus. This resilience, however, also makes recovery from severe setbacks possible, like that of Sardis. The *“smoking flax”* can flame again, and the *“bruised reed”* can once be strengthened (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20). The *“great salvation”* in Christ Jesus enables its recipients to make awesome recoveries. Thus it is written, *“Then they will rebuild the*

***ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations”***  
(Isa 61:4, NASB).

What are the remaining ***“things?”*** They are ***“things that accompany salvation”*** (Heb 6:9). The fear of God, a tender conscience, the joy of the Lord, the remission of sin, and access to God, are a few (2 Cor 7:1; Heb 9:14; 10:22; Luke 1:77; Eph 3:123). In a remarkable reference to regeneration, the Spirit speaks of ***“those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”*** (Heb 6:4-5). Is it possible that such things could die within the very people receiving them? We may be sure that such a demise is not necessary. There is nothing about salvation that would cause or encourage such a dissolution. The death of such things would certainly dishonor the Lord Jesus and prove offensive to all who walk in the light as He is in the light. No valid reason can be adduced for the things in reference to be ***“ready to die.”*** The situation in Sardis was much like that of a dreadful disease that had attacked the last remnant of hope, and was threatening to destroy it all.

There is a strain of teaching that denies such things **can “die.”** Whether the church in Sardis had formally adopted the doctrine or not, it had embraced it in practice. This church was conducting itself as though the Lord Jesus was not needed. Their affiliation with Christ was in name only. The doctrine denying the possibility of losing these things is referred to in various ways. ***“Perseverance of the saints,” “once in grace always in grace,” “once saved always saved,” and “eternal security,”*** to name the more prominent terms. Others like to speak of ***“carnal Christians,”*** another expression conspicuously absent from the Word of God. All of them, whether intentional or not, assume that Christ remains associated with those who are ***“dead”*** to Him—a condition from which He saved them in the first place. Neither, indeed, can it be countered that the church in Sardis was really no church at all. It was recognized by Christ as a church—one of the churches in which

He stood, and whose messenger was in His hand.

How can dying virtues and graces be strengthened. **First**, it will require the interposition of Jesus Himself. It is He that will not **“quench a smoking flax”** or **“break a bruised reed.”** The church must avail itself of His fellowship, into which it has been called. He must be the heart and soul of their message and the single objective of their quest. It took an immediate association with Jesus to save them in the first place, and it will take the same thing to restore them. That close posture must be maintained if they are to **“strengthen the things that remain.”** There is no salvation at a distance from Jesus! The Spirit states the case this way, **“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving”** (Col 2:6-7).

The church in Sardis performed duties of all kinds, but no duty completely. They were constantly beginning, but never brought any thing to a proper end. Their resolutions were languid, their strength feeble, and their light dim. They probably maintained their reputation before men, but their works were not perfect before God. Their works were their own expression, not that of Christ.

**Second**, the seven-fold Spirit must work to enliven and bring spiritual productivity. They must cease looking on things that **“are seen”** (2 Cor 4:17-18), thereby **“grieving”** and **“quenching”** the Spirit. They were being dominated by the **“carnal mind,”** which is **“enmity against God”** (Rom 8:7). What few things that **“remained”** in Sardis would wither and die if they were not **“strengthened.”** As it is used here, the

word **“strengthen”** means *make firm, or establish, primarily by resolution*. Just as it takes a decision to **“neglect so great salvation”** (Heb 2:3) by a preference for other things, so determination is required to strengthen dying spiritual qualities. The church in Sardis began its spiritual life **“in heavenly places,”** along with all other saints (Eph 2:6). That is the realm where the necessary strength will be acquired. The gifts of God flourish in the heavenlies, they die when men are dominated by the world and things that are seen.

Spiritual recovery can only be realized in the light of the Divine countenance. As we choose to live in the consideration and fellowship of God and Christ, unacceptable manners of life not only are apparent, they become repulsive. This results from walking in the light. **“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7, NKJV). The church in Sardis will need Divine assistance to strengthen the things that remain. With strong intention, they must abandon religious life that does not require conscious involvement with their Lord. As it is written, **“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded”** (James 4:8, NKJV).

Jesus has not asked an impossible thing of this church. There still remained a mustard-seed-life, capable of redirecting their entire focus. This was their last opportunity to recover, and they must do so with zeal! This requirement is wonderfully expressed elsewhere by the Spirit. **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Col 3:1-2, NKJV).

Suffice it to say, the Spirit cannot dominate in the periphery of spiritual life. The less aware we are of Christ, the weaker we become. The more we are controlled by the things of this world, the less

responsive we are to God. When anyone attempts to live in a manner that does not necessitate constant recourse to the throne of grace, what was received from Christ begins to die. It makes little difference what kind of theology is developed to allow for such conduct, God will not allow spiritual life to continue where there is no interest in or commitment to it.

## Imperfect Works

*“ . . . for I have not found your deeds completed (“perfect,” KJV) in the sight of My God”* (3:2c, NASB). The

Christian community has given a lot of consideration to *“works.”* Much of its formalized thought, however, has been more reactive than productive. Knowing that we are not justified by works (Rom 4:2-7; Gal 2:16), some view them as completely inconsequential in salvation. Others, reacting to that perversion, have placed in inordinate emphasis upon them, even neglecting the grace of God.

It is incumbent that we see *“works”* as the Lord Jesus sees them. It is not enough to adopt a theological position on the subject. The church in Sardis had *“works,”* but they were not adequate. The Lord Jesus reveals that His God did not consider them *“complete.”* This means that *“works”* are more a process than simple deeds or actions. **They are the result of our involvement with the Lord.** How wonderfully this is seen in the word of the Lord to the Philippians. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:12-13). The phrase *“work out”* reveals our participation in the process. *“It is God who works”* shows *“works”* are not ours alone. The *“work”* of God is to our *“works”* what the spirit is to the body. Our works without God’s work are like a dead carcass.

The church in Sardis performed duties of all kinds, but no duty completely. They were constantly beginning, but never brought any thing to a proper end. Their resolutions were languid, their strength feeble, and their light dim. They probably maintained their reputation before men, but their works were not perfect before God. Their works were their own expression, not that of Christ.

**“Works,”** or deeds, that are **“not complete”** are works in which God Himself is no longer active. They are the result of digression, not progression. Regardless of their number or the fervency with which they are produced, **“works”** wrought apart from faith are incomplete and imperfect. These are the kind of works Jesus exposed in Matthew 7:22-23. **“Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** Their works were **“not perfect”**—**“not complete.”** They came short of Divine expectation! Those who consider works completely inconsequential must reckon with this assessment.

A principle of the Kingdom is seen in this judgment. The Revelation reveals Jesus as **“the First and the Last”** (1:11,17; 2:8,19; 22:13). He is the Initiator of every aspect of **“the salvation of God”** (Acts 28:28). The experience of salvation itself, as well as every expression of it within the believer, finds its Source in Christ. But He is also **“the Last,”** and everything in between. At no point does Jesus lose His absolute essentiality. From this viewpoint, works that are incomplete are those in which the Lord Jesus no longer participates. They lack Divine objective, and therefore are wrought without Christ. Legitimate works are not automatic, they require the effort of men and the influence of Christ. The church in Sardis performed duties of all kinds, but no duty completely. They were constantly beginning, but never brought any thing to a proper end. Their resolutions were languid, their strength

feeble, and their light dim. They probably maintained their reputation before men, but their works were not perfect before God. Their works were their own expression, not that of Christ. It is not that they did not DO enough, they did not do it within the provision of Divine fellowship. Works wrought apart from Christ obtain no value or recognition by the Living Christ.

## REMEMBER

***“Remember therefore . . . ”*** (3:3a, NASB). Remember! — those in a fallen state must reach back to the commencement of their life in Christ. The consideration of future glory alone will prove too challenging, for they have become insensitive to heavenly realities. Now, though they are ***“dead,”*** they must recall their tender beginnings with Jesus. This recollection will provide an environment in which the Lord can work, and recovery can be realized.

### How You received and Heard

***“Remember therefore what*** (“how,” KJV) ***you have received and heard . . . ”*** (3:3b, NASB). There is a slight difference in the translations of this verse. Contemporary versions read ***“Remember . . . WHAT . . . ,”*** while the older versions read ***“Remember . . . HOW you have . . . ”*** In the former, the teaching heard and received is emphasized, while the MANNER in which it was received is the thrust of the latter. There is a sense in which both views are correct. The message itself is ***“the power of God unto salvation,”*** and duly considered, it will provoke a return to the Lord. In another way, recalling the effectiveness of a whole-hearted embrace of the Gospel will provide an resourceful contrast with the deadness now engulfing them. In my judgment, the latter consideration more accurately portrays the ***“mind of the Spirit.”*** Lexically, the word ***“how ”*** (“what,” NASB, NUV) comes from the

word **πῶς** , which means, *to determine how something happens how? in what way? by what means?*

This **“dead”** church is admonished to remember how they **“received and heard”** the word of their salvation. Here is a church like the shallow and rocky soil on which the Word fell. **“These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who,**

When, therefore, Jesus exhorts this church to remember **“HOW”** they heard, He is calling them to a consideration of their hearts at that time. They were more honest, and more open, to the Word of the Lord. Now, their religion had cast them into a deep sleep, and their hearts were neither honest nor good. They had to get back to the point where they COULD receive the Word of the Lord.

when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble” (Mark 4:16-17, NKJV).

Competing interests finally overtook them, even though they maintained a religious appearance. The **“gladness”** with which they once received the Word was no longer present. Now, they were not seizing the Kingdom with violence, as a prize to be grasped (Matt 11:12). Once, like the Thessalonians, they had heard and received the Gospel in a commendable and effective manner. With joy, they had **“received the word of . . . as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”** (1 Thess 1:6, 2:13). Now Jesus calls upon them to ponder those precious beginnings.

Notice the order of the words: **“received and heard,”** NOT **“heard and received.”** This emphasizes the quality of their hearts when they heard. The Gospel cannot be heard discerningly by those whose hearts are unprepared. In His parable of the Sower, Jesus described **“the good ground”** as **“those . . . with a noble** (“honest,” KJV) **and good heart”**

(Luke 8:15). When, therefore, Jesus exhorts this church to remember **“HOW”** they heard, He is calling them to a consideration of their hearts at that time. They were more honest, and more open, to the Word of the Lord. Now, their religion had cast them into a deep sleep, and their hearts were neither honest nor good. They had to get back to the point where they COULD receive the Word of the Lord. The recollection of their beginning would provide an climate in which Jesus would assist them in making a recovery.

### **Hold Fast and Repent!**

**“Remember therefore . . . and keep it and repent. . . ”** (3:3c, NASB). Not only are those in Sardis to recall how they received and heard, they are to hold on to that reflection, retaining it in their hearts. They are to dwell upon it, and not allow it to escape their minds again. Many souls could have recovered from spiritual death itself, if only they would have dwelt upon the times when their hearts were sensitive to the Lord! Such memories, strengthened by the convicting Spirit and interceding Christ, will provoke repentance. When the heart makes a comparison between the blessings of our entrance into life with Christ, and the deadness of religion without Him, repentance is possible. There must be a reason to return to Christ—a moral requirement is not enough! Jesus does not just urge them to repent, He provides them with an effective inducement to do so.

All of this presumes nothing has been altered in the heavenly places, to which we are initially raised with Christ. Nothing has changed in that realm! If only the fallen can look up, and find their way back to an acute consciousness of Christ, their light will flame again! Tender soul, you do well to ponder often the effectiveness of your persuasion of Christ Jesus and His **“great salvation.”** Such memories have a sanctifying influence because of their association with Divine workings. Then—when we **“received and heard”**—the Holy Spirit was convicting and enlightening us. The Lord Jesus Himself was appealing to our hearts, and the purposes of God the Father were being realized. Such sacred contemplation is like standing on holy ground! Naught but good

can come from it

## THE THREAT

Jesus does not take a lack of response to Himself lightly. A serious condition requires stern Divine measures. Because contemporary religion has managed to obscure this aspect of Christ's character, it is particularly important that we give ear to His words. ***“If therefore you will not wake up*** (“watch, KJV), ***I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you . . .***” (3:3e, NASB). Jesus has appealed to the will of those whom He assessed as ***“dead.”*** A theology, therefore, that assumes the inability of those in the grip of death to respond to Christ, is a gross misrepresentation of the case. When Jesus says, ***“If therefore you WILL NOT watch”*** (KJV), He means, *If you do not fervently want to watch, or awaken from the sleep of death . . .* To say it another way, *If you REFUSE to watch and be alert.* The underlying supposition is that failure to awaken would be owing to their own stubborn and calloused will. Yet, it was possible for them to awake—to respond to the Divine summons.

Those who walk at a distance from Christ are lingering on the precipice of disaster. They are sure to encounter ***“the wrath of the Lamb”*** at an unexpected time. If the church in Sardis does not take Jesus seriously, giving heed to His words, they will not be able to recover from their condition!

If the uninformed argue that the *“dead”* cannot awaken, due to their debilitated state, they must enter the throne room and readjust their reasoning. God commissioned Ezekiel to command a valley of bleached and dry bones to *“hear the Word of the Lord”* (Ezek 37). Jesus commanded dead Lazarus to come out of the tomb (John 11:43). He also commanded a man with a withered hand to stretch it forth (Matt 12:13), a lame man to take up his bed and go to his house (Matt 9:6), and summoned Peter to walk on water (Matt 14:29). Were any of these possible from an earthly point of view? The factor that makes obedience to the word of Christ possible is the power that accompanies His word. As He said, *“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). **When Divine power meshes with the human will, nothing is impossible !** For this reason, a refusal to respond to Christ’s words will not be overlooked or excused!

Christ threatens decisive and destructive action! *“I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”* That coming will not be to bless, rescue, or strengthen. It will be an hour of judgment and condemnation. It can be fulfilled in a judgment like that which fell upon Jerusalem because of its rejection of Christ (Luke 13:35), with dreadful disruption and consequences in the flesh. Ultimately, it will occur when the Lord Jesus *“is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess 1:8-9, NKJV).

Those who walk at a distance from Christ are lingering on the precipice of disaster. They are sure to encounter *“the wrath of the Lamb”* at an unexpected time. If the church in Sardis does not take Jesus seriously, giving heed to His words, they will not be able to recover from their condition! This is the circumstance to which Jesus referred when He said, *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men*

*loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,” and ““He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:18-19, 36, NKJV). There is nothing more fearful than facing an angry Christ! Yet, that is precisely what will happen to those who refuse to respond to His warning.

Some churches glory in their name, their position in the community, and the soundness of their doctrine. They have a name that they are alive, but their works are not the result of Divine fellowship! Others boast about their Scriptural order and pattern, yet are not noted for their sensitivity to Christ Jesus. Spiritual life is more important than all religious activity, regardless of the precision with which it is executed. Dead churches, if they do not recover in the strength of the Lord, will eventually sink into the mire of Divine forgetfulness. The epitaph over their tomb will be, *“A dead church that had a name it was alive.”* I fear there are more such churches in our vicinity and time than we dare to imagine.

## A FEW NAMES

*“But you have a few people (“names,” KJV) in Sardis who have not soiled (“defiled,” KJV ) their garments . . . ”* (3:4a, NASB). There is always a **“remnant”**—a group of people who have not sold out to the devil. In Elijah’s day, a remnant of

7,000 had kept the faith, though undetected by the prophet himself (1 Kgs 19:18). They were kept by God because of their faith. During a serious decline in Israel, when prophets prophesied falsely, priests ruled by their means, and the people robbed God, a remnant continued to gather and speak of the Lord (Mal 3:16-17). Even in Babylon, where the people of God has been carried captive, a **“remnant”** of four young men maintained their walk with God (Dan 3:16-18; 6:13). **Wicked**

**environments do not necessarily neutralize the faith of God's people.** Paul kept the faith in a prison in heathen Rome. Joseph and Moses kept it in the idolatrous culture of Egypt, in which they were foreigners. Noah kept the faith when the entire world did not, as Enoch did before him. The land of Uz was noted for a single individual who stood strong for God when viciously attacked by the devil—and he did so with no friends. This has always been the manner of the remnant.

In Sardis, there were *“a few names”* who did not succumb to the wave of death that had swept over that congregation. They probably were not popular with men, but they were with Jesus! He did not forget them, even though there were not many of them. They had kept the faith because of Him! But notice how Jesus refers to this faithful remnant. He tells the dead people about the living ones: *“YOU have a few names . . . ”* Dead churches need to know about the people of God who are within them! They are not the ones invited to the conventions, nor are their names in the brotherhood journals. But their names are written in heaven, and some day they will judge the dead congregations in which they survived by God's grace. I must confess that, due to Divine enablement, I have also survived some dead environs. It took extraordinary effort to do so, but the labor was not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). Think of it, those *“few names”* in Sardis had to overcome the church with which they were affiliated.

Whatever you may think of being *“worthy,”* you had best make provision in your thinking for the Divine vocabulary! Jesus affirms the *“few names”* who had kept themselves clean *“ARE worthy.”* It is not necessary to attempt to step over or around these arresting words. They come from the King Himself, and strictly conform with the truth.

Too, this was not merely a group, but were referred to as “*a few names.*” This is a more precise translation than “*people,*” as found in modern versions. These were noted as specific individuals, not merely a group. Jesus said the “*good Shepherd*” called His own sheep “*by name*” (John 10:3), and elsewhere the Spirit testifies, “*The Lord knows those who are His*” (2 Tim 2:19). These were not sustained as a group, but as individuals. **The value of their association was found in their individual faith and commitment.**

The Lord’s temple is made up of persons who are alive to God. Thus it is written, “*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house . . .*” (1 Pet 2:5). This cannot be said of a religious institution! The value of an individual in an institution is found in their association with the organization. But that is not the case with the remnant. The “*few names*” in Sardis obtained value **in spite of the institution** ! In God’s kingdom, the worth of the group is determined by the spiritual condition of the individuals in it. That is how heaven assesses the matter.

These “*few names*” were noted for keeping their “*garments*” undefiled, or uncontaminated. They evidently “*hated even the garment spotted by the flesh*” (Jude 23). They had not allowed the deadness of the church in Sardis—the one with which they were identified—to effect them. That was a remarkable achievement! **Jesus does not commend them for trying to straiten out the church, but for keeping themselves from being contaminated by it!** The remnant had maintained “*pure religion*” in a dead religious environment. They accepted and obeyed the solemn commission to “*keep*” themselves “*unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27). O, that such fervor were more evident in our time! All about us are religious people with the taint of the world upon them. We cannot get away from them, but we had better not allow them to contaminate our lives.

The “*garments*” of which He speaks are “*the garments of salvation*” and “*the robe of righteousness*” (Isa 61:10). It is a way of speaking of our thorough acceptance with God (Eph 1:6). That acceptance MUST be maintained. How frequently this is urged upon us by the Spirit. “*Keep yourselves in the love of God*” (Jude 21)—that is keeping your garments undefiled. “*Abide in me, and I in you*” (John 15:4)—that is keeping your garments undefiled. “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you*” (John 15:7)—that is keeping your garments undefiled. The remnant refuses to allow worldly manners and thoughts to interrupt their fellowship with the Son. The “*garments of salvation*” have been given to them, and they are to keep them pure and clean! Jesus will not overlook them being soiled, nor will He overlook diligent ones who keep them clean, not allowing the “*fashion of this world*” (1 Cor 7:31) to corrupt their thinking.

### **They Shall Walk With Me**

And what will the Lord do for those maintaining separateness from the defiling world order? “*They shall walk with Me in white!*” That is, their purity will become as evident to everyone as His own impeccable holiness! When Jesus returns, He will be “*glorified in His saints*” (2 Thess 1:10). The vital association He has had with them will become evident to an assembled universe! This is involved in the glorious affirmation, “*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4, NKJV). Centuries before Jesus, David expressed his anticipation of this condition. “*As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness*” (Psa 17:15). It is then, in our revealed identity “*with*” Christ, that the saying will be fulfilled, “*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation*” (Isa 25:9).

To “*walk with*” Christ “*in white*” is equivalent to, “*so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thess 4:17). It is the fulfillment of, “*If we endure,*

*We shall also reign with Him,*” (2 Tim 2:12), and being *“joint heirs with Christ”* (Rom 8:17). This is the grand culmination of faith, and that for which God’s *“great salvation”* prepares us. How refreshing it must have been for the Sardis-remnant to hear these words!

## **They Are Worthy**

Whatever you may think of being *“worthy,”* you had best make provision in your thinking for the Divine vocabulary! Jesus affirms the *“few names”* who had kept themselves clean *“ARE worthy.”* It is not necessary to attempt to step over or around these arresting words. They come from the King Himself, and strictly conform with the truth. Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of *“they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead”* (Luke 20:35). When speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and a snare that would come upon everyone dwelling upon the earth, the Master said, *“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21:36). The Colossians were urged to *“walk worthy of the Lord”* (Col 1:10), and the Thessalonians were admonished to *“walk worthy of God”* (1 Thess 2:12).

The Spirit also declared persecutions to be a Divinely appointed means of being *“counted worthy of the kingdom of God”* (2 Thess 1:5). Paul even prayed God would *“count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power”* (2 Thess 1:11). This is a worthiness undergirded by grace, but which also involves the perseverance of the saints under the pressures of this world. It is a precious promise indeed, *“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city”* (Rev 22:14, NKJV).

It is a remarkable achievement to survive a surrounding of spiritual death. When the children of God engage in hearty efforts to keep their

garments clean, and to be undefiled, their activity is logged in heaven. They will receive due recognition in the world come! The cognition of this reality will provoke sustained godly effort, something that is imperative for safe arrival at the appointed goal.

## THE PROMISE

As is our Lord's manner, a declining spiritual condition becomes the occasion for lofty promises. Remember, it is through the *“exceeding great and precious promises of God”* that we become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet1:4). These provide the greatest and most effective incentive for recovery and spiritual stability. Again, the promise is only given to *“He who overcomes . . . ”* (3:5a, NASB). No defiled or spiritually dead person can lay claim to this promise. It is only for the survivors—those who stand fast under attack, and refuse to again be identified with the world.

### Clothed in White Raiment

First of all, every person is to give diligence to have their name inscribed in this book. Second, every effort is to be expended to ensure it is not blotted out. Names are written here when people are made alive in Christ Jesus. They are removed when they become dead—and the church in Sardis was told it was *“dead.”*

*“He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments . . . ”*

(3:5b, NASB). This is the promise of spotlessness in the presence of the Lord. It denotes the thorough acceptance of God, and the complete absence of moral and spiritual contamination. It is the declared objective of Christ's redemptive work. ***“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”*** (Eph 5:15b-27). The people of God are admonished to fervently seek this condition. ***“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless”*** (2 Pet 3:14). Every vestige of sin will be removed in that day—both personally and collectively. There will be no deficiency of any sort. The effects of transgression, so evident now, will forever be gone. Praise the Lord.

If this seems too far from you, do not lose heart! Salvation makes provision for this to happen! Hear the word of the Lord. ***“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen”*** (Jude 24-25). The church in Sardis must once again become conscious of Jesus! Even though dead, recovery in this world was possible, as well as eternal life in the world to come. Hear the promise of the Spirit. ***“And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”*** (Rev 19:8, NKJV). A powerful incentive, indeed!

### **Name Not Blotted Out**

These are hard words for those believing names cannot be blotted out of the book of life! ***“. . . and I will not erase “(blot out,” KJV) his name from the book of life . . . ”*** (3:5c, NASB). The ***“book of life”*** speaks of those who are recognized and received by God, through Christ Jesus. It is, so to speak, the heavenly log of those who are ***“alive unto God”*** (Rom 6:11). If those in Sardis, who had ***“received and***

*heard*” the good word of God, could not have their names **“blotted out of the book of life,”** this is an absurd threat, and is to be ignored. Later, Jesus will tell the churches of the importance of this book. Those whose names are **“not written in the book of life”** will succumb to the deceiver, being unprotected by the Lord (13:8).

This book will eventually be opened, and its contents made known (20:12). The dreadful fate of anyone and everyone unlisted in this book has been revealed. **“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire”** (Rev 20:15). We are told that **“only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life”** will enter into the Presence and glory of the Lord (21:27). Not to be written in **“the book of life,”** therefore, equates to being condemned, or being cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

First of all, every person is to give diligence to have their name inscribed in this book. Second, every effort is to be expended to ensure it is not blotted out. Names are written here when people are made alive in Christ Jesus. They are removed when they become dead—and the church in Sardis was told it was **“dead.”** Jesus does not say their names could NOT be blotted out. Nor, indeed, does He say if they are lost in the end, that their names never were in the book. Those views are only the contrivances of men. Those who concocted them will answer to Christ for their wicked invention, and those who subscribed to them will answer for choosing to believe men over the **“Author and Finisher”** of their faith.

This book is being updated as long as the world stands. Names are being written in it, and names can be blotted out of it. At the very close of this book, Jesus sounds a solemn warning to anyone presuming to tamper with this very book. **“If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in**

*this book*” (Rev 22:17). Notice, **“HIS PART”** in the book of life, the holy city, and the things (promises) written in this book would be taken away. It is possible to have a **“part”** in this book, and to lose it all—to be alive to God, and to become dead! Sardis was in a most ominous situation!

### **Name Confessed Before the Father and His Angels**

But Jesus will do more for the overcomer than keep His name in the Book! “. . . *and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels . . .*” (3:5d, NASB). Here is a promise with great power. To be acknowledged by Christ before His Father and all of the holy angels is worthy of your extended consideration. Jesus mentioned this confession during His earthly ministry. **“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven”** (Matt 10:32, NKJV). Again He said, **“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God”** (Luke 12:8). It is as though Jesus said, *I will publically acknowledge to be a citizen of heaven—and that before Judge*. Overcomers will be recognized openly in that day, even though they were obscure and unacknowledged in this world.

Overcoming the world involves crucifying the desire for its recognition. Much of corrupted religion is the direct effect of seeking this world’s approbation in some way. The preeminent consideration for every believer is the approval of Christ! On one occasion, Paul emphasized this requirement to Timothy. **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Tim 2:15, NKJV). You do not need to be concerned about Christ’s acknowledge of you there, if you commit yourself being identified with Him here.

The significance of being confessed to the angels is marvelous. As with God, this confession will not be for the conveyance of information.

All along, God knew those who were His. The angels also knew, because they are the appointed ministers for those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). The confession is for our sakes – a reward for fighting a good fight and keeping the faith. It is God’s manner to give recognition to those who overcome the world. It is revealed in Scripture by the records of holy people. Think of the names that have been confessed by God in the Bible. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles, Timothy, Titus, Philemon . . . etc. And what is the effect of that Divine acknowledgment upon the household of faith? It brings a profound appreciation for them, as well as great glory to God. It reveals the effectiveness of Divine workings, and the sustaining power of God. And what shall the confession of overcomers yield in that day? Great and extended praise of and glory to God. A swell of rejoicing shall rise among the triumphant ones that will reverberate throughout eternity. Too, a full confidence of Divine acceptance, and a sense of belonging will dominate that was never before realized. Make it your business to obtain this promise.

## CONCLUSION

***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*** (3:6, NASB). No church or person can afford to ignore this word! The Spirit is saying this to the churches, not to the world; to the saved, not to the lost. The presence of this message in Scripture confirms we are still in the battle-zone—still in the realm of danger. Our adversary stalks us with remarkable tenacity and craftiness. In his arsenal are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He uses the world, with all of its allurements, and energetically seeks to divert our attention to the seen. In his employ are demons, who disseminate doctrines that will condemn those embracing them. He uses wicked teachers who are disguised as ***“ministers of righteousness,”*** and he himself comes to us as ***“an angel of light”*** (1 John 2:15-17; 1

Tim 4:1; 2 Cor 11:14-15). Aside from this, we have the treasure of God in an “*earthen vessel*,” and contend with “*the law of sin*” that dwells “*in our members*” (2 Cor 4:7; Rom 7:14-25). Anyone imagining they can navigate through those treacherous waters while they are spiritually asleep, or out of touch with the King, has already been deceived.

We are not to be intimidated by this condition, but rather seek to avail ourselves of Divine provisions by fighting the good fight of faith. Salvation brings supplies adapted for our very condition. The Holy Spirit has been sent into our hearts to fortify us for the battle, and provide needed resources. The Lord Jesus is seated on the right hand of God, mediating the New Covenant, which is orienting us for glory. Even the holy angels are engaged in ministering to us. There is no reason for any one to come short of the rest prepared for us. But it is all accomplished while close to the Son—nothing is accomplished at a distance, or in a state of spiritual slumber. May this message sensitize your spirit to the jeopardy of being insensitive to your King!

# The Revelation Of CHRIST

Lesson Number 8

## THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

“ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie; indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev 3:7-13, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

As we near conclusion of the personal word to the “*seven churches which are in Asia*,” several things are becoming clearer. First, the Lord

Jesus has a preeminent interest in the condition of His churches. Before He begins to open the future, He speaks to them of their situation, exhorting them to actions appropriate for those who have been **“washed from their sins,”** and constituted **“kings and priests unto God”** (1:5-6). There is a good reason for our Lord’s approach. A weak and debilitated church will not profit from **“the Revelation.”** If the church has left its **“first love”** like **Ephesus** , it will not be able to receive the Master’s word. If it is under severe persecution like **Smyrna** , it must be encouraged and strengthened in order to take hold of the Word with hope. A church that has become sloppy in the doctrine it holds, like **Pergamum** , must have its spirit sharpened, else “the Revelation” will only be a theological novelty. When a church becomes tolerant of the dissemination of reprehensible doctrines, like **Thyatira** , allowing false teachers to propagate, and its members to hold, teachings Jesus hates, its ears have become **“dull.”** It must be awakened to the nature of life in Christ, else they will despise **“the Revelation.”** If a church has become so meshed with the world that it is dead to God, though retaining a name of being vibrant, like **Sardis** , that condition must be corrected before it can profit from the word of the Lord--now, or in the world to come. Now we will see that a church fighting the good fight of faith, like **Philadelphia** , must be strengthened by Divine commitment to be ready for what is to come.

The opening of the future is of no value unless the churches are spiritually alert, walking in the Spirit, and living by faith. Jesus does not first divulge the future, then exhort the churches to get ready for it. He first addresses the churches, judging their deficiencies, and commending their virtues, in order to increase His fellowship with them. That is the Divine manner! We have been **“called into the fellowship”** of God’s **“Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”** (1 Cor 1:9). If that fellowship is weakened, or even ruptured, a condition exists that cannot possibly be productive. It makes little difference what apparently marvelous works have been done, or what impact has been registered upon the religious or non-religious communities. If the churches are not walking in the light of Christ’s countenance, they are wandering on the

precipice of eternal ruin.

### **Kingdom clarity**

Here, in Asia, was a cluster of churches—a “*brotherhood*,” so to speak. They all had a good start, and were all recognized by heaven. But all were not recognized in the same manner, nor were all loved, as they say, “*unconditionally*.” Ephesus was threatened with removal (2:5). Smyrna was assured their tribulation would be brief (2:10). Pergamum was told Jesus was about to come and fight against them (2:16). Thyatira was told Jesus was about to kill some of its members with death (2:22-23). Sardis was warned Jesus was about to come on them like a thief, and they would not know the hour (3:3). Now Jesus is going to tell Philadelphia of an unprecedented opportunity He is going to open to them (3:8).

Anyone imagining that Jesus treats all of the churches the same, needs to sit at His feet and learn. There is a Kingdom standard by which all churches are measured. It is NOT the standard of a purported pattern or governmental structure. It is not the size of the congregation, or the aggression with which it has entered into missions. A good name, as fine as that may be, is not the standard by which the churches are measured. Nor, indeed, are they evaluated upon the basis of their community outreach, and their role in meeting the needs of those about them. Their relationship to Christ Jesus is the point! Their fellowship with both the Father and the Son is the issue! Whether or not they are standing within the circumference of hearing is critical. A church that does not have “*the mind of Christ*,” is not enjoying the “*communion of the Holy Spirit*,” and is out of touch with the Lord, is a blotch on the canvas of Divine intent. There is no place in the heavenly kingdom for such churches.

That is precisely why Jesus aggressively speaks to them. He seeks to correct their waywardness and strengthen their virtues. He speaks to

bring them close to Himself, where they will be protected from the fiery trials He foretells. He calls them close to His bosom, where they can quickly hear and respond to gracious words. The Lord Jesus is bringing His churches away from the realm of danger, and into the spiritual safety zone of heavenly places. It will do not good to hear about a fierce enemy of the church if we insist on dwelling in spiritually far-off places. But, if our lives are consciously and joyously ***“hid with Christ in God”*** (Col 3:3), we will emerge from every trial, and stand at last in the presence of the Lord with exceeding joy.

Now, Jesus speaks to a commendable church. As you might expect, He speaks in a special way, giving special promises, and granting special assurances. We will find that those who maintain their faith are always commended by Jesus. It will also be confirmed that Jesus will grant unusual opportunities to work with Him to those who take advantage of the ***“things that accompany salvation”*** (Heb 6:9). Faithfulness is always rewarded! It is never vain to serve the Lord with zeal.

## WHO IS SPEAKING

***“He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this”*** (Verse 7). Here again is an aspect of the glorified Christ that is not directly mentioned in the account of John’s initial vision of Him (1:12-16). His **holiness** is depicted by His ***“head and hair”*** which were ***“white as wool,”*** and His feet which were as like ***“fine brass.”*** His **truthfulness** is seen in the ***“golden band”*** around His waist, His eyes, which were ***“like a flame of fire,”*** and the ***“sharp two-edged sword”*** that came from His mouth. Jesus speaks to the churches in His glorified capacity. They are to hear Him as the glorified, exalted, and reigning Christ. No longer may they know Him ***“according to the flesh”*** (2 Cor

5:16). Later, those who were martyred for their faith cried out to the glorified Lord, ***“O Lord, holy and true . . . ”*** (6:10). In keeping with His exaltation, the people of God are always to consider Jesus from a spiritually elevated point of view. He is not to be beheld as our peer, but as our Savior. The purpose of God is not to further identify Him with men, but to conform men to the image of His Son. The church will not be helped on its way by a mundane view of Jesus.

### **He Who Is Holy**

Notice, Jesus does **not** say He is true, then holy. He is holy, then true. The truth of Christ may only be comprehended within the context of His holiness. Jesus **WAS** dead (1:18), but He **IS** holy! God affirmed this quality to Israel, saying ***“I am holy”*** (Lev 11:44-45). Peter adduces this to be an appointed incentive for us being holy (1 Pet 1:16). This is the trait ascribed to the Lord seated upon His throne. ***“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”*** (Rev 3:7; 4:8). The six-winged seraphim of Isaiah’s vision also cried out ***“holy, holy, holy”*** (Isa 6:3), as they encircled the heavenly throne. This Divine quality is so prominent that the tabernacle, where service to God was rendered, was divided into two dedicated sections. They were called ***“the HOLY place,”*** and ***“the most HOLY place”*** (Ex 26:33-34). With rare insight for his times, David confessed, ***“But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel”*** (Psa 22:3, NKJV).

The Lord Jesus, from the day of His entrance into this world until now, has been noted for being ***“holy.”*** Even in the womb of Mary, He was known as ***“that Holy One who is to be born”*** (Lk 1:35). The demons recognized Him, confessing Him to be ***“the Holy One”*** (Mark 1:24). On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared Jesus to be God’s ***“Holy One”*** (Acts 2:28). He later declared Him again to be ***“the Holy One”*** (Acts 3:15). The early church, persuaded of His nature, prayed to God concerning ***“thy Holy Child Jesus”*** (Acts 4:27,30). No one has ever seen Jesus insightfully without being impressed with His holiness. It is a quality that becomes evident to all perceiving His Person. What is the

meaning of “*holy*,” and why is such an emphasis placed upon this Divine attribute? Holiness is like a multifaceted jewel.

**Morally** --Morally, it means free from any and all contamination—pure. There never has been, is not now, nor will there ever be, any deviation from uprightness in the Lord Jesus. While we have been “*made partakers of His holiness*” (Heb 6:4), Jesus has always been holy. He “*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*” (1 Pet 2:22). Although “*tempted in all points*” as we are, He was, in every sense of the word, “*without sin*” (Heb 4:15). How marvelously His moral purity is proclaimed in Hebrews 7:26. “*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.*” He Who is holy speaks to the church in Philadelphia. What He has to say to them is associated with that spotlessness, and is to be comprehended as apart from sin.

Christ’s holiness is considered within the context of His redemptive work. He is “*holy*” after having passed through a defiled world, been assaulted by a corrupt enemy, and been “*tempted in all points like as we are*” (Heb 4:15). In view of this circumstance, He is able to make us holy, even though we have no holiness of our own. This is involved in the expression, “*But by His (God’s) doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:30).

**Purpose** --From the standpoint of purpose, HOLY means sanctified, or set apart for Divine service—dedicated. In redemption, Jesus Christ has been Divinely appointed to effect the salvation of all who believe. He is “*THE Christ*,” anointed by God as the exclusive *Captain of our salvation*” (Heb 2:10). His holiness and truthfulness are directly related to the fulfillment of God’s purpose, as revealed in our salvation. This means that **holiness and truth are brought within our reach in**

**Christ Jesus** . These are indispensable resources for recovery and stability in the faith--and they are available in abundance in the Lord Jesus Christ. When He examines the churches, He is functioning in His appointed role, for He Who saves is also He Who judges. His assessment of the churches will be precise, and with a keen interest in keeping them in the heart of God's will. Jesus is ***“holy and true!”***

What remarkable attributes! Both are absolute and eternal. Everything the Lord Jesus says and does is holy and truthful, because He is holy and true. His word can never be questioned, nor can His actions. His government is meticulously righteous, and strictly adheres to the ***“eternal purpose”*** of God. This is particularly important to grasp in a day when professed believers question His government, and some even declare they are “angry” with the Lord. Such foolhardy expressions must be repented of. They are evidences of unbelief, and contradict what the Lord has said about Himself. Regardless of the circumstances in which individuals or churches find themselves, they must subordinate the flesh and confess ***“Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments”*** (Rev 16:7). Even the souls of those who were slain for their testimony cried out, ***“ . . . O Lord, holy and true . . . ”*** They did not question why they died at the hand of their enemies, but when their lives would be avenged (Rev 6:9-11).

The church in Philadelphia had been opposed, and unjustly so — but the Lord was still ***“holy and true!”*** They had confronted members of ***“the synagogue of Satan,”*** and yet the Lord, Who governs all things, remained ***“holy and true.”*** Jesus does not call them to ponder the wickedness of their adversaries, but the holiness and truthfulness of their Lord.

### **He Who Has the Key of David**

***“ . . . who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this.”*** Here, Jesus refers to one of

the most precise messianic prophecies of Scripture. Though veiled at the time it was written, its meaning has been opened up in the Person of Christ. A brief consideration of that prophecy will assist us in seeing the power of the message to the church in Philadelphia.

***“Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your tunic, And tie your sash securely about him, I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. And I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house. So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. In that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken”*** (Isa 22:20-25).

Here, God divulged the nature of His great salvation, to be accomplished between seven and eight

PHILADELPHIA (city of brotherly love) was the only Pergamenian foundation among the Seven Cities. It derived its name from Attalus II., 159-138 B.C., whose truth and loyalty to his brother Eumenes won him the epithet Philadelphus. Philadelphia, also, was a center for the diffusion of Greek language and letters in a peaceful land by peaceful means. The intention of its founder was to make it a center of the Graeco-Asiatic civilization and a means of spreading the Greek language and manners in the eastern parts of Lydia and in Phrygia. It was a missionary city from the beginning, founded to promote a certain unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the realm, the apostle of Hellenism in an Oriental land.

According to church history, the Philadelphian Church was distinguished by a prophetess Ammia, who flourished apparently between A.D. 100 and 160. She was universally recognized as ranking with Agabus and the four daughters of Philip, as one of the few in the later time who were truly gifted with the prophetic power. She remains a mere name to us, preserved in Eusebius' history, 5:17, 2.

centuries after Isaiah's prophecy. The Messiah would be invested with total authority; i.e., ***"I will entrust him with your authority."*** Everything pertaining to the eternal purpose of God would be placed into His hands. The authority would be His. Like a Father, He would care for and feed those under Him; i.e., ***"He will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah."*** He would also be given power to open opportunities and to close them--a decision that would not be able to be effectively opposed; i.e., ***"Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open."*** The coming Savior would be established in the Presence of the Lord, invested with all the glory God; i.e., ***"And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house. So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house."*** He would take the full responsibility for all that offended the Father, absorbing the shock of Divine judgment for those things. The Messiah would, for a season, be ***"cut off"*** out of the holy place. At that time, the offences laid upon Him would be removed from the presence of the Lord; i.e., ***"In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken."***

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus speaks to the church in Philadelphia, He speaks as the Anointed One of God--the One Who is **governing** the world in the interest of His people. He alone is recognized by the Father as worthy of all honor. His is a righteous reign, ***"holy and true"*** in all aspects.

Now He mentions ***"the key of David,"*** a term denoting His government of circumstance. He provides opportunities and removes opportunities in strict consonance with God's eternal purpose. Open doors are opportunities to be involved in that purpose. Closed doors are the removal of opportunities that are out of harmony with the Divine agenda. An example of this aspect of Christ's reign is when the Spirit did not allow Paul and his companions to go into Bithynia, but rather directed them to Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10). Jesus was using the

keys!

## THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

Geographically, Philadelphia was located 30 miles south-east of Sardis, on the road to Laodicea. Spiritually, it bore little or no resemblance to the churches in those cities. If there is one thing we should learn from the message to the seven churches, it is this: all churches are not alike, nor do they receive the same appraisal by Christ Jesus!

History confirms this city suffered frequently from earthquakes. Along with Sardis, it was destroyed in a catastrophic earthquake in A.D. 17. Because of the richness of the soil, however, the inhabitants rebuilt this city, refusing to leave.

Again, this is the only place in Scripture where this church is mentioned. Although men tend to evaluate churches within the context of their prominence among men, Jesus will have nothing to do with such assessments. He encourages churches that are often unknown to the world, and chides those who may be well known. Every “*unknown*” congregation that is holding fast the word of Jesus, and refusing to deny His name, will be comforted by this message.

**JESUS KNOWS!**

***“I know your deeds . . . ”*** (Verse 8a). Once again, the Lord alerts the church to His knowledge of what they are doing (2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15). The church is to function within an acute awareness of the Lord’s perception of it. As His ***“body,”*** the church is to ***“hold fast”*** to its ***“Head,”*** never losing its sensitivity to Him. If the voice of Jesus can penetrate the hearts of those in the churches, it will awaken a spiritual sensitivity that will revolutionize their activities. Much of what is done today in name of Christ is a mere performance, lacking the spiritual awareness of the Lord, which is imperative to acceptable service.

### **An Open Door**

***“Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut . . . ”*** (Verse 8b). What a marvelous circumstance! It reveals that Jesus is pleased with this church. The church in Philadelphia will be afforded the opportunity of working together with Him and obtaining a great reward. There can be no doubt what the open door means. It is a figure of speech used by Paul, and based upon Isaiah’s revelation of the authority of the Messiah. At Ephesus ***“a great door and effectual was opened”*** to Paul (1 Cor 16:9). At Troas also ***“a door was opened”*** for him (2 Cor 2:12). He asked the Colossians to pray ***“that God may open unto us a door for the word to speak the mystery of Christ”*** (Col 4:3). In these three expressions, it is clear Paul refers to opportunities to spread the good news of the Gospel--to work in the Lord’s harvest (Matt 9:38).

This ***“open door”*** was a special gift and privilege vouchsafed to the church in Philadelphia. None of the other churches received such a blessing! It is as though He said, ***“I am opening an opportunity for you to work together with Me, and no one will be able to take the opportunity from you.”*** Special blessings are for special servants. Those who expend meager efforts for Christ need not expect ***“open doors”*** to be set before them. The preeminent requirement for stewards is that they be ***“faithful”*** (1 Cor 4:2). Faithful stewards will find their stewardship expanded by means of open doors.

Many churches function year after year without any apparent awareness of the Lord's ability to open doors to them. They think of themselves as a society of friends rather than the body of Christ, and thus have no real Kingdom distinctions. It is imperative that we see the governmental aspect of Christ's present role. The government of God, which is over everything in heaven, earth, andg under the earth (Phil 2:10), has been placed upon Jesus (Isa 9:6-7; 22:21-22; Psa 2:6-12; 110:1-4; Jer 23:5-6; Zech 6:12-13 ). With faithfulness and timeliness, He is managing the affairs of the world in the interest of the salvation of God and the deliverance of His people. Involved in that government is the participation of the saints. Think of the historical incidents where godly people were used to fulfill the purpose of God. Noah was used to prepare an ark to the saving of his house (Heb 11:7), thereby preserving a remnant through which the Messiah would come. Abraham was called into the Divine purpose, to have a son through whom the Messiah would come and the world be blessed (Gen 12:1-3). Joseph was raised up to preserve a people alive during a great famine, even being placed on the throne of Egypt (Gen 50:20). Moses was chosen to lead the people of God out of bondage, deliver the Law, and provide the beginning books of Scripture (Ex 3:1-11; John 1:17). David was given opportunity to defeat a giant foe, record prophetic utterances, and be a type of King Jesus (1 Sam 17:1-23; 2 Sam 7:27). The holy prophets were raised up to show forth the ***“sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow”*** (1 Pet 1:10-11). All of these were open doors--opportunities to come along side of the Living God, participating in the fulfillment of His purpose.

As soon as Jesus entered His ministry, He began opening doors. Calling His disciples to Him, He sent them forth to invade the kingdom of darkness, and preach the Kingdom of God (Matt 10:5-20). Later He sent out 70 to again assault Satan's domain and bring deliverance to the captives (Luke 10:1-10). Stephen and Phillip, early deacons, were used to do great works, bring people into the Kingdom, and expose the wickedness of the religious elite of the day (Acts 7-8). Paul was singled out, and given a staggering commission to preach the Gospel to the heathen nations of the world (Acts 22:21; 26:18). In the case of the

book we are reviewing, John the beloved was given opportunity to see and record key events of the future (Rev 1:1-9).

All of these are accounts of Jesus using the keys of Kingdom authority. They were open doors, into which the humblest of men entered, shaking the powers of darkness, liberating those who were long bound by sin, and strengthening the souls of those who embraced the Son of God by faith. Open doors! Every church can experience open doors if they will ***“cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart”*** (Acts 11:23)! I recall with joy the experience our congregation in Indiana had in this regard. Though unrecognized in official religious circles, the Lord Jesus opened doors of remarkable effectiveness to us. Both the Banner of Truth (edited by my father, Fred O. Blakely) and The Word of Truth (edited by myself) were birthed in our assembly. They were distributed to thousands on a global scale, working staggering effects for God--and they continue to this day. Jesus opened a door for radio ministry to us. The Word of Truth radio broadcast was national in scope, a fifteen minute broadcast of powerful preaching. Later, a one-hour call-in program, The Word of Truth Radio Forum, was instituted for the Chicago area. I was given an opportunity to hold two crusades in India in 1980 and 1985. The first was attended by 12,000 people, and the second by 19,000--each attending four sessions a day. A tract ministry was also opened to us, with millions of tracts being distributed throughout the world. In addition, a video ministry was opened to us at Good News Productions, where I recorded five series of lessons consisting of a total of 65 ½ hour tapes. These are just a few of the doors opened to us. They involved no other religious institution. We did not launch any aggressive campaign to discover these opportunities. They were simply opened to us by the King.

Jesus affirms He will open a door to the church in Philadelphia. He does not identify what the opportunity will be, and it is not necessary that we know. Because of their faithfulness, they would be given the privilege of more extensive involvement with Jesus. The promise is recorded to alert us to this Kingdom manner! It is important to note that

Jesus NEVER commended or condemned a church because of its size. It is what they DID that was the issue! With the church at Philadelphia, their spiritual posture afforded them additional opportunities to invest in eternity. A congregation wholly submitted to the Lord will be used by Him. They will have doors opened to them that would otherwise be impossible. O, how this aspect of spiritual life needs to be more fully known!

## You Have A Little Power (Strength)

### OVERVIEW

WHO CHRIST IS: “ ” He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens ” (NKJV).

WHAT HE SEES : “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name ” (NASB).

EXHORTATION: “ I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name ” (NASB) .

PROMISE: “ Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie; indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth . . . He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name ” ( NASB).

“ . . . *because you have a little power . . .* ” (Verse 8c). Jesus tells this church why a door will be opened to them. It is not because they are large. It is not because they have made a name for themselves, or achieved *great things* , as defined by men. Rather, it was because **they kept His Word and did not deny His name, even when their**

**strength was small !** To put it another way, *Because you have but a little power, and have made good use of it, I will open an opportunity to you that no one will be able to take from you.* While I have no desire to major on this, it should be apparent to all that this contradicts an institutional emphasis which constrains people to despise smallness and *little strength* . **But there has been more wrought for God with little, than there ever has with much!!** A rod in Moses' hand, a jawbone in Samson's hand, and a sling in David's hand, did more than massive armies with impressive arsenals!

All of these are accounts of Jesus using the keys of Kingdom authority. They were open doors, into which the humblest of men entered, shaking the powers of darkness, liberating those who were long bound by sin, and strengthening the souls of those who embraced the Son of God by faith.

Jesus is not speaking of spiritual strength, but of strength, or ability, from the earthly perspective. They had nothing, from an earthly point of view, to recommend them for an ***“open door.”*** Like the Apostles, they were ***“weak”*** while others, like Sardis, appeared strong (1 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 13:9). Like saints before them, they had been made strong ***“out of weakness”*** (Heb 11:34). They could say with Paul, ***“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; Persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ”*** (2 Cor 4:8-9). Like the churches of Macedonia, the church in Philadelphia functioned ***“beyond their ability”*** (2 Cor 8:3). Like Paul, when they were weak, then they were strong (2 Cor 12:10).

In all probability, this was not a large congregation. Its smallness, despised by the world, did not deter it from having an ***“open door”***

placed before it by Jesus the King! All through Divine history, this has been the manner of the Kingdom. The Law was not given to Egypt or to Babylon, but to Israel, who ***“were the least of all peoples”*** (Deut 7:7). And when our blessed Lord chose men to be Apostles, He did not go to the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, or Lawyers. Those classes would have been considered strong by the worldly mind-set! Instead, He went to the weak—fisherman (Matt 4:18-22), tax collectors (Matt 9:9), and even a Canaanite (Mark 3:19)! We must not allow Babylonish religion to cause us to look with contempt upon smallness, lack of reputation, or the absence of worldly credentials. God has NEVER made selections on this basis, and the tendency to do so now does not come from Him!

### **You Have Kept My Word and Not Denied My Name**

***“ . . . and have kept My word, and have not denied My name . . . ”*** (Verse 8d). In a heathen culture, where following Christ was not in vogue in any sense of the word, the church in Philadelphia maintained its hold on Christ’s word. They did not allow the recollection of Divine utterance to be displaced by worldly considerations. This is equivalent to keeping the ***“affection”*** set on ***“things above, and not on things on the earth”*** (Col 3:1-2). Although highly unusual in the Western church, this is a Kingdom trait that is an absolute requirement for Divine acceptance. Salvation depends upon hearing Christ’s word and believing on the God it affirms: ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”*** (John 5:24). However, salvation is not only initiated by means of Christ’s Word, it is also maintained through that means. ***“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”*** (John 8:31-32).

The position of Christ’s Word in the Divine economy is made clear in Scripture. He is God’s exclusive Spokesman in these last days. ***“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the***

*fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”* (Heb 1:1). God has nothing to say to us that does not come through Christ Jesus! What the Son has said sheds light on all revelation before Him. All inspired utterances after Him have been given by His authority and commission. Christ’s words, as *“spirit and life”* (John 6:63), bring the Divine perspective within our grasp. That is why, when He sent out the Apostles, He said, *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:13-15). Again He said, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you ”* (John 14:26).

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus commends the church in Philadelphia for keeping His Word, He confirms they have lived in the light of what He has made known. They have kept the perspective His words provide, and not allowed the world to dominate their thinking. The matters accentuated by Christ were emphasized by them. The priorities He revealed were their priorities also! All of that is involved in keeping Christ’s words.

To refuse to deny Christ’s name is refusing to deny association with His Person in any sense. When the world put pressure on them to minimize their identity with Christ and emphasize their identity with the world, they refused to do so. An example of denying Christ’s name is found in Peter’s denial of Jesus the night of His betrayal. When confronted about his association with Jesus, He denied that he had any (Matt 26:69-74). When asked if he was with Jesus, He replied *“I do not know what you are saying.”* When another maid challenged him by saying *“This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth,”* he replied, *“I do not know the Man!”* When at last someone said, *“Surely you also*

*are one of them, for your speech betrays you,”* Peter *“began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ ”* That bitter night, over which Peter ultimately gained the victory, became the occasion when he denied Christ’s name!

There were pressures brought to bear upon the church in Philadelphia also. It was an idolatrous city, given over to the propagation of the Grecian culture and language, which gave no value to Jesus. But this despised assembly refused to let go of its identity with the Son of God. It would not diminish its emphasis of the Lord’s Christ, and turn its commitment elsewhere. It knew nothing of distracting fads and momentary bursts of religious novelty. That is something of what is involved in not denying Christ’s name.

## WHAT JESUS WILL DO

The Lord Jesus has commended these brethren for what they have done. Now He will tell them what He will do in their behalf. The Lord WILL *“show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him,”* aggressively seeking an opportunity to do so (2 Chron 16:9). There is a Divine reciprocation that answers every conscientious Kingdom endeavor. *“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you ”* (James 4:8). *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you . . . ”* (Psa 50:15). *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matt 10:32). This, then, is a Divine characteristic upon which believers may rely. Now the Master specifies the marvelous things He will do for His faithful church in Philadelphia.

### In Regards To Their Enemies

***“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee”*** (Verse 9). Here is one of the most arresting promises in Scripture. It is not given to a gigantic and prosperous congregation, but to one ***“with a little strength.”*** It is not given to a church that has been written up in the Philadelphia Journal for its contribution to the community, but to an assembly that has kept Christ’s word and has refused to deny its association with Him.

The Philadelphian assembly was opposed by other gatherings—in particular aggressive Jews who continued to deny Jesus Christ. Paul well said of these people, ***“. . . who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men”*** (1 Thess 2:15). The opposition of these people had been oppressive to the brethren in Philadelphia, and thus their strength had been weakened. These enemies said they were Jews, but Jesus affirms they were not. He was not speaking of their ethnic origin, but of their spiritual condition. As it is written elsewhere, ***“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God”*** (Rom 2:28-29). The Son of God goes even further, declaring these wicked people to be ***“the synagogue of Satan”***—a gathering through which Satan worked, and in which he was dominant. Think of it! It could be said of this opposing religious assembly, ***“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do”*** (John 8:44). The Lord makes clear that whatever claim to godly identity was made by these people, they LIED in so designating themselves.

The Lord will not ignore the enemy! He will make them do something that will be against their will, and contrary to their preference—but He will make them do it anyway! ***“I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”*** Three things the

powerful Christ will **MAKE** happen! He will **MAKE** these pretenders **COME** to the church in Philadelphia. He will **MAKE** them **WORSHIP** at their feet. And, He will **MAKE** them know He loved the church in Philadelphia! Those who are extreme in their exaltation of the free will of man do well to consider this passage! God can **MAKE** Nebuchadnezzar live in a field and eat grass, whether he wants to or not (Dan 4:33). He will not impose salvation on any soul, but ultimately, He will impose condemnation on all who reject the Son! In the case of the oppressors of the church in Philadelphia, He will **MAKE** them acknowledge what His people confessed all along—identity with Himself.

Like the church in Philadelphia, if we hold fast to Christ's word, and refuse to deny His name in any way, our enemies will be brought to confess to the truth of our faith! They will have to admit to an assembled universe that they were wrong, and we were right in cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. They will have to admit Jesus loved us, and we were right in abiding in that love and refusing to leave it.

The fulfillment of this promise will can in at least three different ways. **First** , it could be fulfilled in the conversion of their enemies. Thus, like Saul of Tarsus, they would acknowledge the validity of the faith they once opposed. **Second** , in their enemies seeking their aid and assistance in the time of trouble. How many times I have seen this happen, when scoffers come, pleading for prayers in the time of crisis and sorrow. **Third** , and most probably the primary way, they would acknowledge Christ's love of His people in the day of judgment. The day of reckoning is coming! Not only will Jesus confess all who have confessed Him, all of the enemies of His people will also acknowledge His love was set upon the very ones they hated and opposed. Like Haman had to acknowledge the preference of the king for Mordecai (Esther 6:11), so will all who have opposed the saints confess their preferred status! The Sanhedrin will have to admit Jesus loved Stephen, whom they stoned. Nero will have to bow at the feet of Paul and Peter,

whom he had killed. Cain will bow at the feet of Abel, and Herod will bow at the feet of John the Baptist!

Our labor is not vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58)! Like the church in Philadelphia, if we hold fast to Christ's word, and refuse to deny His name in any way, our enemies will be brought to confess to the truth of our faith! They will have to admit to an assembled universe that they were wrong, and we were right in cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. They will have to admit Jesus loved us, and we were right in abiding in that love and refusing to leave it.

### **Kept From the Hour of Testing**

***“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth”*** (Verse 10). What is ***“the word of My perseverance ,”*** or ***“patience”*** (KJV)? It is the teaching that exposes us to the hostilities of the world, and requires great effort to maintain! It is the word that, when embraced, sets us against the course of this world. Because this church kept that word, refusing to let it go that temporary relief might be obtained, Christ would grant them a special blessing. He would keep them from ***“the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”***

We learn first from this text that Christ's blessings are often discriminating. He does not give the same things to all people. Extraordinary effort will bring extraordinary blessing! Those who extend themselves for Christ will experience Him extending Himself for them! That may contradict some forms of theology, but it is nevertheless true. Those who walk close to Christ will receive more than those who walk at a distance.

What was *“the hour of testing?”* First, it was a time of TESTING, or TRIAL—a time when the fabric of human endurance and character would be put to the test. From the standpoint of Satanic initiative, it would be *“the evil day,”* when a barrage of distracting influences, both physical and spiritual, are hurled at the believer (Eph 6:13). Second, it is a time allowed by God when the fabric and strength of faith is tested. Our text informs us this was not, however, a provincial testing, but a global one: *“that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”*

This word contradicts great bodies of theology – and it has proceeded from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Some deny that such an *“hour”* is possible, while Jesus declares to the church in Philadelphia that it is coming. There is an immediate and future perspective to this word. There was something imminent from which these brethren would be delivered. Many conceive this to be the fierce persecution initiated by Trajan and continued by Adrian, his successor. It was greater and more extensive than that of Nero and Domitian. This bloody persecution began in 108 A.D., a few years after the Revelation was written. It lasted a full 30 years, and was marked by such atrocities the heart of man is scarcely capable of dwelling upon it. Pliny the Second, not a Christian himself, was so moved by the heartless slaughter of Christians, that he wrote a letter of appeal to Trajan. It fell on deaf ears.

There are pressing and unusual trials most difficult to endure, and Jesus instructs us to seek deliverance from them. That deliverance is not guaranteed, and those who teach that it is, are in serious error.

In it he certified that *“many thousands were daily put to death.”* included in that letter were these words. *“The whole account they gave of their crime or error (whichever it is to be called) amounted only to this — viz.. that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight,*

*and to repeat together a form of prayer to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an obligation — not indeed to commit wickedness; but, on the contrary — never to commit theft, robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, never to defraud any man: after which it was their custom to separate, and reassemble to partake in common of a harmless meal.*” Ignatius, great man of God, died in this persecution. His words prior to his martyrdom are noteworthy. *“Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!”* And even when he was sentenced to be thrown to the beast such was the burning desire that he had to suffer, that he spake, what time he heard the lions roaring, saying. *“I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.”*

In my opinion, this was the immediate testing to which Jesus referred. He promises to keep this church from that time because of their faithfulness. Here is an aspect of Kingdom life that is much needed in our time. The Lord Jesus Himself taught us to pray, ***“And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”*** (Matt 6:13). There are pressing and unusual trials most difficult to endure, and Jesus instructs us to seek deliverance from them. That deliverance is not guaranteed, and those who teach that it is, are in serious error. The church in Philadelphia would be excluded from an unusual hour of testing for two reasons. First, it had already endured severe testing, and had only a little strength left. Second, it had faithfully kept Christ’s Word, refusing to deny His name. Those with great strength and not promised exemption from the coming trial, nor are those who have lived at a distance from Christ, not retaining His Word, or holding fast to their confession.

Jesus also spoke of an hour of testing that would precede His return. The words He uses are most sobering, and help to identity our

generation with that of the Philadelphian brethren. ***“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken”*** (Luke 21:25-26). Language fails to adequately paint the dread of such a time! Those who dare to neutralize these words with fanciful explanations involving metaphors of speech and confinement to the destruction of Jerusalem do no favor for the saints, and offer them no advantage. In our Lord's words (Matthew 24), the hour was coming ***“on the earth,”*** not merely Jerusalem. The distress involved ***“nations,”*** not merely Israel. Jesus spoke of international conflict, and ***“famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places”*** (Matt 24:7). A TIME OF TESTING, as it were!

Some fear going through such a time, even though we are assured by religious sophists that the church will not go through anything of this magnitude. The sophists have not spoken for Jesus! Jesus did not tell the church in Philadelphia the churches would not go through a fierce hour of testing. Rather, He told them He would keep them from going through it—and He told them why! They only had a little strength, and had kept His word, refusing to deny His name! The people of God must know that Jesus will act no differently in our time. Those who are unable to endure great tests, and have kept Christ's word and their identity with Him, will not be pushed beyond their limitations. We can trust to this without wavering. Those who do go through fiery tests, like Ignatius and the millions slain in that time, will have the strength to do so. How blessed we are to have an exalted Lord Who is thoroughly capable of managing the affairs of men!

**JESUS IS ON THE WAY!**

How is it that anyone could take our crown from us? It is by diverting our attention to matters that do not require intimate involvement with Christ Jesus. No crown will be given to those who forsook fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and the approval of the Father (2 Cor 6:16-18) for lesser things!

***“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown”*** (Verse 11). Four times in this book Jesus says, ***“I come quickly”*** (3:11; 22:7,12,20). The word ***“quickly”*** describes a circumstance that cannot be predicted, postponed, or hastened. The word means *shortly, i.e. without delay, soon, or (by surprise) suddenly*. The idea is, **I am coming, and you do not know when!** His coming could be a time of deliverance or of judgment; of blessing or of cursing—but He is coming! One of the cries of the early church was ***“MARANTHA!”*** – *“Our Lord comes!,”* or *“Come O Lord!”* (1 Cor 16:22). O, that such a consciousness were prevalent in the Christian community today! This perspective is conspicuous because of its near-total absence in the churches! Those who do not live in the awareness of the imminent return of Christ will not be ready! We have been called to ***“wait for His Son from heaven”*** (1 Thess 1:10), and it simply is not acceptable to lack that longing and anticipation!

The knowledge of the Lord’s coming is to provoke sanctified activity among His people. ***“Hold fast what you have!”*** If it is not possible to lose what we have, this would be a foolish word. However, this is King Jesus speaking, and He ALWAYS speaks truth in perspective of God’s ***“eternal purpose.”*** If His word does not blend with certain theologies, it is because they are false, and are therefore to be abandoned. To ***“hold fast”*** is to seize with a firm grip, and refuse to let go! This admonition assumes there are forces attempting to take what we have from us.

Jesus does NOT say, *Do not worry, what I have given to you cannot be taken from you.* The things which Christ gives CANNOT be kept without the effort of the receiver. Mark it well, that effort is not sufficient of itself. It must be undergirded by Divine power. But that power will not keep within our grasp things we despise, forget, and neglect. Many a backslidden soul can testify to the truth of this.

***“HOLD FAST what you have!”*** How often this exhortation is sounded in Scripture. ***“Test all things; hold fast what is good”*** (1 Thess 5:21). ***“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”*** (2 Tim 1:13). ***“Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end”*** (Heb 3:6). ***“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession”*** (Heb 4:14). ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”*** (Heb 10:23). No backward stance is permitted! Get a firm grip on the blessings you have received by grace, and do not let them go. Do not allow them to become vague in your perception, secondary in their importance, or powerless in their effect. Jesus is coming, and you must have in your possession the things He has given to you when He returns!

Jesus divulges WHY the church with a ***“little strength”*** must hold fast what they have. It is ***“in order that no one take your crown.”*** Once again, some affirm that such a thing is not possible. Whom will you believe? Jesus or those who contradict Him? If it were not possible to have your crown taken from you, the Lord would never have said these words.

One of the great promises of Jesus is, ***“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”*** (Rev 2:10). But here Jesus speaks of having the crown taken from us. Elsewhere, Paul reminds us we are endeavoring to obtain an ***“incorruptible”*** crown (1 Cor 9:25). Paul

reminded Timothy that the reception of a crown required “*striving lawfully*” (2 Tim 2:5). We are speaking of a “*crown of righteousness*” that will be given to “*all they who love His appearing*” (2 Tim 4:8). This is a depiction of the successful completion of our lives, and an entrance into an everlasting reign with Christ Jesus. It is a “*crown of life,*” portraying a reign in life, that will be given to all who “*love Him*” (James 1:12). Its eternality is shown in the description, “*the crown of glory that does not fade away*” (1 Pet 5:4).

How is it that anyone could take our crown from us? It is by diverting our attention to matters that do not require intimate involvement with Christ Jesus. No crown will be given to those who forsook fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and the approval of the Father (2 Cor 6:16-18) for lesser things! This cannot be overemphasized! There is an enormous amount of religion—even Christian religion—that does not require involvement with Deity. Such approaches provoke people to loosen their hold on eternal things. The only way to effectively avoid losing your crown, is to tenaciously hold to the things of God! Hold to them when they are not popular! Hold to them when you are derided for doing so! Hold to them when you are persecuted for doing so! Never let go of what Christ has given to you. You will be required to give it back to your Lord, together with an account of how you handled it! There is no way to escape this procedure.

## THE GLORIOUS PROMISE

As Christ has done with all of the other churches, He now draws this congregation into deeper involvement with Himself through a promise. Remember, it is “*through*” the “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that we become “*participators in the Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4).

## Only the Overcomer!

“... *He who overcomes* ...” (Verse 12a). We must ever remember that only the overcomer will receive the promises! Those who are overcome by evil (Rom 12:21), have, by virtue of that condition, forfeited the promise! Being overcome brings us into bondage to the one, or thing, that overcame us. As it is written, “*by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage*” (2 Pet 2:19). The overcomer, lest we forget, is the one who is standing after the Satanic assault has ended! It is the one who holds on to what he has received, and is found with it when Jesus comes. It is the one who keeps the faith until his exit from this world.

## The Promise of Solidity

“... *I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God* ...” (Verse 12b). This has a sweet sound to those with “*little strength.*” The world drains us of strength—spiritual strength. Salvation addresses this situation by providing the “*renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Tit 3:5). Even our minds can be “*renewed,*” refurbished and strengthened (Rom 12:2). As long as you are in the world, you will require constant recourse to this renewal. The world is a robber, taking from us, and never giving to us! In this world, we will wrestle elements of uncertainty—it is part and parcel of the good fight of faith. A marvelous expression of this circumstance is found in Second Corinthians. “*But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet*

*possessing all things*” (6:4-10). Such afflictions attack spiritual solidity! On one occasion Paul confessed he even *“despaired even of life”* (2 Cor 1:8). The power of God, he confessed, was manifested in Him through pressure, perplexity, persecution, and being struck down – as well as not being crushed, not in despair, not being forsaken, and not being destroyed (2 Cor 4:7-9).

But this will not be the case in the world to come! Each overcomer will be made a *“pillar in the temple of”* Christ’s *“God!”* Solomon’s magnificent temple had only two pillars (2 Kgs 25:16). They were even named, *“Jachin”* and *“Boaz”* (1 Kgs 7:21). The heavenly Temple, however shall have a God-glorifying multiplicity of pillars. Every overcomer will be a *“pillar,”* noted for solidity, strength, and durability! No more vacillation, erratic experience, or moments of weakness! Hallelujah! An indication of the significance of this promise is found in God’s commitment to Jeremiah. He was going to prophesy under adverse conditions—but God would make him equal to the occasion. *“For behold, I have made you this day A fortified city and an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land; Against the kings of Judah, Against its princes, Against its priests, And against the people of the land. They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you”* (Jer 1:18-19). There is a picture of solidity in the midst of fierce conflict. James, Peter, and John, you will recall, were *“pillars”* in the church in Jerusalem. They stood tall when the church was assaulted.

But solidity in the presence of God is greater than solidity in this world. To stand in the midst of adversity is essential, but it is not to be compared with standing solid in the presence of the Almighty God! To be a pillar *“in the temple of My God”* means

we will stand firm through the judgment, in our accountability, and in our coming stewardship. We will be noted for being strong and stable in the presence of God and the Lamb!

But solidity in the presence of God is greater than solidity in this world. To stand in the midst of adversity is essential, but it is not to be compared with standing solid in the presence of the Almighty God! To be a pillar ***“in the temple of My God”*** means we will stand firm through the judgment, in our accountability, and in our coming stewardship. We will be noted for being strong and stable in the presence of God and the Lamb!

### **No More Departures**

***“ . . . and he will not go out from it anymore . . . ”*** (Verse 12c). In this world, the best of blessings are often followed by the greatest of trials and the most bitter experiences. Moses talked with God face to face on Mount Sinai, but had to descend to the tumult of the foot of the mountain. Samson slew a thousand with but a jawbone of an ass, but also pushed the grinding stone at the Philistine mill, in humiliation and disgrace. Peter defended Jesus with a sword in the garden, only to deny him before some maidens. In this world, there are valleys as well as mountains, weakness as well as strength, and defeats as well as victories. In all of heaven, there will not be an apostasy like that of Judas, a denial like that of Peter, or a forsaking like that of Demas!

But there is another sense of this. Now we experientially leave the presence of the Lord, often deprived of the sweetness of Divine communion. The cry of languish evoked from the heart and mouth of the Psalmist has often been my own. ***“O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory”*** (Psa 63:1-2). In such times, a sense of the need of Divine fellowship grips the

heart in the midst of an acute awareness of the depravity of our surroundings. A depiction of this state is expressed by David. ***“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”*** (Psa 42:1-2). A sense of desperation fastens on the soul like a leach, draining it of its vitality. The experience has provoked fasting, prayers, and even abstinence from marital intimacy amount sensitive hearts (Psa 35:13; 1 Cor 7:5). This is ***“going out.”***

But it shall not be so in the glory! There, we will ***“go out no more.”*** Never again will we experience spiritual decline. No more descending into lower occupations, leaving holy realms to keep the faith in profane environments! No more diminishing glow, like that on Moses’ face (2 Cor 3:13). Never again will Scripture shine with a glow of clarity, only to fade from our understanding. We will ***“go no more out!”*** What a blessed prospect, and it is for all who overcome!

### **A Sense of Belonging**

***“ . . . and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name”*** (Verse 12d). This is a marvelous promise of belonging—of knowing we are in the right place, and of having no part of our persons that does not belong. In this world, we are ***“strangers and pilgrims”*** (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 13:14). We do not fit in. Rather than receiving us, the world ***“hates”*** us, because it can only love ***“its own”***—and we are not in that number (John 15:19). There is a sense in which this is a weight to the soul. Faith enables us to bear up under it, but it is there. Some have thrown the faith overboard in order to gain the world’s acceptance. Countless people have modified their lives to accommodate the world’s applause. There is undeniable temptation associated with NOT being received by the environment in which you dwell.

In the world to come, this tension will not be experienced in any form. Every aspect of our persons will fit into the eternal realm, and no part of us will be in friction with it. Jesus provides insight into this condition in this promise. By writing upon the overcomer ***“the name of My God,”*** an obvious affiliation with God Himself is announced. The connection will be obvious. It will also be glorifying to God, as well as satisfying to us. No one will ask of our identity!

In the world to come, this tension will not be experienced in any form. Every aspect of our persons will fit into the eternal realm, and no part of us will be in friction with it. Jesus provides insight into this condition in this promise. By writing upon the overcomer ***“the name of My God,”*** an obvious affiliation with God Himself is announced. The connection will be obvious. It will also be glorifying to God, as well as satisfying to us. No one will ask of our identity! In this world, we are often asked to ***“give a reason for the hope”*** within us. We will never be asked to do this in the coming glory. We will not only be ***“heirs of God”*** (Rom 8:17), that heirship will be apparent to both ourselves and those about us.

By writing on us ***“the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God”*** our citizenship in that realm will become apparent. Now, by faith, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). It is not, however, readily apparent to all about us. Only fellow citizens recognize the reality. But it will not be so in heaven! We will not be misfits, like Abraham in Canaan (Heb 11:13-14), nor will we ***“seek a better country.”*** We will be satisfied with the ***“new Jerusalem”***—the glorified church—and it will be satisfied with us! We will read of this city later, and of John beholding it coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2). Of that city it is written, she

was ***“prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*** This is the glorified church! When John was told, ***“Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife,”*** what He saw was this very city. Here is what the record says. ***“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”*** (Rev 21:9-11). This is the society of the redeemed, and it will be obvious to everyone there that the overcomer is a rightful citizen, and belongs! Hallelujah to the Lamb! Never again will we be part of something that chaffs against our natures.

Jesus will also write upon the overcome His own ***“new Name.”*** This is not a name already mentioned. It is not the name ***“Jesus,”*** or ***“Wonderful Counselor,”*** or ***“Mighty God.”*** Those are all true names, and depict aspects of His Person—but they are not His ***“new Name.”*** The name to which He refers has not yet been divulged. It is a name that reveals more of Him that is possible for us to now receive. Reference is made to this name in Revelation 19:12. ***“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself”*** (verses 11-12). There is more to Jesus than we have yet seen—more to be comprehended than we have yet pondered. The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily, but it has not yet been fully discerned. The time is coming, however, when His fulness will be revealed. Scripture speaks of that time as ***“When the Son of Man comes in His glory,”*** and ***“when He comes in His own glory”*** (Matt 25:31; Luke 9:26).

Let us state this glorious reality in another way. This is speaking of our complete conformity to the image of God’s Son—something God has predestinated (Rom 8:29). What Jesus has promised in our text will be fulfilled in these words. ***“When Christ who is our life appears, then***

*you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). That is involved in what Jesus meant when He promised, “. . . and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”*

## CONCLUSION

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Verse 13). What Jesus has said to the church is Philadelphia is for all of the churches! Every church that has stood strong, yet been viewed as weak and insignificant, needs to take heart! Every church is to hold fast what they have received. Every church is to diligently avoid any person taking its crown! Every church and every person who overcomes will be given glorious and unending solidity in the presence of God Himself. For the faithful of all ages, a promise of never again departing is given. The revealed objective of conformity to the image of Christ will be realized by all who overcome. This message is for the churches. It is also for every individual who *“has an ear.”**

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 9

## THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Rev 3:14-22, NASB)

## INTRODUCTION

We come now to the last of the seven churches. Messages have been delivered to real historical congregations, with real spiritual conditions.

Many have seen in these churches as ages of history, during which the people of God have obtained the characteristics mentioned in the seven churches of Asia. That this is so, I cannot deny. It does, however, require a studied effort to identify the periods. Too, they are not always found in the strict chronological sequence of the messages. That is indication that a more fundamental reality can be seen in these messages. **Our teaching should always accentuate primary matters, making provision for valid subsidiary applications.** It is on the part of wisdom to avoid developing novel explanations of Scripture that have a strong appeal to flesh. If our view of Revelation attracts the interest

of those disinterested in God and His salvation, it is probably not true.

### **A Brief Review**

The messages to the churches underscore the nature of Satan's attack upon the people of God. That assault remains consistent throughout the ages, making Christ's word to these seven churches relevant during all ages of history. A brief review of his assault tactics should serve to alert us to the nature of our warfare.

### **Satan's Attack**

Think of the faithfulness of our Lord, clearly seen in His words to these seven churches. He always commends what is good. You can count on Him to rebuke what is wrong. He will also provide a twofold incentive to recover from sin: threats of judgment, and promises to be obtained. The deeper the sin, the greater the promise, and the more

severe the threat of judgment.

Our adversary aggressively promotes **a religion with doctrinal precision, that lacks a primary love for the Son of God** (example: Ephesus--2:1-7). He also attacks the faithful through **devout religious advocates, who are intimidated by the truth of God, and among whom Satan freely works** (example: Smyrna--2:8-11). With remarkable tenacity, the devil **encourages the tolerance of false teaching and immorality within the church** (example: Pergamum--2:12-17). Satan also incites the church to **allow false teaches to promote his cause in the assembly, without restraint** (example: Thyatira--2:18-29). With great perseverance, the enemy of our souls advances **dead religion--form without power** (example: Sardis--3:1-6). Through oppression and opposition, the devil also **seeks to deplete the strength of the church**, wearing it down so it has but a little strength (example: Philadelphia (3:7-12). Now, in the church in Laodicea, we witness the old serpent's tactic of compromise. He advances the type of religion that **takes no solid stance on anything** --one that is lukewarm and unassertive: **a religion that is bereft of anything from God, yet possesses everything from the world**. Wherever these characteristics are found, the devil is at work! This is HOW he seeks to bring down the people of God!

### Commendable Qualities

We also behold in these churches commendable qualities--things approved and applauded by Jesus. Among these are, an insistence on proper teaching ( *Ephesus* ), continuance in good works in spite of tribulation and poverty ( *Smyrna* ), and holding fast to Christ's name and not denying His faith, even while dwelling in Satan's seat ( *Pergamum* ). Think of how Jesus commends loving service, faith, and the growth of good deeds ( *Thyatira* ). Even in deteriorating assemblies, Jesus recognizes the existence of things about to die, and encourages their renewal ( *Sardis* ). It is also His manner to open effective doors of opportunity to the faithful, even though they have but a little strength ( *Philadelphia* ). The Lord Jesus always looks for things to commend

and encourage. Now, for the first time, we will confront a church in which nothing good can be found.

## **Great Promises**

Think of the faithfulness of our Lord, clearly seen in His words to these seven churches. He always commends what is good. You can count on Him to rebuke what is wrong. He will also provide a twofold incentive to recover from sin: threats of judgment, and promises to be obtained. The deeper the sin, the greater the promise, and the more severe the threat of judgment. The Lord always points to the END--to the grand consummation, when the warfare will be completed, and we will reign forever with Him. Stand and marvel at the magnitude of these expressions. (1) Eating from the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God ( *Ephesus* , 2:7). (2) A crown of life, and not being hurt by the second death ( *Smyrna* , 2:10-11). (3) Eating of the hidden manna, and receiving a new name ( *Pergamum* , 2:17). (4) Receiving power over the nations, and ruling them with a rod of iron ( *Thyatira* , 2:26-27). (5) Being clothed in white raiment, not being blotted out of the book of life, and being confessed before the Father and the angels ( *Sardis* , 3:5). (6) Being made a pillar in the temple of God, going no more out, and having the name of God, the holy city, and Christ's new name, written upon them ( *Philadelphia* , 3:12). (7) Sitting with Jesus in His throne ( *Laodicea* , 3:21).

## **The Lesson to be Learned**

You must not fail to see the manner of the heavenly Kingdom in these messages! The church of the

## **OVERVIEW**

WHO CHRIST IS: “ ”These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God ” ( *NKJV* ).

WHAT HE SEES : “ ”I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could

wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (NKJV).

**EXHORTATION:** “ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ” (NKJV) .

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

Lord Jesus Christ is the object of Satan's attack--a message often repeated in this book (9:1-11; 12:3-15; 13:1-7; 16:13; 19:20). It is also the subject of the King's scrutiny, the object of Divine love, and the focus of great promises. Jesus is the focus of heaven, and the church is the focus on earth. Because Satan has no access to heaven, having been expelled from it, he has focused upon the body of the redeemed. But He is not the only one giving heed to this holy band! The Lord Jesus Himself, Who is over Satan and his hierarchy of evil, also pays close heed to the church. If the church will reciprocate by giving their undivided attention to Him, He will carry them through the attacks of the evil one. That is the overriding message of this grand book!

Any form of religion, regardless of its popularity, that leaves the church vulnerable to the devices of the wicked one (as described in this book) is of the devil himself. It is to be zealously avoided and opposed. A valid spiritual ministry is one which promotes the virtues that Jesus commends. It is one where the promises of Christ are affirmed with consistency, being held out before the people as a strong incentive to participation with Christ. Wherever an aggressive effort is being made to obtain the promises, Jesus is at work, and victory is on the way. It will be startling to many to view the churches in this manner. There will be no place found for fleshly assessments, worldly acclaim, or glorying in appearance.

## **The Final Church Is Assessed**

Now we come to the final assessment of the seven churches in Asia. The Lord Jesus is zealous to have this church ready for what is to come. He wants it to survive the onslaught of the wicked one, and obtain the promises He has procured for them. Although nothing of merit is found in this church, it can still be recovered if it will hear ***“what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”*** Too, this is a message for individuals, who also can possess the handicaps or advantages ascribed to these churches. Our spiritual hearing must be keen and perceptive as we hear this final message! This is the Savior speaking, and He speaks in strict harmony with His nature, and with the ***“eternal purpose”*** of God Almighty. He is NOT assessing the church in view of Grecian culture, but in view of the purpose for which He has purchased it. The acclaim it has received in the world is of little consequence to Jesus. The entire worldly order has been rejected and repudiated by God. It is not salvageable! To be accepted by God, there must be regeneration--a birth into a new realm! The church begins its life in this realm, and it must never leave it. Like a fish dies when it is removed from the water, so the church dies when it is removed from heavenly places. It is not possible to over-emphasize the seriousness of the message of this book! It is appropriate--yea, imperative, for our time.

## WHO IS SPEAKING?

### The Amen

***“ . . . The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this . . . ”*** (NASB). The word ***“Amen”*** means *trustworthy, surely*, or *so be it*. It speaks of **accuracy and finality, stability and assuredness**. The word is used 151 times from Matthew through Revelation, and 30 times from Numbers through Jeremiah. This is a Kingdom word, denoting the sureness of Divine commitment. Under the Law, the people were required to say ***“Amen”*** at the reading of the curses of God (Deut 27:15-26). Three times the expression ***“Amen and Amen”*** is used in the Psalms (41:13; 72:19; 89:52). The Lord Jesus used this word 106 times in the Gospels (frequently

translated “*Verily*” --KJV, or “*Truly*” –NASB, or “*assuredly*” –NKJV). showing the nature of the words He communicated. They were firm, unchangeable, and trustworthy.

When Jesus declares He is “*The Amen,*” He means He is God’s final Word—a sure and steadfast Foundation upon which faith is firmly secured. Firmness, constancy and immutability are in the name, “*AMEN!*” Everything about Him is characterized by these qualities—His Person, His words, His power, blood, and righteousness. There is nothing about Him or His work that does not have the Name “*AMEN!*” written over it.

### **Faithful and True Witness**

In speaking to this church as “*the AMEN!*” Jesus is saying His assessment is the true and final one. He speaks in the capacity of “*the faithful and true Witness.*” He is not only the One through Whom God is speaking in these “*last days*” (Heb 1:1-2), He is the One through Whom the churches are evaluated, commended, rebuked, and admonished. He is faithful to make assessments, and true in the conveyance of what He finds. He is faithful to God’s “*eternal purpose*” in His evaluations, and absolutely true in His assessments. He is also faithful to judge when judgment is required, and faithful to communicate when communication is required. He is the “*Witness,*” telling what He has beheld, and withholding nothing that is profitable. He is not providing a pointless, but a truthful witness.

### **The Beginning of the Creation of God**

But Jesus also declares Himself to be “*the Beginning of the creation of God.*” Here is a most unique designation, and it has been subjected to the abuse of the enemies of Christ. Of old time, the Arians used this expression to disprove the Deity of Christ. They declared it means Jesus was the first One created. This same view is aggressively

entertained and taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

This phrase is to be understood to mean Jesus is the Beginning, the Author, or Source of everything God has created—and He has created ***“all things.”*** It is another way of saying the creation of all things was through Him. As it is written, ***“ . . . God, who created all things by Jesus Christ”*** (Eph 3:9). Elsewhere the Spirit elaborates on the title to which Christ refers to Himself. ***“ . . . the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (or, are held together) ”*** (Col 1:13-17). In the next chapter of Revelation (Chapter 4), this aspect of Jesus is again mentioned. ***“You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created”*** (4:11).

## THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

***“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write . . . ”*** (NASB). This city was located about 50 miles south-east of Philadelphia. Spiritually, as we will see, it was much further than that! Hierapolis and Colossae were about eight miles from Laodicea. It received its name from Antiochus II, in honor of his wife Laodice. Commercially, this was a wealthy city, trading in woolen materials. The indifferent spirit which it possessed unfortunately crept into the church there, requiring a stern word from the King.

Here is a classic example of the effects a culture can have upon a church. Unless the people of God set themselves to be separate from the world, they will assimilate its manners, and incur the judgment of

Christ Jesus. This is a particularly needful word in our day, when the church can scarcely be distinguished from the world, and appears to have little concern about that circumstance. It has absorbed the world's language, manners, and philosophy, and has thus become spiritually impotent. The spirit of accommodation has descended like a plague upon the Western church. From its attire to its music, and from its education to its methods, it has been wedded to this world, and "The World" is its wedded name. Much of this is being done in the name of *evangelism*, purporting to be an effort to reach the world for Jesus. But it has not been effective to alter the course of society. Rather, the taint of the world has splashed upon the professed church. Like the church in Laodicea, it has been contaminated with the society around it.

History confirms there was no violent break in Laodicea between the Grecian and Christian cultures. Their condition was very much like that of our place and time. The word must continue to be sounded, ***"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty"*** (2 Cor 6:17-18, NKJV). The life of faith is difficult enough while obeying this requirement, it is impossible to live in concert with God apart from it.

## HISTORICAL LAODICEA

Laodicea was, of course, a center of the Imperial religion, and received the Temple-Wardenship under Commodus, A.D. 180-191. Its wide trading connection is attested by many alliance-coins, in company with Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, most of the neighboring cities (except Colossae, which was too humble), and some distant cities like Nikomedia and Perinthus. There was an agreement between Smyrna and Laodicea: the latter being represented by its god Zeus, while Smyrna is represented by Zeus Akraios who sits with scepter in left hand, holding out on his right the goddess Victory. (*See picture of coin*)

There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes, and hardly any very strongly marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. Those were the qualities that contributed to make it essentially the successful trading city, the city of bankers and finance, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit

of compromise. (Ramsey)

Paul had great inner conflict for this church. ***“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”*** (Col 2:1-2).

Epaphras had a great zeal for this church. ***“For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea”*** (Col 4:13). The Colossians told to salute this church. ***“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea”*** (Col 4:15). The Colossian letter was to be read to the church in Laodicea, who had also received an epistle from Paul. ***“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea”*** (Col 4:16).

It is difficult to conceive of a church being given greater advantage! The heart and prayers of the most prodigious Apostle who ever lived were for it. One of the premier Kingdom-men of the first century had a great zeal for this church, seeking its spiritual betterment and maturity. They shared Scripture with a sister congregation, being exposed to the very Word of God—a stirring proclamation of the nature and effectiveness of New Covenant life.

We learn from this that spiritual advantages do not necessarily bring a better spiritual condition. **The state of the heart determines whether or not we profit from exposure to the good things of God.** A classic example of this is also found in Israel’s rejection of the very Son of God— ***“God manifest in the flesh”*** (1 Tim 3:16). Their house, Jesus declared, was ***“left desolate”*** because of that inexcusable

rejection (Matt 23:38; Luke 13:35). In a blistering rebuke of the condition of the Jews, Jesus lamented, “*you did not know the time of your visitation*” (Luke 19:44). A knowledge spiritually decadent conditions must not in any way deter us from zealously and powerfully declaring the Word of the King. We must be tireless in our efforts to edify the people of God.

If a church like Laodicea can deteriorate to the point where it becomes obnoxious to Christ, AFTER it has been exposed to much truth, and had been cared for by godly men, what can happen to a church that lacks such spiritual advantages! No one should be surprised at the state of deterioration in churches all around us. With a remarkable decline in Scriptural preaching and spiritual perspective, churches that please Jesus will be exceeding rare. This is a perception that must be gained before any measurable improvement can occur in our churches. We do not need programs, strategies, and contemporary methods. If Laodicea could drift with the advantages of Apostolic teaching, concern, and prayers, what must we expect in our time--when spiritual shallowness, brevity, and fleshly accommodations dominate the church?

It is true, some call upon us to turn our eyes from this condition, but we must not allow such indifference to grip our hearts. We are living in a generation that is being subjected to preaching and teaching with little, if any, eternal relevance. It is altogether too common for entire churches to function year after year without any acute awareness of the “*Amen—the Faithful and True Witness.*” Those with a heart for God cannot overlook this condition!

## THE WRETCHED CONDITION

It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of the Laodicean condition! There is more hope for a cold and calculating sinner than for one who has been awakened by the glorious Gospel, only to lapse into self-contentment and inattentiveness. Unless this condition is corrected, there is no hope of salvation.

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot” (NASB). When Jesus turned water into wine, it is said the *“good wine”* was served last (John 2:10). This is the nature of the heavenly Kingdom -- we progress from worse to better, from death to life, from the inferior to the superior. We are being oriented for glory—for the presence of the Lord, and for eternal involvements with Him. We were raised from death to life, and there is no room in Jesus for deterioration, decline, or backward motion! The best is always last in Jesus! The best realm is last! The best responsibility is last! The best body is last! The best commendation is last!

This manner is not reflected, however, in the messages to the seven churches in Asia. **In this case, the worst church is confronted last.** In spite of the investments of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the church, *“perilous times”* shall descend upon it in the latter times. It would be assaulted with a *“form of godliness that denies the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:1-7). The church at Laodicea provides a prelude to those times. The peril of their condition was not violence, or aggression for the wrong thing. They were not *“hot,”* and they were not *“cold.”* There was a spiritual tepidness about them that could settle down in any environment. Saints were not helped by them, and Satan was not hindered. Righteousness was not advanced, and unrighteousness was not suppressed.

Other ways of saying “*neither cold not hot*” are lukewarm *halfhearted, indifferent, unenthusiastic, perfunctory, spiritless, apathetic, lackadaisical, and uninterested* . Here was salt that was, at the very least, losing its “*savor*” or flavor. If this occurred, the Laodiceans would be “*good for nothing,*” having no Divine utility at all (Matt 5:13). Men have learned to live with this spiritual condition, but Jesus has not. We will find from His words that it will NOT be tolerated.

There is more hope for a persecutor of the church, than for an indifferent and disinterested soul (Gal 1:13)! A woman of the street, steeped in sin, can be touched by Jesus sooner than someone who remains unaffected by either truth or the lie (Matt 26:7-10). You can more easily convert a tax collector who may have unjustly taken from people, than turn a heart to God that is overcome by the sleep of disinterest (Luke 19:8-10). Those who aggressively opposed and crucified the Lord of glory can be brought to repentance more readily than a sluggardly and halfhearted soul (Acts 2:37).

It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of the Laodicean condition! There is more hope for a cold and calculating sinner than for one who has been awakened by the glorious Gospel, only to lapse into self-contentment and inattentiveness. Unless this condition is corrected, there is no hope of salvation. Only condemnation awaits the indifferent soul! They may have avoided what is conceived to be the deeper sins, but they will not be able to avoid the wrath of God.

Over the years I have noted that those who are zealous in their embrace of error are easier to reach with the truth than those who are indifferent and apathetic. Yet, I know of countless religious people who choose to company with the spiritually nonchalant and unconcerned. They suppose that the absence of controversy equates to fellowship,

and the soul who listens but yields no response is not so bad, after all. However, we will find the words of the Lord Jesus to be completely intolerant of this condition.

## THE DIVINE RESPONSE

***“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth”*** (NASB). The KJV uses the word “spue” or “spew,” while the NKJV uses the stronger word “vomit.” The word used here ( ἐμέσαι, em-eh'-o), does, indeed, mean “vomit.” The technical meaning of this word is *to vomit, to reject with extreme disgust*, and is here alone in Scripture. It speaks of something causing nausea, that is repulsive, and highly offensive! Here is an aspect of the Divine character that is apparently little known. There are some things with which the Lord is completely intolerant. He will simply not endure their presence, and woe be to the person or church that insists on keeping them!

God revealed His impatience with perfunctory, or superficial and half-hearted, religion under the Law. Give heed to the vivid language spoken through Isaiah the prophet. ***“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? Says the LORD. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting . Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates ; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them”*** (Isa 1:11-14).

Hear the words of Amos, as he thunders the sentiments of the Lord. ***“I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments”*** (Amos 5:21-23).

Jeremiah also voiced this perspective of the Divine character. ***“Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, Nor your sacrifices sweet to Me”*** (Jer 6:20). Hosea spoke of God’s people offering sacrifices as commanded, only for them to be rejected by the Lord (Hos 8:13). Solomon declared the **“sacrifice of the wicked”** to be an ***“abomination to the Lord”*** (Prov 15:8). There is no greater wickedness than being indifferent to the Lord of glory!

The ***“lukewarm”*** are people who, like Israel in Elijah’s day, ***“halt between two opinions”*** (1 Kgs 18:21). They cannot decide whether to fight against the Lord, or to fight with Him! They linger in what they imagine to be a neutral state, where the truth is set aside for a time of emergency. They do not take it into their heart, nor do they aggressively thrust it from them. The lukewarm do not throw stones at those choosing to walk on the highway to glory, but neither do they walk with them. How despicable they are to Jesus!

Yes! There are some religious activities, performed by people who wear the name of Christ, that are rejected by the Lord. They are not acceptable. What is more, they are offensive to the Lord, repugnant and obnoxious to Him because they come from disinterested hearts. Those who insist on remaining in this dangerous place must hear the voice of the Lord: ***“I will vomit you out of My mouth”*** (NKJV). Jesus is not jesting about this! The church in Laodicea was in serious jeopardy, and yet were remarkably religious! Do not suppose for a fleeting moment

that this condition does not exist all about us. There are myriads within this very area who regularly are subjected to the Word of God in some form, yet remain totally indifferent to it. They do not oppose the Word, nor do they heartily embrace it. They do not object to its propagation, nor do they insist upon it being declared. They are quite willing to settle for limited exposure to the word of their salvation, but do not count upon them to hide it in their heart, or persecute those who affirm it. Such individuals, be they cultured or not, are obnoxious to Jesus. He will not forbear them for long. O, that the church were more sensitive to the word of the Lord!

### **What Does This Mean?**

What does it mean to be “*vomited*” out of the mouth of the Lord? For some, it simply means a loss of reward, or the receiving of a lesser station in heaven, so to speak. Such sophists imagine that it is not possible to fall way or lose your salvation, and thus they have no recourse but to wrest the words of Jesus. But their theology will not alter this expression. It will stand throughout the history of the world, and face all who opposed it in the day of the Lord (John 12:48).

### **A COMMENT FROM THE PAST**

“Ye are neither heathens nor Christians-neither good nor evil-neither led away by false doctrine, nor thoroughly addicted to that which is true. In a word, they were listless and indifferent, and seemed to care little whether heathenism or Christianity prevailed. Though they felt little zeal either for the salvation of their own souls or that of others, yet they had such a general conviction of the truth and importance of Christianity, that they could not readily give it up.”

--*Adam Clarke, from works written between 1810 and 1826*

Jesus is speaking of disassociating this church from Himself--of *unchurching* them,

so to speak. He would not allow them to maintain identity with Himself, for they were at variance with Him. He has wrought a great salvation, entering into it with great zeal (Psa 69:9; John 2:17). Our Lord will not tolerate an attitude toward Himself and His great salvation that is so unlike His own. Although the Laodiceans were close to Christ's heart—close enough for Him to send this solemn warning—if they did not recover from lukewarmness, He would tear them from His heart, refusing affiliation with them. They could have not part with Him in this matter!

To be vomited from the mouth of the Lord equates to being rejected by Him, cast from His presence, and disinherited. If one imagines being disinherited is an impossibility in God's kingdom, let him think more soberly. Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). Esau lost his inheritance because he failed to be aggressive to keep it (Heb 12:16-17). Israel was cast out of Canaan (Lev 18:26; Jer 9:19). There were some angels who did not keep their "*first estate*" (Jude 6). The kingdom was taken from Saul (1 Sam 28:17). Judas lost his bishopric (Acts 1:20). In a telling parable concerning the nature of the Kingdom of God, Jesus spoke of a lukewarm person. The individual was allocated a portion of the master's goods to keep and manage until he returned. But the steward buried his stewardship in disinterest. He did not destroy it in hatred, nor possess it in thankfulness. The word of the Lord concerning him is this: ". . . *from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away*" (Matt 25:29). The person was a real steward, received a real stewardship, and was really expelled.

Rest assured, those who are severed from Jesus when they leave this world, will not be united with Him in heaven. Those whom Jesus rejects here, will not be accepted there! As obvious as that may appear, some still insist on believing such cannot happen! Whatever you may think about this text, it is in your eternal interest to do whatever is necessary to NOT become repulsive and sickening to Jesus! You may have heard that Jesus will overlook indifference. See to it that you do

not believe it. The condition of the church in Laodicea, like that of Israel of old, *“were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom 15:4).

## AN IMPROPER AND A PROPER ASSESSMENT

*“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked . . . ”* (NASB). The church at Laodicea had been taking about itself—and the Lord had heard it! This reminds me of a solemn warning in Ecclesiastes 10:20. *“Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter.”* While, from, a heavenly perspective, this seems rather elementary, it is not so obvious to many churches today. In fact, it was not obvious to the church in Laodicea. They conducted their lives and provided self-assessments without regard to their King. Now, He will inform them of what they said, and of its validity.

### Their Assessment

How comfortably this church must have been sitting! Although nothing could have been further from the truth, they said, *“I am rich, and have become wealthy .”* If there would have been an Asian brotherhood journal, they would have been written up in it. Someone once observed that **spiritual pride and lukewarmness are often united by worldly prosperity** . Here was a church that was very pleased with itself. The city of Laodicea, we are told, was a very successful commercial city, fairly bulging in wealth. Apparently this lukewarm church had profited much from its environment. It probably had several influential and financially prosperous people in it. You might compare it to the First Church of the Frigidaire residing in the Beverly Hills section of Los Angeles – or a thriving congregation in

Manhattan, New York. It is not that it is wrong for churches to exist in such places. But, in such environs, they are to be ***“blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life,”*** like the church in *Philippi*” (Phil 2:15-16). Where such a church exists, God is glorified, Jesus is honored, and hope is held out for the salvation of men. However, this was not the status of the Laodicean church.

There is a wave of prosperity teaching today that is of great concern to me. People are being taught that poverty is a curse, and prosperity is a blessing. They are told that ***“the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just”*** (Prov 13:22), and that they can expect immediate distribution. Notice, the wealth of the sinner is ***“STORED UP for the just, or righteous ones.”*** The distribution of that wealth, it is true, is at the discretion of our Lord. You may or may not experience some of it in this life, but the bulk of the dispersion will be in the world to come. That is when ***“the meek ”*** will ***“inherit the earth”*** (Matt 5:5), ***“all things”*** (Rev 21:7), and an ***“inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away”*** (1 Pet 1:4). It is true, God has decreed that the sinner will not be able to keep his wealth—he must let go of it! Some do not let go until they die—like the rich man of Lazarus fame. Even in his case, Lazarus, who was ***“just,”*** did not receive wealth of the rich man in this world, but died a ***“beggar”*** still (Luke 16:20-26).

Even if the example of Laodicea were not in the Scriptures, we have sufficient warnings to dissuade us from placing confidence in wealth, supposing it gives us the advantage. Is it not written that some who hear the precious Word of the Kingdom ***“go out and are choked with . . . riches”*** (Luke 8:14)? And what of those who set their minds to be rich—to be financially secure and stable, imagining that to be a greater blessing than it really is? How poignantly the Spirit speaks to this subject. ***“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all***

*kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim 6:9-10). The vividness with which James, the brother of our Lord, spoke to oppressive rich men engages all the faculties of the mind. ***“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days”*** (James 5:1-3). Whatever you think about the distribution of the wealth of sinners, and the benefits of having an abundance of resources, you had better temper it with the assessments of the Holy Spirit and our blessed Lord.

I do not doubt that the church in Laodicea was highly respected by the city. Perhaps visiting merchants came to their gatherings, and significant contributions were made to religious causes. Whatever the case, we will find that Christ’s evaluation is the only one honored in heaven! It is true, as is written in Proverbs 27:2, ***“Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.”*** A concentrated effort must be expended by the church to obtain a favorable appraisal from Jesus. I find it interesting that some consider such an effort an attempt to be saved by works. Rather, let us view the situation this way: without Christ’s approval and acceptance, eternal rejection is sure.

Christ’s assessment of this church was not a mere commentary on their external appearance or public words. It was an evaluation of their true spiritual condition. Although the church in Laodicea may actually have declared they did not need anything, I do not believe that is the burden of Christ’s reference. Whether or not they affirmed this in their speech, they confessed it in their manner. They were conducting themselves as though Jesus did not exist. They were not relying upon Divine resources, but were quite content with what they possessed in the flesh. Like the ***“fool”*** of Psalm 14:1 and 53:1, they had said ***“in their heart, There is no God.”*** Their formal position may very well

have acknowledged the existence of God, Christ, and ***“grace to help in time of need,”*** but they really did not rely upon what they formally acknowledged. In my judgment, our land is filled with churches that precisely conform to this wretched pattern.

Here was a church that supposed it was in a safe and secure position. They imagined that beginning the race was all there was to it. Here was some of the original *“once saved, always saved”* people. They had started the race, and had been placed on the proper foundation. Every advantage had been given to them that is given to every person that is born again. It could be said of them as it was said of Israel, ***“My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?”*** (Isa 5:1-4, NASB).

Let it be clear, there is no reason for a lukewarm and indifferent state. There is absolutely nothing about salvation that contributes to such a condition. Everything about life in Christ Jesus discourages indifference and indecision. Wherever a state like that of Laodicea is found, the Spirit has been quenched, the truth has been stifled, and the flesh is dominant. That is why Jesus is completely intolerant of the condition. It is evidence that a place has been made for the devil (Eph 4:27), the flesh has not been crucified (Gal 5:24), and the heart has concentrated on things that are seen (2 Cor 4:17-18). The affection has NOT been placed on things above (Col 3:1-2), people are NOT living by faith (Heb 10:38), and the Word of God has been ***“choked”*** (Matt 13:22). We are speaking of a most serious spiritual malady--one that is altogether too common in our day.

## Christ's Assessment

Let it be clear, there is no reason for a lukewarm and indifferent state. There is absolutely nothing about salvation that contributes to such a condition. Everything about life in Christ Jesus discourages indifference and indecision. Wherever a state like that of Laodicea is found, the Spirit has been quenched, the truth has been stifled, and the flesh is dominant.

Laodicea viewed themselves from the fleshly, or carnal, point of view. Christ views them as they really are. How different is His evaluation--and it is really the only valid one. ***“You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked . . . ”*** Think of the gravity of this word! This is Jesus' view of one of His churches. Concerning their condition, they were ***“WRETCHED,”*** like a filthy and fatigued abject slave. Concerning their actual state, they were ***“MISERABLE,”*** most deplorable, and to be pitied by everyone who saw them. Regarding the spiritual state they were ***“POOR,”*** bereft of spiritual graces, without holiness, and ready to die. From the standpoint of their spiritual perception, they were ***“BLIND,”*** the eyes of their understanding being darkened so they could not see the real things of God and Christ. Looking at them from the viewpoint of standing before the Lord, they were ***“NAKED,”*** stripped of the covering of mercy and grace.

When they came into Christ, they were raised up with Him to sit in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). They were made ***“kings and priests unto God”*** (Rev 1:5-6). But now they had degenerated into a state of wretchedness! They once had access to all the ***“treasures of wisdom***

***and knowledge***” in Christ Jesus (Col 2:3), having been elevated to ***“the sons of God”*** (1 John 3:1-2). But now they had plummeted downward to a state of miserableness! Once their eyes had been opened to the glories of God and His salvation (Eph 1:18-20; Heb 10:32). But now they had reverted to a state of spiritual blindness! Once they had been made rich in Jesus, with ***“all things”*** belonging to them (1 Cor 3:20-23). But now they were again blinded to the things of God, unable to see what was once opened to them! Once they had been clothed with ***“the garments of salvation”*** (Isa 61:10, having ***“put on Christ”*** (Gal 3:27). But now they fallen into a state of moral and spiritual nakedness, with nothing to cover them from the wrath of God!

It is difficult to conceive of the condition of a church being any worse. Here are FIVE CONTEMPTIBLE CONDITIONS, ascribed to a boasting and self-confident church! Forever blot from your mind the vain notion that once you are in Christ Jesus you are locked into a state of acceptance! This was a real church, with one of Christ’s messengers. It was numbered among those in whose presence Jesus Himself dwelt. But they had become absorbed with the ways of the world, and had suffered remarkable loss. They lost their glory, becoming WRETCHED. They lost the privileges of sonship, becoming MISERABLE. No longer were they beholding the invisible God or the things of the Kingdom, but were BLIND. The incalculable riches had been willingly forfeited in preference of other things, and thus they had become POOR. Although they had been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they had cast it aside to become meshed with the world, and now stood NAKED before the Judge of all the earth. What a dreadful condition!

## THE ADVICE OF JESUS

***“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve***

*to anoint your eyes, that you may see*” (NASB). Although the church in Laodicea was in a most serious condition, it was not beyond hope! The Savior from sin is also the Deliverer from setbacks! The same faith that saves the soul will also restore it. As the King, Jesus has the authority and resources to recover any fallen church who correctly sees its condition and will respond to His overtures. What a Gospel we have to preach! Care must be taken by every preacher and teacher to hold out the remedy for sinful setbacks. While sin is to be vigorously opposed, and righteous judgments made, grace and mercy are to be extended for recovery. This is the manner of the Savior.

### **Buy From Me!**

Just as it costs something to degenerate, so it costs something to recover. Some people imagine that nothing about salvation requires something from us. How wrong they are! Here is the Son of God, with a firm grasp on every aspect of the Kingdom, advising His people to **“BUY”** from Him! They sorely need what He has, but they will have to purchase it! It will require a personal investment and commitment to obtain what they need. Some theology would have Jesus saying, *There is nothing you can pay for this, just open your heart and I will give it to you.* But that is not what Jesus says, and it must not be what we say! When we face those in spiritual decline, we must apprise them that recovery will cost them something.

This word — **“buy”** — is used several times in Scripture. It is used in reference to the foolish virgins who went to **“buy”** oil (Matt 25:9-10). The book of Revelation also speaks of a time when those refusing the **“mark of the beast”** will be unable to **“buy”** (Rev 13:17). Peter refers to false prophets who deny the Lord who **“bought”** them (2 Pet 2:1). Joseph of Arimathaea invested his personal resources to **“buy”** fine linen in which to wrap the crucified Christ (Mark 15:46). In every case, a personal investment was required. Be sure, the purchase, from one point of view, will be made **“without money”** (Isa 55:1), but it will require giving up something--withdrawing from your resources.

Solomon once said, ***“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding”*** (Prov 23:23). It is absurd to think you could procure eternal treasure and benefits without any personal investment! Those who seek an easy way to glory--one which costs them nothing--will find no cause to follow Jesus!

One other thing to see here: the purchase can only be made from Jesus. Resources required for spiritual recovery are not obtainable anywhere else. The wisdom of this world cannot provide what believers sorely need! It cannot be found in pleasure, analysis, history, or scholarship! God condemned Israel for going down to Egypt for help. His words to them on this matter are blistering. ***“Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!”*** (Isa 30:1-2). What must be said of those who seek to obtain spiritual advantages from the course and fashion of this world? They must forsake such vain pursuits and ***“buy”*** directly from the Lord Jesus!

The backslidden, fallen, and those in the grip of the ***“sleep of death”*** (Psalm 13:3), must come to Jesus to buy what they need! Saints can assist them, but the goods must be received from Christ Himself! Jesus does not tell the church to go to the other churches and find resources, but to ***“buy”*** them from Him! His language is precise, and in strict keeping with the nature of the Kingdom. If it does not blend with the theology you have adopted, then you must abandon your theology in preference for the words of Christ your King!

### **Become Truly Rich!**

***“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich . . . ”*** Earthly riches do not bring spiritual advantage! It makes

little difference how loud charlatans may shout on this point, riches ***“are corrupted”*** (James 5:2), i.e., they are destined to pass away--to ***“perish”*** (1 Pet 1:7). If we doubt this, Solomon will confirm this to be the case. Having possessed riches in abundance, by the blessing of God, he said ***“Riches profit not in the day of wrath”*** (Prov 11:4), ***“Labor not to be rich”*** (Prov 23:4), ***“For riches are not for ever”*** (Prov 27:24), and ***“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity”*** (Eccl 5:10). Whatever may be said of earthly riches, they are not to be the focus of our attention. Of themselves, they bring no eternal advantage. It is ONLY as they are approached as a stewardship from God that they can become a source of blessing. Laodicea was a rich city, and the church there had been deluded into thinking they too had become rich, having need of nothing. However, as they sat in their wealth, heaven saw them as wretched and poor!

Jesus has gold that has passed the test of Divine judgment. It has been ***“tried in the fire.”*** Preeminently, this is faith. As it is written, ***“These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”*** (1 Pet 1:7, NIV). The worth of a person, or a church, is measured by its faith. Little faith, little value. Much faith, much wealth and worth! Such richness is available from Jesus! Such faith is not distributed upon the basis of worldly possessions, and those who receive it may not receive much in this world--yet they will be ***“rich.”*** James, the brother of our Lord, affirmed a great Kingdom principle, or law, not often declared by religious opportunists. ***“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love him?”*** (James 2:5). Those who are ***“poor in the eyes of the world”*** are not merely those who have no riches. It includes those who do not place a preeminent worth upon them--who do not set their minds on amassing the wealth of this world. Such insightful souls place a higher worth on riches that will transfer to the next world.

Those who **“buy”** this refined gold from Jesus must relinquish a corrupted sense of values. They are asked to **“deny”** themselves in preference of the glory of their Lord. To be rich before God, they must abandon the pursuit of temporal things, and **“seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”** (Matt 6:33). The riches of this world disappear when the Lord but blows upon them (Isa 40:24). The true riches stand the test of Divine scrutiny, and constitute one **“rich”** in the eyes of the Lord. What a contrast we have here. The church in Smyrna was poor in this world, yet **“rich”** in God’s eyes (2:9). The church in Laodicea was rich in this world, yet **“poor”** in Christ’s eyes! The reason for this condition--they had NOT been receiving from Jesus!

### **Be Fully Clothed!**

**“I counsel thee to buy of me . . . white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed . . . ”** Although this church declared it was **“rich and increased in goods,”** it stood **“naked”** before the Lord, like the guilty pair in Eden! It was not covered in the righteousness of Christ, but only held earthly distinction. Now Jesus counsels them to **“buy” “white raiment”** from Him so they can really be clothed. You will recall that God, before expelling Adam Eve from the Garden, made **“coats of skins and clothed them”** (Gen 3:21). Only then were they thrust out into the world, to live in preparation for the final confrontation. Those who imagine that Jesus does not care what we wear must consider this. God looks intently upon the attire, or lack thereof, of our souls. He looks for the **“garments of salvation”** and the **“robe of righteousness”** (Isa 61:10). That alone can cover the nakedness of the soul!

The church in Laodicea had started their pilgrimage by **“putting on Christ,”** as do all believers (Gal 3:27). But somewhere along the way, they put Him off, choosing **“all that is in the world”** (1 John 2:15-17). They discarded the **“robe of righteousness”** and the clothing of **“humility”** for the **“cloak of covetousness”** (Isa 61:10; 1 Thess 2:5; 1

Pet 5:5). Now they must **“buy”** what they had once received, but had since abandoned. They would have to discard their present coverings to again obtain the **“garments of salvation.”** They would have to pay a price--to lose something they presently considered valuable--to obtain this required clothing.

Scripture makes clear that this **“white raiment”** refers to the holiness of the saints. **“And to her (the church) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”** (Rev 19:8).

A quest for righteousness is not common in the Western churches. This is not a good condition.

The absence of a hunger and thirst for righteousness contradicts any profession of association with Christ Jesus. It betrays a condition Jesus calls **“naked,”** and must be remedied this side of our departure from this world.

Jesus promises such clothing to all who overcome (Rev 3:6). How is it, then, that He counsels the church in Laodicea to **“buy”** it now? Because salvation begins now--in this world. If we do not appropriate the righteousness of God by faith here, we will not enjoy the fulness of it there! Jesus referred to this principle when He said, **“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”** (Matt 5:6). Participation in the righteousness of God begins here; it will be consummated there.

Let it be clear, those who become defiled after they were once cleansed and made righteous, must **“buy” “white raiment”** from Jesus. They must again come to Christ, acknowledging their departure from Him, and give what they have to be clean in His sight. Surely you know, **“Nothing impure will ever enter it (the glorified church) , nor will**

*anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*" (Rev 21:27). Too, if a longing for purity is not realized in this world, the reality of it will not be experienced in *"the world to come."*

Many a congregation today is in the position of the church in Laodicea, yet has no messenger to sound the alarm. They stand naked before the Lord, covered only with moral fig leaves of their own making. Like Joshua the high priest, they stand before the Almighty arrayed in *"filthy garments"* (Zech 3:3). Because Joshua chose to stand before the Lord, instead of glorying in himself, he experienced a change of raiment. The *"filthy garments"* were taken away, and he was given a *"change of raiment."* This is what Jesus wants for all who wear His name--but they must stand before Him, to *"buy"* from Him *"white raiment"* that will stand the test of Divine scrutiny.

A quest for righteousness is not common in the Western churches. This is not a good condition. The absence of a hunger and thirst for righteousness contradicts any profession of association with Christ Jesus. It betrays a condition Jesus calls *"naked,"* and must be remedied this side of our departure from this world. Again, I emphasize that this righteousness is procured only from Christ. The Apostle Paul expressed his driving compulsion to be clothed in righteousness in Philippians 3:8-11. *"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."* This is the activity to which Jesus is calling the church in Laodicea.

## Recover Your Sight

*“I counsel thee to buy of me . . . and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”* Spiritual blindness is never justified! To be in a condition where the things of God cannot be seen—where there is a lack of *“spiritual understanding”*—is most serious. Jesus declared this church to be *“blind”*—a state from which they had once been recovered. Their condition was the result of backward movement, as depicted most vividly by Peter. *“But he that lacketh these things [virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love] is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins”* (2 Pet 1:9). The idea is that of blindness to what is right before us, and the inability to see what is ahead. This is a two-fold condition created by neglect and absorption with the ways of the world. More specifically, this condition is brought on by forgetting the purging *“of his old sins.”* That is what had happened in Laodicea. Even though Jesus instituted a feast of remembrance to ensure this did not happen, still Laodicea had forgotten. As a result, blindness set upon their soul.

This church must come to Jesus and *“buy”* salve for their eyes—a spiritual commodity that will remedy their blinded condition. To be sure, they will not pursue things they cannot see! During His earthly ministry, Jesus once *“anointed”* a blind man’s eyes *“with clay,”* telling him to go and wash that he might see (John 9:6-7). But there was a difference in that case—the man *“was born blind”* (John 9:2). This was not the case, however, with the Laodiceans. They were reborn seeing, not in a state of blindness. However, they had lost their vision, and required spiritual *“eyesalve”* to correct their condition—*“eyesalve”* that could only be bought from Jesus. A blind church is tottering on the brink of eternal ruin. If they do not recover their vision, there is no hope for them.

I cannot help but observe the circumstances of our time. Spiritual blindness hangs like a dark cloud over the churches of our land. When

it comes to the things of the Kingdom, there is far too much groping. I hear too many sermons, lectures, and discussions that are like blind men groping in the dark. They are unable to handle eternal things, and flounder in the sea of Scripture in a state of disorientation. They have lost their bearings because they are ***“blind, and cannot see afar off.”*** Dulness and obtuseness concerning the things of God are inexcusable, especially among those professing to be teachers. Jesus called such teachers ***“blind guides”*** (Matt 23:16,24). Paul; said of them, ***“desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm”*** (1 Tim 1:7). We are living in the midst of a great departure from the faith. The purported “great moves” of God that are occurring nearly all have to do with elementary advances in the Kingdom. They are not characterized by “seeing,” or strong spiritual vision. This is a time for buying ***“eyesalve”*** from the Lord Jesus! Let it be clear, we do not despise these “small beginnings,” counting them a token of hope. However, the darkness of the times makes it easy to overstate their greatness.

What is this ***“eyesalve?”*** What is the secret to restored vision? It is certainly not in a disciplined procedure, or a special way of studying the Bible. This is nothing less than the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In a marvelous depiction of the advantages given us in Christ Jesus, the writer of Revelation elsewhere said, ***“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things . . . But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him”*** (1 John 2:20,27). Here is the heavenly Illuminator, Who pulls back veil that nature has hung over ***“all things.”*** The Holy Spirit is the One Who ***“enlightens the eyes of our understanding”*** (Eph 1:18), bringing spiritual perspective. We began our walk with Christ by being ***“enlightened”*** (Heb 6:4) or ***“illuminated”*** (Heb 10:32), and we maintain our walk in the same way.

Without this enlightenment, the world will dominate us, for we have

no other way of perceiving the things of God. They are too high for nature to grasp—even refined and educated nature. They extend beyond the reach of the *“natural man”* (1 Cor 2:14), and are antithetical to the *“carnal mind”* (Rom 8:7-8). Those unduly enamored of academic pursuits tend to ignore this truth. That is because academics, with all of their lower advantages, are closer to the earth than they are to heaven. They are too easily entered by those who are themselves alienated from God. For this reason, great care must be taken by the saints when in that realm. Like the Laodicea church was corrupted by the society in which it resided, so are many today adversely influenced by lower intellectual climes that tend to vaunt flesh and minimize Divine influences. The marked tendency to think like the world is lethal. The soul must break through the darkness into the light, else it will be thrust away from Christ.

## THOSE JESUS LOVES

*“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline (chasten, KJV) ; be zealous therefore, and repent”* (NASB). Jesus severely rebukes this church, but loves it still! He is not seeking to drive it away, but promote its recovery. Not a single believer or church will escape chastening! Thus it is written, *“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons”* (Heb 12:8). Chastening, or spiritual reprimanding, is an appointed means of conforming us to the image of Christ Jesus. Although our earthly fathers chastened and corrected us as it seemed best to them, the Lord does it *“for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness”* (Heb 12:10). There is a Divine objective being served that is most marvelous: *“for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”* The real benefit does not occur while the discipline is being administered, but **after** it has taken effect. As it is written, *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Heb 12:11).

As of this year, I have preached the Gospel for 47 years. During that time, I can recall very few occasions when a church acknowledged it perceived the chastening hand of Christ in its difficulties. In the circles in which I have traveled, there is such a low awareness of the Son of God that it is startling to the soul. It is as though the church in Laodicea has been fully restored in its corrupted state. Still, even under those circumstances, I have witnessed sensitive souls who detected the hand of the Lord moving among them because of His great love. While I do not mean to harp on this point, it is most grievous to me that in the name of the Lord, people have been deprived of spiritual sensitivity—robbed, as it were, of a perception of Christ’s appeals to them.

The required reaction to Christ’s appeals: ***“Be zealous therefore, and repent!”*** This is the only place in the Bible where zeal and repentance are joined together. It indicates the level of difficulty associated with recovery from lukewarmness. When indifference grips the soul, and the spirit of compromise fastens on it like a leech, it requires unusual strength and determination to recover. O, that the churches were more aware of this. Deborah rebuked the Reubenites for their indifference. They sat in their sheepfolds when a summons to war had been issued (Judges 5:16). In Nehemiah’s day, the Tekoites engaged in repairing the walls, but ***“did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord”*** (Neh 3:5). Jeremiah spoke of those who were ***“not valiant for the truth”*** (Jer 9:3), and Ezekiel confronted those who had ***not “gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD”*** (Ezek 13:5). Hosea chided Israel for being like a ***“morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away,”*** and whose heart was ***“divided”*** (Hos 6:4; 10:2). Who can forget the words of Haggai who upbraided the people of God, declaring God had heard their foolish reasoning. ***“The time has not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built”*** (Hag 1:2-6). If you are familiar with those texts, you know the extreme difficulty associated with recovering from that state.

Those who are *“lukewarm”* must marshal all of their resources and repent! They must come away from distractions, and quit their vain and feeble efforts to do something for God. The work of the Lord will never be accomplished while in a state of practical alienation from Him. A fire goes before the Lord, *“and burns up His enemies round about”* (Psa97:3). Zeal is like a fire that goes before us, burning up counterproductive influences. **Repentance does not come easily for those who are indifferent and compromising.** Indeed, it is difficult enough to repent while surrounded by heavenly influences, words of exhortation, and a convicted conscience. It is well nigh impossible for those who sleep as though there were no danger. Like Samson, such must arise and *“shake”* themselves, bringing every sensitivity to its full potential. Repentance involves casting *“off the works of darkness,”* and putting *“on the armor of light”* (Rom 13:14). It also requires throwing down *“imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:5). Such repentance cannot be put off until a *“more convenient season”* (Acts 24:25). The soul must break through the darkness into light, else it will be thrust away from Christ.

## THE GRACIOUS INVITATION

Given the condition of this church, one might imagine strong appeals would NOT be made to anyone in their number. But this is not at all the case. Although Jesus had been excluded from His own church, He eagerly seeks a receptive soul. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me”* (NASB). Now He does not speak to the church itself. Rather He sends a lofty appeal among them, searching for *“anyone”* still possessing sensitivity in that quagmire of lukewarmness. Can it be that one exists in such a suppressive environment? Do not venture a carnal assessment of the situation! Here, we learn something of the nature of Jesus, as well as the existence of

spiritual tenderness in most unlikely places. Do not be quick to give up on the most loathsome environment!

See, Jesus does not tear the door down in a climactic act of Divine wrath! Such a deed would have slain everyone on the other side. The day of wrath has not yet come, so the Son of God will make strong appeals. But He will do so on the OUTSIDE not on the inside. Mark it well, **the religion of the Laodiceans had put a door between them and Jesus**. Whatever kind of religious activity was found among them, it proved a barrier to the Divine Presence. I know of people who imagine such a condition to be impossible. Yet, all through this country there are assemblies that regularly meet with their door closed to Jesus. The early disciples met behind closed doors for *“fear of the Jews.”* On that occasion, the resurrected Jesus appeared in their midst, even though the doors were locked fast (John 20:19). But the church in Laodicea was not afforded this blessing. Their Lord, Who had bought them with His own blood, stood *“at the door”* and knocked, bidding entrance—NOT to their insipid gathering, but to any individual who had managed to survive their tepidness.

He does not call out to the leaders—not to the elders, or deacons, or men, or ladies. His call is not to a group. Above the din of carnality in that assembly, and over the lull of death that had settled upon them, the voice of the Son of God could be heard. The soul in whose heart the truth had found a resting place could hear it. It was one of those *“whosoever will”* calls that is lofty, yet can be heard by tender hearts. *“If ANYONE hears my voice,”* cries the Lord—on the outside of the door. No stilted theology here about men no longer hearing Jesus! He is still speaking (Heb 12:25), and people can still hear Him within the recesses of the heart (Eph 4:21). It makes no difference how dead and lifeless an assembly may be, if there is a sensitive soul there, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, calling out to those with an *“ear to hear.”* That voice can be heard in a text of Scripture, though read in a lifeless liturgy, or declared by an apathetic speaker. It can be heard in a prayer that is read in routine, or a song that is sung without the heart—but it

will be heard by the searching soul. ***“I stand at the door and knock,”*** cries Jesus! It is an aggressive knock! It is a persistent knock!

Listen! Can you hear it? It is accompanied by a word—a directed word: ***“If any one hears My voice and opens the door!”*** The qualification is twofold: hearing and opening! Those are things you can do if you have an ear to hear. It is as though Jesus said, *If any one is sensitive to my presence and will avail himself of it. If anyone is aware of Me, and will extend himself to receive Me!* And what will Jesus do for such a person? Whether anyone else opens the door, welcoming the Presence of Jesus, or not, the receptive individual will experience fellowship and communion with Christ. ***“I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me!”*** That is the same promise Jesus gave to His disciples on the eve of His betrayal (John 14:21,23). **The soul that desires Christ will experience Him!** He will be taught by the Master and cared for by the Good Shepherd. Jesus will prepare a special spiritual diet for that person, and ***“dine with him.”*** It will be a reciprocal fellowship, providing release for the soul as well as nourishment for it: ***“and he [will dine] with Me.”***

There is a tone of urgency in these words. These are not words to be casually pondered. They demand an immediate response. Toward the close of Christ’s earthly ministry, He also spoke of opening the door to Him. In that instance, His reference was to His second coming. His words are arresting. ***“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately ”*** (Luke 12:35-36). Christ’s message to Laodicea will, if heeded, prepare them for that coming. If men will open the door to Jesus now, freely giving Him entrance into their conscious lives, they will be able to joyfully open the door to Him IMMEDIATELY when He comes for His own.

On an intensely personal level, the soul that hears the Voice and opens the door, will experience what the disciples did following Christ's resurrection. Like many in the churches, those disciples had been trying to catch something for a long time, only to have empty nets. For some time they toiled in futility, like many church members do. But when Jesus came and **"stood"** on the shore, the circumstance changed. Do you remember the incident? He asked them if they had caught anything: **"Children, have you any food?"** Forlornly, they answered, **"No!"** They had heard His voice, now He gives them an opportunity to **"open the door."** **"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."** Instantly, opening the door, they cast their nets, and were unable to draw it in because of the multitude of the fish! When finally they all got back to shore, it is written, **"Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread."** Jesus was going to dine with them! In tender love, He had prepared a special meal for them! Hallelujah! But that is not all. **"Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught."** They would feed on what He had prepared, and He would eat what they had caught. Although 153 large fish was in their net, the net was not broken. Then Jesus said, **"COME AND DINE!"** (John 21:5-12).

This is what Jesus was calling from outside the Laodicean church! **"COME AND DINE!"** He wanted to dine with someone—to share with them what He had procured for them! He also wanted them to share with Him the good things they had caught at His direction. He did not call out for a congregation, but for an individual— **"anyone!"** O, what a marvelous picture of Jesus—and He is calling still! How sweet the fellowship of Jesus, into which we have been called—and into which He still calls us (1 Cor 1:9). There are more profound insights than you have yet seen, more nourishing delights for the soul than you have yet tasted! There is more joy and peace than you have yet apprehended, and greater strength and grace than you have yet grasped. It may be that you are in an assembly like that of Laodicea—I hope not. But if you are, whatever handicaps may be there, it cannot still the voice of Jesus, or stop you from opening the door to Him!

## THE STAGGERING PROMISE

And what kind of promise will Jesus make to this lukewarm assembly? How will He draw them into the area of blessing? To those who have vacillated, lingering between two opinions—those who have been unassertive in their profession, being neither hot nor cold—Jesus delivers a promise of staggering proportions. It is designed to awaken them to an aggressive and valiant fight of faith.

As you might expect, one of the greatest promises is given to one of the most unworthy assemblies. Jesus does not give it to the assembly as such, but to anyone within that assembly—or the world—that has an *“ear to hear.”* There is no reason why it cannot be the entire assembly, but Jesus will not hold back the benefit because of a small number! If you are waiting for the rest of the people to join you, wait no longer. Take hold of the promise yourself! *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne”* (NASB).

See with what consistency Jesus speaks: *“He who overcomes!”* He has thus spoken to all seven churches (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), and He will again speak to them collectively in this manner (21:7). Overcoming is everything! It is the line of demarcation between the utterance of the promises and obtaining them! It is the acid-test of worthiness, the ultimate work of faith, and the final evidence of an *“honest and good heart.”* If we do not overcome, it makes no

difference what else we may or may not have done.

And what kind of promise will Jesus make to this lukewarm assembly? How will He draw them into the area of blessing? To those who have vacillated, lingering between two opinions—those who have been unassertive in their profession, being neither hot nor cold—Jesus delivers a promise of staggering proportions. It is designed to awaken them to an aggressive and valiant fight of faith. Hear is again. ***“He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”*** (RSV).

This is being a ***“joint heir with Christ”*** and ***“reigning with Christ”*** (Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12). This transcends anything ever conceived by men. Once, the mother of James and John requested that her sons be seated, ***“one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom”*** (Matt 20:21, NKJV). Although the highest honor she could conceive, Jesus replied, ***“to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father”*** (Matt 20:23), thereby discouraging any such request. Jesus did promise the Apostles, ***“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”*** (Matt 19:28). Although that is a astonishing promise, Jesus rises still higher in His commitment to the one who overcomes. Up to this time, the reigning of the saints of God has generally been related to the judgment itself—i.e., judging men and angels (1 Cor 6:21-2), judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28), enemies falling at our feet to acknowledge Jesus loved us (Rev 3:9), and having ***“power over the nations”*** (Rev 2:26-27). Here, however, we project out into eternity—a reign of endless duration.

There has been far too much minuscule thinking about ***“the world to come,”*** and the role of the

redeemed in it. Our hearts and minds can be enlarged concerning these things. Here is a promise that will contribute to that enlargement. The Lord Jesus will share His throne with the redeemed of all ages. He will lead them forth in endeavors that require all of their ransomed powers, and for which they will be fully equal.

Now, Jesus is sitting with the Father in His throne—mediating the New Covenant, ***“bringing many sons to glory,”*** and waiting until His enemies ***“be made His footstool”*** (Heb 9:15; 2:10; 10:13). That throne is not shared by the redeemed. Having ***“destroyed”*** the devil (Heb 2:14), ***“spoiled principalities and powers”*** (Col 2:15), ***“put away sin”*** (Heb 9:28), and shattered the gates of death (Acts 2:24-27), Jesus returned to heaven to sit in His Father’s throne. From that station He is governing the affairs of this world in the interest of His elect. He is doing so because He ***“overcame”*** everything and everyone that sought to deter Him from His mission. All competing interests were subdued, and all enemies crushed. Now He dispenses ***“mercy and grace to help in the time of need”*** (Heb 4:15-16) to those making the pilgrimage from earth to glory.

A time is coming, however, when the Lord Jesus will have His own throne—when His enemies shall have been publically subdued. Here, we are on most holy ground, and must walk with caution, not allowing flesh to intrude with fanciful explanations. The Spirit pulls the curtain back, giving us a glimpse of this time, in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. ***“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.***

***The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says all things are put under Him, it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all***” (verses 24-28). We dare not venture opinions on this text, but receive it as it stands. Jesus will transfer the Kingdom back to God—the very God Who gave it to Him. When He returns it, it shall have been perfected, cleansed from all defilement, and readied for eternal responsibilities. ***“All things in heaven and in earth”*** will have been united together as God determined (Eph 1:9-11).

The Lord Jesus Himself ***“will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him.”*** His subjection will not be like that of a slave—that is not the intent of these words. The idea is that He will be identified with the redeemed, and together with them shall carry out the will of God. There is a purpose on the trestle board of eternity, that has not yet been fully divulged. There will be glorious enterprises in which the redeemed will participate. Here and there we receive a hint of them. ***“To Him (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever (world without end, KJV). Amen”*** (Eph 3:21). ***“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:7). Who can forget some of the provocative promises regarding these things: ***“Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. . . . You also be over five cities”*** (Luke 19:17-19). ***“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your :Lord”*** (Matt 25:21)

There has been far too much minuscule thinking about ***“the world to***

*come,*” and the role of the redeemed in it. Our hearts and minds can be enlarged concerning these things. Here is a promise that will contribute to that enlargement. The Lord Jesus will share His throne with the redeemed of all ages. He will lead them forth in endeavors that require all of their ransomed powers, and for which they will be fully equal. Here, I will rest my case, although there is much more that could be said. I encourage you to contemplate the greatness your salvation and the exceeding great reward that awaits you.

## CONCLUSION

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (NASB).* As marvelous as these promises are, they are of no avail if people do not listen to them and think upon them. The Word becomes effective as it resides within our hearts and minds. Our meditations will draw out its richness, for in them the Spirit effectively works within us. Too, the solemn warnings given to the churches—particularly the one to Laodicea—are to be taken most seriously. Men have learned to live with lukewarm churches, but Jesus has not! Lifelessness, indifference, and compromise are all abominable to Him, and He will not long tolerate them. What is more, He will not stay where He is not wanted!

The church, both collectively and individually, needs Christ within. His Presence is NOT to be taken for granted, but fervently sought and maintained with zeal. Without the indwelling Christ (Eph 3:15-17), teaching, services, songs, and all forms of godliness are vain, pointless, and incapable of bring us the victory. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches! If we keep Jesus out of our hearts, He will spew us out of His mouth! If we overcome, we will sit with Him in His throne, engaging in an eternal reign with Him.



# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 10

## THE HEAVENLY VISION

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things. Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, 'HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.' And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their

crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.’ (Revelation 4:1-11, NASB)

## INTRODUCTION

We now begin the second great division of this book, which is the Vision proper. It extends from 4:1 thru 22:5, and provides an overview of several key factors. First, it is going to reveal **the manner** in which the Lord Jesus is reigning-- *“in the midst of His enemies.”* This was prophesied in Psalms 110:1-2: *“The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet. The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.”* Second, **the manner of Satan’s attack** against the church is revealed. Third, **some of the involvements of overcoming-faith** are unveiled, showing that victory does not mean the total suppression of the enemy in this world, as ideal and desired as that may be. Fourth, **the final destiny of the devil** and his hierarchy of evil, the wicked, and the righteous is delineated. If we can take hold of these things by faith, we will become equal to the challenges that stand between us and glory.

Briefly, this section of the book may be divided as follows. **(Stage 1)** A vision of heaven and its throne-centered activities (chapters four and five). **(Stage 2)** The seven seals (6:1-8:1). **(Stage 3)** The seven trumpets (8:2-11:19). **(Stage 4)** The visions of the woman, the dragon, the first and second beasts, and Babylon, together with their inter-relationships (12:1-14:20). **(Stage 5)** The seven vials, or bowls (15:1-16:21). **(Stage 6)** The harlot and Babylon the great (17:1-19:21). **(Stage 7)** A brief recapitulation of the final period of history (20:1-15). **(Stage 8)** A

glorious depiction of the heavenly Jerusalem (21:1-22:7).

We are going to see a specific segment of history: i.e., from Jesus Christ's birth to the end of the world. Everything will NOT be chronological, or written in strict historical sequence. The purpose of this book is not to merely convey information to us. Nor, indeed, is it written to allow the construction of a creedal statement. The message of this book is intended to bless those who read hear, and keep it (1:3). Kept within the recesses of the heart, where Divine influences can open them to the understanding, they will prepare the individual for the coming of the Lord. That is why one of the closing statements of this grand book is, "***Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book***" (22:7). While your mind will be tempted to become entangled in the visions of this volume, I urge you to HEAR the words as coming from the Lord Jesus Himself. Hear them as words designed to acquaint you with the manner of the Kingdom, and prepare you for the appointed return of your Lord. **Novelties do not bless, nor will they sustain the soul.** Good preaching and teaching exits the novelty shop and enters into the antique shop.

## AFTER THIS

With Christ, the first priority is not knowing the future, but securing, and maintaining, a right relationship with Himself. That includes the commendation of those fighting the good fight of faith, and the rebuke of those who have lapsed into spiritual sleep.

*"After these things . . . "* ***These things*** are the personal messages

delivered to *“the seven churches of Asia,”* as well as every individual in every segment of time that *“hath an ear.”* With Christ, the first priority is not knowing the future, but securing, and maintaining, a right relationship with Himself. That includes the commendation of those fighting the good fight of faith, and the rebuke of those who have lapsed into spiritual sleep. Every praiseworthy activity will be duly noted by the Lord, and every encroachment of the flesh will be rebuked. The church must be strengthened before it can *“handle aright the word of truth”* (2 Tim 2:15). Sin cannot be tolerated, and righteousness cannot go unnoticed. The future without Jesus is bleak, indeed. With Him, however, rivers can be forged, valleys negotiated, and deserts traversed. The purpose of the first three chapters of this book is the preparation of the church for involvement with Christ in the future—both here and there.

### **A Popular, But Incorrect, View**

Among a large body of fundamentalists, it is taught that, beginning with this section of Revelation, the church has been removed from the world. The events that immediately follow are said to occur without the body of Christ in the world. This includes a *“great tribulation”* that is said to fall upon a world without the people of God resident in it. In this view, *“After these things”* means after the church has been *removed—after history that includes the residency of the redeemed in the world*. I feel compelled to briefly deal with this perspective because of its impact upon our understanding of the Revelation.

### **A High Purpose**

The notion that God would work in the world, whether for blessing or cursing, without the church, contradicts the revealed purpose of God. Through Jesus Christ, the primary objective of God is not to evangelize or change the world, even though they are involved in His purpose. God is revealing Himself to principalities and powers *“through the church.”* This is a matter of revelation, and is fundamental to our

understanding of Scripture. *“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach*

As long as this world remains, glory will be brought to God through the church—in this realm.

Then, with its passing and the coming of *“new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Pet 3:13), it shall continue *“world without end.”* While the world remains, there will be no time where the redeemed are not its *“salt”* and *“light.”*

among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Eph 3:8-12, NKJV). There is no reason for any child of God to be ignorant of this purpose. The Living God appointed an Apostle to the Gentiles to make it known, bringing the redeemed into involvement with that purpose. That purpose was not revealed in previous ages, but now it has been made known. There is no acceptable excuse for being ignorant of it.

The Divine intent is to show His remarkably multifarious wisdom to the heavenly hierarchy *“through the church.”* There is not the slightest hint in Scripture that the world, as we know it, will remain after that purpose has been fulfilled. Nor, indeed, is there any insinuation in God’s Word that this purpose shall come short of Divine intent. Lest we fail to grasp the magnitude of this affirmation, this *“intent”* is associated with *“the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus.”*

The church is particularly described as ***“His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”*** (Eph 1:23). This is the appointed vehicle through which Christ works. The church is His ***“fullness,”*** the repository from which Divine dispensation and judgment proceeds. Both blessing and cursing are facilitated through ***“the church.”*** As it is written, ***“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved AND among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”*** (2 Cor 2:15-16). Salvation is realized through the activity of ***“the church, which is His body.”*** The blindness of the blind is brought out by the Gospel the church declares (2 Cor 4:3- 4). If some object to this, saying the reference was to the Apostles, let them remember the Apostles were placed ***“in the church”*** (1 Cor 12:28).

The idea that Jesus would continue to work in the world without His body is an absurdity, unworthy of our acceptance! Glory will be brought to God ***“in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever”*** (Eph 3:21). As long as this world remains, glory will be brought to God through the church—in this realm. Then, with its passing and the coming of ***“new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”*** (2 Pet 3:13), it shall continue ***“world without end.”*** While the world remains, there will be no time where the redeemed are not its ***“salt”*** and ***“light.”***

## **The End of the World**

Jesus described the time of the gathering of His people as ***“the end of the world.”*** With remarkable precision, the Savior described that hour. ***“The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous***

*will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”* (Matt 13:39-43, NKJV). In the parable of the Net, Jesus declared the same thing in these words. *“So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt 13:49-50, NKJV). Until that time, the wicked will, in fact, be *“among the just,”* or righteous. It is in THAT setting that God has determined to show His remarkable wisdom to heavenly hosts.

Some, fastening on the lexical meaning of the world for *“world”* ( αἰῶνος ), say this is referring to the Gospel *“age,”* and not the end of the world itself. While this word does have the meaning of *“age,”* it is often used of the period of time itself, and not merely a segment of it, as these teachers suppose. Thus, the Spirit spoke of words articulated *“by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world ( αἰῶνος ) began”* (Lk 1:70; Acts 3:21), or from the beginning of time. John 9:32 also uses the term in the sense of ALL time: *“Since the world ( αἰῶνος ) began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.”* Acts 15:18 affirms *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world ( αἰῶνος ).”*

Suffice it to say, there is no clear word in all of Scripture that affirms the church will be taken out of the world before time concludes, or before Jesus appears in all of His glory. Our review of this book will, therefore, assume the presence of *“the church”* during all of God’s works and judgments upon the earth. There is neither reason nor Divine statement that leads us to think otherwise. Further, to think differently contradicts what God has revealed about His determined intention, making God a Reactionary rather than the Implementer of an *“eternal purpose.”*

I affirm the revelation which follows assumes the presence of the

body of Christ in the world, and the execution of His purpose through it. The wickedness of the wicked is accentuated by the PRESENCE of God's people, not their absence. "*After these things,*" then, does not mean after the end of the world. Rather, it means, "*After receiving the message for the churches, this is what I saw.*" It is true, that at this point in The Revelation of Jesus, the religious world divides in their interpretation—and does so significantly. We must not allow this to happen among us. **There are chasms in this book—areas of deep and profound mystery—which we must not fill with the wisdom of men!** We are reading about principles more than details, and things that make for comfort rather than the increase of factual knowledge. **Principle, not detail, is the theme of apocalyptic, or symbolic, language.** This does not mean detail will be absent in this book. It DOES mean detail will not be its focus.

## A DOOR WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN

Whatever you may think of human wisdom, scholarship, and study disciplines, they cannot unlock a single mystery of God! The door stands ajar in heaven, not upon the earth!

*“ . . . I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven . . . ”*  
The first thing that confronts John is most glorious, indeed: *“a door standing open in heaven!”* But, John had to **“LOOK”** to see it! And, he could not **“look”** until he had first discharged the commission to write to the messengers of the churches. Without dwelling long upon it, there is a Kingdom principle to be seen here. As a rule, the things of the Spirit of God do not dawn upon the soul until it looks for them—until the attention is drawn upward. Secondly, those who are lethargic in doing the revealed will of God will not be afforded life-changing glimpses into Divine purpose. To see by faith, you must first yield to

Divine impulses—the drawing of God and Christ (John 6:44; 12:32), and the gracious pleadings of the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30).

As John peers into the heavenly realms, he beholds ***“a door standing open in heaven.”*** How is it that this door was opened? This is another perspective of the veil violently torn in two at the death of Christ Jesus (Matt 27:51). It is a depiction of the heavens being opened BY GOD to the redeemed of the Lord. Its opening is ***“the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”*** (Matt 21:42). It is another way of saying revelation, insight, spiritual understanding, comprehension, and wisdom all **begin on God’s side of the equation** . The ***“door”*** was **not** opened in earth, but in heaven. It is only ***“in heavenly places”*** that we are enabled to behold it (Eph 2:6)!

The things of God—particularly those immediately relating to His ***“eternal purpose”***—are so lofty they must be revealed to the sons of men. This aspect of the Kingdom is seen in the word of the Spirit to the Corinthians. ***“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God”*** (1 Cor 2:9-10). Whatever you may think of human wisdom, scholarship, and study disciplines, they cannot unlock a single mystery of God! The door stands ajar in heaven, not upon the earth!

**The heavens have never opened to pass along mere information.** It has always been for the purpose of revealing Divine intent, particularly as it bears upon His dealings with His people.

## Other Openings

Several times in Scripture, the heavens were opened, or made accessible to selected individuals. In every instance, it was a spiritual epoch in which the mind of the Lord was made known. Ezekiel had such visions. ***“Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God”*** (Ezek 1:1). What similarity this bears to the experience of John. He too was a captive near a body of water, when the heavens were opened to him. Earthly handicaps need not be spiritual ones! Again, when the Lord Jesus was baptized, it is written, ***“And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”*** (Mark 1:10-11). When finding Nathanael, Jesus said, ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open , and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”*** (John 1:51). When Stephen was laying down his life for Christ, he cried out, ***“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”*** (Acts 7:56). The opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27) was associated with the opening of the heavens to Peter. It is written that he ***“fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth”*** (Acts 10:10-11). Later in this book, John will be shown the public triumph of Christ over His enemies. The revelation will be received when he again sees ***“heaven opened”*** (Rev 19:11).

The vision that follows is a pivotal one. It will not be a mere recounting of history, either past, present, or future. **The heavens have never opened to pass along mere information.** It has always been for the purpose of revealing Divine intent, particularly as it bears upon His dealings with His people. Prior to Christ’s enthronement, ***“windows”*** opened in heaven were set forth as a superior blessing (Mal 3:10). However, now that Jesus has ***“spoiled principalities and powers”*** (Col

2:15) and “*obtained eternal redemption*” for us (Heb 9:12), the door of heaven stands ajar, becking to those who are reconciled to God. There are wondrous things to be beheld that will strengthen and comfort the heart.

## ATTENTION DRAWN UPWARD

### The First Voice

“ . . .and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, *Come up hither . . .* ” Although this is a vision—something that was seen (1:12,17; 4:4; 5:1,2; 6:1,9; 7:1,2; 8:2; 9:1,17; 10:1,5; 13:1,2,3,11; 14:6; 15:1,2; 16:13; 17:3,6; 18:1; 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11,12; 21:1,22) —it is the message, or the significance, of the vision that is the point. It is to be comprehended. It will not be enough to simply detect it, it must be discerned! In order for this to occur, John must be brought into the realm of insight. Already, he is “*in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*” (Rev 1:10). Already, he had received an extensive word from Jesus concerning the churches. Now he is admonished to draw even closer.

The “*first voice*” does not leave the matter to interpretation. It is not a vague voice, nor a still, small, and quiet one. It is a voice like a “*trumpet*”—loud, and attention-getting. When this voice is heard, other voices are dimmed to insignificance. This was not an impersonal voice, or simply a sound of a noisy trumpet. John affirms it was a voice “*talking with me*”—intensely personal. In one sense of the word, this was a battle trumpet. It is as though God was saying (for the book of Revelation was God’s message through Jesus, 1:1), *John, I have declared war on the world and the world order! I will now show you how I have determined to overcome the world, bringing glory to My Son, and My people to Myself.*

The voice shouts out, ***“Come up hither!”*** The voice was loud, but John had to be close to get the meaning! He must rise still higher, into loftier realms, where all influences of this world dry up and fall away. To understand this message, the world must be blotted from our view, and its pull upon our spirits reduced to a minimum. John cannot look at the Aegean Sea surrounding Patmos, and hear what the Lord is saying! He cannot ponder the evil of the ruler who banished him to this foreboding and depressing environment, and clearly hear the voice of the Lord. He must ***“come up higher.”***

This is not a meager relating of historical events,  
but a proclamation of the work of God as  
implemented through the reign of Christ Jesus.  
These are not things that can be altered by the  
repentance of transgressors, or hastened by the  
faithfulness of saints.

In the Son, God once condescended to be ***“manifest in the flesh”*** (1 Tim 3:16). In coming into this world and becoming obedient to death, Jesus ***“humbled Himself”*** (Phil 2:8). However, God has now ***“highly exalted Him”*** (Phil 2:9), and Jesus will not humble Himself again in this world. Men and women must not ***“come up higher!”*** They must be elevated, and draw near to the Lord (Heb 7:19; 10:22; James 4:8). The redeemed must raise their sights, come out of the flesh, and get into the Spirit if they are to see any thing of their God! The word is now ***“COME”*** (Matt 11:28; John 7:37; Rev 4:16; Rev 17:1; 21:9; 22:17). **If we want insight, we must get into the realm where it is experienced!** Like John, we must divest ourselves of worldly ambitions and evaluations of self and consider the Kingdom. The Revelation of Jesus was given, and it is discerned, in higher climes, where the mind of the flesh is not welcome, and cannot survive!

## Things Which Must Be

And what will John be given to see in these lofty climes? The trumpeting voice declares, *“Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”* **“UP HERE,”** where Divine determination is made, as well as revelation given! John will not be given impersonal predictions—foretelling events God sees will occur upon the earth. Those unacquainted with God often view prophecy in this manner: i.e., simply declaring what God, in His omniscience, has seen will happen. We must come away from such mundane and spiritually debilitating notions. John will be shown things that **“MUST TAKE PLACE,”** not merely things that WILL take place.

The working of the Lord will be opened to John—what HE is doing, and how He going to do it. The most tragic periods of history will be related to the will of the Lord, as well as the most blessed events. Over and over, we will read phrases declaring this to be the case. *“A crown was GIVEN unto him,”* *“there was GIVEN unto him a great sword,”* *“power was GIVEN unto them over the fourth part of the earth,”* *“white robes were GIVEN unto every one of them,”* *“seven angels which stood before God; and to them were GIVEN seven trumpets,”* *“there was GIVEN unto him much incense,”* *“to him was GIVEN the key of the bottomless pit,”* *“unto them was GIVEN power,”* *“it was GIVEN that they should not kill them,”* *“there was GIVEN me a reed,”* *“the court which is without the temple . . . is GIVEN unto the Gentiles,”* *“to the woman were GIVEN two wings of a great eagle,”* *“there was GIVEN unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies,”* *“it was GIVEN unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them,”* *“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast GIVEN them blood to drink,”* *“and power was GIVEN unto him to scorch men with fire”* (6:2,4,8,11; 8:2,3; 9:1,3,5; 11:1,2; 12:14; 13:5,7; 16:8,8).

John will be shown what GOD is doing! In that revelation, the activity of the evil one will also be shown, but ONLY as it relates to,

and is within, the will of the Lord. Here we are exposed to Divine determination. This is not a meager relating of historical events, but a proclamation of the work of God as implemented through the reign of Christ Jesus. These are not things that can be altered by the repentance of transgressors, or hastened by the faithfulness of saints. If we can see what God is doing, what we are admonished to do will make sense! If the purpose of the Almighty can be perceived, the malicious attacks of Satan will not cause us to fear! These are things which ***“must be hereafter,”*** or following what has already been revealed to John.

### **The Proper Response**

***“Immediately I was in the Spirit . . . ”*** John responds in keeping with the makeup of the ***“new creation”*** (2 Cor 5:17). There is an immediacy associated being ***“in the Spirit”*** that is baffling to the flesh! It is interesting to observe the word ***“immediately”*** is more related to the New Covenant than to the old. In the KJV, it is not found a single time from Genesis through Malachi. It is used only seven times in the NKJV, five times in the RSV and NASB, nine times in the NRSV and NIV. It is used over 80 times in the Gospels alone (NKJV). When Jesus called James and John, they ***“immediately”*** followed him, leaving their nets and their father (Matt 4:22). Christ’s miracles were noted for their IMMEDIATE effect (Matt 8:3; 20:34; Mark 1:31; 2:12; 10:52; Luke 4:39; 5:13; 8:47; 18:43; John 5:9; 6:21).

Slow and tardy responses are unnatural for kingdom people! The closer a person is to the Lord, the more quickly they respond. The further they are from Him, the more time elapses before there is a response—if, indeed, there is any.

Slow and tardy responses are unnatural for kingdom people! The

closer a person is to the Lord, the more quickly they respond. The further they are from Him, the more time elapses before there is a response—if, indeed, there is any. It should not surprise you that a great deal of contemporary religion is built around slow and delayed responses. It is as though churchmen depend upon people NOT responding immediately. Some programs have even been developed to ensure the response does **not** come immediately, for such a response is thought to be unsure and unstable. This is not, however, the manner of the Kingdom. Think of the immediate response of the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:37), the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:24,33, 43-48), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-33), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38).

As directed by Jesus, John has seven times written, ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*** (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Now John sets the pattern for the churches, doing himself what he has urged them to do. He has an ear, he has heard, and now he responds ***“immediately.”*** I cannot leave this matter without noting its rarity in (what I call) the new religious culture. Today we rarely hear of anyone being ***“immediately in the Spirit.”*** No, there must be extensive preparation for such to be the case—if, indeed, it ever occurs. Much activity takes place to purportedly get people into the spirit—praying, singing, praising, exhortation, etc.

Speaking for myself, I do not despise such efforts. It is, however, of great concern that they are necessary. I do not know that Christ Jesus is as tolerant of the carnal mind as such procedures might lead us to believe. Had John not been ***“immediately in the Spirit,”*** I do not know the Lord would have lingered, waiting for him to get into the Spirit. It is on the part of wisdom to be ***“in the Spirit”*** without extensive prodding and preparation. Many a soul has missed the blessing of the Lord, together with great spiritual insights, because they were not ready to receive them. There is a penalty to be paid for being spiritually lethargic.

## THE THRONE AND THE ONE UPON IT

*“ . . . and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne . . . ”* Oh, what a picture is this! If John is going to be shown the future, He must see it from the perspective of the Throne of Almighty God! The greater light of that throne will remove the mystery of the lesser and subordinate thrones. **Circumstance takes a back seat to Omnipotence!** John is first confronted with a throne, and ONE sitting upon it. It is a throne situated in heaven, not on the earth—and the throne is presently occupied, not to be assumed in the future!

Permit me to dwell upon this for a moment, for this is one of the keys to this marvelous book! John first sees a Throne, not a golden street! He does not see an angel, but a Throne! The Person who is beheld cannot be seen apart from the Throne! John does not first see a dragon, but a Throne; not a beast, but a Throne; not a mark of the beast, but as Throne! First, he does not see martyred saints, but a Throne. The revelation to him does not start with a plague, but with the Throne; not with locusts and a bottomless pit, but with a Throne! The vision does not begin with a view of the church, but with a perspective of a *“Throne in heaven!”*

It is essential to get this message into our hearts. Many have approached this book with the tribulation, antichrist, or the mark of the beast in mind. That is their dominant consideration, so they derive little, if any, comfort from this book. The less prominent the Throne is in our thinking, the more we will be confused by things that follow. Remember, this is opening of the government of God, as executed by Jesus Christ in the salvation of His people.

## Set in Heaven

The place of ultimate rule is ***“set in heaven!”*** That is why we have been raised to sit together with Christ ***“in heavenly places”*** (Eph 2:6). All authority except that resident in the One on that throne is derived authority. ***“There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”***

This throne is not set up on earth, but in heaven! That is the secret! It is something Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way. After seven years in the field, and after his understanding returned to him, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and cried out, ***“I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”*** (Dan 4:34-35). He learned what Daniel affirmed he would learn in his seven-year exile with the beasts of the earth: ***“the heavens do rule”*** (Dan 4:26). John does not require seven years to learn this truth. Being ***“in the Spirit,”*** immediately he sees what could not be seen by the prideful ruler of Babylon! He did not see a discussion chamber in heaven, but a throne!

This is not the first time the throne of God has been revealed to godly men. Micaiah, an obscure prophet from the time of Ahab, once testified, ***“I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left”*** (1 Kgs 22:19). The Psalmist affirmed, ***“I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left”*** (Psa 47:8). Isaiah also saw this throne, as it is written, ***“In the year that***

***King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple***” (Isa 6:1). It may interest you to know that reference is made to this throne in EVERY CHAPTER of Revelation except chapter two (1:4; 3:21; 4:2-10; 5:1,6,7,11,13; 6:16; 7:9-11,15,17; 8:3; 9:13; 10:4,8; 11:16; 12:5; 13:5,7; 14:3,5; 16:17; 19:4,5; 20:11; 21:5; 22:1,3).

The place of ultimate rule is ***“set in heaven!”*** That is why we have been raised to sit together with Christ ***“in heavenly places”*** (Eph 2:6). All authority except that resident in the One on that throne is derived authority. ***“There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”*** (Rom 13:1). If Pilate appears to have power over Jesus, it is only because it has been ***“given”*** to him by the One Who sits upon the throne (John 19:11). The kings of the earth have a King, whether they know it and consent to it or not. The lords of this world have a Lord over them, independently of their consent. Jesus Christ is ***“King of kings and Lord of lords”*** (Rev 17:14; 19:16). That is what He is NOW! In anticipation of His redemptive reign, Jesus prayed, ***“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him”*** (John 17:1-2). Earthly kings who persecute the church are not excluded from that authority! The devil himself, together with all of his wicked hosts are subject to King Jesus! A storm cannot rise on the sea without His approval, nor can a hair fall from your head without His sanction (Matt 10:30). Not even a small and frail bird can fall from the sky apart from the Divine will (Matt 10:29)! His reign is that minute!

There is a sense in which ***“all things are of God”*** (2 Cor 5:18), and it is not to be denied or questioned by mere mortals. Lest we miss the importance of this perspective, the Spirit affirms, ***“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen”*** (Rom 11:33). The exalted Christ fulfills the Psalmic expression, ***“Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places”*** (Psa 135:6). Such a reign is necessary to

subdue our enemies. It is essential for our encouragement and strength. And, it is a requirement, if we are to negotiate through this world, and at last stand before the Lord *“without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”*

### **Revealed in Light**

God is described in terms of light, a perspective often developed in Scripture. Paul reminds us that God *“dwells in light that no man can*

No Divine quality has been compromised or abandoned in our salvation! In reconciliation, no Divine attribute is suppressed or ignored. No! The One sitting upon the throne glowed with purity AND judgment, with righteousness AND peace, and with justice AND mercy!

approach unto” (1 Tim 6:16). Hundreds of years before Paul, the Psalmist spoke of God *“Who covers Himself with light as a garment”* (Psalm 104:2). John, in his First epistle, affirmed *“God IS light”* (1 John 1:5). In the three gems that are mentioned we behold the outflowing attributes of God. The jasper depicts the brilliance of the PURITY of God, or His holiness. The blood-red sardine stone shows the avenging wrath of God. The gentle greenness of the emerald reveals His merciful character, through which we can confront his holiness and justice without being consumed. Because of Christ, these glorious attributes have been joined together for the salvation of mankind. This is a source of great wonder!

### **Like A Jasper and Sardine Stone**

*“ And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance . . . ”* John’s attention is immediately drawn to the One

sitting upon the throne, and not to the throne itself. On earth, the position of the king is what gives him his authority. With the King of glory, **it is His Person that gives power and majesty to the throne** . Note, John sees no form nor similitude, but the glory of the One upon the throne!

The glory of the One sitting upon the throne (and not the throne itself) is likened to precious stones. The ***“jasper”*** is considered a dull opaque stone in our times. But it was not so in the ancient world. It is a member of the chalcedony family, which is a form of quartz, occurring in a variety of colors. The ***“jasper stone”*** was used in the breastplate of the high priest of old, being the third stone in the fourth row (ex 28:20; 39:13). This stone is mentioned four times in the Revelation. Once in our text, where it is used to describe the appearance of the One sitting on the throne. It also is used to describe the “new Jerusalem” [the glorified church], which is seed as ***“Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”*** (21:11). Around the city was a wall ***“of jasper”*** (21:18). The first foundation of the wall, comprised of precious stones, is ***“jasper”*** (21:19). With a capacity of showing many different colors, the ***“jasper stone”*** used to describe God’s glory is said to be ***“clear as crystal ”*** (21:11). The stone is seen as translucent, characterized by purity and brilliance! How fitting to describe our blessed Lord in His Sovereignty!

The sardine stone, or sardius, was a blood red stone—always red, though varying in shade. Here we see a portrayal of God’s jealous and fiery nature. He is, after all, a ***“consuming fire”*** (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29), and His very name is ***“Jealous”*** (Ex 34:14). His nature forbids Him to give His glory to another (Isa 48:11), refusing to recognize any other gods, because there really are no other. ***“The wrath of God”*** is, indeed, ***“revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”*** (Rom 1:18).

Here, however, the glory of the jasper and the sardine are mingled—brought together in a single Person: the One sitting upon the throne. ***Here purity and mercy join with righteousness and judgment!*** We are not faced with a mere attention-getting vision, but a soul-stirring one! In salvation, the attributes of Deity have been joined together for our benefit and consolation. In the words of Scripture, ***“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other”*** (Psa 85:10). Mercy and truth are found in glorious harmony in the One upon the throne! Man’s transgression has not been overlooked, yet mercy has embraced him! Righteousness has not been cast aside, yet peace has joined it in reconciliation. It cannot be stated better than it is in Romans 3:26: ***“To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”*** No Divine quality has been compromised or abandoned in our salvation! In reconciliation, no Divine attribute is suppressed or ignored. No! The One sitting upon the throne glowed with purity AND judgment, with righteousness AND peace, and with justice AND mercy! The TRUTH of man’s condition has been confronted and dealt with. And, man has been reconciled to the very God that expelled the race from Eden! Praise be to the One that glows with the glory of the jasper and sardine stones!

### **A Rainbow Around the Throne**

***“ . . . and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”*** What a marvelous sight! A throne with One sitting upon it, encircled with a glorious rainbow. The dominant color amidst this seven-hued bow of colors is green—the color of the emerald. The emerald was also in the high priest’s breastplate (Ex 28:17, *carbuncle* in the KJV), and was the fourth foundation of the wall about the city of God (Rev 21:19). The imagery is that of Majesty, and was also shown in part to Ezekiel by the river of Chebar. That prophet also saw the Throne of God and a glory ***“like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it”*** (Ezek 1:28).

Here is the token of a faithful God, Who keeps His promises and His covenant. The Lord first introduced this aspect of His Person to Noah. ***“Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said: This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth”*** (Gen 9:11-16, NKJV).

The Lord is ever in remembrance of His covenant with Christ, never forgetting it! The recollection of His effective atonement is like a glorious and peaceful rainbow surrounding His throne. **The universe is being governed with that atonement in mind.** Humanity is evaluated in strict regard of their response to God’s ***“unspeakable gift”*** (2 Cor 9:15).

## TWENTY FOUR ELDERS

***“And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.”*** Now we enter into the realm of the especially profound. Here is one of the challenging passages of this great Revelation. In our approach to this passage, we must not abandon what we know: namely that this book is a Revelation, particularly of the purpose and reign of the Lord. It is intended to comfort the saints,

not confuse them; to build them up, not tear them down; to prepare them for what is coming, not drown them in a sea of difficulty. **The focus of this section of the vision is the throne, not what is around it.** Therefore, we must consider everything in light of the Sovereign Lord.

Encircled around the throne were twenty four additional thrones. They were not independent of the central throne, but dependent upon it. The twenty-four thrones were occupied by twenty-four elders--seasoned and mature in their occupancy of the thrones. The elders are pure and holy, as seen in their white garments. They are also reigning, as depicted by their golden crowns. All of this is *“around the throne,”* indicating that they are approved by God in the capacity in which they are presented, i.e., pure and reigning.

Six times in this book, reference is made to the twenty-four elders (4:4,10; 5:8,14; 11:16; 19:4). In every instance, after we are introduced to them (4:4), the elders are said to *“fall down”* before the One upon the central throne. They have an acute awareness of the Lord’s Person and purpose, and willingly acquiesce to His rule, giving Him the honor due His name. Although they have crowns on their heads, they cast them down before the throne of God (4:10). Continually, they worship and praise the Lord (5:11,14; 7:11; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). They also present to God the prayers of the saints (5:8), and one of their number comforts John when he wept because the book of destiny was unable to be opened (5:5). One of this sacred number even expounds one of the visions to John (7:13). An active cluster of holy personalities, indeed! They know God! They honor God! They bring prayers to God. They discern the need for comfort and thus minister it. They even have understanding of the workings of the Lord. Who are these twenty-four elders?

### **Old Testament Imagery**

First, the imagery is taken from the Old Testament Scriptures. Of old

time, prophets depicted a council, of

From this view, the twenty-four elders portray the entire priesthood of believers who have fought a good fight and finished their course. They are circled around the throne, participating in the reign of the Almighty. Here is the body of the redeemed who have finished the race, brought into accord with the One sitting upon the throne.

sorts, surrounding the Lord. One vivid picture is presented by the obscure prophet Micaiah. It is one of the more arresting passages in the Old Scriptures. ***“Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then He said, ‘You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.’ Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you”*** (1 Kgs 22:19-23). In the book of Job, we read of the ***“sons of God”*** presenting themselves before Him (Job 1:6; 2:11). Isaiah wrote of God reigning in glory before the presence of ***“His elders,”*** or ancient ones (Isa 24:23). While, in one sense, God reigns ***“alone”*** (Isa 44:24), He has also called personalities around Him to participate in His government. This is His manner, which accounts for His aggressiveness in the matter of salvation.

Another perspective may be seen in the manner in which the priests served under the Law. Priests were so numerous, they could not all serve simultaneously. They were therefore divided into twenty-four groups (1 Chron 24:7-18). The Levites were also divided into twenty-

four clusters for temple activity, which included praising God with musical instruments (1 Chron 25:6-31). It is interesting to note that the twenty-four elders of Revelation also have harps (5:8). The imagery was introduced under the Law, and now it is seen in its reality.

### **A Depiction of the Redeemed**

From this view, the twenty-four elders portray the entire priesthood of believers who have fought a good fight and finished their course. They are circled around the throne, participating in the reign of the Almighty. Here is the body of the redeemed who have finished the race, brought into accord with the One sitting upon the throne. They left this world via death (with the exception of Elijah), appearing to have been losers. But now they are seen on thrones, with crowns! In the consummate sense, they have been washed from their sins, and are kings and priests unto God, as declared in the first chapter of Revelation (1:5-6).

This is a picture of the redeemed of the Lord, the body of Christ, or the *“saved,”* who are no longer in the body. We know this to be the case, because they become involved in the pouring out of judgments upon the earth (11:16). They are presented from heaven’s point of view. They are in close proximity to God, they are holy, and they are reigning. They are not asleep in the grave, as some suppose, but are alive and consciously encircling the throne of God. They speak! They praise! They admonish! They cast their crowns down before their Lord! They are conscious and active while the world remains—John saw them!

We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by the number of the elders. The point is that, in Christ Jesus, God has gathered participants around Himself. They are now involved in His government in an introductory manner. In the world to come, they will adjudicate the kingdom, which will be given to them (Dan 7:18,22,27). Some have suggested that the number twenty-four represents the twelve Jewish patriarchs, and the twelve Apostles. I prefer to view it *as “whole family*

*in heaven and earth,”* which is named after Jesus (Eph 3:15)--a number taken from both Jew and Gentile.

There can be no question about these elders typifying the redeemed who have completed their race. The song they sang to God makes this clear. *“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”* (Rev 5:10). This cannot be said of any angel, or cherubim, or seraphim! It is a description belonging to those redeemed from the fall!

### **Around the Throne**

One final word about the position of these thrones, and those sitting upon them. They are *“around the throne.”* They are not in a room, or location, by themselves, as though representing an independent reign. They are not separate like Israel was in Goshen, removed from the seat of power. Nor, indeed, are these thrones found in the outer court, or even in the Holy Place. They are thrones of rule, not positions of servile activity or mere routine. These are expressions of Sovereign rule--an extension of the reign of the Almighty!

By the same token, the further one is from God, the less authority is possessed, and the less power one has with God. One of the great tragedies of our times is that contemporary religion initiates and maintains a religion of distance from God. It is no wonder it is so powerless!

In all of this, we must see that heaven is a place of rule (Dan 4:26). Remember, a door into heaven was standing ajar, and John saw that realm--one where personalities sat on thrones and had crowns. This imagery will be projected throughout this book. Angels will be seen as having power over certain segments of God's kingdom (11:6; 14:18). The overcoming ones have already been declared as destined for power (2:26). **Heaven is a place of rule**, or dominion, and those who are there are associated with authority.

**The closer one is to God, the more apt he is to rule.** This accounts for answered prayers, like that of Moses (Ex 32:10-14) and Elijah (James 5:17-18). Here, in closeness to the Lord, is *where "the prayer of faith"* is prayed, and the answer guaranteed (James 5:15). By the same token, the further one is from God, the less authority is possessed, and the less power one has with God. One of the great tragedies of our times is that contemporary religion initiates and maintains a religion of distance from God. It is no wonder it is so powerless! If we have been raised to sit together in *"heavenly places"* (Eph 2:6), no real work of God can be done outside of that realm. Yet, that is the domain concerning which an abysmal and pervading ignorance dominates the average church.

### **Clothed and Crowned**

Later, this white raiment will be defined as *"the righteousness of saints"* (19:8). This is not imputed righteousness, now enjoyed by saints in the world, and in the body (Rom 4:22-24). This is the state of eternal glory, where the people of God are found *"not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"* (Eph 5:27). The righteousness with which they are clothed is what they *"with patience"* waited for through faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:5). They are no longer encumbered with the *"old man,"* which is to consistently be *"put off"* during our earthly pilgrimage (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9). No more do they content with *"another law,"* resident in their *"members,"* which wars against the *"law of"* their *"mind"* (Rom 7:23). *"Wretched man that I am"* (Rom 7:24) never comes from the mouths of these twenty-four elders! Their race has been finished, and their crowns have been won.

They are reigning, not running!

We know this is the case, because this holy group has crowns, and that is something we do not have in this world. We are running to obtain the crown, but we do not have it yet (2 Tim 2:5; 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10).

The judgments that follow are in the interest of the redeemed, God's "*elect*." In particular, those who have been slain for the word of their testimony, and because they were righteous, will join with the Lord in the judgment of the ungodly. Think of the holy individuals now among them: Abel, the holy prophets, John the Baptist, Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, etc. This book will declare the vindication of the martyrs, and the sealing of their testimony! Too, they represent what will be granted to everyone who overcomes. They too will reign, world without end.

## EMITTING FROM THE THRONE

*“And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds (voices, KJV) and peals of thunder.”* This is a throne of activity. Those who blurt out in the flesh, *“Why doesn’t God do something!”* are ignorant, and unworthy to speak. The throne of the Almighty is not dormant or inactive. The Lord is not waiting to rule, He is ruling! Flashes of lightning come from the throne, together with voices and peals of thunder! **Something is going on here!** Divine purpose is being implemented from this throne! The throne vibrates, as it were, with activity—glorious activity!

The throne of the Almighty is not dormant or

inactive. The Lord is not waiting to rule, He is ruling! Flashes of lightning come from the throne, together with voices and peals of thunder!

## **Something is going on here!**

Lightnings, Sounds, and Thunder

*“And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning . . . ”* How reminiscent this is of Mount Sinai! Of that awesome occasion, when the holy Law was given, it is written, *“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were . . . lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain”* (Ex 19:16). And again, *“Now all the people . . . the lightning flashes . . . and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off”* (Ex 20:18). Nature is violently disrupted when God begins to reveal Himself! At Sinai, He revealed His Law. In the book of Revelation, He is revealing the destiny of all who oppose him, as well as those who trust Him.

These bolts of lightning depict the introduction to the discomfiting of the enemies of God. As it is written, *“He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them”* (Psa 18:14). This display shows the world God is about to work—it becomes apparent, and the earth trembles. Again, the Psalms declare, *“The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook”* (Psa 77:18). The immediate reference is the Mount Sinai, where the alienated people were jarred from their murmuring and rebellion by the Presence of the Almighty. But this also reveals the manner of the Lord. When He calls men into account, whether in temporal or eternal judgment, **there is always a prelude of terror**. Whether it is Egypt trembling in the wake of the ten plagues (Ex 12:30), or Jericho trembling at the thought of approaching Israel (Josh 2:10-11), there is always a prologue to Divine judgment.

Jesus spoke of this procedure when referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and also to the end of the world. *“And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matt 24:6-8). Again He said, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken”* (Matt 24:29). Hear His words again, *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken”* (Luke 21:25-26). While men take it upon themselves to neutralize these solemn warnings with stilted theological stances, let all who have ears to hear listen! Jesus spoke of the prelude to Divine judgment—of things that preceded the baring of His holy arm.

When John saw the throne with lightnings, voices, and thunderings emitting from it, he was being told **God was about to work in a climactic way**. The world gathered together against His Son. The church, His people, had been exploited by charlatans, and persecuted by others. Now God is going to respond! **Reaping time is about to come**. Mount Sinai was a small display compared with what will now be revealed.

Think of the Spirit's reference to Divine thunder. *“The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; From heaven He will thunder against them . . . ”* (1 Sam 2:10). *“But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel”* (1 Sam 7:10). *“At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away”* (Psa 104:7). In the remainder of this book, *“thunderings”* will be associated

with the initiation of judgment against the enemies of God. ***“And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound”*** (8:5,6). ***“And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath”*** (16:18-19). At the demise of His enemies, voices and ***“mighty thunderings”*** are heard in heaven, rejoicing that the enemies have been crushed. ***“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”*** (Rev 19:6).

This phenomenon, then, presents us with the God of judgment. That judgment will be in favor of His people, and against all who opposed them, rejecting His Son. You will find His judgment to be a dominant theme in this book. Repeatedly, they are mentioned (Rev 6:10; 11:18; 15:4; 16:5,7; 17:1; 18:8,10; 19:2; 20:4,12).

### **Seven Lamps of Fire**

We have read of these lamps, ***“which are the seven Spirits of God,”*** before (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). This refers to the working of the Holy Spirit, always active in the execution of Divine objectives. Whether preparing men for salvation, or for Divine judgment, the Spirit is at work in the initiatives of God. He brooded upon the face of the primeval deep in creation (Gen 1:2), strove with men prior to the flood (Gen 6:3), and convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11). Notice, these seven lamps were ***“burning,”*** depicting the intense and effective activity of the Spirit of God.

One last thing to observe in this remarkable picture: **everything centers in the throne of God!** John saw **the throne** . The reigning twenty-four elders were around **the throne** . The lightnings, thunders, and voices emitted from **the throne** . And the seven-fold Spirit is *“before the throne.”* **The affairs of the earth are in the control of our Lord!** He is ruling *“in the midst”* of His *“enemies”* (Psa 110:2). The persecuted saints are to derive comfort from this perspective: *“The heavens do rule!”* The Kingdom into which we have been translated is **THRONE-CENTERED!** It is only as this is seen that profitable participation is realized.

## A SEA OF GLASS

*“ . . . and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal . . . ”* The imagery is taken from the tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, where a giant cast sea, or laver, was prepared. It was fifteen feet across and seven and one-half feet high. On the right and left hand of this large *“sea”* were ten lavers (five on each side) in which the priests washed things to be offered in sacrifice. But the priests themselves washed in the larger *“sea”* (2 Chron 4:6). The tabernacle had a brass laver that stood before its door, made from the looking glasses used by the women who served at the door of the *“tabernacle of the congregation”* (Ex 38:8).

We are now beholding that of which the tabernacle was but a *“pattern.”* It was for this reason that God commanded Moses to be precise in the production of the Tabernacle. It was a projection in physical apparatus of heavenly things. As it is written, *“ as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount”* (Heb 8:5; Ex 25:40; 26:30; 27:8; Num 8:4). Solomon’s Temple was also built in strict accord with *“the plans*

*of all that the Spirit had put in his mind*” (1 Chron 28:12, NIV), which God gave to David. In David’s own words, *“All this I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan”* (1 Chron 28:19, NIV). The reason for this demand for precision involved more than simply being exact in obedience. The requirement for exactness is found in the image being projected by the tabernacle and temple--the way of approach to God. Now, in the Revelation of Jesus, we are seeing the substance of which the tabernacle and temple were but figures.

### **Like Crystal**

How different is this sea from the seas of this world. In the world, the *“sea”* is a picture of agitation and tumult. Isaiah said, *“But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt”* (Isa 57:20). Jeremiah associated the sea with tumultuous roaring (Jer 6:23), and Ezekiel spoke of troublous times being *“as the sea causes its waves to come up”* (Ezek 26:3). But this is not the picture before the throne of the Almighty! There is no agitation born of uncertainty there! While God is *“angry with the wicked every day”* (Psa 7:11), yet heaven is peaceful, tranquil, and unagitated. How refreshing it must have been for John, surrounding by the rolling and foaming Aegean Sea, to behold the tranquil realm of the heavenly throne!

**The closer you get to the throne of God, the more aware you become that God is in control.** Conversely, the less aware you are of heavenly places, the more things appear to be out of control. The association of this sea with the laver of washing depicts a God that has forgiven us without Himself being disrupted. Among men, it is possible for supposed forgiveness to be wrapped in a volatile atmosphere—but it is not so in heaven. The shouts of the crowd during the triumphal entry were more true than they imagined. *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”* (Luke 19:38). The peaceful realms of heaven may be realized now by

faith.

It is tranquil there!

## THE FOUR BEASTS (Living Creatures)

These “*living creatures*” are mentioned throughout this book. Mentioned thirteen times, they are ALWAYS found near to the throne and the Lamb of God (4:6,8,9; 5:6,8,11,14; 6:1,6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7). They are a primary part of this book, clarifying the nature of the activity around the throne of God.

*“ . . . and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within . . . ”* These “*living creatures*” are mentioned throughout this book. Mentioned thirteen times, they are ALWAYS found near to the throne and the Lamb of God (4:6,8,9; 5:6,8,11,14; 6:1,6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7). They are a primary part of this book, clarifying the nature of the activity around the throne of God.

These four beasts, or “*living creatures*” (NASB) have been mentioned before in Scripture. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel saw the throne of God, and made mention of similar beings. Similarities in the visions are found in table #1. The creatures in Isaiah’s vision are called

*“Seraphim”* (Isa 6:2), while the ones in Ezekiel’s vision are called *“Cherubim”* (Ezek 10:1). Both prophets saw *“creatures”* in the immediate proximity of the throne (Isa 6:1; Ezek 1:26; 10:1). In Revelation, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, the *“living creatures”* are noted for intelligent activities and expression. Raw emotion and expressions without objectivity are not found about throne of the universe.

We are introduced to this high order of personalities at the very threshold of human history. A representative or representatives of their number guarded the entrance to the *“tree of life,”* not allowing any to approach it (Gen 3:24). They were also prominent in the tabernacle service. The *“mercy seat,”* which covered the ark of the covenant, was adorned with two *“cherubim”* –one on each side of it (Ex 25:18-20). Made of solid gold, their wings spread over the top of the mercy seat, while they faced each other looking toward the mercy seat. In the tabernacle service God communicated with the high priest from the mercy seat. His promise was, *“And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel”* (Ex 25:22). Artistic designs of Cherubim were also found on the curtains of the tabernacle (Ex 26:1; 36:8), and on the veil of separation as well (Ex 26:31; 36:35). These figures were also prominent in the Temple (1 Kgs 6:23-30; 2 Chron 3:7). A remarkable picture of the throne room of the Almighty, surrounded by lofty personalities with His mercy being prominent! As the priests ministered within the tabernacle, they became acutely conscious of God Himself, and a surrounding entourage of lofty personalities! This is what we are witnessing in the Revelation.

### **In the Midst, and Round About**

The kingdom of God is **THRONE-CENTERED** ,  
not world-centered! It deals with what God is

doing, not what man is doing. **The most productive activity in this kingdom is therefore proclamation, not application!** Those who serve God are not primarily resolver of human dilemmas, but announcers of the Divine agenda.

These “*living creatures*” are ALWAYS found near the throne (4:6,8,9; 5:6,8,11,14; 6:1,6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7). While, in a sense, God is God alone, **His reign is one of participation** in which other personalities take part. We see this in creation, where it was said, “*Let US make man*” (Gen 1:26). We learn from Scripture this referred to the pre-incarnate Word, through Whom God “*created all things*” (Eph 3:9). As it is written, “*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist*” (Col 1:16-17). That is the ultimate in participation—the inter-involvements of the Godhead Itself!

The “*living creatures*” provide us with a glimpse into other personalities participating in the Lord’s reign. Throughout this book we will also be introduced to angels who play a key role (Rev 1:1; 5:2; 7:2; 8:3-13; 9:1; 10:1). Even the saints are involved in Christ’s reign by means of their prayers (Rev 8:4). Ultimately, the saints will reign with Christ free and unencumbered in every sense (Rev 20:4; Dan 7:18,22,27; 1 Cor 6:2-3). In this segment of the Vision, we are seeing the nature of heaven’s rule. **It is one in which several personalities participate under the reign of Christ Jesus.** In the four living creatures we see a very high order of personalities.

Of particular interest here is the area occupied by the living creatures. They were “*in the midst (center) of the throne, and around the throne*” (v. 6). Their focus was the throne of the Lamb! Their activity centers in

Divine rule. As such, they set the tone for all valid endeavor. The kingdom of God is **THRONE-CENTERED**, not world-centered! It deals with what God is doing, not what man is doing. **The most productive activity in this kingdom is therefore proclamation, not application!** Those who serve God are not primarily resolver of human dilemmas, but announcers of the Divine agenda. This is a circumstance that is scarcely known in the contemporary church—at least in the Western world. There are entire systems set up in the name of Christ whose agenda centers in this world.

If anyone could make an application of truth, it would be these living creatures. They are a high order of beings, with unusual insight into what God is doing. Yet, they remain around the throne, unwilling to venture out on their own. How must the impulsive activities of mankind appear to these personalities. I fear the type of persuasions we face in the religious community are far more serious than some would have us believe.

### **Full of Eyes**

These creatures are noted for their inscrutable wisdom. The fulness of their eyes is said to be *“in front and behind,”* and also *“within”* (4:4,6). They know things to come (eyes in front), and have insight into the past (eyes behind). They also have a propensity to perceive what is occurring (eyes within). Noted for their understanding, they are filled with praise, for praise is provoked by understanding.

There is another aspect of the Kingdom that is seen here. **The progress of the Messianic rule is characterized by inscrutable wisdom.** The *“eternal purpose,”* determined before the foundation of the world, is never placed into the background. The character of God is never ignored. The nature of man, the malice of the devil, and the exaltation of the Lamb of God are always prominent. While there are outbursts of praise, they are always insightful. Every determination is

noted for Divine objectivity. **There are no obtuse personalities around the Lord's throne.** There is no involvement divorced from high and lofty purpose. Participation without insight may occur at a distance from the throne, but never in its proximity. This view devastates religious thrusts that lack objectivity, are founded on raw emotion, and are not marked by spiritual discernment.

## **The Significance of the Imagery**

### **REVELATION 4**

- \* Four creatures (v 6)
- \* Full of eyes (v 5)
- \* Lion, calf, man, eagle (v 7)
- \* Six wings (v 8)
- \* Words (v 8)\*

### **ISAIAH 6**

- \* Seraphim (v.2)

- \* Six wings (v 2)
- \* Words said (v 3)

### **EZEKIEL 1**

\* Four creatures (v 5)

\* Man, lion, ox, eagle

(v 10)

\* Four wings (v 6)

## EZEKIEL 10

\* Cherubim (v 1)

\* Full of eyes (v 12)

\* Cherub, man, lion,

eagle (v 14)

\* Four wings (v 21)

***“The first living creature was like a lion . . . ”*** Here is a portrayal of strength that is never intimidated. Solomon provided an expression of this type of strength. ***“A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any”*** (Prov 30:30). It is also a depiction of one of the wild beast category of living things. The lion is also supreme among such beasts.

***“ . . . the second living creature like a calf . . . ”*** Here was a very prominent animal of sacrifice (Lev 9:2-8), a depiction of continual recognition of Christ’s vicarious atonement. Here also is a picture of another order of living things—the domesticated. The calf, or ox, is supreme among cattle.

***“ . . . the third living creature had a face like a man . . . ”*** Here is a depiction of the loftiest of all Divine creation—intelligent life, made in the very image of God (Gen 1:27). Man is supreme among all creatures.

**“ . . . the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.”** The eagle soars high, winging its way to lofty heights, yet having most keen vision. Those waiting upon the Lord are noted for mounting up with wings like an eagle (Isa 40:31), which is noted for renewed strength (Psa 103:5). The eagle is supreme among birds.

Here is a marvelous depiction of all things being made by and for Christ. As it is written, **“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist”** (Col 1:16-17). Nothing can properly be viewed apart from association with the Lord. Even the creation, in all of its diversity, has been touched by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. To this very day it **“groans”** in expectant travail, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom 8:18-19). It is then that it will be liberated from the corruption imposed upon it because of man’s sin (Rom 8:20-21).

As Christ represents humanity, so these living creatures represent the totality of creation, made for the purpose and pleasure of the Almighty. They are real personalities that form a continual reminder of the purpose and coming culmination of all things. Although much more can be said on this subject, this will suffice for this time.

There is also a view which has the four living creatures standing for the four Gospels. The face of a man is said to apply to Matthew who presented Jesus as a MAN. The face of a lion is understood to refer to Mark, who presented Jesus as KING. The calf, or ox, is said to refer to Luke, who presented Jesus as SERVANT. Finally, the eagle is seen as referring to John who declared Jesus in His high and lofty attributes.

This view was first taught by Augustine around the fourth century. For myself, this seems to be stretching the imagery of this chapter. Too, I am not persuaded that this is a clear presentation of the Gospels.

### **The Six Wings**

The versatility of the *“living creatures”* is seen in their six wings. Isaiah saw the six-winged seraphim and provided some insight on the matter. *“Each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew”* (Isa 6:2). The inexplicable glory of the Lord is too great to be viewed without a covering, and thus two wings are used to cover the face. Humility before the Lord is seen in the covering of the feet. Insightful obedience is depicted by the two wings with which they flew. The picture of Isaiah saw presents the seraphim as hovering over the throne, ready to instantly respond to the command of their Lord. For them, it was much like Israel eating the Passover with their staff in hand, shoes on their feet, and girded for immediate departure. Those, of course, who consider winged heavenly creatures an absurdity, do well to become more familiar with the Word of God.

### **Who are the Living Creatures**

I take it that these are the cherubim who kept the way to the tree of life. They were portrayed in the tabernacle. God Himself, it is written, *“rode upon the cherub”* at Mount Sinai (2 Sam 22:11; Psa 18:10); i.e., His presence was made known through them. In rich tabernacle imagery Asaph wrote, *“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!”* (Psa 80:10). Surrounding the throne, these remarkable beings fill the air with *“Holy”* and *“Amen,”* suitable responses for those in the Divine presence (5:14; 19:4).

## **HEAVENLY EXPRESSIONS**

Again, I want to emphasize the nature of heavenly praise. It flows from understanding, and reflects insight. While imperfect expressions may be employed upon earth in what is called praise, no such thing exists in heaven!

*“ . . . and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”* The ascriptions of honor are ceaseless. The greatness of the conquering Lamb is the subject of inquiry and expression in heaven. It is our aim to have it dominant among us as well!

Notice the insightfulness of this praise. No shallow expression before the throne! Those who content themselves with superficial expressions of praise do not do well. Simplicity has its place, but it is never close to the throne of God! The character of God is discerned and ascribed to Him. His authority and eternity are recognized. Glory is given to the Lord, together with honor and thanksgiving.

### **Holy, Holy, Holy!**

Being close to the throne, the *“four living creatures”* see the

dominance of His holiness. In his vision, Isaiah also saw holy beings crying ***“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts”*** (Isa 6:3). In particular, He is holy in all of His ways, words, and judgments. It is one thing to say God is holy, it is quite another to see, or perceive, it. By ascribing holiness to the Lord, He is being given glory and honor. As it is written, ***“The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works”*** (Psa 145:17). This righteousness is particularly seen in the government of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is seated upon the throne. The manner in which He is bringing ***“many sons to glory”*** (Heb 2:10) is righteous! He is impeccably ***“holy”*** in His Word—His assessments, demands, and direction. A delineation of His holiness is expressed in Psalm 89:14. ***“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.”***

In the record that follows, the saints of God will be given over for a season to an enemy who will overpower them (Rev 13:7). Fierce judgments will be poured out upon the wicked (14:7; 17:1; 18:10). In all of this, the King is ***“holy, holy, holy!”*** Those who question His judgments only acknowledge their distance from the throne! The ***“living creatures,”*** however, always see and confess to the holiness of their Lord. We do well to follow their example.

### **Prostrate Worship**

At the announcement of the King’s holiness, ***“the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him.”*** While it is fashionable in our day to stand and ***“worship,”*** of old time people ***“fell down”*** and worshiped (Psa 72:11; Matt 2:11; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 5:14; 19:4; 22:8). This portrays the redeemed acknowledging the Source of their salvation, the uprightness of their Savior, and their absolute subjection to Him. No assertiveness of self-will here—not before the throne!

It was their cognizance of the One upon the throne that moved them

to so worship. It was not, however, mere appearance, but an awareness that He *“lives forever and ever.”* Upon being confronted with the King’s holiness, the twenty-four elders fall down and worshiped! Again, I want to emphasize the nature of heavenly praise. It flows from understanding, and reflects insight. While imperfect expressions may be employed upon earth in what is called praise, no such thing exists in heaven! Satan demanded such worship from Jesus (Matt 4:9), and Nebuchadnezzar demanded it of the Hebrews children (Dan 3:5-15). But God and the Lamb alone are worthy of such worship!

Once again, praise is elicited by the announcement of the Divine character. It is intelligent praise, flowing from the understanding. *“Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”* *“Glory”* accentuates the apparentness of the Lord’s working—i.e., it was revealed. *“Honor”* speaks of lifting Him up because what He has done is seen. *“Power”* declares an understanding that all authority is resident in the One Who sits upon the throne. This is insightful praise

#### Crowns Cast Down

By casting their crowns *“before the throne,”* these, who were sitting upon thrones, acknowledged their reign was given to them. They were *“made”* kings (Rev 1:5-6). From one perspective, when before the Throne, their crowns became insignificant. What are achievements—even valid ones—when we are before the Throne of God and of the

Lamb!

It was no loss to the twenty-four elders to cast their crowns before the throne! In fact, it provides the secret for keeping the crowns—recognition of the One Who gave them. In a sense, we begin to do this even now by acknowledging, ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am”*** (1 Cor 15:10). It is, after all, God Himself Who ***“works in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”*** (Phil 2:13). The *throne-zone* is characterized by an acute awareness of the Source of blessing and rule.

### **Divine Worthiness**

Once again, praise is elicited by the announcement of the Divine character. It is intelligent praise, flowing from the understanding. ***“Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”*** ***“Glory”*** accentuates the apparentness of the Lord’s working—i.e., it was revealed. ***“Honor”*** speaks of lifting Him up because what He has done is seen. ***“Power”*** declares an understanding that all authority is resident in the One Who sits upon the throne. This is insightful praise (as though there were any other kind).

I cannot overemphasize this fact. The closer we are to the Throne—the presence of the Lord—the more intelligent our praise becomes. It is my persuasion that contemporary *Christianity* is majoring on the *mechanics* of praise, but is sorely lacking in the area of insight. That indicates that much of what is called praise is really not praise at all. It is not the result of seeing the One on the throne.

Notice that the worthiness of the Lamb is associated with creation. This is not the only reason for worthiness being ascribed to Him. Later the Lamb will be extolled in these words, ***“You are . . . For You were***

*slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10).* However, the honor begins with our Lord being the Creator! **“For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”** Although men can arrange, discover, and rearrange, they cannot create! God alone can do that! The assessments that He has made of the churches were made in this authority. The judgments that follow in this book are executed uprightly and in truth.

## CONCLUSION

We have peered through a door standing ajar in heaven. The glimpse afforded to us sets the remainder of the book in perspective. The book of destiny is nothing less than the execution of the Monarch of creation—the Lord of all. The government has been placed upon His shoulder, and the Revelation reveals how He is governing. We will see history from the perspective of the Throne!

**This government is being implemented in an arena of participation.** While God can rule alone, He has chosen not to do so. First, He is ruling through His Son, the exalted Lamb. Second, the Son employs various personalities from angels to men to fulfill His will. Even the devil and all of his forces, both spiritual and fleshly, move within the circumference of His will. They are used by Him, but He is never used by them!

**The will of the Lord is done in an environment of insightful praise.** The purpose of God is intelligent. The reign of the Lamb is thoughtful and purposeful. And, the involvements of those close to the throne are also characterized by perception and understanding. Let us resolve to put behind us a religion that lacks purpose, and is not distinguished by

spiritual insight. Redemption has brought us to God—to the Throne. As we become more perceptive of this environ, the traits of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders will also be found in us.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 11

## THE BOOK OF DIVINE INTENT

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. " (Revelation 5:1-14, Nkjv)

## INTRODUCTION

The stage has been set for the revelation of the future. Specifically, for the unfolding of the purpose of God as it is fulfilled under the administration of the Lord Jesus Christ. ***“Spiritual understanding”*** is administered from the “throne zone.” Hearts and minds must be elevated into the heavenlies before any accurate understanding of the work of the Lord can be experienced. Our entrance into higher realms cannot be casual. John was ***“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,”*** and was told, ***“Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this”*** (1:10; 4:1).

A heavenly perspective is not critical to an academic view of Scripture. But if you want the view of Jesus, which is the only valid view, you must set your affection where He is, and seek the things that are there (Col 3:1-2). That is precisely what we see occurring in this book.

Up! Up! Up! It is a key word regarding the current reign of Jesus. When Jesus blessed the loaves and fishes, He looked ***“UP into heaven”*** (Matt 14:19). When He ascended, He was received ***“UP into heaven”*** (Mark 16:19). The Gospel of Luke says He was ***“carried UP into heaven”*** (Luke 24:51). When Paul heard words that could not be uttered in earthly language, he said he was ***“caught UP to the third heaven,”*** and ***“was caught UP into paradise”*** (2 Cor 12:2,4). Regeneration involves being ***“raised . . . UP together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:6). When at last we put on immortality, and the natural order passes away, we will be ***“caught UP together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”*** (1 Thess 4:17).

This is not a mere academic exercise. Rather, it confirms that **spiritual insight, regardless of its level, can only occur in separation from the world order** . Our hearts and minds must rise above the world and its cares in order to apprehend the things of God. This is why the Spirit strongly urges, *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Col 3:1-3). The church has been plagued with lifeless academia, which does not require coming up into heavenly places. A heavenly perspective is not critical to an academic view of Scripture. But if you want the view of Jesus, which is the only valid view, you must set your affection where He is, and seek the things that are there (Col 3:1-2). That is precisely what we see occurring in this book.

The door was opened *“in heaven!”* The throne that is seen is **in heaven** ! The one sitting on the throne is **in heaven** ! The twenty four elders are **in heaven** . The four living creatures are **in heaven** ! The book to which we will now be introduced is **in heaven** ! We are going to be brought up high, and then given a view of the Lord’s workings from the heavenly point of view. We will see the saints from heaven’s perspective. The activities of the evil one, and all those in alliance with him, will be seen from this high perspective.

### **Not A Mysterious Realm**

Rather than being a mysterious realm, this is the domain where things are more clearly seen. The *“open door”* could not be seen from earth. The throne and He that sat upon it cannot be seen from the world. We will now be introduced to a *“book”* that cannot be seen from this world. That is another way of saying the working of God cannot be comprehended with the natural mind. That, of course, is the precise statement of the Spirit. *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor 2:14).

As obvious as this is, men will dispute it, declaring that man is capable of discerning without being in heavenly places, or possessing the Spirit of God. This only reveals how lowly their considerations are. Were the professed people of God to occupy themselves with the purpose of God, the blessings of God, and the promises of God, they would soon find out how challenging they are. Questions like “*What is the Lord doing?*”, “*How is Jesus reigning?*”, and “*What is the role of the saints in the Divine rule?*” are too weighty for the carnal or natural mind. That is why the contemporary church has chosen to speak of other things, and to follow another agenda. Were men to occupy themselves more with the Lord, and less with the activities of men, they would soon understand both God and man better!

## THE BOOK IS SEEN

*“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.”* The Sovereign God, seated upon the throne, is now seen with something in His hand. It is in His right hand, indicative of something within His power and control. John sees that it is a “*book,*” --to be more precise, a “*scroll.*” It is filled with writing, on “*the front and on the back,*” or, as we would say it, *on both sides of the paper* . It is also sealed with seven seals, so that the writing cannot be read.

### Similar to Ezekiel’s Vision

The book of Revelation is also a book of Divine judgment. It is not, however, limited in its execution, as it was in the scroll seen by Ezekiel,

and the book of Daniel. God will deal with all who have lifted up their heel against Him! His terrors will be directed toward kings and governments that rose against Him. The false prophets and pretending church will also be judged by God.

The vision is similar to one had by Ezekiel, and doubtless represents a manner in which God divulges His workings to the sons of men. Ezekiel's experience is recorded in the second chapter of his book. Like John the Apostle, the prophet of old was in captivity (Ezek 1:1). He was also by a body of water, the "**river of Chebar.**" Instead of facing the glorified Christ, Ezekiel was confronted with "**a whirlwind**" that "**came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire**" (1:4). He was being confronted with Deity, but not in the advanced manner as the Apostle John. He also faced "**four living creatures**" (1:5-26). He also saw a rainbow, as did John (1:27-28). Instead of being "**in the Spirit**" and being summoned up higher, Ezekiel was told to stand on his feet. The Spirit then entered into him, and he stood upon his feet. He too was told he was being sent with a message. His message was to the children of Israel. John's was to "**the churches.**"

Ezekiel was shown the "**roll of a book,**" remarkably like that of John the beloved. "**And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe**" (2:9-10). This was a book of judgment, a record of Divine reappraisals upon the disobedient children of Israel. The imagery is too much like that of the Revelation to be coincidental. This, too, is a book of Divine judgment.

### **Daniel's Experience**

Daniel the prophet was also made privy to things written in the book

of Divine intent. A mighty angel told him, ***“I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth”*** (Dan 10:21). He was not talking about the writings of Moses and the Prophets, but about what was recorded in heaven. Other versions translate ***“scripture of truth”*** as ***“book of truth”*** ((RSV, NRSV, NIV). It is the same book John saw, although Daniel’s exposure to it was comparatively limited. The angel appearing to Daniel prepared to divulge to him what God had determined to be done.

### **A Book of Judgment**

The book of Revelation is also a book of Divine judgment. It is not, however, limited in its execution, as it was in the scroll seen by Ezekiel, and the book of Daniel. God will deal with all who have lifted up their heel against Him! His terrors will be directed toward kings and governments that rose against Him (6:15; 11:15). The false prophets and pretending church will also be judged by God (14:9; 16:19; 18:2,10,21; 19:20; 20:10). Although the Revelation mentions the final judgment of all men (20:12-13), the body of this book, in the right hand of God, does not deal with that reckoning. Neither, indeed, will we find the writing of this book confined to ***“lamentation and woe,”*** as that of Ezekiel.

### **Written Within and Without**

Written within and without, or on the front and back, **this book is the title-deed of the church** --the tracing of its history in the world, and the glorious outcome of it all. The fact that we see a ***“book”*** underscores that we are seeing the fulfillment of Divine purpose. It is a declaration of things to come. As it is written, ***“And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them”*** (Isa 42:9). And again, ***“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’”*** (Isa 46:10). God never acts by impulse or caprice, but always by design. As it is written, ***“In whom also we***

*have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ”* (Eph 1:11-12).

The writing within and without also reveals there is **nothing dull or monotonous** in the working of our Lord. There is continuous activity, for our God neither sleeps nor slumbers (Psalm 121:3-4). Pointing to this aspect of the Divine nature (continually working), Jesus said, **“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working”** (John 5:17, NASB). When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord (John 12:41), the Seraphim were drawing attention to the working of the God. **“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isa 6:3), i.e., with evidence of His prodigious work..

## **In God’s Right Hand**

### ***Fulfilling His Purpose***

We will find that the book is in a Divine hand that is open. The Lord is not gripping the book, but holding it forth in an open and willing hand. We know this is the case, because a challenge will be issued to open the book, not the right hand of God. This picture is nothing less than a depiction of the willingness of our great God to make His works known to the sons of men.

By being **“in the right hand”** of the living God, we learn this is not a mere prediction of what will happen. It is a book of, what I have chosen to call, **Divine intent** . This is nothing less than the delineation of the

purpose of God. It is also the opening of the reign of Christ Jesus, and some of its principle involvements. There is Divine Sovereignty revealed here, for ***“the right hand”*** of God is one of power and invincibility. His ***“right hand”*** is associated with ***“saving strength”*** (Psalm 20:6), the procurement of blessing (Psalm 78:54), and victory (Psalm 98:1). All of this tells us that **God uses His power to achieve His objective, or purpose.**

### ***With the Church in Mind***

The future is viewed with the church, or body of Christ, as the primary cluster of people. Others are mentioned as they relate to this church, whether friend or foe. We must see that the future of the church, or ***“things that must be hereafter,”*** is in the hand of the Lord. We are NOT on an uncharted sea! How often this is emphasized in Scripture. ***“Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them”*** (Isa 42:9). ***“And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them”*** (Isa 44:7). ***“Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me”*** (Isa 45:11). ***“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”*** (Isa 46:9-10). ***“I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I showed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them”*** (Isa 48:5-6).

You will recall that God even revealed the future to Nebuchadnezzar

in a dream, although he was a heathen. Daniel opened the matter to him, explaining **what God was doing** . ***“I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I showed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them”*** (Dan 2:28-29).

### ***God’s Will, Not Man’s***

With all of man’s wisdom, he cannot determine the future. We do well not to ascribe too much significance to the will of man. It is the will of the Lord that will be done, man notwithstanding! When speaking of the foreknowledge of God, an emphasis is placed upon what **HE** is doing. As it is written, ***“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”*** (Acts 15:18). The workings of the Lord are precise and extensive. After delineating the purpose of God regarding both Jew and Gentile, Paul exclaimed, ***“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”*** (Rom 11:36). That is a doctrinal statement that parallels the vision of the book in the right hand of God!

### ***An Open Hand***

We will find that the book is in a Divine hand that is open. The Lord is not gripping the book, but holding it forth in an open and willing hand. We know this is the case, because a challenge will be issued to open the book, not the right hand of God. This picture is nothing less than a depiction of the willingness of our great God to make His works known to the sons of men. How frequently our Lord has revealed this aspect of His Person. Glorious phrases are woven throughout the text of Scripture that portray a willing God. ***“. . . to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God”*** (Psalm 50:23). ***“With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation”*** (Psalm

91:16). *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* (Jer 33:3). Any hindrance in our understanding is not due to God, or any unwillingness on His part. The open hand of Omnipotence confirms that if we are straitened, or hindered, it is due to our meager spiritual appetites. Thus it is written, *“You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections”* (2 Cor 6:12, NASB).

The understanding of the future, particularly as it regards the people of God, is seen in the context of an open, willing, gracious, kind, and beneficent hand! To consider the future from any other perspective is to cause the curtain of obscurity to fall upon our heart and understanding.

### *The Primary Use of His Power*

Although God DOES react to disobedience and rebellion, as with the world of Noah’s day, Sodom, Egypt, and wayward Israel, that is not the primary use of His Divine power. It is also true that God blesses and sustains the righteous, often causing them to prosper in the midst of impossible circumstances. Yet, that is not the dominant use of His strength. **Essentially, His power is used for the execution and fulfillment of His PURPOSE** --conceived before the world began. One of the primary teachings of Scripture is that, as men become willingly involved in this purpose, Divine power sustains and benefits them personally.

Any hindrance in our understanding is not due to God, or any unwillingness on His part. The open hand of Omnipotence confirms that if we are straitened, or hindered, it is due to our meager spiritual appetites. Thus it is written, “You are not

restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections”

All of this is to say that the book held in the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne, is a **full disclosure** (written on the front and the back) of the working of the Lord in the world. It is not a declaration of the working of Satan, but of the fulfillment of God’s purpose in spite Satan. Here we will not be given a commentary on the work of an antichrist, false church, and wicked governments. Rather, we will be shown the futility of their activities. **Here, we will see the final resolution of the affairs of the earth.** History (past, present, and future), will be viewed from the standpoint of God’s *“eternal purpose.”* God has a purpose, and it will be fulfilled to the most infinite detail before the universe goes up in flame!

### A Sealed Book

The **book** in the right hand of God was not *“open”* like the one seen by Ezekiel (Ezek 2:10). Rather, it was *“sealed with seven seals.”* In this respect, it was like the prophecy given to Daniel--sealed, with the words being *“shut up”* (Dan 12:4). A seven-fold seal is a perfect seal, which means **there is no possible way the contents of this book could be known apart from Divine intervention** . Man, with all of his disciplined learning, history, and language expertise cannot pry into the mind of the Lord. If, by an act of Sovereign good pleasure, God does not divulge what He is doing, there is no possible way of discovering it. On an elementary level, it is absolutely impossible to arrive at a knowledge of God’s workings in Christ Jesus apart from His Word, the Bible. No philosopher, however astute in gifts and disciplines, can discover why Jesus came, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. The significance of the blood of Christ, His current intercession, and the reality of His return could not be discovered--it HAD to be revealed. God’s purpose, so to speak, was *“sealed”* in these matters until He, in His mercy, made them known.

The book is *“in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne.”* The purpose is His. The execution of the purpose belongs to Him. **The future is in His hand because the ONLY reason for a future is the fulfillment of His purpose !** Settle it in your mind: **If God did not have a purpose, there would be no world, and no humanity.** The book is in His hand because He authored it. It is there because He controls it. It is also there because only He can will, or purpose, it to be revealed. There is no spiritual understanding apart from *“the Lamb.”* His Sovereignty over the Kingdom includes the administration of wisdom and understanding. Both are resident in, and hidden with, Him. The pride of man has moved many to reject this condition. Yet, it remains impossible to learn of eternal matters with Him. All praise to Him!

## THE ARRESTING CHALLENGE

The book is not intended to remain sealed. God wants His purpose to be known. But first, He must show the need of Himself in the matter. The book has been seen, or, to state it another way, the announcement has been made that He does have intentions. Now the universe is challenged on the matter.

*“Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’”* Suddenly *“a strong angel”* appears on the scene. He cries out with a shout that reverberates throughout the universe. *“Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”* The book is not intended to remain sealed.

God wants His purpose to be known. But first, He must show the need of Himself in the matter. The book has been seen, or, to state it another way, the announcement has been made that He does have intentions. Now the universe is challenged on the matter.

Notice, a “**strong angel**” shouts the challenge with a “*loud voice*” that penetrates every area occupied by personalities or things created. But he does NOT ask who is **strong** enough to open the seals, but who is “*worthy*” to open, or break, them. He does NOT ask who is **wise** or **cunning** enough to open them, but who is “*worthy*” to do so. Who can unlock the mystery of Divine purpose? Who, on their own, can open up what God is doing in the earth--or anywhere else?

Consider, a man did not issue this challenge, but a “*strong angel.*” This portrays the posture of angels, as elsewhere declared in Scripture. Particularly regarding salvation, it is said of them, “. . . *unto us they* (the prophets, v. 11) *did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into*” (1 Pet 1:12). From our standpoint, how anxious this angel must have been to hear a response to his challenge: “*Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?*”

### **Worthiness, the Preeminent Requirement**

The preeminent qualification is WORTHINESS! How different from the requirements of “*this present evil world!*” Here men are afforded privileges upon the basis of appearance, accomplishments, or even their oratorical abilities. Others are qualified because of their academic credentials, or remarkable feats. But that is not the criteria in heaven! Worthiness **in the sight of God** is the qualifying factor! We must learn that God will not allow unholy and unworthy people to handle eternal things, much less understand them!

But this worthiness involves more than moral excellence. We will find that **accomplishment** will be the deciding factor. The one who is worthy must have achieved something of high value to God. And thus the shout reverberates throughout all created realms, ***“Who is worthy?”*** John waits with anxious heart! Surely, in this high and holy place, someone will be found worthy to open the book and break the seals that hide the future. The cherubim and seraphim are here, together with mighty angels like Michael and Gabriel. Twenty four elders are here, having completed their race, and sitting upon thrones. Perhaps one from this distinguished population will rise in reply to the challenge.

### **No One Is Able!**

***“And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.”*** Silence reigns supreme in answer to the summons! Among all the ***“spirits of just men made perfect”*** (Heb 12:23), there is not a solitary individual found worthy to open the book—or, to delineate the working of the Lord! Among that number were Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul. But they were not worthy to open the book. Upon earth, among the godly, among those walking in the light, none could be found who could declare ***“the things that must be hereafter.”*** Even ***“under the earth,”*** in unseen realms, there was no person found worthy to open the book! No historian was worthy! No language expert was worthy! The poverty of all derived wisdom is thus exposed, regardless of who possesses it.

Remember, John the aged Apostle is hearing these words--but he is not worthy either. Do not forget, we are in the very throne room of God. The challenge rings throughout the halls of heaven, ***“Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”*** But there is no answer, no response! There are times, and this is one, when the mouths of everyone are silenced--when the Divine demand is too great. Like Job,

we must lay our hand upon our mouth at such times (Job 40:4). **If the opening of this book depends upon any created being, it will forever be closed!**

## THE FERVENT DESIRE TO KNOW

He weeps much! He was not worthy! The angels were not worthy! The redeemed were not worthy! Not even the four living creatures were worthy! Yet, the book was there, in the open hand of the Lord, awaiting for one worthy to open it. John's love of the truth and at-homeness with the Lord, caused him to weep copiously at this condition.

*“So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.”* Bursting into tears, John begins, and continues, to weep copiously. Oh, he fervently wanted to know *“the things that must be hereafter!”* He was not content, like many, to remain in spiritual ignorance. Nor, indeed, can anyone standing in the presence of the Lord be satisfied to remain ignorant of things that **can** be known! The prevailing ignorance in the church betrays a spiritual condition most serious. Those who *“dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid”* of the workings of the Lord, and thus maintain their distance from them, refusing to probe into His truth (Psalm 65:8).

It is with great sorrow that I must acknowledge the majority of *church* people I know would have been content to remain ignorant of the book in the right hand of God. Some theological expert would have stepped forward to tell us it **cannot** be known, because *“no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the*

*book, neither to look thereon.*” Their religion hinges upon the expertise of men, not upon God. They forget that the book is in God’s hand! So, when men cannot open the matter, they are quite content to let it remain closed. But it was not so with John!

He weeps much! He was not worthy! The angels were not worthy! The redeemed were not worthy! Not even the four living creatures were worthy! Yet, the book was there, in the open hand of the Lord, awaiting for one worthy to open it. John’s love of the truth and at-homeness with the Lord, caused him to weep copiously at this condition.

For the spiritually minded, there is a certain sorrow that attends ignorance. They have a desire to know, and cannot be content to remain in a state of nescience when something can be known--particularly when it regards the purpose of Almighty God. Earnest thinkers are often weeping because they do not understand God’s judgments. They are, after all, *“a great deep”* (Psalm 36:6).

You must see the gravity of the situation. Long ago, the Lord said through Amos, *“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets”* (Amos 3:7, NIV). Now, John has been told he will be shown *“the things that must be hereafter”* — the plan or purpose of God. When he perceives these things as a book in the right hand of God, it is suddenly made known that no one can be found worthy to open the book, or divulge the purpose of God. **It now seems that there is no one in the entire universe to whom God can reveal these secrets!** This appears to contradict God’s word to Amos. We will see that this problem will be resolved, praise the Lord!

### **A Principle to be Seen**

There is an important principle to be seen here. William Barclay, past

lecturer from the University of Glasgow, once said, *“It is a problem when the teacher cannot deliver a message to a congregation totally incapable of comprehending it. It is the eternal problem of love; love cannot tell its truths or give its gifts to those incapable of hearing or receiving. The need of the world is for men and women who will keep themselves sensitive to God. He has a message for the world in every generation; but that message cannot be delivered until there is found a man capable of receiving it. And day by day we either fit or unfit ourselves to receive the message of God.”*

A weighty consideration, indeed. And it is much more true of God than of the teacher. He will NOT **“manifest”** Himself, share His **“secret,”** or **“show”** His covenant, to those unsuited to receive it (John 14:21,23; Psalm 25:14). If ever a person is to learn from God (and it is written **“they shall all be taught by God,”** Isa 2:3; John 6:45), they must have such an intense interest in available truth that they weep when they cannot see it! Oh, that more would hear the Word of God like that! Search the Scriptures for prophets and men of God that spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. None of them were casual or haphazard in their relationship to God. None were given to see heavenly things while dominated by the flesh, or distracted by the world. God simply will not show His truth to those whose ear is uncircumcised (Jer 6:10) and insensitive to Him. This is a truth that MUST be grasped by every soul desiring to know the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Becoming immersed in the world order necessarily excludes one from spiritual understanding. Many a soul has forfeited indispensable Kingdom insights in preference for the carnal mind.

## ONE WITH AUTHORITY TO OPEN THE BOOK

### **Do Not Weep!**

We now embark upon one of the most majestic scenes in all of

Scripture. As John is weeping, one of the twenty-four elders speaks to him. It looks hopeless to the aged Apostle, but it is not! There is really no cause to weep, but as yet, the real situation is hidden from John. He has been told he would be shown *“the things that must be hereafter,”* and now it appears that is not possible.

*“But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep.’”* For the first time, we hear from one of the twenty-four elders, and he has a good word indeed! It is as though John’s genuine interest has been tested, and he has passed the test. The words of the elder remind us of the three times Jesus said them to discouraged and frustrated souls. To the widow of Nain, whose son had died, Jesus said *“Weep not!”* (Luke 7:13). To those at Jairus’ house, weeping and mourning because of the death of his daughter, Jesus said, *“Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth”* (Luke 8:52). As Jesus was on the way to the cross, devout women followed who mourned and lamented. He said to them, *“Weep not . . . ”* (Luke 23:28).

Now, John hears the same words from an enthroned victor from the good fight of faith. It is as though he said, *Your analysis of the situation is wrong! All is not hopeless!* The word of the elder, *“Weep not,”* is similar to other Scriptural exhortations. *“Fret not . . . ”* (Psa 37:1), *“Let not your heart be troubled . . . ”* (John 14:2), and *“Fear not”* (Rev 1:7). This is a word of comfort that declares **more is to come**! It is just not that it is a sin to weep. There is no real **cause** to weep! The dilemma has been addressed by the One upon the throne.

### **One Has Prevailed!**

*“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”* Here we find that worthiness is not found in character alone, but in accomplishing the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. This passage has scarcely an equal in all of Scripture. The utterance lies at the very heart

of God's redemptive purpose, and focuses on the One Individual upon Whom the hopes of our race are suspended. The Lamb suddenly becomes the center of the scene. While the "**book**" in the hand of the One upon the throne is intriguing, **it is the Lamb that holds the answer to its contents**. I want to emphasize this because of the undue exaltation of scholarship in our times. It has become a shrine at which every novice bows. But where is scholarship in this scene? Here is fulfilled the saying that dominates the environs of salvation. "**Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**" (1 Cor 1:20). A strong angel has hurled the challenge for one worthy person in the universe of intelligence, and none has answered. Let them forever keep silence when we come into the realm of sacred knowledge, for they can offer us no advantage! One has "**prevailed,**" and only One can take the book of destiny and open it to our hearts and minds.

### **There Was A Conflict**

Jesus shook off the powers of hell—Satan and all of his combined hosts—leading them away captive (Eph 4:8). In the mightiest struggle the universe has ever witnessed, Christ and Satan locked in mortal combat. For three days it appeared on earth as though Satan had won—as though the grave had again conquered. But in the midst of the darkest hour, and as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Christ rose triumphant from death and the grave, triumphing over them.

Learn too that there was a conflict BEFORE the book could be opened. The adversary of both God and man had to be brought down, death defeated, and life and immortality brought to light. The indebtedness created by our infractions of the Law had to be taken "**out of the way**" so we could be justified by faith (Col 2:14). Sin itself had to be "**taken away,**" "**blotted out like a thick cloud,**" and "**cast into the depth of the sea**" (Heb 9:26; Isa 44:22; Mic 7:19). Even though we were "**saved**" and "**called**" according to God's "**purpose**

***and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”*** (2 Tim 1:9), a battle had to be fought and won before that purpose could be fulfilled. Like it or not, salvation could not be effected by a Divine mandate. The worlds were created by Divine word, but our salvation was a Divine **work** .

### **The Lion of the Tribe of Judah**

The first living creature was “*like a lion,*” but this **IS** the Lion! He was prophesied by our father Jacob as he pronounced blessings upon his children. “*Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people*” (Gen 49:9). In John's vision, the promised descendant is no more a “*lion's whelp,*” or cub! He is in His glory now, having risen to full strength. Now, no one dares to rouse Him, knowing none can contend with Him successfully. Shiloh has come, and the scepter has been given to Him. He is “***THE Lion of the tribe of Judah,***” and the government is upon His shoulder. His wrath is “*as a roaring lion*” (Prov 19:12), and his strength is unexcelled (Prov 30:30).

Jesus shook off the powers of hell–Satan and all of his combined hosts–leading them away captive (Eph 4:8). In the mightiest struggle the universe has ever witnessed, Christ and Satan locked in mortal combat. For three days it appeared on earth as though Satan had won–as though the grave had again conquered. But in the midst of the darkest hour, and as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Christ rose triumphant from death and the grave, triumphing over them. In the wake of that triumph, He became the “***Author and Finisher of our faith,***” and the “***Captain of our salvation,***” and is now “***bringing***” us “***to glory***” (Heb 12:2; Heb 2:10).

## ***Focused Strength***

The strength of the Son of God is Divine strength, not raw energy as men imagine. That means it is focused, being used for the fulfillment of God's purpose. ***"It is evident,"*** Scripture apprizes us, ***"that our Lord sprang out of Judah"*** (Heb 7:14). With strength and aggression He is now living to ***"make intercession"*** for the saints (Heb 7:25). His current ministry as ***"the Lion of the tribe of Judah"*** is in order to our salvation. But to obtain that ministry, He had to prevail over the enemy. He had to triumph over temptation, and finally over the grave itself. He, and He alone, is worthy to open the book, and to break the seals that conceal its contents to mortals, and even angels.

## **The Root of David**

But the Lamb is also ***"the Root of David."*** How gloriously this was prophesied. ***"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots"*** (Isa 11:1). He the fulfillment of God's promise to David: ***"I will establish his throne forever"*** (1 Chron 17:12). David's glorious reign was but an introduction to that of the prevailing Lamb! Isaiah said the Messiah would reign ***"upon the throne of David"*** (Isa 9:7). Jeremiah affirmed God would ***"raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth"*** (Jer 23:5), and David's throne would ***"never lack a man to sit on it"*** (Jer 33:17). Ezekiel referred to the coming Savior as ***"My servant David,"*** who would be ***"a prince among"*** the people (Ezek 34:23-24). Hosea spoke of Israel returning to seek the Lord ***"and David their King"*** (Hos 3:5). What we are seeing is involved in the fulfillment of those marvelous prophecies. A prevailing Lamb ready to open the Divine workings in the earth.

## **The Standing Lamb**

***"And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four***

*living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain . . .*” Jesus spoke of His identity with the throne of His Father to the Laodicean church. *“To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Rev 3:21). I do not know if the Lamb had been there all of the time or not. If He was, then the book had captured John’s vision so as to obscure the triumphant Lion of the tribe of Judah. **It is important that we do not allow the Book to detract us from the Person of Christ.** How can such a thing happen? By being more enamored with what is said than with Who said it. Note, He is not at the side of the throne, but in the middle of it. He is the locus, or center, of activity. The four living creatures are around Him, as well as the twenty-four elders. All of heaven honors and adores Him!

You will notice that we are brought back to our salvation before we consider the future. The great truths of the Gospel are repeatedly sounded out in the Revelation. In my judgment, this is designed to teach us something. The key to perceiving the future is found in comprehending the greatness of our salvation.

John does not see a lion standing, but *“a Lamb as though it had been slain.”* The risen Lord is a *“Lion”* to His enemies, but a *“Lamb”* to His *“many brethren,”* and to God as well. To Satan and his hosts, the Lord is a Lion. To God and His children, He is a Lamb. This is, of course, clear reference to His vicarious and atoning death. **That death is of perpetual significance in glory.** There is never a day that King Jesus is viewed in disassociation from His death. God sees Him as a Lamb newly slain. That is the meaning of the phrase *“as it had been slain.”* The marks of death remain upon Him, and it is seen as though He was

just offered for the sins of the world. We should not marvel that God calls upon us to see Him in the same manner. **Enough of an historical Jesus!** Let us banish that academic thought from our vocabulary and view the conquering One as heaven does: *“as though He had been slain.”* The vision is vital, for He was *“slain”* for us! That is why, to the saved, the *“preaching of the cross”* is *“the power of God”* (1 Cor 1:18). Because of its effect upon our understanding, and its power to accomplish the purpose of God, Paul *“determined not to know any thing among”* men, *“save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Cor 2:2). Here is the center of preaching, the concentration of knowledge, the heart of preservation, the reason for self-mortification, and the stimulus of hope.

In an act of apparent weakness, the Lord Jesus triumphed over the adversaries, fulfilling the will of the Father (2 Cor 13:4). Mark it well, the *“Lion of the Tribe of Judah”* was also the sacrificial *“Lamb as it had been slain.”* His triumph did not lead to His death, but His death led to His triumph!

One further thing should be observed as we linger before this arresting vision. You will notice that **we are brought back to our salvation before we consider the future.** The great truths of the Gospel are repeatedly sounded out in the Revelation. In my judgment, this is designed to teach us something. The key to perceiving the future is found in comprehending the greatness of our salvation. Those who have no interest in that, will not experience the opening of the book of Divine intent, or purpose. God will not divulge the outcome of the battle to those who neglect His salvation. They will be shut up to doubt and confusion.

### **Perception and Influence**

As we should know, this is no ordinary Lamb. First, it appears as though it has just been slain. Now we are exposed to more of His

Person. The Lamb that is standing in the midst of the throne has great power and is omniscient, or all-seeing.

### *Seven Horns*

“ . . . *having seven horns . . .* ” The “*seven horns*” depict Christ’s great and perfect power. This kind of language was developed by God in old time, in order that we might comprehend the nature of Christ Jesus as now declared. In a graphic picture, Moses spoke of Joseph possessing great power. In this description, he refers to “*horns.*” “*In majesty he is like a firstborn bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even those at the ends of the earth*” (Deut 33:17, NIV). Zedekiah the prophet made iron horns as a sign of victory over the Syrians (1 Kgs 22:11). With great solemnity, the wicked are warned, “*Do not lift up your horn*” (Psa 75:4). Zechariah spoke of “*four horns,*” depicting powerful nations that “*scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem*” (Zech 1:18-19). The Lamb’s seven horns declare His total and unquestioned power.

What a thorough picture of Christ is provided in this text! He fulfills the promise of a powerful High Priest. He is also a reigning King. Having taken away the sins of the world, He is ever pictured as a newly-slain Lamb, with great honor and unquestioned authority. High and exalted, yet meek and lowly! We see in one holy glimpse the humiliation of His death and the glory of His heavenly reign.

The “*horns*” also declare the HONOR due the Son. The Word of God has also acquainted us with this manner of thinking. “*For You are the glory of their strength, And in Your favor our horn is exalted*” (Psa 89:17). “*He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His*

*righteousness endures forever; His horn will be exalted with honor”* (Psa 112:9). *“And He has exalted the horn of His people”* (Psa 148:14). The seven horns on the Lamb affirm His glorious exaltation. *“God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name”* (Phil 2:9).

### **“Seven Eyes”**

*“. . . and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”* There is only one other reference to *“seven eyes”* in Scripture, and it is a significant one. Remember, in our consideration of the figures and symbols in this book, we will resort to the prophets. Here is Zechariah’s arresting prophecy. *“Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription, ’ Says the LORD of hosts, ’And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day”* (Zech 3:8-9). This is doubtless a declaration of the coming Messiah. He is the *“Servant”* and *“Branch,”* as confirmed by the other prophets (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 52:13; Jer 33:21,22,26; Ezek 34:23,24; 37:24; Isa 4:2; 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15). The *“stone”* laid, or set, before Joshua is later called the *“capstone,”* or *“headstone”* (4:7). The stone was to have engravings, like the stones of the high priest’s breastplate—*“engraved, as signets are engraved”* (Ex 39:6). This was a veiled picture of the coming Savior. We know this is the case because of the following promise: *“And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”* Notice, that stone of Zechariah’s vision had *“seven eyes.”* This vision declared the pervasive influence of the Kingdom of God, as well as the Omniscient reign of its King. The *“stone,”* from this view, is like the stone of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which was cut out of a mountain without hands. Beginning small, it eventually filled the whole earth, consuming all other kingdoms (Dan 2:35-45).

The only other reference to *“seven eyes”* in the entire Bible is in our

text, Revelation 5:6. Here the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne is said to have “*seven eyes*.” He, and He alone, is the total fulfillment of the prophecies before Him. While His “*seven horns*” speak of His power and honor, made known in His mediatorial reign, the “*seven eyes*” declare the **nature** of the reign, one of wisdom and purpose. That is how His omniscience, or all-knowingness, is exercised. With discernment that takes everything in the earth into consideration, He is bringing the sons of God to glory. **His is a wise, as well as a powerful, reign.** There is no place on the face of earth where He does not behold His people, their adversaries, and their troubles. He will bring them through it all!

What a thorough picture of Christ is provided in this text! He fulfills the promise of a powerful High Priest. He is also a reigning King. Having taken away the sins of the world, He is ever pictured as a newly-slain Lamb, with great honor and unquestioned authority. High and exalted, yet meek and lowly! We see in one holy glimpse the humiliation of His death and the glory of His heavenly reign. All glory to the conquering Lamb!

## THE BOOK IS TAKEN

At last, the book in the open hand of God will be taken by a worthy Person—the Son of the living God. He has made Himself “*worthy*” by removing sin, subduing alien forces, taking away the Law as a means to righteousness, and triumphing over death and the grave.

### **The Book Taken From the One on the Throne**

Looking at this passage as a whole, we will see

three grand swells of adoration. Each portrays the addition of participants in one grand chorus of praise. The first comes from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. The second comes from myriads of angels. The third is lifted up by every created thing in the universe, from the nearest to the far flung depths of creation.

*“Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”* Here we see the **willingness** of the Lamb to take the book. We also see the total absence of hesitancy on the part of the One sitting on the throne to give it to Him. This confirms the eagerness with which our Savior seeks to enlarge our understanding. It also declares again the satisfaction of the Father with the Son, and His commitment of all things into His hand—even the future. But there is also an element of boldness and familiarity here. He did not come and ask for the book, but *“He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.”* He did not come to look at the book, but to TAKE it! Among other things, that means it **belonged** to Him. He, by the will of the Father, is the Architect of the future. The Father purposed it, the Lamb will fulfill it! With *“seven horns,”* He has the fulness of power to do it. With *“seven eyes,”* He has the wisdom to do it well, and to the everlasting glory of God.

Jesus Christ is the Administrator of Divine purposes. What God wills, He does. See the picture. The Lamb *“came and took the book.”* That settles the future. There is no cause for us to be unduly concerned about what will happen—no cause to fear. This is why holy men and women can shout with Paul, *“ . . . I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”* (2 Tim 1:12).

## Immediate Response Registered

No sooner has the Lamb taken the book, and there is activity around the throne—instant response. The standing Lamb is given praise for His glorious accomplishments. Looking at this passage as a whole, we will see three grand swells of adoration. Each portrays the addition of participants in one grand chorus of praise. The first comes from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. The second comes from myriads of angels. The third is lifted up by every created thing in the universe, from the nearest to the far flung depths of creation. What a mighty chorus it is! And all of it is sparked by the *SIGHT* of the Lamb as He stands in the midst of the throne!

*“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb . . . ”* These twenty-eight heavenly personalities (four living creatures and twenty-four elders), representing all of nature and all the redeemed, do not faint, or collapse from a cessation of strength, as did Daniel upon earth (Dan 10:8-17). The presence of the Lamb did not so clash with their beings that they were struck down like Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-4). Rather, their **comprehension** of the Lamb moved them to fall before Him in honor and preference for Him. This is no mere formality, although it is formal. One further thought, **it was the consideration of the Lamb’s control of the future that elicited this display of honor.** Let all with faith follow their example, and cease to allow the future to intimidate them. The King controls it, and all is well!

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the PERSON of the Lamb—before Him. His attributes and accomplishments constrain them to pay homage to Him. They were also ascribing greatness to Him, as others did throughout Scripture (Mark 8:33; Luke 5:8; 8:41; 17:16). Throughout the Word, when people were conscious of Deity, they fell down on their faces (Deut 9:18,25; Job 1:20; Matt 2:11; 18:26). Even demons and unclean spirits fell down before the Son of God, knowing His greatness (Mark 3:11).

**All glory be to the Lamb who evokes such honor!**

The four living creatures play a key role in the rest of the Revelation (5:14; 6:1,6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4), and the twenty-four elders as well (5:14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 19:4). Their positions, however, are always in view of the Lamb of God—with Him dominating their vision and conscience. This is the heavenly manner. **On earth, we do not well to attempt to conduct Kingdom affairs without an acute awareness of the reigning Lamb.** I fear that much of what goes on in His name is done apart from a cognizance of His Person. Such works are an abomination to God, regardless of the accolades they receive from men. In all things pertaining to salvation, God does nothing apart from Jesus Christ. It is certain He will give no recognition to those who are at variance with that practice.

### **Harps and Bowls**

This language, couched in Scriptural phraseology and concepts, speaks of willing, insightful, and pleasing praise. It also teaches us that **the future is accomplished within the framework of praise.** Too, everyone of the twenty-four elders were included, something rare indeed upon the earth.

“ . . . each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Something of particular interest is said of the twenty-four elders. Everyone of them has a harp, and was holding golden bowls of incense. For some Christian groups, this is a most inappropriate sight, indeed. Mind you, the twenty-four elders represent the redeemed of the earth, from both Jew and Gentile. They will confess they have been redeemed

to God, and made kings and priests to God (v. 9-10). Whether or not men concur with this view, they are faced with the Holy Spirit associating “*harps*” with heavenly praise. Two other times “*harps*” are mentioned, and once they are called “*the harps of God*” (Rev 14:2; 15:2). Of old time, the “*harp*” was sanctified for God’s use. God is depicted as being “*praised upon the harp*” (Psa 33:2; 43:4). Singing and praising are said to be “*with the harp*” (Psa 71:22; 98:5; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3). A “*solemn sound*” was sent up to God upon the harp (Psa 92:3). Once David said, “*I will open my dark saying upon the harp*” (Psa 49:4).

Remember, Revelation is saturated with language introduced by holy men of God in the Scriptures. On earth, there were only a few who had harps, employing them in praise to God. But around the throne, all the redeemed will have them. These harps speak of adept and comely praise. We know the Lord is well pleased with such expressions, and the powers of darkness are not. Once, when an evil spirit from the Lord troubled king Saul, he sent for David, noted for his cunning use of the harp. Of that occasion, it is said, “*David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him*” (1 Sam 16:23). The mighty prophet Elisha once requested a skilled minstrel, or harpist, to play before him that he might prophecy. It is written, “*But now bring me a harpist. While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha*” (2 Kgs 3:15, NIV).

This language, couched in Scriptural phraseology and concepts, speaks of willing, insightful, and pleasing praise. It also teaches us that **the future is accomplished within the framework of praise**. Too, everyone of the twenty-four elders were included, something rare indeed upon the earth.

**THE BOWLS, OR VIALS.** The elders also held golden vials (KJV),

or bowls, filled with pleasing odors, or incense. We are told precisely what these represent: *“the prayers of saints.”* There are at least four things that stand out to me about these *“golden bowls.”* First, they were **precious** – *“golden.”* Second, they are **containers** – *“bowls.”* Third, they are **totally used** – *“full.”* Fourth, they have an **appeal to God**–*“incense.”* Scripture has already associated prayer with incense. As it is written, *“May my prayer be set before you like incense ; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice”* (Psa 141:2). The Psalmist was saying, *May my prayer be pleasing to You!* Here we have a picture of PLEASING prayers–prayers that are the type the Lord desires.

Insight into the power and reign of Christ has provoked prayers among *“the saints.”* Are these prayers limited to the saints on earth? I believe, for the most part, they are. However, we do have a prayer in this book uttered by those who had left the earth via martyrdom (Rev 6:9-10). The point of our text, however, is not WHERE the saints are, but that an **abundance** of pleasing prayers are being presented to the Administrator of the Kingdom–the Lamb of God.

### *The Future Is Associated With Prayer*

The prayers of the saints DO have a bearing upon the future. They are mentioned again in the eight chapter of the Revelation. *“Another angel, who had a golden censer,*

As He prepares to execute judgment, the prayers of the saints of all ages are brought before Him. Holy men and women from every age, prayed in accordance with His revealed will, and in faithful acquiesce to it. Now, their prayers will be answered. None of their prayers were uttered in vain! They chose, while in the world, to side with God in their prayers. Now the pleasing fragrance of their prayers rises to the King of kings.

came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all

the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand" (8:3-4). In a very poignant affirmation of the role of prayer in the future of the saints, the Lord spoke through Ezekiel the prophet. ***"Thus says the Lord GOD: 'On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus says the Lord GOD: 'I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them : I will increase their men like a flock'"*** (Ezek 36:33-37).

You will remember that the Lord Jesus taught us this very truth. He taught them to pray, ***"Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven"*** (Matt 6:10). Again, He urged His disciples, ***"Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"*** (Matt 9:38). This is one of the means through which we enter into the determined will of the Lord. Daniel knew this truth, and, seeing the Word of the Lord was about to be fulfilled, engaged in prayer. Here is the account. ***"In the first year of his (Darius) reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes"*** (Dan 9:2-3). The fatalist view is an utterly false one—the *whatever will be will be* notion! There is no room for such foolishness in the Kingdom of God. **We have been called into participation with the King of kings, and we may zealously enter into it.**

But I see yet another facet of the Kingdom in these golden bowls,

filled with the prayers of the saints. Throughout the ages, the saints of the Lord have lifted prayers to God that appeared to go unanswered—at least to their generation. Think of some of the imprecatory prayers uttered by the Psalmist. Allow me to give a few of them. ***“The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined”*** (Psa 10:2). ***“Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none”*** (Psa 10:15). ***“Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave”*** (Psa 31:17). ***“As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God”*** (Psa 68:2). Some have faulted David for praying in this manner, viewing such expressions as vindictive. But there is no need to view them in this way at all.

The Lord Himself has said, ***“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord*** (Rom 12:19). Do men imagine this is a vain word, or that it is mere rhetoric? Let them run from such foolish notions! David was entering into what God declared He was going to do. God also revealed this aspect of His nature to Moses, saying, ***“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them”*** (Deut 32:35). Nahum also declared this trait of the Lord’s nature. ***“God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies”*** (Nahum 1:2). No person of sound mind doubts that God will, in fact, judge His enemies—or that He does not often do it now, in this world. Thus early saints prayed in accordance with this revealed aspect of God’s nature, refusing to avenge themselves, taking matters into their own hands.

With this in mind, consider the text again. God is getting ready to pour judgements upon the earth. Wicked men will suffer Divine reappraisals for their rejection of His purpose, salvation, and the reign of His Son. As He prepares to execute judgment, the prayers of the

saints of all ages are brought before Him. Holy men and women from every age, prayed in accordance with His revealed will, and in faithful acquiesce to it. Now, their prayers will be answered. None of their prayers were uttered in vain! They chose, while in the world, to side with God in their prayers. Now the pleasing fragrance of their prayers rises to the King of kings. He is administering the Kingdom in their interest, and it is fitting that their prayers are supplications are therefore remembered. It is true, indeed, ***“the prayer of the upright is His delight”*** (Prov 15:8). Such a view of the prayers of the godly will prove a great encouragement in times of difficulty and trial. The fervent effectual prayers of the righteous always “avail much.”

Hold on to that truth!

## A NEW SONG

With an acute awareness of the glorified Lamb, and amidst insightful worship and the prayers of the saints, a ***“new song”*** is wafted toward the throne and the Lamb. It is ***“new”*** because it is of another order. It is characterized more by insight than obligation, and is sung with a new perspective. Greater kingdom-clarity has produced this song. It is ***“new”*** in respect to all other ages. It is ***“new”*** in relation to all other experience. It is ***“new”*** as regards all other privileges. It is ***“new”*** because it is more in keeping with the nature of Christ’s mediatorial reign. After all, newness characterizes His glorious Kingdom. We have a ***“new covenant,” “new commandment,”*** and are ***“new creations”*** (Heb 12:24; John 13:34; 2 Cor 5:17). There is now a ***“new man,” a “new and living way,”*** and ***“newborn babes”*** (Col 3:10; Heb 10:20; 1 Pet 2:2). We are serving our Lord ***“in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”*** (Rom 7:6). We look forward to receiving a ***“new name,”*** dwelling in the ***“new Jerusalem,”*** and inhabiting ***“a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness”*** (Rev 2:17; 21:2; 21:1). I ask you, is it not fitting that there also be a ***“new song!”***

## He Is Worthy

*“ And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals . . . ’* Remember, the challenge of finding someone **“WORTHY”** to take the book was sounded. Now the insightful see that such an One has been found. Mind you, some rulers are unworthy of their position. Pharaoh was not worthy of his position, as he oppressed the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar proved himself unworthy of his kingship when he took the credit for the glory of his kingdom. Pilate and Herod proved themselves unworthy when they joined in an unholy alliance against the Lord Jesus Christ. But Christ is WORTHY of His position! He is WORTHY of the praise and adoration He receives. Jacob confessed, *“I am not worthy”* (Gen 32:10), but Jesus IS worthy! John the Baptist confessed he was *“not worthy”* to carry the shoes of Jesus (Matt 3:11), but Jesus IS worthy! A centurion seeking mercy from Jesus said he was *“not worthy”* for the master to come under his roof (Matt 8:8), but Jesus IS worthy! We are not witnessing a mere formality in this section of Revelation! We are seeing the Lamb as He really is—WORTHY! WORTHY! WORTHY! He is deserving, and merits what He receives. It is fitting, proper, and exemplary to give Him praise.

But this is not a general ascription of worthiness to the Lamb. It directly relates to the unfolding of the future—taking the book and opening its seals for the saints. He is *“worthy to take the book, and to open its seals.”* It is good that He is, for God will not relinquish the book of Divine intent to an unworthy person!

## He Was Slain

*“For You were slain . . .”* Remember, the Lamb is standing in the midst of the throne as a newly slain Lamb—bearing the marks of death. His was a violent death, but a purposeful one—and the ones praising Him perceive it. Here is a central pillar in the temple of truth—the Lamb of God was *“slain.”* It is the FIRST thing ascribed to Him by the

insightful worshipers, for it is the thing that is most dominant about Him. He was ***“the Prince of life”*** (Acts 3:15), and yet was ***“slain,”*** or killed. His was not the death of a martyr. It was a purposeful one, in which He ***“laid down”*** His life in order to fulfill a Divine commandment and objective (John 10:18). When with His disciples, Jesus affirmed this was going to happen—He would be ***“slain”*** (Luke 9:22). Peter declared on the day of Pentecost that Jesus, through the hands of wicked men, was ***“slain”*** (Acts 2:33). Later, affirming that the purpose of God was fulfilled in His death, Jesus will be referred to as ***“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”*** (Rev 13:8). The discerning praise, however, will confirm that Christ’s death was not an end of itself. **It is what resulted from it that gave it true worth.**

### **He Redeemed Us**

Even the prayers of the saints, as has already been affirmed, have been integrated into the rule of the Almighty. It should not surprise us that our very persons are being made suitable to participate with Jesus in the administration of His kingdom.

“And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation . . .” Just as sin proliferated to ***“every tribe and tongue and people,”*** so does the effectiveness of Christ’s death. Elaborating on this very marvelous aspect of redemption, the Spirit says, ***“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many . . . Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”*** (Rom 5:15,18,19).

Notice the redemption was **“to God,”** not merely to a system of thought or a way of life. It is true, we are **“redeemed from the earth”** and **“from among men”** (Rev 14:3,4), but we are **“redeemed to God.”** He has called us unto Himself to bless us, and grant us participation in both His nature (2 Pet 1:4) and purpose (Rom 8:29). What insightful praise is this!

### **He Made Us Kings and Priests**

**“And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.”** Here is an aspect of Christ’s death scarcely, if ever, mentioned in the institutional church. If you are a proclaimer or teacher of the Word, make it your business to put the people in mind of this truth: Christ has made us **“kings and priests to God!”** We are destined to **“reign with Christ”** (Rom 8:17), sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21). Even the prayers of the saints, as has already been affirmed, have been integrated into the rule of the Almighty. It should not surprise us that our very persons are being made suitable to participate with Jesus in the administration of His kingdom.

**“ . . . and we shall reign on the earth.”** Although I have often mentioned this, Daniel thrice declared the time was coming when the saints would **take the kingdom** (Dan 7:18,22,27). This praise confesses that purpose is seen. Remember, **“priests”** minister to God (Ex 28:1,3,4,41), while **“kings”** share in the rule (2 Tim 2:12; Rom 8:17). The **“earth”** in reference is the **“new”** one, long anticipated by the godly. It is true that in a preliminary way, we reign now, having been raised with Christ to sit with Him in heavenly places. However, that reign is abbreviated in comparison to what it will be. This aspect of redemption is another one grossly neglected by the nominal church. Of old time it was written, **“ . . . those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth”** (Psa 37:9). **“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace”** (Psa

37:11). ***“For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth”*** (Psa 37:22). Jesus confirmed this to be precisely the case when He said, ***“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”*** (Matt 5:5). **The day of God’s people is coming!** Currently, the earth is the place of our probation and proving. But soon, it will be the place of our reign! Now it is positioned in wickedness (1 John 5:19), but soon it will be purged and given to us! We will judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:2-3), and all things will be put under our feet, as God designed from the beginning (Heb 2:8-9). Not the least of this reign will be realized in the bruising of Satan under our feet. ***“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”*** (Rom 16:20).

Prior to this ***“new song,”*** sung by those who have completed the race, sorrow and regret permeated the songs of creation. The ***“whole creation”*** groaned in its song, expectant, yet in sorrow (Rom 8:22-23). There was a weight of darkness that hung over every realm while it remained in a state of nature. All of the redeemed also ***“groan within”*** themselves, ***“waiting for the adoption,”*** the ***“redemption”*** of their bodies (Rom 8:23), while they cry ***“wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death”*** (Rom 7:24). There are songs of thanksgiving and praise, but they are mingled with songs of regret, sorrow, and pain. When faith and hope dominate the heart, there are joyful songs of hope and anticipation that erupt from the saved. These are but a prelude to the ***“new song”*** that will be sung insightfully when all things are made new.

## HEAVEN RESPONDS

Now, the wave or ever-increasing praise continues. We have seen the throne, and the One sitting upon it. The Lamb has also been seen, standing in the midst of the throne. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders have been brought to our attention, together with

their insightful praise and adoration. Suddenly, John realizes there is an infinite number of personalities in this holy place.

### **The Inquiring Look**

Now, the wave or ever-increasing praise continues. We have seen the throne, and the One sitting upon it. The Lamb has also been seen, standing in the midst of the throne. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders have been brought to our attention, together with their insightful praise and adoration. Suddenly, John realizes there is an infinite number of personalities in this holy place.

*“Then I looked, and heard . . . ”* Here, again, is the Kingdom manner. **First look, then hear!** What John now sees has been there all along, but his attention must be drawn to the coming event before he can profit from it. Do not wonder that we are told, *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,”* (Col 3:2), and *“looking unto Jesus”* (Heb 12:1-2). Many a soul has never effectively heard from God because He does not have their attention. You will remember that Jesus did not speak to Saul of Tarsus until He had his attention. Now, in keeping with this Kingdom manner, John looks, then hears, a great swell of praise.

*“ . . . and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice. . . ”* The personalities around the throne of God appear to be ranked. First, the Lamb, in the center of the throne. Then the four living creatures. Then the twenty-four elders. Now, another

circle of personalities is seen—a vast multitude of angels described as “*many angels*” and “*ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands.*” If you considered this a mathematical expression (which it is not), ten thousand times ten thousand is one hundred million. Then “*thousands OF thousands.*” This is the Spirit’s way of referring to an “*innumerable company of angels*” (Heb 12:22). There are no wayward or recalcitrant ones among them. They are ALL “*around the throne,*” focused and devoted to the One upon it. We have just heard a reference to the redemption of men, and the reconstituting of them as “*kings and priests to God.*” We know from First Peter 1:11-12 that salvation is of particular interest to the angels. In fact, they “*desire to look into these things.*” Knowing this, we would expect them to respond to the praise given to the Lamb—and respond they do!

### **He Is Worthy!**

“ . . . saying with a loud voice: *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!*” Remember, the summons for someone worthy to take the book and open its seals has been delivered. The praise we are hearing directly relates to that matter. And what do these mighty and numerous angels ascribe to the Lamb? Of what is He worthy? In keeping with the environment, they speak with a “*loud voice.*”

**POWER!** This refers to **objective** power, or authority to fulfill God’s eternal purpose. Every place the word “*power*” is used in Apostolic doctrine, it has to do with the fulfillment of Divine objective. Jesus is declared to be “*the Son of God with power*” (Rom 1:4). The Gospel is God’s “*power unto (in order to) salvation*” (Rom 1:16). This is the power that works “*effectively,*” accomplishing the will of the Lord (Eph 3:7,20). By saying the Lamb is “*worthy to receive power,*” the angelic hosts are declaring **He alone is qualified to carry the will of the Lord to its completion, and complete it He will!**

**RICHES (wealth) !** There are Kingdom resources that are needed in order to the safe arrival of the saints in glory. Having turned their back to the world, they can no longer depend upon what it has to offer, for all of it is temporal. These riches, however, cannot be obtained apart from Divine distribution. Who will give them to us? Who will bring to us the gifts and graces needed to negotiate through this evil world? It is the Lamb Who stands in the midst of the throne! It is written, “. . . *Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Col 2:3). The “*riches of His grace*” are dispensed by the Lord Jesus, the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Those who insist on maintaining their distance from Him, refusing to suspend all their hopes upon Him, will find no resources for spiritual life. Those who **do** rely upon Him, will realize an abundance of good and essential things.

When we recognize our personal spiritual impotence, we comfort ourselves in the knowledge that the Lamb has been given the strength we need, and will give it to us through the channel of our faith

**WISDOM!** The wisdom Christ receives is not for Himself, any more than the power and riches are. The power is to execute the purpose of God, and the riches are to distribute to the saints. So it is with the wisdom. He has received it because He is worthy, and none can obtain it apart from Him. When we lack wisdom, and ask for it, according to James 1:5, it is Jesus Who will dispense it to us. God has put us into Christ, and made Him our wisdom. As it is written, “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:20). Once again, the “*treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” are hidden in Christ,

and cannot be obtained apart from Him (Col 2:3).

**STRENGTH (might)!** This is strength to be imparted to those en route to glory. They need strength, because their own is insufficient for the journey. They must be ***“strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”*** (Eph 6:10). If ever Christ is to dwell in their hearts, they must be ***“strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man”*** (Eph 3:16). And where will they receive this strength? It must come from Christ, for He alone has received it to give to us! He died for us when we were ***“without strength”*** (Rom 5:6), but He will see to it that condition does not remain for those believing in Him. This strength is **His** strength. He refers to it as ***“MY strength,”*** declaring that it is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). When we recognize our personal spiritual impotence, we comfort ourselves in the knowledge that the Lamb has been given the strength we need, and will give it to us through the channel of our faith.

**HONOR!** The ***“honor”*** the Lord has received begins with God Himself, Who ***“crowned Him with . . . honor”*** (Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 1:17). That honor, however, is also given to His body, the church. Those seeking for honor will receive it from Him (Rom 2:9). There are vessels that have been prepared for ***“honor,”*** and Jesus will give it to them. Ultimately, it will come when He says to the ***“sheep”*** on His right hand, ***“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”*** (Matt 25:34). That will be the bestowment of ***“honor”*** which He Himself received and will share with us.

**GLORY!** Before ***“the Word became flesh”*** (John 1:14), He had ***“glory”*** –inexpressible glory! But that glory could not be shared with our race, which, in every individual part, had ***“come short of the glory of God”*** (Rom 3:23). This is not the case now, however, that He has ***“put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”*** (Heb 9:26). He has now

received a glory He can share with His brethren. Prior to His death, Jesus anticipated this, and fervently prayed for its fulfillment. ***“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”*** (John 17:24). When He appears, He will share that glory with those who have lived by faith—that is why He received it! As it is written, ***“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”*** (Col 3:4). As the Spirit well said in Romans 8:17, ***“ . . . if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him,”*** NRSV).

Oh, the angels know it now! The Lamb is worthy to receive all of the things we require to complete our pilgrimage. The Father wanted us to have them, but His righteousness would not allow their distribution until the Lamb had prevailed.

Now the praise reaches its crescendo! It goes so far, it can go no further. Every created thing in heaven, earth, and under the earth, and all that is in the sea joins the mighty chorus. The picture is that of united song, with everyone and everything joining  
in.

Now, praise God, the Lamb has prevailed, the distribution is being made, and the book of Divine intent can be opened.

### **The Whole Creation Responds Together**

***“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”*** Now the praise

reaches its crescendo! It goes so far, it can go no further. Every created thing in heaven, earth, and under the earth, and all that is in the sea joins the mighty chorus. The picture is that of united song, with everyone and everything joining in. What we are seeing here fulfills the exhortation of Psalm 150:6, ***“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”***

**Every Creature In Heaven.** Whether we are speaking of the heavens wherein the sun, moon, stars, and planets reside--or the heaven in which the singing birds fly--or the realm occupied by the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and an innumerable company of angels--they all are included. Everything above the earth joins the song.

**Every Creature On the Earth.** This includes man at the high end, and creeping things at the low end. The cattle on a thousand hills, which belong to God, join the song. It is the song of a redeemed earth that we hear, and of redeemed personalities. Long the whole creation has waited to sing the song, and sing it they shall. John sees beyond time, into eternity, and sees ***“the whole creation”*** joining in praise to the exalted Lamb.

**Under the Earth.** This phrase is mentioned several times in Scripture, and is an intriguing one. The prohibition of idolatry mentioned this area. ***“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”*** (Ex 20:4). It does not appear this is the meaning of our text, however--i.e., creatures in the water under the earth. It is generally understood that this refers to the seas, also including subterranean waters. Our text already mentions the seas, and all that is in them. Philippians 2:10 proclaims that every creature ***“under the earth”*** will eventually bow to Jesus. I prefer to see this as referring to the region of the dead. This being the case, the honor due to Jesus reaches into the extremities of creation, where even the dead are

held. The reign of Christ even extends there, as is evidenced by Jesus preaching to the “*spirits in prison*” after He died and prior to His resurrection (1 Pet 3:21; 4:6). The point is, **there is no place in all of creation where the conquering Lamb is not honored and praised** – where His reign is not known.

The praise that is rendered to the victorious Lamb is worthy of our consideration. It is insightful, and pregnant with meaning. No frothy expressions here! It is praise produced by a recognition of the Lamb.

**BLESSING.** The word literally means *good or fine speech* , or a *bestowed gift* . The recipients of blessing now declare it has come from the Lamb in the midst of the throne. They extol Him in their best speech, giving their praise freely and willingly. This is not mechanical praise, made so popular in our day. Nor, indeed, is it under the domination of emotion. Here is the ultimate fulfillment of the expression, “*Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name*” (Psa 103:1). Not to be overlooked, this blessing brings satisfaction to the Lord Himself, because it is prompted by a recognition of His Person and accomplishments.

**HONOR.** This word means *reverence, respect, and recognition, esteem, and dignity* . The Lamb towers above all other personalities in His Person, character, and achievements. He is worthy of esteem, and it is grossly sinful to withhold it from Him. Here is an expression that confesses a recognition of this truth. The capacity to give recognition is gathered together, and focused upon the Lamb who is worthy. The Lamb is really the only One worthy of being in the forefront.

**GLORY.** Glory means *radiance, brightness, splendor, and a manifestation of excellent power* . Here is an expression that affirms Christ’s Person bursts through and dominates all other radiance. Joseph,

for example, had “*glory in Egypt*” (Gen 45:13). Babylon was “*the glory of kingdoms*” (Isa 13:19). Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom has glory (Dan 4:36). But all of that pales into insignificance before the glory of the Lamb. He outshines them all!

**POWER.** This word means *Sovereignty, might, and dominion* . All other power is derived. As it is written, “*There is no power, but of God*” (Rom 13:1). But true Sovereignty belongs to the Lamb—it is His by right. He DOES have the dominion over all other kingdoms, whether it appears to be so or not. He truly is “*King of kings and Lord of lords.*” Before God’s redemptive purpose is completed, the words will reverberate throughout the universe, “*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*” (Rev 1:15).

The purpose of our text is not to define all of these areas, but to affirm that honor comes to the triumphant Christ from every quarter. How appropriate that the peak of the praise comes from all realms! After all, it is written, “*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him*” (Col 1:17). It is therefore essential that praise eventually come to Him from all of these domains!

### **The Final Amen**

*“Then the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.”* ”

The personalities closest to the throne, and with the greatest insight, shout the “*AMEN*”—surely, so be it, and this is trustworthy! The praise they have heard is accurate, and stands as it is. It does not require further interpretation of explanation, and has not been flawed in its expressions. Much of the purported “*praise*” that rises from earth’s confines is flawed and imperfect. Expressions are often redundant,

inaccurate, and sometimes even false. Some praise is only received because of the heart of those offering it, whose spiritual understanding is something less than mature. If you will review the *“new song,”* in which everything created participated, you will find no vagueness or ambiguity. There is no falsehood or flaw. It is precise and it is true, from beginning to end! Allow me to put that song together, beginning with praise from the redeemed.

*“You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth . . . Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! . . . Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”*

It is no wonder the four living creatures shouted *“AMEN,”* and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship Him who *“lives forever and ever.”* Christ’s death is extolled. The results of His death are proclaimed. His worthiness is lauded. What He has received is declared. Every form of recognition is freely and rightfully given to Him, and Him alone. The only personalities withholding praise from Him are those who have not seen Him as He really is! To that we can only say, *“AMEN,”* and prostrate ourselves before the conquering Lamb!

## CONCLUSION

We have been in heavenly places! The stage has been set for the unfolding of the future. With care you should have noted the repeated references to things familiar to the redeemed. Redemption by Christ’s blood, the constitution of God’s people as kings and priests, and

Christ's triumph over all, has been accentuated. The reason—the future directly relates to that. Any view of this book that puts the Lamb into the background cannot be true! We have seen Him clearly brought into the foreground in this marvelous chapter. A perspective of Revelation that causes other events to overshadow the death of Christ is false to the core. His triumph and exaltation are associated with Him being a *“Lamb as it had been slain.”* We must not allow our hearts to be distracted from that view, for it has set the stage for the rest of the book. Christ's glory is associated with His redemption. His Sovereignty directly relates to His great salvation. The honor ascribed to Him comes because of His Lamb-accomplishments.

The context of Revelation is the salvation of God, as administered by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the rest of Scripture. It does not proclaim a new agenda, a new purpose, or an era of history divorced from the people of God. The notion that the church has been removed from the scene from chapter four on, is an absurdity unworthy of consideration by any person of sound spiritual mind. It simply will not stand the test of Scripture or of spiritual understanding. That view has been concocted by men who do not understand what God has purposed or what Jesus is doing.

When men approach this book with world situations in the foreground, and the saints in the background, they are simply not approaching it with the mind of Christ. Jesus approached it by first speaking to the churches. We are then given to witness an open door in heaven, where there is tranquility, an acute awareness of the holiness of the Lord, and insightful worship. Now we behold the Lamb of God, as if He had just been slain. **Redemption is the context of this book.** Everything is to be filtered

through the salvation of God, as accomplished in and through Christ Jesus, the Lamb.

Revelation begins with a view of Jesus, continues with His Word of the churches, and ends with His promise of coming again. Thirteen times in this book, those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, ***“the saints,”*** are mentioned (5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6). ***“Jesus,”*** the redemptive name of our Lord, is mentioned 14 times throughout the book (1:1, 2, 5, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4). Words like ***“redeemed”*** (5:9; 14:3,4), ***“saved”*** (21:24); ***“washed”*** (1:5; 7:14), ***“by Thy blood”*** (5:9), and ***“victory”*** (15:2), connect the Revelation with the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus. Regarding the saints, the book relates to His High Priesthood. Regarding the opponents of the saints, they relate to their demise. Judgments will be rendered because of the world’s treatment of the saints (6:9-10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20-21).

**The context of Revelation is the salvation of God, as administered by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the rest of Scripture.** It does not proclaim a new agenda, a new purpose, or an era of history divorced from the people of God. The notion that the church has been removed from the scene from chapter four on, is an absurdity unworthy of consideration by any person of sound spiritual mind. It simply will not stand the test of Scripture or of spiritual understanding. That view has been concocted by men who do not understand what God has purposed or what Jesus is doing. Thrust this imagination from you as you would a filthy rag, for it is precisely that!

If it seems too strong to speak in this manner, you must understand that these corrupted views of the book of Revelation have fostered reactions that are inconsistent with the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Not a few people are more fearful of “the great tribulation” than they are of the lake of fire, which is the second death. Some have more

dread of an anti-Christ who will place a mark upon you, than they have being rejected by the Lamb.

A corrupted view of Revelation permeates the rest of Scripture, moving men to interpret it in view of the Revelation, instead of vice versa. This book uses the language of the rest of Scripture to express its message, which procedure would be an inanity if it spoke of a different agenda. I have taken the time to state this as clearly as I know how because of the sobriety with which this book begins and concludes. ***“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (1:2). “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (22:18-19).*** These sober words forbid us to shun familiarity with this volume, entertain novel views of it, or take the liberty of imposing tradition upon it. It has been given for our blessing, and carries great benefits for the saints. Also, it is unquestionably the Word of the Living God, given through Christ to the churches. Men dare not tamper with its contents as though its meaning were open to private views, or the opinions of men. Let it stand as it is. Believe what it affirms. Its message is in perfect accord with the rest of Scripture.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 12

## THE SEVEN SEALS

(the first six)

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to

stand?" (Revelation 6:1-17, Nkjv)

## INTRODUCTION

The stage has been set for the unfolding of the future--particularly as it regards the fulfilling of God's purpose. Remember, without Divine purpose, there is neither reason nor possibility for such a thing as "the future." If we view coming events, particularly those described in God's Word, from an earthly point of view, it will be impossible to ascertain the message and intent of Scripture. The governments of this world, with their advancement and status, is NOT the focus of the Word. They are ONLY mentioned as they relate to the fulfillment of the "*eternal purpose*" of God, conceived (if I may use that term) before there was either earth or government.

### Apprehension

Throughout the Revelation, the primary righteous personality is Jesus, and the primary wicked one is Satan. All good and righteous people are so classed because of their identity with the conquering Lamb. All wicked people are so classed because of their affiliation with the devil.

It is essential that we see the necessity of spiritually apprehending these things. They cannot be comprehended by the natural, or fleshly, mind. John was "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day,*" when he received this message (1:10). He was given insight into the Person of Christ (1:12-18). The Apostle was shown the relationship of Christ with His churches immediately after beholding

the glorified Savior (1:20; 2:1-3:22). The Lord prepared Him for the body of this revelation by showing him an open door in heaven (4:1), and the throne of Sovereignty, and He who sits upon it (4:1-11). John was then shown that the future is in the hand of the God of heaven (5:1-4), and that it can only be opened by the conquering Lamb (5:5-7). With remarkable precision, he is also shown the relationship of both praise and prayer to the execution of that *“eternal purpose”* (5:8-14). Until a lively sense of these key factors grips our soul, we will find ourselves distorting the message of this remarkable book.

The future, as delineated in Revelation, has exclusively to do with the fulfillment of God’s objective--determined *“before the world began”* (2 Tim 1:9). Key events and persons will not be viewed as an historian would view them. The world speaks of the political figures, such as the Pharaoh’s and the Caesars, Nero, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Washington . . . etc. More wicked and base civilizations laud entertainers and athletes, who contribute nothing to the moral fabric of a society. But the Lord passes them all by. He touches only upon people and events that play a vital role in the consummation of His purpose, whether for good or evil. Throughout the Revelation, the primary righteous personality is Jesus, and the primary wicked one is Satan. All good and righteous people are so classed because of their identity with the conquering Lamb. All wicked people are so classed because of their affiliation with the devil.

Our minds must be delivered from the fascination of worldly things, whatever form they take. Spiritual understanding simply will not be experienced by those with an earthly mind-set. We will be brought face to face with war, famine, death, and bloodshed in this chapter. If we do not have *“the mind of Christ,”* we will not profit from it. If our minds are not elevated, the passage will become blurred and pointless to us.

## **Arena of Conflict**

We are going to see how **the purpose of God will be accomplished in an arena of fierce opposition and intense activity** . We will also see **the triumph of the saints over every conceivable handicap and resistance** . In addition, it will become apparent that as *“the end”* approaches, **pressures increase and forces combine against the saints** . In summary, Christ Jesus has entered into a triumphant ministry that will eventuate in the triumph of the elect over all circumstances, and the demise of Satan and all of his powers. The saints will be brought through fierce and relentless attacks, oppositions, and hardships—but they will safely arrive at their appointed goal. No obstacle, regardless of its seeming formidability, is capable of stopping the most humble of believers from landing safe on that heavenly shore! We have been brought into the only thing in history that is sure.

## THE FIRST SEAL

*“ Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals . . . ”* With Divine deliberation, the Lamb opens *“one of the seals.”* The triumphant Lamb is not hasty in divulging the workings of the Lord. He also displays His authority, by opening but *“one”* seal, and it is one of His own choosing. No one can deter Him from opening the seal. When the enthroned Christ wills to make something known, no power of darkness can prevent Him from doing so. He will also open to us what needs to be opened first.

### The Noise of Thunder

*“ . . . and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder . . . ”* One of the *“four living creatures”* now speaks. Until this time, these heavenly beings have always acted in unison (4:6,7,8; 5:6,8,14). But now one of them speaks with thunderous tone. You will remember that *“thunders”* proceed out of the Throne (4:5). **This speaks of Divine intention.** Satan’s voice is never depicted as thunder,

nor is that of his emissaries. The voices of men, particularly as regard intentions, are but faint whispers, unworthy of our undivided attention. Only what God does is truly **“thunder,”** drowning out the noises of the earth. Here, on the Isle of Patmos, amidst the crashing of the sea waves, John heard a thunder that subdued the watery roars about him, capturing his attention. It comes from one of the personalities near to the throne, who have insight into the Divine workings.

There is a sense in which the message is brought to him. Yet, there is a point at which he must come to it. This, again, is the manner of the Kingdom. Before you can see what Christ makes known, you must come to Him!

“Come and See!”

**“‘Come and see’ . . . ”** Four times in this chapter, this summons is issued to John (v. 1,3,5,7). There is a sense in which the message is brought to him. Yet, there is a point at which he must come to it. This, again, is the manner of the Kingdom. Before you can see what Christ makes known, you must come to Him! There is another view of this summons that may be of interest. Some suppose the words **“and see”** to be out of order. The NIV also omits these words, based on an analysis of manuscripts. Were this view correct, the summons **“COME!”** would be to the rider now declared; i.e., **“Come and do what you are going to do!”** This is a strained interpretation of the text, and is by no means universally embraced by the supposed experts. It is generally conceded that this word— **“Come and see”** —is addressed to John himself, and that is the position I also take. It is in keeping with the declared purpose of the vision, which was to show John **“things that must be hereafter.”** I do not believe anything in the text suggests this is the Divine word to involved powers to begin their work. Now, John’s attention is drawn to the unfolding of God’s work upon the earth, as

administered by the Lord Jesus Christ .

Here is an area where the modern church is extremely **deficient—coming and seeing** . Like John, each of us must **“come,”** approaching to the Lord with a mind to comprehend what He reveals of Himself and His purpose. Too, a revelation, regardless of its magnitude, will bring no personal benefit unless it is comprehended. Also observe there is no delayed response on the part of John. His mind is already fixed in heavenly places, tuned to the Divine frequency. A comely state, indeed!

### A White Horse

**“And I looked, and behold, a white horse.”** The language revealed by the Spirit is critical. While some choose to view such texts in view of a cultural framework, the Spirit always speaks **“combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”** (1 Cor 2:13, NASB), not combining cultural words with spiritual thoughts. We will resort to Scripture itself to identify the significance of this description.

In Scripture, the **“horse”** is symbolic of warfare and militant aggression. **“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God”** (Psa 20:7). **“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God”** (Psa 33:17). **“He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man”** (Psa 147:10). **“The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD”** (Prov 21:31). **“. . . What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle”** (Jer 8:6). Zechariah wrote of a **“goodly horse in battle”** (Zech 10:3). In the case of trusting in the initiatives of men (represented as **“horses”**), such is vain and foolish. But our text is not speaking of the initiatives of men, but of the fulfillment of the purpose of God. Notice: first John’s attention is draw to the horse, and then to the rider on the horse. This is another way of saying the focus is on WHAT is occurring, then WHO is administrating

the occurrence.

The horse is *“white,”* which is also significant. This word is used nineteen times in revelation, and ALWAYS is associated with purity and Deity. There are NO exceptions. We read of the glorified Jesus with *“His head and his hairs were WHITE like wool, as WHITE as*

This is a vivid picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, pure, holy, and aggressive. He is depicted as riding into the territory that had been dominated by the devil for over four millennia. He comes to conquer the hearts of men who have occupied realms of darkness.

snow” (1:14). Overcomers are promised a *“WHITE stone”* and *“WHITE”* raiment (2:17; 3:4,5,18). The twenty-four elders are clothed in *“WHITE raiment”* (4:4). The martyrs under the throne are provided *“WHITE robes”* as they wait to be vindicated (6:11). A vast multitude of those *“sealed”* by God are seen with *“WHITE robes”* (7:9,13,14). The *“Son of Man”* is seen sitting on a *“WHITE”* (14:14). A significant angel is witnessed proceeding from the heavenly temple, clothed in *“pure and WHITE linen”* (15:6). The *“righteousness of the saints”* is described as *“fine linen, clean and WHITE”* (19:8). The Lord Jesus Himself is depicted as riding on a *“WHITE horse,”* and those following Him are also on *“WHITE horses,”* clothed in *“fine linen, clean and WHITE”* (19:11,14). Finally, the place of ultimate accountability is called *“a great WHITE throne”* (Rev 20:11). Of old time, the singing Levites were all arrayed in *WHITE* (2 Chron 5:12). The purifying of men from their sin is called becoming *“WHITE”* (Isa 1:18). Daniel saw *“the Ancient of days,”* clothed in *WHITE* (Dan 7:9). He also saw purging as being made *WHITE* (Dan 11:35; 12:10). When Jesus was transfigured, His garments become *WHITE* (Matt 17:2), and holy angels associated with His resurrection and ascension were clothed in *WHITE* (Matt 28:3; Mk 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). It is

difficult to imagine how the Holy Spirit could structure our thinking on this word any clearer.

The *“white horse”* portrays heavenly warfare; a Divine initiative. We are not to filter this image through an earthly analysis of history, or some other form of natural thought. Too, the fact that is the *“first”* seal, sets the Lord in a proper perspective. He is primarily executing a heavenly purpose. While His reign does involve reactions to the sins of men, they are not the chief purpose of His reign.

### The One Upon the Horse

*“He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him . . . ”* The one sitting upon this white horse has a *“bow,”* which is a declared instrument of warfare. David spoke of **God’s initiative against the wicked** : *“If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent HIS BOW, and made it ready”* (Psa 7:12). *“Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth HIS BOW to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces”* (Psa 58:7). Jeremiah spoke of the Lord repulsing His enemies by means of *“HIS BOW”* (Lam 2:4; 3:12).

The *“bow”* is also a sign of power, as declared in the prophets. *“O LORD, were You displeased with the rivers, Was Your anger against the rivers, Was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation? YOUR BOW was made quite ready; Oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah You divided the earth with rivers”* (Hab 3:8-9). *“ For I have bent Judah, MY BOW, Fitted the bow with Ephraim, And raised up your sons, O Zion, Against your sons, O Greece, And made you like the sword of a mighty man”* (Zech 9:13). The overthrow of the enemies of God has been described in terms of the arrows projected by the bow. *“Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; The peoples fall under You”* (Psa 45:5). Here is a picture of **EFFECTIVE** Divine warfare, where the intention of the Lord will be fully executed.

This is a vivid picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, pure, holy, and aggressive. He is depicted as riding into the territory that had been dominated by the devil for over four millennia. He comes to conquer the hearts of men who have occupied realms of darkness. This picture coincides with Christ's declaration of His objectives in the Gospels. ***"I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division"*** (Luke 12:49-51). Jesus came to set the battle in array. While in the flesh, He was ***"straitened,"*** or restricted, in this mission. But He is no longer in the flesh, having experienced the ***"baptism"*** of suffering in His death. When exalted to His throne, He began the Kingdom initiative, to take a people out of the world for His own name (Acts 15:14). The battle bow is in His hand, to smite the hearts of people with conviction, and triumph over the powers of darkness.

### **The Mission of the Rider**

***" . . . and he went out conquering and to conquer."***

Here is the key to the whole vision. It can only be said of the Lord Jesus that He is ***"to conquer."*** All other kingdoms are temporary, and all of their power and seeming success is ***"given"*** to them by the God of heaven. They are **not** intended to ultimately conquer, but are only temporary pawns on the stage of Divine purpose. Remember, The triumphant Christ rides as the One fulfilling God's ***"eternal purpose."*** His objective is not to establish a competitive empire upon the earth, but to call men into a higher and eternal Kingdom. His is a righteous cause! He will triumph in His quest, defeating stubborn wills, adverse circumstances, and those who dare to challenge His power.

It can only be said of the Lord Jesus that He is **“to conquer.”** All other kingdoms are temporary, and all of their power and seeming success is **“given”** to them by the God of heaven. They are **not** intended to ultimately conquer, but are only temporary pawns on the stage of Divine purpose.

Some believe this is a picture of judgment upon the wicked—that Jesus does not rise as one extending His Kingdom, but in retaliation for the wickedness of the kings and kingdoms of the world. That this is declared in this book cannot be denied – but that is not the message of this vision. We are expressly told the mission of the rider, and it is not the punishment of the wicked. This rider **“went out conquering and to conquer.”** Here is a most vivid picture of the cause behind the rapid spread of the Gospel in the first century.

The remarkable expansion of the Kingdom during the first century is a commentary on the effectiveness of the Rider on the white horse, the Lord Jesus Christ. The very first declaration of the Gospel yielded a harvest of 3,000 souls (Acts 2:41). The second major proclamation resulted in about 5,000 men believing the declared Word (Acts 4:4). The book of Acts records the steady growth of the body of Christ, and the words are marvelous. **“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women . . . And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . . And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith . . . Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did . . . And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great**

*company of the priests were obedient to the faith . . . And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized . . . And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds . . . So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”* (Acts 5:14; 6:1; 8:14; 17:8; 18:8; 19:18, 20).

All of this was accomplished with no organization as we know it today. Everything was orchestrated by the Spirit of God under the administration of the Lord Jesus, Who went forth **“conquering.”** A little more than one half of the first century had passed when Paul wrote, **“This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant”** (Col 1:23, NIV). Paul did not say it WOULD be preached, but that it had already been preached. If men doubt the possibility of this dynamic spread of the Gospel, consider this. From Jerusalem there was a dispersion of **“devout men from every nation under heaven”** — and they went **“everywhere, preaching the Word”** (Acts 8:4). A converted political official took the Gospel into Africa, in the region of Ethiopia (Acts 8:27-39). **“All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord”** during Paul’s ministry (Acts 19:10). The book of Acts records the spread of the Gospel into Rome, Greece, Syria, and even the barbarous Isle of Malta (15:41; 19:21;20:2; 28:1-2). Nationalities represented by those born again at Pentecost included **“Parthians (including India) , and Medes ( Persia) , and Elamites (Northeast of Persian Gulf) , and the dwellers in Mesopotamia (Syria) , and in Judaea (Israel) , and Cappadocia (Eastern Asia Minor) , in Pontus (Northeastern Asia Minor) , and Asia, Phrygia (Central Asia Minor) , and Pamphylia (Southern coast of Asia Minor) , in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene (North Africa) , and strangers of Rome (Italy) , Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians”** (Acts 2:9-11). Obstacles like hoary Jewish tradition, commitment to justification by works, idolatry, witchcraft and curious arts, and Grecian philosophy were trampled down by the power of the Gospel of Christ.

In every age, the Lord Jesus is looking for people through whom He can work. The number of them makes no difference. He can penetrate a heathen world with a Paul, or bring down a ruthless and dominating church with a Luther. There is “*no restraint*” with God

John is shown the reality of this remarkable spread of the Gospel. This was the Lord Jesus Himself, conquering what seemed unconquerable, and triumphing gloriously. Many believers were attributing this success to the bearers of the message, and thus called themselves after those God used to convert them (1 Cor 1:12). Others saw it as the spread of a new religion, with no association with the living Christ (Acts 17:32). Still others saw it as an occasion to make a name for themselves, and to gain preeminence among the brethren (Phil 1:16; 3 John 9). But the truth of the matter is that it was the Lord Jesus, riding forth “*conquering!*” It should not surprise us, that to this very day, the effectiveness of the Gospel is rarely attributed to the Lord Jesus. Men are regularly lauded and extolled for their effectiveness in evangelism, missions, and general church growth. All such glorifying is vain, for man cannot produce spiritual increase. That is a prerogative belonging alone to Deity. As it is written, “*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*” (1 Cor 3:6-7). As elementary as this may seem, it remains “*sealed*” to those who are not in fellowship with Christ Jesus.

This is a depiction of the glorious triumph of the Gospel from Pentecost to John, who wrote near the end of the first century. With major persecutions now beginning, believers may have been tempted to think the triumph was coming to an end. But this was not the case. The Lord Jesus is not only shown as conquering, but also “*to conquer.*” There was more to come! The purpose of God would **not** be frustrated, and the saints would **no**t be ultimately overcome! Before the conclusion of this book, we will hear the heavenly shout, “*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of*

***his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever***” (Rev 11:15). All of Christ’s enemies will be openly and unquestionably subordinated. The devil and all of his forces will be cast into the lake of fire. All political and religious opposition will be decimated.

Remember, Christ’s Kingdom is one of participation. Christ accomplishes His triumph through His people, empowering them to stand, opening their eyes to see, and filling their hearts with joy and peace. In every age, the Lord Jesus is looking for people through whom He can work. The number of them makes no difference. He can penetrate a heathen world with a Paul, or bring down a ruthless and dominating church with a Luther. There is ***“no restraint”*** with God (1 Sam 14:6).

We will see it is no small accomplishment to maintain faith when everything is going well, and the truth of the Gospel is spreading. Many a soul has fallen into pride and covetousness in the wake of apparent success. We will find that institutionalism soon became dominant, pushing Christ Jesus into the background. The condition exists to this day. With the rise of the institutional church, the rapid spread of the Gospel ground to a near-halt. Only where brave souls dare to oppose this spiritual encroachment is any real conquering found. But before the age concludes, the Revelation will present a suitable people who will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The triumph will be concluded with these faithful souls at Christ’s side, with crowns on their heads, and shouts of praise upon their lips.

## THE SECOND SEAL

***“When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’”*** We are witnessing the fulfillment of Divine purpose in the earth. As we will see, everything shown is not

pleasant, nor is it intended to be. This book is written for the comfort and consolation of the saints—to assure them they would be sustained through every form of difficulty. Faith is superior to earthly knowledge, and will bolster the one possessing it to stand when it does not seem possible to stand. We must not allow ourselves to entertain a glamorous view of the Kingdom of God, imagining that the reign of Christ Jesus inducts a time of ease and comfort. John could tell us from the Isle of Patmos that he had not found it to be so. He confessed he was a ***“brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ”*** (1:9). John is now given to behold another aspect of God’s redemptive purpose.

The only way to effectively comfort those who are ***“in any trouble”*** (2 Cor 1:4) is to persuade them of the Sovereignty of the Lord in their circumstance.

If the Lord is not in absolute control, the circumstances of life will crush our hope.

### **The Color of the Horse**

***“Another horse, fiery red, went out.”*** The color of this horse is ***“red,”*** signifying the shedding of blood. The color red is associated with blood in Scripture. In a stunning overthrow of the wicked Moabites, an event occurred by which the Moabites were deceived. It is written, ***“Then they rose up early in the morning, and the sun was shining on the water; and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood . And they said, This is blood ; the kings have surely struck swords and have killed one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!”*** (2 Kgs 3:22-23). The remaining words of this verse will confirm this to be a declaration of fierce and relentless militancy. It depicts violent disruption, particularly with regards to the people of God.

## The Mission of its Rider

***“And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.”*** Throughout this book, we must not allow this perspective to get away from us. Every thing that occurs is within the perimeter of Christ’s government. Nothing takes place outside of His strict and purposeful control. The rider received power to fulfill his mission. ***“It was given unto him . . . ”*** Seventeen times this perspective is given in the Revelation (6:2,4,8,11; 8:2,3; 9:1,3,5; 11:1,2; 12:14; 13:5,7; 16:6,8). The only way to effectively comfort those who are ***“in any trouble”*** (2 Cor 1:4) is to persuade them of the Sovereignty of the Lord in their circumstance. If the Lord is not in absolute control, the circumstances of life will crush our hope. That is why true men of God acknowledge, ***“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord”*** (2 Cor 4:5).

This rider was given power to ***“take peace from the earth.”*** That is a most arresting statement! It teaches us that times of agitation and trouble do not come at random! It also teaches us, ***“When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?”*** (Job 34:29). God can give men rest from their enemies, and has done so in the past (Deut 25:19; Josh 1:15; 21:44; 23:1; 2 Sam 7:1; 1 Kgs 5:4; 8:56; 2 Chron 14:6). That peace can only be disrupted when it is ***“given”*** from the Throne of the Lord. Satan cannot force disruption upon the world, or upon an individual, without Divine approval. If it were it not for the Ruling Lord, animosity of a most fierce nature would be unleashed, as it were, upon the face of the whole earth.

While He spoke of this condition among the Jewish people, Jesus described such a circumstance, on the domestic level, in most vivid language. ***“Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and***

*shall cause them to be put to death*” (Mark 13:12). Ezekiel also spoke of this most unusual ferocity. *“I will call for a sword . . . Every man's sword will be against his brother”* (Ezek 38:21). He also spoke of it on a global basis. *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”* (Matt 24:7). In the days of king Asa, a condition like this existed. *“And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity”* (2 Chron 15:5-6). Isaiah also spoke of a situation where hostility existed between nations. *“I will set Egyptians against Egyptians; Everyone will fight against his brother, And everyone against his neighbor, City against city, kingdom against kingdom”* (Isa 19:2). Now, John is given to see such activity on an unprecedented scale. Imagine – taking peace from the earth! Although men have become accustomed to trouble, agitation, and bloodshed throughout the world, they must be careful to view such things from the heavenly perspective. Brutality, bloodshed, and the absence of peace would reign ruthlessly and without interruption, were it not for the King of kings!

Remember, the Revelation is not a mere recounting of history in advance; it is the delineation of the *“eternal purpose”* of God. Here a sort of spiritual map is provided to reveal the circumstances through which the sons of God will be brought to glory. They will not be brought to the heavenly Jerusalem from the Garden of Eden, but in the cauldron of social, political, and spiritual conflict. The removal of peace from the earth, as described in this vision, is targeted to test the saints, and reveal the superiority of faith to circumstance. The disintegration of human relationships is a dreadful thought, but that is involved in taking peace from the earth.

Of particular focus here is the persecution of the saints. In the removal of peace, violent opposition breaks out against the people of God. Extensive oppression of believers followed the extraordinary spread of the Gospel into all the world.

Early in the life of the church, it ***“found favor with all of the people”*** (Acts 2:47; 4:21). Oppositions were largely from the Jews, with no significant initiatives against them by the rest of the world (Acts 9:23; 13:45,50; 17:5,13; 18:12; 19:33; 20:3; 23:12; 25:7; 28:19). Herod’s antagonism against Peter was prompted because he saw it ***“pleased the Jews”*** (Acts 12:3). In a telling statement of the case, Paul wrote to Gentile believers in Thessalonica, ***“ For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost”*** (1 Thess 2:14-16). But this condition changed toward the end of the First century!

They will not be brought to the heavenly Jerusalem from the Garden of Eden, but in the cauldron of social, political, and spiritual conflict. The removal of peace from the earth, as described in this vision, is targeted to test the saints, and reveal the superiority of faith to circumstance.

Fierce and relentless persecution broke out against the saints of God, as well as a worldly climate of war and tumult. The rider on the red horse began to cut a swath through the world that would yield a bath of blood among the people of God. In 64 A.D., Nero opposed the people of God, with Paul and Peter martyred in the wake of his assault. In his day, legal decisions that were favorable to Christians were overturned. In 95 A.D. Domitian persecuted the people of God, during which over 40,000 died. In 163 A.D., after a third persecution by Trajan, Antoninios inflicted a grievous persecution against believers, in which Polycarp and Justin Martyr died. In the year 202 A.D. Septimus Severus engaged in an initiative against the church. Maximum began a bloody persecution in 202 A.D., Decius in 256 A.D., and Valarius in 259 A.D.—200 years of aggressive and bloody persecution!

**Of this period** , Workman wrote, “For 200 years, to become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining a despised and persecuted sect, the swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms. For 200 years he that would follow Christ must count the cost, and be prepared to pay the same with his liberty and life. For 200 years the mere profession of Christianity was itself a crime. ‘Christianus sum’ was almost the one plea for which there was Persecution no forgiveness, in itself all that was necessary as a ‘title’ on the back of the condemned. He who made it was allowed neither to present apology, nor call in the aid of a pleader. ‘Public hatred,’ writes Tertullian, ‘asks but one thing, and that not investigation into the crimes charged, but simply the confession of the Christian name.’ For the name itself in periods of stress, not a few, meant the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, the panther, or in the case of maidens an infamy worse than death" (*Workman, 103, from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

This was a 200 year persecution from Rome. An estimated 50,000,000 believers were martyred during this time because of their identity with Christ Jesus.

War also rose to new heights after 220 A.D. At that time, four great civilizations existed in the world. The Roman Empire, Sassanian Empire, the Gupta Dynasty, and the Han dynasty. These were noted for social stability, houses of wood and stone, great cities, and extensive literary works. Another group of people lived in Central Asia,

Now we turn to the natural order, beholding the control of the Sovereign Christ in that realm as well. The reigning Lamb maintained the saints in the bloody opposition of its enemies. Now He will maintain it when the earth refuses to yield its

## increase.

who dwelt in tents, and could neither read nor write. It appeared the more formal civilizations had nothing to fear from these nomads. But then the rider on the red horse entered, taking peace from the earth. The nomads traveled far and wide, often invading China, India, Persia, and Rome. In 220 A.D., the Huns swept into China and ended the Han dynasty. In 484, they killed the Persian Emperor, and in 535 brought an end to the Gupta dynasty in India. The most famous of all Huns, Attilia, invaded Italy in 452. Later military groups included the Goths, and the Visigoths, who sacked Rome in 410. The Vandals came in 455 capturing Carthage, and also destroying Rome. Peace, as it were, had been ***“taken from the earth.”*** If you are only casually familiar with this period of history, you know these wars were characterized by remarkable brutality and heartlessness.

The historical persecutions and wars just mentioned, however do not constitute the complete fulfillment of the red horse and its rider. Rather, this is a depiction of **one type of obstacle that lies between the saints and glory**; one that is accentuated from time to time in human history. Were this not the case, the book of revelation would not have the comforting power it was designed to have. Many a Twentieth Century believer can readily identify with the rider on the red horse, as well as clusters of saints throughout the world.

Both persecution and war are encompassed in the vision – but from the standpoint of the saints. “Why,” it might be reasoned, was power “given” to take peace from the earth, and inflict suffering upon the saints of the Most High God?” There are at least two reasons, and both of them are lofty. **First, the church is superior to this world.** The earth can unleash its best and most formidable opposition against the redeemed, but they will stand by their faith. The church will sail to glory on a sea of blood, if called upon to do so. The loss of earthly life, and the frail tabernacle that attends it, will not impede their journey. Both persecution and war confirmed the superiority of spiritual life and weaponry.

**Second, heavenly powers and principalities witnessed the greatness of the grace of God.** In spite of unjust and heartless treatment, believers maintained a non-retaliatory spirit. They were willing to commit their cause to the Lord, knowing He would settle it for them. They formed no army to march against their enemies, nor did they side with an earthly empire in an unholy alliance, as did some of the kings in Israel's history (1 Kgs 13:1; 2 Chron 18:1; 2 Chron 20:35). Even in their death, they glorified God, regarding it an honor to lay down their lives for their Lord. You may rest assured, these noble martyrs will be duly compensated by the Lord for sacrificing their lives in order to maintain their identity with the Lord Jesus.

One additional observation about this period of time. **Persecution neutralizes the development of erroneous theological views.** It is true that, for the elect, hearts and minds are more focused during times of duress. Much false teaching and corrupted theological views, have been developed in periods of ease and acceptance from the world. Times of ease and acceptance have often proved to be open doors for the development of flawed and harmful views of Scripture. We do well to be alert in such times, and valiant for the truth.

## THE THIRD SEAL

*“When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a black horse . . . ”*

Now we turn to the natural order, beholding the control of the Sovereign Christ in that realm as well. The reigning Lamb maintained the saints in the bloody opposition of its enemies. Now He will maintain it when the earth refuses to yield its increase.

This is a depiction of famine,

when the scarcity of food prevails. Notice, the horse is **“black.”** Here a time of trouble is seen. Scripture has established the power of the language of this text. **“Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness ”** (Joel 2:5-6). **“ . . .and the faces of them all gather blackness ”** (Nah 2:10). **“My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat”** (Job 30:29). **“For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black : because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it”** (Jer 4:28). **“BLACK,”** then, speaks of mourning and woe, calamity and hardship. This is descriptive of something infinitely more than a handicap or inconvenience. It represents a most severe trial, brought upon all mankind, but particularly upon the saints. This woe is different from the previous one. The blood of the saints is not shed in this case. The church is not faced with a bloody persecution. The test of their faith comes from a different perspective.

**“ . . . and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius . . . ’** Here is a picture of famine, when needed resources are scarce, and must be measured with discretion. The language reminds us of expressions of old time, when God brought famines. **“When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied”** (Lev 26:26). In his lamentations, Jeremiah spoke vividly of such times. **“Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine”** (Lam 5:10). Ezekiel also spoke of famine in this sort of figure. **“And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it . . . and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment”** (Ezek 4:10,16).

This rider inducts a time of famine, when food would be so scarce it would have to be sold by weight. A pair of scales, or more properly **“balances”** (KJV), signifies the weighing of goods. As it is written, (Lev 19:35-36; Ezek 5:1; Dan 5:27). Elsewhere in Scripture, this is called **“breaking the whole staff of bread”** (Psa 105:16; Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 14:13). Those who doubt the Lord can allow, and even cause, such things to happen, must rethink the matter. Of old time, God **“called for a famine”** (2 Kgs 8:1). He declared He would **“send”** a famine (Jer 24:10), and cause them to come upon those who did not submit to His judgments (Jer 27:8; 29:17).

As with other sections of this grand book, there is a historical fulfillment of the passage, as well as the statement of Divine purpose and principle. Following the season of war and persecution, there was, indeed, a time of fierce and relentless famine. A single excerpt from Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of Rome* will serve to confirm this point. “But a long and general famine was a calamity of a more serious kind. It was the inevitable consequence of rapine and oppression, which extirpated the produce of the present and future harvests. Famine is almost always followed by epidemical diseases, the effect of scanty and unwholesome food. Other causes must, however, to have contributed to the plague, which, from the year 250 to the year 265, raged without interruption in every province, city, and almost every family of the Roman empire. During some time five thousand persons died daily in Rome; and many towns that had escaped the hands of the Barbarians, were entirely depopulated. Applying this authentic fact to the most correct tables of mortality, it evidently proves that about half the people of Alexandria perished; and could we venture to extend the analogy to the other provinces, we might suspect that war, pestilence, and famine, had consumed, in a few years, about **HALF OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.**” (*Decline and Fall of Rome*, Vol 1, Chap 10).

From the standpoint of Rome, this was nothing less than Divine reprisal for its maltreatment of the saints of God. Viewing it from the perspective of nature, it is as though the creation rebelled at the

treatment of the sons of God, refusing to yield its produce. From the standpoint of the saints, it was a time in which faith was again proved superior over everything under heaven. From the viewpoint of heavenly principalities and powers, it was confirmation of the strength of the grace of God.

The Sovereignty of our Lord is seen in this black horse and its rider. As the plague descends upon the earth, a cry is heard from heavenly places. This plague will not be without Divine restraint. “. . . ***and do not harm the oil and the wine.***” A limitation is placed upon the rider. Though widespread, the famine did not destroy everything vital to humanity. The figures of “***oil***” and “***wine***” are declared in Scripture. “***He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which***

God can not only prepare us a table “***in the presence***” of our enemies, He can do it in the midst of a spiritual famine as well. Faith always makes us superior to the circumstances!

strengthens man's heart” (Psa 104:14,15). These expressions denote joyful sustenance, when the heart is made strong and joyful in God, even though circumstances seem to contradict faith. The limitation placed upon the rider of the black horse affirmed the upholding of the people of God. Saints of God have confronted famine, and we should not be surprised if they do again (Abraham—Gen 12:10; 26:1, Jacob and his sons--Gen 41:57; 42:5; 43:1, Ruth and Naomi--Ruth 1:1, David—2 Sam 21:1, Elijah—1 Kgs 18:2; 2 Kgs 4:38; 8:1). Still, in those times, the word was fulfilled, “***Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy, To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine***” (Psa 33:18-19).

## Spiritual Famine

Some have taken a spiritual view of this text, seeing the famine as a spiritual famine. I do not rule this out. Passages such as this cannot be confined to the realm of history. God simply does not speak in that manner. History is always a projection of higher and eternal principles, and may be used to clarify the nature of spiritual life. Looking at the black horse and its rider from this perspective, we have a reference to spiritual famine, when the Word of the Lord will become exceeding scarce due to the propagation of error and the loss of spiritual appetite. Through Amos, God did speak of sending such a famine upon the land. ***“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it”*** (Amos 8:11-12).

Such periods have often come upon the earth. In the days of Samuel, every word of God was ***“precious,”*** because there was no ***“open vision,”*** or ***“widespread revelation”*** (1 Sam 3:1, KJV, NKJV). There were also the ***“Dark Ages,”*** when spiritual ignorance reigned for a thousand years. There is a form of spiritual famine afoot in our land today, when the real Word of God is scarcely heard, and the Gospel has been buried beneath the rubble of religious tradition. Yet, the ***“oil”*** and ***“wine”*** necessary for spiritual life remain available to those who will seek for it. God can not only prepare us a table ***“in the presence”*** of our enemies, He can do it in the midst of a spiritual famine as well. Faith always makes us superior to the circumstances! There was a point in history, after the widespread persecution of the church, when heresy was disseminated with remarkable zeal and effectiveness. Many of the erroneous views spawned during that time, remain powerful influences to this very day.

## THE FOURTH SEAL

*“When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a pale horse.”* Here again, trouble is increasing, and fear is in its wake. A pale horse speaks of a time of fear and trouble in the extremity. God described the time of Israel’s blessing as one in which its face would not *“grow pale,”* flushed, as it were, because of fear and consternation (Isa 29:22). A time Jeremiah described as *“Jacob’s trouble”* was one in which *“all faces turned pale”* (Jer 30:6). The color *“pale”* is one of greenish-white—the color of one stricken with grievous disease, or moved with feelings of panic and consternation. From the standpoint of nature, disease and debilitating fear generally follows war and famine. The idea of the passage is the multiplication of sorrows, the increase of difficulty, and the enlarged effects of relentless trouble.

*“And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.”* Oh, the dread of it all. Death comes charging onto the scene, with Hades following it. This means death will not only be a possibility, it shall happen, and the unseen world will open wide to receive its victims. Here is the conclusion of troubles the world in general, and believers in particular, will be called upon to undergo.

Death itself has no power except what is given to it.

When it girdles the globe with seeming effectiveness, it is only because it has been *“given power”* to do so. That means that God, even in that last contradicting circumstance, will work all things together for the good of those who love Him

## and are called according to His purpose

But lest the fainthearted become victims of their own imagination, we are quickly told of our Lord's control of this situation. Power, or authority, was GIVEN to **"them"** (death and hades) over **"a fourth part of the earth."** Death could not run at will, nor could hades swallow up humanity at its own behest. This was a matter strictly managed by the Lord of glory. Remember, our consolation is in what the Lord does, not whether or not we go through difficulties. Our times are in the Lord's hand (Psa 31:15), not in the hands of death! Death itself has no power except what is given to it. When it girdles the globe with seeming effectiveness, it is only because it has been **"given power"** to do so. That means that God, even in that last contradicting circumstance, will work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

The term **"Hades"** (translated **"hell"** in the KJV) has been confusing to many. This word is, what is called, a transliteration: i.e., the Greek letters are simply converted to English letters, rather than the word itself being translated. Most of the time this is done, it is because there is no English word that precisely parallels the term. Grammatically speaking, the word **haidēs** ( ὁ ᾗδης – **"the hades"**) means *the world of the dead*: literally, *an unseen place*. Although some theology sees this as synonymous with the grave, this is not the case. There is another word for **"grave."** It is **mnemeion** ( μνημείω ), and means *tomb, grave, or sepulcher* –the place of interment for the body. This is where they laid the body of Lazarus (John 11:17). It is where Jesus' body was **"buried"** (Matt 27:60), and where the disciples laid the body of John the Baptist (Mark 6:29). Hades, as we understand it, relates to the soul, while the grave relates to the body.

The rider on this pale horse is identified as **"Death"** – which is a third consideration. Death is the process by which the body is consigned to the grave, and the soul goes to Hades. The word **"death"** comes from **thanatos** ( Θάνατος ) and means a *separation*. In the case of mortality,

it is the separation of the soul from the body (Rom 5:14; 8:38; 1 Cor 15:54). In the case of spiritual death, it is the separation of the individual from God (Rom 6:21; 7:13; 8:6). Death is not annihilation, or non-existence. It is separation. This rider represents a wave of death that will effect a significant percentage of mankind.

The means of death are divers, covering most known areas. Notice the classifications. The sword (*war*) , hunger (*famine*) , death (*disease and pestilence*) , and the beasts of the earth. In summary, **this is death by unnatural means** . It parallels a statement made in Ezekiel 14:21. ***“How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem; the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence; to cut off man and beast from it?”*** Ezekiel saw the same four means that John saw: the sword, famine (*hunger*) , wild beasts (*beasts of the earth*) , and pestilence (*death*) . What Ezekiel saw related to Jerusalem. What John saw related to the world. These four means are mentioned elsewhere, in connection with judgment (Ezek 5:17; Jer 16:4). Showing Sovereign control over all creation, even the beasts of the earth are appointed to bring death among men (Lev 26:22; Deut 32:24).

Here is the fulfillment of the ancient prophesy, ***“Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself And opened its mouth beyond measure . . . ”*** (Isa 5:14). The word ***“Sheol”*** is a general word denoting the region of the dead. Sometimes it refers to the grave (Gen 37:35; 42:38; Psa 6:5; Isa 38:18; Hos 13:14) , and sometimes to Hades (Deut 32:22; Psa 9:17; 16:10; Ezek 21:21; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:2). Isaiah affirms that the region of the dead can ***“enlarge itself,”*** preparing, as it were, to receive a large number of those cut off from the earth.

While this precisely coincides with a period of human history, it is not confined to it. We are viewing history from behind the scenes. From a higher vantage point, we are beholding the unfolding of Divine purpose. Of specific interest is the manner in which the saints of God confront

death, in all of its varied forms. Faith empowered them to confront death head-on, not fearing the rider on the pale horse. The Psalmist challenges, *“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace”* (Psa 37:37). The saints know that *“whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's”* (Rom 14:8).

These *“souls”* were not slain because of the way they lived! Their death was brought on because of what they SAID! The trite saying, *I had rather see a sermon than hear one*, may have some element of truth in it, but it is certainly a small one. Those who suppose that a godly life speaks louder than the Word of God need to reexamine their view.

## SCENES OF SUFFERING

In the second, third, and fourth seals, we have witnessed scenes of suffering. It seems to me they have provided a thorough view of suffering. There is persecution, the conflict of nature, and death itself, with everything that attends it. We have read of fierce and unrelenting opposition, bloodshed, famine and all forms of deprivation (both natural and spiritual). We also saw the full scope of death, including violence by the sword, starvation, death in its general sense, and being devoured with the beasts of the earth. It has been, from one perspective, a gruesome picture. But none of these things were able to effectively neutralize the conquering Savior, or the faith of those who trust Him. The *“great salvation”* was adequate for every test—even in extreme

measures.

We have witnessed a compendium of world history! It all confirms the saints are strangers and pilgrims in the world, not ultimately suited for it. It also substantiates that faith is equal to any and every worldly challenge. Listen to the confidence with which those dominated by faith and hope speak. *“To die is gain” . . . “We die unto the Lord” . . . “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” . . . “The time of my departure is at hand” . . . “I am about to put off this earthly tabernacle” . . . We know that is the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, eternal in the heavens*” (Phil 1:21; Rom 14:8; 2 Cor 5:8; 2 Tim 4:6; 2 Pet 1:14; 2 Cor 5:1). Suffice it to say, the high purposes of God will not be served by our convenience and comfortable circumstances. The crucible of hardship has proved a far better arena for the development of character and the glory of God

## THE FIFTH SEAL

### **A New Location**

*“When He opened the fifth seal . . . ”* The panorama now shifts from the seen world to the unseen world. Upon the opening of each of the previous four seals, one of the living creatures said, *“Come and see!”* But no such summons accompanies the opening of the fifth seal. Neither is a horse and rider associated with this seal. This is not an earthly conquest. In the opening of this seal, we are transported into the realm where there is neither war nor rumor of war. No pestilence here, nor disease, nor ravishing of wild beasts. This is a realm where life on earth is a recollection, a memory--something that is past.

## Personalities Are Seen

***“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.”*** Here is one of the rare occurrences in Scripture where ***“souls”*** are seen. These are representative of a particular segment of ***“the spirits of just men made perfect,”*** into whose fellowship we have been called (Heb 12:23). They have already experienced the ***“dissolving”*** of their ***“earthly tabernacles,”*** in which they no longer ***“groan.”*** They are no longer burdened with the weight of mortality—they are ***“souls”*** (2 Cor 5:1-4). Having met their appointment of death (Heb 9:27), and ***“finished”*** their race (2 Tim 4:6), we are given a glimpse of them on the other side, as it were. We will find that Christ has been ***“magnified”*** by their death (Phil 1:20).

And who are these ***“souls?”*** They are martyrs, who were ***“slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.”*** They were rejected upon earth, but are now in the proximity of the throne. They had been ***“slain,”*** or murdered, because of their proclamation of the Word of God, and their personal identity with the Lord. They were not respected for being religious, or accepted because of their outgoing personalities. These ***“souls”*** had not gained popularity because of their religious success, or for the formation of an effective Christian organization. These were not the revered pastors of mega-churches, or the authors of self-help books and secret tips to spirituality. No! They held to a testimony of their own. It was not borrowed, the result of a course they had taken, or a finely tuned theological system. The ***“souls”*** we now behold had embraced the ***“glorious Gospel of the blessed God,”*** ***“tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,”*** and given their hearts to its proclamation. Stephen may have been among their number (Acts 7:58-60), as well as James (Acts 12:2), John the Baptist (Mark 6:18-28), and Peter and Paul. Perhaps the first martyr, Abel, was among them (Gen 4:3-8), and the godly prophets slain by wicked Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4,13). While the emphasis is doubtless being placed upon those slain during the rides of the previous three horsemen, I doubt it is limited to them.

These “*souls*” were not slain because of the way they lived! Their death was brought on because of what they SAID! The trite saying, *I had rather see a sermon than hear one*, may have some element of truth in it, but it is certainly a small one. Those who suppose that a godly life speaks louder than the Word of God need to reexamine their view. Godly conduct “*adorns*” the doctrine – it does not replace it (Tit 2:10). The “*souls*” we now see were “*SLAIN*” because they bore witness to the truth. They brought the message of God to men, and were killed because of it. They endeavored to turn men from darkness to light, and therefore their lives were taken from them. How defiled the world must be for such a thing to happen! In them, the Word of God was fulfilled: “*Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*” (Psa 44:22), “. . . *whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it*” (Lk 9:24), “*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*” (Rev 12:11).

And where are these souls located? It is “*under the altar.*” They are not in the center of the throne, as the Lamb. Nor, indeed, are they among the four living creatures and twenty-four elders that surround the throne. We behold no thrones for them, as for the twenty-four elders. They are “*under the altar.*” While the twenty-four elders depict the ultimate state of the righteous of all ages, these “*souls*” are seen during the interim state—between the time of the vision and the end of the world. The “*altar*” alludes to the brazen altar of the tabernacle, where beasts were slain, and their blood poured out at its foot. As it is written, “*And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting*” (Lev 4:7). The lives of these “*souls*” had been offered to God upon the altar of spiritual sacrifice. In interest of eternal things, and within a rich fellowship with the Lord Jesus, they

had forfeited their lives rather than neutralize their message. The concept of being “*offered*” to God is also affirmed elsewhere in Scripture (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6).

Hear them! They are interested in the cause for which they were slain. They knew the cause was right, and the world was in error. When shall the truth for which they gave their lives triumph over wrong? When will all doubt be removed as to who was right and who was wrong? When will the name of the Lord be fully glorified, and His martyred saints be vindicated?

Some have speculated what “*the altar*” might be. It has been viewed as Christ Himself. Others perceive it as indicative of a temporal state, a sort of holding place for departed saints—like “*Abraham’s bosom*,” where Lazarus was carried by angels upon his death (Lk 16:22). While I am inclined to the latter view, the vision is emphasizing the **recognition** of the martyrs’ death, and the commitment of God to vindicating them before the curtain is drawn down upon earth’s history. Care must be taken not to allow speculations to cloud the message, or to be diverted to novel tributaries of theological thought.

### **Their Cry**

Contrary to the notions of the soul-sleeper, these personalities are not unconscious and inactive. They do not fulfill Solomon’s “*under the sun*” view of death: i.e., “. . . *there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going*” (Eccl 9:10). Quite to the contrary, we find these souls with both knowledge and wisdom.

Through the Gospel, we have gained insight into the unseen realms that even Solomon did not possess.

And what do these “*souls*” cry out? We do not hear them praising God, or declaring relief that they have left the world at last. “*And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’*” I am not surprised that this contradicts, and glaringly so, much contemporary theology. This is the cry of liberated souls that have passed beyond domain of the curse, yet have **not** yet entered into the fulness of God’s glory. Although they are no longer in the realm of time, they remain conscious of it. They are in not the world, yet maintain an interest in what is occurring there.

Hear them! They are interested in the cause for which they were slain. They knew the cause was right, and the world was in error. When shall the truth for which they gave their lives triumph over wrong? When will all doubt be removed as to who was right and who was wrong? When will the name of the Lord be fully glorified, and His martyred saints be vindicated? For some, the whole matter is inconsequential. They have given little of themselves to the Lord and His revealed objectives, so this kind of thought does not even occur to them. Such sophists cannot conceive of the blood of the saints being “*avenged!*” Like it or not, their blood will be avenged by God!

In a scathing rebuke of His generation, the Lord Jesus announced this aspect of Divine justice. “*Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation*” (Luke 5:49-51). Indeed, if “*God is not*

*unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”* (Heb 6:10), He surely will not forget the blood of His martyrs!

Vengeance is an aspect of the Divine nature, and we do well to remember it! The Psalmist ascribed vengeance to the Lord, asking that He show Himself—much like the request of the souls under the altar. **“O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!”** (Psa 94:1). The Holy Spirit urges believers not to take matters into their own hands, avenging themselves. Rather, they are to feed their enemies when they are hungry, and give them to drink when they are thirsty (Rom 12:20). But let us NOT be naive about this matter. Unless they repent, that is **not** how the Lord will treat them. **“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord”** (Rom 12:19; Deut 32:35,45; Nah 1:2-3; Heb 10:30). The martyrs are aware of this aspect of the Divine nature. Their question is not IF He will avenge their blood, but WHEN He will. Their blood, like that of Abel, was crying out from the ground. The cry of these souls is not a request for mere retaliation. They appeal to the holiness and truthfulness of God. **“How long, O Lord, HOLY AND TRUE, dost Thou NOT judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”** For their blood **not** to be avenged would render God unholy. If God did not vindicate these faithful saints, He would no longer be true. But He is both Holy and True, and their blood will be avenged!

Again, a soft and deceived church knows nothing of the circumstance unveiled at the opening of the fifth seal. This is not the representation of agitated and vindictive souls, but of righteous ones. It is not the first time we have heard godly souls cry out, **“HOW LONG?”** This cry also came from David. **“My soul also is greatly troubled; But You, O LORD; HOW LONG?”** (Psa 6:3). **“HOW LONG, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? HOW LONG will You hide Your face from me? HOW LONG shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my**

*heart daily? HOW LONG will my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psa 13:1-2). “Lord, HOW LONG will You look on?” (Psa 35:17). “O God, HOW LONG will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?” (Psa 74:10). “LORD, HOW LONG will the wicked, How long will the wicked triumph?” (Psa 94:3). The prophet Habakkuk also cried out, “O LORD, HOW LONG shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ And You will not save” (Hab 1:2).*

“Their blood is shed

In confirmation of the noblest claim—

Our claim to feed upon immortal truth,

To walk with God, to be divinely free

To soar and to anticipate the skies.

Yet few remember them. They lived unknown

Till persecution dragged them into fame,

And chased them up to heaven. Their ashes flew

No marble tells us whether. With their names

No bard embalms and sanctifies his song.

And history, so warm on meager themes,

Is cold oln this. She execrates, indeed,

The tyranny that doomed them to the fire,

But gives the sufferers little praise.”

(Cowper)

The godly, whether in this world or *“under the altar,”* are not content to see the cause of Christ opposed and His people maligned and slain. They will NOT take matters into their own hands, but by faith they know the

Lord will not let their persecutors go unpunished. It is righteous for them to acquiesce with God in this matter, and they are not to be criticized by those whose professed faith has brought them no suffering. Paul once said, *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works”* (2 Tim 4:14). David once said to Saul, *“Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you”* (1 Sam 24:8). Again he said, *“And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness”* (2 Sam 3:34). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, *“it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you”* (2 Thess 1:6). Do not be tempted to lightly regard the persecution and death of God’s people. Such atrocities have not gone unnoticed by God, and He will surely settle the accounts. I know well that we to pray for those who persecute and use us despitefully (Matt 5:44). But unless they repent, their opposition to the people of God will prove to be their undoing.

### **The Answer Given to Them**

These martyred souls are not rebuked for making such a request. They are not told their question is out of order. *“Then a white robe was given to each of them . . . ”* First, a *“white robe”* was given to each one of them. It was as though they were told: *God is righteous in waiting to execute vengeance, and you are righteous in waiting also.* This robe speaks of assurance that their death will not go unavenged. It also confirms they are approved of God now. Additionally, it indicates their reservation, as it were, for the marriage supper of the Lamb. It also confirms the high and settled peace that belongs to those who have laid down their lives of the Word of Christ. Though not in the fulness of glory, these souls are now absolutely free from the **possibility** of defilement.

*“ . . . and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer . . . ”* The matter is under the control of the conquering Lamb,

and He will leave no injustice unjudged. The martyrs are told ***“they should rest a little while longer.”*** Their cry for vengeance was not inappropriate, it was premature. They were to rest in peace and assurance, knowing the Judge of all the earth would do right. They were also to rest from asking ***“How long . . . ?”*** They must be content to wait, if only for ***“a little while longer.”*** Ultimately, all accounts will be settled when the Lord comes again—and that is just ***“a little while.”*** As it is written, ***“For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry”*** (Heb 10:37). There is a Divine purpose being served. It is larger than the martyrs, yet includes the proper vindication of them. It is comforting to note their question was neither rebuked nor ignored. Attention was given to the matter that concerned them, and they were given what was necessary to sustain them until the time of reckoning.

***“ . . . until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”*** Some theological stances will not allow such language – but faith is able to embrace it. There was a ***“number”*** of fellow servants that should yet be ***“killed.”*** This number is known only to God – but it does exist. They are souls ***“accounted as sheep for the slaughter”*** (Psa 44:22; Rom 8:36). Each of them will be given grace to glorify God in their death, even as did Peter, who was also appointed to this number (John 21:19). Of old time, the saints counted martyrdom an honor, and did not balk when their faith cost them their lives. A church comfortably ensconced in the world knows nothing of this spirit.

## THE SIXTH SEAL

We have walked through the history of the world, seeing it from the standpoint of the heavenly Kingdom. God has His way in the world, whether it is in the triumphant spread of the Gospel, and the sweeping of multitudes into the Kingdom, or in the preservation of the saints

during extraordinary opposition and hardship. God's people are going to surface from all of these things. Their faith is adequate for the challenges of success, the assault of persecution, the oppression of famine, and the experience of death by unnatural causes. While the Israelites were excluded from the ten plagues of Egypt, safe in the land of Goshen (Ex 8:22; 9:26; 10:23), those in Christ Jesus are **not** exempt from the afflictions just mentioned. High and holy purposes are being served by their participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Too, the wickedness of the wicked is being brought out by the presence of the godly. Additionally, the extreme hatred of Satan surfaces as the work of grace becomes more evident.

Now we face the inevitable conclusion of it all. Nature, which brought its famines and plagues, will be folded up as a garment. The persecutors of the church will confront the Lord of the people they hated, maligned, and even killed. The day of the Lamb's wrath is scheduled on the Divine agenda, and we are going to catch a glimpse of it here.

***“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”***

But there is coming a time when the light of the

sun will be extinguished, and it will cease to make its successive journeys across the sky. How frequently this is mentioned in Scripture. . God will, in the end, “*clothe the heavens with blackness,*” and “*make sackcloth their covering*” (Isa 50:3)—the funeral of the universe!

The language is so vivid, it is difficult to escape its meaning. Notwithstanding, all manner of doctrine has been spewed upon the church regarding this passage. Some suppose it is a graphic portrayal of a temporal judgment (*in particular, the destruction of Jerusalem*), even though the vision seems to go out of its way to ensure this view is not entertained. It is a bit of strained theology that applies such lofty and universal language to provincial judgment, upon a particularly small section of the world. The judgment of Jerusalem was fierce and awesome. But it was a type of a greater judgment that will occur when everything is shaken, and all of the wicked are called into account.

What we are seeing here is the end of all things, and the final confrontation of the Lamb by His enemies. The very same day is portrayed as one of blessing, joy, and glory for the saved (2 Thess 1:8-10). But this is a book of judgment; a record of the dealings of God with His enemies. The first seal revealed the triumph of Christ over all. The next three seals revealed the experience of the saints upon the earth. The fifth seal unveils that departed saints will still be vindicated. Now, we are projected to the end of time.

“ . . . *and behold, there was a great earthquake . . .* ” There are indications in Scripture that the end of the world will be preceded by some arresting indicators. Such a picture is portrayed in this very text. “*A great earthquake*” signifies the shaking of all things as prophesied

by both Isaiah and Haggai. ***“Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger”*** (Isa 13:13). ***“For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land”*** (Hag 2:6). The Spirit confirms this to be a declaration of the end of all things, in Hebrews 12:26-28. ***“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”***

Those who have a light-hearted view of the Living God, and of the Lamb, will do well to ponder this passage. The earth will convulse, as if getting ready to give birth to a *“new earth”* that will be filled with righteousness. The earth writhed and thrashed about at Sinai, and trembled when Jesus died. But that is nothing compared to what will occur as the end is upon us.

***“. . . and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.”*** During the ordinary course of nature, the sun and the moon are known for their faithfulness and reliability. The Psalmist measured faithful occurrences in these words, ***“They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations . . . In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth”*** (Psa 72:5-7). How marvelously their stability is portrayed in Isaiah. ***“Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever”*** (Jer 31:35-36).

But there is coming a time when the light of the sun will be extinguished, and it will cease to make its successive journeys across the sky. How frequently this is mentioned in Scripture. (Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10,31; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24). God will, in the end, “*clothe the heavens with blackness,*” and “*make sackcloth their covering*” (Isa 50:3)—the funeral of the universe!

While some seek to spiritualize this text, we do well to consider it within the context of this remarkable affirmation. It will require an extreme amount of effort to separate this occurrence from the end of all things. The most stable of all heavenly bodies will fail! The moon will become “*like blood,*” dark and foreboding. This phenomenon is mentioned three times in Scripture (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:12), and depicts a dreadful conclusion to nature.

*“And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.”* The multiplicity of stars confirms the greatness of this occasion. Only God knows their vast number, yet calls them all by name (Psa 147:4). It is true that “*stars*” often depict earthly rulers and dignitaries (Gen 37:9; Dan 12:3; Obadiah 1:4; Jude 1:3). However, that sort of imagery does not fit into this passage. It is too climactic to be viewed as anything other than “*the end of all things.*” God will shake the heavens (Isa 13:13; Joel 3:16), and cause the stars to jar out of their place and fall, just like a giant wind strips a tree of its winter fruit. We are witnessing the demise of nature, coming down, as it were, in a manner that will be observed by all men.

*“Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.”* In Genesis 1:1, the universe was unfolded like a giant scroll, upon which would be written the workings of the Lord. But in the end of time, that universe will be

rolled up, brought to a conclusion, and replaced with a new heavens and a new earth. Nature, that has survived for the history of the world, will be *“moved out of its place.”* Great mountains and mountain ranges, long

Nothing will be able to hide the ungodly from the Lamb. The heavenly bodies in which they trusted, and out of which they made gods, will fail. They will not be able to take refuge in the mountains, or remote Isles, that have in existence for centuries.  
The time of reckoning has come.

noted for their stability (Psa 36:6; 65:6; 125:2), will be removed. Nothing will be able to hide the ungodly from the Lamb. The heavenly bodies in which they trusted, and out of which they made gods, will fail. They will not be able to take refuge in the mountains, or remote Isles, that have in existence for centuries. The time of reckoning has come.

*“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?””* Our attention is turned to those unreconciled to God through the Lamb. Earth’s dignitaries, who had initiated attacks against the saints, are brought into view. The *“great”* men of the earth, noted for their influence are seen. *“Rich men,”* who thought to change the course of things with their silver and gold, together with commanders who marshaled armies, and *“mighty men”* who won great battles, are all effected by what is happening. Every quadrant of society is influenced, including every one who served others, and those who were free from social bondage. They had opposed the saints, refused to hear them, and either were aggressive against them, or allowed them to be persecuted and killed without lifting their voice or siding with them. Now, they must confront ultimate reality. Like Adam in the Garden, and Israel at

Sinai, they try to hide themselves. They cry for help from the mountains and rocks, but can find no solace or hiding place, for all of nature is convulsing in the throes of death.

We cannot overlook the prelude to this day of terror, which occurred when Jerusalem was overthrown in 70 A.D. Jesus referred to that time when, on the way to the cross, He addressed the weeping daughters of Jerusalem. ***“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’ Then they will begin ‘to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?”*** (Luke 23:28-31). Jesus Himself was the ***“green tree,”*** unsuitable for burning, and the more unlikely to burn at all. If men did this to Him, what would they do to the dry stubble of Jerusalem and its inhabitants? A harsh judgment, indeed, fell upon them. But it was light compared to the end of all things.

The wicked are NOT confused about what is happening. More than the demise of nature, more than the fearful collapse of the heavens, they are facing the ***“wrath of the Lamb.”*** During the history of the world, ***“the Lamb”*** sought to draw men to Himself, but that time has ended. His mercy is now reserved for His elect, with none remaining for the wicked—not even in the form of rain, once sent upon the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45). This is the ***“day of wrath,”*** so long declared by the godly (Job 21:30; Zeph 1:15; Rom 2:5). By ignoring this appointed day, the wicked have carved out their own destiny, and a dreadful one it is.

The solemn declaration of the Spirit is enough to jar every soul from its complacency, if it will listen.

***“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God”*** (Rom 2:5-11). Let every one with ears, hear!

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the first cycle is completed, and the enemies of the people of God are called into account. Faith has preserved the saints in earth, and they have been consoled under the altar. We have witnessed the working of God in the earth—the Mediatorial reign of King Jesus, and the outcome of it all. It is not a message for the squeamish, but we all do well to take heed to it. If we are living by faith, we will derive comfort from the message of the first six seals. Our faith is not vain in the Lord, nor are our labors. We have no guarantee concerning the course we will be called to run. It may lead through difficult times, and unspeakable trials – or we may run it in times of relative peace. But whatever your lot may be, the Lord is with you. The Lamb will supply you what you need for the race you are called to run. If you are surrounded by enemies, He will prepare a table for you. He will make you greater than your oppressors, and enable you to stand when all others are falling.

Take the message of this chapter to heart, and do not wrangle about whether we have read of the destruction of Jerusalem or the end of the world. There is nothing about this text that would suggest a judgment

like that of Jerusalem—nothing. It remains for supposed scholars to deduce that. Take the text as it stands, and see if it does not speak plainly to you of hardship, opposition, bloodshed, and the end of the world. See if it does not shout to your heart about a conquering Savior and the ultimate accountability of all who oppose Christ and His people.

Ultimately, history will confirm nothing was able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus the Lord. But do not take it from me, let the Holy Spirit shout it to your heart. ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Rom 8:35-39).

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 13

**ALL ISRAEL  
SHALL BE  
SAVED**

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed. (Revelation 7:1-8, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

We are entering into a section of Revelation around which much controversy rages. The Christian community is by no means united in its view of this passage. I feel there are several reasons for this unfortunate condition. First, we are living in an era of institutionalized

religion, when the truth itself is not the point. It must ever be remembered that truth has a value of its own. **“Truth,”** is ultimate reality, and God affirmed Himself to be **“abundant . . . in truth”** (Ex 34:6). Truth is not speculative, conjectural, or hypothetical. What men think about the truth has no bearing on the truth itself — it has no effect upon reality. For this reason, men can **“walk in the truth”** (Psalm 26:3), be **“valiant”** for it (Jer 9:3), and experience freedom through it (John 8:32). The truth of God can be **“obeyed”** (Gal 5:7). **“loved”** (2 Thess 2:10), and **“known”** (1 Tim 4:3).

The book of Revelation does NOT unveil a new vein or stratum of truth. Rather, it is but an elaboration of the truth already affirmed in Scripture. This is a vital point to see and embrace. The child of God must not allow a **perspective** of Scripture to remove his thinking from the Lord Jesus Christ and His great salvation. To permit such a distraction is to initiate a state of spiritual retrogression. It is not possible to **“keep the faith”** or maintain an acceptable status with the Living God apart from vital union with the Son of God. What is more, that union is maintained through faith and by means of the truth. If I entertain novel views of Scripture that are actually at variance with the revealed purpose of God in Christ, I do so with peril, for **“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth ”** (2 Thess 2:13). With great zeal, therefore, we must avoid any approach to the book of Revelation that tends to obscure the will of God as revealed in the Person of Christ and the Gospel.

There is a grand aim to this book, and I want to ever keep it before your mind. The superiority of the heavenly Kingdom, as currently administered by Jesus, is affirmed, together with the inferiority of the kingdoms of the earth. This superiority is seen in the ultimate triumph of the church over all of her adversaries. **Her triumph will not be realized by removal, but by survival!** The purpose for the world relates directly to the saints. Even though they are presently strangers and pilgrims in the world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11), it was really made

for them, not sinners. Jesus revealed this in His parable of the tares of the field. The good seed sown in the world is identified as ***“the children of the kingdom,”*** while the tares, of intruders, are the ***“children of the wicked one”*** (Matt 13:38). **There simply is NO reason for the world apart from the saints of God!** This is seen in The Revelation. The world and its inhabitants are diametrically opposed to the people of God. However, there opposition is temporal and incidental. In the end, all such opposition shall fall to the ground, and ***“the saints will take the Kingdom”*** (Dan 7:18,22,27).

## AFTER THESE THINGS I SAW . . .

***“After these things I saw . . . ”*** We are still in the sixth seal. The seventh seal is not broken, or opened, until the eight chapter (8:1). The sixth seal indicates the consummation of all things — the end of the world and the judgment of the ungodly. The Divine commentary on this seal extends to the conclusion of the seventh chapter.

The sixth chapter closed with the probing question, ***“who shall be able to stand?”*** The Lord now addresses this matter, revealing His consideration for His people, even in the end of the world. Trouble and sorrow, even in the ultimate, are attended by the most minute and aggressive thoughtfulness of those whom the Lord ***“foreknew”***

Now comes a thoughtful interlude — the revelation of something that occurs before the end of the world. Here is a Divine elaboration of ***“the end”*** (Matt 10:22; Matt 24:6,14; Cor 1:8; 15:24; Heb 3:6,14; 6:11; 1 Pet 4:7; Rev 2:26). The sixth chapter closed with the probing question, ***“who shall be able to stand?”*** The Lord now addresses this matter, revealing His consideration for His people, even in the end of

the world. Trouble and sorrow, even in the ultimate, are attended by the most minute and aggressive thoughtfulness of those whom the Lord “*foreknew*” (Rom 8:29; 11:2).

### **The Removal of the Wicked**

Of primary consideration is the removal of the wicked—the first thing brought to our attention regarding “*the end*” (Rev 6:15-17). This is why the first association of the Son of God with “*the end*” relates to “*the wrath of the Lamb,*” and “*the great day of His wrath.*” At this point, we come into sharp conflict with a significant percentage of *end time theology*. I will affirm, and show from God’s Word, that the wicked will be removed FIRST from the earth.

In the parable of the tares of the field, Jesus declared this reality. “*Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn . . . The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*” (Matt 13:30,41,42). The children of the Kingdom and the children of the wicked one will GROW TOGETHER until the wheat is harvested into glory. When the harvest comes, the wicked will be removed “*first,*” being severed from among the just. This is also taught in the parable of the Net. “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net,*

*It is as though John said, I beheld the decimation of the world order; the collapse of the temporal. I beheld with comfort the truth that the world and its inhabitants would pass away. Now my attention was turned to the elect. I was given to see the relationship of the promises of God to the end of the world.*

that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew

to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and ***sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth***” (Matt 13:47-50).

Again, Jesus taught this in the discourse recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. ***“But as the days of Noe (Noah) were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”*** (vs 37-39). Who is it that were ***“taken away”*** in the flood? Certainly not Noah and his family. It was the wicked--just as it shall be in the end of the world.

John the Baptist prophesied of this very activity when he introduced Jesus. ***“Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”*** (Matt 3:12). The threshing floor is the world, and it is ***“purged”*** by the removal of the wicked, not the withdrawal of the righteous. That should be evident enough for all to see. Permit me to state it again: **The world will NOT be purged by the removal of the righteous, but by the removal of the wicked --** contrary eschatology notwithstanding.

The recounting of ***“the end of all things”*** (1 Pet 4:7) is not declared in an academic or chronological manner. It will be seen from the perspective of God’s ***“eternal purpose.”*** What God has affirmed in the rest of Scripture will be brought to our minds. He is not establishing a new agenda here, but amplifying on the one already declared. The collapse of the natural order is seen, together with the frightening awareness of the enemies of God. But this will NOT take place prematurely, or before everything spoken by the mouth of God’s holy prophets has been fulfilled (Acts 3:20-21). It is as though John said, *I*

*beheld the decimation of the world order; the collapse of the temporal. I beheld with comfort the truth that the world and its inhabitants would pass away. Now my attention was turned to the elect. I was given to see the relationship of the promises of God to the end of the world.*

The end of the world will not abort the promises of God--particularly regarding His people. While **“the end”** is determined, **it will not come prematurely** . Nor, indeed, will it require an adjustment to the revealed objectives of God. The first three verses of this chapter are saying, *Do not proceed with the destruction of the world until I have fulfilled My promise to the ancient people!*

## POWERFUL ANGELS

**“ . . . I saw four angels . . . ”** We have no extensive explanation of these angels. They are simply ministers of God, **“that do his pleasure”** (Psa 103:21). Remember, **the Kingdom of God is a one of participation** . The will of the Lord is carried out by faithful ministers. At the highest level, this is accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ, the **“Minister”** of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:1-2). At the intermediate level, it involves the holy angels, of whom it is said, **“Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire”** (Heb 1:7). In a more apparent way, it includes the employment of the saved, John himself being an example (Rev 1:1). The Lord is now taking us behind the scenes, revealing that the end of the world will take place in strict harmony with His **“eternal purpose,”** and in the interest of the foreknown **“remnant”** of His people. We must not allow our minds to be distracted from the absolute preeminence of the salvation of God. At no point does it become a secondary consideration.

**They Control the Earth**

“ . . . *standing at the four corners of the earth, holding* [back, NASB] *the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree . . .* ” These are, in a sense, restraining angels. They are holding back the means through which the world will finally, as it were, collapse. They stand “*at the four corners of the earth,*” having the ability to sustain or destroy it at the word of the King. Nothing is out of control in all of the world! From every corner, and in every place, Divine control is being administered. Without that control, the world should have collapsed long ago through the instrumentality of controlling angels, who are not pictured as sympathetic toward sinful and rebellious men.

The phrase “*the four corners of the earth*” speaks of the earth from an objective point of view. The “*whole earth*” is for the schooling and orientation of the saints of God. The “*four corners*” of the Divine design relates exclusively to this objective. Everything is being orchestrated with the fulfillment of Divine intent in mind. Oh, how a suffering church needs to hear this!

“*The four winds*” are mentioned frequently in Scripture – once again, the language of Moses and the prophets is being used. In every case where this phrase is used, something of great significance is heralded. Jeremiah spoke of the judgment of Elam as the bringing of “*the four winds of the four quarters of heaven*” (Jer 49:36). Ezekiel prophesied the awakening of the whole house of Israel. As the result of the wind, or Holy Spirit, *coming “from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live”* (Ezek 37:9). Daniel saw the rise of despotic powers resulting from “*the four winds of heaven . . . stirring up the Great Sea*” (Dan 7:2). He also saw “*four notable ones*” coming “*up toward the four winds of heaven*” (Dan 8:8). The overthrow of a principle kingdom is depicted by Daniel as “*broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven*” (Dan 11:4). Zechariah also used this terminology when referring to the regathering of the children of Israel: “*Up, up! Flee from the land of the north,*” *says the LORD; “for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of*

*heaven,” says the LORD”* (Zech 2:6). Our blessed Lord also spoke of the angels gathering the elect *“from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”* (Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27). This is Holy Spirit language!

In our text, *“the four winds”* speaks of destructive force associated with the end of the world. These *“winds”* are to the world what the *“great wind”* which *“came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house,”* killing all of Job’s children, was to him (Job 1:19). These are like the *“destroying wind”* which God sent against Babylon of old (Jer 51:1). But these winds will not be loosed to the disadvantage of any child of God! The world will not be brought to its appointed conclusion short of the fulfillment of God’s predestinated purpose. You can believe that, dear child of God! Notice the precision of the expression: *“that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.”* Whether globally ( *the earth* ), provincially ( *the sea* ), or individually ( *any tree* ), the purpose of the Almighty will NOT be frustrated!

Here is a vivid picture of the longsuffering of God! He is allowing the wicked to flourish, as it were, like a green bay tree (Psa 37:35; 73:3-11). But, alas, their seeming triumph is but for a moment, *“For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb”* (Psa 37:2). As it is written, *“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”* (Rom 9:22). Let no one dare to fault God for withholding the destruction of the world, even though the wicked are boasting themselves in it, and harassing His people! This world is being maintained in the interest of God’s eternal purpose. Involved in that objective is the perfecting of the saints in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. God will not allow the world to pass away until that purpose is fulfilled!

## ANOTHER ANGEL WITH THE SEAL

***“Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God . . . ”*** The purpose of God is always uppermost, always preeminent, always dominant! The angels do not operate on their own, but in strict accord with the Divine agenda. The angels with power over the earth await a word from their King! Now, from ***“the East,”*** in which the sun rises (Num 2:3), another angel appears. He comes from the quarter where light springs forth! The ***“angel ascending from the east”*** is indicative of a Divine initiative. This angel has been given authority over the four holding back the four winds of the earth. He speaks for the Living God and His Lamb. This is God’s world, and His purpose is being fulfilled in it.

This angel has something of exceeding value – ***“the seal of the living God.”*** The ***“seal”*** is not for men, but for angels! It was to identify the people of God, distinguishing them from the wicked. It is not a seal visible to men, nor is it intended to allow men to diagnose the inhabitants of the earth. The spirit speaks of this seal elsewhere. ***“ . . . the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal : “The Lord knows those who are His . . . ”*** (2 Tim 2:19). That seal was first set upon the Lord Jesus, in a unique and solitary way. As it is written, ***“God the Father has set His seal on Him”*** (John 6:27). This is a mark of Divine ownership, by which the people of God are designated for sparing. Through the approaching angel, God was saying, *Wait until my people are identified with Me! Until My purpose, “according to election” (Rom 9:11), has been fulfilled!*

There are several examples in Scripture of people God ***“knew,”*** as it were, who were not yet translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son. There was the Ethiopian eunuch, to whom, Philip was sent (Acts 8:27-38). There were also the people of Macedonia, to whom the Lord directed Paul and company to minister (Acts 16:9-10). Cornelius and his household are another example of individuals known of God, who

had to be sealed (Acts 10). A classic example is found in the word of Jesus to Paul when he was in Corinth. Although it appeared on the surface as though few people were receptive in that area, Jesus revealed to Paul, ***“for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city”*** (Acts 18:10).

I realize it is not fashionable to address this subject, but there is great benefit in seeing something of its truth and power. However a person understands the foreknowledge of God, it is clear that He knows those who are inclined to Him before they are so inclined. He is of power to keep destruction from them until the opening of their eyes. This is not an excuse for neglecting the call of the Lord. Rather, it is designed to teach us the preciseness with which this world is being governed. This is seen in a most remarkable explanation of the conversion of certain Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia. After being forthrightly rejected by the Jews, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles. These people rejoiced to hear the Word of the Gospel. It is written, ***“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”*** (Acts 13:48). While some wrestle with this expression, the standard versions of Scripture are consistent in their translation. ***“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”*** (NKJV). ***“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”*** (NASB). ***“And all who were appointed for eternal life believed”*** (NIV). ***“And as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers”*** (NRSV). ***“And those marked out by God for eternal life had faith”*** (Basic Bible English). **In their case, destructive forces were held back until they were sealed!** That is a Divine perspective, and can be embraced without reservation!

## SOVEREIGNTY SPEAKS

***“And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth,***

*the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.*” Here again, the exactness of Divine control is seen. These four angels were *“granted to harm the earth and the sea.”* As powerful as angels are, they cannot operate independently of the will of God. His Jurisdiction forms the perimeter around the all expression in His universe, be it among angels, demons, or men! Found at the station to which they were appointed, these mighty angels receive a word from the Potentate Who is over all. The angel bearing the message cries out *“with a loud voice,”* a procedure with which we have grown familiar in this book (5:2,12; 6:10; 7:2,10; 8:13; 10:3; 12:10; 14:7,8,15; 19:17). Heavenly voices shatter the silence of earthly monotony, and drown the muffled and inferior sounds of this world.

And what is the message to these angels possessing power to *“harm the earth and the sea?”* Mind you, they have been given power, or authority and ability, to inflict this *“harm”* – but not until the proper time. Abilities granted from God cannot function outside of His will. No gift or dispensation of power, regardless of its degree or measure, can be effective in a realm, within a period of time, or in an effort, that is not within the *“good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”* If angels cannot use their power for matters unrelated to the purpose of God, you may be sure men cannot!

Although given power to *“harm,”* the angels are told to wait in abeyance! It is not yet time. There is something that must first take place! The word is specific. *“Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees.”* Do not proceed with your work of destruction! Remember, we are still in the sixth seal, which declared the end of all things. The world is coming down – but not until . . . ! The Lord Jesus, Whose return will herald the grand consummation, will not exit the heavenly sanctuary *“until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began”* (Acts 3:21). God will not be frustrated in His purpose!

## The Sealing

**“WAIT!”** cries the angel! Do not destroy the world until the servants of God are **“sealed”**—until they come into the fold! You will remember that Sodom could not be destroyed until Lot was saved from it (Gen 19:16-22). This vision is remarkably like that of Ezekiel, who was given to see the marking of a remnant, who were exempted from destruction. The account is a telling one. **“And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it. To the others He said in my hearing, “Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary” (Ezek 9:3-6).**

Men must be continually reminded that God is not seeking a reason to condemn humanity. He has a keen interest in His people – those He has foreknown – and He will not allow **“the end”** to come until they have been sealed. Of old times, astute students of the Word referred to this as *prevenient grace*. By this, they meant there is an application of God’s grace that preserves those who will be saved, not allowing the Tempter to remove them from the earth prematurely. For some, this is too weighty to consider, and others aggressively deny that it is so. However, God’s Word does speak to this subject, and we do well to give heed to it. Peter states the case this way: **“ . . . *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ . . .* ”** (1 Pet 1:2). All of the major versions give this perspective. **“ . . . *who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood*”** (NRSV). **“ . . . *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood*”** (NIV). **“ . . .**

*chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (NASB).*

In a very telling expression, Jude also presents this view. *“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1, NRSV, BBE). The NASB says, *“kept for Jesus Christ,”* as well as the ASV and NSRV. The KJV represents it in a slightly different manner, still accentuating Divine activity prior to our induction into the Kingdom. *“. . . preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”* You will remember our Lord Jesus said of those coming to Him, *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:44).

The *“sealing”* to which our text refers is not the same as the sealed book the Lamb is now opening. The seals on the book, or scroll, **CONCEALED** its contents. The *“seal”* placed upon the 144,000 **REVEALS** their recognition by God. God has presently *“sealed”* those in Christ with His Holy Spirit, marking them as His own (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30). Although not identical to this seal, the sealing, or marking, of the 144,000 identify them as belonging to the Lord. The world is not to be destroyed prior to their acceptance! This is a staggering consideration that reveals the remarkable detail involved in the preservation and coming destruction of the world.

While our text will set a specific consideration before us, it clearly reveals that Divine interest and activity is exercised in the behalf of the saved **PRIOR** to their reception in Christ Jesus. A similar perspective was also uncovered in the fifth chapter, where a heavenly messenger informed the souls of martyrs of some of their brethren *“should be killed as they were”* (Rev 6:11). Blessed word of God that stretches our minds and challenges cherished religious tradition!

## “ALL ISRAEL”

***“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.”***

An exceeding large number of individuals are “*sealed*” – 144,000. Although it is possible this is a literal number, I am inclined to consider it in another way. The identity of these people is so clear, it is difficult to understand how it can be missed. These were not representative of a wide variety of peoples and cultures, i.e., “*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (5:9). We are told these were “*all the tribes of the children of Israel.*” At once, we find ourselves at variance with some very dominant theological views. Some will have us to believe this represents the entire church—the body of Christ. Of course, were that what was meant, that is what would have been said. This total-view of the saved is declared elsewhere by the Spirit: “*the whole family in heaven and earth*” (Eph 3:15), “*the redeemed of the Lord*” (Isa 61:12), “*the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10), “*them that are sanctified*” (Heb 6:14), etc. The Lord is, however, more precise here. This vast number is “*all the tribes of children of Israel.*”

This phrase ( *the tribes of the children of Israel* ) occurs ten times in

Scripture (Num 28:28; 36:3; 36:9; Josh 4:5,8; 14:1; 19:51; 21:1; Rev 7:4). In every single passage, the Jewish people are in reference. No place is the church as a whole represented as ***“the tribes of the children of Israel”*** –nowhere. The redeemed **ARE** referred to as ***“the Israel of God”*** Gal 6:16), but **NEVER** ***“the tribes of the children of Israel.”***

The phrase ***“children of Israel”*** is unusually common in Scripture, being used 644 times: 630 in the Old Testament writings, and 14 times in the New Testament Scriptures. What is more, the term ***“house of Israel”*** is used repeatedly throughout Scripture–no less than 152 times. 146 of these are found in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, while 6 are found in the New Covenant writings. Not a single occurrence of either of these expressions refers to the body of the redeemed–the church, or those who are in Christ Jesus. A mind bathed in Scripture simply cannot come to that conclusion apart from the imposition of doctrines of men!

Jesus used the phrase ***“house of Israel”*** when directing His disciples to confine their initial work to the Jewish people (Matt 10:6). He also used it when speaking with ***“a woman of Canaan”*** who was a Gentile, saying He was sent to the Jews (Matt 15:24). Peter used it on the day of Pentecost in addressing the Jews (Acts 2:36). Stephen also employed the term when confronting the Jews with their history of hard heartedness (Acts 7:42). The Spirit twice used it in the book of Hebrews when quoting from Jeremiah concerning the New Covenant to be made ***“with the house of Israel”*** (Heb 8:8,10). This term is always confined to the nation of Israel, and is **NEVER** employed to describe those who are in Christ Jesus. Nothing in the doctrine or nomenclature of Scripture will lead an individual to equate ***“the tribes of the house of Israel”*** or ***“the house of Israel”*** with the church, or body of Christ. Such an effort is an attempt to conform the Word of God to an imaginary theology, generated by man in justification of a distorted view of Divine purpose.

In the book of Revelation, as in all of Scripture, the language employed is appropriately “ . . . *taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*” (1 Cor 2:13, NASB). This is a principle we must retain with great zeal. One of the primary functions of Moses and the prophets was the development of a spiritual nomenclature through which God could communicate with those in the Son. The distortion of that revealed vocabulary is a transgression of unspeakable magnitude. It obscures the Divine message, and rivets the soul to theological fantasy—mere imaginations of corrupt hearts. I affirm without apology, that the expression “*the tribes of the house of Israel*” can only mean one thing in the context of Scripture—this is the ancient people, the Jews. They have not been forgotten by God, nor have they been summarily and hopelessly rejected as some imagine.

### **One hundred and forty-four thousand**

*“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand . . . ”* Remember, this is an apocalyptic book—a book of symbols. The numbers used therein are generally symbolic of something, and are not intended to connote mathematical counts. This particular figure is a summary number. We are told it represents 12,000 from each of twelve “*tribes of the children of Israel*” (12 X 12 X 1,000). It is a term of thoroughness or completeness. The number twelve is so used in Scripture, forming Divine associations in our minds. Jacob had **TWELVE** sons, from which the **TWELVE** tribes came (Gen 35:12). At the giving of the Law, Moses built an altar and **TWELVE** pillars, according to the **TWELVE** tribes of Israel (Ex 24:4). The breast plate of the High Priest has **TWELVE** stones, with the names of the names of the children of Israel (Ex 28:21). Within the tabernacle, there were **TWELVE** loaves of freshly baked bread, representing the **TWELVE** tribes of the children of Israel (Lev 24:5-7). At the dedication of the altar, “*in the day when it was anointed,*” offerings were presented in “ **TWELVE** silver platters, **TWELVE** silver bowls, and **TWELVE** gold pans” (Num 7:84). The animal sacrifices at the tabernacle dedication included “ **TWELVE** young bulls, the rams **TWELVE** , the male lambs in

***their first year TWELVE , with their grain offering, and the kids of the goats as a sin offering TWELVE ”*** (Num 7:87). The prophet Elijah, in his contest with the prophets of Baal, built an altar of TWELVE stones ***“according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob”*** (1 Kgs 18:31).

Lest we miss the point, this book later reveals a most interested aspect of the ***“the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”*** Described as a majestic city, it had a great wall with twelve gates, upon which were inscribed twelve names. ***“And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel”*** (Rev 21:16). These names, mind you, were written upon the gates of the city, or the point of entrance. The truth of the matter is, salvation involves identity with the ancient people Israel. Our Lord Himself declared, ***“Salvation is of the Jews”*** (John 4:22). Salvation, in fact, is for them ***“first”*** (Rom 1:16; 2:10). What we are about to see is the mercy of God extended to the people among whom we have been grafted. A massive display of the Divine activity will be declared which involves a large number out of ***“every tribe of the children of Israel.”***

While I am by no means disposed to numerology, or an inordinate emphasis upon numbers, there is something to be said for the number twelve. First, it is used no less than twenty-two times in the Revelation (7:5,6,7,8; 12:1; 21:12,14,16,21; 22:22). It depicts perfection, or what embraces everything. The number four is generally representative of the created universe (Isa 11:12; Mark 13:27; Rev 7:1). When classifying the people of the earth, this books lists four: ***“kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”*** (Rev 5:9; 14:6). The number three of the Godhead (1 John 5:7). All three are mentioned in single verses, denoting the perfect unity between them (Matt 3:16; 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 3:5; Acts 7:55; 10:38; Rom 15:16,30; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:3; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:6; Phil 3:3; 1 John 4:2; 1 Pet 1:2). It is generally considered that the perfect number ***“seven”*** (used 54 times in Revelation) is the result of 4 + 3 – all the earth and all the Godhead. Another significant number, twelve (used 22 times in Revelation) is the result of 4 X 3 – thorough involvement of both earth and heaven. The number in our text, 144,000, is considered the ultimate in Divine working: 12 X 12 X ,1000. Because this represents a perception, it cannot be bound upon fellow believers. It is, however, worthy of some consideration.

Following this logic, 144,000 means the involvement of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with representatives from all of Israel at a given point in time.

### **“Of *ALL* the Tribes of the Children of Israel”**

The phrase “*all the tribes of the children of Israel*” has led some to wonder if every Israelite from all time is included in the vision. Emphatically, this is **not** the case. Again, the use of this phrase in Scripture will confirm that it refers to the majority of Israelites during a particular segment of time. Moses chose 1,000 warriors of “*all of the tribes of Israel*” to go against the Midianites (Num 31:4). Similar occurrences are found in the following passages: Deut 29:21; Josh 22:14; 24:1; Judges 20:2,10; 21:5; 1 Sam 2:8; 10:20; 5:1; 15:10; 19:9; 20:14; 24:2; 1 Kgs 8:16; 11:32; 14:21; 2 Chron 6:5; 11:16; 12:13; 33:7;). The prophets also employed the phrase to describe the Israelites from a particular time, or those who were alive (Ezek 48:19; Zech 9:1).

Additionally, “*all the tribes of Israel*” does not mean every single person. Scripture uses it to denote representatives from every tribe (2 Sam 5:1). Our text also views it from this perspective, referring to a number that were sealed “*OUT OF every tribe of the people of Israel*” (NRSV), or “*FROM every tribe of the sons of Israel*” (NASB). The Revelation, then, concerns a determined number of Israelites from every recognized cluster of the ancient people—the “*sons of Israel*” (Jacob).

The reason for the representative number is explained in Romans 2:28-29. “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*” There is a “*remnant*” among the Israelites, known only to God. Our text reveals that a large number of them will surface before the end of the world. Another text which speaks of a people within a people is

Romans 9:6-8. *“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, In Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”*

## 12,000 From Each of the Twelve Tribes

There are 12,000—a perfect and thorough number—sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The listing of the tribes is very precise, and falls into harmony with God’s dealings with this people. The tribes are not listed as they are elsewhere, or in the same order. In the original listing of the sons of Jacob, the order is as follows. *Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin* (Gen 49:1-28). When Israel’s camp was set up around the tabernacle, another order of priority was established. The listing in Numbers involved the consideration of the various ministries of the tribes relating to the tabernacle.

Without becoming unduly distracted at this point, it will be helpful to show why there is a difference in the listings. God always works in accordance with His pre-determined will, and in concert with the various judgments made known in previous periods. Judah, according to Jacob’s prophecy, assumed the preeminent place among his brethren, thus displacing Reuben, who was *“unstable as water”* (Gen 49:3-48-10). Simeon and Levi moved back four positions, in keeping with the judgment pronounced upon them because of their fierce anger (Gen 49:5-7). Dan is completely omitted, because it gave itself wholly to idolatry (Judges 18:30-31). Gad moved up to third place because of his overcoming nature (Gen 49:19). Asher and Naphtali also moved up because their character (Gen 49:20-21). Manasseh, the firstborn of Joseph, took the place of Dan, in keeping with the prophecy that Joseph’s bough would run *“over the wall,”* signifying unusual expansion (Gen 49:22).

### *Some Preliminary Conclusions*

We see some principles here which are worth noting. **First**, the faithfulness and spiritual industry of God's people are not forgotten by God! This, of course, is affirmed in Hebrews 6:10. ***“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”*** **Second**, men always reap what they have sown, and are not to be deceived about that reality. ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”*** (Gal 6:7-8). **Third**, positions that are vacated by the unfaithful will be filled by others. This is seen in the replacement of Judas (Psa 109:8; Acts 1:20), as well as Mordecai's solemn warning to Esther (Esth 4:14).

### **An Equal Number**

You will observe that an equal number is taken from each tribe – 12,000. **This does not indicate equality, but completeness.** It is a term signifying ***“the whole house of Israel,”*** as used elsewhere in Scripture (Lev 10:6; Jer 13:11; Ezek 37:11; 39:25; 45:6). This is nothing less than the John's insight into the sure fulfillment of Romans 11:26-27. ***“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”*** While this is not acceptable to many, we will find it to be clearly declared throughout Scripture, in keeping with the revealed objective of God, and in strict harmony with Apostolic doctrine.

**UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF  
SCRIPTURE**

The proper understanding of any section of God's Word is found within the context of all Scripture. Unlike other literary compilations, the Scriptures are a single unit. All of the books are bound together by the common factor of inspiration (2 Tim 2:16-17). Holy men of God spoke as they were "***moved***" (or carried along) by the Spirit of God (2 Pet 1:21). On a practical basis, this means that all of Scripture has a single focus—the purpose of God. Although comprised of writings from different times and through different people, the Word remains the expression of an unchanging God. It is woven together with the thread of redemption, and bordered with eternal purpose. The Divine objective, conceived from the foundation of the world, and unchanging, has been poured into the text of Scripture. Any doctrine, therefore, that cannot stand the test of all Scripture is spurious, and is to be rejected.

Divine judgment was sent against Israel because of its rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was an awesome judgment, described in most vivid terms. "***For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation . . . For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations . . .***" (Luke 19:43-44; 21:23-24). Some have incorrectly concluded Jesus to mean Israel would be altogether cut off. But this is not at all the case. The Lord placed a limitation upon this judgment. He said it would be "***until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled***" (Lk 21:24). Paul also referred to this time when he spoke of the present state of Jewish blindness. "***For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in***" (Rom 11:25). We do well to give heed to these Divinely revealed limitations. If they do not fit into our view of Scripture, then we should

discard our views and embrace the Word of the King. It will stand, and ***“cannot be broken”*** (John 10:35).

Our text is projecting us to the time when Israel will again come into prominence – when ***“the times of the Gentiles”*** shall have been fulfilled. Unlike many with whom we must contend, the Lord has not forgotten His promises concerning the ancient people, nor has He summarily written them off. Carnal explanations of Israel’s role in the Divine economy cannot nullify the promises of God! Well into the middle of the First Century, the Spirit continued to classify humanity into three categories: ***“the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God”*** (1 Cor 10:32). We do well to avoid adopting views of Scripture and the working of the Lord that reject this inspired utterance. While there is neither Jew nor Greek in Christ (Gal 3:28), it is ONLY in Him that the distinction is dissolved. **Furthermore, it is not removed by the Jews becoming one with us, but by us becoming one with them.** As it is written, ***“That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”*** (Eph 2:12-13,19). And again, ***“you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree”*** (Rom 11:17).

### **God’s Promise to Abraham**

The relationship of Abraham to the preservation and blessing of Israel is frequently declared in Scripture. This was the foundation upon which Moses based his intercession for Israel, when Jehovah God threatened to cut them off. Hear the mighty intercessor plead his case. ***“Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. ”Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply***

*your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever”* (Ex 32:12-13, NKJV). If you wonder concerning the effectiveness of this entreaty, hear the Word of the Lord: **“So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people”** (Ex 32:14, NKJV).

During the time of the kings, the Lord had great compassion upon the people of Israel, who were frequently harassed by wicked kings like Hazael king of Syria. His consideration, however, was more for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than for the people of Israel themselves. As it is written, **“But the LORD was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence”** (2 Kgs 13:23). God’s covenant with Abraham is a frequent point of reference in Scripture (Gen 13:16-17; 17:2-5; Lev 26:42; Psa 105:8-9; Micah 7:20). While it is true the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise is realized in Christ alone, this by no means supports the notion that Israel has been cut off without remedy. The teaching of Scripture is straightforward upon this subject. **“Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”** (Rom 11:28-29).

## GOD’S PROMISES TO ISRAEL

Remembering that God has pledged Himself to fulfill everything spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:20-21), the promises made to Israel are of particular interest. Remember, in the Revelation we are witnessing the outworking of Divine purpose, declared before by the prophets. Nothing totally new will be found in the message given to John, and it will be in perfect harmony with previous revelations of the Divine objective.

It is important to say at this point that the acceptance of Israel will be on the same basis as that of the Gentiles. There will be no special Gospel for them. This is apparent because believing Gentiles have been become partakers of the covenant promised to the Jews. While the nations were **“last”** in respect to revelation, they are, as a whole, **“first”** in partakers of the promised benefits. The Divine rationality behind this is most edifying to consider. The Spirit does not leave us to conjecture on this point, but speaks with unusual clarity.

During the time of Moses, God declared His ultimate intentions to Israel. Because they provoked Him to jealousy and anger with their idolatrous vanities, He would provoke them to jealousy by favoring an un-convenanted people. Here are His words. **“They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation”** (Deut 32:21). Taking up this line of reasoning, Paul affirms this to be the real reason behind his Apostleship to the Gentiles. **“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them”** (Rom 11:11-14). With this in mind, a brief review of some prophetic utterances relating to Israel’s recovery are in order.

I will not deal exhaustively with the prophecies that follow. My purpose is to show the commitments of God to Israel—to unveil the lofty language with which He spoke to them. We will find Apostolic writings to be in accord with these promises.

## The Faithful City

***“I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross , And take away all your alloy. I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city . Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness”*** (Isa 1:25-27). Ultimately, the blessing of thorough cleansing is realized in the Kingdom of God’s dear Son. That does not, however, depersonalize this promise, thereby excluding the Israelites. The Spirit witnesses that ***“the covenants”*** and ***“the promises”*** belonged to Israel (Rom 9:4-5). Here, the Divine commitment is to remove contamination from wayward Israel, resulting in it be noted for righteousness and faithfulness. That this remarkable promise was partially fulfilled during the days of Zerubbabel and Ezra cannot be denied. Those days did not, however, exhaust this prophecy. The language is simply too lofty to have been fulfilled in the restoration of Jerusalem and the perfunctory fulfillment of routine worship.

## Not Turn Away

***“In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers. But I said: 'How can I put you among the children And give you a pleasant land, A beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?' And I said: 'You shall call Me, My Father, and not turn away from Me.' Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, says the LORD. A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; They have forgotten the LORD their God. Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backslidings. Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God”*** (Jer 3:18-22). The obstinance of Israel is everywhere declared in Scripture. Throughout its history, repeated departures from the living God were uncovered—the ultimate being

realized in its rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, God declares a time will come when the ancient people, united together, will **“not turn away”** from Him. Once again, the faithfulness here depicted is realized by every person in Christ Jesus. However, that does not fulfill this text.

### **They Shall Serve the Lord**

***“Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it. 'For it shall come to pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid”*** (Jer 30:7-10). Observe that God declares He Himself will **“raise up”** David their King, and will do it **“for them.”** This is unquestionably a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is repeatedly so called (Isa 9:7; 16:5; 55:3; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 34:23-25; Hosea 3:5). When the Jews rejected Jesus, they did so to their own peril. The Lord, however, did not repudiate this promise, but held out hope to the rejecting people, however faint it may seem. ***“See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”*** (Matt 23:39). He did not say they would NEVER say this, but that they would behold Him no more until they did!

### **God Will Not Go Back on His Promise**

***“Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before***

*Me forever* ” (Jer 31:35-36). Here is a most remarkable text. It immediately follows the announcement of the New Covenant which, the Spirit declares, is presently being administered by Christ Jesus (Heb 8:1-13). God, Who cannot lie, makes a commitment here. He does so with the panorama of Divine purpose before Him. The sun, moon, stars, and sea can be removed more easily than for Israel to cease from being a nation before Him. That is God’s own affirmation!

### **The Covenant Established With Them**

*“Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you . Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your older and your younger sisters; for I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of My covenant with you. And I will establish My covenant with you . Then you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done , says the Lord GOD”* (Ezek 16:60-63). The language of this text is too majestic to be brushed aside by stilted theology! An everlasting covenant will be established with the people. Waywardness will be remembered, causing shame to grip the heart. Never again will the mouth boast great and unlawful things. An atonement will be provided for everything that was done. These words were not spoken to the Gentiles, but to the Jews. Our experience of them is by virtue of our grafting in among them. We must not overlook that the commitment was made to Israel, and God has pledged to fulfill His Word.

### **Public Acceptance**

*“I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles . Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of*

*Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord GOD”* (Ezek 20:41-44). Until this day, the Israelites have not been hallowed before the Gentiles. They remain “*a byword among the nations,*” as declared in Deuteronomy 28:37. Yet, the prophet holds out a glorious promise—one which faith can grasp. The language of this text is too magnificent to refer to a temporal restoration. These are realities that are experienced in Jesus Christ alone. We have tasted of them, but our tasting has not exhausted this text. God, Who cannot lie, has made a commitment to Israel, and we do well to ponder it.

### **Better Than the Beginning**

*“I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings . Then you shall know that I am the LORD”* (Ezek 36:11). From the days of Sinai until now, God has not done better for Israel than He did at their beginning. Their association with the Living God has been in a state of deterioration, reaching its depths when they refused the Lord’s Christ. But God will “*do better*” for them than at their “*beginnings.*” That is His commitment, and He cannot lie.

### **The Spirit Put Within Them**

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh . I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes , and you will keep My judgments and do them . Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I*

*will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses . I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you . . . ”* (Ezek 36:27-29). It is not possible for such a promise to be fulfilled apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is nothing less than the declaration of the new nature—and it is promised to Israel. A new heart! A new spirit! God’s own Spirit within them! Caused to walk in His statutes! Keeping God’s judgments, and doing them! Delivered from uncleanness! Has any of this occurred to Israel? Indeed, only a remnant of them have tasted these blessings, together with representatives from the nations. But this word has not fallen to the ground, nor has it been spoken in vain.

### **The Nations Around Will Know**

*“So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate . I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus says the Lord GOD: I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock”* (Ezek 36:35-37). The work of God among the Israelites will become apparent to surrounding nations. What was desolated will be restored. God has declared it, and God will do it – that is His own declaration. What is more, the ancient people will even ask God to do this for them, as He has promised.

### **The Aliens Will Not Pass Through**

*“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, And the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, And utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But the LORD will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know*

*that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, And no aliens shall ever pass through her again ”* (Joel 3:14-21). Just as the consummation of all things is appointed, so is the establishment of the children of Israel. It is true, this promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem, where those alienated from God will forever be excluded. The phrase *“children of Israel,”* however, leads us to avoid confining the words to the world to come.

### **They Will Seek Their Lord and King**

*“Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king . They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days”* (Hosea 3:5). Prophecies such as this are like precious jewels set in the signet of God’s Word. *“David their King”* is a clear reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ezekiel referred to Messiah in this manner (Ezek 34:23,25; 37:24), as well as Jeremiah (Jer 30:9). This text was not fulfilled at Pentecost, nor in the turning of the Gentiles to God. It remains for *“the children of Israel”* (a term that is never applied to the church) to seek the Lord their God AND their spiritual David, not yet recognized by them. It is difficult to overlook this clear prophecy of a happy future for the Israelites.

There is coming a time when the veil, presently over the hearts of the Jews, will be lifted, and Christ is seen in truth. This type of activity is described in Second Corinthians 3:15-17. *“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech; unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”* While the Spirit is

not speaking specifically of the restoration of Israel here, that promised reality is within context. You sense the expectation of the Apostle when he says, ***“Nevertheless, when ones turns to the Lord, the veil is lifted.”*** With care, He did not present their condition as hopeless.

## ROMANS ELEVEN

The eleventh chapter of Romans is a remarkable delineation of the Divine view of Israel. What is there declared will justify the view taken of the prophecies just mentioned. The question put before us, ***“Has God cast away His people?”*** (11:1). In this case, ***“His people”*** does not refer to the church, but to the children of Israel. The tenth chapter of Romans concluded with, ***“But Isaiah is very bold and says: I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me. But to Israel he says: All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people”*** (10:20-21). The people who did not ***“seek”*** the Lord, nor ***“ask”*** for Him, were the Gentiles—the people that were to ***“provoke”*** Israel to jealousy. The Lord will now declare the Israelites have NOT been summarily cut off, or rendered without hope. Remember, I am showing the spiritual logic of the sealing of the ***“tribes of the children of Israel,”*** and how that procedure does not refer to the church., as ordinarily conceived.

### Paul Was an Israelite

In answer to the question, Paul fairly shouts, ***“God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin”*** (11:1b0. Not only was he a child of Abraham by faith, he also was in the flesh— ***“of the tribe of Benjamin.”*** His point is that this would not be possible if God had discarded Israel in favor of the Gentiles. Not only was Paul accepted in the Beloved, he attained an unusual status, laboring ***“more abundantly”*** than the other Apostles, and writing nearly 30% of all New Covenant writings.

## God Reserves Remnants

He brings us back to the foreknowledge of God, the driving force behind His choice. ***“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”*** We know this is the case because of the Lord’s previous dealings with His people. On one occasion, it appeared as though the entire nation had forsaken the Lord. Elijah, who had more than average discernment, concluded he ***“alone”*** was left, and they were seeking his life. ***“Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?”*** (11:2-3). But God had an answer for him! Elijah was not correct in his assessment, for he had judged according to appearance. The Lord had ***“reserved”*** for Himself 7,000 men who refused to bow their knees to Baal (11:4).

The Spirit concludes, ***“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”*** (11:5). It is not a matter of some merely surviving, but of a graceful choice! Those who suppose Israel has been written off, and only the Gentiles are left, do well to set with Elijah and hear the Word of the Lord. There can be no such thing as a ***“remnant”*** if Israel is cut off! The grace of God is that great-to preserve for Himself a spiritual nucleus that shall at last swell into a great multitude.

## The Present Condition of Israel Accounted For

***“ . . . the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day. And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always”*** (11:7b-10). Because of their rejection of the Lord Jesus, God has poured a spirit of deep spiritual sleep upon Israel.

As it is written, ***“For the LORD has poured out on you The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers”*** (Isa 29:10). It is not a spirit of death, as He poured out upon Satan and his angels, who are consigned to chains of darkness until the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). This is a spirit of stupor from which recovery is possible!

The meaning of the passage is that God’s ancient people are subject to spiritual stupefaction without ceasing to be His people. Although difficult for some to receive, the Spirit will now take up the argument that the present hardening of Israel, a very definite reality, is not intended to be permanent. The same God Who has poured out a spirit of deep sleep upon them can awaken them as a valley of dry bones, dry and blanched (Ezek 37:1-14). We should not be surprised at this form of reasoning. We Gentiles were once ***“not a people,”*** but are now ***“the people of God”*** (Deut 32:21; 1 Pet 2:10). Our former condition is described as being ***“dead in trespasses and sins,”*** being ***“by nature the children of wrath.”*** We had ***“no hope, and [were] without God in the world”*** (Eph 2:1, 3,12). Of all people, we should have no difficulty believing God is able to recover this people. Yet, this is not left to conjecture. God will speak plainly to us on the matter,

### **Are They Unrecoverable?**

***“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! [God forbid, KJV] ”*** (11:11a). The Jews have, indeed, ***“stumbled over the stumbling stone.”*** As it is written, ***“They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall . . . ”*** (Rom 9:32,33). The Spirit forbids us to conclude they have been utterly throw down, thus becoming unrecoverable. Those who imagine this is the case are in sharp conflict with the ***“mind of the Spirit!”*** By saying Israel has NOT stumbled ***“so as to fall beyond recovery”*** (NIV), He is declaring they shall, indeed, be recovered. God is not finished with them, nor has He consigned them to reprobation.

## **Their Fall, Our Gain**

***“But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles”*** (11:11b). Only God can bring good things out of bad, blessing from cursing, and benefit from disadvantage. There are two notable things to be seen in this brief but pungent expression. First, it is ***“through their fall”*** that salvation has ***“come to the Gentiles.”*** Second, there is a Divine agenda that drives this whole circumstance: ***“to provoke them to jealousy.”*** This is lofty reasoning, and will not fit into the constricted bag of human wisdom.

Even in their humiliation, Israel has brought blessing to the world! What a marvelous work of the Almighty! I am sure Abraham never conceived of this being involved in the blessing of the world through His Seed. There yet remains a significant portion of the Christian community that finds it difficult to believe. Like it or not, Israel’s hardening works for the world’s salvation. Out of seeming ruin, deliverance came to the world. The reasoning here is that this would not be possible if Israel had been totally abandoned, or cut off from hope.

## **The Divine Logic**

***“Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! . . . For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*** (11:12,15). Now the Spirit launches into Sacred reasoning, teaching us how to think about such circumstances. He affirms that the present ***“riches of the world”*** is not sufficient for God’s glory and Christ’s reward. The present extent of salvation is great, but is still not glorious enough for the magnitude of Christ’s atoning death and triumphant resurrection! We must not allow ourselves to become impeded by stunted thinking!

Isaiah spoke of the extent of God's salvation in a telling remark about His view of the Son. ***"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth"*** (Gen 49:6, NASB). What a remarkable affirmation! Salvation is infinitely larger than the average person is prone to think! Look what has come out of the temporary ruin of Israel! ***"Riches for the Gentiles!"*** If their fall has brought a blessing of this magnitude, what will ***"their acceptance"*** bring? What a foolish argument this would be if ***"their acceptance"*** were not possible – if they had been summarily cut off! For the present time, the Gentiles are feasting at the table of salvation, the ***"lavish banquet for all peoples"*** (Isa 25:6). But some day, in God's appointed time, the appetite of the Jews will be whetted to sit at the table also! When this happens, a wave of glory will push throughout the world, bringing greater blessing than what was experienced when they were cut off and salvation was extended to the Gentiles. That time is described as the time of ***"their fulness,"*** or ***"full inclusion"*** (NRSV).

### **Paul Magnifies His Office**

***"For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them"*** (11:13-14). The contemplation constrained Paul to enter energetically into his ordained ministry. He was not a prodigious laborer out of a sense of obligation alone, but because he saw something of the grand purpose of God. He labored effectively among the Gentiles, or nations, ***"to provoke to jealousy"*** those who were of his flesh—that is, natural Israel. Before the grand influx, he wanted to ***"save some of them,"*** participating to the fullest degree possible with the purpose of God.

The exceeding rarity of such a perspective is unquestionable proof of

the extreme shallowness of contemporary *Christianity*. I am persuaded that one of the reasons for its relative ineffectiveness is its minuscule view of the Kingdom. Paul, on the other hand, magnified his ministry by laboring with God's revealed objective in mind. He wanted to give the Jews something to be jealous about!

One passing thought. Do you suppose the ancient people are moved to jealousy by the religious froth that is offered up today? These people who, in their conservative posture, think absolutely nothing of what the world thinks, and are devoted to extensive periods of religious activity. Will such a people be moved to jealousy by brief services, a religious culture that blends with the world, and the prevalence of Scriptural illiteracy? They will have to see something more than institutionalism and finely structured creedal statements to be moved to jealousy.

Notice the remarkable strength of this reasoning. ***“For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*** (NASB). With zeal and consistency, shun any view of Scripture that does not allow you to take these words into your heart and mouth. If it were not possible for Israel to be ***“accepted,”*** this would be a most foolish argument, indeed. The coming reality of their acceptance is what gives force to this reasoning. The acceptance of Israel will spark a great awakening, a resurrection, as it were, ***“from the dead.”*** We will see this very point made in the Revelation text. It is one which, when contemplated, brings great joy to my heart. I must acknowledge that I have grown weary of spiritual simulations and deadness.

### **They Are Still In A Supportive Role**

***“For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*** (11:16). The Spirit lays the axe to the tree of human pride, particularly as it is evidenced in among those professing godliness. The use of the words ***“firstfruit”*** and ***“root”*** refer to the

fathers, or Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The terms “*lump*” and “*branches*” refer to the resultant nation, Israel, through all time. The word “*holy*” means sanctified, or set apart for God. Once again, this is lofty reasoning, and will not conform to worldly patterns of thought. Keep in mind, this text is not speaking about spiritual Israel, but those related to Paul in the “*flesh*.”

A kingdom principle is enunciated here that is found throughout Scripture: **The dedication of the part includes the consecration of the whole.** This principle was established under the Law. The fifteenth chapter of Numbers provides the detailed reasoning on the matter. When coming into the promised land, the people were to offer to God sacrifices of cakes and animals. In so doing, they would sanctify the remainder of what they ate (Num 15:1-21).

The Romans text is declaring the blessing of Israel for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – a fact often affirmed by the Spirit (Ex 2:24; 3:15; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jer 33:26). For God to renounce Israel, He would have to disown Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom He made covenant. To ensure that no such conclusion is ever reached, God has irrevocably linked His name with those three patriarchs. He is “*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” (Ex 3:6,15,16; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Acts 3:13; 7:32). Properly seen, that fact alone confirms Israel has not been cut off!

*“ And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you ”* (11:17-18). Note that ALL of the branches were NOT cut off—which would be the case if God has totally rejected Israel. What is more, God did NOT grow a new tree, or

develop a new spiritual lineage. ***“Some,”*** not all, of the Jews were removed from the tree because of their unbelief. In order that there be no loss, individuals who had no part whatsoever in the Jewish lineage—from a ***“wild olive tree”***—were grafted into the sanctifying ***“firstfruit”*** and ***“root”*** of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham thus becomes our ***“father”*** in the faith (Rom 4:1,12,16; James 2:21). The blessing which we now receive is nothing less than ***“the blessing of Abraham”*** (Gal 3:14), come upon us because of Israel’s partial blindness.

Let no one boast ***“against the branches,”*** or the Israelites, supposing God no longer has a heart for them. They have NOT been totally cut off, because their ***“root”*** is supporting us. The tree has not died ***“from the roots,”*** as that fig tree Jesus cursed (Mark 11:20). Nor, indeed, has the refreshing ***“fatness”*** of the tree failed. The Gentiles are scheduled to provoke the Jews to jealousy, but they will not provide ***“fatness,”*** or ***“richness”*** to them. They have supplied it to us!

### **Did We Take Their Place?**

***“You will say then, Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either”*** (11:19-21). The presence of this sort of reasoning is altogether too prominent. If not taught outrightly, some have been bold enough to embrace it in their hearts. God has a purpose, but it was not to REPLACE the ancient people. The Gentiles have not stepped into the place of the Jews, but have become partakers of THEIR benefits. The New Covenant, which we presently enjoy in Christ Jesus, was never promised to the Gentiles. It is identified exclusively with ***“the house of Israel”*** (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-13; 10:16-17).

Mark it well, those who were ***“broken off”*** suffered the consequence because of their unbelief. Those who imagine branches cannot be

broken off do well to consider this. The branches that were removed belonged to Abraham, and were actually in the natural olive tree. Unbelief, however, disqualifies from Divine acceptance, and thus they were broken off. The solemn warning is to see to it that we are not broken off for the same reason. Rest assured, when unbelief grips the heart, and our trust is not in the Lord, breaking off is about to occur.

### **We Must Learn From Them**

*“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again”* (11:22-23). Here are two sides of the Divine nature. They appear to be contrary to one another, but they are not. There is perfect harmony in these qualities: the *“goodness and severity of God.”* God was *“severe”* to those who fell, showing them no mercy. He was *“good”* to us, making us acceptable even though it was not logical, from our point of view, to do so.

Do not suppose for one moment that it is not reasonable to believe Israel can be grafted in again, or that you can be cut off. For Israel to NOT continue in unbelief is just as possible as you to NOT continue in faith. What is more, *“God is able to graft them in again!”* Again, this is not a mere philosophical statement, but is undergirded by Divine intent. If such a thing was no longer possible, it would be foolish to so direct our thinking.

### **It is Reasonable for Them to be Grafted In Again**

*“For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”* (11:24). From every vantage point, the acceptance of

the Jews conforms to sound reason. If it seems impossible for such a thing to occur, consider that the acceptance of the Gentiles. We were “*cut out*” of a state of total unacceptableness, and “*contrary to nature*” placed into a tree God has been maintaining for centuries. How reasonable is such a procedure? The Spirit does not present theoretical possibilities to us in this text, but prophecies of the reinstatement of the Jews into the tree of Divine acceptance. We Gentiles have really been accepted! Our salvation is real! “*Much more*” shall the ancient people again enjoy Divine acceptance. The force of the language cannot be effectively denied. The Spirit does not say it is *possible* for them to be grafted into the tree again! With the strength of Divine affirmation He says they “*SHALL*” or “*WILL*” be grafted into their own olive tree. He is declaring what will occur, NOT what CAN happen! The text is intended to teach us that this prophecy is more reasonable than the acceptance of the Gentiles.

### **They Are Coming Back!**

*“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . . ”* (11:25-26a). The entire perspective is called “*this mystery.*” He does not mean that it cannot be understood. Rather, this is a strain of truth that could never be known were it not revealed. Judging from appearance, men have concluded the Jews have been *written off*, as it were. With unjustified dogmatism, some affirm they have been replaced, and are no longer a people. Now the Spirit comes like a flood-tide to wash away such foolishness. The corrupted views entertained by men have vaunted the opinions of men, and denigrated the Word of the Lord!

The blindness poured out upon Israel is not total, but “*in part.*” It is, as the NASB puts it, “*partial hardening*” that “*has happened to Israel.*” In this case, however, the Spirit does not associate “*partial*” with individuals or a total number. Instead the correlation is to a time: “*until*

*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*” Jesus said Jerusalem would be *“trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (Lk 21:24). The coming in referred to relates to salvation, or being made members of the household of faith. Presently, we live in a time when the church is dominated by the Gentiles. However, they have not done well. They have done with the Gospel what Israel did with the Law, attaching their traditions to it, then binding them upon other men. But their time is coming to an end—perhaps more quickly than some think. If you suppose there is no precision in the Kingdom of God, consider the NIV’s translation of this verse. *“Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”* Those who dare to affirm there is no such number will be made ashamed by the fulfillment of this word.

So, in this manner, *“All Israel shall be saved.”* The notion that this refers to the whole church contradicts this passage, however cherished it may be. The subject of this entire passage has been the nation of Israel. The point being made is that they have not been utterly cut off. The expression *“and so,”* comes from οὕτωκαὶ (hou-to-kai), which means *in this manner*, or *in this way*. This, then, is the way in which Israel shall be saved – precisely the same way the Gentiles were. **They will, by grace, have the veil lifted from their eyes, and be placed into the tree from which they were separated.**

This will be done in strict accord with the Scriptures and the present ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“. . . as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”* When Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph saying, *“you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21). In confirmation of this, Peter announced to the Jews of His day, *“To YOU first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless YOU, in turning away every one of YOU from your iniquities”* (Acts 3:26).

While only the first-fruits of the spiritual harvest was experienced in the early days of the church, our text affirms a full harvest is yet to come.

The text to which Paul alludes is found in Isaiah 59:20-21, and it is potent! ***“And a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, declares the LORD. And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, says the LORD, from now and forever.***” Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul provides a fuller perspective of the coming event. The Redeemer, or Deliverer, will not simply come for those who have already turned from transgression. Rather, He Himself will turn them from their waywardness, giving them a new heart and spirit as He has promised (Ezek 36:26).

In order to remove from our minds the idea that He is speaking of the Gentiles, or the church in general, He states the Deliverer will ***“banish”*** (NRSV) or ***“remove”*** (NASB) ungodliness from JACOB – a term by which the church is never identified. This will be the fulfillment of God’s promise through Isaiah. ***“I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye, And will remove all your alloy”*** (Isa 1:25). This also is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with them, and has never retracted: ***“For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”*** (Rom 11:27; Isa 27:9; 43:25; Jer 50:20; Ezek 36:25-27).

### **For the Father’s Sake!**

***“Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their***

*disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy*" (11:28:32). Those who cite the unworthiness of the "*house of Israel*" have their concerns answered here. Their worthiness or unworthiness is no more related to their salvation than it is to that of the Gentiles. Because of their rejection of the Lord's Christ, they are presently "*enemies.*" But, and do not miss this, it is "*for your sake!*" By this, he means it is in order to our acceptance. The door of salvation was opened to us because of their fall, or temporary blindness. "*For the sake of the fathers,*" and because of "*the election of grace,*" they are still "*beloved.*" Forever put to rest any notion that the Israelites have lost all favor with God. They are still "*beloved,*" according to the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Knowing the aggressive manner in which men pursue flawed theology, the character of God is associated with the reinstatement of Israel, or their acceptance in Christ Jesus. "*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,*" or *without repentance* (KJV). God did not choose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and promise to bless their offspring, taking away their sin, only to abandon His word. The integrity of God is at stake in this matter.

The parallel between the turning of Jacob and the acceptance of the Gentiles is remarkable. Once we were disobedient, but now we have obtained mercy through Israel's disobedience. In the same way, now Israel is disobedient, but because of the mercy shown to the Gentiles, they also will obtain mercy. Neither Jew nor Gentile, therefore, will be able to boast in the presence of the Lord.

### **Stand Back and Marvel!**

*"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His*

*ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen”* (11:32-26). As though caught up in a cloud of glory, the whole matter under discussion overwhelms the Apostle. With an eagle eye of faith, he has caught a glimpse of the genius of salvation, and seen its magnitude. Through the circumstances just proclaimed, **“God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all”** (NRSV). The Jews were shut up in disobedience WITH Law, and the Gentiles WITHOUT it – but **“God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all”** (NIV).

This is not something about which to argue. It is intended to impress our hearts with the **“depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.”** The cutting off of the Jews, and their grafting in again, reveal God’s wisdom and knowledge. The unacceptable state of the Gentiles, and their acceptance contrary to nature, manifests the same. From beginning to ending, salvation is of the Lord! No part of it will allow glory to go to men! If God had not revealed these things to us, we would never have known them: i.e., **“For who has known the mind of the LORD?”** This purpose was not the result of intercession or consultation with created beings, whether angels or men: i.e., **“Or who has become His counselor?”** Neither, indeed, will these glorious realities occur because men have manipulated themselves into the place of blessing: i.e., **“Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?”**

From beginning to end, from the acceptance of the Jews to the acceptance of the Gentiles, **“of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”** How marvelous are His workings! They are worthy of our faith, our acceptance, and our contemplation.

## CONCLUSION

Our Revelation text has dealt with the time of the fulfillment of God's commitment to Israel. The world will not conclude prematurely, nor will the curtain of time be dropped with the promises of God unfulfilled. It is true, some will corrupt this teaching, thinking they can successfully predict the end of the world, or even postpone commitment to Christ. But such is a very foolish approach to this text. In the first place, the fulfillment of Divine commitments does not require a lengthy period of time. A nation can be *born in a day*. Thus did the prophet speak, ***“Before she was in labor, she gave birth; Before her pain came, She delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children”*** (Isaiah 66:7-8). Such a thing occurred at Pentecost—and that was the first-fruits, not the complete harvest.

It is good for the saints to seek an expansion of their thinking concerning the great work of God. We are not part of a small thing, but something exceedingly large. We should realize that something engaging the interest of angelic hosts cannot be small or thoroughly comprehensible by mortals. I personally thank and praise the Lord for honoring His commitment to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I honor Him for committing to fulfill the promises delivered by His holy prophets to the people of Israel. God be glorified for bringing the Gentiles into His salvation, grafting them into the Jewish tree, and enabling them to participate in its richness. May He also be praised for making us aware of His intent to restore the ancient people to Himself through the Deliverer Who has also saved us.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 14

## TRIUMPH AND THE SEVENTH SEAL

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" and I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven

for about half an hour. (Revelation 7:9 - 8:1, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

We are entering into a section that is marked by fearful Divine workings upon the earth—judgments that will constitute retribution upon the ungodly, an awesome pouring out of judgment. The message, however, is not designed to cause debilitating fear among the godly. **Before** the judgments are described, attention is given to the consolation of the people of God. First, the conclusion of the world will not occur until the purpose of God has been fulfilled to the most precise degree. Even those of the house of Israel, currently estranged from their Maker, will be protected and brought into the fold. None of those **“foreknown”** by the Lord will be excluded because of the things coming upon the earth (Rom 8:29; 11:2; 2 Tim 2:19.) The true **“sheep”** are known by the Lord, and will be protected by Him (John 10:27-30).

Some are not able to receive these things because they conflict with their theological views. We must not allow the intrusion of a system of thought that dulls the edge of the Sword of the Spirit. Those who **“are persecuted for righteousness' sake”** (Matt 5:10), need the reassurance that comes from Divine commitment. **The Holy Spirit is more interested in stabilizing suffering saints than in buttressing finely-tuned eschatological persuasions that have been developed by mere men.** This book is not written to aid in the development of systematic theological, but to comfort the people of God with a view of the ultimate outcome of their faith.

There simply is too much in the Word of God on this subject for it so be a point of controversy! Those who **“cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart”** (Acts 11:23) have every reason to be optimistic. Believers

with a heart for the people of God can rest their hope in the Lord, knowing He is ***“able to keep”*** them ***“from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”*** (Jude 24). Whether it is tribulation on a personal level, or a global scale, the sons of God will survive! Satan will NOT be successful in overturning the purpose of God. He will not be able to thwart those whom God has foreknown from coming to Him, nor those who keep the faith from completing their race. The Lord knows how to keep people ***“safe for Christ”*** (Jude 1, NRSV), and make those in Christ ***“to stand”*** (Rom 14:4). Only eternity will adequately portray the magnitude of salvation. Until then, we have, among many others, the text before us, that expands our vision of God’s ***“so great salvation”*** (Heb 2:3).

## A VISION OF THE REDEEMED

In keeping with the Abrahamic promise, a vast multitude of the redeemed is seen. How glorious the sight. Those of us who have grown too accustomed to small numbers, are delighted to behold the conclusion of *project humanity* !

***“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues . . . ”***

In keeping with the Abrahamic promise, a vast multitude of the redeemed is seen. How glorious the sight. Those of us who have grown too accustomed to small numbers, are delighted to behold the conclusion of *project humanity* ! The promise which Abraham embraced, resulting in him being counted righteous, related to the vast number of the saved. ***“And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number***

*them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:5-6). The Lord again substantiated the same promise to His “friend.” “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:17-18).*

Again, the promise was confirmed to Isaac, the child of promise. *“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 26:4).*

In elaboration of the Abrahamic promise, Jeremiah prophesied of the increase coming through *“the seed of David,”* Who is Jesus. *“As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me” (Jer 33:22).* Although Jesus died without ever bearing earthly seed, His offspring are so numerous He is called *“everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6-7).* In Him is found the ultimate fulfillment of the ancient promise, *“Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited” (Isa 54:1-3, NKJV).*

Oh, salvation is an exceeding great enterprise, and we do well to consider it. Where sin did abound, grace did *“much more abound”*

(Rom 5:20). Some will question this reality, but it is plainly declared in Scripture. The very text provided above, is adduced by the Holy Spirit in reference to those in Christ Jesus. ***“But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise”*** (Gal 4:26-28, NKJV). If it does not presently appear that salvation is large, take hold on the word of the Lord! The work is not yet completed! But it will be, for ***“For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth”*** (Rom 9:28). Christ will be honored, and God glorified, by a number of redeemed that will appropriately complement His vicarious sacrifice!

In reasoning upon this matter, God spoke through Isaiah. While all of the attention was upon the nation of Israel, that was not a sufficient for the Son. His great work required a larger inheritance than that! Thus did the prophet speak, ***“Indeed He says, It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth”*** (Isa 49:6). The 144,000 in the first part of this chapter were ***“out of every tribe of the people of Israel”*** (Rev 7:4). But lest our minds stop there, our vision is stretched to include the whole world! **Salvation will reach as far as the curse, not only provisionally, but effectively!** Although the Jewish people missed the significance of the prophecies, God often used the prophets to declare the gathering of a people from the Gentiles. The ***“Root of Jesse,”*** it is affirmed, would be sought by the Gentiles (Isa 11:10). The Messiah would also bring ***“justice”*** to the Gentiles—a clear reference to the glory of justification (Isa 42:1). Not only would the Savior be given as a ***“Covenant to the people”*** (Israel), He would also be ***“as a Light to the Gentiles”*** (Isa 42:6). As if beckoning for the nations to come to Him, the Lord declares, ***“Behold, I will***

Christ will be honored, and God glorified, by a number of redeemed that will appropriately complement His vicarious sacrifice!

lift My hand in an oath to the nations, And set up My standard for the peoples” (Isa 49:22).

### **A Great Influx of Peoples**

What we are seeing is a great influx of people following ungodliness being turned away from Jacob (Rom 11:26). This is a marvelous occurrence concerning which little is known. It is as though the Spirit purposefully avoided tantalizing our curiosity. Isaiah was given an intriguing prophecy concerning Israel that whets the spiritual appetite. It reveals the impact Israel will have upon the nations, something hitherto relatively unknown. *“It shall come to pass in that day That the LORD shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, And will assemble the outcasts of Israel, And gather together the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth”* (Isa 11:11-12). Micah also revealed this aspect of the future. *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”* (Micah 4:1-2). Something of the magnitude of this was also revealed by Zechariah. *“The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us continue to go and pray*

*before the LORD, And seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.' Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the LORD.' Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:21-23).*

Were this all we had on the subject, there might be justification for thinking this was all fulfilled at the inauguration of the New Covenant on Pentecost. But this is not everything on the matter. The Spirit also spoke of these things with great clarity through the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Spirit reasons, *“Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? . . . For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”* (Rom 11:12,15, NKJV). If the recovery of Israel were an impossibility, or if it were not on the Divine agenda, this type of reasoning would be absurd. **Faith cannot take hold of philosophy, nor can hope spring from the well of supposition.** Possibilities are not strong enough to support the weight of trust, nor can they sustain extended effort. The anticipation of good things must have strong support! The above affirmations show us that the best has been reserved for the last. If this conflicts with any view of last things, let God be true, and every man a liar.

We will find the *“nations”* do not turn to Christ during a great swell of peace and safety, but in *“great tribulation.”* At the expense of their own lives, many of them will embrace the Savior. Until this day, most of the martyrs have come from the Gentiles—a most remarkable consideration!

We cannot leave this section without noting the representation of all peoples in this group. They were ***“of all nations,”*** or from among the Gentiles. This fulfills many prophetic utterances (Psa 67:1,2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; Isa 2:2; 66:18; Hag 2:7). This also fulfills the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

There were representatives from ***“all . . . kindreds,”*** or families. These are blood relations, in distinction to geographical locations, as promised in Psalm 22:27. ***“All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You.”***

The vastness of salvation is often questioned, sometimes doubted, and frequently even denied, because of the scarcity of believers in any given generation. There is too much in God’s Word, however, to justify small views of a ***“great salvation.”***

The multitude comes from ***“all . . . people,”*** or united body of individuals, whether kingdom, nation, or city–political entities. Again, this is in fulfillment of several prophecies (Psa 47:1; 117:1; 148:11). Isaiah spoke of such a blessing, began at Pentecost, but certainly not confined to that glorious occasion. ***“And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations”*** (Isa 25:6-7, NKJV). God be praised for this promise!

The inclusion of “*all . . . tongues*” is also a marvelous display of the sufficiency and efficiency of salvation. The diversity of languages is traced to the curse of God, when the people were dispersed at the tower of Babel project (Gen 11:7). Salvation reverses that situation, as started at Pentecost, where people were united by an understood message (Acts 2:6). Again, the prophets spoke of this type of thing. “*For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory*” (Isa 66:18).

Geographical divisions! Blood divisions! Political divisions! Language divisions! God’s “*great salvation*” leaped over them all, bringing together a diversity of people, making them one. This is nothing less than the fulfillment of the vision of the healing waters which was shown to the prophet Ezekiel. He beheld the powerful effects of the Gospel as waters that issued from the house, or dwelling place, of God. As the waters proceeded they became broader and deeper. First they were ankle deep, then knee deep, then to the loins, then deep enough to swim in. The waters became so large they were “*a river that could not be passed over.*” Everywhere they went, they brought healing and restoration. Like a mighty torrent, the healing waters flowed “*toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.*” Its healing properties were universal, for “*every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.*” Only a few “*swamps and marshes*” would not be healed. Fruitfulness in abundance on either side of the river (Ezek 47:1-12). This is a view of the effectiveness of Christ’s atonement, and we catch a glimpse of it in our text also.

The vastness of salvation is often questioned, sometimes doubted, and frequently even denied, because of the scarcity of believers in any given generation. There is too much in God’s Word, however, to justify small views of a “*great salvation.*” Think of some of the remarkable

expressions long this line. *“God shall bless us, And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him”* (Psa 67:7). *“The LORD has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations; And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God”* (Isa 52:10). *“The Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, Worthlessness and unprofitable things’”* (Jer 16:19). *“And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great to the ends of the earth ”* (Mic 5:4). *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea”* (Isa 11:9). *“For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea”* (Hab 2:14). No individual, however theologically astute, can remove the optimistic note in this chorus of verses. There will be a great awakening that will dwarf everything before it, and it will be inducted by a the grafting in again of Israel.

Here a extraordinary and decisive blow is delivered to sectarianism, which dominates the Gentile church. The multitude that we behold is perfectly united, with no schism among them. Together they stand before the throne and the Lamb, arrayed in the very righteousness of God. They are not divided into groups, as men have sought to do upon the earth!

### **A Decisive Blow to Sectarianism**

Here a extraordinary and decisive blow is delivered to sectarianism, which dominates the Gentile church. The multitude that we behold is perfectly united, with no schism among them. Together they stand

before the throne and the Lamb, arrayed in the very righteousness of God. They are not divided into groups, as men have sought to do upon the earth! I share with you a most excellent statement from a man of God. *“Religious sects, which alas! abound, even in Christendom, and which are a calumny on the Gospel, nourish in the minds of their votaries the idea that heaven will be peopled mainly, if not entirely, by those within their own pale.”* ( D. Thomas, 1950 ). Well said, brother Thomas! Well said!

## THEIR POSITION AND STATUS

### **Before the Throne and the Lamb**

This multitude includes the remnant of Israel (144,000), but is not limited to them. This is a picture of *“one body,”* joined together in glorious unity. The location of this great multitude is critical. They do not stand before men, as when they were upon the earth. No longer are they a *“spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men”* (1 Cor 4:9). No longer are they *“made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things”* (1 Cor 4:13). They were *“strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Heb 11:13), but they are in their proper habitation now! Hear the blessed declaration. They were *“ . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . . ”* This is the culmination of their salvation, the objective of their calling, and the goal toward which they ran with patience!

While they were engaged in the *“good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12), this throne was the *“throne of grace”* (Heb 4:16), from which precious resources were received. This is actually the Father’s throne, to which Jesus has been exalted, and where He is presently seated (Rev 3:21). This vast multitude had availed themselves of *“the Throne”* when they walked by faith, drawing near to the One seated upon it (Heb 10:22). Now, through the grace of God, they stand before the Lord—trophies of

His matchless grace. The promise has been fulfilled: *“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--to the only God our Savior . . . ”* (Jude 24-25).

Those who desire to complete the race set before them must give due consideration to the conclusion of the race. They must have faith to see themselves in this vast number, standing before the Throne with no condemnation upon them--free at last from the difficulties and vicissitudes of life. **Without this dominating consideration, the race is too long, and the battle too fierce.** That is why the suffering saints of John’s day were provided with a vision of the coming time. Allow me to be candid about this matter. The best laborers in the Kingdom often become weary with battle-fatigue, and nearly faint in their hearts. Those who boast of always being cheerful and on top of the situation simply are not telling the truth. The zone of peace is up ahead—it is not in this world!

For this reason, those who only remind us of our duty, never holding before us the conclusion of the warfare, do us great harm. They have robbed our souls, and placed greater burdens upon us. Too, those who emphasize life in this world, failing to set before us the glories of the ages to come, are like the *“little foxes that spoil the vines”* (Song of Sol 2:15). You who speak in the name of the Lord, hold glory before the people! Tell them of the inheritance, and of their presentation before the throne of God without fault and in a state of inexplicable joy. Whatever you have to say, do not leave the hope of glory obscure. Do not cover it with the black blanket of Law, or the dazzling spread of life in this world. **Faith needs to hear about the future.** It’s eye will fill with tears if it is not able to behold the coming glory!

Behold how the Son of God is honored! The vast multitude stands before the One Who redeemed them— *“the Lamb.”* He created the

world (Eph 3:9), defeated the devil (Heb 2:14), and trampled under His foot all the kingdoms of the world (Rev 11:15). **But His greatest achievement is the reconciliation of the world to God** (2 Cor 5:18-20). In this work He paid the greatest price, suffered the greatest humiliation, and experienced the greatest exaltation. In this book, Jesus is referred to as ***“the Lamb”*** no less than twenty-seven times (5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8,11; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:14,22,23; 22:1,3). This is ***“the Word”*** in His redemptive capacity, and forms the EMPHASIS of this book. By way of comparison, He is referred to as ***“King”*** three times (15:3; 17:14; 19:16), ***“Jesus”*** fourteen times (1:1,2,5,9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4; 22:16,20,21), and ***“Lord”*** twenty-two times (1:8; 4:8,11; 6:10; 11:8,15,17; 14:13; 15:3,4; 16:5,7; 17:14; 18:8; 19:1,6,16; 21:22; 22:5,6,20,21). But it is as ***“the Lamb”*** that He rises to the height, leading His people through the dark courses of an evil world, and bringing them into the safe habitation of glory. Miss Jesus in His redemptive capacity, and you have missed Him altogether.

those who only remind us of our duty, never holding before us the conclusion of the warfare, do us great harm. They have robbed our souls, and placed greater burdens upon us. Too, those who emphasize life in this world, failing to set before us the glories of the ages to come, are like the ***“little foxes that spoil the vines”***

### **Clothed in White**

***“ . . . clothed with white robes . . . ”*** Here is justification brought its culmination. This is why it is written, ***“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”*** (1 Cor 6:11, NKJV). The imputation of

righteousness (Rom 4:11,23,24) is in order to a faultless presentation before the Throne and the Lamb. In this world, imputation affords unreserved acceptance, complete exoneration from all guilt, and fellowship with the Son (Eph 1:6; Acts 13:39; 1 Cor 1:9). Yet all of that is **preparatory** for the ultimate confrontation! Jesus promised the faithful they would walk Him *“in white”* (Rev 3:4,5). He admonished lukewarm Laodicea to *“buy”* white raiment from Him so she could be clothed before Him, and not be ashamed (Rev 3:18). This is nothing less than the appropriation of righteousness—the very righteousness of God (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21; 2 Cor 5:21). That righteousness enables the believer to overcome in this world, and stand before Throne in the next one.

We are not to think of salvation as merely being saved from the enemy, or having our past dealt with effectively. That is the beginning of eternal life, but not its consummation. To come short standing *“before the throne and the Lamb”* in spotless purity is to have failed miserably and completely! The matter of our salvation is not over until Jesus presents us to Himself *“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:27). This type of language is again expressed in Revelation 14:4-5. *“These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”* Any view of salvation that minimizes or excludes this glorious perspective is dangerous. If embraced, it thrusts the soul into jeopardy, taking from it the true perspective of eternal life. Well did Peter admonish us, *“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless”* (2 Pet 3:14). Availing ourselves of the atonement now will yield the coveted benefit of absolute and unquestioned purity when we stand before the Throne and the Lamb.

## **Palm Branches in Their Hands**

“ . . . *with palm branches in their hands . . .* ” The language reminds us of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. “*The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!*” (John 12:12-13. NKJV). At that time, Jesus was entering a throng of people. In our text, a throng of people are entering the presence of the Lord. It is a time of much greater recognition and praise than the occasion when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Considering the introductory feasts of the Law, here is the antitype of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the type of the celebration being witnessed. The Feast of Tabernacles was the general harvest festival, and the anniversary of the beginning of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. During the Feast, no servile work was to be done. They lived in booths, constructed of various branches, including those from the Palm tree. The point of the Feast was to commemorate deliverance from their desert wanderings and promote thanksgiving for entrance into the promised land (Lev 23:34-44).

This earth had divided this vast multitude, but salvation united them! All of them now stand before the Throne in joyful submission and adoration. Without exception, every single one of them is clothed in white, impeccable righteousness. All of them are acutely aware of both the Throne and the Lamb, and are prepared to offer insightful praise to Him.

The picture before us is of people of faith freed from the trial of life in the world, and standing at last in the real *promised land* . Their journey to the celestial city, like that of Israel to Canaan, was filled

with toil and delay. But, now they are safe at last, standing in the ultimate haven, ***“before the throne and the Lamb.”*** Now, instead of dwelling in ***“booths”*** as Israel, God has ***“spread HIS tabernacle over them”*** (Rev 7:15, NASB). While some have interpreted these ***“palm branches”*** to be emblematic of triumph and victory, it seems more likely they are indicative of ***eternal rest***. Their trials have subsided, their sufferings have concluded, and they are home at last.

**This earth had divided this vast multitude, but salvation united them!** All of them now stand before the Throne in joyful submission and adoration. Without exception, every single one of them is clothed in white, impeccable righteousness. All of them are acutely aware of both the Throne and the Lamb, and are prepared to offer insightful praise to Him. It is a glorious picture of entering into rest from the realm in which many of them died for their faith, and all of them suffered for righteousness sake. They certainly do not miss the world! They are now with their Lord.

## INSIGHTFUL CONFESSION

This multitude is not silent! In unison, they lift their voices in holy ascription. ***“. . . and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”*** In keeping with all utterances in this book, they cry out with a ***“loud voice”*** (5:2,12; 6:10; 7:2,10; 8:13; 10:3; 12:10; 14:7,9,15; 19:17). Those so speaking include angels, the martyrs, and a redeemed multitude). Satan in all of his various forms (***“king,” “Dragon,” “Destroyer,” “Abaddon,” “Apollyon,” “the Devil,” and “Satan”***—9:11; 12:3; 20:2) is NEVER said to speak with a ***“loud voice.”*** Nor, indeed, are his wicked ministers said to do so ( ***“beast,” “false prophet”*** (11:7; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Satan, nor any of his influential ministers, are capable of speaking so loud as to drown out the heavenly Voice! But when heaven speaks, or those who are stand before the Throne and the Lamb, all else

becomes but a faint whisper!

And what does this delivered multitude cry? They take the entirety of their salvation—all of it in every aspect—and declare it belongs to God and the Lamb! On earth there are arguments about the source of salvation, but not in heaven! Among those who are ***“absent from the Lord”*** (2 Cor 5:6), there have been disagreements concerning the cause of salvation. Men have long disputed about the role of works, the place of grace, and the involvement of the human will. And while there may be some degree of value in such disputations, no one standing before the Throne and the Lamb have any question whatsoever about why they are there! ***“Salvation,”*** in all of its aspects, ***“belongs to OUR God Who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb.”*** On earth, some said they were ***“of Paul,” “of Apollos,”*** and ***“of Cephas”*** (1 Cor 1:12). But no such associations are made before the Throne and the Lamb! Stooping even lower, some have chosen to identify themselves with Luther, Calvin, Campbell, and other lesser luminaries. Men have chosen to call themselves Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Charismatic, and a host of other names that divide them from other believers. But no such identity can transfer into the world to come. All such names fall away at the grave. Blessed are the persons who chooses to reject the use such identities BEFORE they stand before the Throne and the Lamb. The name of Jesus is the ONLY name the Father honors.

How glorious is this truth! ***“Salvation is of the Lord!”*** (Jonah 2:9), and ***“Salvation belongs to the Lord!”*** (Psa 3:8). It is God Who is ***“working salvation in the midst of the earth”*** (Psa 74:12), and the multitude before the Throne and the Lamb know it very well. It is **HIS** salvation (Psa 9:14; 119:81; Isa 51:5,6,8). No wonder it is declared to be ***“the salvation of God”*** (Psa 50:23; Lk 3:6; Acts 28:28). From beginning to end, ***“Salvation belongs to our God . . . and to the Lamb!”*** From our calling to the completion of the race, it is of God! No facet of salvation, however minuscule, has been wrought independently of God and the Lamb. The Father planned it, and the Son perfected it! God desired it, and the Lamb fulfilled it! This ***“great salvation”*** which has

come to us involves the activity of both God and the Lamb. At no point have they been idle or uninvolved, and the redeemed multitude know it as they stand before the Throne and the Lamb.

In the world, the associations of both the Father and the Son are rarely emphasized in representations of salvation. But it will not be so when the redeemed multitude stand *“before the Throne and the Lamb.”* Because of a preference for lower things, the smoke of the battle has obscured these things from many.

By ascribing salvation *“to our God which sits upon the Throne,”* the multitude acknowledges salvation itself is evidence of the Sovereignty of God. Divine rule is evidenced in salvation! **Before** we came into the Son, He foreknew us (Rom 8:29). **Before** we called upon the name of the Lord, He protected us (Jude 1). He drew us to the Son, and the Son expounded Him to us (John 6:44; Matt 11:27). It is He Who works everything together for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28). He works in us *“both to will and to do of His own good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). It is the Lamb alone Who took away *“the sins of the world,”* satisfying God completely (John 1:29; Heb 9:26; Isa 53:11). The Lamb, and the Lamb alone *“destroyed the devil”* and *“spoiled principalities and powers”* (Heb 2:14; Col 2:15). A successful journey through this world is owing to the intercession of Christ (Heb 7:25). The implementation of the New Covenant initially and in personal application is accomplished by the Lamb (Heb 8:6; 12:24). Even the reaping of the saints from the earth will be under the administration of the Lamb (Matt 13:41). *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

In the world, the associations of both the Father and the Son are

rarely emphasized in representations of salvation. But it will not be so when the redeemed multitude stand ***“before the Throne and the Lamb.”*** Because of a preference for lower things, the smoke of the battle has obscured these things from many. They simply live too low, with their minds dwelling on temporal things. As this condition is remedied through faith, and individuals are brought more into harmony with the perspective of the multitude before the Throne, it will become evident that ***“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*** in its totality, and without a single exception! No flesh will glory in the presence of the Lord!

Remember, we are still in the sixth seal. While the spread of salvation under the leadership of the Jews is doubtless referenced, it is all within the context of the end of the world—the consummation of the ages. The world will not come to a conclusion until all of the wheat has been duly sealed and ultimately harvested. Too, here is the **conclusion** of the whole matter: standing before the Throne and the Lamb in spotless purity and understanding the Source and thoroughness of our salvation. Any presentation of salvation that lacks this perspective is seriously flawed, and is to be summarily rejected. In Christ, you are part of a vast and glorious purpose.

## THE HEAVENLY RESPONSE

There is always inter-involvement in heaven. A degree of alertness and participation exists there that is not known in the earth. Nothing is overlooked, and no ascription of praise goes unnoticed. ***“All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’”*** The amalgamation of personalities about the Throne respond immediately. From the outer perimeter of angels, to the inner circle of the Living

Creatures, the entire group unite in an instant response. Here is precise order, united reaction, and insightful reaction. Notice, their worshipful expression is produced by the confession of truth! Here, no mighty deed is performed by the redeemed—only the confession of truth perceived!

It appears to me that this perspective is sorely needed in our time. Much religious response has little to do with the confession of foundational truth. A significant, if not dominating, percentage of reaction among *church* people has very little to do with the confession of truth. A certain ambience of sensationalism surrounds the contemporary church that succeeds in hiding God, obscuring salvation, and minimizing Christ Jesus. It is a tragic circumstance from

The enterprise of salvation is here opened fully to the heavenly hierarchy. For ages they desired to **“*look into*”** these things (1 Pet 1:12), perceiving in salvation the most extensive Divine working ever undertaken. It transcended the creation itself, and even the climactic giving of the Law at Sinai, which many of them attended, and in which they were instrumental. Now they respond to the confession of the redeemed.

which people must be delivered if ever they are to stand spotless before **“*the Throne and the Lamb.*”** Our reaction in the earth is to be compatible with that in heaven. As Jesus taught us to pray, **“*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*”** (Matt 6:10).

The enterprise of salvation is here opened fully to the heavenly hierarchy. For ages they desired to **“*look into*”** these things (1 Pet 1:12), perceiving in salvation the most extensive Divine working ever

undertaken. It transcended the creation itself, and even the climactic giving of the Law at Sinai, which many of them attended, and in which they were instrumental. Now they respond to the confession of the redeemed. They do not merely fall before the Throne and the Lamb, they **say** something! As it is written, *“fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying . . . ”* Whatever may be said for silence, there is not much of it in heaven! The words of this lofty body of personalities are clear, understandable, and discerning. We ought to here observe, **the closer one is to the Throne, the more confession of truth and praise to God will be heard.** In passing, it is arresting to notice how often worship is associated with saying something in the Presence of Deity (Gen 24:26-27,48; Job 1:20-21; Matt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; Mark 5:6-7; Heb 11:21; Rev 5:14; 11:16; 19:4; . . . etc.).

## AMEN!

*“Amen”* – Trustworthy! Surely! So be it! Verily! Indeed! Here holy angels and other lofty spirits are approving what men have said. Do not miss how remarkable this is! How far this redeemed multitude has come, to elicit an *“AMEN”* from such a holy society! These holy beings are satisfied with what the redeemed have said. It has been precise and full of insight! They see the wisdom and glory of the saying and are willing to let it stand as said! There is no flaw in it, no deficiency, no inadequacy. It is thorough and all encompassing. In it is summarized a vast composite of truth that has spanned millennia in its revelation. *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* may appear but introductory to the sophists of this world, but **not** to illustrious personalities around the Throne. May the Lord grant us to be as impressed with this confession as they are!

## Blessing!

The point of this expression is not blessing that COMES from God, but blessing that GOES to Him. Although the saints benefit and are satisfied with salvation, and holy angels, the living creatures and the

twenty-four elders are blessed by it, God Himself and the Lamb received the greatest and most extensive benefit! **Not only do the saints have an inheritance, God and the Lamb do also!** God's "*inheritance*," we are told, is "*in the saints*"—and it is glorious (Eph 1:18). The Lord Jesus was also promised the "*heathen*" for His "*inheritance*" (Psa 2:8). The term "*blessing*," when ascribed to God, emphasizes Divine satisfaction with His inheritance.

Zephaniah depicted this satisfaction in a remarkable expression. "*The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing*" (Zeph 3:17). Moses spoke of the Lord taking "*delight*" in His people, and "*rejoicing*" over them (Num 14:8; Deut 30:9). The Psalmist wrote of God taking "*pleasure*" in those fearing Him and hoping in His mercy (Psa 147:11; 149:4). Isaiah also prophesied of God "*rejoicing*" over His people, and "*joying*" in them (Isa 62:4-5; 65:19). Jeremiah spoke of the same thing (Jer 32:41). The people of God are even declared to be the "*apple*" (or pupil) of God's "*eye*" (Deut 32:10; Psa 17:8; Lam 2:18; Zech 2:8).

## Glory!

His pervasive work is seen in all of salvation, and is counted as a precious jewel--of great value. It is as though they are shining the spotlight of attention upon the Author and Perfecter of salvation. The body of the redeemed that stand before Him are trophies of His grace, and precious jewels in His crown

"*Glory*" has to do with the **recognition** of God and the Lamb in their

great salvation. If salvation is the baring, or revelation, of the Divine “*arm*” (Isa 52:10; Isa 53:1; John 12:38), then “*glory*” has to do with the perception of that reality. These holy beings exult in the recognition of their God—a stance that is common in heavenly places.

### **Wisdom!**

Salvation is an economy of “*wisdom*.” The saints have seen it, and so does the heavenly hierarchy. At last, the principalities and powers before whom God has been displaying His “*manifold wisdom*” (Eph 3:10) behold it in its fulness! The ways of God are too deep for created intelligence to fathom. This it is written, “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*” (Rom 11:33). But God has not left the matter obscure. He has revealed it to the saved through Christ, and to lofty personalities through the church (Eph 3:10)—particularly as it stands before the Throne and the Lamb.

### **Thanksgiving!**

The giving of thanks proceeds from understanding--when the work of God is seen and appreciated. The living creatures, elders, and angels do not give thanks to men—not to Noah, Abraham, Moses, or the holy prophets. They do not give credit to the Apostles or other writers of Scripture like Luke, James, and Jude. They know, and the testimony of the redeemed confirms, that all thanks go “*to our God forever and ever*.” Were it not for the mighty God, not a single aspect of salvation, whether in reception or in maturity, could have been accomplished. The holy assembly is grateful for this, and brings their sacrifice of praise to the King.

### **Honor!**

“*Honor*,” in Scripture, is the highest degree of dignity and value. It

is not something that can be rendered perfunctorily, or only by procedure. Preciousness and extreme value are associated with honor, particularly as it is ascribed to God Almighty. His pervasive work is seen in all of salvation, and is counted as a precious jewel--of great value. It is as though they are shining the spotlight of attention upon the Author and Perfecter of salvation. The body of the redeemed that stand before Him are trophies of His grace, and precious jewels in His crown (Mal 3:17). Proper praise and worship can only be given when **facing** the Throne, with all else removed from our attention. That is giving **“honor”** to Him! The contemporary notion of praise and worship that is gaining momentum is not, to say the least, saturated with **“honor”** for God. It is, in my estimation, too earthy.

### **Power!**

This **“power”** is working power--Omnipotence that is devoted to the accomplishment of God’s **“eternal purpose.”** In the world, **“power”** is used for entertainment and other things that yield no lasting benefit--but it is not so with the power of God. Salvation, the most extensive Divine project ever revealed, is nothing less than a display of Divine ability and strength. From an impossible circumstance, the absolute and total fall of mankind, God has extracted a people for Himself, finally causing them to stand before Him in total purity and with extensive insight. The power that has wrought this belongs to God! Now, in this world, we are to seek to have our eyes opened to **“the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe”** (Eph 1:19).

### **Might!**

Although closely related to **“power,”** **“might”** shows another aspect of Divine initiative. While **“power”** underscores Divine authority and ability to **do** something, **“might”** emphasizes the ability to **accomplish** the objective, bringing it to fruition. The word literally means *forcefulness*, and postulates the overthrow of all adversarial powers. Such might belongs to God alone! Believers, you may recall, are urged,

in this world, to ***“be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”*** (Eph 6:10). If they will trust Him, and lean upon Him, He will bring them to their ***“desired haven”*** (Psa 107:30). It is not possible for those who believe to be ashamed in their faith! Faith will receive its own reward and thorough satisfaction. No wonder we are admonished to keep it!

## DEVELOPING AWARENESS

It is not enough simply to behold visions. Yet, John does not blurt out some meaningless observation. As the preacher said, ***“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few”*** (Eccl 5:2).

It is essential that the vision be comprehended to a measurable degree. While John gazes at this remarkable sight, one of the twenty-four elders interrogates him. ***“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’”*** Notice, the significant observation is that they are ***“arrayed in white robes”*** while standing before the Throne and the Lamb. These are spotless **before the Lord**. They have *acquired* purity, and have done so while in another place. Thus, the question is posed, ***“Where did they come from?”*** It is often the heavenly manner to question in order that teaching may be given. The mind must be directed to heavenly realities in order to hear an explanation of them.

John does not venture a guess, or attempt to reason out a logical answer. He realizes this is out of the domain of man. He is not presumptuous or philosophical. Thus it is written, ***“and I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’”*** I cannot help but recall the response of Ezekiel when asked about the valley of dry bones. ***“And He said to me, ‘Son of man,***

*can these bones live?’ So I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, You know’”* (Ezek 37:3). Blessed is the person who answers Divine interrogations in such a manner! To seek understanding from the Lord is to be preferred over human investigation and surmising. Not everything is intended to be found **“by searching.”** There are some things that must be made known from above, and John is faced with one of them. He knows it, and thus submits himself to the elder who asked the questions. May the Lord give us grace to respond in Divine interrogation in like manner.

## THE REDEEMED IDENTIFIED

### Where They Came From

There is a willingness on the part of the elder to divulge what was not apparent. **“So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation . . . ’”** The language here is important. Various translations emphasize differing aspects of this text. **“They which came out of great tribulation”** (KJV). **“The ones who come out of the great tribulation”** (NKJV). **“They that come out of the great tribulation”** (ASV). **“The ones who come out of the great tribulation”** (NASB). **“They who have come out of the great tribulation”** (RSV). **“They who have come out of the great ordeal”** (NRSV). **“They who have come out of the great tribulation”** (NIV). **“They who came through the great testing”** (BBE). **“Those who are coming out of the great tribulation”** (YLT). **“Those who have come through the great oppression”** (Phillips). **“The ones coming out of the great tribulation”** (Living Bible). **“The people who have come safely through the great tribulation”** (TEV). **“The people who have been through the great persecution”** (Jerusalem Bible). **“The men who have passed through the great ordeal”** (NEB). All of the concepts conveyed in these translations are inherent in the text. At least three different perspectives are seen, enlarging our view of the text.

**ACCENTING WHERE THEY ARE.** This perspective underscores the **completion** of the suffering—the fact that it is all over, and the holy ones now stand before the Throne and the Lamb. The ordeal through which they passed is over, and the salvation of God has been proved superior to all of Satan’s artifices--equal to the most severe experiences allowed by God. “*Came out*” (KJV), “*have come out*” (RSV, NRSV), “*came through*” (BBE), “*have come through*” (Phillips) “*have come*” (TEV), “*have been through*” (JB), “*have passed through*” (NEB).

**ACCENTING WHERE THEY CAME FROM.** Here, the path through which the redeemed ones come is emphasized. The multitude did not sail on placid seas to the realm of peace and safety. The ordained path is “***through suffering***”—a way also taken by the Lamb Himself. If any will stand spotless before the Throne and the Lamb, they will come from tribulation, stress, and suffering. Only the magnitude of suffering differs—the reality of it is always present. “*Come out*” (NKJV, ASV, NASB).

**ACCENTING THE INCREASING NUMBER.** This

The idea is that this is an increasing multitude, coming out of “***great tribulation***” and standing at last before the Throne and the Lamb. They have been unaffected by the tribulation. It has not soiled their garments or robbed them of their praise. From the furnace of affliction they have come, passing through the blazing attack of the wicked one, and they have won!

point of view reminds us that our text is approaching the end, which will not come until **all** of the children are gathered in. From the battle field, a stream of redeemed ones will continue to flow into heavenly realms until time is

no more. “*Are coming out*” (YLT), “*coming out*” (LB).

This verse is translated from the phrase οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης, Linguistically, for those who are interested, this is Present middle participle, with the idea of continued repetition. One scholar (Charles) paraphrases it this way: “*The martyrs are still arriving from the scene of the great tribulation.*” While he has added the view that this multitude is confined to the martyrs, he has captured the sense of the text. The idea is that this is an **increasing** multitude, coming out of “**great tribulation**” and standing at last before the Throne and the Lamb. They have been unaffected by the tribulation. It has not soiled their garments or robbed them of their praise. From the furnace of affliction they have come, passing through the blazing attack of the wicked one, and they have won!

### **A Mythical View of the Rapture**

The presence of this multitude deals a devastating blow to a mythical, yet popular, view of “*the rapture.*” While the word “*rapture*” is not found in Scripture, the idea it connotes is declared. “*Rapture*” literally means, *the transporting of a person from one place to another*. Theologically, the term is based upon First Thessalonians 4:17. “***Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord***” (NKJV). “***We who are alive***” are those who have remained in the world until the coming of the Lord. “***Them***” are those who have died prior to His return. When the Lord Jesus descends from heaven with “***a shout,***” accompanied with the arresting “***voice of the archangel***” and the piercing blast of “***the trump of God,***” all saints of all ages will be brought together in one grand company. It is then that they will be “***caught up***” (the phrase used by all major translations) to meet the Lord, never again to be absent from Him in any sense.

The phrase “***caught up***” comes from ἀρπαγησόμεθα (ar-pag-as-o-

me-tha), which means *to take away, snatch, seize, or take away*. Of its use in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon says, "*used of Divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another, to snatch or catch away.*" <sup>1</sup> The word is used to describe Philip being caught up and transported miraculously to Azotus (Acts 8:40). It is also used in Revelation 12:5 to portray the ascension of Jesus into heaven, and away from the devil's domain. The First Thessalonian text uses the term to portray the gathering of the wheat into the barn, or the harvesting of the elect from every corner of the earth. If that is what people mean by "*rapture*," then we have no controversy with them. In my judgment, however, it is best to employ language of Scripture to describe the event, and not humanly-devised theological language upon which has been suspended a great deal of hoary tradition.

The popular view of "*the rapture*" sees it as a *secret* event, undetected by anyone but the people of God. Some speak of the mysterious disappearance of the people of God from every continent and place, with all of the wicked left behind to face *the great tribulation*. Mind you, God's Word does not say this. Men have superimposed their view upon the text of Scripture, doing all within their power to make it support their supposition. The text before us, however, blasts a gigantic hole in this bit of theological nonsense. This great multitude of the redeemed were not removed prior to the tribulation, but **out of its midst**. Not only that, they continued to come from the arena of fierce opposition and persecution. We are well past the fourth chapter of Revelation, which some have said begins an era **without** the church in the world. But here, in the seventh chapter, and in the midst of the sixth

Their presence before the Throne and the Lamb is owing to redemption—the very same redemption that was experienced by those in the first century. No special Gospel has been preached to them.

There is nothing that separates them from any other group of believers. They are redeemed and they are victorious—the two great book-ends of our salvation. They came into Christ, and they went out of the world victorious in Him.

seal, we have people coming out of the great tribulation. It is not a few that we see, but a vast multitude. They do not come from a section of the world, but from **“every kindred, tribe, tongue, and people.”** Their presence before the Throne and the Lamb is owing to redemption—the very same redemption that was experienced by those in the first century. No special Gospel has been preached to them. There is nothing that separates them from any other group of believers. They are redeemed and they are victorious—the two great book-ends of our salvation. They came into Christ, and they went out of the world victorious in Him.

Neither language nor doctrine can justify the view of a secret catching-away of the people of God. That view is in sharp conflict with the words of our Lord concerning the removal of the wicked **“first”** (Matt 13:30,38-40). It is in opposition to the Kingdom principle of suffering being a prerequisite to reigning with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12). It also contradicts the text we are considering.

### **Great Tribulation**

Here is a tribulation that touched every quadrant of the world, every society of people, and every language group. The identification of this tribulation has been the cause of much division within the body of Christ. Some conceive of it as a general term, denoting all forms of suffering experienced **“for righteousness sake.”** Others see it as an unusual time of distress that will occur near the closing of time.

While there is not an abundance of revelation on this subject, Jesus did speak of a period of unparalleled tribulation. His words are found in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. They follow His reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. ***“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened”*** (vs 21-22; Mark 13:19-20). The language that follows does not support the limitation of this period to the destruction of Jerusalem. While that was a most dreadful occurrence, it does not justify limiting the prophecy to that destruction in A.D. 70. The Lord affirms nothing like this had occurred ***“since the beginning of the world”*** until the time the prophecy was uttered. He adds ***“nor ever shall be.”***

Revealing the direct involvement of God, Jesus states the dreadful days would be shortened ***“for the elect’s sake.”*** The reason adduced for this shortening is that ***“no flesh would be saved”*** were the oppression to continue. I do not believe anyone can support a view that limits ***“the elect”*** to believers in Jerusalem, or ***“flesh”*** to the nation of Israel. ***“Elect”*** and ***“flesh”*** are very large terms, and we do **not** well to confine them to the nation of Israel.

Our view of this tribulation must take into consideration the multitude that have come out of it. It is described as ***“a great multitude which no one could number , of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.”*** There is absolutely nothing restrictive about this language. Nothing is here that would lead us to believe these were people from a particular geographical area, a specific nation, or an isolated period of time. What is more, their condition in no way isolates them from any other believers. They are ***“arrayed in white,”*** stand before ***“the Throne and the Lamb,”*** and have harvest palms in their hands. That cannot be descriptive of believing Jews that survived the destruction of Jerusalem. In my judgment, it requires an unusual imagination to postulate such a thing.

This tribulation, then, must be descriptive of something common among the saved—something through which all of them have come. The tribulation surely varied in its intensity and duration, but it was all any of them could endure. Early in the history of the church, the saints knew ***“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”*** (Acts 14:22). From the first persecution of the people of God in Acts 8, until the final assault of the devil mentioned in Revelation 20:8-10, the people of God all have experienced tribulation. When they stand before the Throne and the Lamb, they will all acknowledge they have come ***“out of the great tribulation”***—life in an evil and condemned world. This ***“great tribulation,”*** therefore, speaks of the ordeal of living by faith in this world generally, and of focused Satanic assaults in particular. It is doubtless true that such tribulation will increase as we approach the end of time.

Those imagining that believers are delivered from tribulation, instead of coming out of it, have assessed the faith-life incorrectly. They are not aware of the wrath and aggressiveness of the devil (Rev 12:12), the corruption of their own flesh (Rom 7:18), or the absolute depravity and enmity of the world (1 John 2:15-17). The warfare of faith involves an incessant struggle, and is attended by a spiritual frustration that provokes deep groaning with the child of God (Gal 5:17; Rom 8:23). **The glory of salvation is realized in its outcome – complete and final deliverance from every competing influence, every form of antagonism, and all forms of oppression and suffering.** Ours is truly a *“great salvation!”*

**The glory of salvation is realized in its  
outcome – complete and final**

deliverance from every competing influence, every form of antagonism, and all forms of oppression and suffering.

### **They Washed Their Robes**

*“ . . . and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* The language of Scripture assists us in understanding the Kingdom of God. It also destroys preconceived notions about God’s *“great salvation.”* These people are noted, among other things, for something **THEY** did! There are many who say we have nothing whatsoever to do with our salvation. There is a sense, of course, in which this is true. From the provisional or foundational perspective, we did **not** have anything to do with our salvation. That was wrought by Jesus alone, with no one assisting Him in the work. However, we **ARE** involved in the **appropriation** of that salvation. There is a sense in which we have been *“washed”* by Divine activity. Thus it is written, *“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11). Again, *“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood”* (Rev 1:5). This is **NOT** a washing we did!

Our text, however, speaks of some washing performed by the redeemed. **THEY** *“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* They **availed** themselves of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! They appropriated, by faith, the grace of God. To put it another way, they had *“faith in the blood,”* as stated in Romans 3:25. *“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . . ”* While some object to this translation, stating it should read *“a propitiation in His blood through faith”* (NASB), the meaning remains the same. The effectiveness of the blood is the thing that is

embraced by faith. Several translations see no difficulty with this (NIV, RWB, Darbys, YLT, etc.). **These saints washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb by trusting to its effectiveness.** They knew God recognized and received the sacrifice of Christ, and thus they received it too. For this reason, God honors them.

The effect of their faith is glorious. Although they were formerly clothed with *“filthy rags”* (Isa 64:6), their robes became pure and white. Too, although based upon the righteous accomplishments of another, the robes now belonged to them. They were *“their robes!”* On earth, righteousness was imputed to them. Now it is their own, as they have been freed from every form of weakness.

## THEREFORE . . .

Salvation is *“not of works,”* but it is not without effort! It took effort—remarkable effort—for these saints to hold on their way in a wicked world. It required extreme exertion to keep the faith when it incurred great suffering. To continue to grow amidst the tares of this world is no small accomplishment. It required all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength!

*“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.”* Why does this multitude stand *“before the Throne of God?”* Prior to this, only cherubim, seraphim, and holy angels stood here! This area was not occupied by any man, save *“the Man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5). We find the answer in this remarkable word, *“THEREFORE!”* The reason for their presence is found in the description given of them.

We know several things about them. **(1)** They were from every area of the world, and every grouping of people. **(2)** They were all clothed in white, or impeccably righteous. **(3)** They all had palms in their hands, representative of the great harvest of the Lord. **(4)** They all came out of great tribulation. **(5)** They all had washed their robes, making them white in the blood of the Lamb. These are the very reasons they were standing **APPROVED** before the Throne of God! Because they were citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20), they willingly accepted the status of strangers in the world. Thus, they were gathered from every part of it, and brought where they were at home. Their character had been refined by grace, and they were righteous-compatible with the heavenly realms. No aspect of their persons is now defiled, for they are no longer in their *“vile”* bodies (Phil 3:21).

The time of harvest was coming, and this multitude was recognized as belonging in the dwelling of God. The world was an arena of suffering for them, for they did not belong there. The reproaches of Christ fell upon them in the world, and now the glory of Christ comes upon them before the throne of God. While in the world, they took advantage of what God had provided for them in Christ Jesus, laying hold on eternal life. Thus there were not *“before the Throne of God.”*

Salvation is *“not of works,”* but it is not without effort! It took effort-remarkable effort-for these saints to hold on their way in a wicked world. It required extreme exertion to keep the faith when it incurred great suffering. To continue to grow amidst the tares of this world is no small accomplishment. It required all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength! They knew nothing of being casual, as though Christ was carrying them to heaven while they remained in a state of spiritual stupor. It took effort to wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb-to avail themselves of the atonement provided for them. Satan opposed their efforts, but they took hold of salvation anyway. The world oppressed them for their decision, but they maintained their faith. That is why they are standing *“before the throne of God”* in a state of moral and spiritual purity. That is why they have been harvested from

the world for heaven! For them, the world was a place of orientation – a realm of preparation for the world to come.

No one will stand spotless before the throne of God and the Lamb who has not worked out their own salvation with fear and trembling. The redeemed will have invested themselves in the appropriation of salvation just as surely as Jesus wholly consecrated Himself in the accomplishment of it. A salvation that allows spiritual inactivity among those being saved is a spurious one.

## A CHANGE IN STATUS

It becomes clear we are dealing with eternity here. What is to follow is not descriptive of a temporary state, or of anything that could happen this thoroughly in the world. Although some have chosen to apply the following words to the condition of salvation in the world, the language strictly forbids such a view. It is too lofty, too thorough, too filled with hope. To dull their meaning by saying they are a mere hyperbole is to rob the saints of anticipation– something they sorely require in this world. Too, such a view tends to make us more satisfied in this world than God intends.

### **Serving Him Night and Day**

***“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”*** In the world, our service for the Lord is, much against our will, intermittent. Our flesh is not capable of continual service. It is an ***“earthen vessel,”*** prone to weakness, and like a weight upon our souls. Many, like Epaphroditus, have had their service interrupted while ***“sick to the point of death”*** (Phil 2:27, NASB). It is only by the grace of God that our service attains to any degree of acceptance, for ***“who is sufficient for these things”*** (2 Cor

2:16).

Tell me of the world to come, where our service will be consistent and unending—where we will “*go no more out*” (Rev 3:12). Our activity will be characterized by stability, for we ourselves, by the words of Jesus, will be made “*a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore*” (Rev 3:12). We will no longer serve the Lord in a condition of absence, for “*while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:6b). Our ministry will be accomplished in the very presence of God, with a lively sense of His closeness. There will be no troubling factor, nor anything interruptive. Total and unflinching service will be the norm.

By saying “*night and day*,” the Spirit is emphasizing the **continuity** of the service. Technically, “*there is no night there*” (Rev 21:25). He uses this language because there **are** nights here—nights when service is rendered difficult, if not impossible. But no such occasions shall come

By saying “*night and day*,” the Spirit is emphasizing the continuity of the service. Technically, “*there is no night there*” (Rev 21:25).

He uses this language because there are nights here—nights when service is rendered difficult, if not impossible. But no such occasions shall come upon us in the world to come. There will be no need to rest—no night. There will be no times of fear or danger, when a defensive posture must be assumed—no night.

upon us in the world to come. There will be no need to rest—*no night*. There will be no times of fear or danger, when a defensive posture must be assumed—*no night*. The point is that we will continually be about our Father’s business, increasing in participation with neither cause nor

desire for cessation. No boredom! No fatigue! No depletion of our resources!

One further thing should be observed. Under the Law, which contained the type of what we see here, serving God night and day was the business of the Levites (1 Chron 9:23). No one else could involve themselves in the service. When it came to the Most Holy Place, ONLY the High priest could serve—and it was NOT night and day, but once a year. But look what we have in this text. We have people *“of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues”* before the throne of God (the Most Holy place), and serving Him night and day *“in the Temple.”* What a marvelous redemption that has produced such a group, and enabled them to accomplish such service!

### **God Dwells Among Them**

*“And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.”* Oh, what a blessing is this! In this world, God dwells in us *“through the Spirit”* (Eph 2:22). He is with us, together with the Son (John 14:21,23), but not in His fulness. If we only have the *“firstfruits of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:23), we cannot have the complete harvest of the Living God Who gave us the Spirit (Gal 4:6)! It is true that even now we are challenged to be *“filled with all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:19). That expression, however, speaks of a thorough filling of our limited vessels, not a complete acquaintance with God.

This text, as in Revelation 21:3, refers to *“God Himself”* dwelling with us. It is His Presence **WITHOUT** any competitive influences. On Sinai, the glory of the Lord descended, but it also left. The face of Moses glowed as a result of the Divine Presence, but it faded. In the tabernacle, the glory of God came and went. But this is not the case in the world to come. Not only will we *“go no more out,”* God will never depart, His Presence become vague, or a sense of loneliness grip our hearts. His Presence will be perceptible, while it is not always that way

in this world. We will live with an acute consciousness of, and delight in, the Presence of the Lord—world without end!

This is not the delineation of the *“firstfruits”* of salvation, but of its full harvest. Here is the end of our journey, the culmination of faith, and the reward of righteousness.

### **Hunger and Thirst No More**

*“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore . . . ”* The life of faith is attended by seasons of strong spiritual hunger and thirst. A blessing is pronounced upon all who *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matt 5:6). They will be filled! It will not, however, be in this world, where we labor under great handicap away from home. There are times when the soul cries out, *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psa 42:1-2). Again, spiritual cravings are revealed in the strong cry, *“O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water”* (Psa 63:1), and *“I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Selah”* (Psa 143:6). The soul that lives at a distance from God knows nothing of these longings. Nevertheless, they are very real, dwarfing all earthly concerns.

Someone might cite the word of Jesus to the woman at the well, affirming that such thirsts as David had are no longer the lot of believers. You may recall our Lord spoke to that Samaritan woman of never thirsting again. *“But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14, NKJV). Again, in John 6:35, Jesus proclaimed, *“I am*

The life of faith is attended by seasons of strong

spiritual hunger and thirst. A blessing is pronounced upon all who *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matt 5:6). They will be filled! It will not, however, be in this world, where we labor under great handicap away from home.

the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” These words of Jesus, however, declared another aspect of spiritual life, and did not obviate the thirst of which the Psalmist spoke. Jesus was speaking of the SOURCE from which we are satisfied. The well of satisfaction is moved within the believer. **It is so gratifying that no other source is sought.** There will never again be a sense of spiritual desolation and hopelessness.

Nevertheless, there are seasons when the soul longs for fuller measures, greater fellowship, and more closeness. After all, we are not in heaven yet, and still have but the firstfruits of the Spirit. If we are *“saved by hope”* (Rom 8:24-25), a longing for more is integral to spiritual life. We fellowship with the whole creation in a longing for liberty, where a sense of inadequacy will never again be experienced. *“For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body”* (Rom 8:19-23). We know *“that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord”* (2 Cor 5:6), and long to be *“present with the Lord.”*

But the time is coming when the saved will never again experience *“hunger and thirst”* – in ANY sense. No small number of God’s

people have undergone ***“hunger and thirst”*** in the body, as well as in their soul. Some have ***“wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”*** (Heb 11:37-38). But in the glory, as we stand before the Throne of God, the ***“ages to come”*** will begin during which not a single moment of hunger or thirst will occur! There will never be a sense of deficiency, weakness, or longing. NO MORE!, is the word from the King! No more sense of destitution! No more cries of ***“wretched man that I am!”*** ***“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore.”***

### **The Sun, nor Any Heat, Shall Strike Us**

***“ . . . the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat . . . ”*** For the child of God, there is a certain oppressiveness to life in the world. Here, it is likened to the blazing sun rising upon us—being stricken with the heat of trial and oppression. The Scriptures do speak of ***“fiery trials”*** which many of God’s people have undergone (1 Pet 4:12). Here, our faith is tried, as in a fire (1 Pet 1:7). When some trials come, they are like the scorching sun beating upon our head. The heat that strikes us causes our dross to rise to the surface, in order that it may be removed. Here, we read of the time when all of that will have ended. Never again will we be tested, tried, or tempted. No more tribulation of any kind!

Fighting the good fight of faith tends to deplete our spiritual resources, making us thirst for the Living God. This thirst is not to be equated with despair, but is the consequence of being in a frail tabernacle and occupying a cursed world. The experience of inadequacy is expressed in a variety of ways in Scripture. Some of the more vivid terms are found in the fourth chapter of Second Corinthians. ***“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed”*** (vs 8-9, NASB). Paul testified of one time when his group of laborers ***“were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that***

*we despaired even of life”* (2 Cor 1:8).

But all of this will come to its appointed conclusion, praise the Lord! When we leave this world, we leave the heat of trial! When we cease to stand before men, and stand before the throne of God, we no longer will be tempted. Life in all of its aspects will be a blessing, and no trouble will come upon us! There will be no deserts, famines, or winds of adversity! How refreshing to the soul to contemplate the glorious state!

### **The Lamb Will Shepherd and Lead Us**

*“ . . . for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd*

Fighting the good fight of faith tends to deplete our spiritual resources, making us thirst for the Living God. This thirst is not to be equated with despair, but is the consequence of being in a frail tabernacle and occupying a cursed world.

them and lead them to living fountains of waters . . .” Those who live by faith experience the leading of the Good Shepherd now. He calls out His sheep, and leads them into paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psa 23:2-3; John 10:1-6, 7-16). At this present time, the Lord Jesus is *“the great Shepherd of the sheep,”* and the *“the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls”* (Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25). But there is **more** to come, **more** territory to be occupied, **more** insight to possess, **more** responsibilities to be fulfilled. We are only on the porch of eternity!

There are eternal treasures we have not yet seen, or even imagined. How true it is, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those*

*who love Him*” (1 Cor 2:9). It is true, **“God has revealed it to us by his Spirit”** (1 Cor 2:10), but the revelation is only introductory. We have viewed the promised land much like Moses, from the Mountain of redemption. But we are not there yet. Salvation is more vast than is currently experienced. This is owing to the frailty of our human constitution, the presence of a hostile foe, and the surrounding of a decaying and destitute world.

There are **“fountains of living waters”** to which the Lamb will lead us. It is the same fountain from which we drink even now, but we will then have access to the complete fountain. Too, here we drink *indirectly* from the fountain. Faith is the means by which gain access to the living water. But there, we will drink *directly* from the **“living fountains of waters.”** No more second-hand knowledge! No more forgetting aspects of the Kingdom we never thought we could forget. There will always be freshness and vitality, with no need to refresh our minds with truth that has become vague. No one will take water from the fountain and give to us, as in this world. We will obtain it for ourselves. There will be unparalleled personal involvement, with no form of restriction or disappointment whatsoever.

### **All tears Wiped Away**

**“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** Blessed promise! What child of God does not take hold of this with joyful anticipation! In this world, we wipe tears, only for them to return again. But then—God Himself will wipe them **“away.”** Can you bring yourself to ponder this wonderful commitment? I think of Paul’s word to young Timothy, who had experienced the results familiar to every child of God: **“I recall your tears”** (2 Tim 1 :4). How many precious saints I have beheld, who also had **“tears.”** I have seen them weep because of their shortcomings. I have witnessed them as they carried great burdens for their loved ones, and for the church of God. Many of their tears have been induced by pain, helplessness, and frustration. I have stood over caskets and at grave sides as saints have wept at the loss of

companions.

How many times I have recalled my own tears. Often, with the Psalmist, I have ***“watered my couch with my tears”*** (Psa 6:6). Sometimes, the reality of separateness from the world takes hold on the heart. It is then that I cry out with David, ***“Hear my prayer, O LORD, And give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner, as all my fathers were”*** (Psa 39:12). These are common experiences—part and parcel of living in the world.

But these tears are not unnoticed! God sees them, and remembers them! Well did the Psalmist say, ***“Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?”*** (Psa 56:8). The Lord knows when we cried, and what we cried about. A broken heart is of great price before Him. If the Lord was ***“nigh them”*** in this world—when the saints wept—(Psa 34:18), what will their experience be when they are before ***“the throne of God?”*** No wonder this very promise is again stated in Revelation 21:4. ***“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”***

But there is more to be seen in this expression. Wiping ALL tears AWAY means there will never be a recollection of the things that caused tears to come! As it is written, ***“for the former things have passed away”*** (21:4b). Not only will they have ***“passed”*** away experientially, their memory will also be removed. Isaiah spoke of this condition in a most wonderful way. ***“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind”*** (Isa 65:17). Here is a word for struggling saints—for those in the crucible of trial! I candidly wish we could spend more time on this, but this is intended to be an overview. Still, the heart that dwells upon these things will surely be strengthened. It is a good word that produces hope!

**QUIETNESS!**

***“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”*** Now comes the seventh seal. When it is opened, there is no activity—none at all! We do not hear the thundering hoof beats of horses, nor mighty thunderings. There is no war! There is no famine or pestilence! There is no persecution or bloodshed! We hear no cry from the martyrs, nor summons from one of the living creatures to ***“Come and see.”*** There are no voices, no trumpets, no summons, and no earthquakes and falling stars. There is only silence—total silence!

Here we enter into the eternal Sabbath, the rest that is prepared ***“for the people of God.”*** This is God’s rest, into which none fully enter in this world. As it is written, ***“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God”*** (Heb 4:9). It is a ***“rest”*** because the wicked are at last silent (1 Sam 2:9; Psa 31:17), and have ceased from their ***“troubling”*** (Job 3:17). No more contradiction! No more ungodly laughing or mocking!

Now comes the seventh seal. When it is opened, there is no activity—none at all! We do not hear the thundering hoof beats of horse, nor mighty thunderings. There is no war! There is no famine or pestilence! There is no persecution or bloodshed! We hear no cry from the martyrs, nor summons from one of the living creatures to ***“Come and see.”*** There are no voices, no trumpets, no summons, and no earthquakes and falling stars. There is only  
silence—total silence!

No more disputation, assertions of unbelief, or boasting in the flesh! No more smut, cursing, profanity, or filth. No more murmuring, lying, gossip, or speaking unadvisedly with the lips. ***“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”*** No more undisciplined tongues, untimely speech, or men speaking when they ***“wist not what to say.”*** No more edicts from men to cease from praying, preaching, or testifying! No more religious babbling, religious hucksters, or false teachers! ***“There was silence in heaven for about***

***half an hour.”***

You do well to ponder the blessed state! Their will be quietness from all fear of evil (Prov 1:33). Then will be brought to pass the saying, ***“The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet”*** (Isa 14:7). Isaiah’s words will come to glorious fulfillment, ***“My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, In secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places”*** (Isa 32:18). The promise to Jacob will be fulfilled for all of the redeemed. They ***“shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid”*** (Jer 30:10). No one will be able to ***“make trouble”*** (Job 34:29). ***“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”***

Think of the rest that is inherent in this quietness. The redeemed will take their rest ***“in safety”*** (Job 11:18). As the Psalmist said, we will ***“fly away and be at rest”*** (Psa 55:6). We were not able to find ultimate rest and silence in this world. We took hold of the words delivered by Micah, ***“Arise and depart, For this is not your rest; Because it is defiled, it shall destroy, Yes, with utter destruction”*** (Micah 2:10). But that is not the condition in the world to come. There we will ***“rest from our labors,”*** praise the Lord (Rev 14:13). We will never again serve the Lord with handicap, opposition, or in the midst of trouble. ***“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”***

The extended silence is like a challenge for any disruption to arise! As we settle into our eternal abode, it will become clear that there are no adversaries, and trouble in every form is once and for all excluded. You know, in this world a single second cannot pass without some form of disruption. A wayward thought, a wicked word, a malicious deed – temptation, a trial, a challenge. But when we enter the world to come, all of that will be behind us. We will take our armor off at last. For the first time, we will take our guard down. There will be no need for defense, resistance, or vigilance. The battle will be over, the race won, and the foe defeated! That is something of what is involved in,

*“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”* Blessed quietness that awaits the faithful!

## CONCLUSION

Your trials are momentary. Hold on! If you walk in the Spirit and live by faith, the only trouble you will ever experience will be in this world. Your only frustrations will be here! Your only opponents will be here. And all of these things are working for you now—they are your employees, working for you *“a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”*

This is what I call you to—the eternal rest. I challenge you to engage in a hearty effort to stand before the Throne of God, arrayed in a white robe, and with harvest palm in your hand! Target entering into the rest of God, to serve Him night and day in His temple, and be led by the Shepherd into ever deepening fellowship. For those walking by faith, the best is always ahead! You are now in the realm of the curse, but are headed for the place of ultimate blessing.

If the wicked trouble you, **think of the goal** . If you are dissatisfied with your own progress, **think of the goal** . If you become perplexed, cast down, or your energies depleted, **think of the goal** ! The work of faith and labor of love may not be appreciated by those on earth, but they are in heaven!

The war is going to end, the conflict will be brought to a conclusion, and you will enter into rest! **Your trials are momentary.** Hold on! If

you walk in the Spirit and live by faith, the **only** trouble you will ever experience will be in this world. Your **only** frustrations will be here! Your **only** opponents will be here. And all of these things are working for you now—they are your employees, working for you ***“a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”*** (2 Cor 4:17). All of this will occur as you continue to fasten your mind on eternal things—things that cannot be seen.

I cannot set before you a congregation or a work that will cause you to be proud in the flesh. I do not have a name that has great influence, nor can I cause you to become successful in this world. I have nothing to offer that will make you famous, or that will cause you to rank high in the religious world. I cannot guarantee a resolution to all of the difficulties you experience in this world, and am not wise enough to solve your problems.

I am a man of like passions as you, with struggles and failings. I have not yet apprehended that for which I have been apprehended, and have a very acute awareness of my own frailty. I too become perplexed, and have been dashed to the ground by difficult trials. But my eye is toward the goal. I have learned to regard the trials of life as ***“momentary”*** and fleeting, only a grain of dust when compared with the ***“greater weight of glory”*** (2 Cor 4:17). I can offer you companionship in the Kingdom and tribulation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The blessings that have been described in this text are the ***“children’s bread.”*** They are for you. They are also worthy of your very best effort. I exhort you to ***“lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (Heb 12:1-2). Do this with faith and with hope. Your labors

are not vain in the Lord!

A place before that very throne awaits you. See to it that nothing hinders you from obtaining it. Though men and demons oppose you, **press on!** Even when your conscience smites you, **press on!** When disappointments with your surroundings beat upon your heart, **press on!** It will not be long, and the war will be over. In the meantime, God is with you. Praise the Lord!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 15

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. (Revelation 8:2-6, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is NOT a chronological narration of the history of the world. It is a book of **perspective**, providing various observations of time—all from a heavenly point of view. If the saints are to safely negotiate through this world, they must have the heavenly outlook of things. This is **not** a mere philosophical view. It is involved in the spiritual posture described in the fourth chapter of Second Corinthians. *“For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things*

*which are not seen are eternal*” (4:15-18). The people of God are not victims of malicious men, although that is how it appears. They **ARE** part of an eternal purpose that is being brought to completion in an arena of fierce warfare. They have been called into a conflict that will conclude with the complete demise and banishment of all who are contrary to God. In their warfare, they are supplied everything required for the battle. They are also sustained until their work is completed. It is imperative the people of God live in an alert and perceptive state. The enemy of their souls is subtle, and will defeat all who are asleep or lack understanding. For this reason, the Savior has provided us with Scripture and teaching ministries in order that we walk not in darkness.

## **An Overview of the Seven Seals**

The seven seals view history from the standpoint of **trial** , showing the saints to be superior in every form of testing. Each of the trials had the potential of overthrowing the people of God, but their faith made them adequate.

**The first seal** revealed the *immediate and ultimate success of the King of kings* , the conquering Lamb (the rider on the white horse). The people of God do not become inflated with pride during this initial spread of the Gospel, but join their Master, subduing the flesh.

**The second seal** unveiled *the fierce trial of persecution* , and the shedding of the blood of the saints (the rider on the red horse). Rather than believers being overthrown by this evil aggression, they bring great glory to God by willingly laying down their lives. They were, in fact, partakers of the Divine nature!

**The third seal** introduced us to *the test of deprivation and famine* . Here is a test that has caused many to deny the lord—but not those who cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. They hold on to the Lord,

finding the means of survival He has provided. The severity of the trial was matched by the power of God.

**The fourth seal** declares *the assault of death by unusual means* . But as the final enemy closes in upon multitudes, those in Christ Jesus continue to keep their focus upon the Lord, showing faith to be superior.

The seven seals view history from the standpoint of **trial** , showing the saints to be superior in every form of testing. Each of the trials had the potential of overthrowing the people of God, but their faith made them adequate.

The fifth seal provides a glimpse *restless souls in the unseen world* . They know their blood is not yet avenged, and cry out for an answer. They are provided one, which affirms the Divine purpose is still being fulfilled. Nothing has gone off course, so to speak. Even in the unseen world, God provides!

**The sixth seal** discloses *the final trial—the end of all things* . It will be attended by a fearful prelude that will be detected by all. But the saints will survive this also, standing at last before the throne of God, victorious and shouting His praises. That end will not come until **all** of the children are gathered in, including the foreknown remnant of Israel.

**The seventh seal** begins with *total tranquility—all enemies overthrown* , and all saints safe. **Trial will not exclude a single believer from “the reward of the inheritance”** (Col 3:24) ! Those who put their trust in God have nothing to fear from trial! In the

Beloved, they are made equal to every difficulty, even though tears and sorrows are pressed from them in the refiner's fire. **This world is a place of testing and trial for the believer.**

### **Another Cycle begins**

Now we begin another cycle – another view of the world. This time it is not viewed from the saints perspective, but from the standpoint of Divine judgment. Our introduction to these judgments includes a most wonderful perspective. We will find the saints **participating** in the execution of these judgments—not directly, but indirectly. They have been called *“into the fellowship of”* God's *“dear Son”* (1 Cor 1:9). That *“fellowship”* includes a personal and satisfying communion with Him, in which direction, shepherding, and nourishment are ministered. However, our fellowship is not limited to these satisfying elements, as we will find. We are also brought into the very rule of Christ, entering into His triumph over His enemies. This outlook is found several places in God's Word, and is most edifying to the soul. You will immediately recognize it is another neglected element in institutionalized religion. That is so because it deals with the realm of the unseen, where worldly acclaim cannot

be realized. The salvation of God excludes flesh altogether!

The seven seals have brought us through stress and difficulty, substantiating the adequacy of salvation. The proof has been confirmed to us, but it has also been displayed to angelic hosts. The greatness of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is too often understated, and too frequently viewed through restricting sectarian glasses.

## **ANGELS STANDING BEFORE GOD**

We must seek deliverance from the notion that everyone standing before the Lord occupies equal ground. This is not the case, either with angels or with men. Michael and Gabriel are not ordinary angels, nor are the seven we now confront. Among men, there have been several who have excelled. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the holy prophets! From within the church, the Apostles stand out, and from within the Apostles, Paul stands out.

*“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God . . . ”* Our continued exposure to the heavenly hierarchy is intriguing. We never go very far in this book without being exposed to the way things REALLY are. There is a *“throne”* that governs the affairs of this world, and we are constantly reminded of it—**“THE throne,” 33 times** (1:4; 3:21; 4:2,3,4,5,6, 9,10; 5:1,6,7,11,13; 6:16; 7:9,10,11,15,17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3,5; 16:17; 19:4,5; 20:11; 21:5; 22:1). That throne is occupied by the One ruling all things. He is called *“Him who sat upon the throne”* (5:1,5). Repeatedly we read of the One *“on the throne”* (4:2,9,10; 5:1,7,13; 6:16; 7:10,15; 19:4; 21:5). In this book, suffering **saints are urged to behold life as the administration of the purpose of the One upon the throne!**

The book of Revelation, as the verse presently being considered confirms, is not a mere rehearsal of things to come. It is not a lifeless prediction of fatalistic events, but the announcement of a strictly governed purpose. Before anything happens, we are apprized it must be cleared through the throne, and Him Who sits upon it. Then angels to which we are now introduced *“stand before God.”* What they present ascends up *“before God”* (8:4). Judgments that follow are conducted before a golden altar that is *“before God”* (9:13). The twenty-four elders, we are reminded, are *“before God”* (11:16). When fraudulent

religion falls, it does so because it has come up **“before God”** (16:19). As the co-Occupant of the throne (3:21), the Lamb is the prominent figure in this book. The government is presently upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6-7), and He is ruling in the midst of His enemies (Psa 110:2). Things that occur in this book, therefore, are said to be **“before the Lamb”** 5:8; 7:9). He receives **praise** (5:12-13)! He opens the **future** (6:1-16)! The **redeemed** stand before Him (7:9). The very **book of life**, in which the saved are written, belongs to Him (13:8). He is the One being **followed** by the pure (14:4). The final **condemnation of the wicked** will be **“in the presence of the Lamb”** (14:10). He is the one against Whom the wicked actually fight, and He is the One Who will overcome them (7:14). The **day of wrath** belongs to Him (6:26). The glorious **marriage of the church** is also His (19:7,9). The **Apostles** who form the foundation of the glorified church, belong to Him (21:14). You must not miss the point of this book! This is the record of a government—Divine government! It is a delineation of the reign of Jesus Christ.

### **The Angels Stand Before God**

This is something of what is involved in the words, **“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God.”** These holy beings do not move about in a random manner. They are not executing their own will, or seeking their own pleasure. They **“stand”** before God, awaiting His direction. These personalities are characterized by unusual wisdom (2 Sam 14:17,20). They also, when compared with men and wicked angels, **“excel in strength”** (Psa 103:20; 2 Pet 2:11). They are **“holy,”** untainted with sin (Matt 25:31; Mk 8:38). Because the favor of God is upon them, they are referred to as **“elect angels”** (1 Tim 5:21). There is an innumerable company of them (Heb 12:22), yet **personal** responsibilities are allotted to them. Here, for example, we see seven of the vast number, standing before God! Further, the text indicates they are **regularly** in close proximity to the throne. It does not say they “are standing” before the throne, but that they **“stand before the throne.”** They are not simply occupying the place as spectator, but are in a designated position. I take it, therefore, they are a special class of

angels. This should not surprise us, for we are told of “*archangels*,” who are of special note (1 Thess 4:16; Jude 9).

### **Some Preliminary Lessons**

I cannot proceed without drawing some conclusions from this scene. **First, we must seek deliverance from the notion that everyone standing before the Lord occupies equal ground.** This is not the case, either with angels or with men. Michael and Gabriel are not ordinary angels (Dan 10:13; Jude 9; Dan 8:16; 9:21; Lk 1:19,26), nor are the seven we now confront. Among men, there have been several who have excelled. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the holy prophets! From within the church, the Apostles stand out, and from within the Apostles, Paul stands out. There were some believers who were “*of note among the Apostles*” (Rom 16:17).

The execution of Divine purpose is carried out as determined before the foundation of the world. *The world does not revolve around individuals, but around the purpose of the Almighty.* Predestination and appointments have to do with that purpose, not individual lives.

From the highest point of view, men are “*appointed*” to these lofty positions. That is why Jesus said to James and John, who requested key positions in His Kingdom, “*but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father*” (Matt 20:23, NASB). From the lower vista, the redeemed are to aspire to the loftiest role possible, seeking to be as close to the Throne, and as useable to the Lord, as possible! It is still true, “*For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His*” (2 Chron 16:9,

NASB). Salvation includes the opportunity to excel—to occupy places of unusual blessing. The Word of God is filled with examples of those who did so: i.e., Joseph and David (young men), Joshua and Caleb, Timothy, Titus, etc. Forever blot from your mind the notion that you are shut up to mediocrity.

**Second, everything in the heavenly Kingdom is strictly governed, and fulfilled as appointed.** This does not necessarily mean that every detail of life is according to Divine appointment. It **does** mean the execution of Divine purpose is carried out as determined before the foundation of the world. *The world does not revolve around individuals, but around the purpose of the Almighty.* Predestination and appointments have to do with that purpose, not individual lives. We dare not view the working of God from a low vantage point. Remember, John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and was summoned higher still. If we assess what He was given to see from a mere historical perspective, we will miss the real intent of the message. While there is a valid historical perspective, it obtains no lasting, or eternal, benefit for the saints of God. Edification and comfort will only be found in a spiritual view of these things.

**There is a high and lofty purpose being fulfilled in the earth**, and we do well to diligently seek to be in harmony with it. Noah entered into the ark on ***“the selfsame day”*** appointed by God (Gen 7:13). Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage ***“at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass,”*** according to Divine determination (Ex 12:41). The rich supply of manna supplied to Israel ceased ***“in the selfsame day”*** they ate the fruit of the land of Canaan (Josh 5:11). The birth of Jesus was ***“in the fulness of the time”*** (Gal 4:4). As well, the coming of the Lord and the end of the world are according to appointment—i.e., a designated day. As it is written, ***“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained”*** (Acts 17:31).

## *What We Are Seeing*

What we are witnessing in the book of Revelation, is the execution of Divine appointments. This is not a record of the responses of the Almighty to the unfettered workings of the devil, or the unbridled insurrection of men. While Divine responses are, indeed, revealed, they are in strict keeping with Divine appointments. It is His purpose, however, that is the theme.

**A suffering church needs to hear more about what God is doing than what they are experiencing!** The focus of preaching and teaching is the fulfillment of the Divine agenda, not the resolution to problems related to living in the body. Contrary to the contemporary imagination, preaching is not an activity designed to meet the self-diagnosed needs of people. It is exposing them to the Divine agenda.

## THEY ARE GIVEN SEVEN TRUMPETS

In the seven seals, the punishment of the wicked was a subsidiary consideration. In the seven trumpets, it is a primary one. The seven seals demonstrated the protection of the saints in all adversity. The seven trumpets will unveil the jeopardy and sure overthrow of the ungodly. Throughout the seven seals, the Lord took care not to break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. We now enter a vision that will reveal equal care is taken to utterly frustrate the cause of the wicked, bringing them down in a hail of appointed judgment.

*“ . . . and to them were given seven trumpets.”* Here again, the control of the Almighty is accentuated. The *“seven trumpets”* were *“given”* to these heavenly ministers of justice. Remember that the

Kingdom of God is one of participation. God rules through means, calling other personalities into His Sovereign rule. All of the authority has been given to *“the Man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim 2:5), the exalted Son of the living God (Phil 2:9-11). The enumerable host of angels are under the Son, worshiping Him and doing His bidding (Heb 1:6; 1 Pet 3:22). The involvement of the saints will also be declared in this vision–involvement that begins now, in this world, and at this time.

By saying *“to them were given seven trumpets,”* the Lord is declaring that what follows are not random occurrences in the world. They are not the announcement of Satan’s working in the world, but of God’s judgements upon the world. While Satan is undoubtedly involved in what follows, it is a subordinate involvement, not a primary one.

### **Consoling the Saints**

The message of the seven seals was devoted to the consolation of the people of God. They would be carried safely through all adversity, arriving at last with spotless character before the Throne and the Lamb. Their final song would be one of triumph, while the final expression of the ungodly would be one of utter frustration. Now, John is directed to the judgment of the wicked. He, and we as well, will be given to see that **what encourages and brings hope to the righteous brings judgment to the wicked** . The fire of Divine judgment not only softens the hearts of the godly, but it hardens the hearts of the ungodly. The same path threw the Red Sea that brought deliverance for Israel, brought destruction upon Pharaoh and his armies. When Jesus returns, not only will He be *“admired in all them that believe,”* there will, at the same time, come punishment and *“everlasting destruction”* upon the ungodly (2 Thess 1:8-10). Remember, **what encourages and brings hope to the righteous brings judgment to the wicked** .

In the seven seals, the punishment of the wicked was a subsidiary

consideration. In the seven trumpets, it is a primary one. The seven seals demonstrated the protection of the saints in all adversity. The seven trumpets will unveil the jeopardy and sure overthrow of the ungodly. Throughout the seven seals, the Lord took care not to break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. We now enter a vision that will reveal equal care is taken to utterly frustrate the cause of the wicked, bringing them down in a hail of appointed judgment.

### A Needed Perspective

The godly need this perspective! In our day, this view is clouded with religious sentimentality. A certain care for the wicked is actually fostered by some *Christian* presentations. But you will not find this encouraged in the Word of God. Those who put their trust in God are continually reminded of the final overthrow of the wicked. This knowledge assists them in standing in the maelstrom of opposition. Think of some of the expressions of the Spirit. ***“But the wicked shall be silent in darkness”*** (1 Sam 2:9). ***“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more”*** (Psa 37:10). ***“But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away”*** (Psa 37:20). ***“But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it”*** (Prov 2:22). ***“But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil”*** (Rom 2:8-9). ***“He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”*** (Matt 3:12). ***“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”*** (Eph 5:6). ***“They are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things”*** (Phil 3:18-19). ***“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality”*** (Col 3:25). ***“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape”*** (1 Thess 5:3). ***“But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil”*** (1 Pet 3:12).

One of the many tragedies of our time is silence in the pulpit about the judgment of the wicked—about their coming total overthrow and punishment. By withholding the Word of the Lord on this subject, a door is opened for the devil to tempt people to compromise their faith.

Why is it necessary to speak of the overthrow of the wicked? **First**, in these announcements is a solemn warning to the wicked, to turn from their ways. God, after all, has *“no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezek 33:11). Notwithstanding, the wicked will perish, and therefore God in mercy warns them, urging them to turn from their wicked ways. **Second**, the wicked presently appear to have the upper hand. Too often, they seem to triumph over the godly. They killed the prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the Apostles, and untold numbers of those clinging to the testimony of Jesus. They have passed laws against the embrace and expression of the faith, and have dared to oppose those who walk with Christ. For some, this is a discouraging matter, even tempting weakened souls to compromise their faith, or even abandon it altogether, to make life more tolerable. In order to smother this temptation, the Holy Spirit speaks to us about the sure judgment of the wicked. They are in *“slippery places”* (Psa 73:18). We are not to modify our behavior in order to appease them, or lessen their opposition of us!

One of the many tragedies of our time is silence in the pulpit about the judgment of the wicked—about their coming total overthrow and punishment. By withholding the Word of the Lord on this subject, a door is opened for the devil to tempt people to compromise their faith. They thus maintain an exaggerated view of the ungodly, imagining

them to be more powerful than they really are. Christ's message to the churches will not exclude this facet of Divine activity! We will hear about the trumpets as well as the seals, about the judgement of God as well as His protection.

## Why Trumpets?

The seven seals included the vision of horses and riders, depicting activity upon the earth. Why do we now read of *“trumpets?”* This is the language of Moses and the prophets, and emphasizes Divine activity. **The voice of the Lord is likened to a trumpet**. When the Law was given at Sinai, *“the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud”* was heard (Ex 19:16; 20:18). The working of the Lord is said to be *“with the sound of a trumpet”* (Psa 47:5). Even the return of the Lord will be accompanied by the sound of a trumpet (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). **This speaks of drawing attention to what the Lord is going to do.**

A trumpet is also used to declare the judgment of God against something. *“Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins”* (Isa 58:1). *“Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, And set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem; For disaster appears out of the north, And great destruction”* (Jer 6:1). In a vivid depiction of Divine judgment Joel wrote, *“Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains”* (Joel 2:1-2). In our text, we have the announcement of awesome judgments.

Trumpets were also used to call together an assembly – to rally the people for a cause. Thus it is written, *“Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, 'Gather together,' And say, 'Assemble yourselves, And let us go into the fortified cities”* (Jer 4:5). In the seven trumpets the saints of

God are summoned to behold the judgment of God upon their enemies.

Finally, trumpets are used to announce impending danger. ***“When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life”*** (Ezek 33:3-5). In these trumpets, we will not only hear of the judgment of God upon the enemies of Christ, we will also be given a solemn warning to disassociate ourselves from such. If you are hesitant to withdraw from the ungodly, think of the wrath that is coming upon them. It will assist you in cutting their chords away from your soul.

In short, what we will see in the seven trumpets is the collapse of earthly uniqueness, its values and its powers. Jesus came to ***“send fire upon the earth.”*** He ***“kindled”*** it while dwelling amongst us (Luke 12:49), but it will reach its climax when those who have dared to oppose the Lord and His Christ face the wrath of the Almighty. It is not without significance that at the destruction of Jericho, a most precise parallel to this vision is seen. On the seventh day, the people of Israel compassed the city of Jericho seven times. It was then that seven priests blew seven trumpets. As they made a ***“long blast,”*** the people were to shout with a ***“loud shout.”*** It was then that the wall of the city ***“fell flat”*** (Josh 6:4-5). Even as Israel possessed Jericho at that time, so the falling of the wicked will occasion the saints taking the Kingdom, in answer to the promise of God (Dan 7:18,22,27). The people of God can wait in confident hope.

**MUCH INCENSE**

*“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”* Here we are introduced to some theologically difficult language. The prayers of the saints are said to be offered by an angel upon the golden altar that is before the throne. Do angels play a role in the presentation of the prayers of the saints? Whatever we may choose to think about the matter, that is precisely what is declared in this text. There are several perspectives of prayer offered in Scripture. **First**, it is directed to the Father Himself (Matt 6:9). **Second**, it is asked *“in the name”* of the Lord Jesus, or in fellowship with, and because of, His Person and accomplishments (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26). **Third**, the Holy Spirit helps our weaknesses by making intercession for us in language that cannot be uttered (Rom 8:26). **Fourth**, angels have been employed to reveal the Father’s

I understand the prayers to be the **cumulative** prayers of the saints, offered to God in faith throughout the ages. These are prayers concerning the ungodly, who have oppressed the godly.

response to prayer (Dan 9:21-23; 10:12; Luke 1:13). Part of their ministry in behalf of the heirs of salvation has to do with prayer. The extent of this involvement is not known.

The text does not say the saints prayed to the angel, but that he **possessed** the prayers of the saints, and was given *“much incense”* to *“add”* to them (NASB). The role of the angel is not to make the prayers of the saints effective, but to participate in them. I understand the prayers to be the **cumulative** prayers of the saints, offered to God in faith throughout the ages. These are prayers concerning the ungodly, who have oppressed the godly. Several of these prayers are recorded in Scripture. Moses, for example, prayed against Korah and his rebellious

group (Num 16:15). In his valedictory prayer, Moses also prayed for the overthrow of Levi's enemies (Deut 33:11). Nehemiah prayed against his enemies (Neh 4:4-5). The "*sweet Psalmist of Israel*" repeatedly prayed against the enemies of the Lord (Psa 5:10; 6:10; 9:20; 10:2; 35:4; 59:5; 143: 12). The prayers of Jeremiah also included imprecations against the unrighteous (Jer 11:20; 12:3). Paul the Apostle also prayed in this manner (Gal 1:8-9; 2 Tim 4:14-15). These were not prayers of vindictiveness, or a plea for the Lord to retaliate against those who simply

Here the intercession of Jesus and the supplication of the saints are joined together in a pleasing fragrance that envelopes the throne of God. The will of the Lord is about to be executed. It is in strict harmony with the intercession of Jesus and the prayers of the saints.

sought harm against the saints. The men praying these prayers were involved in the cause of the Lord. Their prayers were petitions for God to thwart the **cause** of the wicked, not allowing it to overturn the purpose of the Lord.

In these prayers, the saints sided with the Lord. The truth of the matter is that God will overthrow the wicked, dashing their cause, and their persons, to the ground. The only hope for such enemies is to side with the Lord, repenting of their opposition, like Saul of Tarsus, and zealously embracing the Divine will. **The judgment of the wicked is as sure as the salvation of the righteous!** No prayer regarding the overthrow of the wicked, that is uttered in faith and within the context of Divine fellowship, has gone into the air. When the time comes for Divine judgment, whether temporal or eternal, God will recall the prayers of His people. That is the picture we have before us!

## **The Incense**

Notice, the *“incense”* –*“much incense”* -- was **given** to this angel, just as the seven trumpets were given to the seven angels standing before the throne. Strict and precise Divine control is being confirmed to our hearts. **Divine influence must be mingled with our prayers before they can be effective!** Prior to this, golden bowls filled with incense were represented as being *“the prayers of the saints”* (Rev 5:8). But this is **NOT** the case here. The prayers are independent of the incense, being made effectual and pleasing by it. This incense is given to the angel to **mix** with the prayers of the saints. The incense gave fragrance to the prayers, making them pleasing to the Lord. In general, this incense is a depiction of the effective atonement of Jesus. Additionally, it is the intercession of Christ, daily accomplished from the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. Here the intercession of Jesus and the supplication of the saints are joined together in a pleasing fragrance that envelopes the throne of God. The will of the Lord is about to be executed. **It is in strict harmony with the intercession of Jesus and the prayers of the saints.**

There is a twofold message here. **First** , the coming judgments were primarily owing to the world’s treatment of the Son of God. Divine reaction now comes in response to the world’s attitude toward the Son—the conquering Lamb. Sin is defined by men’s reaction to the Son. As it is written, *“And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in Me”* (John 16:8-9). The *“incense,”* therefore, has to do with the pleasing effect of His vicarious atonement.

**Second** , the sacrifice of Christ, when mingled with the saint’s prayers, made them pleasant to God, **because they were in harmony with His will** . The effectiveness of prayer is owing to its reflection of Divine priorities. Many prayers remain unanswered because they are not compatible with the accomplishments and objectives of the Lamb of God. They are out of synch with the Divine agenda, and thus fall to the ground. But this is not the case with the prayers we now confront. They are offered by saints who walk in the light, and therefore their

prayers can mingle with, and be blessed by, the intercession of Jesus. What a blessed contemplation!

### **Tabernacle Imagery**

The imagery is taken from the tabernacle service, where a golden censer was also employed (Lev 16:12; Heb 9:4). The tabernacle censer had hot coals from the altar, upon which the high priest placed “*sweet incense, beaten small*” (Lev 16:12). The purpose of this procedure is precisely defined. “*And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die*” (Lev 16:13).

Here is a revelation of the Divine nature. The Lord makes provision for the protection of His people, even during great judgments. As the recollection of them, and their prayers, come before Him, it is a pleasant consideration that compels Him to be merciful. It also moves Him to answer their prayers. That is something of the significance of the smell of sweet incense enveloping the mercy seat as the prayers of the saints came up before God.

### **ASCENDING BEFORE THE LORD**

This is vivid picture of God preparing to do something—to execute His will. It is not done without regard for the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Neither, indeed, does it exclude the fervent supplications of His people! Even the angelic hosts are employed in the fulfillment of God’s good pleasure. Remember,

## **God's Kingdom is one of participation!**

*“And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.”* What a glorious mingling is seen in this vision. The fragrance of Divine sacrifice, the prayers of the saints, the Living God Himself, and the angel of the Lord—all focused upon the fulfillment of Divine objective! This is vivid picture of God preparing to do something—to execute His will. It is not done without regard for the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. Neither, indeed, does it exclude the fervent supplications of His people! Even the angelic hosts are employed in the fulfillment of God's good pleasure. Remember, **God's Kingdom is one of participation!** Here you see the lofty fellowship into which the saints have been called. Because the perception of this is so critical to an understanding of the book of Revelation, extending reasoning about it is necessary.

### **Believers Are Called into the Heavenly Agenda**

Reconciliation to God involves participation in His *“good and acceptable and perfect will”* (Rom 12:2). That is not a reference to, what is commonly called, *God's will for my life*. It is not merely *a way of life* into which we have been called. In Christ, and through the promises, we *“become partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). That participation has an objective, and is not an end of itself. Through this means, we are called into the very working of the Almighty God. This is the meaning of the following texts. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose ”* (Rom 8:18). *“God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began”* (2 Tim 1:9).

This participation begins now, and will be culminated when the heavens and earth pass away, to be replaced by a *“new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness”* (2 Pet 3:13). Contemporary

religion has miserably failed to clarify this to the multitudes. Churches are dominated by a membership that is unaware of the magnitude of salvation, or the glorious things that are now available to them in Christ Jesus. The extent of their association with the Godhead is virtually unknown, although expounded extensively in scripture.

All of this has a great deal to do with our text. We are about to behold the execution of Divine judgment. It will be accomplished with the pleasing and sanctifying accompaniment of saint's prayers. They have become involved in the kingdom of Christ, and play a role in His government **now** , as well as in the world to come.

### **Identified with Christ**

Our identity with Christ is integral to salvation—it is what is it all about. That identity is thorough--past, present, and future. This is a glorious reality that lies at the very foundation of spiritual understanding. A view of salvation that does not take this full perspective into account is flawed, and will rob the soul. Too often, salvation is considered only as deliverance **from** the past, without regard to what we have been deliver **to** . Believers must be reminded they have not only been delivered ***“from the power of darkness,”*** but have as well been ***“translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son”*** (Col 1:13). We have been turned ***“from darkness TO light, and from the power of Satan TO God”*** (Acts 26:18). The strength of new life is not found in what we do **NOT** do, but in what we have been freed to **DO** . That freedom is in the Son, and is the reason why we have been freed; i.e., ***“It was for freedom that Christ set us free”*** (Gal 5:1, NASB). That freedom is not only liberty from the tyranny of the devil and sin, it is also freedom to be involved with Christ Jesus.

### ***The past***

***“We died with Christ”*** (Rom 6:8; Col 2:20). . . . ***“have been***

*crucified with Christ*” (Gal 2:20). The past accomplishments of Jesus relate to redemption from sin, or the reconciliation of the world. He put sin away (Heb 9:26), destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15), and obliterated both the cause and the reality of the debt incurred by transgression (Col 2:14). His achievement thoroughly pleased God, bringing great satisfaction and delight to Him (Isa 53:11). The glory of the circumstance is that believers have been integrated into the accomplishments of the conquering Lamb. Two things are inferred from this. **First** , the effectiveness of Christ’s atoning death is realized by the individual receiving it. **Second** , participation in the reign of Christ is also accomplished—initially now, and fully in the world to come. Our text particularly unveils the latter benefit.

### *The present*

“ . . . *joint heirs with Christ*” (Rom 8:17) . . . “*your life is hidden with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3) . . . “*But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him*” (1 Cor 6:17). Christ not only died, He is “*alive for evermore*” (Rev 1:18). He not only **did** something, He is **doing** something. The reign of Jesus has already begun, and the saints are part of it. They are already joint heirs with Him (Rom 8:17). Their lives are presently hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). They are already one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17)! Christ dwells in them now (Eph 3:17), and they are in Him (1 John 2:28). Whatever Jesus is doing at this present time, the children of God are participants in it. It is measured, to be sure, but a reality nevertheless.

### *The future*

Blessed future, when we will fully come into our inheritance. Our status will be thoroughly known, as we reign unencumbered and without distraction. This

is fundamental to our faith, i.e., the realization that we have been targeted to reign with Christ Jesus, world without end.

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8) . . . ***“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”*** (Col 3:4) . . . ***“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him”*** (2 Tim 2:12). Blessed future, when we will fully come into our inheritance. Our status will be thoroughly known, as we reign unencumbered and without distraction. This is fundamental to our faith, i.e., the realization that we have been targeted to reign with Christ Jesus, world without end. If we allow this perspective to go from us, we will not be able to glorify God in our life by bringing forth much fruit.

### **Raised Together with Christ**

***“. . . even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:5-6). ***“He has made alive together with Him”*** (Col 2:13). ***“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”*** (Col 3:1). Not only were we ***“crucified with Christ”*** (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20), and ***“buried with Him”*** (Rom 6:2; Col 2:12)), we were also ***“raised”*** with Him. This is fundamental to sound doctrine.

If it is true that we have been ***“called into the fellowship”*** of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9), then we participate in His **present** ministry, as well as in the effectuality of His sacrifice. There is no point to being ***“with Christ,”*** if we do not participate in what He is doing. We have not been called into the role of a spectator, but one of participation! That is basic in our reconciliation to God. We are ***“partakers of the Divine nature”*** (2 Pet 1:4), and ***“partakers of Christ”*** as well (Heb 3:14). That is another way of saying we not only were ***“crucified with Christ,” “died”***

and were ***“buried”*** with Him, but are also ***“risen”*** with Him and ***“live”*** with Him. That life is active, and begins now.

At this present time the saints are sitting ***“in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*** (Eph 2:6). We have been made ***“one”*** with both the Father and the Son—brought into conscious involvement with Them, and what They are doing. This is what Jesus prayed for, and it is what occurs when we ***“walk in the light as He is in the light”*** (John 17:21-23; 1 John 1:7).

### **And You . . .**

Remember, we are witnessing the prayers of the saints, mingled with the intercession of Jesus, being a motivating factor in heavenly places. A pleasing fragrance rises into the presence of the Almighty ***“with the***

The extent of our association with Deity is infinitely greater than the best among us has dared to imagine. While many spend their time deciphering duty, the Lord wants to open our eyes to the possibilities before us. While there are duties and obligations in the new life, there is more—much more!

prayers of the saints.” This is a marvelous consideration, scarcely mentioned in many churches. Right here, it is necessary to further discuss what has occurred in salvation. An understanding of this is essential to the comprehension of the book of Revelation.

***“ . . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the***

*glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins . . . **AND YOU**” (Eph 1:17-2:1).*

The exaltation of Christ is the appointed consequence of His substitutionary death. He has been raised from the lowest realm of the curse, to the highest place in heaven. This glorification is appropriately called being *“highly exalted”* (Phil 2:9). Take careful note of the Ephesian text we are now considering. Paul is praying for the illumination of believers to three key elements. First, what God has called us **TO** : *“THE HOPE OF His calling.”* Second, what a glorious inheritance the Lord possesses **IN** the saints: *“the riches of the glory of His INHERITANCE in the saints.”* Third, the magnitude of the power that is devoted exclusively to believers: *“the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.”* All of these are participative in nature. We have been called into involvement with Deity: *“The hope of His calling.”* God Himself has provided for involvement with us: *“His inheritance in the saints.”* Divine commitment is found in the unity of believers with God and Christ through the Spirit: *“His power toward us who believe.”* The extent of our association with Deity is infinitely greater than the best among us has dared to imagine. While many spend their time deciphering duty, the Lord wants to open our eyes to the possibilities before us. While there are duties and obligations in the new life, there is more—much more!

### **Look at the Power**

Look for a moment at the type of power that is *“toward”* believers,

or dedicated to and for them. Lest we be tempted to philosophize about it, the Holy Spirit precisely defines it. This power is characterized by “*exceeding greatness*” (KJV), or “*surpassing greatness*” (NASB), or “*immeasurable greatness*” (NRSV), and is “*incomparably great*” (NIV). It should be obvious such power is not devoted to the mere correction of interpersonal relations, dropping bad habits, and expanding church attendance. While there is nothing wrong with these things, they do not demand the use of such power. Hear the delineation of how this power has been employed. It is the very power that God “*worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*”

Think what it took to bring Jesus back from the region of the dead! Ponder the enormity of the power required to bring Him through the domain of the “*prince of the power of the air*” (Eph 2:2), and position Him at the very right hand of God. By the power that is now devoted to believers, the Lord Jesus has been placed “*far above ALL principality and power.*” There is no power or form of authority that is not directly answerable to Him. There is not a personality in heaven, in earth, or under the earth, that can lift his finger without the approval of the exalted Christ! All forms of might and dominion are under Him! There is no name above or equal to His exalted name—not now, or throughout all eternity. How much power does it take to accomplish all of that? **That is the power that is devoted to the saints of the God—those who believe !**

The enthroned Lamb is the “*Head over all things.*” Every thing has been placed “*under His feet,*” or in subordination to Him. That includes demonic forces and evil angels as well as the holy angels. Personalities that seek the advantage of God’s people are under Christ, and those who seek their harm. There is only One that is not under Christ, and that is the Father Himself, Who has placed all things under Christ. As it is written, “*But when He says all things are put under*

*Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted"*  
(1 Cor 15:27).

### **Christ Given TO the Church**

It is in this capacity—as Head over all things—that Jesus has been given to the church. This text is **not** teaching that Jesus is the Head of the church, a truth that is taught elsewhere (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). The point of this text is that Jesus has been **given to the church** as Head over all that surrounds it. He is Head over the enemies of the church, as well as its friends. Every advantage has been given, therefore, to those who believe. **There is no power aligned against them that is not answerable to Christ, and over which He does not rule. Further, there is no blessing or benefit required by the church that is not under His control, and which he cannot freely dispense, if He wills to do so.** He has been made Head over everything *“for the church.”* There is no reason for His exaltation apart from the church, the body of the redeemed. The Lord Jesus revealed this in His prayer on the night of His betrayal. *“As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him”* (John 17:2). This is why Jesus has been given *“all authority”* – it is *“for the church!”* This is why He is reigning – it is *“for the church.”* Those, therefore, who entertain low views of the church have, by that very attitude, set themselves against Christ, making themselves subject to His judgment.

### **Believers Were Also Raised**

The point of this text is that Jesus has been given to the church as Head over all that surrounds it. He is Head over the enemies of the church, as well as its friends. Every advantage has been given, therefore, to

those who believe. There is no power aligned against them that is not answerable to Christ, and over which He does not rule.

However, the matter does not end here. This train of thought extends into the second chapter of Ephesians. Actually, verses 21-23 of the first chapter are parenthetical. The full impact of the thought is realized by reading it this way: ***“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places . . . And you , who were dead in trespasses and sins.”***

The point is that believers were raised to this lofty position WITH Jesus. They have not only been lifted out of the domain of Satan, they have been raised into the domain of Jesus. Here, in these heavenly places, they are blessed with ***“ALL spiritual blessings”*** (Eph 1:3), not the least of which is participating in His reign now. In a very real sense, we have been raised up with Jesus, and seated with Him. That, of course, is the representation of the case declared in Ephesians 2:4-6. ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him , and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus”*** (NASB).

Viewing our revelation text from this perspective, we see **why** the prayers of the saints are mingled with the intercession of Christ to bring about judgments upon the earth. Believers have, in an initial sense, joined with Jesus in His triumphant reign now. They will more fully participate in ***“the ages to come.”*** However, that participation beings now.

## *Paul's Apostleship*

Allow me to illustrate this point. There are several poignant statements in Scripture that reflect the believers experience of Divine power. Here are a few of them. Think of the remarkable commissioning of Paul. ***“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance”*** (Acts 26:18). Ordinarily, those are things that can only be accomplished by Jesus. Yet, Paul now joins in that activity. Paul further elaborates on his fellowship with a ruling Christ. ***“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them ”*** (Rom 11;14). ***“I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some ”*** (1 Cor 9:22). Saving people is a work of Christ, yet Paul sets himself to join in the work.

## *Applied to Other Believers*

Lest we suppose this kind of participation is limited to the Apostles, hear a word to young Timothy. ***“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you ”***(1 Tim 4;16). The embrace of such a truth will fuel the fervency of Kingdom laborers!

The success of early church was not owing to the precision of its procedures, or the dynamics of its organization. Rather, it was because it was effectively joined to the Lord, and thus joined with Him in the conversion of sinners, the edifying of the body of Christ, and the subduing of evil.

This thought is even taken to the domestic level—to a wife saving her husband, or a husband saving his wife. ***“For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*** (1 Cor 7:16).

James extends the blessing to anyone who sees a soul wandering from the truth. ***“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”*** (James 5:19-20). Paul affirms the same truth to the Galatians. ***“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”*** (Gal 6:1). John also teaches with this participation in mind. ***“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death”*** (1 John 5:16).

### ***The Promise of Jesus***

Jesus declared such things would occur in His challenging promise. ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it”*** (John 14:12-14). How can such things be? It is because the one ***“who believes”*** in Christ is knit to Him, and participates in what He is doing. Observe that the ***“greater works”*** will **not** be performed because of a greater power given to the believer, but because Jesus went ***“to the Father.”*** The believer, you see, is joined to the exalted Christ ***“in heavenly places,”*** and joins in the administration of the Kingdom.

### ***Spiritual Gifts Considered***

This is the role of spiritual gifts. Take, for example, the matter of edification, or building up the saints of God. Technically, that is the work of the risen Christ, Who is the ***“great Shepherd of the sheep”*** (Heb 13:20). However, those in Christ are afforded a role in this ministry--reigning, as it were, with Jesus. It is no wonder Paul spoke of ***“the power which the Lord hath given me to edification”*** (1 Cor 13:10). All other spiritual gifts have this in common: they are dispensed to every person for the common good of the body. Thus they are nothing less than a participation in the current ministry of Jesus, the ***“great Shepherd of the sheep.”*** The success of early church was not owing to the precision of its procedures, or the dynamics of its organization. Rather, it was because it was effectively joined to the Lord, and thus joined with Him in the conversion of sinners, the edifying of the body of Christ, and the subduing of evil.

### ***The Nature of the Warfare***

The reality of this truth should also be apparent in the nature of the warfare into which we have been called. Our contention is not with humanity, but with high and powerful spiritual authorities. As it is written, ***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”*** (Eph 6:12). Do not gloss this text! Remember that the overthrow of the forces of darkness is the work of the Lord Jesus Himself. It is He that will subjugate all wicked powers under His feet. As the Scripture declare, ***“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet”*** (1 Cor 15:25). While, in a sense, that work belongs exclusively to Him, the saints participate in it. Eventually, Satan himself will be subdued under our feet (Rom 16:20). **Our struggle against the hierarchy of evil is nothing less than a facet of reigning with Jesus!**

### **Back to the Key Thought**

While the common association of worship is made with praise, the Scriptural association is with “service,” which is an alternate word for “**worship.**” It is said of the nations of the saved, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.” They are participating in the Kingdom, not merely observing its workings and responding to them with praise.

Lest we miss the connection of these thoughts with our text, the “*prayers of the saints*” are depicted as playing a key role in Divine activity—**significant activity** (as though there were any other kind). **As they became identified with the Lamb, they also began to play a role in the execution of His will. Their prayers are declared to be involved in the judgment of the wicked.** The knowledge of this circumstance should provoke us to formulate prayers that are in strict accord with the revealed will of God—prayers that can be mingled with Christ’s intercession, and move the arm of God. I fear that the prayers of the average congregation fall far short of what they could be. With these things in mind, think of the prayer of Stephen. “*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*” (Acts 7:60). Or, the prayer of Paul for Israel, “*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved*” (Rom 10:1). These were not expressions of sentimentality! They flowed from a rich fellowship with the Son of God, and will no doubt play a role in the Deliverer turning away ungodliness from Jacob.

### **The Contemporary Worship Syndrome**

I am thankful for any increase in sensitivity to and involvement in the worship of God. An awareness of the majesty and worthiness of our Lord is commendable, and must not be opposed. But we have not been called to worship God, although that is inherent in spiritual life. Those who belong to Christ DO “*worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil 3:3). That is not what they **ought** to do, but what new creatureship constrains them to do. The believer is compelled by the higher principle of life, not by law. What does concern me about the current trend is its lack of emphasis on

identity and involvement with God. For example, there is a sense of groping that characterizes much of contemporary Christian music. Too often, it simply does not reflect a sense of the exaltation of the believer ***“with Christ.”***

### ***Worship primarily related to service***

While the common association of worship is made with praise, the Scriptural association is with ***“service,”*** which is an alternate word for ***“worship.”*** It is said of the nations of the saved, ***“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple”*** (Rev 7:15). They are participating in the Kingdom, not merely observing its workings and responding to them with praise. Throughout the book of Revelation, worship is a response to Divine activity (4:10; 14:7; 15:4). However, the burden of the book relates to the activity of the Reigning Christ, with the participation of the saints.

### **Reigning with Christ**

The significance of reigning with Christ must not escape us. ***“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him . . . ”*** (Rom 8:17). Actually, the suffering experienced by the saints is owing to their present identity with Christ Jesus. They are, in a sense, reigning in their very suffering. Their enemies are not capable of overcoming them, as they cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart. It often appears as though the saints are overcome in their suffering. Many of them are martyred, and others persecuted mercilessly. However, they are kings, not vassals. It is Satan that is frustrated by them, and not vice versa. As it is written, ***“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death”*** (Rev 12:11). Our reign on the other side will be an extension of the ***“reign in life”*** that began here and now (Rom 5:17).

### ***The First Resurrection***

***“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years”*** (Rev 20:1). This is an extremely controversial passage. Because we are going to deal with it extensively later, I will only touch upon its relevance to our present discussion. The particular point we are addressing is **reigning with Christ** . This passage speaks of a group of people that will do precisely that.

The term ***“first resurrection”*** is represented by some as depicting the resurrection of the righteous with the resurrection of the unrighteous occurring one thousand years later. No such depiction is found in the Word of God, although extensive effort has gone into attaching such a meaning to Revelation 10:5. You must remember that this book is to be viewed in the light of Christ’s redemptive work, as expounded in the Apostolic writings.

***“Resurrection”*** is **never** used in the plural (i.e., *resurrection s* ), and is always declared to include both the godly and the ungodly (John 5:28-29; 11:14; Acts 17:32; 1 Cor 15:21,42). The ***“first resurrection”*** is not one of sequence, but one of kind. The words ***“first”*** and ***“second”*** are not chronological terms in Scripture. When speaking of events or epochs, **differing orders** are meant. Thus we read of the ***“first”*** and ***“second”*** man (1 Cor 15:45-47), and the ***“first”*** and ***“second”*** covenant (Heb 8:7; 10:9). Likewise, we read of the ***“first resurrection,”*** but **never** a *second resurrection* . Also, there is a ***“second death,”*** with no reference to a *first death* .

The ***“first resurrection”*** is a **spiritual resurrection** , as distinguished from the bodily resurrection. The ***“second death”*** is a spiritual death, distinguished from separation from the body. Just as those in the flesh will experience two deaths, so those in the Spirit experience two resurrections. In both cases, the first of these experiences takes place in

the earth. It is there that we are first raised, or born again. It is also there that we first die, or are separated from our bodies. Also, both terms (resurrection and death) have an eternal perspective. The “*second death*” is eternal, forbidding the possibility of recovery. Likewise, for the redeemed, the final resurrection is eternal, with the complete exclusion of jeopardy.

Picture the cumulative expressions of this desire coming up before God, mingled with the pleasing fragrance of Christ’s sacrifice and intercession. They come to His remembrance as He prepares to judge those who have dared to left their heel against His Son. As a son of God, you have been joined to the Lord in a most remarkable way.

Regarding this particular text, the consequence of the “*first resurrection*” is reigning with Christ Jesus. The reign begins here, but will be brought to fruition in the world to come. This resurrection puts us beyond the reach of the second death, which cannot function in heavenly places, either in an initial or eternal sense.

I understand the reference to the “*first resurrection*” to particularly apply to the resurfacing of the cause of the martyrs, when they will reign indirectly in the rapid spread of the Gospel. Remember, we are speaking of a Kingdom characterized by participation, where the saints of God themselves play a key role. From the beginning of Christ’s reign, until all of the kingdoms of this world have become His (Rev 11:15), the saints are integral to His reign. We are apprized that the fellowship into which we have been called includes “*the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Heb 12:23). They are no more idle than we are. It is refreshing to know their cause will yet flourish in the earth, even

though they were vigorously opposed while here. Those who participate *“the first resurrection”* (i.e., being raised from death in trespasses and sins) share in the triumph of the truth, even after they have left this world. The *“second death,”* therefore, has no power over them, being incapable of separating them from the love of God or the reign of Christ.

### **The Association with Our Text**

In our text, we are witnessing a lofty view of the saints reigning with Jesus. The focus is upon their *“prayers,”* which means the reign takes place **prior** to the end of the world. None of their prayers have been in vain, particularly as they related to the cause of Christ. This perspective clarifies the reason for Christ’s teaching concerning prayer. *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt 6:9-10, NKJV).

Picture the cumulative expressions of this desire coming up before God, mingled with the pleasing fragrance of Christ’s sacrifice and intercession. They come to His remembrance as He prepares to judge those who have dared to lift their heel against His Son. As a son of God, you have been joined to the Lord in a most remarkable way. As you take advantage of your lofty position, focusing your prayers and labors upon His work, you have a part in the execution of His will. What a glorious privilege you have!

### **THROWN UPON THE EARTH**

*“Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth . . . ”* Again, tabernacle imagery is employed, because it was the *“example and shadow of heavenly things”* (Heb

8:5). The altar of reference is the altar of sacrifice, or burnt offerings. That fire was never to go out, but burned continually. As it is written, ***“And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. 'A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out”*** (Lev 6:12-13). The original altar fire which **consumed** the first sacrifice, came out from the Lord (Lev 9:24). It is that fire, we understand, that was never allowed to go out.

The reason for this requirement was its depiction of the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. **That vicarious sacrifice burns with efficacy throughout all time.** It never goes out, or loses its power to reconcile, keep, and glorify. Therefore, because the tabernacle was a shadow of the effectiveness of Christ’s death, the fire that consumed the tabernacle sacrifices was to burn continually, else the **“substance”** of the shadow would become distorted. The imagery of putting fire from the altar into a censer with incense was also introduced in the tabernacle service (Lev 10:1; 16:12). On one occasion, this was the means through which Israel was spared from extermination through a Divinely imposed plague (Num 16:46). Here was a vivid depiction of the mingling of **(1)** An effective sacrifice, **(2)** Divine approval, and **(3)** prayer.

John is now given a vision of the heavenly manner – the way in which Divine judgments are set in motion. They do not simply happen, but are in strict accordance with the ***“Divine nature”*** and ***“eternal purpose.”***

**First** , God does not act capriciously, nor does He react to wicked men inconsistently with His nature and purpose. God can neither violate His character or His determined, or eternal, purpose. **He has therefore provided for Himself, as well as us, the Lamb, Who appeals to His mercy for the preservation of His people.**

**Second** , His Kingdom is governed in the interest of His Son–Deity in Its redemptive posture. There is nothing more prominent in the present Kingdom than the salvation wrought out by the conquering Lamb. The entire world is being governed with that salvation in mind. At no point are other considerations moved to the front – like a world economy, the prevalence of a nation, or the resolution of other social and domestic issues. If men move these to the forefront, they move out of God’s will!

**Third** , having incorporated those in Christ into the Kingdom, God is motivated by their insightful and fervent prayers–their participation in the Divine government. When the Word admonishes us to “*pray in the Spirit,*” or build up ourselves, “*praying in the Holy Spirit*” (Eph 6:18; Jude 20), something more is meant than seeking personal advantage–although that is involved. We are being called to deeper involvement in the working of the Lord. Again, when Jesus told His disciples to “*pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*” (Matt 9:38), it was nothing less than a summons to participate in His Kingdom. Oh, that this truth would become more clear to the saints of God!

We have, therefore, a wonderful blending of key matters in this text. The Living God, the Lamb of God, and the people of God–joined in holy union. Here is a fulfillment of Christ’s prayer, that believers might be one with Him and the Father (John 17:20-23). Here is the purpose of God, the activity of Jesus, and the prayers of the saints, joining together in holy efficacy. Mind you, it is not that our prayers add any weight to the fulfillment of God’s will. Rather, it is that God has chosen to bring honor and glory to himself, through the Son, by working through the redeemed.

### **The Appointed Time Has Arrived**

By saying the angel “*took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth,*” the Spirit means the time appointed

for the judgment of God's enemies has come. The judgments of the Almighty are about to descend upon the earth. They will be an open confirmation that the sacrifice of the Son, and those who have accepted it, cannot be opposed with impunity. Also, it will become apparent that the prayers of His people have been heard – even the pleas that were heard from the souls of martyred saints *“under the altar.”*

### *Temporal judgments*

These are temporal judgments i.e., judgments that occur **before** the great and notable day of the Lord. They have eternal consequences, yet take place in time. We should not be surprised that these judgments occur, for the Scriptures are filled with similar reprisals. The wicked will not necessarily wait until the great and notable day of the Lord to experience Divine retribution.

Think of the Scriptural record with this in mind. God's judgment was experienced in this world by Adam and Eve, Cain, the world of Noah's day, and the people at Babel. Ponder the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the nation of Egypt with Pharaoh and his army, Jericho, and the nations that occupied Canaan. Kings Sihon and Og, the cities of Tyre and Sidon, Neuchadnezzar and Babylon, and boastful Sennacrib. Following the Word becoming flesh, there was the judgment of Herod, Ananias and Sapphira, and the dreadful destruction of Jerusalem.

**Let no person think the actions of the wicked are being overlooked—especially those who openly oppose Christ Jesus and persecute His people!** Retribution does not come upon men immediately because God is granting them space to repent. However, hard hearts do not recognize this provision, so go on in their opposition to God. As it is written, *“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”* (Eccl 8:11).

The Spirit refers to this aspect of God in 1 Timothy 5:24. **“Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.”** The NIV reads, *“The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.”* Such sins are so flagrant, they are apparent to all about them. Often, they become conspicuous **because of God’s judgment upon them**, as with Cain, Achan, Korah, Judas, and Ananias and Sapphira.

Suffice it to say, there is coming a time when the hierarchies of evil will be shaken violently by God—prior to the end of all things. There have been preliminary exposures to this manner of Divine judgment, as in the fall of Rome after dominating the world for nearly 500 years, and a political existence of nearly 1,000 years. Because of her sins, she was brought down by God, in this world, and well before the coming day of eternal judgment. It is God’s manner to so judge. The confederacies of the wicked will be broken up, and there will be nothing they can do about it. The ruins of Egypt, Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece confirm this. Once again, Scripture clearly attests this to be the Divine manner. Therefore, it is not to be questioned.

## THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

**“ And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.”** As the appointed time arrives, the prayers of the saints mingling with the accomplishments and activity of the conquering Lamb, it is accompanied by awesome manifestations. In the heavenly places, there is an acute sensitivity to Divine workings. The **“sons of God shouted for joy”** when the world was created, and the human enterprise got under way (Job 38:7). Thousands of angelic hosts accompanied God as He descended on Mount Zion at the giving

of the Law (Psa 68:17). Heavenly hosts brake forth in praise at the birth of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:13). **The closer we get to the throne of the universe, the more acute is the sensitivity to the working of the Lord!** Of old time, this was also shared by those upon earth. Those living by faith were able to sense great Divine epochs. When the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt drew near, Moses had a mind to visit his brethren (Ex 2:11). The prophet Daniel knew the time of Israel's deliverance from Babylon was approaching (Dan 9:2-3). As John the Baptist's ministry began, *"the people were in great expectation"* (Lk 3:15). When the Lord Jesus was born, there were people looking *"for redemption in Jerusalem"* (Luke 2:38). Paul also spoke of *"knowing the time"* (Rom 13:11). Mark it well, **the working of the Lord, whether for blessing or cursing, is accompanied by sensitivity and perception around His throne.**

And what do we hear?

Forever put out of your mind any notion that casualness can exist where the working of the Lord is known! There is always a violent disruption of the natural order, whether in the hearts of men or in the worldly environment.

*"Noises (voices, KJV), thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake."* The NASB reads, *"and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake."* Forever put out of your mind any notion that casualness can exist where the working of the Lord is known! There is always a violent disruption of the natural order, whether in the hearts of men or in the worldly environment. Think of the great epochs of Scripture, and of the disruption of the natural order that accompanied them. Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the law, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and his soon return.

When we were first introduced to the heavenly throne, from it ***“proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices”*** (4:5). Later in the book, when the heavenly sanctuary is opened, there will be ***“lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail”*** (11:19). When the seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the earth, there will again be heard ***“noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth”*** (16:17-18).

**This is the language of Divine judgment.** Boiled down to its essence, it speaks of the overthrow of the cursed order—the world and all that is in it. Throughout history there have been token judgments, revealing the ultimate destiny of all who oppose God. However, just as surely as we know of the Lord will ***“cover the earth as the waters cover the sea”*** (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14), **there will also be an extraordinary outpouring of judgment upon the wicked .**

### ***David’s expression***

A vivid description of the judgment of God against the wicked is

The text before us deals with Divine judgment on a massive scale. When the angel hurled fire upon the earth, it was indicative of an unprecedented judgment of the wicked. The judgment will be decisive and apparent, revealing the wickedness of the wicked. Yet, it is not their final portion. The worst is yet to come! There will be ***“everlasting destruction”*** in the end.

provided by king David. It is interesting that it occurs in answer to prayer, much like our text. ***“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up***

*from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it” (2 Sam 22:7-9).*

### *Differing levels*

In both blessing and cursing, there are, in my judgment, five levels of Divine manifestation. These represent my own perception of the case. **(1) The personal level.** At this level individuals are blessed (Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Paul, etc.), and individuals are cursed (Cain, Jezebel, Ahab, Judas, etc.). **(2) Small groups.** Here both blessing and cursing are extended beyond the individual. Blessings of note include Noah and his house, Rahab and her house, and Cornelius and his house, etc. Judgments in this category include Korah and his cohorts, and Achan and his family. **(3) Larger token revelations.** In this case, large scale benefits and judgments are experienced, which extend beyond the individual and the smaller group. Blessings in his group would include the house of Israel, the city of Samaria at Philip’s preaching, and believers on the day of Pentecost. Large scale curses include, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgment of Egypt at the time of the exodus. **(4) Massive revelations.** These are revelations on a global scale. The knowledge of the Lord covering the world as the waters cover the sea, is an example of blessing. The flood is an example of judgment. **(5) The ultimate.** Here we deal with ALL of humanity – all of the saved, and all of the condemned. This will occur at the return of our Lord, the *“great and notable day of the Lord.”*

The text before us deals with Divine judgment on a massive scale. When the angel hurled fire upon the earth, it was indicative of an unprecedented judgment of the wicked. The judgment will be decisive and apparent, revealing the wickedness of the wicked. Yet, it is not their final portion. This is only preliminary to the final judgment. The worst is yet to come! In the end, there will be *“everlasting destruction”* for all unreconciled to God.

## CONCLUSION

We have dealt with an intriguing text of Scripture. The strength of its ministration to us is not found in the details it provides, but in the Kingdom principles therein revealed. Remember, John is writing as a companion in tribulation, as well as in the *“kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus”* (Rev 1:9). Through him, Jesus is bolstering His people, assuring them of His dominion and ultimate victory. The suffering saints are targeted for better things, and their cause will not be abandoned or fail. Even more than this, the Lord is promising the participation of His people in the victory.

Those who have opposed the saints, although it presently appears they have triumphed, will reap the seeds of destruction they have sowed. Throughout the centuries, whether before John, during his exile, or in our day, God’s people have prayed for His kingdom to come. They have wrestled against wicked principalities and powers, and besought the Lord to bring down the wicked and their cause. None of those prayers have been in vain. They have all been heard, and held in reserve, as it were, until the appointed time. When God executes judgment upon those who have maligned His Son and opposed His people, He will remember the prayers of the saints. In these judgments He will not only vindicate His own holy name, but theirs as well. In the meantime, the saints must press into the holiest place, seeking close fellowship with the Son, the favor of the Father, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They have been called according to God’s eternal purpose, and they must avail themselves of all of the resources provided for their participation.

Without controversy, we have walked upon holy ground. Every believer does well to ponder these things in the heart. Admittedly, they are not common considerations for professed believers. In my judgment, this is because institutionalized religion has supplanted spirituality—chiefly through the activities of religious professionals. The truth of the

matter is that the judgment of the wicked and the vindication of the saints have very little to do with the goals and activities of the average church. If this is a proper assessment, it does not speak well for our religious environment. In fact, it places it squarely at variance with the Lord and His Christ. The word of God is essential for the agenda of God. The revelation of Christ is required for fellowship with Christ.

Take heed, then, to the words of this book -- particularly those we have just considered. Make it your determined objective to participate in the Kingdom of Christ. It will not be long until the well of praise will spring up within the saints, together with renewed faith and hope. That, of course, is the reason this book has been given to us.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 16

## THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

" The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood . And a third of the living creatures in the sea died , and a third of the ships were destroyed . Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water . The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck , a third of the moon , and a third of the stars , so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" (Revelation 8:2-6, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Those who have a sentimental view of the Living God will find this a most difficult section of Scripture. As well, if any entertain an inordinate affection for nature, this passage will also tend to be offensive. This is a declaration of judgment—decisive judgment. It is not a period of negotiation, but of Divine indignation. Further, it is not the account of Satanic activity (although he doubtless is involved), but of Divine purpose.

Before we begin, it is important that we establish our hearts in the truth. In Christ Jesus, we have been ***“blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places”*** (Eph 1:3). The tumult which we will now confront does not take place in heavenly places. It is not a disruption of the heavenly court, or a thwarting of Divine purpose. This is a depiction of disruption upon the earth. It is a declaration of the frustration of the enemies of God, and is given to comfort the hearts of the saints. We sorely need a word from God as we fight the good fight of faith, assuring our hearts that the enemies of God have not gone unnoticed, nor will their cause ultimately triumph. All evil is destined to fail, and all righteousness is destined to triumph. The ungodly will all be overthrown, and the godly will all be victorious. These are basic postulates of Scripture. The understanding of them is a great source of strength to believers.

## **Principles Involved**

***God is Judge,***

***and known for Judgment***

As we proceed through this section, the fierceness of the wrath of the Almighty will become evident. No child of God should be surprised or alarmed by this. God is declared to be a God of judgment. Think of the many affirmations of this truth. ***“ . . . His work is perfect; For all His ways are . . . May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon . . . Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, For the LORD is the God of knowledge; And by Him actions are weighed . . . God is angry with the wicked every day . . . For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds . . . The LORD is in His holy temple, The Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men . . . He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD . . . Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face”*** (Deut 32:4; Judg 11:27; 1 Sam 2:3; Psa 7:9,11; 11:4; 33:5; 89:14).

Because of this, those who oppose God, reject His Son, and persecute His people, will be judged. That judgment will begin in this world, and be consummated on the day God has appointed for universal judgment.

### *God takes Vengeance*

While God is *“merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth”* (Ex 34:6), He will take vengeance on those who refuse to respond to His grace, or seek to exploit, those qualities. The Lord **does** take vengeance, repaying those who trample on His mercy. While it is not pleasant to think on this subject, it is necessary to do so. It must be remembered that this aspect of the Divine nature required the atoning death of Christ. Salvation delivers us *“from the wrath to come”* (1 Thess 1:10).

*“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense . . . I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. . . He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people . . . O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! . . . You took vengeance on their deeds . . . To execute vengeance on the nations, And punishments on the peoples . . . Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you . . . God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies . . . Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord . . . in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Deut 32:35,41,43; Psa 94:1; 99:8; 149:7; Isa 35:4; Nahum 1:2; Rom 12:19; 2 Thess 1:8).

This is **not** an *“Old testament view”* of God. Rather, it is a revelation

of His nature, and is to be taken seriously. This aspect of God cannot be erased. Neither can men ignore it with impunity. Now—in this time—is ***“the day of salvation.”*** It is a space provided by God to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need. For those availing themselves of His great salvation, the wrath due them has already fallen upon Christ Jesus. However, for those who reject the Son, counting His atonement unworthy of embrace, God will take vengeance upon them. Our text reveals this occurs, in measure, in this world. Often, the measure is far larger than men imagine possible. It is ever true, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*** (Heb 10:31).

### ***What is Sown will be Reaped***

Another Kingdom principle revealed in this text involves sowing and reaping. ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap”*** (Gal 6:7). This law applies to both good and evil, Spirit and flesh. As it is written, ***“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”*** (Gal 6:8). Our text declares the reaping of corruption in epochal ways. As with agricultural sowing and reaping, what is harvested, when sowing to the flesh or Spirit, is in far greater measure than what is sown. Regarding wicked men it is written, ***“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind”*** (Hos 8:7).

Declaring this same principle, Jesus said, ***“for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”*** (Matt 26:52). The principle is stated again in the book of revelation. ***“If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword”*** (Rev 13:10). This is not the announcement of a possibility, but of an inevitability. ***“Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished”*** (Prov 11:21; 16:5). It is ever true that everything in which the wicked trust is powerless to save them in the day of God’s wrath, whether introductory, or in the ***“great and notable day of the Lord.”*** The things in which men trust utterly fail when the breath of the Almighty blows

upon them. As it is written, *“Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath . . . ”* (Zeph 1:18).

**If we miss this perspective, we will not profit from the vision!**

### **A Historical Perspective**

There are historical perspectives to the trumpets, just as there were to the seals. While these are to be duly noted, our view of the text is not to be confined to a historical view. In history, the judgments declared in this text have been demonstrated. **However, history cannot exhaust Divine principle!** We have the nation of Israel as a notable example of this. They were given Divine advantages, yet despised them. Therefore, they reaped the judgment of God. As we behold them, we are to take care not to fall into the same snare. Solemnly we are warned, *“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Cor 10:6-11). It would be foolish to say the reaction of God to lust, idolatry, tempting God, and complaining was exhausted in the people of Israel. No person of sound mind would dare postulate such an absurdity. Yet, men have taken upon themselves to take the judgments of the seven trumpets and lock them within the confines of history-past. They do seriously err, and bring great impediment to the people of God.

### **A Significant Thing to See**

The four trumpets deal a devastating blow to an inordinate attraction to the earth—the realm of nature. Throughout history, men have idolized nature, creating gods to themselves from it. Rejecting the resounding testimony of nature, wicked men *“changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things . . . and exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever”* (Rom 1:23, 25). Even Israel, at the very foot of Mount Sinai, *“changed their glory Into the image of an ox that eats grass”* (Psa 106:20). Wicked Manasseh instituted the worship of nature when he *“made a grove . . . and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them”* (2 Kgs 21:3). King Josiah, awakened by the reading of the Law, *“put down”* idolatrous priests who *“burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven”* (2 Kgs 23:5). The whole world, both Jew and Gentile, became guilty of worshiping the creation—of ascribing the honor due to God alone, to what He had made.

Even in our time, the earth has become the object of unlawful affection. Phrases like *“mother earth”* and *“earth day”* should not be found in the mouths of God’s people. That the exaltation of ecology is to a place of such prominence that it mandates the development and institution of special laws, is remarkable. That men would speak of *“animal rights”* while murdering the unborn, is evidence of a sophisticated form of idolatry that is, nevertheless, an abomination to God. God will pour judgments out upon the realm so highly revered by blinded souls, and will offer no apology for doing so.

### **Like the Judgment of Egypt**

This section of Revelation is remarkably like the judgment of Egypt, who had enslaved and abused the people of God. **The judgment of God was poured out upon their gods!** The Lord affirmed, *“against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment”* (Ex 12:12). Looking back on the exodus, Moses declared, *“upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments”* (Num 33:4). I have provided a chart (figure 1)

that lists the various gods of Egypt. The prominence of **nature** is evident in the gods they chose to serve—gods which were really “*no gods*” at all 2 Kgs 19:18; Isa 37:19; Gal 4:8).

## **God Will Weaken the Invincible**

In the first four trumpets, God will weaken what men imagine to be invincible. He will show the instability of everything that is made—everything that sustains earth life—everything to which men sinfully ascribe Divine attributes. Judgment will fall upon the earth, the trees, and the green grass. It will come to the sea, the creatures in the sea, and the ships men build to accomplish commerce by means of the sea. All sources of water, both rivers and streams, will be judged. Even the sun, the moon, and the stars—noted for their stability—will be shown to be inferior, and unworthy of our focus.

One other thing to note. The judgments will fall upon what is temporal, and will eventually pass away. There are no such judgments in the “*heavenly places*.” We learn from this to detach ourselves from the natural order, which is “*reserved unto fire*” (2 Pet 3:7). Whatever knits the hearts and minds of men to the natural order is dangerous beyond description. **Whether it is philosophy, worldly wisdom, carnal religion, or wicked lusts, when dominating, it moves the individual closer to judgment and eventual condemnation.** I am persuaded this is a truth rarely perceived. We live in a time that is dominated by carnality in the church—a situation of the greatest gravity. It has not escaped the attention of the Almighty!

Let all who name the name of Christ see to it that they put off the works of the flesh—all of them. The Lord will honor all such efforts with a multiplication of grace and peace, a preservation in the day of wrath.

## **THE FIRST TRUMPET**

***“The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”*** When one realizes this is but the introduction to coming judgments, the enormity of sin is at once established. It has defiled the entire natural realm to such a degree it must endure Divine judgment now, and finally be destroyed by fire. Western religion has cultured people for ease, and robbed them of an acute sensitivity to the malignancy of transgression. The life of relative ease has dulled the senses of the religious multitudes to such an extent that mere inconvenience is considered a great grief. Let all such deluded souls give heed to the sounding of the first trumpet.

I cannot help but recall the judgment upon Egypt, to which these trumpets bear a remarkable resemblance. For your reference, I have provided Figure 2, which lists the ten plagues God brought upon Egypt. Of particular note is the seventh plague, which also consisted of hail and fire. The plague is described in Exodus 9:23-24. ***“And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.”*** Later, the Psalmist referred to this phenomenon. ***“He gave them hail for rain, And flaming fire in their land”*** (Psa 105:32).

### **Irreconcilable Forces**

Here is a judgment that, like the seventh plague upon Egypt, employed apparently irreconcilable forces—hail and fire. These forces can only work together by Divine decree. Within the realm of nature,

they are mutually exclusive—when you have one, you cannot have the other. No matter how wise man is, he cannot mingle fire and ice.

There is a remarkable principle to be seen here. With the elect, everything is being ***“worked together”*** for their good, whether trial or blessing, famine or plenty, sorrow or joy (Ro, 8:28). With Joseph, the hostility of his brothers, the lies of Potiphar’s wife, the forgetfulness of the butler and baker, and the rising of a new pharaoh, worked together for his good. Perceiving this, he said to his brothers, ***“you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good”*** (Gen 50:20). In this plague, however, we have everything **working together for judgment**—for calamity in the world. Just as Pilate and Herod became friends in their conspiracy against Christ, so God can bring together contrary forces in judgment against the wicked. Because of this, nothing is capable of averting the determined judgment of the Almighty. The wicked will not be able to escape judgment, though it tarry long. As it is written, ***“It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him!”*** (Amos 5:19).

Even at Mount Sinai, the Psalmist reveals that hailstones and coals of fire attended the revelation of God. ***“From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire”*** (Psa 18:12-13). Again, the Psalmist refers to the judgment of God in terms of fire and hail combining to fulfil His will. ***“Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word”*** (Psa 148:8).

This is a description of the judgment of the Almighty, in which all forces combine against the wicked, with nothing contributing to their blessing, or working for their good. It is a dreadful description which constrains the righteous to fear the Lord, and cleave to His Son with

purpose of heart. Away with insipid theologies that represent God as incapable of such judgments. Let men behold Him as He is!

### **Is it Real Hail and Fire?**

No believer can allow vain thoughts to creep into the mind, imagining that such things could not happen in our time, and where we are. We are in a nation that has rejected God at the government level—a nation that allows for moral degradation, even defending the imagined right to be perverse. The church has grown cold because of abounding iniquity, and a spirit of lethargy has pervaded the land.

Is this real hail and fire? or is it merely a figure of Divine judgment? First, remember, it was real hail and fire experienced by Egypt, and there is no Divine commitment that such cannot happen again, on even a larger scale. On one occasion, God ***“cast down great hailstones from heaven”*** upon the enemies of Israel, killing more with the hail that Israel did with the sword (Josh 10:11). Later in the book of Revelation, the Spirit mentioned ***“huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each”*** (16:21). Let no person become so corrupted by academics that he thinks such to be impossible. I personally abhor an approach to the Word of God that removes the element of the supernatural, confining everything to the natural realm. Throughout Scripture, such an approach is evidence of unbelief, hardness of heart, and a commitment to wickedness.

But we need not confine this trumpet to the forces of nature. As I have shown you, this is the language of Divine judgment, which will take varied forms. No child of God should be surprised by an outbreak of mighty hailstones and fire. But let none suppose that exhausts the meaning of this text. **This portrays judgment that *cannot* be averted.** Just as no intercession for Egypt could have spared it from the plagues, so nothing will be capable of averting the judgments of described in

this text. Do you doubt that such a condition can be reached? Hear the word of the Lord. ***“So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble”*** (Jer 11:14). ***“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Do not pray for this people, for their good’”*** (Jer 14:11). ***“Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth”*** (Jer 15:1). If this is true of the children of Israel, what is possible with those who have openly declared themselves to be the enemies of God, who have taken upon themselves to malign His Son, resist His Spirit, and persecute His people?

### **Mingled with Blood**

Here the judgment differs from the seventh plague. The meaning of the text is that hail and fire were mingled together **in** blood. What a dreadful scene! The idea is that men will die in this judgment. Nature will not bear the brunt of it alone. There will be violence, war, and bloodshed. Truly, there are enormous penalties to be paid for opposing the people of God! Throughout history, the persecutors of the godly have had to face Divine retribution— **in this world** . Cain, Pharaoh, Jezebel, Ahab, Herod, and Jerusalem—to name a few.

### **Partial Destruction**

Again, the language is very precise, revealing Divine control at the most minute level. No judgment can extend beyond the perimeter of God’s purpose. No divine fire can rage out of control, so to speak. Here is a judgment cast upon the earth that has a devastating effect upon vegetation, or plant life. ***“A third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”*** Divine judgment is not neutralized—it is a full third, not a fourth or a tenth. Yet, it is not thorough, allowing for recovery among the sensitive—it is a third, not a half or the whole. It is the ***“trees”*** that are first burned, which are noted for strength and duration. Because they provide food, shade, and material for humanity,

it is an epochal tragedy to have a third of them destroyed.

***“All of the green,”*** or living and productive, ***“grass”*** is burned up. The word ***“grass”*** means *herbage or vegetation* . This judgment also reminds us of the seventh plague upon Egypt. Not only was hail and fire sent upon the land, ***“the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in bud”*** (Ex 9:31). This is equivalent to ***“breaking the whole staff of bread”*** (Psa 105;16). By saying ***“green grass”*** ripened grain is meant. This too was a partial judgment, like that of Egypt, where ***“the wheat and the rye were not smitten: for they were not grown up”*** (Ex 9:32).

If you have perceived some of the events now taking place in the earth, it should not surprise you that such judgments are, indeed, possible. Fire raging out of control, and a blast of heat that is withering the fields are faint trumpet blasts, calling men to repentance. No believer can allow vain thoughts to creep into the mind, imagining that such things could not happen in our time, and where we are. We are in a nation that has rejected God at the government level—a nation that allows for moral degradation, even defending the imagined right to be perverse. The church has grown cold because of abounding iniquity, and a spirit of lethargy has pervaded the land. The offspring of God are slain in the womb, and the elderly and infirm are considered expendable. Such conditions cry out for Divine vengeance, which will not long tarry.

History is a tablet upon which Divine workings are inscribed. They are written there for our learning. The large scale overthrow of the wicked is like a mighty trumpet blast from heaven! When I say ***“historical view,”*** I am not affirming an exclusive view, but the enactment of Divine principle.

## **An Historical View**

History is a tablet upon which Divine workings are inscribed. They are written there for our learning. The large scale overthrow of the wicked is like a mighty trumpet blast from heaven! When I say “*historical view*,” I am not affirming an exclusive view, but the enactment of Divine principle. Our consideration of Revelation is not to be confined to a single theological position. Rather, we are to behold its principles. We are also to be sensitive to the demonstration of those principles historically. There is also a necessity to see the principles in relation to our generation, as well as generations to come.

At the time of John’s writing, the Roman empire had begun to be the seat of activity against the church. The first governmental opposition came from pagan Rome—the land of the Caesars. They crucified the Lord, Paul, Peter, and would kill countless believers in their persecutions. At the height of their glory, God visited them with judgment. History confirms that about 400 A.D., the Goths (Visigoths) gathered from the unexplored lands of the North. They swept into Rome like a mighty hailstorm. With them, there was no mercy. Countries that bloomed like gardens were left barren deserts. The Goths killed and burned everything in their path. In 409 A.D., Alaric headed them into Rome itself, where the face of a foreign enemy had not been seen in 800 years. Rome was the Queen of the earth, but she had aligned herself against the Lord and His Christ. Of Alaric, history records the following. “*Alaric, c.370-410, was a Visigothic king whose capture of Rome in 410 signaled the final decline of the Roman Empire in the West. The leader of Visigothic mercenaries in the Roman army, he rebelled (395) and was proclaimed king by his troops. He led his army toward Constantinople and then into Greece, where he took increasing advantage of the divisions between the eastern and western halves of the empire. In 397 the emperor in the East, Arcadius, gave Alaric military command of Illyria, from which he staged (401) an invasion of Italy. Twice forced to withdraw (402, 403) by the general Flavius Stilicho, he returned after the execution of Stilicho in 408. His*

*first two sieges of Rome (408, 409) were ended by negotiation, but in 410 he stormed and devastated the city. He died while preparing to invade Africa.” 1*

Historians tell us that traitors opened the gates. In the dead of the night, Rome was besieged. Eight days after her fall, Alaric was dead, and the leaderless Goths returned to the regions of the North. Swift and decisive judgment had taken place like a mighty hailstorm mingled with fire. Devastation was left in the wake of the judgment. Rome stands for the greatest of the earth; the most unique government, the pinnacle of success, and the seat of organizational excellence. Her longevity moved some to call her “*the eternal city.*” However, when God visited her in judgment, she fell quickly because she had aligned herself against the Most High.

Just as Rome was not the last foe of God’s people, so their judgment was not the last upon the enemies of Christ. We have, in the last 50 years, witnessed the collapse of Germany, Japan, and Russia—all of which persecuted the people of God. Should the very country in which we reside continue its anarchy against the Living God, it too will suffer His judgment.

We have witnessed in the first trumpet a preliminary judgment. There is more to come. Our exposure to this text should produce a profound sense or determination in us. Here is a side of the Lord flesh does not want to see. It is the role of the church, as the “***pillar and ground of the truth,***” to keep men apprized of this truth, refusing to hide it from them.

## THE SECOND TRUMPET

Let me remind you these judgments have been furthered by the prayers of the saints. The cries of the godly have come up before the Lord, and He is answering them. Learn that activity originated from heaven shakes the earth, causing disruption in the temporal realm. Also, when Divine judgment takes place, all things harmonize for evil against the wicked. Too, man's best glory fades in the withering effect of fiery indignation, and the most stable falls. It is, indeed, ***"a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."***

***"Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."*** Again, we have a parallel to the plagues of Egypt—except on a larger scale. In Egypt, God declared, ***"I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river"*** (Ex 7:17-18). The ecologists must have been alarmed! The river, probably the Nile, was a god to the Egyptians. For it to be turned into blood was a judgment of greatest magnitude. If men wonder if this can literally happen, let them consider that first plague in Egypt. God did that, and none should think it impossible that He can do it again. The nature of this volume, however, does not allow us to limit its affirmations to such phenomena. There are principles to be seen, history to be perceived, and coming judgment to be acknowledged.

### **A Great Burning Mountain**

Here judgment that can be obstructed is declared. The mountain, most stable of all natural resources available to man, is cast into the sea. The mountain

offers no hiding place, no refuge, no safety. It is indicative the removal of hope, and inevitable Divine confrontation.

In the first trumpet, the stability of the trees proved no match for Divine indignation. Now we see a mountain, noted for far greater stability than trees, ignited with fire, and **“tossed like a ball”** (Isa 22;18) into the sea. When it struck the sea, it reeked havoc. Blood, death, and destruction followed. These are violent words, calculated to stir slumbering hearts, showing the sobriety with which life is to be addressed.

Here judgment that cannot be obstructed is declared. The mountain, most stable of all natural resources available to man, is cast into the sea. The mountain offers no hiding place, no refuge, no safety. It is indicative of the removal of hope, and of inevitable Divine confrontation. The text reminds me of the Lord’s curse against Esau. **“But I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation, and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness”** (Mal 1:3, NASB). There is no hiding for the wicked when their mountain is violently thrown into the sea. As it is written, **“Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'”** (Lk 23:30). Again, it is written of the wicked, **“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”** (Rev 6:16).

The language also brings the words of Jesus to mind. **“Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done”** (Matt 21:21). The casting of a mountain into the sea is indicative of a curse—a judgment from God, of which the cursing of the fig tree was a figure (Matt 21:19-21). Suddenly, an immovable mountain, cast by Omnipotence into the sea! Something thought impossible taking place abruptly and effectively. Let every soul take heed not to live as

though things will continue as they are!

### **A Figure of Speech**

While there is no question about the possibility of a mountain being cast into the sea (as in a volcanic eruption), this is more a figure of speech. The Lord, as it were, draws near to His enemies in these trumpets, to cast them down. This is the meaning of Ezekiel's words. *"All the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains"* (Ezek 38:20-21). Micah also was inspired to speak in this manner. *"The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place"* (Micah 1:4). Here is the language of overthrow by miraculous means. This is not a commentary on earthly history, the march of nations, or the mere collapse of empires. While all of those things are involved, this is the **judgment** of the Almighty. It is not God using the deeds of men to accomplish His purpose, but **causing** things to happen. He is the One doing the deed. As it is written, *"The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these"* (Isa 45:7, NASB). The KJV uses the expression *"create evil"* in this verse. The *"evil"* in reference is not moral evil, but tragedy, or catastrophe. As Amos confirms, *"If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"* (Amos 3:6).

### **The Waters Partially Corrupted**

Now the judgment of God is directed toward the waters—the place of commerce and life-sustaining food. One third of the sea becomes blood—but for God's mercy, it would **ALL** have become blood. The waters thus lose their vitality. The third part can no longer provide food, they are not good for drink, and are loathsome for travel. See the

Divine control in this judgment. The great burning mountain does its work, but only to the extent of the Divine will—and precisely so. God is incensed by the conduct of His offspring, yet is not ruled by His wrath. In this plague is an example of our Lord remembering mercy when pouring out His wrath (Hab 3:2).

Earth's successes shall begin to wane and vanish, as the hand of the Lord is upon it. Yet, provision will be made for repentance and recovery. As we proceed through this book, we will find this provision, however, will only confirm the hardness of heart that dominates the enemies of the Lord.

There are other examples of water being turned into blood in scripture. Twice Moses turned water into blood (Ex 4:9; 7:17). In a conflict with the Moabites, the sun shone upon the water, causing the Moabites to believe it had turned into blood. This, they were discomfited by the Israelites (2 Kgs 3:22-23). In a lamentation against Pharaoh, king of Egypt, Ezekiel declared God would fill the valleys with Egyptian carcasses, and cause their blood to flow through the land like a mighty river (Ezek 32:5-6). Later in Revelation, we will encounter God's two witnesses, who have power to turn water into blood (Rev 11:6). Again, in the pouring out of the vials of judgment, an angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man, and everything in it died (Rev 16:3).

**This speaks of uncontested, yet measured, overthrow!** Earth's successes shall begin to wane and vanish, as the hand of the Lord is upon it. Yet, provision will be made for repentance and recovery. As we proceed through this book, we will find this provision, however, will only confirm the hardness of heart that dominates the enemies of the Lord.

### **Partial Death to Creatures in the Water**

*And a third of the living creatures in the sea died. . .* ” So precise is the judgment, that the creatures of the sea only die where the judgment has taken place. Those affected by the curse are confined to the place and proportion of the curse, praise the Lord. A large part of life is destroyed, but not the largest! The enemies of God, therefore, who have shed the blood of His saints, will experience a foretaste of the greater wrath to come. They will behold how powerless they are in the wake of Divine power, and how precise and controlled is the execution of Divine wrath.

### **Partial Destruction of Ships**

“ . . . *and a third of the ships were destroyed.*” Control! Control! Control! There is Sovereign control throughout judgment as well as mercy. The purpose of the Lord is never adjudicated in an ad hoc manner. It is always carried out with precision, thoroughly, and in strict accord with the Divine nature. Whatever one may choose to think about *the free will, of man*, it has no relevance whatsoever in the working of God. No person, regardless of the level of ingenuity or and consistency of determination can save one fish or one ship from the destroying hand of God. In a single and decisive act, God can bring commercial activity to a grinding halt. He did in the depression experienced by our country, and He can do it again.

Here, the judgment of God is poured out upon earthly trade, bartering, business, success, and stability. Military superiority, often found upon the high seas, is brought down like crackling paper. Later, in the unveiling of God’s judgment

Rome, however, had publically aligned itself against the Lord and His Christ. They persecuted His people, and considered Jesus inferior to the Roman government. Thus, they would be judged upon the sea, just as surely as they were upon the land.

against the false church, spiritual Babylon, God devastated those upon the sea. The

language is arresting. ***“For in one hour such great riches came to nothing. Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’ They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate’”*** (Rev 18:17-19). If you are ever tempted to become impatient with the seeming invincibility of the wicked, remember the trumpets! God can ***“break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind”*** (Psa 48:7).

A thriving sea commerce is depicted in Scripture as a sign of success. ***“All the ships of the sea and their sailors were with you in order to deal in your merchandise”*** (Ezek 27:9). In the same manner, judgment poured out upon the sea, sea life, and ships upon the sea, is a indication of the sudden failure of this means of support and success. Militarily speaking, many wars have been won on the high seas. In this trumpet, the overthrow of the ships indicates defeat in the very area where triumph was once enjoyed.

## **An Historical View**

Historically, there was a significant overthrow of the enemies of God upon the high seas. About 422 A.D., hordes of warriors poured down from the North. They were even more savage than the Goths before them. They rushed over Gaul, swept through Spain, over the narrow strait of Gibraltar, and ripped Africa from the hand of Rome. They then prepared to assault Rome by sea with a massive fleet, engaging in a fierce effort for mastery of the Mediterranean sea. For 600 years, no hostile ship had disputed Rome’s mastery of the sea.

Rome, however, had publically aligned itself against the Lord and His Christ. They persecuted His people, and considered Jesus inferior to the Roman government. Thus, they would be judged upon the sea,

just as surely as they were upon the land. The two fleets met at sea in the shock of battle, with the sea literally reddened with the blood of warriors. The Islands of the sea then fell into the hands of Barbarian Vandals. The Roman ensign was removed thirty years after the context began. Vandals then rushed the beautiful city of Rome, bringing it to the ground. For fourteen years, under the leadership of Genseric, the Vandals spared neither age nor gender, but engaged in wholesale slaughter. For 800 years, Rome had gathered the spoil of other nations. Now that very was taken away in Vandal fleets. It is, indeed, ***“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.”***

Of these Vandals, history records the following. *“ Among the barbarian peoples who attacked the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD were the Vandals, a Teutonic tribe that governed a North African kingdom from 439 to 534. By the 4th century the Vandals were living in the area of the Tisza River (in what is now eastern Hungary). As the Huns moved west later in that century, they pushed the Vandals before them. In December 406 the Vandals crossed the Rhine and invaded Gaul. They ravaged Roman territory there and in 409 invaded Spain. Following a series of defeats inflicted in 417 by the Visigoths, who were fighting on behalf of the Romans, the Vandals moved south to Andalusia. In 429 the new Vandal ruler Gaiseric abandoned Spain and invaded North Africa, which finally fell under his complete control in 439. Gaiseric, who ruled until 477, gained control of the western Mediterranean and sacked Rome in 455. It is to the latter act that the Vandals owe their name. ”*<sup>1</sup>

It is ever true, ***“Do not fight against the LORD God . . . for you shall not prosper!”*** (2 Chron 13:12). Holy prophets have seen this, and held on their way during fierce opposition. ***“But the LORD is with me as a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper”*** (Jer 20:11). We do well to emulate those early proclaimers of unpopular messages, thereby aligning ourselves with the faithful of the ages. God will fully justify our faith in Him, and willingness to wait for

His time. The cause of the righteous, as well as thje righteous themselves will be fully vindicated. Yet a *“little while,”* and he that shall come will come. All the records will then be balanced.

## THE THIRD TRUMPET

*“Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.”* One after another, swiftly and effectively, the judgements of the Lord descend upon the earth. Already, the trees and all green grass have been destroyed. Then a third part of the sea is smitten, with a third part of the creatures in the sea, and a third of all ships being destroyed. Now judgment comes upon the flowing and springing sources of water. For the first time, *“men”* are said to die. The waters are made bitter by a falling star from heaven, causing the death of *“many men.”* You sense the intensity of the plagues is growing. Just as blessings tend to increase, so do curses. As the path of the righteous grows *“brighter and brighter,”* so the path of the wicked increases in darkness.

### A Great Star Falls from Heaven

Jesus said falling stars would be a prelude to His return. *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matt 24:29-30). This indicated a disruption of powers residing in the heaven—the demise, as it were of principalities and powers presiding over the despotic

This falling star brings bitterness to life, making it more difficult to live than to die. It is interesting to note that the great cities on the banks of rivers have, for the most part, been replaced. Judgment came upon them, for nearly all of them were noted for heathenistic ways and opposition to the saints.

nations of the world. A depiction of this type of overthrow is found in the answer to Daniel's prayer (Dan 10:12-20). There is a parallel between the account of Daniel and that of our revelation text, although a slight variation in meaning exists.

In a more general sense, darkened and fallen stars are an indication of unusual trouble. Ezekiel used this type of language to describe the fall of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. ***“When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land,’ Says the Lord GOD. ‘I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries which you have not known”*** (Ezek 32:7-9). Joel also used this type of language in a vivid depiction of the day of the Lord. ***“The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness. The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it?”*** (Joel 2:10-11). Here, then, is judgment from God, executed by his great army of men upon the earth.

This is the announcement of great trouble and sorrow! First fire burned up vegetation. Second, a burning mountain was cast into the sea, bringing violent disruption. Now a burning star falls from heaven into the rivers and springs of water. Fire in every case—fire that goes before the presence of the Lord—fiery judgment. Bit by bit, judgments come

upon the world, diffusing its power, and heaping punishment upon it for its rejection of the reigning Lamb, and its treatment of the saints.

### **A Time of Intense Trouble and Sorrow**

This is not an insignificant event. This falling star brings bitterness to life, making it more difficult to live than to die. It is interesting to note that the great cities on the banks of rivers have, for the most part, been replaced. Judgment came upon them, for nearly all of them were noted for heathenistic ways and opposition to the saints.

The name of this star is ***“Wormwood,”*** or *bitterness*. Among other things, this reveals the emphasis is placed upon the **effect** produced rather than upon the instrument through whom came. It also speaks more of principle than of specifics, although historic occurrences are involved. Of old time, ***“wormwood”*** was a symbol describing turning away from the Lord. ***“So that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood”*** (Deut 29:18). It also is a term accentuating the judgment of God, where men are made to taste the bitterness of their rejection of Him. ***“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: ‘Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, And make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem Profaneness has gone out into all the land’*** (Jer 23:15; 9:15; Lam 3:15,19).

As the text indicates, this is a bitterness that eventuates in death. This type of language is seen in Proverbs 5:4-5. ***“But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell.”*** This is the judgment of ***“life for life,”*** which is a Divine prerogative. It is a sentence that removes peace, prosperity, strength, and hope. It brings affliction and torment, unsettling tranquility and removing ease and convenience. What is more,

it is a prolonged judgment with lingering effects.

We do have an historical judgment of this sort in Scripture. Habakkuk sounded the alarm in words much like those of our text. ***“Look among the nations and watch; Be utterly astounded! For I will work a***

God does bring judgment through the means of others—both individuals and nations. We need to know the Lord is like this. It will assist us to temper our judgment, and not take matters into our own hands. If the martyrs of old did not retaliate, curse, or do despite to those who slew them for pleasure, what ought we to do toward those speaking evil of us?

work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, And more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; Their cavalry comes from afar; They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come for violence; Their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it” (Hab 1:5-10), NKJV). There is a ***“bitter and hasty nation,”*** like ***“wormwood.”*** They were terrible, dreadful, swift, fierce, violent, and scornful—like a flaming star falling suddenly into the waters.

God does bring judgment through the means of others—both individuals and nations (Isa 7:17-19; Ezek 6:3-7; 16:36-43; 23:22-28). We need to know the Lord is like this. It will assist us to temper our judgment, and not take matters into our own hands. If the martyrs of old did not retaliate, curse, or do despite to those who slew them for pleasure, what ought we to do toward those speaking evil of us? Just as surely as the God vindicated the martyrs, so will He exculpate all who

have owned Him publically, at the expense of ridicule, hardship, and even death.

### **An Historical View**

I want to emphasize that while God poured out judgment upon the *eternal city* of Rome, that does not exhaust the third trumpet. It still stands as a sure token of God's judgment, through other people, against all who abuse His children. At the time of this vision, Rome, in all of its glory and splendor, took it upon itself to persecute the saints of the most high God. Already, decisive blows had been struck against this city, but more was to come. About 440 A.D. there suddenly appeared a shooting star, or meteor-like destroyer. His name was Attila the Hun, called "*the scourge of God.*" He appeared with 800,000 fighting men of fierce countenance. And where did he appear? On the Danube River! This horde had come from Central Asia, marched North of the Euxine Sea from Russia, and now knocked on the river-boundary of the Roman empire.

They overcame opposition on the Danube, and proceeded Westward, and crossed the Rhine River. On the River Marne, they were met in conflict with the hosts of Rome. Historians say that blood actually made the river run red, as an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 violently died. The awesome army proceeded Southwest, and on the banks of the Rhone river met with, and overcame, opposition. Then Attila and the Huns swept down from the Alps, and on the banks of the River Po contended for the mastery of Italy. Of Attila and the Huns, history records the following. "*Attila, d. 453, a ruler of the nomadic Huns, harassed the eastern half of the Roman Empire during the 440s and devastated much of the western half of the empire in 451-52. Because of these exploits he came to be known as the 'Scourge of God.'* In 434, Attila and his brother Bleda negotiated a treaty with the East Roman (Byzantine) emperor Theodosius II and obtained an immense annual tribute of about 300 kg (660 lb) of gold. After six years of peace, the Huns invaded the empire, destroyed several important cities, and

*defeated several imperial armies. After another treaty and payment of more tribute, peace was made. In 445, Attila murdered his brother and launched a new campaign against the empire. In 447 he struck again and forced the emperor to cede large areas of territory south of the Danube to the Huns. Another large tribute was also promised.” 1*

Rome, unable to contend with them, sent to negotiate with Attila, playing on the superstition, they thought, of the Huns. They told them how Alaric sacked Rome, and died three days later. They also reminded them that Genseric had done the same, and also died in a few months. The tactic worked, and Attila turned his hordes to the banks of the Danube. Notwithstanding, he had made the waters bitter for Rome, decidedly weakening her. She had persecuted the saints of the Most High God, and thus was given bitter gall and wormwood to drink.

Let it be said, *“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”* (2 Pet 2:9). How glorious to be relieved of the responsibility of correcting the transgression of others! Too, it refreshes the soul to simply *“wait on the Lord”* in times of trial.

## THE FOURTH TRUMPET

*“Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.”* In strict accord with Divine purpose, the fourth angel blows his trumpet. Nature is again struck, but at the highest level. The sun, moon, and stars, objects of idolatry, yet gifts from God, are smitten . The source of light is reduced by one third! As in nature, so spiritually, illumination is essential to life. The smiting of the sun, moon, and stars, therefore, is language depicting great trouble and handicap.

Throughout Scripture this kind of language is used to express great commotion. Here are some examples. *“For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible . . . After many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously . . . When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land,’ Says the Lord GOD . . . ”* (Isa 13:10-11; 24:22-23; Ezek 32:7-8). In these verses, a total overthrow is seen. Our text, using the same type of language, speaks of a partial overthrow—a judgment in part: **“ONE THIRD.”** This is the same type of judgment that will happen in **“the day of the Lord”** (2 Pet 3:10-13), except it is in part. **Just as salvation is a precursor and sample of what is to come, so are the judgments we are witnessing antecedents to the final judgment.** They reveal the nature of God—His reaction to the abuses of wicked men.

### Figurative Terms

While the actual smiting of nature is not to be ruled out, the strength of these terms is found in the truths of which they are a type, or figure. Let no one doubt that God can cause nature to rebel against humanity. He did in the flood, in the plagues against Egypt, and in various famines for which He called in the land. When nature aligns itself against us, we are to make an association of that condition with the Living God. **“The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm”** (Nah 1:3). By Divine decree, the sun stood still, causing two days in succession, without a night between them (Josh 10:12-13). Showing the control of the creation by the Creator, Isaiah was used to turn the shadow of the sun backward by ten degrees on a sun dial

Rome killed both the Apostle to the Jews, and the Apostle to the Gentiles. It enacted laws that opposed the Gospel being preached, the public confession of Christ, and living to God alone. The Lord therefore dimmed the light of the Gospel, as it were, imposing upon godless men spiritual darkness.

(Isa 38:8-10). Miraculously, a star led wise men from the East to the place where the **“King of the Jews”** was born (Matt 2:2-10). The Lord loosed the waters of the firmament in the flood (Gen 6), and caused the rain to cease and start again, at the word of Elijah (James 5:17-18). The Lord has imposed darkness upon the earth, contrary to astronomical laws (Ex 10:21-22; Lk 23:44). Let no one doubt that our God has control of the elements of nature! He can call for a famine, send a storm, and dry up the heavens. He can cause nature to work against man, disrupting its ordained routine. Further, we are to associate such disruptions with the Lord. Changing weather patterns and unusual environmental circumstances are not to be charged to coincidence.

**There are three perspectives of Scriptural figures of speech. *First*, the language can be taken as it stands, as portraying general truth and principle. *Second*, it can be viewed spiritually, as paralleling occurrences in the spiritual realm. *Third*, it can be seen in historic happenings that provide men with an example of Divine intrusion into the affairs of men. It is my persuasion that all three of these are involved in the message of Revelation. There are general Kingdom principles declared in the these figures. There are great spiritual realities that are unfolded in them. Additionally, we can behold an outworking of these principles in history, thereby confirming to our hearts they are not mere myths or stories.**

### **A Spiritual Principle Seen**

The book of Revelation is opening the manner in which Christ is ruling the Kingdom. It is showing us how God works everything together for the good of His people, and everything for evil against those who blatantly oppose His Son, resist His truth, and persecute His people.

In this text, sources of light are reduced by one third—again, a token of mercy. Mind you, the truth of God had been rejected by the dominating world government. Rome killed both the Apostle to the Jews, and the Apostle to the Gentiles. It enacted laws that opposed the Gospel being preached, the public confession of Christ, and living to God alone. The Lord therefore dimmed the light of the Gospel, as it were, imposing upon godless men spiritual darkness. This was a fulfillment of the word spoken by Amos. ***“And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord GOD, That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, And all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, And baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, And its end like a bitter day. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord GOD, That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it”*** (Amos 8:9-12). See, the language is similar to that of our text. He speaks of a spiritual phenomenon in terms of the impacting of nature. As in our text, the darkness was partial. The sun went ***“down at noon.”***

When the truth of the Gospel is continually rejected, and finally maligned, it will be withdrawn from men. Those who dare to tamper with the truth of God do not know what they are doing. The Lord will not long endure the abuse of His servants and the rejection of the ***“record He has given of His Son”*** (1 John 5:10-11).

## *The Dark Ages*

Here is a prophecy, as we will see, of the *dark ages*-- one of the most dreadful periods of human history. God can cause men to ***“grope in the dark without light”*** (Job 12:25). He can mandate that ***“their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the LORD pursue them”*** (Psa 35:6). He ***“set”*** men ***“in dark places,”*** where the sun does not give its light, neither the moon nor the stars (Lam 3:6). He did this to the Jews, causing ***“blindness in part”*** to happen to them (Rom 11:20). He also caused this condition to take place in the Gentile world, that spurned the message of creation (Rom 1:21). Micah spoke of such darkness with powerful words. ***“Therefore you shall have night without vision, And you shall have darkness without divination; The sun shall go down on the prophets, And the day shall be dark for them”*** (Mic 3:6).

The historical view is showing the demise of the Roman Empire—a government which seemed invincible. The four trumpets, from an historical point of view, declare that fall by stages. Founded in 509 B.C., ancient Rome finally fell in 476 A.D., nearly 1,000 years later.

The acceptance of the truth of God brings great blessing at every level. But when that truth is censured and attacked, curses are released at every level. Nations have fallen simply because of their rejection of the truth of God. Great hardships have been endured by peoples because of opposition to the Gospel of Christ. Curses of famine, tempests, and pestilence, have been endured by whole bodies of people because of the refusal to yield to the Living God. There are sufficient records in Scripture of such occurrences to make this quite clear. Even though Christ Jesus has come, there has not been a cessation of this type of thing. The destruction of Jerusalem over three and a half decades after Jesus returned to heaven, is sufficient to confirm this to be the case.

## **An Historical View**

The historical view is showing the demise of the Roman Empire—a government which seemed invincible. The four trumpets, from an historical point of view, declare that fall by stages. Founded in 509 B.C., ancient Rome finally fell in 476 A.D., nearly 1,000 years later.

In 476 A.D., Odoacer, king of Heruli, a Northern race, was encouraged by the apparent weakness of Rome, to come against it. He besieged and took the city in that year. Of him, history records, “*A Germanic warrior and king of Italy, Odoacer, also known as Odovacar, b. c.433, dethroned the young emperor Romulus Augustulus on Aug. 28, 476, bringing the moribund Western Roman Empire to a formal end.*”<sup>1</sup> The Roman senate, that had met for 1,228 years, was driven from its chambers, and the mighty fabric of the Roman empire fell to the ash-heap of deposed empires, never to rise again.

With the fall of Rome came the *dark ages* – a period of unparalleled spiritual ignorance. Of the *dark ages*, often called the *middle ages*, history says, “*Dark Ages is the name traditionally given to the period in European history from the fall of the Roman Empire in the west (5th century) to the coronation of Charlemagne (800), or sometimes to the 10th century. The term has also been used to denote the entire Middle Ages down to the Renaissance (15th century). Modern historians avoid using the term because of its value-laden implications of barbarism and intellectual darkness.*”<sup>1</sup> Here is a period of 1,000 years, dominated by the ignorance of God. The Word of God was hidden away, inaccessible to the masses, and, therefore, heathenistic traditions penetrated the *Christian* shell of the church.

During this time, the church of God gave only a feeble light, hidden, as it were, beneath the rubble of religious tradition and superstition. Even the art of this era reflected hopelessness, confusion, and rank superstition. The Word of God was wrested from the hands of the people and buried in the recesses of monasteries. It was during this time

that Roman Catholicism rose to power, with Papal Rome replacing Pagan Rome. It is a dark and evil epoch in Christian history! The world, which had, for the most part, rejected the Son of God, was sent “**strong delusion.**” Its most glorious government crumbled to the ground. Ruthless barbarians ruled the world, and human life and dignity plummeted into the black hole of disregard.

Those who suppose they can be indifferent to, or even oppose the truth of God, do well to ponder the first four trumpets. They announce to us that God **will** reckon with His enemies in this world – before the consummation of the ages. Both men and nations will reap what they have sown!

## A SOLEMN WARNING SOUNDED

One might suppose what has been declared is judgment enough -- but it is not. Now another angel appears, sounding an alarm to the world. God has not finished. His wrath has only begun. “***And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’***” The NASB, RSV, and NIV versions say John saw “***an eagle flying***” through the midst of the heavens. Because this represents a messenger, bearing a most somber communication, I gather “***an angel***” is the most appropriate language. While he may have taken the form of an eagle, it was the message that makes his appearance unique. Therefore, “***an angel***” is most suitable for the context.

Only 57% of the judgments are completed at this point – four of seven. There are yet three trumpets to sound, and they will be even more fierce than the preceding four! Those who have a saccharine, or honeyed, view of the Almighty will find this section difficult to receive.

Waves of wrath rush over the ungodly, effecting the whole world. Truly, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God”*** (Heb 10:31).

The phrase ***“inhabiters of the earth”*** is thought by some to be confined to the ungodly. However, the expression is used again in chapter 12, where a warning of the wrath of Satan is sounded (verse 12). From that second text, it becomes clear that ***“inhabiters of the earth”*** is not confined to the ungodly. In chapter twelve, Satan’s wrath is vented against the people of God, depicted as ***“the woman which brought forth the man child.”*** While his diabolical efforts are thwarted, they presume the presence of God’s people in the realm of danger.

It is my persuasion that we are living in a segment—perhaps the ending-- of this dreadful time, when great woe is pronounced upon those in the earth. While the ungodly themselves will suffer Divine reprisal, the godly will also go through great stress and trouble.

Notice, we have here a triple warning: ***“Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth.”*** This is the only time in all of the Bible that such a warning is issued, and we do well to give it due consideration. What follows will be awesome.

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of things that can be observed in this remarkable passage. Three of them will be sufficient to undergird what has been said.

**Nature bears the brunt of man’s sin.** The sin of humanity has so

infected nature, that it bears the brunt of Divine wrath. This is pictured in the violent influences upon it depicted in the first four trumpets. Trees, all green grass, the sea, and the creatures in the sea are influenced. The rivers, the fountains of waters, the sun, the moon, and the stars, are affected. While these all are symbolic, they are not **only** symbolic. They confirm that the burden of mortality, or the bondage of corruption, has been passed to the entire natural order because of man's sin.

**Pent up forces waiting to be released.** All about us, Divine restraint may be detected. Many have marveled the Lord had been so long suffering. Some even dare to imagine He is indifferent, asleep, or does not exist at all. But this is not the case. Angelic hosts, and the entire natural order waits for His bidding. In a moment sudden calamity can break forth with destructive force. This is not intended to cause cringing fear in the saints. It **is** to alert the ungodly of the serious jeopardy in which they daily live. It is also calculated to sharpen the saints perception, commitment, and aggressive involvement in the Kingdom of God.

**The fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.** From the historical perspective, we are seeing the collapse of the feet of iron and clay, the final world empire of the vision of Daniel (Dan 2:31-45). The epitome of earthly government was seen in the vision of a giant statue. With a head of gold, the material of this image deteriorated from the head to the feet—an indication of the declining nature of worldly power at its best. There were four divisions to that statue. ***“This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay”*** (Dan 2:32-33). The statute was totally destroyed by a small stone, cut out of a mountain ***“without hands,”*** that became a mountain filling the whole earth (Dan 2:34-35). Daniel, through inspiration, affirmed this stood for four successive kingdoms, each one replacing the one before it. The four consecutive empires were (1) the Babylonish, under Nebuchadnezzar, (2) The Medo-Persian empire, under Cyrus, (3) The

Macedonian empire, under Alexander the Great and his successors, and (4) The Roman empire under the Caesars.

Daniel interprets the demise of these kingdoms as the triumph of the Kingdom of God. ***“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure”*** (Dan 2:44-45). Historically speaking, what we have seen in the first four trumpets is the destruction of that fourth Kingdom of Rome. Indeed, the dream was ***“certain,”*** and the interpretation was ***“sure.”***

Among other things, we will see throughout the remainder of this book the real nature of human government. It eventually opposes the government of God, however noble its beginnings may be. Also, all human governments will ultimately fail, as ***“The kingdoms of this world”*** will ***“become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*** (Rev 11:15).

Here, I provide a historical overview of these kingdoms as given by Adam Clarke.

I. HEAD OF GOLD. This was the first monarchy, begun by Nimrod, A.M.1771, B.C. 2233, and ending with the death of Belshazzar, A.M. 3466, B.C. 538, after having lasted nearly seventeen hundred years. In the time of Nebuchadnezzar it extended over Chaldea, Assyria, Arabia, Syria, and Palestine. HE,

Nebuchadnezzar, was the head or gold.

II. BREASTS AND ARMS OF SILVER. The Medo-Persian empire; which properly began under Darius the Mede, allowing him to be the same with Cyaxares, son of Astyages, and uncle to Cyrus the great, son of Cambyses. He first fought under his uncle Cyaxares, defeated Neriglissar, king of the Assyrians, and Craesus, king of the Lydians; and, by the capture of Babylon, B.C. 538, terminated the Chaldean empire. On the death of his father Cambyses, and his uncle Cyaxares, B.C. 536, he became sole governor of the Medes and Persians, and thus established a potent empire on the ruins of that of the Chaldeans.

III. BELLY AND THIGHS OF BRASS. The Macedonian or Greek empire, founded by Alexander the Great. He subdued Greece, penetrated into Asia, took Tyre, reduced Egypt, overthrew Darius Codomanus at Arbela, Oct. 2, A.M. 3673, B.C. 331, and thus terminated the Persian monarchy. He crossed the Caucasus, subdued Hyrcania, and penetrated India as far as the Ganges; and having conquered all the countries that lay between the Adriatic sea and this river, the Ganges, he died A.M. 3681, B.C. 323; and after his death his empire became divided among his generals, Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. CASSANDER had Macedon and Greece; LYSIMACHUS had Thrace, and those parts of Asia which lay on the Hellespont and Bosphorus; PTOLEMY had Egypt, Lybia, Arabia, Palestine, and Coelesyria; SELEUCUS had Babylon, Media, Susiana, Persia, Assyria, Bactria, Hyrcania, and all other provinces, even to the Ganges. Thus this empire, founded on the ruin of that of the Persians, “had rule over all the earth.”

IV. LEGS OF IRON, AND FEET AND TOES OF IRON AND CLAY. I think this means, in the first place, the kingdom of the LAGIDAE, in Egypt; and the kingdom of the SELEUCIDAE, in Syria. And, secondly, the ROMAN empire, which was properly composed of them.

1. PTOLEMY LAGUS, one of Alexander’s generals, began the new kingdom of Egypt, A.M. 3692, B.C. 312, which was continued through a long race of sovereigns, till A.M. 3974, B.C. 30; when Octavius Caesar took Alexandria, having in the preceding year defeated Anthony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium, and so Egypt became a Roman province. Thus ended the kingdom of the Lagidae, after it had lasted two hundred and eighty-two years.

2. SELEUCUS NICATOR, another of Alexander's generals, began the new kingdom of Syria, A.M. 3692, B.C. 312, which continued through a long race of sovereigns, till A.M. 3939, B.C. 65, when Pompey dethroned Antiochus Asiaticus, and Syria became a Roman province after it had lasted two hundred and forty-seven years. That the two legs of iron meant the kingdom of the Lagidae and that of the Seleucidae, seems strongly intimated by the characters given in the text. "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron. Forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise," ver. 40. 1. The iron here not only marks the strength of these kingdoms, but also their violence and cruelty towards the people of God. History is full of the miseries which the kings of Egypt and Syria inflicted on the Jews. 2. It is said that these legs should break in pieces and bruise. How many generals and princes were destroyed by Seleucus Nicator, and by Ptolemy, son of Lagus! Seleucus, particularly, could not consider himself secure on his throne till he had destroyed Antigonus, Nicanor, and Demetrius; and Ptolemy endeavored to secure himself by the ruin of Perdiccas, and the rest of his enemies. 3. The dividing of the kingdom, the iron and clayey mixture of the feet, point out the continual divisions which prevailed in those empires; and the mixture of the good and evil qualities which appeared in the successors of Seleucus and Ptolemy; none of them possessing the good qualities of the founders of those monarchies; neither their valor, wisdom, nor prudence. 4. The efforts which these princes made to strengthen their respective governments by alliances, which all proved not only useless but injurious, are here pointed out by their mingling themselves with the seed of men. "But they shall not cleave one to another," ver. 43. Antiochus Theos, king of Syria, married both Laodice and Berenice, daughters of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt. Antiochus Magnus, king of Syria, gave his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy Epiphanes, king of Egypt; but these marriages, instead of being the means of consolidating the union between those kingdoms, contributed more than any thing else to divide them, and excite the most bloody and destructive wars. In chap. 7:7, the prophet, having the same subject in view, says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it," and in chap. 8:22: "Now that being broken," the horn of the rough goat, the Grecian monarchy, "whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power." These and other declarations point out those peculiar circumstances that distinctly mark the kingdom of the Seleucidae, and that of the Lagidae; both of which rose out of the Macedonian or Grecian empire, and both terminated in that of the Romans.

2. These TWO LEGS OF IRON became absorbed in the Roman government, which also partook of the iron nature; strong, military, and extensive in its victories; and by its various conquests united to and amalgamated with itself various nations, some strong, and some weak, so as to be fitly represented in the symbolical image by feet and toes, partly of iron and partly of clay. Thus, as the Lagidae and Seleucidae arose out of the wreck of the Grecian empire; so the Roman empire arose out of there ruin. But the empire became weakened by its conquests; and although, by mingling themselves with the seed of men, that is, by strong leagues, and matrimonial alliances, as mentioned above they endeavored to secure a perpetual sovereignty, yet they did not cleave to each other, and they also were swallowed up by the barbarous northern nations; and thus terminated those four most powerful monarchies.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 17

## THE FIFTH TRUMPET

" Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. they had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things." (Revelation 9:1-12, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing the reaction of heaven to earth's rejection of the

Lord's Christ, and the persecution of His people. Satan has deluded some into believing such reprisals do not take place. These deceived ones conceive of God as incapable of such things. As Peter would say, they are "**willingly ignorant**" (2 Pet 3:5). There is no excuse for such a distorted view of the God of heaven. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit has presented the Divine nature with such precision that only a hardened heart can miss the message. The judgment of God upon Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah's world, Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, Tyre, Sidon, and others speaks too loudly to be ignored. The seven nations expelled from Canaan also provide an example of Divine judgment (Deut 7:1; Acts 13:19), together with the overthrow of Babylon, the Mede/Persian empire,

and the Grecian principality. The fearfulness of falling into the hands of the living God is also seen in the judgment of Jerusalem for failing to recognize the day of its "*visitation*" (Lk 19:42-44). There is such a plentitude of revelation on this subject, there is no excuse to remain in fundamental ignorance of it. Any view of God that accommodates the flesh and makes sinners comfortable is inexcusable. The nurturing of man's sinful nature is inexcusable!

### **Watch Out!**

We must also exercise care to avoid a mere academic approach to this book—as though the Lord was just passing information to us. The purpose of this vision is not to hone up on our history, or provide us with some interesting views of earthly chronology. This is a message from Jesus to the churches—a message that is relevant to living by faith. Although it is written to the seven churches of Asia, it is not for them alone. Repeatedly the Lord says, "***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***" (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Too, a blessing is pronounced upon every individual who reads, hears, and retains the words of this volume (1:3). Additionally, a dreadful curse is pronounced upon anyone who dares to tamper with its message by adding to it or taking from it (22:18-19). It is difficult to conceive of any message being more relevant!

## **We Must Be Discerning**

It is our business to discern what is being said by Jesus. The language of this book confirms its importance. It is not the language of fantasy, but of great sobriety. Eternal issues are at stake. The wrath of the Almighty is declared. The judgment of the wicked is proclaimed. The protection of the righteous is affirmed. The Sovereign control of the Almighty is revealed in all of these things. How our faith needs to take hold of these realities. They will prove to be a deterrent to sin and an encouragement to righteousness.

## **A Lamentable Condition**

It is our business to discern what is being said by Jesus. The language of this book confirms its importance. It is not the language of fantasy, but of great sobriety. Eternal issues are at stake. The wrath of the Almighty is declared. The judgment of the wicked is proclaimed.

In our country, the fear of God is relatively unknown—even within the professed church. Under the direction of the wicked one, a view of the Lord has been developed and perpetrated that is powerless to keep men from sin or involve them in righteousness. Men appear to think little of infracting the Law of God, going on in sin and unacceptable behavior without a twinge of their conscience. It is a time of appalling apostasy that demands the proclamation of the message of Revelation. Jesus did not countenance godless toleration, indifference and lukewarmness in the churches of Asia, and He will not tolerate it today. He rained down judgment upon His enemies in early centuries, and He will do it today.

Every person does well to allow this book to stir their spirits to the nature of spiritual life, the disposition of God, and the traits of the reign

of Jesus. The Lord is favorably disposed toward those living by faith, who have embraced and follow His Son. He will see to it that the world is governed with them in mind. But for those who choose to live with God and His great salvation pushed into the background, He will orchestrate the affairs of this world to work against them, contributing to their final demise and ultimate removal from His presence.

## **Heresy and Divine Judgment**

In this section of the Revelation, we will see that the spread of heresy was nothing less than a judgment from God. The professed church had become so lethargic it had become God's enemy. Not only were true believers oppressed by the heathen, they were also oppressed by those claiming identity with the Lord Jesus—the nominal church. Tradition and empty formality ran roughshod over the Christian community as nominal Christendom took upon itself the character of the world. Thus, judgment came from heaven. If ever there was a time when this message was relevant, it is our time. **The enemies of God have become more assertive because the professed church has retreated into the darkness of indifference.** The real people of God can scarcely find a place of refuge from Satanic initiatives. Throughout our country there is a remnant who hunger and thirst for righteousness, yet are being limited by powerless preachers and lifeless churches. Like a great thief, *institutionalism* has arisen to plunder the souls of men. The condition has **not** gone unnoticed! God in heaven has seen the plight of His people!

## **THE FIFTH TRUMPET IS BLOWN**

*“Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.”* Earlier, John beheld a star **falling** from heaven (8:10-11), but this is not what he

sees now. This is a star that has already fallen from heaven to the earth. The NASB refers to *“a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth.”* Scripture often uses the word *“star”* to denote one occupying a lofty position. The Lord Jesus, for example, was prophesied to be a *“Star out of Jacob”* (Num 24:17). The lofty angels are also referred to as *“morning (or, very bright) stars”* (Job 38:7). Satan himself, referred to as *“Lucifer, son of the morning,”* is depicted as a star fallen from heaven (Isa 14:12). Just as Isaiah’s prophecy applied to a person with Satanic traits ( *“the king of Babylon”* –Isa 14:4), so this trumpet includes the idea of someone of Satanic character bringing a scourge upon the earth. When the early disciples began to make inroads into Satan’s empire, Jesus’ explained their success by saying, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”* (Lk 10:18).

The language is precise, and we must give heed to it. This is **not** star from heaven coming to the earth, as found in the Lord Jesus. It is a star already *“fallen”* to the earth. Christ’s entrance into the world (or more precisely, His work in the world) was the evidence of humility. He came on a mission from heaven that required laying aside Divine prerogatives. But this is not the nature of the star confronted in the fifth trumpet. This is a **fallen** star – one in a state of moral and spiritual decline. His is an evil mission that, like Satan, reflects his fallen nature. Too, whereas Christ’s mission involved elevating men into *“heavenly places”* (Eph 1:3; 2:6), the activities of this fallen star are confined to the cursed realm of earth.

### **Related to the First Four Trumpets**

The first trumpet is blown **because** of what occurred when the first four trumpets were sounded. It represents an acceleration of judgment. However, we are now introduced to the unleashing of Satanic powers. Here is evil more directly related to hell than anything before it. The terrors that now come upon the earth are beyond the realm of nature. They will transcend military aggression, as spiritual forces are unleashed in the world.

Here is evil more directly related to hell than anything before it. The terrors that now come upon the earth are beyond the realm of nature. They will transcend military aggression, as spiritual forces are unleashed in the world.

Godly men like Tertullian were persuaded the star that fell from heaven was Satan himself. Others, like Arethas, Bede, Vitranga, and Alford feel it was an evil angel. Wordsworth believed an apostate Christian teacher was meant. Notable scholars like Andreas, Bengel, and De Wette were convinced this was a good angel which permitted wicked powers to rise. Still others identify the fallen star with certain evil emperors.

There is a sense in which all of these views are true. **Ultimately, the power of the fallen star is traced to the devil himself (9:11).** Satan, in his work upon the earth, always works through an agent. In the garden of Eden, it was a serpent. Since then, it has been wicked and available men. Too, religious corruption has proved to be his most influential stratagem in opposing the saints. Add to this the fact that Satan cannot left his finger without Divine approval, and you have all of the varied interpretations fulfilled.

I take this “*fallen star*” to mean the devil himself. Ultimately, he is the one behind all moral and spiritual misrepresentation and decline. With remarkably precise words, Isaiah spoke of Satan’s fall. “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High. Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit*” (Isa 14:12-15).

Just as the ultimate exaltation was that of the Lord Jesus, with all other exaltations subordinate to His, so the ultimate falling is that of Satan, with all others subordinate to his. All spiritual demise is ultimate traced to him, and is governed by God.

### **The Key to the Bottomless Pit**

Notice, the key to the abyss was “*given*” to this fallen star—to Satan himself. This is an occasion under Divine control! Hell cannot spread its malignancy until granted from the Throne to do so! I have said it before, but must do so again. **The devil cannot operate at will.** He is under the Governor, and his horde of locusts cannot be released simply because he desires it. He cannot obtain or use the key that unlocks evil unless it is given to him! This is intended to be a comfort to the godly. It is also intended to warn the ungodly that their conduct may very well give God a reason to loose the powers of darkness. It is God Who possesses the key to the bottomless pit. He can lock it or open it; restrain iniquity or allow it to flourish.

The principle seen in this trumpet is alarming. **Spiritual degeneracy becomes the occasion of the temporary triumph of evil.** Through it, the forces of hell are unleashed, and great wickedness is promoted. Several times in this book, the success of Satan is associated with spiritual degeneracy. Men simply cannot fall away from the truth without Satan being given an advantage. Do you wonder why the Apostles zealously charged the church to awake from sleep (Rom 13:11-12)? They knew a lethargic church would surely occasion the rise of evil, the promotion of delusion, and the opening of the bottomless pit. A weak church is an unspeakable liability.

## **THE BOTTOMLESS PIT IS OPENED**

*“And he opened the bottomless pit . . . ”* O, what a dreadful picture is this! The *“bottomless pit”* is mentioned seven times in the Revelation (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3).

The *“angel of the bottomless pit”* is none other than Satan himself, called *Abaddon* and *Apollyon* –the Destroyer (9:11). Later, a *“beast”* rises from this region to make war with the saints, and even to *“overcome”* them (11:7). We will find this to be political, or governmental, power. Another *“beast”* also rises from the *“bottomless pit”* to oppose the saints (17:8), which will be identified as corrupt religion. Before the book is concluded, a mighty angel possessing the key to this abyss will restrain Satan, whereas his influence is loosed in our present text (20:1-3). **Bless God, the devil is a controlled adversary, else there would be no hope for mankind!**

If this were all of the information we had about the *“bottomless pit,”* it should drive believers to so live as to constrain God to keep the pit shut. No person realizing the depravity of this pit will ever want it to be opened, or its contents spewed out among men.

### **A Figurative View**

From a figurative point of view, the *“bottomless pit”* is seen in the depraved nature of fallen man. The capacity of men for evil staggers the imagination of the most prodigious thinkers among our race. Little

Those who do not flee to Christ for refuge are oblivious to their own capacity for evil. From time to time we hear of barbarous and atrocious acts of individuals that go beyond all reason.

wonder Jeremiah exclaimed, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”*** (Jer 17:9). Those who do not flee to Christ for refuge are oblivious to their own capacity for evil. From time to time we hear of barbarous and atrocious acts of individuals that go beyond all reason. An example of the pervasive effect of such depravity is seen in the world of Noah’s day. ***“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence”*** (Gen 6:5,11).

The Lord’s description of how He found His people, Jacob, again illustrates the depths to which humanity has fallen, and the evil of which it is capable. ***“For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness . . . ”*** (Deut 32:10). The fallen human nature is like a wild beast in a barren wasteland—not to be trusted, and capable of enormous deeds of evil. The unregenerate nature, still resident in the saved, has a dreadful capacity— ***“bottomless”***—for iniquity. Little wonder it is described as ***“dead in trespasses and sins,”*** the place where the Satan now works (Eph 2:1-2). Such as live under the dominion of that nature are ***“children of wrath,”*** who are ***“condemned already”*** (Eph 2:3; John 3:18). Think of descriptions like ***“having no hope and without God in the world”*** (Eph 2:12), ***“being past feeling”*** (Eph 4:19), and ***“corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”*** (Eph 4:22). Ponder being ***“once darkness”*** (Eph 5:8), under ***“the power of darkness”*** (Col 1:13), and ***“alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works”*** (Col 1:21). Who among us does not fear the unlocking of such debauched powers!

**Take care, child of God, not to feed this part of your nature, lest it be unlocked, and you suffer the consequences!**

I understand it is not fashionable to speak in this manner, yet our day demands that we do so. Men are lingering on the edge of the ***“bottomless pit,”*** unaware of its depth. Too, others are oblivious of the fact that as they neglect God’s ***“great salvation,”*** they move closer to the abyss. Remember, the key belongs to the Lord! He can lock or unlock blessing and cursing as well. ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”***

### **Smoke Rises from the Pit**

***“ . . . and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.”*** Here is a vivid depiction of delusion, and its effects upon the minds of men. This is nothing less than the clouding of men’s minds, and the darkening of their understanding. Yet, it is more than that. This is extraordinary delusion, and unusually effective. It is pervasive, successfully obscuring the bright light of the sun and defiling the purity of the air. What a dreadful circumstance!

In my judgment, it is not good to press this figure too far, attempting to limit its meaning by specific historic occurrences. It will be demonstrated in history, to be sure, but the message of this text extends beyond an historic perspective. We are to behold here the things of which Satan is capable when the God permits and restraints are removed. This is particularly true in the area of delusion, or the darkening of the understanding.

Make no mistake about this, the devil can, and does, blind the minds of those ***“who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them”*** (2 Cor 4:4). Were it not for Divine restraint upon him, his delusion of ***“the whole world”*** (Rev 12:9; 1 John 5:19) would have continued uninterrupted until the heavens are rolled up as a scroll!

An arresting depiction of the judgment of God is provided by Joel. It speaks with the same tones reflected in the passage before us. ***“Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, The like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations”*** (Joel 2:1-2).

Here is a vivid depiction of delusion, and its effects upon the minds of men. This is nothing less than the clouding of men’s minds, and the darkening of their understanding. Yet, it is more than that. This is extraordinary delusion, and unusually effective.

This entire passage is remarkably like that of Revelation. Joel spoke of a great and strong people who would sweep like a devastating plague over the land. He declared, ***“Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like swift steeds, so they run”*** (2:4), affirming that fear would grip the hearts of all who saw them (2:6). Like that of our text, this is the language of Divine judgment—fierce and irresistible judgment! Truly, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”***

### **Locusts Come Out of the Smoke**

***“Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”*** This is no small judgment! Throughout Scripture, locusts are associated with fierce and unrelenting destruction. You may recall the plague of locusts visited upon Egypt. They ***“covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the***

*fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt”* (Ex 10:12-15). Destruction! The Lord declared His judgment upon Israel in the same language. *“You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it”* (Deut 28:38). He said He would *“command the locusts to devour the land”* (2 Chron 7:13). Joel also spoke of utter devastation at the hand of the locust (Joel 1:4). Scripture has associated the locust with Divine judgment, destruction, and devastation. (Psa 105:34; Joel 2:25; Nah 3:15)

In this case, we have a **militant delusion–delusion fostered by violence or force rather than mere philosophy**. The carriers of this *“strong delusion”* will spread their misconception by force. We will find an historical fulfillment of this, but it does not exhaust this prophecy. Further comments on this horde of locusts will be made later in this lesson.

### **The Sending of Delusion**

We know from even more specific teaching on this subject that continued rejection of the truth will be judged by God. He will loose, as it were, the forces of hell, sending religious deception to those who refused His Gospel. Hear the Word of the Lord. *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess 2:9-12).

We must never forget this book is a declaration of the manner of the Kingdom. It reveals how Jesus is maintaining the government, which is

upon His shoulder, and His alone (Isa 9:6-7). Everything He does, whether the opening of the bottomless pit, or the complete exoneration of sinners, is with *“cause.”* He does nothing capriciously, or without a cause. As it is written, *“. . . and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it (Jerusalem) ” says the LORD GOD*” (Ezek 14:23). While our text does not deal with Jerusalem, it does deal with Divine judgment, which is always for a cause.

Whether delusion is perpetrated by those practicing heathen idolatry, the historically religiously-militant Mohammedan, or the *Christian* sectarian, the effect is the same. Hard hearts are given the lie to embrace, in order that their condemnation might be just, and the truth of God be vindicated. **Delusion is inevitable where the truth is not embraced.** There is no acceptable alternative to believing the truth!

## STRICT DIVINE CONTROL

Divine judgment is never out of control, raging like a wild fire. Notice the level of control on this judgment. The militants are *“commanded”* not to harm anything that is alive. By this, the Spirit means anyone in whom the life of God is found. The people of God will be shielded, as it were, from the delusion that is coming, as Israel was shielded from the plagues of Egypt.

*“They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill*

*them, but to torment them for five months.*” Divine judgment is never out of control, raging like a wild fire. Notice the level of control on this judgment. The militants are “*commanded*” not to harm anything that is alive. By this, the Spirit means anyone in whom the life of God is found. The people of God will be shielded, as it were, from the delusion that is coming, as Israel was shielded from the plagues of Egypt. “*The Lord knoweth them that are His*” (2 Tim 2:19), and will not allow their feet to be moved. Notice also the warring carriers of delusion were not given authority to “*kill,*” but only to “*torment.*” Not only that, the time given to them was precise, “*five months.*” Lest any suppose this meant the judgment was not severe, the Spirit will reveal the torment to be so grievous men would prefer death to life, but be unable to find it.

### **Ezekiel Spoke in the Same Manner**

The Lord has familiarized us with this type of language through the prophet Ezekiel. Through him, the Lord spoke of judgment against Jerusalem in the same manner. Fierce judgment was to come against the holy city, but the people identified with God would be spared. In vivid language the prophet writes, “*He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar.*” The “*six men*” were angelic hosts with authority over Jerusalem, like the angels in Revelation had charge of wind, the waters, fire, etc. One was among them with an “*inkhorn.*” His role was to find the people who lamented the condition of the holy city, and place a mark upon them. “*And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.*” The Lord takes note of those

burdened by the iniquity around them—particularly when it is found among God’s people.

And what will be the portion of those men who lamented over the decadence of the city. Hear the King of glory speak. ***“To the others He said in my hearing, Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary”*** (Ezek 9:1-6). Let us forever purge from our minds any notion that God is tolerant of iniquity! He is righteous, and a God of judgment. He sees both the wicked and the righteous, and will reward both accordingly.

### **The Seal of God**

The tormenters could not touch the servants of God! They were given permission to hurt ***“only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”*** The church, then, has not been removed at this point in Revelation, as some imagine. If this is not the case, we have servants of God, with His seal upon them, who are not in the body of Christ, are not in Christ Jesus, and exist without the influence of the Holy Spirit. It requires a remarkable imagination to conceive of such a thing. It also requires unbelief and a fundamental ignorance of God and His salvation.

The people of God are described here as ***“the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads .”*** As we have said before, the word ***“grass”*** means herbage, or vegetation—like the fresh sprouts eaten by grazing cattle. It is herbage in the state of growth, that has not yet come to maturity. This, therefore, views the people of God as those whose tenure in this world has not yet been completed—who are in a state of growth and are tender. The Psalmist spoke of the people of God as those who ***“shall flourish like grass of the earth”*** (Psa 72:16).

Let us forever purge from our minds any notion that God is tolerant of iniquity! He is righteous, and a God of judgment. He sees both the wicked and the righteous, and will reward both accordingly.

These people are also likened to *“any green thing.”* Here the accentuation is placed upon life itself, and not the development of the life. These are people in whom Deity resides, who are living unto God. Jesus, for example, referred to Himself as a *“green tree”* - one that was living, and filled with Divine life (Lk 23:31). The Psalmist spoke of spiritually flourishing as being *“like a green olive tree in the house of God”* (Psa 52:8).

Those exempted from the torment are also likened to *“any tree,”* an indication of spiritual stability. The saints are truly *“trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified”* (Isa 61:3). These are the people who withstand the storms of life, bear fruit to God, and whose roots tap into the water of life.

And what will be the lot of such people? **They will be sealed in their foreheads!** It adds no strength to the text to think of this as a physical mark, detected by men. This is a mark seen by angelic hosts, not by men. It is in the forehead, because it has chiefly to do with the mind—with the thought patterns of believers. They have experienced the *“renewing”* of their *“mind,”* and with their minds *“serve the law of God”* (Rom 12:2; 7:25). These are the people who *“mind”* the *“things of the Spirit of God”* (Rom 8:5).

The manner in which people THINK identifies who they really are.

Those who cannot think the thoughts of God are simply not of God. They are not sealed in their foreheads!

### **The Significance of the Forehead**

The imagery and significance of the *“forehead”* was developed under the law. Aaron, the High priest, was to wear a plate of pure gold upon his forehead, upon which was engraved **“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”** (Ex 28:36). His mind was to be occupied with things pertaining to God, and therefore his High Priestly attire reflected that situation.

When directing the prophet Ezekiel, God gave him a resolute mind. This was necessary because he was sent to prophesy to an obstinate people. The determined mind given to him is described as a forehead of flint. **“Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house”** (Ezek 3:8-9). The *“forehead,”* therefore, reflects the condition of the mind.

The seal of God upon the forehead depicts a condition where men **think like God** , and are therefore identified with Him. This is nothing less than having **“the mind of Christ,”** an integral part of being conformed to His image .

The seal of God upon the forehead depicts a condition where men **think like God** , and are therefore identified with Him. This is nothing less than having **“the mind of Christ,”** an integral part of being conformed to His image (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 2:16). It is not common to hear such things, but those who do not think like God, or whose mind is not **“controlled by the**

***Spirit***” (Rom 8:6, NIV), have no evidence of identity with the Living God. Such will not be protected from Satanic delusion. The only other kind of mind that can be possessed is a **“*carnal mind,*”** which is **“*enmity against God.*”** Such a mind **“*is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be*”** (Rom 8:7).

It is tragic beyond description that much of what parades itself as *Christian* is actually at variance with God. Not only are the thoughts of countless professed Christians unlike Christ’s, they are at variance with Him. Our text, while declaring fierce Divine judgment, affirms that such people will **not** be protected from the cloud of delusion that will be released upon a world saturated with unbelief. The hedge has been removed from all such individuals.

### **Other References to the “Forehead”**

In addition to the passage in the 9th chapter of Ezekiel, the Spirit refers elsewhere to the **“*forehead*”** being marked. You may recall that the devastating sixth plague was held back until God’s servants were **“*sealed in their foreheads*”** (Rev 7:3). These same sealed ones are also referenced in 14:1. Again, this is an aspect of regeneration called being **“*be renewed in the spirit of your mind*”** (Eph 4:23).

The infamous mark of the **“*beast*”** is said to be received either **“*on their right hand or on their foreheads*”** (Rev 13:16). This is no more an external mark than the seal of God upon the forehead. It is symbolic language denoting conformity to the devil’s delusion. It is either found in DOING what he says, whether willingly or unwillingly (in the right hand), or subscribing in the mind to his manner of thought (in the forehead). Those receiving this mark are mentioned again in 14:9. Such, we are told, **“*drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation*”** (14:10).

Later in Revelation, we are introduced to the false church—the fabrication of the devil himself, offered as a adulterous substitute for the church of the living God. That spiritual harlot also has a name written on her **“forehead.”** The name reminds us of its devilish thought patterns, and alliance with the world. The name is **“MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”** (17:5). That is an appropriate description and chief trait of false religion - deviate thinking!

The real people of God are not only characterized by thinking that reflects the mind of their Savior. They also are noted for NOT thinking as the world and corrupted religion. Thus the martyrs are described as they **“who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands”** (20:4). They did not think like the world, nor did they serve its interests.

The ultimate experience of the saints of God will include the total absence of wayward and unwanted thoughts. Without obscurity, and in glorious clarity, they shall behold their King **“face to face,”** and bask consciously in His presence. How marvelously this is stated in the last chapter of this book. **“They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads”** (22:4).

This conformity in the mind begins now—in this day and time. Now is the time to have our thought patterns changed. They will not be changed when the world ends. **“The mind of Christ”** will not only prepare us for dwelling in Christ’s presence, it will protect us from the delusions of the wicked one. Any representation of *Christianity* that leaves people with a worldly mind-set is false to the core. It is to be rejected with haste, for it will force one into a state of delusion. Only the truth makes men free (John 8:32,36). I am persuaded that multitudes of professed believers have yet to be convinced of this fact.

The scarcity of truth, and the limited quest for it, confirms this to be so.

## A DREADFUL SCOURGE

***“Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.”*** Remember, Divine restraint is placed upon this assault. It was not ***“given”*** to the devil’s messengers to take life. The condition brings the affliction of Job to mind. While the occasion differs, the circumstance is somewhat the same. In Job’s case, Satan could not take his life, but was granted authority to afflict him. Who can forget the words of the Lord, ***“And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life”*** (Job 2:6). The issues of both life and death belong exclusively to God Almighty. As it is written, ***“He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death”*** (Psa 68:20). Only God can set both ***“life and death”*** before us (Deut 30:19). Satan, while he had ***“the power of death”*** (Heb 2:14), could never exercise that power without Divine approval.

It is imperative that the saints of God perceive this, for it will sustain them in the time of trial. This does not mean no harm will ever come to believers, and those who suppose this to be the case will be shaken by life’s circumstances. What it **does** mean is that all trials of God’s people are monitored and controlled. He will not allow them to be tested beyond their measure of endurance, or to be tried beyond their ability (Cor 10:13). An example of this is found in the godly king Josiah. The sins of previous generations were going to be visited upon Judah. Notwithstanding, because of the character of Josiah, he was spared seeing that visitation. It is written, ***“Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring***

*on this place”* (2 Kgs 22:20).

Another example of the control of God over His people and their circumstances is found in the Apostles. Jesus sent them into a spiritual wolf pack, informing them they would be opposed, betrayed, and some of them even put to death. Yet He anchored them in the protection of the Almighty, affirming nothing would be beyond His notice or apart from His control. ***“Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls”*** (Lk 21:14-19). The control of the Almighty is so precise that a single hair cannot be lost without His approval. In view of this, Jesus told His Apostles to possess their souls in patience, or through their endurance, they would gain their life (RSV).

**Suffering saints need to hear this!** The Lord does not hide from us that evils are coming upon our world, just as they did on previous generations. But we will not be left to the caprice of the wicked one! God will make us equal to the occasion, while also commanding the aggressors not to hurt us. It is a true saying, ***“godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”*** (1 Tim 4:8).

### **Like A Scorpion**

Again, this is the language of Scripture. When interpreting figures of Scripture, our first recourse is to the Word itself.

*First use of the word*

We are first introduced to scorpions in relation to Israel's punitive trek through the wilderness. Of those forty years it is written, ". . . *Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water . . .*" (Deut 8:15). In this instance, there were very real scorpions that plagued the people. The point, however, was the **jeopardy** of the wilderness, in which life-sustaining needs were not found. The desert was marked by **peril and pain**. "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*"

### *Second use of the word*

The second Scriptural reference to scorpions is a figurative one. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, prepared to reign in the stead of his father, he did not speak kindly to the people. Even though he was advised by the "*old men*" to speak tenderly to the people, he affirmed he would use threatening language instead. "*And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions*" (1 Kgs 12:11,14; 2 Chron 10:11,14). Here the term denoted severe punishment, as compared with less harsh chastisement. Some historians apprise us there was a special whip that was called "*scorpion*." It was designed to inflict unusual pain.

"St. Isidore, and after him Calmet and others, assert that the scorpion was a sort of severe whip, the lashes of which were armed with iron points, that sunk into and tore the flesh. We know that the scorpion was a military engine among the Romans for shooting arrows, which, being poisoned, were likened to the scorpion's sting, and the wound it inflicted." 1

### *Third use of the word*

The third use of this word is found in the book of Ezekiel. "*And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words,*

*though briers and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions ; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house”* (Ezek 2:6). Here, the word is used to describe people—people who will inflict pain upon the heart and conscience of the prophet. He was to arm himself for their hurtful ways and rejection of his words.

#### *Fourth use of the word*

Jesus Himself employs this term in His response to the triumphant return of the commissioned seventy. *“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Lk 10:19). Here the term is associated with the devil himself, whose diabolical army causes spiritual pain and infection among men.

#### *The meaning of the text*

*“And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”* This plague does not describe destroying agents, but **agents of pain**, sorrow, fear, and dread. Danger in the midst of spiritual poverty is declared—unparalleled danger. The element of punishment is seen upon those who have rejected the truth, and thus have not the seal of God upon their foreheads. The activity of Satan is also seen. He is working through this pain-inflicting horde to make living painful and difficult among the sons of men.

### **Not Normal Sufferings**

This is not a description of the normal sufferings of life. These are accelerated sufferings, wed to delusion, and augmented by fear.

### **Life Becomes Intolerable**

It describes a condition with which mankind cannot grapple. With all of his wisdom and ingenuity, a condition is brought which can neither be removed nor neutralized by the wisdom of man. Woe to the person who puts his trust in man, men's wisdom, and the inventions of man.

Here is a judgment in which life becomes intolerable. ***“And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.”*** These words produce great sobriety among those believing them. Here is a precursor to the end of the world, in which men will also seek death in preference to confronting the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16).

Scripture often describes great anguish in this language—preferring death to life. It depicts a very real situation. However, the emphasis of the language is not the circumstance that produced it, but the **effect** of the circumstance upon the soul. It describes a condition with which mankind cannot grapple. With all of his wisdom and ingenuity, a condition is brought which can neither be removed nor neutralized by the wisdom of man. Woe to the person who puts his trust in man, man's wisdom, and the inventions of man. God can, and often does, bring circumstances upon men in which their wisdom wilts and their power dissipates.

### *Job's Lamentation*

In Job's lamentation, he refers to a condition where death is preferable to life. ***“Why is light given to him who is in misery, And life to the bitter of soul, Who long for death, but it does not come, And search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, And are glad when they can find the grave?”*** (Job 3:20-22). In another

telling expression that shows the extent to which men can suffer, Job said, ***“my soul chooses strangling And death rather than my body. I loathe my life; I would not live forever”*** (Job 7:15-16). Remember, Job’s affliction was caused by Satan with the approval of God, just as in our text. But Job’s suffering is not to be compared with the greatness of the judgment of the fifth trumpet!

### *Jeremiah’s Prophecy*

Jeremiah also spoke of a time when death would be preferred to life. ***“Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them,” says the LORD of hosts***” (Jer 8:3).

### *The Extremity of Anguish*

This is descriptive of the extremity of anguish. There is a spiritual dimension to both blessing and cursing, pleasure and pain. The lesser and the greater can be found in both benefit and deprivation. Think of this text! Death is the ***“last enemy,”*** and is universally abhorred and zealously sought to be avoided. Yet, the mighty God can so orchestrate life that death actually becomes a preference. Men will, in such a case, go against nature itself. God be praised for His great salvation!

### **Divine Retribution**

Our text speaks of a time of Divine retribution – a time in which the influences of hell are released upon those who are not in Christ Jesus, and have not the seal of the Holy spirit. It is a time when men’s hearts will fail for fear (Lk 21:26), and yet they will be powerless to avert the judgment. The mighty God will not allow them to die, even though they prefer to do so. God has the power to do this! The power of life and death belong to Him alone.

While there is an historical fulfillment of this trumpet, we do well to also think in larger terms. There is no power in history itself. We must behold the Divine principles that are at work in history.

Without controversy, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*** Judgment awaits all who reject the Son and His salvation—and there are no exceptions!

## THE MESSENGERS OF DESTRUCTION

The point of this text is not to paint a physical portrait of the messengers of pain, but to emphasize the effectiveness with which they come. This is symbolic, or apocalyptic, language that underscores the irresistibility of the judgment of God.

***“The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. they had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails.”***

### Joel Speaks

This same figure of assault is used by Joel, in reference to loss that was temporal, or did not result in death. ***“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I***

*sent among you*” (Joel 2:25). The first and second chapters of Joel should be read in association with this passage. They are the well from which the prophet is drawing this vivid description. He is speaking of torment in the language of the prophet. Joel describes a great nation with locust-like characteristics. It laid the vine waste, stripped the bark from trees, demolished fields, and obliterated corn. Every tree is withered, and the flocks begin to die because there is no food for them (Joel 1:7-18). The adversarial army darkens the very sky. They are like a roaring fire that blazes across the county side. They are so devastating the earth shudders because of them (Joel 2:1-11).

### **Some Facts About Locusts**

One commentator, G.R. Driver, has researched the locusts of the East and affirmed the things attributed to them in Scripture are no exaggeration. We are told they are about two inches long, with a wing span of 4-5 inches. They travel in a column a hundred feet deep, and as much as four miles long. When such a cloud of locusts appears, the effect is like an eclipse of the sun. The destruction they cause is beyond all imagination. When they leave an area, we are told, not a blade of grass is left. Trees are stripped of their bark, and the land looks as though it had been ravished with fire. In 1866, a plague of locusts invaded Algiers. The destruction was so total that 200,000 people died of starvation during the famine that followed. Like Joel’s time, these are God’s *“great army.”*

### **The Egyptian plague**

This is the type of plague that was sent upon Egypt (Ex 10:4-19). This was a devastating plague. The locusts *“covered the earth,”* so the people could not see it. They ate everything that remained from the hailstorm. They also *“ate every tree”* that grew in the field. Scripture tells us the Lord brought the locusts into Egypt by means of an east wind. *“Previously,”* we are told, *“there had been no such locusts as they.”* The spoliation left by them is described in these words. *“They*

*covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt”* (Ex 10:11-15). This was a very literal plague, with very literal consequences. Nature is under the control of the Almighty!

## **The Shadow Is Weaker Than the Substance**

The plague of Egypt was but a shadow of the plague of Revelation – and the plague of Revelation is only a shadow of the day of wrath, at the coming of the Lord. A Kingdom principle to be seen here is this. The shadow, or type, is always weaker than the substance, or antitype. Thus, the typical lamb of Leviticus was far inferior to the Lamb of God, Who took away the sin of the world. The tabernacle of the Exodus was inferior to the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. The Aaronic High Priesthood was only introductory to the glorious High Priesthood of Christ Jesus . . . etc., etc.

By the same token, the historical locust plagues that have devastated the earth are nothing to compare with the devastation and torment that is inflicted by hosts from the *“bottomless pit.”* This is a demonic plague, and, by Divine decree, is thoroughly effective. We are witnessing an awesome judgment that is infinitely more severe than the gnawing of a locust or the sting of a scorpion. The unleashing of Satanic delusion is something for which nature has no adequate counterpart. In every sense of the word, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”* How zealously we must embrace and contend for the truth while we have it! It is too precious to ignore! Let every soul with insight promote an eager and unsatiable love and appetite for the truth of God!

## TORMENT UNDER DIVINE CONTROL

I ever want to keep before you the precision with which our Lord rules. Nothing is ever out of control. All things are being worked together for the good of those who love God, and are called according to his purpose. Too, all things are being orchestrated **against** those who have been confronted with the truth of God, but have refused His seal in favor of the world's acclamation. God does not take lightly the rejection of His Son!

*“Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.”* Now, the picture is painted with greater clarity, as the Spirit develops the picture for us. This powerful army has power to *“hurt men”* to such an extent they will seek death in preference of life. But they operate under the greater authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords. The duration of their power was *“five months.”* For whatever worth it may be, authorities tell us that is considered the life-span of a locust. As you must know, however, that is not the point of the text. This is a controlled period of torment—controlled by God, and even in consideration of the ungodly. **God is both Sovereign and merciful, two traits rarely combined among the sons of men.** What, therefore, the tormenting army does is limited—they cannot kill, and they cannot touch those with the seal of God upon their foreheads. Also, the duration of their work is limited—it is only for five months.

This is not punishment that extends into the next world. It is reserved for *“time.”* Should *“men”* fail to profit from this affliction, a far worse thing awaits them in the world to come. While this message comforts saints, it is a warning to sinners.

## Hurting Men

The expression “*hurt men*” is not to be taken lightly. The holy angels are not accessible to these forces, but “*men.*” These are not “*men*” in general, for those aligned with God through Christ are excluded. The people of God will live on in the midst of this furnace of affliction, whether Satan wants them to or not. The “*men*” to be hurt are godless men. They are individuals who do **not** have the seal of God upon them—who are **not** reconciled to God. Such will not have to wait until the judgment day to have their sins visited upon them! “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*”

## God Has Left examples

Those who question whether or not such things can happen only betray their ignorance. From the beginning of time individuals and collections of individuals rise to testify that men begin reaping what they sow in this life. The flood still stands as a token of God’s intolerance of iniquity. Sodom, ancient Tyre, Nineveh, and even Jerusalem, reveal the judgment of God upon cities. Nations like Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, testify that judgment for sinful nations is not reserved unto the final day.

Let every child of God rejoice in the management of the affairs of men, the orchestration of events, and the consideration of the godly.

## Five Months

Authority was given this host of hell to “*hurt men*” for five months. First, it is a **limited** period. Second, it is a **specific** period. Third, it is a time upon **earth**. It is not only a time when suffering is restricted, it is also one when the powers of hell are restrained.

## *Time in Revelation*

### **TIME PERIODS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

- ◆ 10 days of tribulation for the church in Smyrna(2:10).
- ◆ 5 months of torment upon those without God's seal (9:5,10).
- ◆ 42 months, the Holy City trodden down (11:2).
- ◆ 1,260 days, God's two witnesses prophesy in sackcloth (11:3).
- ◆ 3-1/2 days people see the the two witnesses dead bodies (11:9).
- ◆ 3-1/2 days elapse before the witnesses rise from the dead (11:11).
- ◆ 1,260 days woman is nourished from the face of the serpent (12:6).
- ◆ Time, times, and ½ a time, the woman is nourished (12:14).
- ◆ 42 months, given to the great blasphemer to speak (13:5).
- ◆ 1,000 years, Satan is bound (20:2,3).
- ◆ 1,000 years, the martyrs reign with Jesus (20:4).
- ◆ 1,000 years, the "rest of the dead" do not live (20:5).
- ◆ 1,000 years, the blessed given to reign with Christ (20:6).
- ◆ 1,000 years, afterward, Satan is loosed for a little season (20:7).

Various time periods are used throughout the book of Revelation. While there are parallels in history, such time periods generally have to be calculated, with an option to use various methods. While this cannot simply be written off as without merit, it does indicate it is not the primary and most profitable view of the time periods in this book. Notwithstanding, there is some value to be found here.

You will find that the specific duration of these periods is not the primary point. Rather, it is what occurs during that time. Several times,

the same period is referred to in different time-terms. For example, 42 months, 1,260 days, and time, times, and ½ a time are all referring to the same interlude. Accounting a month as 30 days, 42 months=1,260 days. Twelve months of 30 days would make a year 360 days long. 3-1/2 years (time, times, and ½ a time), therefore, would also equal 1,260 days. The same period is referred to in different terms because different things are being emphasized.

Suffice it to say, in the expression “*five months*,” a relatively brief period is signified.

### **Prophetic Calculation**

There is a way of looking at this passage that has Scriptural precedent. While this view cannot be bound upon men, we will discover it does hold a substantial meaning. We find this method of calculation in the books of Ezekiel, Numbers, and Daniel. Some have considered this to be a significant index. I find no reason to doubt this to be the case. I am personally persuaded this is one of the manners in which God reckons time.

#### *Ezekiel's prophecy*

In a most unusual requirement, God told Ezekiel he would, in some sense, bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. He was going to be a sign to the house of Israel (Ezek 4:3). The prophet was told to first lay upon his left side for 390 days. Second, he was to lay on his right side for 40 days, for the house of Judah. He was then told each day stood for a year in God's judgment against His people. ***“Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when you have completed***

***them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year ”*** (Ezek 4:4-6). What an act of mercy for the holy prophet! What a depiction of awesome judgment for the Jews!

The remarkable precision of the day-for-a-year view is difficult to charge to coincidence, or exegetical creativity. Suffice it to say, there is good reason to believe this is a way God calculates time.

#### *Israel’s Judgment in the Wilderness*

This is not the first time such a calculation was employed. When Israel searched the land of Canaan for forty days, returning in unbelief, they were judged by God. They were assigned a wilderness wandering of forty years—one year for each day they spied out the land in unbelief. The judgment reads this way. ***“According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years , and you shall know My rejection”*** (Num 14:34).

#### *Daniel’s Messianic prophecy*

There is yet a third employment of this type of calculation in Scripture—i.e., a day counting for a year. It is found in the book of Daniel. The passage deals with seventy weeks associated with the coming Messiah, and is highly controversial in Fundamentalist circles. The passage is found in Daniel 9:24-27. Because of the relevance this has to the understanding of Revelation, briefly dealing with this prophecy will be profitable.

Seventy weeks were set by God as a period in which the following

would be accomplished. Transgression would be **“finished,”** and an **“end of sins”** would be made. **“Reconciliation”** would also be made, and **“everlasting righteousness”** would be brought in, the vision would be **“sealed,”** or completed, and **“the Most Holy”** would be **“anointed”** (Dan 9:24). The obvious reference to Christ’s atoning work and the opening of God’s righteousness for humanity ought to be obvious.

The period of seventy weeks is divided into three distinct periods.

*(1. Seven weeks, or 49 years (9:25).*

*(2 Sixty-two weeks, or 434 years (9:25-26).*

*(3. One week, or seven years (9:27).*

While the precise beginning point of the calculations is seen differently by several notable scholars, there is a unanimity among them concerning a day standing for a year. The following represents a standard view of the passage.

The first period of seven weeks, or 49 years, belong to the repairing and restoration of Jerusalem. Ezra and Nehemiah were employed in this task for 49 years (453 BC - 404 BC), from the commission of Artaxerxes.

The second period of sixty-two weeks, or 434 years, begins with the completed restoration of Jerusalem (404 BC - 30 AD). That brings us to the beginning of Christ’s public ministry.

The third period of one week, or seven years, begins with Christ’s public ministry (30 AD). In the midst of the seventieth week, or after 3-1/2 years, Messiah would be **“cut off,”** or die for the sins of the people. The remaining 3/1-2 years take us to the conversion of Paul in 37 AD, when the thrust of the Gospel moved from the Jews to the Gentiles.

The remarkable precision of the day-for-a-year view is difficult to charge to coincidence, or exegetical creativity. Suffice it to say, there is good reason to believe this is a way God calculates time. **This being the case, five months would stand for a period of 150 years.** As I will show, there is a period of history that precisely conforms to this text. It should serve to confirm to our hearts that we are dealing with reality.

### **The Leader of the Horde**

*“And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.”* In this matter, these spiritual locusts differ from natural ones. Ordinarily, locusts do not have a leader. As it is written, *“The locusts have no king, Yet they all advance in ranks”* (Prov 30:27). We are, therefore, speaking of supernatural phenomenon—spiritual militancy, or a delusionary flood.

There should be no doubt in our minds concerning the identity of this leader. Although this is the only place in the Word of God where this name ( *Abaddon*, or *Apollyon* ) is used, it doubtless refers to Satan himself. The name means *“Destroyer,”* or *“destroying one.”*

Some believe it is a reference to death. However, since these demonic hordes have no power to take men’s lives, they cannot be led by death. They are operating under the subordinate authority of the devil himself.

### *Satan is The Destroyer*

It was our Lord Jesus Himself Who identified Satan as a destroying one. *“ . . . the devil . . . He was a murderer from the beginning . . . ”*

(John 8:44). Peter also speaks of him in this capacity, likening him to a **“roaring lion”** who stalks the race, **“seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Pet 5:8).

There is a corrupt view of Satan that is growing in popularity among many professed believers. It is that Satan possesses no power at all, and the saints have nothing to fear from him. While there is an element of truth to this, it is only an element, and not the entire picture.

The church at Smyrna was told it would suffer tribulation at the instigation of Satan himself. **“Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days”** (Rev 2:10). Later in the vision of Revelation, Satan is presented as giving power to a spiritual aggressor to **“make war with the saints and to overcome them”** (Rev 13:1-7). Before Revelation ends, the devil is **“released from his prison”** to flood the world with delusion. With supernatural energy his armies cover the breadth of the earth in an effort extirpate the saints of the Most High God (Rev 20:7-9). Let no one mistake the character of Satan!

### *A corrupt view of Satan*

There is a corrupt view of Satan that is growing in popularity among many professed believers. It is that Satan possesses no power at all, and the saints have nothing to fear from him. While there is an element of truth to this, it is only an element, and not the entire picture. The devil has, indeed, been **“destroyed”** through the vicarious death of Christ (Heb 2:14). **That destruction, however, is only in the heavenly places!** Those who live by faith are in a realm where Satan is restrained. Those who live in the flesh function in a realm where Satan can be loosed.

**Believers are warned about the presence of Satan.** They are told, ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”*** (1 Pet 5:8). The mighty Apostle Paul once acknowledged Satan had deterred him from coming to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:18). With sober tones, the Spirit shouts, ***“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time”*** (Rev 12:12).

Make no mistake about it, Satan is a very real foe, with very real power! Long after Jesus had ***“destroyed him who has the power of death,”*** the Spirit spoke of those who had ***“turned aside after Satan”*** (1 Tim 5:15). Recalcitrant sinners who dared to wear the name of Christ were ***“delivered to Satan”*** for the ***“destruction of the flesh”*** (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). He still has ***“devices”*** that require alertness on our part, else he will get advantage of us (2 Cor 2:11).

The spirit prophesied of a time when one of Satan’s workman would rise ***“with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception”*** (2 Thess 2:9). Those who conduct their lives as though Satan were not a formidable adversary are in great error. He is **ONLY** restrained by God, never by man! On one occasion King Jesus permitted Satan to bring a thorn to Paul, in order that Divine strength might be made known in him. Paul, though given great power, could not repel the visitation or rid himself of the thorn (2 Cor 12:7-9). Let the saints settle it in their minds: they do have a very real foe in Satan!

### **Once Again**

Here the mighty God gives power to Satan to open the arsenal of hell and gather demonic forces to assault the earth. Limits are placed upon

him and his vile armies. They cannot touch any one alive to God—who have the seal of God upon them. Too, they cannot kill, but can only torment. The duration of their work is five months.

Glory, if you will, in the Sovereign God of heaven, and His Christ. The government has been placed upon the shoulder of our Savior, and all is well. He takes into consideration both the godly and the ungodly, and rewards them accordingly. We need not take it upon ourselves to punish the ungodly. God Himself will see to that.

## THE HISTORIC VIEW

Remember, we are dealing with the judgment of God upon those who have refused to be aligned with Him. The forces of hell are employed by Christ in this retribution. Those who walk with Christ will be visited by Him. Likewise, those who serve the devil will, under the government of King Jesus, be visited by Satan. **Every person must reckon with the one they serve—even in this life!**

Recognize, what we behold here is coming from hell. It comes under the leadership of Satan. It also comes under the authority of the Lord Jesus, who alone has the key to the bottomless pit. That key can be used only when it is *“given.”*

Also, **the reason for this retribution must be restated** . The world, as a whole, had begun to reject the Gospel. Although there was a remarkable spread of the truth at the first, corruption had now set in, and opposition to the truth began to assert itself. *Rome* joined in the conspiracy to kill Jesus, killed both Paul and Peter, and shed the blood

of millions of saints. *Asia* martyred Philip, Andrew, and Jude. *Ethiopia* killed Matthew. The *Jews* killed the prophets, Jesus, Stephen, James the Less, and Matthias. *Greece* killed Mark, Luke, and Barnabas. *India* slew Thomas. *Africa* martyred Bartholomew. *Britain* killed Simon. **The world is not innocent!** It has historically aligned itself against the Lord's Christ, and thus experienced the judgment of God. With remarkable deliberation, it ignored the solemn warning of the mighty God. ***“Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm”*** (1 Chron 16:22; Psa 105:15).

While we are to have compassion on the world, and endeavor to turn it from darkness to light, we are **not** to entertain an accommodating view of it. It is neither good nor innocent!

### **The Rise of Mohammedanism**

While we are to have compassion on the world,  
and endeavor to turn it from darkness to light,  
we are **not** to entertain an accommodating  
view of it. It is neither good nor innocent!

The introduction and spread of Mohammedanism is one of the remarkable occurrences of history. It came from the East, the land of locusts, lions, horses, and scorpions. Their men were noted for their long flowing hair. Pliny spoke of them as *“The turbaned Arabs with uncut hair.”* Marcellinius and Jerome mentioned *“the long haired Arabs.”*

The leader of this religion was Muhammad, who claimed to be the *“Prophet of God,”* even affirming he was *“the Comforter,”* or Holy Spirit. This was the first aggressive perversion of the Gospel. Muhammad affirmed he was elected of God to preach true religion. He

claimed to receive his call from Gabriel the angel. The great prophets, he avouched, included Adam., Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and finally himself–Muhammad. Abraham is regarded as their patriarch, and “father of the faithful.” Their teaching also affirms Jesus will return at the end of the world to lead the faithful against the forces of evil.

This awful reign of religious perversity began in 632 AD. They marched out of Arabia like a horde of locusts, determined to subdue the world to Mohammedanism, after all of Arabia had been subdued. In 634, the city of Damascus was taken, and has been Mohammedan ever since. In 634, Jerusalem fell, and a mosque which still remains was erected in the very heart of the city. In 638 Egypt was conquered, as the armies pushed Westward to the Atlantic ocean. In 675, they poured into the borders of Europe, and conquered Constantinople. In 711 they crossed the straits of Gibraltar and conquered Spain. In 716 they defeated Constantinople the second time, and in 721 crossed into France in an attempt to conquer Northwest Europe. At this time, their empire of deception extended from Central Asia over Persia, Arabia, Syria, Africa, Europe, Spain, and Portugal. Within 100 years after leaving Arabia, they secured Asia, Africa, and Southwestern Europe. ( Universal Standard Encyclopedia and Groliers Encyclopedia )

Their reign of terror ended in 782 AD, 150 years after it began in 632 AD. While some might be tempted to charge this all to coincidence, I find it most difficult to accept such a postulate. Rather than being noted for butchery and slaughter, they were noted for converting people—even nations—to their religious persuasion. They represent a significant departure from the truth – a loosing of the powers of hell, as it were.

How appropriately they fulfill the vivid description Revelation provides (Rev 9:7-10). The horde of locusts were shaped like ***“horses prepared to battle”***—these militant evangelists

Because we live in a nation that is in the very process of rejecting Christ, the relevance of this message ought to be apparent. Regardless of our heritage, we dare not suppose this nation to be exempt from such a judgment!

swept through the world on horses. The horde of Revelation had **“crowns of gold,”** denoting a reign—precisely describing the spread of Mohammadanism. The locusts from the bottomless pit also had **“faces like men,”** denoting intelligence and strategy—something for which the crusading Arabs were noted. They also had **“hair like a woman,”** describing a certain attractiveness or appeal—also something for which the militant evangelists were noted. But the cloud of locusts also had **“teeth like a lion,”** indicating their devouring and consuming nature—aptly depicting the manner in which this militant religion stole hope and brought hearts into bondage. The army from hell also had **“breastplates of iron,”** denoting crudeness, strength, and a lack of refinement—something which characterized these religious militants. The extreme and aggressive activity of the Satanic messengers was described as **“the sound of wings as chariots”**—also fulfilled in the non-stop activity of the proponents of error. The presence of the hellish horde was always felt, as depicted by their tails which were **“as scorpions”**—an appropriate description of the presence of the crusaders of error. When the bottomless pit was opened, hurt and misery followed the invading host, for **“stings were in their tails”**—a fact fulfilled in the loveless and heartless reign of this corrupt religion.

We are still living under the sway of this religious corruption. In 1973, there were 500,000,000 Mohammedans (called Moslems) in the world. Today, there are over 1,000,000,000 – 20% of the world’s population!

While these historical facts do not exhaust the vision’s fulfillment, they do confirm to us the seriousness of rejecting the truth of God.

Because we live in a nation that is in the very process of rejecting Christ, the relevance of this message ought to be apparent. Regardless of our heritage, we dare not suppose this nation to be exempt from such a judgment! The Word of the Lord is still true! “. . . *they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (2 Thess 2:10-12). This is an aspect of God that is little known, yet is essential to godliness. We do well to sound it abroad.

## MORE IS TO COME!

***“One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.”*** One might dare to suppose Divine judgment had finally been exhausted. Surely the world has suffered enough for its rejection of the truth of God! But this is not the case at all. When once the wrath of God is aroused, fearful things follow! Only one third of the retribution has taken place! More is to come!

Remember, this is Christ’s message to the churches! This is an aspect of the Divine nature with which we are to be familiar! How Kingdom efforts would be changed if the reality of this text were to burst upon the souls of men! The rejection of the truth would be viewed quite differently. The lethargic manners that characterize so many churches would no longer be tolerated. What an effect would be wrought in the approaches of men to the preaching of the Gospel! Entertainment and jovial environments would no longer have such high values assigned to them. A *professional* approach to the service of the King would not seem so needful. The awakening of the soul to the manner in which Jesus governs His Kingdom provokes a different outlook on doctrinal error, sin, and church functions. The slapstick approach to the truth of

God, the prominence of humor, and religious careers would lose their popularity.

When men—any men—refuse the truth, malign Jesus, and persecute His messengers, they will be opposed by God! There will be an unleashing of forces against them with which they will not be able to contend. The Lord blinded Israel because they did not believe (Isa 29:9-14; Rom 11:87-11). He brought Jerusalem down because it did not know the day of its **“visitation”** (Lk 19:42-44). The world itself was flooded with delusion because, after God had sent messengers to its extremities, it chose to reject the truth and kill the messengers. Make no mistake about it, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”***

## CONCLUSION

We have reviewed a sobering text of Scripture, and you do well to take it seriously. Do not be distracted by theological positions, historical views, or fanciful explanations. The Word of God is not a novelty, and it is essential to spiritual life. The dominating message of this book can be, and must be, understood. It is essential to the people of God overcoming the world. It cannot be ignored or placed to the side in preference of more supposedly palatable sections of Scripture.

It is our business, therefore, to culture our relationship to the Lord—to enhance our fellowship with the Son. Divine protection and consideration depends upon our occupation of the spiritual zone of safety—the Lord Jesus Christ! Our souls must abhor and shun anything that moves us beyond the perimeter of blessing. When the

things of God become vague, the gap between us and judgment gets smaller. As we cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, drawing near to Him with a true heart, we are occupying the realm of Divine consideration.

If you are tempted to be fearful, remember that the unleashing of the forces of hell was accompanied by Divine restriction. Those with the seal of God upon their foreheads could not be touched by the invading hosts. Nothing living could be harmed! The Lord does not pour out His judgments without due consideration of the godly! In the flood, He remembered Noah. In the destruction of Sodom, He remembered Lot. In the plagues upon Egypt, he remembered the Israelites. God will not abandon those who place their trust in Him!

It is our business, therefore, to culture our relationship to the Lord—to enhance our fellowship with the Son. Divine protection and consideration depend upon our occupation of the spiritual zone of safety—the Lord Jesus Christ! Our souls must abhor and shun anything that moves us beyond the perimeter of blessing. When the things of God become vague, the gap between us and judgment gets smaller. As we cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, drawing near to Him with a true heart, we are occupying the realm of Divine consideration.

It is good to remember that evil can be unleashed! The key to the bottomless pit can be given to our adversary! The pit can be opened, and a cloud of delusion can cover the places occupied by men! This can be on a personal, national, or even global basis. Every individual is capable of more evil than they dare to imagine. We each have a “*bottomless pit*” resident in our fallen natures. It is only the grace of God that keeps it from being opened. Our personal growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ keeps the pit closed! Too, every society, regardless of its level of refinement and spiritual

advancement, has within it the seeds of corruption—a ***“bottomless pit.”*** Given leave by God, that pit can be opened, producing unspeakable delusion and defilement. The only way of averting the loosing of Satan and his delusions is listening to and availing ourselves of, the truth of God.

Let every soul be encouraged to seek the Lord with all of the heart, and to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His harvest! If His laborers do not go forth, Satan’s laborers will! The knowledge of this will enable us to pray more fervently ***“that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith”*** (2 Thess 3:1-2). Too, remember those who speak in the name of the Lord! Pray they will ***“speak boldly,”*** as they ought to speak (Eph 6:20). More is at stake than many dare to imagine!

I cannot close this section without once again reminding you of the faithfulness of God. The consideration of the godly is directly related to the faithfulness of our Lord. ***“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”*** (1 Cor 10:13). His character will not allow Him to forget the trusting one! Whether you are young or old, your faith in God is not in vain. Do not allow the wicked one to cause you to fear the fierceness of the punishment of the ungodly. Rather, focus upon the exceeding great of the reward of the righteous.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 18

## THE SIXTH TRUMPET

" Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed; by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm. But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." (Revelation 9:13-21, NKJV)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This book is Christ's message to the churches! It is relevant to the life of faith, comforting to those who are suffering for the name of Jesus, and a solemn warning to those who dare to oppose God. Although this is a book of figures and symbols, that does not dull the power of its message. A type is always less significant in its impact than the reality which it represents or introduces. This is a cardinal rule of sound Scriptural exposition, and must be remembered as we probe the Revelation.

### **Divine Purpose being Revealed**

Before going further, I would remind you that these judgments are a Divine reprisal against those who have opposed and even shed the blood of the saints of God. The vindication for which the souls “*under the later*” cried (Rev 6:9) is taking place. The bloodshed of the martyrs, remember, was by the design and permission of God Himself. When crying out for vindication, the martyrs were told, “*that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also*” (5:11). Although this is a difficult thing for some to see, it is affirmed in Scripture, and we are obliged to receive it.

Daniel spoke of the momentary triumph of the enemies of the saints. Speaking of an arch-foe, Daniel wrote, “*He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most*

Jesus is expounding to John the working of God Almighty. This is NOT a mere history lesson. Neither, indeed, is it a warning of the unbridled working of our adversary, the devil. The Lord Jesus, duly empowered by the Father, is on the throne of the Kingdom. Nothing is out of control

High, and shall intend to change times and law. *Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time* ” (Dan 7:25, NKJV). Confirming that this was, indeed, the truth, Jesus revealed the same thing to the Patmos-Prophet. Speaking of an opponent of the saints, John wrote, “*Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation* ” (Rev 13:6-7).

The record, then, is clear on this matter. For some, this is a “*hard*

*saying,* ” and they are unable to receive it. Such have been exposed to a view of God and Christ that does not allow for the free acceptance of these things. That condition, I fear, is more serious than some would have us suppose. One of the unavoidable effects of false doctrine is **the development of a conscience that cannot receive all of God’s Word** .

In all of this, the Lord remains true to His commitment to **not** allow the saints to be tested above their ability (1 Cor 10:13). The temporary triumph of the opponents of the church does not cause any of the **“saints of the Most High God”** to cast off their faith. The hardness of the trial was but an evidence of the strength of the people of God, displayed to heavenly principalities and powers.

Additionally, because of the harmless nature of the people of God, their persecution confirms the depravity of the ungodly, and the justice of God in punishing their oppressors. These are issues of great importance in the saints, although not commonly recognized by the inhabitants of this world.

I want to underscore that Jesus is expounding to John the working of God Almighty. This is NOT a mere history lesson. Neither, indeed, is it a warning of the unbridled working of our adversary, the devil. The Lord Jesus, duly empowered by the Father, is on the throne of the Kingdom. Nothing is out of control – nothing at all! In confirmation of this, briefly recall what we have read to this point.

### **A Brief Summation**

- 1. John was first confronted with the glorified and **REIGNING** Jesus (1:10-20).*
- 2. Jesus provides **HIS** assessment of the churches (2:1-3:22).*
- 3. The throne of heaven is seen, and One sitting in regal splendor and **POWER** upon it --  
–**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (4:1-11).*

4. A scroll is beheld, denoting the execution of God's purpose under the **CONTROL** of the Lamb ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (5:1-14).
5. Under the first seal, the conquering Savior is shown, wearing a crown **GIVEN** to Him ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (6:1-2).
6. Under the second seal, power is **GIVEN** to take peace from the earth ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (6:3-4).
7. Under the third seal, a famine is depicted in which the oil and the wine **CANNOT** be hurt ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (6:5-6).
8. Under the fourth seal, death begins a ruthless reign in which power is **GIVEN** over a fourth part of the earth ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (6:7-8).
9. Under the fifth seal, souls under the alter are **GIVEN** white robes, and told to wait until the number their brethren who **SHOULD BE** killed as they were is fulfilled ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (6:9-11).
10. Under the sixth seal, nature **COLLAPSES** at the word of the King, as the day of the Lamb's wrath comes ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (9:12-17).
11. John is introduced to four angels **GIVEN** power to hurt the earth and the sea ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (7:1-2).
12. The four angels are told **NOT** to hurt the earth or the sea until the servants of God have been sealed ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (7:3).
13. The twelve tribes of Israel are **SEALED** by God, a thing thought impossible by many ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (7:4-8).
14. A vast number of redeemed that cannot be numbered is seen **BEFORE THE THRONE** and the Lamb ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (7:9-16).
15. The Lamb of God is seen in the **CENTER** of the throne, absolutely Sovereign ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (7:17).
16. The seventh seal is opened and unhindered silence prevails for **HALF AN HOUR** ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:1).
17. Seven angels are **GIVEN** seven trumpets ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:2).
18. Another angel with a golden censor is **GIVEN** much incense to offer with the prayers of the saints ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:3).
19. The first angel sounds his trumpet, and a **THIRD PART** of the trees are burned up, and all **GREEN** grass ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:7).

20. The second angel sounds his trumpet, and a **THIRD PART** of the sea becomes blood, a **THIRD PART** of the creatures in the sea die, and a **THIRD PART** of the ships are destroyed ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:8-9).

21. The third angel sounds his trumpet, and a **THIRD PART** of the rivers and fountains of water are defiled, causing **MANY** men to die ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:10-11).

22. The fourth angel sounds his trumpet, and a **THIRD PART** of the sun, moon, and stars are smitten ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:12).

23. An angel is heard proclaiming **THREE** more woes are to come, and cannot be averted ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (8:13).

24. The fifth angel sounds his trumpet, and a fallen star is **GIVEN** the key to the bottomless pit ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (9:1-11).

25. The solemn word is given that **TWO** more woes remain, and will surely come ---**UNEQUIVOCAL** control (9:12).

**Let no person doubt the precision of the reign of Christ Jesus.** When men are tempted to think they are forgotten, or that things are out of control, let them solemnly consider this book! The destiny of the churches is controlled by Jesus! The history of the world is controlled by Jesus! The persecution of believers *is* controlled by Jesus! The harm of men by all means (famines, pestilence, etc.) is controlled by Jesus! The

THE REIGN OF JESUS IS VERY REAL!

demise of nature *is controlled by Jesus!* The judgment of the wicked *is controlled by Jesus!* The opening of the pit of hell *is controlled by Jesus!* It is imperative that this view be maintained throughout this book, else we will be distracted by its language, and embrace foolish and profitless views of the word of Jesus. The comforting power of Scripture is found within this perspective. I urge you to heartily embrace it.

**THE PLACE OF THE VOICE**

The Lord does not punish the wicked simply because they are bad. He does so because of their reaction to His Son and His great salvation.

***“ Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God . . . ”*** The Spirit will not allow us to get far from the heavenly sanctuary! He will not lead us beyond the altar of atonement—where the vicarious sacrifice of Christ becomes insignificant and primary! If we are ever led into considerations that obscure the heavenly realm, or that cause the death of Jesus to recede into the background, we have been influenced by the wicked one.

Notice the description of the place from which a heavenly voice is heard: ***“the four horns of the golden altar.”*** This is the same altar upon which the ***“prayers of the saints”*** were offered, being mingled with the incense of Christ’s atonement (8:3). I gather this is also the same area from which the voice of those beheaded for the word of their testimony was heard (6:9-11). This is an answer to the request of those precious martyrs, who were told to wait for a while. Their plea was heard, and now will be answered.

The ***“golden altar”*** was the altar of incense in the tabernacle service (Ex 39:38; 40:26; 4:11; 2 Chron 4:19). On this altar, the priest placed some of the blood that was shed on the brazen altar (Lev 4:7). Sacrificial blood upon the horns of the altar of incense foreshadowed the pleasing effect of Christ’s sacrifice to the Father. This is the imagery now taken up by our text.

The ***“golden altar,”*** you will note, is said to be ***“before God.”*** **What follows is the will of God, is wrought by God, and is for His glory.**

This manifests an aspect of our redemption that pervades all of Scripture. **The primary view of Christ's death is that of the Father.** All other views are subordinate to that one! The world is governed with God's view of the sacrifice of Christ in mind.

**Whether it is the blessing of the righteous, or the judgment of the wicked, it is what the Father thinks of the death of His Son that governs the action.** The rule of God through Christ Jesus brings great benefit to the saints, but it is not because of them! God works all things together for our good (Rom 8:28), but He does so because of Jesus—in particular, because of the reconciliation He has accomplished. The golden altar is **“before God.”**

The Lord does not punish the wicked simply because they are bad. He does so because of their reaction to His Son and His great salvation.

O, what a truth is to be seen here! Much of the religious world has little interest in the death of Christ, and its unparalleled effects in both heaven and earth. The reconciliation wrought by the Son has taken a *back seat* to

institutional interests, family concerns, political issues, and the gratification of self. But it is not so in heaven! Directions given to holy angels are given in view of God's honor of Jesus! Judgments are cast into the earth because of the honor due the Son! **The voice of direction comes from the place of atonement.**

How appropriately the type introduced under the Law states the case. ***“You shall make an altar to burn incense on . . . And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD”*** (Ex 30:1-10). How fitting for the atonement to be made on the altar issuing a

pleasing fragrance before the Lord. This precisely foreshadowed the pleasing and acceptable affects when Christ ***“by his own blood . . . entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”*** (Heb 9:12). Remember, the tabernacle, with its precisely ordered routines, was a ***“pattern,”*** which served as ***“the copy and shadow of the heavenly things”*** (Heb 8:5).

While novel interpretations of the book of Revelation ignore the death of Christ and His vicarious atonement, we find it at the heart of Divine motivation in our text. There is no aspect of the heavenly Kingdom that ignores the propitiation wrought by Jesus—not even the judgment of the wicked. From the standpoint of Bible interpretation, any view of Scripture that minimizes the reconciliation accomplished by Christ Jesus is to be rejected as spurious and harmful. Such a view simply cannot be proper.

What follows has everything to do with the death of Jesus Christ. It represents a judgment from God upon those who have ***“lightly esteemed”*** the Rock of their salvation (Deut 32;15). We are dealing here with issues proclaimed throughout the Word of God. This is no novel view! It is harmonious with all of Scripture.

## **THE FOUR ANGELS**

***“ And I heard a voice . . . saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. ”*** We are not told whether these are holy or evil angels – but it makes no difference. I am personally persuaded they are evil angels, and will present my reasons later.

The point is they are under the control of the King. Like Pilate, they

*“could have no power at all . . . unless it had been given . . . from above”* (John 19:11).

### **A Pivotal Truth**

I must not fail to continually put you in remembrance of this pillar of truth. John the Baptist also said, *“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven”* (John 3:27). Jesus Himself confessed, *“The Son can do nothing of himself”* (John 5:19). This is a vein of truth that runs throughout the Word of God, and it is central to our understanding of Christ’s message to the churches. If we forget *“the kingdom is the LORD’S: and He is the governor among the nations”* (Psa 22:28), we will soon succumb to the hardships of life. It is ever true, and we do well to embrace it, *“But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases”* (Psa 115:3). Again it is written, *“Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places”* (Psa 135:6). How eloquently God spoke through the prophet Daniel on this matter. *“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”* (Dan 4:35).

Men saturated with the wisdom of this world give too much credit to man. They suppose him to be more capable than he really is. God has not

No personality in heaven, earth, or under the earth can effectively contest or resist His government. The ONLY question is whether of not it will bless or curse us – and it WILL do one or the other!

relinquished the reins of His Kingdom to sinful men. Nor, indeed, does our adversary the devil, have unbridled jurisdiction. With unmistakable clarity, God has affirmed the government has been placed upon the shoulder of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is presently ruling *“in the midst”* of His enemies (Psa 110:1-2). No personality in

heaven, earth, or under the earth can effectively contest or resist His government. The ONLY question is whether or not it will bless or curse us – and it WILL do one or the other!

### **Angels that are Bound**

Notice the language of this text. There are four angels ***“who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”*** Every major translation reads precisely the same (which, of itself, is most remarkable)—KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, RWB, Darbys, and YLT. The BBE (Basic Bible English) translates the word ***“chained.”*** This is, indeed, a strong word! It comes from the Greek word δεδεμένους, which means (1) *bind (together), tie (up) (Matt 13:30) . . . (3) of arrest and imprisonment bind, tie up (Mark 6:17) . . . (5) of physical incapacity cause to be ill (Luke 13:16); (6) the binding and loosing of Matt 16:19 and 18:18.* <sup>1</sup> It is used three other times in Scripture, and in each case, it refers to bondage, as in *forceful restraint* (Acts 9:2,21; 22:5).

The use of this term does not seem to allow for the angels to be ***“holy,”*** or ***“elect”*** angels. It does, however, describe the condition of fallen angels, who are declared to have been delivered ***“into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”*** (2 Pet 2:4), and ***“reserved in everlasting chains”*** (Jude 6). I take this position because of what we are told of the holy angels. They are *willing* servants of the Lord, ***“who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word”*** (Psa 103:20). It seems inappropriate to say such angels are ***“bound,”*** unless they are bound by God’s word. That view, however, seems to take too much liberty with the text. Too, the angels are ***“loosed,”*** set free, or released.

Again, the government of Jesus is clearly seen. Although these angels are powerful and destructive, they remain in ***“chains,”*** so to speak, until released by the Word of the King!

While it is not pleasant to consider such things, those who are not serious about the Lord do well to remember His authority over the forces of evil. **They are restrained or released at His Word!** How quickly men will correct their ways when this is seen.

## **The River Euphrates**

The location of these fierce angels is ***“at the great river Euphrates.”*** This is a river of note in Scripture, and it is this perspective that gives weight to the text. This is one of the four rivers mentioned in relation to the Garden of Eden. One primary river flowed out of Eden, dividing into four subsidiary rivers. Of those rivers, it is written, ***“The fourth river is the Euphrates”*** (Gen 2:24).

When God made promise to Abraham concerning the land of promise, He stated ***“River Euphrates”*** as one of its boundaries (Gen 15:18). Additional references are later made to this boundary (Deut 1:7; 11:24; Josh 1:4). From this perspective, the Euphrates river was a boundary between the land of promise and the rest of the world— **a border that separated Israel’s ENEMIES from them.** On one occasion, David defeated the king of Zobah in order to ***“recover his territory at the River Euphrates”*** (2 Sam 8:3).

The river Euphrates is the place where Jeremiah learned of God’s indignation against the pride of Judah (Jer 13:1-10). Jeremiah also saw this river as a place of Divine judgment, where wicked men stumbled and fell (Jer 46:6,10). Again, Jeremiah was given insight concerning the overthrow of Babylon the Great. He was told to tie a stone to a book and ***“throw it out into the Euphrates.”*** Just as the book sunk in the river, so Babylon would ***“sink and not rise from the catastrophe”*** God would bring upon them (Jer 51:63,64). Later in Revelation, the river Euphrates is said to be ***“dried up,”*** thus preparing the way for the

*“kings of the east”* (Rev 16;12)—i.e., restraint would be removed.

This, then, is language that has been cultured through Moses and the prophets. Here is something first associated with beauty and perfection—the Garden of Eden. It then became a line of demarcation between the enemies of God and His people. This is a vivid picture of the world order—something that began without flaw, then deteriorated because of sin.

### **The Wicked Are Under God**

Sweet solace, indeed, to the people of God! That trouble is coming upon the earth cannot be denied. But God will not allow it to overrun his people! The avenging angels are held in chains, as it were, until released to do His will.

**God uses the wicked to accomplish his purposes.** Although they are under Satan, he is a secondary ruler, operating within Divine constraints, and in strict accordance with Divine purpose.

This is another truth revealed throughout Scripture, and particularly in our text. The Lord challenges the world to ponder this. He is the ONLY one *“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it”* (Isa 46:10-11). At one point in time, the Lord summoned heathen Cyrus to execute His will (Isa 45:1-6). He also *“raised up”* Pharaoh, to get glory for Himself upon him (Ex 9;16; Rom 9;17). Twice, the Lord

***“stirred up an adversary”*** against Solomon (1 Kgs 11:4,23). The Lord told Samuel that if David sinned against Him, he would ***“chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men”*** (2 Sam 7:14). He also placed ***“nations”*** under the ***“yoke”*** of Neuchadnezzar, causing them to serve him (Jer 28:14). He also ***“raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes”*** to come against Babylon and destroy it (Jer 51:11). Make no mistake about it, the Lamb is ***“over all”*** (Rom 9:5).

### **Bound at the River Euphrates**

These angels were bound by, or stricked to, the area of the River Euphrates. They could proceed no further until released by the Word of the King. Too, they could not do their wicked work unless given leave from the Throne to do so. It is as though they were on the other side of the border separating the people of God from the children of the wicked one. They could not invade the saint’s camp (Rev 20:9) any more than the enemies of Israel could invade them while all of the men were attending Divinely appointed feasts. As it is written, ***“For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year”*** (Ex 34:24).

Sweet solace, indeed, to the people of God! That trouble is coming upon the earth cannot be denied. But God will not allow it to overrun his people! The avenging angels are held in chains, as it were, until released to do His will. Little wonder it is affirmed God has NOT given us the ***“spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”*** (2 Tim 1:7).

### **The Significance of the River**

Here is a depiction of the world order which, like the River Euphrates, started out good, but ended up corrupt. It is an area occupied

by our enemies, and to which they are confined until ***“loosed”*** by Omnipotence. Here resides a Divine arsenal, to be released at His will—an arsenal of evil. These are not enemies disposed to kindness. Were it not for the restraining will of the Lord, they would long ago have overrun the world. These are characterized by pride, and are possessed of the spirit of the evil one.

## **DIVINE CONTROL AGAIN REVEALED**

***“So the four angels, who had been prepared . . .”*** Again, notice the precision of the language. We are witnessing the execution of the purpose of God. It is characterized by precision and timeliness. These angels, restrained with Divine chains, ***“had been prepared .”*** **The heavenly Kingdom is characterized by preparation!** Places of authority, Jesus affirmed, are reserved for those ***“for whom it is prepared by My***

Nothing happens without the influence of the King’s scepter! He is in control. Remember, Jesus is sending a message to His churches—His suffering churches. The affairs of the world are presented as part of the administration of His Kingdom.

Father” (Matt 20:23). The ***“Kingdom”*** to be inherited by those who suffer for righteousness sake, has been ***“prepared”*** for them (Matt 25:34). Hell itself has been ***“prepared for the devil and his angels”*** (Matt 25:41). The ministry of John the Baptist was ***“to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”*** (Lk 1:17). Salvation itself has been ***“prepared before all peoples”*** (Lk 2:31). The children of God, called ***“vessels of mercy,”*** have been ***“prepared beforehand for glory”*** (Rom 9:23). The things provided for those who love God have been ***“prepared for them”*** (1 Cor 2:9). When Jesus came into the world, He entered in a body that had been ***“prepared”*** for Him (Heb 10:5). Later

in the Revelation, the people of God survive the assault of the devil by finding a place ***“prepared by God, that they should feed”*** without fear (Rev 12:6). The reign of Jesus is not an ad hoc reign, wherein He responds to unplanned and unanticipated events! His rule is one of purpose and exactness.

Once again, this is seen in the text before us. We must keep this uppermost in our minds, or the language of this book will tempt us to be diverted to mere theological novelties. Such things rob the soul, and push us away from the holiest of all. These angels had been ***“prepared”*** for their work, and were ***“bound”*** until the time appointed for that work to be carried out. Solomon saw this and declared, ***“The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble”*** (Prov 16:4, RSV). Solomon’s word can be viewed as affirming the wicked will ultimately suffer the wrath of God. It can also be perceived as saying the Lord has prepared them to administer chastisement, and other forms of suffering to the unbelieving and defiled. Both are true, as confirmed throughout Scripture.

### **An Exact Time**

***“ . . . for the hour and day and month and year . . . ”*** Nothing happens without the influence of the King’s scepter! He is in control. Remember, Jesus is sending a message to His churches—His suffering churches. The affairs of the world are presented as part of the administration of His Kingdom. That Kingdom is maintained with the advantage of His people in mind. Nothing—absolutely nothing—will put His saints at a disadvantage! Everything belongs to them—even ***“things to come.”*** As it is written, ***“For all things are yours: whether . . . the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s”*** (1 Cor 3:21-23).

Our Text is another confirmation of this truth. If there are destructive powers who would do us harm, they are ***“bound”*** until such time as

their work will serve God's purpose. When they are released to fulfill their purpose, it will be for an appointed time and duration. The extent of their influence is also under Divine control. They cannot begin without a word from the Throne, and they can go no further than they are directed. How the church needs to know this!

The precision of this time allotment is remarkable. An hour, a day, a month, and a year. This is specified with the history of the world in mind. Divine rule is that specific! An example of this level of particularity is found in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This emancipation came after 430 years of bondage, and in accordance with the prophecy made to Abraham 638 years before (Gen 15:13). This precision is expressed in Exodus 12:42. ***“And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.”*** In their deliverance, God promised, ***“not a hoof shall be left behind”*** (Ex 10:26). We are witnessing this level of precision in the Patmos vision: i.e., ***“the hour and day and month and year.”***

There are two ways of viewing this, and both are worthy of our consideration.

### **Beginning and Conclusion**

**FIRST**, this is a symbolic way of emphasizing the **exactness** of the beginning and duration of the judgment. It is all under the control of King Jesus! The reign of our Lord is precise! While I do not want to press these figures too vigorously, there is some value in the following observations.

#### *The Hour*

Here, the time of the *beginning* of the judgment is seen as a Divine

appointment—even down to the very hour. It is that precise—just like the appointed resurrection of the dead: ***“the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice”*** (John 5:28). Frequently, Jesus employed this form of precise language (Matt 26:45; John 4:21; 5:25; 12:23; 16:32). **THIS HAS TO DO WITH THE COMMENCEMENT AND AVAILABILITY OF A DIVINE APPOINTMENT.**

### *The Day*

You must not miss the manifestation of the heart of Jesus in this text. He is mindful of His people, alerting them to circumstances that are coming. They may, because of their closeness to Him, detect the coming of such things.

The word ***“day”*** is used in the same way, denoting a Divinely appointed occurrence: i.e., ***“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world . . . ”*** (Acts 17:31). The time in which men can receive the reconciliation is called ***“the day of salvation”*** (2 Cor 6:2). This form of expression is also common in Scripture (Matt 10:15; Rom 2:5; 13:12; 1 Cor 3:13; Phil 1:16; 2 Pet 3:12). **THIS HAS TO DO WITH THE ENTIRETY OF AN EVENT, THAT WILL CONCLUDE AS SURELY AS IT BEGINS.**

### *The Year*

Even the word ***“year”*** is used to denote Divine appointment. The time of salvation is referred to as ***“the acceptable year of the Lord”*** (Luke 4:19). **THIS VIEWS THE EVENT AS EXTENDED, AND NOT A BRIEF PERIOD.**

Two versions of scripture accentuate this view in their translation of

the verse: i.e., that the angels were prepared to execute their work at a particular point of time . *“So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year . . . ”* (RSV). *“And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year . . . ”* (NIV).

It is as though the Lord said to His suffering church, *Judgment is coming upon the ungodly—fearful judgment. But it will not come until the appointed time, and it will all be under My control. Do not fear!* You must not miss the manifestation of the heart of Jesus in this text. He is mindful of His people, alerting them to circumstances that are coming. They may, because of their closeness to Him, detect the coming of such things. However, because of the temptation to fear, their Lord apprizes them they are Divinely controlled events.

### **Duration**

**SECOND** , the language can denote the **duration** of the judgment described. In this case, the language is symbolic, each period standing for a length of time: a day, an hour, and a year. Using the formula of *a day for a year* , given in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6, we come with a period of 396 years and four months.

Admittedly, this requires a bit of manipulation. Instead of being based on the Jewish year, this calculation is based upon a solar year. The formula is as follows.

Solar year 365-1/4 days

Month 30 days

Day 1 day

Hour 1/12 of a day

Total 396, 4 months

Here, too, precision can be seen. Whatever one may think of this method of calculation, it is nevertheless true, Divine appointments include commencement, duration, and termination! It is ever true, ***“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen”*** (Rom 11:36).

### **Extensive, But Limited, Power**

***“ . . . were released to kill a third of mankind.”*** The very language challenges those who subscribe to a humanized view of the Living God. It is the King of glory Who ***“released”*** these destroying angels. They were bound until he disengaged them upon the world. All praise be to God, destructive forces are in subjection to Him. That is why it is written, ***“There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy”*** (James 4:12). With solemn tones, Jesus told His disciples, ***“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”*** (Luke 12:5). It is true, there are those ***“which kill the body”*** (Matt 10:28), but they cannot do so at will. They are subject to the King of kings, and are ***“bound”*** until His word gives them leave. This reality will not fit into some of the finely tuned theological stands men have developed. However, it fits well into the perspective of faith.

The power of these angels is seen in the effectiveness of their mission: ***“to kill a third part of mankind.”*** However, Divine restraint is also seen: they had no power over two-thirds of mankind! Hallelujah to the Lamb! You must see, that were it not for His government, evil powers would long ago have terminated our race!

We must not fail to grasp this word. The four angels, formerly *“bound,”* were *“RELEASED to kill a third part of mankind.”* Our aim is not to become so distracted by their mission that we miss the message of Christ! He is *“the Head of all principality and power”* (Col 2:10). He has been exalted *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion”* (Eph 1:21). That includes powers that kill, as well as ones that protect! When, therefore, we are brought face to face with death—whether on a global or a personal scale—we must see it as under Divine control! That is why we are told *“death”* is ours—it belongs to us, and will serve us (1 Cor 3:22).

Suffice it to say, the quartet of supernatural powers could not take charge of the world. Their mission is the punishment of the ungodly, and even that is under Divine restraint. A certain number, a certain time, and a certain duration.

## **THE VASTNESS AND FEROCITY OF THE ARMY**

There is no strategy that can effectively deter this horde from accomplishing their mission. The Lord speaks in overwhelming language because of the sureness of the judgment. This is not a threat, but an announcement.

*“Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million (two hundred thousand thousand, KJV); I heard the number of them.”* Remembering that symbols are always introductory to the reality, this is a most remarkable text. It is the Divine way of saying *irresistible multitude*. There is no strategy that can effectively deter

this horde from accomplishing their mission. The Lord speaks in overwhelming language because of the sureness of the judgment. This is not a threat, but an announcement.

This is the second time John said, ***“I heard the number.”*** The first time is when he saw the sealing of 144,000 ***“of all the tribes of Israel”*** (Rev 7:4). In both cases, the ***“number”*** is significant. That significance, however, is not found in mathematics. This is a manner of expressing unimaginable numbers, employed throughout Scripture, and is not unique to the book of Revelation. ***“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands . . .”*** (Psa 68:17). ***“A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him”*** (Dan 7:12). Rebekah was told she would be the mother of ***“thousands of millions”*** (thousands of ten thousands, NASB)--Gen 24:60. Angelic hosts about the heavenly throne are said to be ***“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands”*** (Rev 5:11). Enoch, the seventh from Adam, used this sort of terminology to describe hosts of angels accompanying Divine judgment. ***“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands*** (not “thousand”) ***of His saints”*** (Jude 14). Suffice it to say, this manner of speaking is not a way of identifying a specific number, but of describing an innumerable host. **It our text, it denotes invincibility in the mission they are sent to accomplish.**

### **A Ferocious Picture Is Painted**

***“And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.”*** The Spirit now gives John to see a swift and effective army – one that had been held back until the appointed time. The fact that this is a ***“vision”*** indicates it is not the precise description of an historical event. Dreams and visions **ALWAYS** portray something other than the figures beheld in them. To

name a few: ✦ Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:12), ✦ Joseph's dreams of the stars and the fat and lean cattle (Gen 37:9; 41:2-4), ✦ Jeremiah's almond rod and seething pot (Jer 1:11), ✦ Ezekiel's scroll, valley of dry bones, and healing waters (Ezek 2:9; 37:1-11; 47:-13), ✦ Amos' grasshoppers (Amos 7:1-2), ✦ Zechariah's golden candlestick (Zech 4:1-2), and ✦ Nebuchadnezzar's statue (Dan 2:31-35).

Lest men become complacent in their commitment to the Lord, they should ponder what devastating powers are presently restrained by the Lord. Were it not for His mercy, all havoc would break out.

You will recall the first four seals unveiled **single** horses and riders that rode triumphantly in their mission. Now we behold a vast multitude of horses and horsemen—in figurative language (which is reduced), 200,000,000! Remember, these have been “*released*” by angels who were formerly “*bound*.” **Lest men become complacent in their commitment to the Lord, they should ponder what devastating powers are presently restrained by the Lord.** Were it not for His mercy, all havoc would break out. The description of the riders underscores their mission. It is not one of mercy!

### *Breastplates*

“ . . . *those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow . . .* ” The KJV refers to these as “*breastplates of fire*.” They had the appearance of fire, although they were not fire itself—much like the cloven tongues that sat upon each of those who were together on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). On that threshold day of Pentecost, the “*fire*” was related to salvation. In John's vision, it relates to Divine judgment. In both cases, however, we are speaking of **effective** and determined Divine action.

The breastplates are multi-colored, also having blue and yellow – red, smoky, and yellow. The color of the hyacinth, or jacinth, is deep purple—or the color of smoke. The significance of the colors relate to Divine judgment. Red for fire, blue for smoke, and yellow for brimstone. Fire for *devouring* , smoke for *blinding* , and brimstone from *the bottomless pit* . Satan’s hosts are being commissioned to make the ungodly, who have served Satan, to feel the repercussions of their rebellion against God.

**“Fire and smoke”** are often used to characterize the **intrusion of God into the course of nature** . Of His visitation at Sinai, it is written, **“Smoke went up from His nostrils, And devouring fire from His mouth; Coals were kindled by it”** (2 Sam 22:9; Psa 18:8). The judgment of the wicked is described in these vivid words. **“As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish before God”** (Psa 68:2). Other passages using **“smoke and fire”** to describe Divine judgment include the following. Isaiah 9:18, 30:27, and Joel 2:30.

### *Brimstone*

But here **“brimstone”** is added to the combination of colors. Not only is this Divine intervention—not only is it Divine judgment—the very forces of hell are employed to carry it out! This chastising throng appears to be armored by flame, with the glow of a blazing furnace, and smoke and brimstone from hell surrounding them. **God be praised this army is circumscribed by Divine power!**

### *The Heads of the Horses*

**“ . . . and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions . . . ”**  
The head or face of a lion is used in Scripture to describe fierceness and effectiveness. The Gadites, competent warriors, were described as those

***“whose faces were like the faces of lions”*** (1 Chron 12:8). In His chastisement of Israel, God described the agents employed in these words. ***“ . . . their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it”*** (Isa 5:28-29)

Here, then, is a vast host, released by God, empowered by hell, and invincible in their mission.

### ***The Mouths of the Horses***

***“ . . . and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. ”***  
The horses and the riders have the same traits—perfectly united in their mission. The shields of the riders were like fire, smoke, and brimstone. The horses breathed out the same hellish breath!

In this world, weapons and warriors are not always matched. Intentions and the means by which they are carried out are not always harmonious. But when the hand of God moves, whether for blessing or cursing, this is not the case. The means are always fully adapted to the objective. The employed cause always yields the intended affect.

In this judgment, as with all Divine adjudications, everything works together to accomplish the determined objective. The riders are equipped for their mission, and the horses upon which they ride are also adapted for it.

In this judgment, as with all Divine adjudications, everything works together to accomplish the determined objective. The riders are equipped for their mission, and the horses upon which they ride are also adapted for it.

One further thing: all of this language confirms this judgment is against the wicked, not the righteous. The language used to describe the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24; Lk 17:29), the uprooting of the wicked (Job 18:15; Psa 11:6), the judgment of Assyria (Isa 30:33), and the overthrow of Gog (Ezek 38:22-23) confirm this to be the case.

The book of Revelation uses the language of Moses and the Prophets. There is where God developed the vocabulary through which He could communicate to His people. In this case, the language is that of destruction. In my judgment, it is not wise to press the symbolism too far, forcing it into a sort of theological mold. We will find remarkable fulfillment in history, but *the language is descriptive of decisive, overwhelming, and irresistible judgment from God.*

### *Their Effectiveness*

***“By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed; by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.”*** Notice, the ***“fire, smoke, and brimstone”*** are called ***“three plagues.”*** Three sources of overthrow! Three Divinely appointed means of judgment! Three effective reprisals for the rejection of Christ and His Gospel. While I do not want to press the figures too far, fire speaks of destruction, smoke of delusion, and brimstone of torment. All of these, and more, are involved in this trumpet.

This vast army assails humanity, and a third of all men die! A large part, indeed, **but not the largest part** ! The rider on the pale horse, with death and hades in his wake, was given power ***“over the fourth***

*part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth”* (6:8). Judgment, then, is becoming more severe. No longer are a fourth part killed, now it is a third part. Just as blessings increase, so do Divine judgments! The invading locusts, you may recall, *“were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months”* (9:5). This army is given power to kill. Once again, the control of the King is seen. The destructive troop can proceed no further than the Lord allows!

### *Sin has consequences*

Sin, indeed, does have consequences, and we dare not miss that message. Novel views of the Revelation cloud this perception, causing the heart to become entangled in religious philosophy. However, men and women of God know the judgment of the Almighty is a serious matter.

Little wonder the Spirit witnesses, *“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and Revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds”* (Rom 2:5-6). What we are seeing in the trumpets is a prelude to the great day of wrath—the time when *“the wrath of the Lamb”* (Rev 6:16) will be unleashed.

The word *“third”* is used extensively throughout this book. It signifies **a partial, but significant, overthrow or judgment**. Think of the repeated use of this language. In previous judgments a *“third part”* of the trees were burned up (8:7). A *“third part”* of the sea became blood, a third part of the creatures in the sea died, and a third part of the ships were destroyed (8:8). A *“third part”* of the rivers and waters were made bitter, causing the death of *“many”* (8:10-11). A *“third part”* of the sun, moon, stars, day, and night were also smitten (8:12). Later, the devil is seen pulling down a *“third part”* of *“the stars of heaven”*

(12:4).

Now, because of continued involvement in things hated by God, coupled with a rejection of the Son, the enemies of God are made to suffer more than before. The judgment is increasing in intensity. When men grow worse, so does their judgment!

## **THEIR POWER**

*“For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.”* We are still speaking of the horses, not the riders upon them. It is as though the horsemen were being carried along by Divine purpose, unable to work independently of God’s objective. Ordinarily, the horse is controlled by the rider. In this case, the riders are subservient to the horses.

We are taught in Scripture that false teaching and false prophets are more to be feared than war-mongers. This is not a common perception among those who have an inordinate fear concerning things coming upon the earth. Notwithstanding, it is a true one.

Unlike the natural realm, the power of these horses is *“in their mouth and in their tails.”* From the earthly point of view, both the mouth and tail of the horse are among its weakest points. Its mouth is capitalized on by men, who insert a bit by which the horse is turned. The tail of the horse is fragile, bringing danger only to flies and other forms of insect. But such is not the case with these horses.

## The Power in Their Mouth

As forceful as this warring multitude was, its real effectiveness was found in their mouth. It is what they espoused, and aggressively promoted, that caused the greater harm. Later, a vicious **“beast”** will rise against the people of God. He too will be noted for what comes out of his mouth. It is written, **“And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . . ”** (13:5). We are also introduced to the united assault of the dragon (Satan), the beast (earthly government), and the false prophet (corrupt religion). Of them it is said, **“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty”** (16:13-14).

What can we learn from these things? We are taught in Scripture that false teaching and false prophets are more to be feared than war-mongers. This is not a common perception among those who have an inordinate fear concerning things coming upon the earth. Notwithstanding, it is a true one. Jesus never told men to beware of Herod, Pilate, or any form of war. He did, however, say **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”** (Matt 7:15). There is a remarkable consistency to this that has very few, if any, exceptions (Matt 16:6; Mk 12:38; Lk 12:15; Phil 3:2; Col 2:8; 2 Pet 3:17).

Spiritual delusion has eternal consequences. That is why so many warnings are issued concerning it. The time of lifeless religion is called **“perilous times,”** and perilous they are (2 Tim 3:1-5)! The dominance of corrupt *Christianity* (for want of a better term) is referred to as **“giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”** (3 Tim 3:1). That is a more dreadful circumstance than the average *churchman* dares to imagine. This is the type of thing referred to by the words **“their power is in their mouth.”**

## The Power in Their Tail

Here the weakest part becomes a source of strength. Ordinarily, the **“tail”** is secondary, and not to be feared. You will recall the occasion when Moses’ rod turned into a serpent—a sign of Moses’ Divine commission, wrought by God before Pharaoh. When introducing Moses to the **“sign,”** the Lord told Moses, **“Reach out your hand and take it by the tail (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand)”** (Ex 4:4). How grateful Moses must have been he was not commanded to seize the serpent by the head! The point is, the **“tail”** is not to be feared, even in the deadly serpent.

Our text signifies there will be no weakness, or vulnerability, in this assaulting aggregation. They will be invincible in the matter for which they are released. They will not be caught off-guard, so to speak, or have weaknesses that may be exploited by those they attack. They are sent as **“the rod of God”** upon the world order, and are effective in their mission.

Another example of this truth is found in the Lord’s promise to Israel. If they would diligently obey the voice of the Lord, He would command a blessing upon them. Part of that blessing would be superiority over their enemies. It is stated in this way: **“And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail ; you shall be above only, and not be beneath . . . ”** (Deut 28:13). If, on the other hand, they did **not** hearken to the Lord’s commands, they would become servile. **“The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail ”** (Deut 28:43,44).

Our text signifies there will be no weakness, or vulnerability, in this assaulting aggregation. They will be invincible in the matter for which

they are released. They will not be caught off-guard, so to speak, or have weaknesses that may be exploited by those they attack. They are sent as *“the rod of God”* upon the world order, and are effective in their mission. The wisdom of this world will be impotent against them, as well as the imagined power of men. To use a folksy aphorism, they will get the people *“coming and going.”*

Although I have said it before, it bears mentioning again. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”* It is unspeakably foolish to refuse the Gospel, maintain a love for this world, and even oppose the saints of God! The Lord will not overlook this. Men must repent of such things, or fall into God’s hands.

## **THEY REPENTED NOT!**

*“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”* Here is one of the most arresting passages in Scripture. It reveals the dreadful effects of sin upon the sinner.

This enormous army has a world-wide effect, given power to kill a third part of mankind. **But they were no more effective than the Gospel of Jesus Christ!** The Gospel had spread throughout the world, and yet the time came when men did not heed it. Their hearts waxed cold, and they refused to repent. Now comes this mighty swarm, inflicting death upon mankind. It is on a large and unprecedented scale. However, men **did not repent** under this assault, any more than they did under the influence of the Gospel. Their hearts were so hard, no form of punishment could change them!

Among other things, this justifies God in His judgment of mankind. The wicked are worthy of such treatment, for they were unchangeable. Men often philosophize about the possibility of men changing. Too often, their reasoning does not include the working of the Lord. You will recall, God has been known to **“harden”** certain wicked people—to ratify their propensity to evil. He **“hardened”** Pharaoh (Ex 4:21; 14:4), the kings of the cities of Canaan (Josh 11:20), and the spirit of the king of Heshbon (Num 21:23; Deut 2:30).

Stated another way, God has been known to give people over to their own desires—another way of saying

Demons have a **“table”**—a place of meeting, where they have confluence with men. Those who practice idolatry sit at that table, having fellowship with demons, and drinking from their cup (1 Cor 10:20-21). Such practices are to be repented of, and with great haste!

they were **“hardened.”** Of wayward Israel, it is written, **“But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels”** (Psa 81:11-12). This same judgment was brought upon the Gentile world, which refused to acknowledge God. **“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness . . . For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections . . . God gave them over to a reprobate mind”** (Rom 1:24,26). The latter text reveals that sodomy was the outcome of this judgment (Rom 1:26-28). This should strike fear into the heart of every person devoted to, or philosophizing about, the sin of sodomy, or homosexuality.

**God Is Vindicated**

The point of our text is that this judgment vindicates God! It shows the wicked were not salvageable, so to speak. They *“repented not”* when confronted with the Gospel. Nor, indeed, did they repent when confronted with the worse things that can be experienced in this world. Even judgment on a massive scale—like a third part of men dying—is powerless to change those who are *“reprobate.”*

Let no soul imagine that *reprobacy* is a theological concept that has been developed by men. The Word of God declares such a state—a condition where men are rejected by God, with no hope of retrieval (Gen 6:5-7; Jer 6:30; 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12; 15:1; Ezek 14:14; Rom 1:28; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:16).

### **The Works of Their Hands**

This refers to idolatry, and is a Divine manner of speaking. These precise words are used to describe Israel’s lapse into idolatry. *“Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched”* (2 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chron 34:25). Of this wicked propensity God said, *“the children of Israel have provoked Me only to anger with the work of their hands”* (Jer 32:30). In his final sermon, Stephen referred to this trait in Israel (Acts 7:41).

The prevalence of imagery—*“the works of their hands”*—in religion is staggering. Neither, indeed, is it confined to the heathen community. Images and religious artifacts are so common in professed Christendom that, for some, it has become the only sign of being a Christian. Men have a propensity to the development of gods and charms in which they trust. When men refuse to repent of such things, the Lord takes note of it. **The ascription of Divine traits to articles of human invention is serious beyond imagination.**

## Connection with the Demonic World

Idolatry, whatever form it takes, affiliates the idolater with the demonic world. This is clearly taught in Scripture. Our text says men ***“did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons”*** (9:20 ). Following this same line of reasoning, Paul told the Corinthians, who were struggling with idolatry, ***“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons”*** (1 Cor 10:20). Paul warned believers of ***“doctrines of demons”*** (1 Tim 4:1).

Demons have a ***“table”*** –a place of meeting, where they have confluence with men. Those who practice idolatry sit at that table, having fellowship with demons, and drinking from their cup (1 Cor 10:20-21). Such practices are to be repented of, and with great haste!

I offer one additional thought on this subject. John is seeing a vision that revealed things in advance to his own time. In it, he is told of the activity of, and submission to, ***“demons.”*** Those, therefore, who affirm there is no such thing as demons, or that they have ceased to function in an influential way, are in sharp conflict with the very word of God. Too, those who determine to reach people in idolatrous sections of this world must realize they are stepping into demonic citadels and bastions. They must arm themselves with spiritual weaponry in such a circumstance. Academic dexterity and expertise is powerless in places of demonic superiority.

## Immorality--Bred in Religion

There is a moral degradation in idolatry, as is confirmed in our text. Springing from devotion to ***the “works of their hands,”*** men came under the grip of immorality. As it is written, ***“Neither repented they of***

*their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts*” (Rev 9:21). What a quartet of evil! ❶A disrespect for the Divine imagery in man– **murders** .❷ Involvement in the occult–**sorceries** .

❸The fulfillment of base lusts– **Fornication** . ❹A disregard for the possessions of others– **thefts** . All of this in a religious garb!

**The conditions that are prevalent in the heathen countries of the world are the direct result of their religious practices!** A commitment to false gods, whether philosophical or gods of wood and stone, yields a corrupt harvest. It is imperative that the people of God see this. We are living in a time when psychological and philosophical explanations are being offered for depraved human conduct. Such explanations have no place among those who profess the name of Christ! They are actually more closely related to idolatry than to the knowledge of God!

### **Satanic Activity**

One further observation is necessary. **Immorality is evidence of Satanic, even demonic, activity.** Taking human life (including abortion and euthanasia), occultism, erogenous behavior, and stealing, are all in the same category! They are evidences of Satanic activity and commitment to the realm of demons. It is a class of activity with which God is wholly intolerant. Further, it springs from the well of corrupt religion.

Our text solemnly reminds us of a time when the majority of godless men are unwilling to repent of their involvement in things cursed by God. Even unprecedented judgments from the Lord are powerless to alter their thinking, or induce them to repent. O, that men saw this more clearly!

## **THE HISTORICAL VIEW**

Once again, there is an historical view that fulfills, but not completely, this Divine judgment. In it the attitude of God toward those who hate Him is confirmed. While these events do not exhaust our text, they do introduce us to its sobriety and reality. **Historical judgements are but preludes to the final judgment.** This is seen in Christ's comparison of the day of judgment to the flood (Matt 24:38-39) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29-30). The destruction of Jerusalem was also a prelude to the final judgment (Matt 24). This is, then, a revealed way of thinking—that history is an arena in which the final judgment is introduced.

## The Turks

In 1057 A.D., the ferocious Turks began an aggressive campaign to reduce religions of the Northwest to belief in the Koran. Themselves converts to Mohammedanism, they committed themselves to the militant spread of it. For fifty years, they remained by the Euphrates River, until commissioned to force men to embrace the Koran.

This fierce band came upon horses, waging a religious war. They were called Turkomen, Turkans, or Turks. Their army spread over an area of 600 miles, and they were aggressive. Their initial assault yielded a sacrifice of 630,000 professed Christians to the Arabian prophet. (*Gibbons Decline and Fall of Rome, Volume 5, Page 512*).

In their attacks, the Mohammedans used artillery never before employed—canons. They also used gunpowder in the overthrow of the Eastern Empire (Greece)—something never used before (*Gibbons Decline and Fall of Rome, Volume 6, Pages 379-380, 388-389*). Horrible atrocities took place in the wholesale slaughter of nations in the Turkish wake.

Finally, in 1453, the Turks overthrew the last stronghold of the Eastern Empire, Constantinople (May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1453). At that time, it had been 396 years and four months from the time they crossed the Euphrates River and entered into their bloody campaign (1057-1453).

Thus, *the great* empires of the world were finally overthrown in their entirety. They had dared to enter into competition with the Living God, and thus were judged by Him. Daniel had prophesied the kingdoms of this world would be broken into pieces and consumed, and indeed they were (Dan 2:44).

Although considerably more could be said concerning this historical view (which is remarkably precise), I have elected to only introduce this perspective. I do so because I do not want to detract from the nature of this solemn text, or diffuse its power by dwelling upon introductory matters. Those who are interested can find much on this.

## CONCLUSION

Surely, we have dealt with a most sobering text! The hardness that sin creates has been affirmed with the words, ***“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”*** Even though confronted with Divine judgment, hard hearts remained hard! They should have learned from the calamity around them, but they did not. It is necessary that men learn from tragedies around them. Do you remember the words of our Lord concerning a bloody atrocity and structural failure that took place in His day? ***“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their***

*sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Lk 13:1-5). It is as though the Lord orchestrates often orchestrates events in order to warn wayward men!

It is also good to remember the words of Proverbs 29:1, which certainly apply to this text. *“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”* While the “longsuffering of God” leads, or constrains, men “to repentance” (Rom 2:4; 9:22; 2 Pet 3:15), that longsuffering can be rejected. God is calling men to repentance. He does so through the Law, in the Gospel, and by means of circumstances about us. Should men refuse to give heed to His summons, dire circumstances await them. God is able to raise up adversaries against them as He did to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14,23-25).

We must also learn from this text that the saints are safe in Christ Jesus. As it is written, *“safety is of the LORD”* (Prov 21:31). We are certainly not to be indifferent toward texts like the one with which we have just dealt. They are to be a stimulus to godliness. Where repentance is required, we are to *“be zealous and repent”* (Rev 3:19).

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 19

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET # 1

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets. Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth."

(Revelation 10:1-8, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Significance of the Trumpet**

We are witnessing the announcement of the judgments of God against His enemies. It is being presented as the sounding of seven trumpets. From the beginning of God's dealings with His people, the sounding of trumpets have been used to alert the people. The year of Jubilee was published by the sounding of a trumpet (Lev 25:9). The fall of Jericho was preceded by the sound of a trumpet (Josh 6:5,20). The ark of the covenant was brought up with the sound of a trumpet (2 Sam 6:15; Psa 47:5). Nehemiah rallied his wall-builders for battle with the sound of a trumpet (Neh 4:20). Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the portent of coming war as the sound of a trumpet (Jer 4:19-21; Ezek 33:4-5). Joel declared coming Divine judgment as the sounding of a trumpet (Joel 2:1).

This is God's manner of alerting the people to His own activity—the sounding of a trumpet. This is not merely history announced in advance! **It is a declaration of a Divine initiative.** If we fail to

remember this, our view of Revelation will become corrupted and we will descend into the arena of human wisdom. Language is the container in which thought is placed. In God's dealings with humanity, He Himself developed the nomenclature through which effective communication takes place.

Whether He moves to bless or curse, the Lord alerts the people. In the texts we are considering, He is coming in judgment.

### **Why Is Judgment Announced?**

Here again, we are exposed to the Divine manner—God's way of doing things. As it is written, ***“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets”*** (Amos 3:7). Whether He moves to bless or curse, the Lord alerts the people. In the texts we are considering, He is coming in judgment.

There are a number of reasons for this approach: i.e., announcing judgment well in advance of its coming. It will be profitable to mention a few of them.

- ❶ *The Divine forewarning gives opportunity to the offender to repent for opposing the Lord, and seek His forgiveness.*
- ❷ *Advance warning leaves those engaged in war against the Lord without excuse.*
- ❸ *By employing angelic hosts in the declaration of coming judgments, the Lord is alerting these heavenly principalities to the plan of the ages.*
- ❹ *The recording of these judgments enable spiritual posterity to*

*properly interpret history, and learn from the Lord's ways.*

- ⑤ *Giving heed to these prophecies will persuade succeeding generations not to oppose the Lord by rejecting His salvation and persecuting His people.*
- ⑥ *The consideration of these judgments will convince the saints they are not to avenge themselves. Vengeance belongs to the Lord!*
- ⑦ *We can learn from these declarations that sin leads to a condition from which repentance is not possible.*
- ⑧ *All opposition to God, whether on an individual or organized level, is destined to fail.*

### **Profitability**

One of the traits of “*all Scripture*” is **PROFITABILITY** ! As it is written, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim 3:16-17, NKJV). The book of Revelation is not excluded from that declaration. It is therefore to our benefit to seek *profit* from our exposure to the vision given to John. While it contains much information, that information is not an end of itself. Spiritual advantage must be realized, or nothing has really been gained. Everything must fit into the Divine objective to conform us to Christ.

### **I SAW!**

“*I saw . . .*” Some suppose this to be a unique segment of the vision – a departure, as it were, from the message of the trumpets. But this is not the case. Here is a **gradual transition** from the sixth to the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet will not sound until the fifteenth verse of

chapter eleven. That makes this seeming interlude quite lengthy (10:1-11:14). In this section, our attention will be focused upon the church, its deficiencies and strengths. This will serve to accentuate two things for us. First, the ungodliness of the world order, as revealed in its opposition to the people of God. Second, that some of the world's corruption has penetrated into the church, and will also be judged by God. The world order is coming down, whether it is found in aggression against the people of God, or in the corruption of the church.

## A MIGHTY ANGEL

### The Divine Manner

The involvement of the heavenly host throughout this book should be evident. Divine proceedings summon the heavenly host into activity. How often we have seen this!

- *The book was signified by an angel (1:1).*
- *A strong angel proclaims (5:2).*
- *Many angels praising around the throne (5:11)*
- *Four angels standing on the four corners of the earth (7:1).*
- *An angel ascending from the East with the seal of God (7:2).*
- *All the angels fall on their faces and worship (7:11).*
- *Angel with a golden censer is given much incense (8:3-5).*
- *Angel with the first trumpet of judgment (8:7).*
- *Angel with the second trumpet of judgment (8:8).*
- *Angel with the third trumpet of judgment (8:10).*
- *Angel with the fourth trumpet of judgment (8:12).*
- *Flying angel with a word of woe (8:13).*

Trials are all controlled, with none of them spinning out of control. Even when fierce and decisive

judgments are poured out, precise government is employed. This is confirmed by the consistent involvement of angelic hosts, all of which answer to the Almighty.

☞ *Angel with the fifth trumpet of judgment (9:1).*

- *Angel with the sixth trumpet of judgment (9:13).*
- *Four angels bound by the river Euphrates (9:14).*

There is a vital truth to be seen here. **Principalities and powers are behind the affairs taking place upon the earth—and they are all governed by the Lord!** The vision given to John underscores this. Those who have undue concern about what is coming upon the earth, and whether or not the saints will be present, overlook this fact. Trials are all controlled, with none of them spinning out of control. Even when fierce and decisive judgments are poured out, precise government is employed. This is confirmed by the consistent involvement of angelic hosts, all of which answer to the Almighty.

### **Consciousness of Angels**

The Word of God encourages us to be conscious of the angelic order. Paul charged Timothy to carefully observe what he had said **“before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels”** (1 Tim 5:21). In the assembly of the saints, women are to conduct themselves properly **“because of the angels”** (1 Cor 11:10). Solomon urged humanity not to speak rashly, saying **“before the angel, that it was an error”** (Eccl 5:6). The angelic order—particularly the elect angels—are among the fellowship into which we have been called (Heb 12:22). They are commissioned to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14), and are **“fellow servants”** (Rev 19:10). All of this is gloriously confirmed in the book of the Revelation! The consistent involvement of angels confirms we are witnessing **the government of God**, not the uncontrolled anarchy of wicked men.

## Why Make These Observations?

I do not want to be redundant, but these observations are necessary. Because angels are mentioned throughout this vision, and are key figures in the fulfillment of God's purpose, we must have a proper view of them. After all, we have been called into their fellowship, and they have been appointed to minister to us.

\* It is essential that we entertain a godly view of angels. We must not allow our hearts to consider them in an unlawful manner (Col 2:18).

\* It is consoling in troublous times to consider the unfailing involvement of holy angels in the affairs of men.

\* We are to regard the holy angels as part of the fellowship into which we have been called.

\* God's angels are fellow servants. They are involved on a different level than we, but it is the same battle.

## Another Mighty Angel

*“I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire”* (Verse 1). This is *“another mighty angel,”* the first one being introduced in connection with the seven-sealed book (a *“strong angel,”* 5:2). We are dealing with matters so significant they can only be handled by unusually strong and mighty beings!

The events taking place upon earth had their origin in heaven! The spirit keeps us in continual remembrance of this— **“from heaven.”** As a matter of interest, the word **“heaven”** is mentioned 56 times in this book. God and the Lamb rule the earth from there. Earthly history is planned from there. Effective messengers are sent from there. Departed saints have gone there. Believers who overcome will go there. The destruction of all of our foes will come from there. It is the heavens that do rule!

*The angel came down*

In order for this mighty angel to do his work, he had to **“come down from heaven.”** Any earthly activity is always “down,” whether it is Jesus coming to save us, the Spirit coming to direct and empower us, or the angels to minister to us. For man to behold God work, or work for God, he has to **“come up.”** But for the mighty angel to work in our behalf, he has to **“come down.”**

Do not think this a small and insignificant observation. While we are **“in the body,”** we are tempted to think too highly of the earth. And of our own involvement in it. Texts like this assist us in developing a sound perspective of what is occurring all around us.

*Clothed with a cloud*

Any earthly activity is always “down,” whether it is Jesus coming to save us, the Spirit coming to direct and empower us, or the angels to minister to us. For man to behold God work, or work for God, he has to **“come up.”** But for the mighty angel to work in our behalf, he has to **“come down.”**

The language is majestic. Often this kind of language is employed to show the glory of Divine involvement. “. . . *they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud* ” (Ex 16:10). “*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*” (Lk 21:27). “*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (Acts 1:9).

Satan is never said to come in a cloud, nor are any of his ministers. **This is language denoting heavenly activity.**

The cloud was glorious, yet veiled the angel’s blinding glory from the eye of John. This was God’s resplendent messenger, coming in the glory of God. **This angel is on a Divinely appointed mission!**

*A rainbow was upon his head*

This further emphasizes that the angel is a messenger of Divine intent. Remember, a rainbow encircled the throne of God (Rev 4:3). It denotes the grace and mercy of the Lord, which are over all of His works. As it is written, “*His tender mercies are over all His works*” (Psa 145:9). Even in the temporal judgment of the wicked, Divine mercy tempers their punishment. We have read of a **fourth** part of the world being stricken (6:8), a **third** part of men being stricken (9:15), the inability of attackers to kill, and torment limited to **five months** (9:5,10).

Were it not for the mercy of God, the wicked would have been totally removed. But there is now a rainbow around the throne—a token of Divine mercy and longsuffering. Those qualities are now ascribed to the descending angel, who will function with strict accord with the character of God, as well as His purpose. It is not until “*the end*” that the wicked will taste “*the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation*” (Rev 14:10). Too,

because the church will be the subject in the next few verses, mercy is particularly emphasized.

*His face was like the sun*

Coming from the presence of the Lord, the angel is characterized by glory. The principle is the same as was revealed in Moses, when he talked to God on the mount. When he came out from the presence of the Lord, his face glowed with Divine glory (Ex 34:29-35). Too, when our blessed Lord prayed on the mountain ***“His face shone like the sun”*** (Matt 17:2). **A personality, whether angel or man, cannot come from the presence of the Lord without having evidence he has been there!**

*His feet as pillars of fire*

The description is much like that of the glorified Christ: ***“His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace”*** (Rev 1:15). This is a most vivid description of an angel coming from the presence of the Lord. The ***“mighty angel”*** has, as it were, walked up and down in the holy place, becoming familiar with the purpose of the almighty. He comes to fulfill the mandate and mission of the King of kings and Lord of lords. **What we are about to see is an expression of the government of King Jesus!** The appearance of this angel confirms he comes from the Lord. To put it another way, he is a fulfillment of the prophesy of Jesus to Nathanael. ***“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”*** (John 1:51). Were it not for Christ Jesus, this angel would never have appeared to John! It is His salvation, His government, and His agenda that determines everything.

## THE LITTLE BOOK

*“He had a little book open in his hand . . . ”* (Verse 2a). The Revelation given to John is a book of books! We have already been introduced to the book of Divine purpose and providence—a book written within and without (5:1). Later we will be exposed to *“the book of life”* (20:12a), and the *“books”* out of which all men will be judged (20:12a).

### The significance of “book”

Frequently the Word of God speaks of *“books”* or a *“book”* being maintained in heaven. This is an anthropomorphism—the ascription of traits, common to our world, to heavenly things, in order to accommodate our understanding.

Frequently the Word of God speaks of *“books”* or a *“book”* being maintained in heaven. This is an anthropomorphism—the ascription of traits, common to our world, to heavenly things, in order to accommodate our understanding. It is not that there are books, as we think of them, in heaven. Books are necessary upon earth because of the infirmity of our flesh and our forgetfulness. The Divine character, however, includes such things as unwavering purpose, unfailing remembrance, and due recognition. Several examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

#### *Moses*

In his powerful intercession for Israel, Moses reasoned with God. *“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written”* (Ex 32:32). Here, God’s recognition and acceptance of Moses’ person are emphasized.

### *David*

David confessed his tears had been recorded in God's "**book**" (Psa 56:8). He also confessed that every aspect of his person had been written in God's "**book**" (Psa 139:16). In this text, the point is God's recognition of the sorrows related to living by faith.

### *Malachi*

Malachi spoke of those who feared God speaking frequently with one another. Such conclaves, he affirmed, had been recorded by God in "**a book of remembrance**" (Mal 3:16). The prophet was shown that God not only takes note of those choosing to think upon Him and communicate with those of kindred spirit, He will duly reward them in the final day.

### *Daniel*

A mighty angel unveiled the future to Daniel by showing him "**what is inscribed in the book of truth**" (Dan 10:21, NRSV). This text underscores that God's purpose was put into place before the foundation of the world. It is now being fulfilled in strict accord with the heavenly design.

A "**book,**" therefore, speaks of something God has planned—something that is being carried out by His appointed messengers.

## **It Is A Little Book**

The angel does not hold a large sealed book, like the one introduced in the fifth chapter (5:1). That book was large, requiring seven seals. It was a depiction of the full purpose of God. This book is a "**little book,**" and it is "**open.**"

It is called “*little*” because it signifies limited revelation –a part of the whole. It is also “*little*” because it represents a brief segment of time, as related to the whole of time. Additionally, it is “*little*” when compared to “*the ages to come*” (Eph 2:7). Scripture often speaks of a “*little space*” (Ezra 9:8; Acts 5:34), a “*little while*” (Job 24:24; Psa 37:10; Hag 2:6; Heb 10:37), or a “*little time*” (James 4:14). The idea is that of limitation or abbreviation. **What the angel has in his hand is a portion of the purpose of God which is to be unveiled to John.** It is gracious of the Lord to reveal “*His secret*” to the prophet (Psa 25:14; Amos 3:7). It is evident the Lord is acting in strict accord with His character, which is to unveil what He is doing to those with a heart to receive it.

The Word of God is given by God, and comes from heaven—whether in part or in whole. It is not a mere human production, and must not be approached as though it were. What is revealed from heaven involves things no mortal mind can conceive or concoct

In a day when *largeness* is the measure of nearly everything, a “*little book*” does not appear to have much significance. Yet, we will find that “*little*” can be exceedingly large.

### **It Is An Open Book**

The first book John saw was “*sealed*” (5:1). The next book he beholds is “*open.*” Jesus had to break open the seven seals of the first book, unveiling the execution of Divine purpose. As John as spends time in the presence of the Lord, he is given to see things more clearly. **Now, a**

**segment of Divine purpose is more readily apparent—it is revealed to John.**

How glorious is the opening of Divine intent! **In all of His marvelous doings the Lord preserves His glory, His promises, His character, and His people!** There is safety in His purpose as well as blessing, security as well as benefit. This is an aspect of the heavenly rule we must see. He is always mindful of those in the Son—always!

It is the Lord Who “*opens*” the things of God to men, just as Jesus opened the Scriptures to Cleopas and his partner (Lk 24:32). This is an opening of the Book to the understanding, or hearts of men—not merely their minds (Lk 24:45). This is the experience described in Second Corinthians 3:18. “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*”

*Interlude does not equal idleness*

You may recall there was a brief interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals (7:1-17), so we are in an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. However, *interlude* does not mean idleness. During the time between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, 144,000 servants of God were “*sealed*.” There are no lulls in Divine activity—no stopping of the prophetic clock, so to speak. The Lord is ever at work!

**The purpose of the intervals in Revelation is the development of perspective within God’s people.** It is as though the Lord moved us back to obtain a fuller picture. The value of this book is the *larger* picture that it brings to us. Here a segment of Divine intent will be illuminated that will tend to clarify the whole of revelation. Those who take hold of the things of God know this is a kingdom manner. *The part*

*can shed light on the whole.*

The fact that this book is “*open*” places the responsibility upon men. If “*what may be known of God*” in creation rendered men inexcusable who ignored it (Rom 1:19), what will be the portion of those who close their minds to this “*open*” book?

### **A Thought on Revelation**

The Word of God is given by God, and comes from heaven—whether in part or in whole. It is not a mere human production, and must not be approached as though it were. What is revealed from heaven involves things no mortal mind can conceive or concoct—that is, holy men “*spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet 1:21).

The inspiration of Scripture cannot be effectively argued by men, and thus confirmed to the intellect. Although this observation contradicts much of what is called *Apologetics*, it is imperative that we see its truth. **The Word of God speaks more to the spirit of man than to his intellect.** It awakens a responsive chord within the soul, enlivening, challenging, and causing hope to rise. No mortal word can do this!

Faith is the “*evidence*” of the truth of God’s Word (Heb 11:1). It, and it alone, is the confirmation that the Word has come from God. Faith brings proof to the soul of the reality of which God speaks. It *substantizes* the proclamation, making it real to the individual. Until the individual believes, no proof of inspiration can reside in the soul.

When it comes to revelation, we step into an arena that excludes the wisdom of men—effectively and completely. Either men believe the Lord, or there can be no acceptance of them or understanding of the

Word. God will not allow the persuasion of the truth of His Word to be given to men in the container of unbelief! Believing truth is a preeminent matter.

## THE MIGHTY VOICE

**This, then, is God’s way of saying He is going to interrupt the course of nature and the affairs of men.** When He does so, there will be no resistance on the part of men! They will be as helpless before Him as a frail doe before a roaring lion.

“... *And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land...*” (Verse 2b-3a). The picture is a riveting one. It transcends anything that can be imagined by man. This is a Divine working, and does not conform to human patterns of thought. Heaven is superior to earth, and this heavenly being is able to affect *the entire world*. This is not talking about a fourth part of the earth (6:8), or a third part (8:8-12; 9:15-18). It is not a tenth part, as in Revelation 11:13.

### *A global revelation*

While men are prone to think provincially, and within the confines of geographical and social restrictions, this revelation expands our thinking to global proportions. The “*mighty angel*” put his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land. The sea and the land represent the entirety of the world (Gen 1:10). The whole world is to be influenced by what is to follow!

### *A voice like a roaring lion*

**“ . . . and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars . . . ”** The lion is mentioned frequently in this book. The first living creature had a **“face like a lion”** (4:7). The reigning Christ is **called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”** (5:5). Later, an opponent of Christ and His people will have a **“mouth like the mouth of a lion”** (13:2). The language speaks of **aggressiveness and effectiveness** .

We are not told what the mighty angel said, simply that his voice was like that of roaring lion—riveting and demanding. It constituted a **Divine intrusion into the affairs of men** , as the roar of a mighty lion breaks the monotony of normal life. This type of language (i.e., the roar) is common when speaking of Divine disruption. **“The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: He shall cry, yea, roar ; He shall prevail against His enemies”** (Isa 42:13); **“The LORD shall roar from on high”** (Jer 25:30); **“He shall roar like a lion”** (Hos 11:10); **“The LORD also shall roar out of Zion”** (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2); **“The lion hath roared , who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?”** (Amos 3:8).

**This, then, is God’s way of saying He is going to interrupt the course of nature and the affairs of men.** When He does so, there will be no resistance on the part of men! They will be as helpless before Him as a frail doe before a roaring lion. God’s people need this perspective when things appear to be going against them. *All of their troubles can end in a moment of time !* Their foes can be scattered suddenly and effectively by a roaring word from the King. The knowledge calms the soul.

## THE SEVEN THUNDERS

***“When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices”*** (Verse 3b). Upon the roar of this mighty angel, a heavenly response takes place. Seven mighty thunders utter their voices, harmoniously and effectively. How frequently thunders are mentioned in this book (6:1; 8:5; 11:19; 14:2,5; 16:18; 19:6)! Again, this is an expression of Divine intrusion!

### **Constant Response**

In heavenly places, constant response is taking place. There are no insensitive or unexpressive personalities there! Whenever there is ***“silence”*** in heaven, it is remarkable and only for a short time (Rev 8:1). The four living creatures constantly respond to the presence of the Lord (4:8-9). The twenty-four elders are also noted for their expressive response (4:10-11; 5:9). Many angels responded to the Lamb (5:11-12). The praise of the angels was answered by a response from ***“every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them”***

The heavenly Kingdom, however, is not a stereotyped Kingdom. **It is not managed through routine, but through sensitivity and faith!** Monotony and typecasting have no place in the reign of Jesus! He is a living Savior, employing a living Word, and administrating a dynamic Kingdom.

(5:13). In the seventh chapter, we are introduced to a multitude responding in praise to God (7:10). Their praise is answered by a response from ***“all the angels”*** (7:12). At the announcement that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, the twenty-four elders respond in praise (11:16-17). Those gaining victory over conspirators of evil respond in insightful praise (15:2-3). At the overthrow of Satan’s hosts, the voice of ***“much people”*** is heard praising God (19:1-3). The twenty-four elders join in the response of adoration (19:4-5), followed by the voice of a great multitude (19:6).

We are witnessing a Kingdom trait not common in many circles—**RESPONSE** ! We live in the time of the silent church, when response is unusual—particularly insightful praise. But it is not so in the heavenly realms! Scripture informs us God inhabits “*the praises of Israel*” (Psa 22:3). Other versions say He is “*enthroned on the praises . . .*” (NKJV, NASB, RSV, NIV). This circumstance is but a reflection of the heavenly domain.

The Kingdom of God is a Monarchy, with One Sovereign reigning over it. His word, and His alone, governs that Kingdom. His will, and His alone, is effectively executed. But it is not a Kingdom characterized by silence among its subjects! *The more the human spirit is tuned to the heavenly frequency, the more responsive it will become* . While the response may take varied forms, it will always erupt!

### **Do Not Write!**

“ . . . *Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them’*” (Verse 4). It is as though the Lord Himself confirmed the cry of this mighty angel (2 Sam 22:14; Psa 18:13; Rev 4:5; 19:6).

Before the sound of the seven thunders fades away, John begins to write. He has been told throughout the book to write what he sees and hears (1:11,19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). The heavenly Kingdom, however, is not a stereotyped Kingdom. **It is not managed through routine, but through sensitivity and faith!** Monotony and typecasting have no place in the reign of Jesus! He is a living Savior, employing a living Word, and administrating a dynamic Kingdom. Those who desire to serve the lord must do so in a spirit of attentiveness and watchfulness!

Now the Lord forbids John to write what he has heard! It is ever true, as Solomon said, ***“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter”*** (Prov 25:2). Among other things, it confirms the necessity of Divine involvement if we are to understand His Word and workings. The fact that God can, and does, ***“conceal”*** a matter, confirms He can also open it up! He receives glory by both activities—revealing and concealing!

### *Daniel’s experience*

This is not the first time the Lord has concealed a matter. Daniel had the same experience. After being given a remarkable revelation concerning the future, the prophet was told, ***“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase”*** (Dan 12:4). It is not that the message would **NEVER** be known. It was that it would not be revealed prematurely! In this case, it would not serve God’s purpose for His intentions to be uncovered before ***“the time of the end.”***

Perhaps some scribe or scholar thinks himself equal to deciphering the hidden message. Using language expertise, a supposedly infallible hermeneutic, or superior analytical skills, he might endeavor to open up what God has hidden. But all of his labor would be in vain. When God hides a matter, it is hidden. There simply is no way to unlock what God has locked!

### *Jesus speaks*

Prior to His ascension, Christ’s disciples thought to gain some insight into God’s workings. Earnestly they asked, ***“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*** (Acts

The things that ***“are revealed”*** are pertinent to the

spiritual lives of those for whom they have been revealed. The “*secret things,*” or matters unrevealed, are not essential for the generation to whom they are hidden.

1:6). Had these men posed this question to many of the preachers and teachers I know, they would have been told, *He will NEVER restore the kingdom to Israel!* But that is not what Jesus answered, and it is not on the part of wisdom for His subordinates to give such an answer. Here is what Jesus said. “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority*” (Acts 1:7). That aspect of the Kingdom has been “*shut up,*” “*sealed,*” and “*hidden*” to even the Apostles themselves. Such knowledge would not have benefitted the indispensable ministry of the Apostles, and thus it was not divulged to them. No amount of Scriptural expertise or disciplined study could have unlocked such “*times or seasons*” to the apostles. It simply was not appropriate for them to know these things.

#### *The principle enunciated*

The involved principle was enunciated under the Law, and is still applicable today. “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law*” (Deut 29:29). The things that “*are revealed*” are pertinent to the spiritual lives of those for whom they have been revealed. The “*secret things,*” or matters unrevealed, are not essential for the generation to whom they are hidden.

#### *Why things are hidden*

The hiding of a matter can be for at least two reasons. ❶ The time is not appropriate, as in Daniel 12:4. ❷ The people are not able to receive it, as in John 16:12.

*There is a proper time*

However, when the times begin to be fulfilled, then the Lord begins to unveil things relevant to the life and ministry of His people. This was the reason for Paul's strong exhortation to the Romans. ***“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light”*** (Rom 13:11-12).

Simeon, because of the times in which he lived, was given particular revelation of and involvement with the coming Messiah (Luke 2:25-28). At the same time, there were those who ***“looked for redemption in Jerusalem”*** (Lk 2:38).

Make no mistake about it, God does deal with times and seasons! Everything is NOT on automatic pilot! The prophets frequently spoke in terms of specific times when Divine purposes would be executed and fulfilled (Jer 3:17; 33:15; Zeph 1:12; 3:19). John the Baptist declared he was the harbinger of such a time (Mk 1:15). Paul spoke of an appointed time when the faithful would be praised by God (1 Cor 4:5). The Savior Himself was born ***“in the fulness of time”*** (Gal 1:4). And, the day of Pentecost was a day that ***“was fully come”*** (Acts 2:1).

*Not time to understand the thunders*

Thus, our text manifests that a response had been heard by John which bore no immediate relevancy to his time and ministry. Nor, indeed, was it appropriate for those who read his ***“book”*** to know what the seven thunders uttered.

**TIME SHALL BE NO MORE!**

*“The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever . . . ”* (verses 5-6a). Everything in the Kingdom of God is Theocentric: i.e, God-centered. No perceptive personality proceeds independently of the will and blessing of God Almighty. This mighty angel, who had influence over both land and sea, *“raised up his hand to heaven,”* recognizing the Commander of the universe. With one hand he held the opened *“little book,”* while the other is raised to heaven in solemn acknowledgment of the Sovereign Lord.

The angel swears *“by Him Whom lives for ever and ever.”* It is as though he is saying, *What is about to occur is by Sovereign decree. It is the working of the Lord, with which I concur, and which cannot be resisted.*

The angel speaks as a representative of the King. What he is about to say is an announcement of something determined by God.

## The Creator

Any view of history, contemporary events, or the future, that does not allow for the preeminence of Deity is false. Whether we are assessing the past, perusing the present, or contemplating the future, it must be within the context of an eternal ruling Lord!

“ . . . Who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it . . . ” (Verses 6b). Because the coming event has to do with the earth, the angel reminds the universe that the Lord is its Creator. Men may speculate about the origin of the universe, but angels, *“who are greater in power and might”* do not engage in such foolish speculations. Nothing has come into existence of itself. The heavens were created by God, as well as everything within

them. The earth is His creation, including all things in it. The sea is also the work of His hands, together with everything in it.

### *Much made of the Creator*

The Holy Spirit makes much of the Creator. He affirms God ***“created all things through Jesus Christ”*** (Eph 3:9), and that for a purpose. Namely, ***“to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Eph 3:10-11). Of ***“the Word,”*** John affirms, ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”*** (John 1:3). Paul extends the matter by saying, ***“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”*** (Col 1:16).

Not only, therefore, were all things made by the Lord, they were also made ***FOR*** Him. The creation is the arena in which the great purpose of God is being fulfilled in most meticulous detail. In the end, everything will have served ***HIS*** purpose. This mighty angel recognizes that as he raises his hand to heaven, and swears by ***“Him Who lives forever.”*** He is acknowledging the rule of heaven (Dan 4:26).

Although things appear chaotic, and often without form or pattern, yet they are under the control of the Almighty. How frequently this is stated in Scripture. A sampling of these affirmations will be profitable. ***“O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?”*** (2 Chron 20:6). ***“For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations”*** (Psa 22:28). ***“He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah”***

(Psa 66:7). ***“The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all”*** (Psa 103:19).

Notice the perceptive description of the Lord. ✖- ***“Who lives forever”*** (Psa 92:8; Isa 40:28; 44:6; 1 Tim 6:15-16). ✖- ***“Created the heavens and the things therein”*** (Gen 1:1,14-19). ✖- ***“The earth and the things therein”*** (Gen 1:1; Psa 95:4-5; Jer 10:12; Acts 17:25). ✖- ***“The sea and the things therein”*** (Gen 1:20-22). Nehemiah joins in the angelic affirmation with a remarkable summation of the Divine nature. ***“You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You”*** (Neh 9:6).

**Any view of history, contemporary events, or the future, that does not allow for the preeminence of Deity is false.** Whether we are assessing the past, perusing the present, or contemplating the future, it must be within the context of an eternal ruling Lord!

The higher we are, the more careful and thoughtful we are in our words about God and Christ. The closer we are to the earth, the more haphazard our speech becomes concerning the Lord. We are not to think of God in lowly terms of this world! This is one of the objections some of us have to contemporary religion. It has humanized God in its speech and concepts. Those guilty of such thoughtlessness need to learn from this mighty angel.

There will burst upon the horizon of time a realization among all peoples of what God was doing in the world. For some, it will be the culmination of

everything they have hoped for. For others, it will be the conclusion of every benefit, advantage, and purpose.

A key observation

One further observation. Presently, there are three major divisions of the creation: *heaven, earth, and sea* (Ex 20:11; Psa 146:6; Ezek 38:20; Amos 9:6; Acts 4:24; 14:15). In the world to come, there will be *a “new heavens and a new earth”* (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13). However, there will be *“no more sea”* (Rev 21:1).

The fact that our Lord is the Creator justifies His involvement in earthly affairs. It is His world, and *“all souls”* belong to Him (Ezek 18:4).

### Time Has Run Out

*“ . . . that there should be delay no longer . . . ”* (Verse 6c, NKJV). The KJV reads, *“that there should be time no longer.”* There is a two-fold meaning to these words. **First**, this is the language of prophet fulfillment; i.e., *there will be no further delay in the sounding of the seventh trumpet*. **Second**, *the purpose for the earth has been served, and the time for the termination of all things has arrived*.

The thought is that *everything has been progressing to an appointed conclusion*. Now the appointed time has arrived, and the inhibition of time will be removed—**no more delay**! There appears to be a reference to the word given to the souls under the altar. *“It was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed”* (Rev 6:11).

### *An interesting perspective*

There are several different views concerning what needs to be fulfilled before time is rendered obsolete. Each of them has some merit.

❶ That the Gospel must first be preached throughout the whole world. This is based on Matthew 24:14. ***“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”***

❷ That the fulfilling of the words of the holy prophets—all of them—is what must first take place. This is based on Acts 3:20-21. ***“And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”***

❸ That when the last soul believes the Gospel, the end will come. Although myself subjected to this teaching, I do not know of a text upon which it is based.

❹ That when the last martyrs are slain, the Lord will conclude what we call ***“time.”*** This is based on the text in Revelation 6:11. ***“It was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”***

### **The Word is Fulfilled**

While there is an element of truth to each of these views, they do not provide a perspective that is large enough. We find the question of WHEN time will end in this very text. It will be when ***“the mystery of***

**God**” is **“finished,”** or **“accomplished”** (NIV). That is, when the grand purpose of God has been brought to its fruition.

**“ . . . but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the mystery of God would be finished , as He declared to His servants the prophets”** (Verse 6d-7). There will burst upon the horizon of time a realization among all peoples of what God was doing in the world. For some, it will be the culmination of everything they have hoped for. For others, it will be the conclusion of every benefit, advantage, and purpose.

The temporality of this realm, and the eternity of the world to come will then become apparent. As time winds down, the vanity of life without God will be clearly seen.

*The MYSTERY will be concluded*

Our text announces the finishing, or completing of the mystery. This refers to the completion of the purpose, the conclusion of the objective regarding the reclamation of humanity.

The Spirit speaks frequently of **“the mystery.”** Jesus told His disciples they had been granted the privilege of knowing **“the mystery of the Kingdom”** (Mk 4:11). Paul reminded the Romans that the Gospel involved the opening of **“the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began”** (Rom 16:25). Through Christ Jesus and His great salvation, God has **“made known to us the mystery of His will”** (Eph 1:9). In particular, Paul affirmed, God has **“made known”** unto him **“the mystery”** (Eph 3:3). That **“mystery”** was localized in the Person of Christ, through Whom it is being fulfilled and made known (Eph 3:4).

In fact, redemption involves a *participation* in this mystery, called **“the fellowship ( ἡ οἰκονομία ) of the mystery”** (Eph 3:9). Other versions translate this expression *“the administration of the mystery.”* This is a good translation if we understand the *“administration”* is realized by bringing the sons of God into the outworking of the **“mystery.”**

This **“mystery”** is presently being **“revealed to His saints”** (Col 1:26). In the conforming of them to the **“image of His Son”** (Rom 8:29), they are made familiar with both the nature and work of God. As the Spirit of God changes them **“into the same image, from glory to glory”** (2 Cor 3:18), what God is doing through Christ becomes more apparent to them.

#### *An overview of the mystery*

The word **“mystery”** describes a Divine objective that must be revealed to be known. It corresponds to the word **“secret,”** which is used by Moses and the prophets (Deut 29:29; Dan 2:19,22,30; Amos 3:7). The use of both words presumes the opening of the matter by God to His people. Appropriately, Daniel described the Lord as **“a God in heaven who reveals secrets”** (Dan 2:28,29).

From one perspective, the **“mystery”** is **the utter frustration of the powers of darkness** (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8). From another vantage point, it is to **conform the people He foreknew to the image of His Son** (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Still another viewpoint is related to **the display of Divine wisdom to principalities and powers through the church** (Eph 3:10-11). Yet another aspect of this purpose is **the gathering of everything in heaven and earth into one** , in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:9-10).

These are but different facets of Divine purpose, determined before

the world began, and which has always been resident in the Divine nature. Everything is progressing to the fulfillment of this purpose, with all of its facets.

Our text announces the finishing, or completing of the mystery. This refers to the completion of the purpose, the conclusion of the objective regarding the reclamation of humanity.

### *Clarity is coming*

Although God's plans are being steadily and certainly accomplished, it is not always obvious to the sons of men. We are given glimpses of the purpose itself, and occasionally are blessed with insights concerning its fulfillment. But when ***"the mystery is finished,"*** total clarity will break through the clouds of obscurity! Until then, our hearts are comforted in the understanding that Christ is on the throne, governing in righteousness.

### *The time*

The thought of time being no more, and of the completion of God's purpose no longer being delayed, is worthy of our consideration. Jesus said some men commit iniquity, treating the servants of the Lord with contempt and indulging the flesh. They reason, ***"My master is delaying his coming"*** (Matt 24:48; Lk 12:45). But there is coming the time of the seventh trumpet, when ***"He who is coming will come and will not tarry"*** (Heb 10:37).

This is the time that demons fear. As it is written, they cried out, ***"What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"*** (Matt 8:29). This is ***"the time of the harvest"*** (Matt 13:30). It is ***"the time"*** when the Lord will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and every faithful person shall

have ***“praise of God”*** (1 Cor 4:5). Later in Revelation it is called ***“the time of the dead”*** (11:18). It is the time when the present heavens and earth shall have served their purpose, and the ***“ages to come”*** will commence (Eph 2:7).

## **As Declared to His Servants**

### **the Prophets**

The finishing of the mystery or the completion of His purpose, will be in strict accordance with what was declared ***“through His servants the prophets.”*** This confirms the truth declared by Amos. ***“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets”*** (Amos 3:7).

*Who are these prophets?*

Though laboring in general obscurity, these holy prophets spoke of things far beyond their time. Their eagle eye of faith pierced into the future, as God spoke through them of His “eternal purpose.” Their view was partial, and they were not granted to comprehend the fulness of what they affirmed. But God has not forgotten those holy prophets, and will bring every syllable they uttered to fulfillment.

Who ***“His servants the prophets”***? Is this a generic term for everyone throughout the ages that has spoken a word for God? I think not. The expression ***“the prophets”*** is mentioned no less than 54 times from Matthew through Revelation. It represents a particular class of people, chosen by God, to announce His intentions—particularly as relating to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The saints of God are ***“built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone”*** (Eph 2:20).

These are not prophets like Agabus (Acts 21:10), or Philip’s four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Nor, indeed, is the angel referring to the prophets placed in the church for the edification, comfort, and exhortation of the body (1 Cor 14:3). All of these are certainly legitimate and valuable. They do NOT, however, form the foundation upon which we are built.

These are ***“the Prophets”*** whose writings Jesus expounded to the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27,44). They are the ones who wrote of the coming Messiah and His kingdom (John 1:45). They were witnesses to the ***“righteousness of God,”*** as revealed through Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21). The Spirit reminds us, through Peter, they ***“prophesied of the grace that would come to you”*** (1 Pet 1:10).

Though laboring in general obscurity, these holy prophets spoke of things far beyond their time. Their eagle eye of faith pierced into the future, as God spoke through them of His ***“eternal purpose.”*** Their view was partial, and they were not granted to comprehend the fulness of what they affirmed. But God has not forgotten those holy prophets, and will bring every syllable they uttered to fulfillment. For your consideration, the following sampling of prophetic references is given. They speak of a Divine purpose that will not fail of fulfillment. Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:11-16; 65:44-25; Jeremiah 3:16-19; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 8:23.

God has declared, and there will be no contradicting of it, ***“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may***

*give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11, NKJV).*

### How This Truth Inspires Us

The news of time being **“no more”** is refreshing, indeed, to the saints of God. It speaks of the conclusion of their trials, the overthrow of their enemies, and the realization of their hope. What a joyful sound! **“The mystery of God is finished!”** That is what brings a conclusion to time.

Those in Christ Jesus live in prospect of the grand consummation. Time is a precious commodity, given to us to use wisely. How sensible the admonition, **“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”** (Eph 5:15-16).

Think of the things that belong to **“time.”** ❶ This is when some men do not endure **“sound doctrine”** (2 Tim 4:3). ❷ It is when we **experience “the time of need”** (Heb 4:16). ❸ Now is the period of our sojourn, in a land where we are strangers and pilgrims (1 Pet 2:11). ❹ The **“now”** is when we often need to be awakened, due to the tendency to slumber and become lethargic in the good fight of faith (Rom 13:11). ❺ All of our trials belong to **“time,”** as well as all testings, sufferings, discipline of the body, and battles.

### *Lay up a good foundation*

The spirit gives an admonition to those who are **“rich in this world.”** The exhortation is appropriate for most us. **“Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they**

*may lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim 6:18-19).

We have not been created in Christ Jesus for time, but for eternity! That is why this book is for our comfort—it tells of events that lead to the consummation. The purpose of God is being brought to a glorious conclusion in the very midst of His enemies.

The logic of living godly

Building upon reality of the coming demise of the natural order, the Spirit speaks candidly to believers. *“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Pet 3:11-13).

The church has been translated into the eternal order. It is an order where the words of the angel are a welcome sound! **Time will give way to eternity!** Praise the Lord! Even now, our trials are *“working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor 4:17). Our resurrection bodies are awaiting us in heaven now. They are our *“house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (2 Cor 5:1). The salvation which we have by grace through faith is *“with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10), and is itself an *“eternal salvation”* (Heb 5:9). We are told of *“eternal redemption”* (Heb 9:12), an *“eternal inheritance”* (Heb 9:15), and the promise of *“eternal life”* (1 John 2:25). We have been given *“everlasting consolation,”* and have believed an *“everlasting Gospel”* (2 Thess 2:16; Rev 14:6).

**We have not been created in Christ Jesus for time, but for eternity!** That is why this book is for our comfort—it tells of events that lead to the consummation. The purpose of God is being brought to a glorious conclusion in the very midst of His enemies.

*The next significant event*

This text teaches us that once the Scriptures are open to us, the next truly significant event will be the dissolution of time. What a day of rejoicing it will be when the veil of time is torn asunder, and we enter into the endless ages to come!

**AN INTERLUDE**

Our text speaks of ***“the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound.”*** It is *then* that the finishing of the mystery, or the completion of Divine purpose, begins.

The winding down of time is preceded by an ***“open book”***— by the unfolding of the Word of God. This speaks of illumination, particularly through the Scriptures, and is initiated from heaven.

*The experience of Daniel*

Daniel was told to conceal what he was given, shutting up the book ***“until the time of the end.”*** The words to Daniel are arresting. ***“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase”*** (Dan 12:4). Although there are an impressive number of variant views of this text, mainstream thinking has generally perceived it in the same way.

The words of Daniel were closed, like a sealed fountain (Song of Sol 4:12), until the time when earnest inquiry would characterize the times. The **“increase of knowledge”** is related to men running **“to and fro,”** i.e., in a fervent quest for knowledge.

The Amplified Old Testament captures this sense of the text. *“But you, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. Then shall many run to and fro and search anxiously [through the Book], and knowledge [of God’s purposes as revealed by His prophets] shall be increased and become great.”*

### *The meaning of these words*

The meaning of the vision, therefore, is that **prior to the conclusion of all things, the knowledge of the Lord will break forth, and a broader understanding of Divine purpose will be obtained**. This will occur because men’s hearts will be stirred to search out the truth of God. They would no longer be content to dwell in a state of spiritual ignorance concerning the **“eternal purpose”** of God.

The apprehension of truth must be preceded by a fervent quest for understanding. The failure to engage in such a quest will close the volume of the book, making it mysterious and inconsequential to the individual.

Some of you are experiencing the opening of the Book. Your hearts have been thrown into a fervent quest for the truth. The blessedness of this condition cannot be overstated! You are a meaningful part of a prelude to the bringing down of time.

Later, in the twelfth chapter of Daniel, **“the end”** is defined more precisely. **“But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and**

*will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days”* (12:13). What a wonderful promise! Here is a pledge of Daniel’s involvement in the world to come, following the resurrection. There are few passages of Scriptures that speak with greater clarity on the subject. This is the conclusion that is being introduced in our text.

### *A principle to be seen*

There is a principle to be seen here that is of incalculable value. Truth cannot be perceived through systematic methods, which tend to be impersonal, not requiring the involvement of the heart. The impact of systematic theology, hermeneutical approaches, and stereotyped interpretations has been devastating to the Christian community. These have vaunted scholars instead of Jesus, and attributed Divine traits to methods rather than God. Spiritual poverty and ignorance are in their wake, proving they are not of God.

The apprehension of truth must be preceded by a fervent quest for understanding. The failure to engage in such a quest will close the volume of the book, making it mysterious and inconsequential to the individual. The prophet Jeremiah enunciated this principle of understanding. ***“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart”*** (Jer 29:13, NKJV). This premise was expressed by others throughout Scripture (Lev 26:40-45; Deut 4:29-31; 30:1-20; 1 Kgs 8:47-50; Psa 91:15; Isa 55:6-7; Hos 5:15; 6:1-3; Amos 5:4-6; Zeph 3:1-3; Lk 11:9-10).

**The fervency depicted requires all of the heart.** It is not a casual quest for knowledge, or a mere academic thrust that is described in the words ***“many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”*** God requires that ***“the whole heart”*** be engaged in a quest for Himself and His truth (Deut 30:2,10; 1 Kgs 2:4; 23:3; Jer 3:10; 24:7; Psa 119:2,10,58,69,145; Joel 2:12; Acts 8:37).

### *Confirmed by History*

History confirms a fervent quest for the truth has always been honored by God. The book has been **“opened”** to those with burning hearts. Great revivals have always been attended by such a spirit. Some of them are recorded in Scripture. ❶ The time of Joshua (Josh 5:1-9). ❷ The time of Samuel (1 Sam 7:1-6). ❸ The time of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:17-40). ❹ The time of Jehoash and Jehoiada (2 Kgs 11-12). ❺ The time of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1-7). ❻ The time of Josiah (2 Kgs 22-23). ❼ The time of Asa (2 Chron 14-15). ❽ In the latter part of Manasseh’s life (2 Chron 33:12-19).

Such awakenings are fitly described in the book of Acts, when the knowledge of God was spreading rapidly. That growth was associated with an apprehension of the Word of God. **“But the word of God grew and multiplied”** (Acts 12:24).

The Reformation Movement is an example of what an energetic quest for truth can do. That was a movement which broke the back of a religious system that had successfully stifled the Word of God for centuries. **It was a movement of the open book!** Not only were the Scriptures made accessible to the people, there was a remarkable resurgence of spiritual understanding. Some have concluded the same type of thing occurred during the beginning of, what is called, the Restoration Movement.

### *An application*

It is generally acknowledged (among those with whom I have been identified) that a disinterest in the Word of God prevails in their churches. Cunning men concoct schemes to awaken the interest of *their people*, whom they acknowledge are Scripturally illiterate, and content with the situation. Preaching has been modified and curtailed to meet

this condition. Brevity, shallowness, and casualness characterize much of what is falsely called “*preaching*.” But all of this has been ineffectual to change the situation.

This type of renewal took place at the preaching of John the Baptist. He did not go to the people, but the people came to him. As it is written, “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins”

### *A Spiritual Resurgence*

This vision is proclaiming that a spiritual resurgence will take place before the curtain of time is brought down. The book will be open, and the words of the prophets will be fulfilled down to the finest detail. This does not mean that everything will end with truth dominating in the earth. We know, from a variety of passages, this will not be the case (Matt 24:12,37-39, etc. ). However, there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel. Isaiah said it this way, “***For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.***” What a blessed promise!

He further affirmed this would **not** be due to an energetic evangelistic effort. It would come “***For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious***” (Isa 11:9-10). Habakkuk also spoke of that day (Hab 2:14). The Gentile initiative is prophesied several places. “***The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising***” (Isa 60:3). “***In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’***” (Zech 8:23). “***Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will***

*teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”* (Micah 4:2).

This type of renewal took place at the preaching of John the Baptist. He did not go to the people, but the people came to him. As it is written, *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins”* (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:5). Speaking of this unprecedented awakening, Jesus said, *“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it”* (Matt 11:12, NIV). This was not the result of a missionary effort, but of spiritually hungry people taking hold of the truth!

### ANTICIPATE THE LORD’S WORK

Our text affirms we have not seen the last of this type of thing. May the Lord hasten the day when this again occurs—and may it do so in our time, and in the place we occupy!

### TAKE THE LITTLE BOOK!

*“Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth’”* (Verse 8). God will not allow John to be a mere bystander—an observer only, as it were. He is called into participation, summoned to involvement. Though old in years, suffering in tribulation, and isolated on a desolate rock, John must engage in spiritual initiative. That is the manner of the Kingdom! A lack of involvement in the working of the Lord is wholly unacceptable.

*Deliberate action required*

John is not forced to take the book, but commanded to take it! His will must enter into the matter. He is to be characterized by the same spirit of which this interlude had spoken—a seeking of the Word of the Lord. The book must be taken voluntarily!

*The command is specific*

The closer we are to the Lord, and the more sensitive we are to His voice, the more clarity prevails. Those who delight in mystery do well to take heed to these words.

There is no ambiguity here! He is told WHAT book take: ***“the little book.”*** The book is further identified: ***“which is open.”*** The location of the book is made clear: ***“in the hand of the angel.”*** The particular angel is specified: ***“which standeth upon the sea and the earth.”***

The closer we are to the Lord, and the more sensitive we are to His voice, the more clarity prevails. Those who delight in mystery do well to take heed to these words.

*Boldness is required*

John is not told the angel will come to him, and give him the book. He is to ***“Go, take the little book.”*** He was not taking the book from a fellow mortal. That might have been difficult enough. He is taking it from the hand of a mighty angel that has called for the cessation of time. There is no academic posture that can fulfill such a word!

We learn from this that Divine commands are always attended by Divine strength. You will recall that Christ's words to the infirm were accompanied by Divine power; i.e., "*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house*" (Matt 9:6), "*Stretch out your hand*" (Matt 12:13), "*Lazarus, come forth!*" (John 11:43), etc., etc. It is still the same today! The commandments of the Lord are always accompanied by His power. That is what makes them doable!

Thus, the stage is set for the next section of this book. John is now involved in the Divine purpose at a new level. He will join in the working with both heart and mind. Thus, the Apostle will set an example for us all. As we sit at the feet of Jesus, allowing faith to dominate our hearts, we will be drawn into the Divine working.

## CONCLUSION

God is working everything together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). Also, everything is working against the ungodly, even though, from time to time, that does not appear to be the case.

The plan of the ages is being unfolded to us, as well as the manner in which it is being fulfilled. Under the governing hand of King Jesus, the purpose of God is being brought to its culmination. That purpose involves the exposure and punishment of evil doers as well as the enlightenment and reward of saints. No action of man has been overlooked. Too, no facet of the "*eternal purpose*" has been frustrated or abandoned.

God's involvement of other personalities in the completion of His determined objective is noteworthy. The conquering Lamb is the primary One involved. But there are also holy angels, mighty angels, and strong angels. The four living creatures are participants, as well as the twenty-four elders. Even wicked angels are summoned into association with this purpose. The prayers of the saints and the pleas of the martyrs under the throne are also instrumental in the completion of the Plan. Even the kings of the earth are drawn into it.

God is working everything together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). Also, everything is working against the ungodly, even though, from time to time, that does not appear to be the case.

All of the universe, and all the activity of created personages, are moving toward the consummation of the ages. Everything is being orchestrated from the Throne in meticulous detail – without compromising the nature of God, or violating the Divine imagery in mankind. It is ever true, ***“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen”*** (Rom 11:36).

### *Not a history lesson*

These things are not a mere history lesson! Rather, they are calculated to bring ***“everlasting consolation and good hope by grace”*** to those engaged in the good fight of faith (2 Thess 2:16). The warfare into which we have been called requires a high level of confidence, a goodly measure of joy, and a dominating hope. In order to possess these things, God has unveiled something of the future to us. He has not told us everything, but He tells us enough to assure our hearts that all will be well for the righteous.

As we run the race that is set before us, the Lord holds the goal before our hearts!

Those who are suffering for righteousness sake—companions, as it were, in tribulation—are to take heart! There has been no interruption of Divine purpose! God is still working everything together for their good, and their reward is still great!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 20

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET #2

So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings." Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." (Revelation 10:9 - 11:2, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

John has seen an open book in the hand of a "*mighty angel*," whose influence pervades both land and sea. When the angel cries for a cessation of time, the voice of seven thunders reverberates throughout the heavens and earth. As he has throughout this revelation from Jesus, John prepared to write what he hears. However, he is forbidden to do so. It is not that the thunders uttered something irrelevant or unrelated to the purpose of God. The time, however, was not appropriate for their message to be revealed.

Throughout the Scriptures, this perspective of the heavenly Kingdom is proclaimed and exhibited: i.e., that revelation, illumination, and

spiritual insight are granted only when appropriate to the times or individual. Understanding is never an end of itself. As with everything else in the Divine economy, it plays a role in the administration of the will of the Lord. For example, the children of Israel remained relatively small in number until ***“the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham”*** (Acts 7:17; Gen 15:13). When Daniel knew the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity was coming to a conclusion, he began to seek for understanding from God (Dan 9:2-27). It was only as “the time drew near” for Jacob to die, that he received insight direct Joseph concerning his burial, bless Joseph’s sons, and his own twelve sons (Gen 47:29-49:33). As Jesus sensed the time approaching when He would be received up into glory, He ***“steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”*** (Luke 9:51).

Jesus upbraided the Pharisees and Sadducees for not being able to ***“discern the signs of the times”*** (Matt 16:3). Why did He do this? Because it was a time when an understanding could be received from God—an understanding that would have enabled preparation and appropriation. Along this line, Paul reminded the Romans of the responsibility to ***know “the time”***— to be aware of Divine workings and provisions (Rom 13:11).

This, then, is a Kingdom principle – that God opens the truth in a timely manner. For John, it was not time to know what the thunders uttered. However, everything was not hidden to him. It was the time for the church to learn in remarkable detail of the encroachment of the devil.

This, then, is a Kingdom principle – that God opens the truth in a timely manner. For John, it was not time to know what the thunders

uttered. However, everything was not hidden to him. It was the time for the church to learn in remarkable detail of the encroachment of the devil. This is why the message of Revelation is so essential—it is a timely message, without which we will not be sufficiently equipped for the times.

The truths now revealed had been introduced in earlier Apostolic writings, but not with the details now provided. Paul wrote of a **“falling away”** that would come. Through him, Christ made known this **“falling away”** would be initiated through religion—a system of thought propagated by one claiming Divine qualities (2 Thess 2:3-4). Timothy was told this departure would be the result of giving heed to **“seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.”** He too was told the digression would be a religious one, and accompanied by religious teaching (1 Tim 4:1-3). Paul also told Timothy the coming apostasy would allow for immorality and spiritual corruption, while maintaining a **“form of godliness”** (2 Tim 3:1-5). It would also be a time when sound spiritual thinking would fade from view, and men would become devoted to **“fables,”** gathering about themselves teachers who would feed their corrupt appetites (2 Tim 4:3-4).

Now, as this dreaded time of apostasy moves closer, the Lord unveils more of its attending details. I want to emphasize this is not an appeal to the idle and unproductive curiosity of people. As with all of Scripture, this is intended to make the child of God **“perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”** (2 Tim 3:17). The Lord Jesus is not only unfolding the purpose of God, but the strategy of the devil as well. His purpose is to enable us to avoid being snared by Satan’s devices (2 Cor 2:11). I cannot conceive of anything being more practical than the message of this neglected book!

Once again, the time was approaching when Satan would step up his initiative against the people of God. His approach would be different

that it was up to the time of John. He would not seek to **corrupt**, rather than destroy the people of God. It is to our advantage to take the message seriously, and to endeavor to grasp its significance. Too, care must be taken not to seek more details than are provided by the King of glory.

## THE LITTLE BOOK IS TAKEN

*“So I went to the angel and said to him, Give me the little book”* (Verse 9a). Remember the word given to John—a word that came from heaven itself. *“Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth”* (10:8). That word was equivalent to the granting of authority to take the *“little book.”* No person in heaven, earth, or under the earth, could void that word from heaven! John could, in other words, obtain understanding concerning this segment of God’s purpose. Not merely was the future to be opened to John, but the working of God. His control over the affairs of men would be unveiled to the aged Apostle.

Something of the Kingdom manner is revealed in this event. Throughout Scripture, men are always modest and unassertive in the Presence of the Almighty. Brashness is never seen when men are cognizant of the Lord. Also, boldness is always required to fulfill the Divine mandate! There is no casualness in the presence of the Lord! A perusal of the Word of

To barge into the Divine presence, or to assume to handle eternal things in the energy of the flesh, is strictly forbidden. As John responds to the Divine commission, he is acutely aware of this situation.

the Lord will confirm this to be the case. The experience of Abraham (Gen. 15:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:16-17), Moses (Heb 12:21), Isaiah (Isa 6:1-3), Ezekiel (Ezek. 8:3-10), Daniel

(Dan 8:27), and others illustrate the point. Those who boast of familiarity with God, yet lack **“reverence and godly fear,”** have simply not told the truth!

While John was directed to **“take the little book,”** notice how he does it. Once again, here is a Kingdom manner. John goes to the angel and ASKS for the book. **“So I went to the angel and said to him, Give me the little book.”** He had received authority to **“take the little book,”** yet asked for it. Those who are not acquainted with the ways of God would have attempted, I suppose, to simply reach for the book. But this is not the way God works! This is one of the **“ways”** of God that it is essential to know. You may recall that Israel was shown God’s **“deeds,”** while Moses was afforded the blessing of knowing His **“ways”** (Psa 103:7). It is imperative that we behold the **“ways”** of the Lord, and the **“manner of the Kingdom”** (1 Sam 10:25) in this marvelous book. Real spiritual learning is appropriated through this means!

Even though there are things **“prepared”** for those loving the Lord, they are to be sought and asked for! Such things, in a sense, **“belong unto us”** (Deut 29:29). Yet, we are not to be presumptuous in the appropriation of them. Little wonder the Psalmist prayed, **“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression”** (Psa 19:13). To barge into the Divine presence, or to assume to handle eternal things in the energy of the flesh, is strictly forbidden. As John responds to the Divine commission, he is acutely aware of this situation.

John does not reach out his hand to **“take the little book,”** but opens his mouth in a humble request for the book! Oh, there is much to be learned from this! It is true that we **“lay hold of eternal life”** (1 Tim 6:12,19), **“obtain mercy and find grace to help”** (Heb 4:16), and **“receive abundance of grace”** (Rom 5:17). There are Divine provisions that **“belong”** to us, and which may be appropriated in abundance. There is, however, a sort of Kingdom *protocol* (for want of

a better word) which is to be observed in acquiring them. Abraham, the only man in Scripture called “the friend of God” (James 2:23), conducted himself in modesty when coming before the Lord. ***“Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes . . . Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak . . . Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord . . . Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once”*** (Gen 18:27,30). Ezra also approached the Lord with this kind of humility. ***“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God”*** (Ezra 9:6).

Although the Lord determines to work among men, it is often His manner to have them **ask** for that working. After promising remarkable things to Israel, the Lord said, ***“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock’”*** (Ezek 36:37, NKJV).

Jesus referred to this Kingdom manner when He said, ***“Ask , and it will be given to you; seek , and you will find; knock , and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”*** (Matt 7:7-8). James, the brother of our Lord, also spoke of this manner when he said, ***“you do not have because you do not ask”*** (James 4:2).

You might be tempted to think this has little to do with our text—but do not allow such an imagination to grip your heart! Although John was ***“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,”*** and was shown ***“things to come,”*** he maintained a humble posture. There are not blessings from God that allow for the assertion of flesh, or for trafficking in heavenly places as though they were common.

John approaches the ***“mighty angel”*** and says ***“Give me the little***

*book!*” He knows the book belongs to the angel, and not to himself. He also expresses the Divine will, saying “*Give me the little book,*” while not presuming to simply reach out and take it. There is a marvelous melding of humility and boldness here, driven by desire, and fueled by faith. John is not only obedient, he is eagerly submissive. He wants what the Lord has said he can have! Oh, that this frame of mind and heart were more common among professed believers!

## THE LITTLE BOOK IS EATEN

*“And he said to me, Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth”* (Verse 9b). The book is not simply handed to John. The angel is himself a participant in the reign of Jesus, and he will not relinquish the book to a disinterested and uninvolved person. Among the sons of men, novelties, memorabilia, and souvenirs are common. But this is not the case in the Kingdom of God. Men receive from God **only** what they are appointed to use! Too, unless there is participation in the truth, men cannot lay hold of it! There is no place for aloofness in the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ!

If you are looking for a mere introduction to the Lord, and do not want to give yourself to the contemplation of His truth, the heavens will become as brass to you (Deut 28:23). God is not interested in increasing your worth among men, but in bringing you into involvement with Himself.

This is an aspect of the Kingdom that must be seen. Men, in their attempt to institutionalize the truth, have allowed place for disinterest and a lack of involvement.

Such conditions prevail in the institutionalized church, but not among those who ***“walk in the light as He is in the light.”*** If you want God to open the truth to you, you must reconcile yourself to being involved in His work. It will simply not be opened unless this is the case. Your personal investment is required. That is involved in Solomon’s word, ***“Buy the truth, and do not sell it”*** (Prov 23:23). This requirement is also seen in the words of our blessed Lord, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you”*** (John 6:53). If there is no participation, there will be no understanding!

Now, John is called into deeper involvement! He is not given the ***“little book”*** to simply hold, or store in some secret place. It is not given to him to place him in an elite group, or give him a higher status. He is told, ***“Take and eat it!”*** Possess it and consume it! Let its words ***“sink down into your ears”*** (Lk 9:44). This message is to become a part of John’s person. Once digested, he will not be able to forget it. It will consume his thoughts and dominate his meditations. In him will be fulfilled the saying, ***“I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation ”*** (Psa 119:99).

If you are looking for a mere introduction to the Lord, and do not want to give yourself to the contemplation of His truth, the heavens will become as brass to you (Deut 28:23). God is not interested in increasing your worth among men, but in bringing you into involvement with Himself. The experience of John on Patmos perfectly accords with this principle. It is of deep concern to me that we are living in the midst of a religious environment that knows virtually nothing of this spiritual posture.

In prior centuries, God required this same involvement of another prophet. Ezekiel also had to ***“eat the book”*** shown to him from heaven. A scroll was spread before him similar to that presented to John. It was filled with ***“lamentations, and mourning, and woe.”*** In a remarkable

parallel to our passage, Ezekiel was told, “*Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel*” (Ezek 3:1). Like the Apostle John, the Prophet Ezekiel was not allowed to be detached from his message! Before he could preach, he had to digest the message—take it into his heart and conscience, making it part of himself! Speaking proverbially, the Word of God had to become the blood of the prophet’s soul. It had to occupy his mind and fill his vision. He was not allowed the luxury of being distracted to lesser things. You will note this same requirement was found among the Apostles. Their message became their life, the driving compulsion of their being.

Throughout history, no person lacking this trait has let a lasting mark for God. I cannot help but observe once again the near-total absence of this characteristic among those who have been denominated Christian leaders, preachers, and teachers. *They have not eaten the book!* Their minds are not saturated with the Word of God, and it does not control the way they think. There is too much of the world in their hearts and minds—too many of the sayings of men. The word of the Living God has never reached their “belly” – their innermost person that controls their motivation and view. Such men, however successful they may appear, will not be used mightily of God. They dwell too far from Him to be key figures in the fulfillment of His purpose.

**Understanding** what the Lord is doing will produce both sweetness and bitterness, gladness and sorrow. The heart will be lifted and dashed to the ground by the same message! Both blessing and suffering proceed from involvement with God, and blessed is the individual who sees it!

The “*mighty angel*” tells John up front there will be differing results

from consuming the book—from ingesting the Word of the Lord. “. . . *it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.*” This is not a mere emotional experience, or a violent disruption of the fleshly processes. The “*little book*” itself will “*make,*” or cause, the reactions of bitterness and sweetness. **Understanding** what the Lord is doing will produce both sweetness and bitterness, gladness and sorrow. The heart will be lifted and dashed to the ground by the same message! Both blessing and suffering proceed from involvement with God, and blessed is the individual who sees it!

The message itself causes “*sweetness*” and great delight to the soul. The implications of the message, and the results that come from it, can cause bitterness of soul. Just as the “*sweetness*” is not mere fleshly exhilaration, so “*bitterness*” is a legitimate spiritual experience, not the expression of the lower, or fleshly, nature. The Gospel, for example, brings out who are being saved AND those who are perishing. As it is written, “*For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Cor 2:15-16). The expression “*who is sufficient for these things*” means “*Who is equal to such a task?*” Who has the constitution to handle both sweetness and bitterness, joy and sorrow, delight and languish? It is the person who “*eats the book*” —who throws himself into the digestion of the King’s Word!

There are precious few, it appears, who spend time *eating the book* ! Legion is the name of those who study **about** the word, but never *eat the book* ! They spend phenomenal energy in learning about the original language of the book, the historical background of the book, and the comments of others concerning the book. It is not that these things are wicked, or that there is nothing of value in them. That is not my point. They cannot, however, become a substitute for *eating the book* ! No one will be an effective laborer in the Lord’s vineyard that does not spend time digesting what God has said.

***“Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter”*** (Verse 10). The Apostle does not balk at the word of the angel. He does precisely what is required of him. He takes the book from the angel's hand, and immediately consumes it. The effects are exactly what the angel said they would be. The immediate effect of the Word was sweetness to the spiritual palate. It was a good word because it came from a good Lord! It was sweet because it told of the Lord's doing, which is marvelous in the eyes of those who see it.

David referred to the sweetness of the Word, confirming its initial affect upon the human spirit. ***“The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”*** (Psa 19:9-10, NKJV). Again, it is contained in the 119 th Psalm, ***“How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*** (Verse 103, NKJV). Great delight registers upon the heart of the person choosing to *eat the book* .

These are the repercussions that professional religious men never see. It broke the heart of John to know of the unavoidable descent of Divine judgment. He could not be indifferent to it. The fact that God was going to move, and that His purpose would surely be fulfilled, was ***“sweet.”*** The wake of suffering, however, was like the ***“vinegar mingled with gall”*** that Jesus tasted on the cross

But, alas, that is not the only experience wrought by the book! There is also

**“bitterness”** in the inmost part of the eater. It registers upon the soul of the one consuming the Word that too often those hearing it will be hurt by the very word that brought sweetness to the one consuming it. Like Ezekiel and John, Jeremiah also realized this. With great fervency he cried out, **“For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me”** (Jer 8:31). That is the kind of bitterness of which our text speaks. When you digest the Word, you will fellowship with the Lord in this: **“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Pet 3:9).

Ezekiel, for example, experienced bitterness, just like John. **“So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me”** (Ezek 3:14). There was a certain chaffing in his spirit that approximated anger, although it was not fleshly, or sinful. The state he experienced lasted for **“seven days,”** as he sat astonished among those in captivity (3:15).

Daniel had a similar experience. After receiving the message of the Lord and digesting it, he **“fainted and was sick for days . . . ”** (Dan 8:27). Later, when he had heard the conclusion of the Lord’s message, Daniel said , **“my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me”** (Dan 7:28). Again, in the tenth chapter of his book, Daniel writes, **“Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength . . . O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength”** (Dan 10:8).

Habakkuk also tasted of the bitterness mentioned. **“When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with**

*his troops*” (Hab 3:16).

John the beloved was given a message to send to the churches (1:11). Part of his responsibility was to himself consume the message given to him—to *“eat the little book.”* He is given a vision of a great falling away – of the rising of a spiritual Babylon that would dash the saints in pieces, ride roughshod over the truth, and appear prominent among men (chapters 17-18). The message given to him was but an elaboration of the words spoken by Jesus, and written by Peter, Paul, and Jude (Matt 24:12; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 4:1-4; 2 Pet 2:1-3; Jude 18).

John saw and heard, and wrote as directed. He warned of coming realities that would incur the wrath of the Almighty. Yet, in spite of all of the warnings, both those preceding John, and those delivered by him, the apostasy came. Babylon still rose with its corruption, obscuring Christ and bring a flood of delusion. The love of many still waxed cold, and multitudes still departed from the truth. Suddenly, after digesting the Word of God, John is stricken with a sense of God’s great love in warning the church. He realizes these things will, indeed, come to pass. The message was then bitterness in his belly. It was much like the *“care of all the churches”* which came upon Paul every day (2 Cor 11:28).

These are the repercussions that professional religious men never see. It broke the heart of John to know of the unavoidable descent of Divine judgment. He could not be indifferent to it. The fact that God was going to move, and that His purpose would surely be fulfilled, was *“sweet.”* The wake of suffering, however, was like the *“vinegar mingled with gall”* that Jesus tasted on the cross (Matt 27:34).

This is a form of fellowship from which many draw back. It is revealed in the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem. Do you remember His words? ***“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation”*** (Lk 19:41-44, NKJV). There was “joy” associated with our Lord’s mission (Heb 12:2), but there was also bitterness! It will be no different for those who take us His yoke, and put their hand to His plow!

It is ever true, ***“The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits”*** (2 Tim 2:6). He must be the first to taste of the blessed sweetness of the message. He must also be the first to taste the bitterness of its implications! Before anyone can effectively labor with God, the Divine message must first be burned into the soul. It must be a part of him—as much as his personality, preferences, and dislikes. He must ***“eat the book.”***

There are often bitter consequences to receiving the Word of the Lord. Jesus spoke of this, and we do well to take it into our souls. ***“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”*** (Matt 10:34-39, NKJV). Let us once and for all have done with naive and simplistic views of the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ!

## BECOME PROFICIENT IN EATING THE BOOK!

I cannot help but speak, as it were, to John, the Patmos Seer. *O John, the things that caused bitterness to your belly have come into the world! Many of us have shared your bitterness from the other side of Patmos. We have seen the truth wasted and perverted! We have seen the saints starved and neglected! Some of us have grown up with those who blushed to declare to Zion their sins. We have also walked with those who would not have sinners rebuked in Zion. We have seen the church grow wealthy and prominent in worldly terms, but impoverished in spiritual ones. With sadness we have beheld her ministers meet with the approval of the enemies of God, and her houses of worship become jewel-encrusted centers of pleasure and entertainment. We also weep for the abominations in Jerusalem! The bitter implications of the truth of God have settled in our belly, as well as the sweetness of His counsel upon our mouth.*

## JOHN BECOMES A PARTICIPANT

This is what brought the “***bitterness***” into the belly of John – his participation in the work. He is going to prophesy to the very people who will taste of the judgment of the Almighty! It was not easy for John. The very Spirit of the Judge entered into John, making him a participant with Him.

“And he said to me, You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Verse 11). This is what brought the “***bitterness***” into the belly of John – his participation in the work. He is going to prophesy to the very people who will taste of the judgment of the Almighty! It was not easy for John. The very Spirit of the Judge entered into John,

making him a participant with Him. God has ***“no pleasure in the death of the wicked”*** (Ezek 33:11; 18:23,32). John fellowships with the Lord in that circumstance. Although God is just in the most harsh of His judgments, it is still true, ***“He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. To crush under one's feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice due a man before the face of the Most High, or subvert a man in his cause; the Lord does not approve”*** (Lam 3:33-36). Those who are called into the fellowship of God's Son are also called to this experience. Suffering and glory are joined together.

Here again is a principle of the Kingdom that must be seen more clearly by our generation. **Kingdom labors are fulfilled by participation, not merely fulfilling obligation.** Those who approach the Lord's work from a mere professional view, or for personal advantage, will simply be excluded. Their labors will not be recognized. The reason for this condition is obvious. Apart from union with Deity, we are actually at variance with the Lord. If we are not yoked with Him, we are at war with Him. In his fallen state, man is not even capable of agreement with God. He is not suitable for Divine employment because of this situation.

If you would work for the Lord, you must get under the yoke with Him. You must embrace His agenda, and consume His Word! Your employment requires that you digest what God has determined and declared. You must dwell upon the Word long enough for it to work an effect with you.

If men doubt this to be the case, God has clarified the matter. Outside of Christ, ***“There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who***

*understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Rom 3:10-18). This is a precise statement of the case, all contrary thoughts notwithstanding. **Whatever flows from the well of nature conflicts with the will of the Lord.** The *“carnal mind”* is *“enmity”* against God. It is not subject to the law of God. What is more, it is not possible for it to be (Rom 8; 7). **“By nature,”** or apart from regeneration, we are *“the children of wrath”* (Eph 2:3). If an effective union is not produced between God and man, it is not possible to avoid His wrath.

This is why participation is essential! It is the compelling reason behind the *“exceeding great and precious promises”* of God. They have been given to us in order that we might become *“partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). And why is this the case? Simply put, God has called us into His own working. We are now *“laborers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9). Now, in Christ Jesus, God works in us *“both to will and to do of His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). Now, in strict accord with both His nature and His purpose, He is working in us *“that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ”* (Heb 13:20-21).

In keeping with this principle, John is called into the work of the Kingdom. A *“mighty angel”* holds the open book, but John will be the one who proclaims it! God has consistently moved in this manner—employing men in the execution of His determined will. He used Enoch to declare the coming judgment of the flood, as well as the coming of the Lord Jesus to judge the world (Jude 14-15). He called Noah into His purpose to judge the world with a flood (2 Pet 2:5). The epoch of the giving of the law found Moses summoned into the work (John 1:17). The *“holy prophets”* were called into the work, prophesying of

the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Mighty John the Baptist was called into the purpose, chosen to ***“make ready a people prepared for the Lord”*** (Lk 1:17). The twelve Apostles were hand picked by Jesus that they ***“should go and bring forth fruit, and that [their] fruit should remain: that whatsoever [they] shall ask of the Father in His name, He may give it [to them] ”*** (John 15:16). In the same manner, Paul was summoned into accord with Jesus to ***“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”*** (Acts 26:18). This has always been God’s way!

Now, in his old age, John is once again called into a higher level of activity. It is not enough for him to be exiled on Patmos! He is brought into the labors of the Lord once more. Now he will ***“prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.”***

If you would work for the Lord, you must get under the yoke with Him. You must embrace His agenda, and consume His Word! Your employment requires that you digest what God has determined and declared. You must dwell upon the Word long enough for it to work an effect with you. It will not be enough to fill your mind with comments about the Word, although that is noble when kept within the proper measure. Your priority, however, must be the Word of the King. That is what must delight your heart. The ramifications of that Word is what must be the source of your bitterness. The Word must dominate you, satisfy you, and awaken within you a fervent desire to be used by God. When this happens, you will join the ranks of men like John!

## THE TIME OF MEASUREMENT

At this point, we enter into a most solemn part of this book. Again, I remind you of the folly of thinking the church was removed from the world at the conclusion of the third chapter.

“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there” (11:1). Increased involvement now begins. Before, John was simply writing. Now, he is going to measure, or judge. At this point, we enter into a most solemn part of this book. Again, I remind you of the folly of thinking the church was removed from the world at the conclusion of the third chapter. John is going to “*measure,*” or evaluate and judge, “*the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.*” This is certainly not a call to assess what is in heaven. Such a thought is too absurd for any thinking person to entertain. Here, judgment is **BEGINNING** “*at the house of God*” (1 Pet 4:17).

The “*reed*” given to John is a measuring instrument. It is something of fixed length—a means of appraisal that has been determined by God. There are Divine requirements, and they are seen in this “*reed.*” Grace is very real, but so is judgment. Those who do not ponder accountability to the Lord do well to consider this passage. God will view everyone associated with Himself in view of His purpose, His will, and His preferences.

### **Moses**

This is not the first time we have confronted Divine measurement. God has always maintained the right to measure things. With great solemnity, Moses was told, “*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain*” (Heb 8:5; Ex 25:40). Men are

simply not allowed to depart from the Divine agenda in order to gratify their own desires.

### **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah also was told of a measuring line. ***“And the measuring line shall go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever”*** (Jer 31:38-39). Here, God would chalk-out, as it were, His own territory. Although death and devastation had been there, He would reclaim it for Himself.

### **Ezekiel**

The judgment of Jerusalem was announced to the prophet Ezekiel. That judgment also involved a measuring reed. ***“He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.”*** The extreme bitterness associated with this judgment is seen in the requirement placed upon the prophet. ***“Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see.”***

The measurements were remarkably detailed, extending through the next five chapters of Ezekiel. (Ezek 40-45). The remarkable thing about this passage is its similarity to our revelation text. The temple itself was measured in every aspect (Ezek 40:5-43:12). The altar was measured (Ezek 43:13-44:3). Also, the worshipers, or those serving in the temple, were measured (44:4-31).

## Zechariah

In the days of Zechariah the prophet, the measurement of the people of God was again declared. *“Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, Where are you going? And he said to me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length”* (Zech 2:1-2).

You can see the consistency of God in this matter of judgment. John is being brought into the evaluation of the people of God, just as the prophets before him.

### A VITAL PRINCIPLE TO BE SEEN

Here is a principle aspect of the Divine working that must not escape our attention. Anything built, or commanded to be built, by our Lord comes to the time of measurement. It will be inspected to see if it measures up to Divine expectation!

Here is a principle aspect of the Divine working that must not escape our attention. **Anything built, or commanded to be built, by our Lord comes to the time of measurement. It will be inspected to see if it measures up to Divine expectation!** There is no way for this procedure to be avoided. It is built into the very nature of the Kingdom of God, and is a precise expression of the Divine nature. Jesus expounded this principle in the parables of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), the pounds (Lk 19:12-27), the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), and the Vine (John 15:1-5). We have been called into God’s work, and we will be assessed with that in mind.

## A More Precise View

Countless religious people fail to consider the day of judgment, whether a preliminary time, or *the “day of the Lord,”* within the context of Divine purpose. People tend to think of judgment be accomplished by measuring each deed by a right/wrong standard, without regard to how it related to what God was doing. Jesus spoke of *“many”* who will say in that great day, *“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”* The Lord did NOT respond with a rejoinder that denied they had, in fact, done such things. He simply countered, *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt 7:22-23).

What accounts for the difference in the assessment of the works in reference? Those who<sup>9</sup> did them said they were *“wonderful works,”* or *“miracles”* (NASB). Jesus said they were *“iniquity,”* or *“lawlessness”* (NASB). His explanation for that circumstance was, *“I never knew you.”* Notice, He did not say, *“You never knew me,”* although that was, no doubt, the case.

The solution to the dilemma is found in our Revelation text. What Jesus was saying is this: these prodigious workers were not aligned with His purpose. They were not working in union with Himself. Their accomplishments were not in synch with His agenda, and could not be harmonized with His purpose. In other words, they were working on their own, not from within His yoke.

The measuring process to which we are going to be subjected, both in our text and in the day of judgment, will view what we have said and done in that light. Were we working with the Lord, or in separation from Him. Did our activities have anything to do with what he was doing? Did they require the grace of God? Were they accomplished without the Spirit of God? Did we need an Intercessor to accomplish

them? Make no mistake about this. Such judgment is eventually coming for everyone. Our text reveals it will come ahead of time for some. History confirms this to be the Divine manner. It is seen in Adam and Eve, Cain, the world of Noah's time, wayward Israel, Ananias and Sapphira, and others.

Now, let us consider the objects of evaluation. What is to be "*measured?*" In this, we will see the consistent focus of the Lord. We will behold the proper emphasis for God's people. In order of their evaluation, we have ❶ *The temple of God* . This is the realm from which God works, and where His Presence is found. ❷ *The altar*. This is the means by which atonement is accomplished. It is the basis upon which reconciliation is realized. ❸ *Those who worship therein*. These are the ones engaged in Divine service—those who have professed allegiance to the Living God. The history of the world, as well as the destiny of men, hinges upon the Divine assessment of these areas.

What John is NOT told to measure is also significant. He is NOT told to measure *the government* , although it was infinitely corrupt in his time. He was not told to measure *the family* , of domestic aspect of society, although that is a vital area. Neither, indeed, was he told to measure *the social trends* of the day, even though they were remarkably corrupt.

This is the church, whether in pretension or in reality.

Those who profess to be part of this temple will be measured just as though they were. The Divine standard will be placed along side everything that presents itself as the place where God can be met or found.

Why were these things omitted? Is it that God never judges these areas? Indeed not! The destiny of men, however, does not depend upon these aspects of mortal life, however essential they may appear. The dwelling place of God, the provision for atonement, and those aligned with God are the real issues. These are all areas that require—absolutely require—the reigning Jesus. There can be a government, family, or society without the glorified Christ! All of those existed before the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. There can be families without an Interceding Savior. They existed before the Son of God entered into this vile world. There can be productive and helpful societies without a Redeemer. There were prior to the God sending His Son into the world.

But the Temple of God cannot exist without the Son of God. An atonement for sin cannot be effective without the Lamb of God! There can be no human traffic in the heavenly temple apart from the One Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus! All of these are intricately associated with the reigning Christ.

### **The Temple of God**

This is the church, whether in pretension or in reality. Those who profess to be part of this temple will be measured just as though they were. The Divine standard will be placed along side everything that presents itself as the place where God can be met or found.

The church is presented to us as God's temple. ***“Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”*** (1 Cor 3:16-17). Whether or not men so regard the church, this is how heaven regards it. ***“The temple of God is HOLY!”*** Those who defile or contaminate it will not be held guiltless!

The gravity of this circumstance is seen in this word to the Corinthians. ***“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell***

*in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (2 Cor 6:16). For the temple of God, separation from the world order is an absolute essentiality. *“Therefore come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you”* (Verse 17). The *“measuring reed”* is for a process that includes this type of assessment. *Is the church holy!* That is a critical question with God!

One of the objectives, if not the preeminent one, involves becoming a suitable dwelling place for God—His temple, as it were. *“Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ”* (Eph 2:20-22). If, collectively, the Lord does not dwell within a people, their existence is vain. Such an assembly will not pass the measurement of God. They will come up short. It will be said of such an assembly as it was once said of Israel, *“For the bed is too short to stretch out on, And the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself in it”* (Isa 28:20). The unusual number of religious assemblies in which the presence of the Almighty is not evident confirms the need for this measurement.

Thus John is told to *“measure the temple of God.”* Estimate it by the revealed purpose of God! See how it fits into the Divine agenda, and what it has contributed to the realization of the plan of the ages. Examine its fruit, and see if it has withered. Behold if *“nothing but leaves”* is found, when fruit is expected (Matt 11:13-14).

As inconceivable as it appears to the spiritual mind, there are actually religious men who specialize in *“wood, hay, and stubble”* Christians. Their programs

are calculated to swell the numbers with people who are spiritually weak, and require little nourishment.

God is sensitive about His temple! He has pledged Himself to **“destroy”** those who defile it! Those who construct, what they call, a *seeker-friendly* environment, do well to consider this now, for God will consider it then! Hear the Word of the Lord. **“But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”** (1 Cor 3:10-15).

This is not speaking of individual works, or deeds—the expressions of individuals. The **“works”** of reference are the converts—those placed upon the Foundation Stone. In this regard, Paul told the Corinthians, **“Are you not my work in the Lord?”** (1 Cor 9:1). **“Wood, hay, and stubble”** are people who will not stand the test of Divine judgment. They will be denied, like those to whom Jesus said, **“I never knew you.”** As inconceivable as it appears to the spiritual mind, there are actually religious men who specialize in **“wood, hay, and stubble”** Christians. Their programs are calculated to swell the numbers with people who are spiritually weak, and require little nourishment. Religious careers have been built upon such strategies. Regardless of the glowing reports, such men must take the Word to heart. **“If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss.”** There are labors that are wasted! What is more, those who **“suffer loss”** must themselves pass the fire test. The measurement of the temple of God is sure! We do well to submit to it now.

The measurement will, no doubt, be extensive, as depicted in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 40-45). The term **“Temple”** takes us back to the wilderness tabernacle, after which the Temple was constructed. The tabernacle was a precise reflection of heavenly realities **“the example**

*of heavenly things*” (Heb 8:5; Ex 25:40). The involvements of this measurement are worthy of mention. This is not a mere measure of the perimeter of the temple. There was a holy place, in which the priests ministered daily. There was also a *“most holy”* place, where atonement was made, and Divine communication experienced. Consider also the table of showbread, the golden candlestick, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat. All of these spoke of the ordained approach to God.

- ❶ The service of God (Holy Place)
- ❷ Access to God (The Most Holy)
- ❸ Spiritual nourishment (Showbread)
- ❹ Illumination (Golden candlestick)
- ❺ Pleasing God (Altar of incense)
- ❻ The covenant (Ark of the covenant)
- ❼ Place of communion (Mercy Seat)

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is fairly representative. Each of these things will be measured by God. None of them will be taken for granted or overlooked.

- ❶ In what way, and by what means, is God served?
- ❷ How do men seek access to God?
- ❸ How is nourishment ministered?
- ❹ What is the means through which spiritual understanding is sought?
- ❺ In what ways are efforts made to please God?

- ⑥ How is the covenant perceived?
- ⑦ How is communion with God represented?

In the institutionalized church these are normally *not* areas of consideration. That is a tragic mistake! These are areas of Divine consideration. While the professed church busies itself with institutional concerns, recruitment, budgets, and entertaining programs, the measuring reed is being readied!

### “MEASURE THE TEMPLE!”

In this book, the Lord Jesus Himself has already used the measuring reed. In chapters two and three, He measured the seven churches, finding their deficiencies

One of the indispensable ministries of those speaking for God, is to alert the church to Divine measurement.

There are countless congregations in existence that never give a thought to this. The jeopardy of their situation, when seen, is frightening to the soul.

and strengths. That was but a prelude to coming assessments, and the ultimate judgment of the last day. It behooves every church, every congregation, every gathering of believers, to prepare themselves for Divine evaluation. The church is NOT an end of itself! It is the **“pillar and ground of the truth,”** the appointed custodian of the means to salvation. Its Creator is Jesus. The Source of its life is the Holy Spirit. The purpose it serves belongs to God the Father. Because of this, it will be measured!

One of the indispensable ministries of those speaking for God, is to alert the church to Divine measurement. There are countless congregations in existence that never give a thought to this. The

jeopardy of their situation, when seen, is frightening to the soul. ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”***

## **The Altar**

The worship of, and acceptance by, God has always required an ***“altar.”*** Noah is the first one said to build an altar to God. On it, he offered ***“of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings.”*** It is written, ***“And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done”*** (Gen 8:20-21). It was essential that Noah have an altar!

The next man of primary importance was Abraham, the friend of God. As soon as God appeared to Him, confirming the coming blessing to him and his seed, Abraham ***“built an altar to the Lord, Who appeared to Him”*** (Gen 12:7). The patriarch, from that day forward, was noted for the altars he built to God (Gen 12:8; 13:4,18; 22:9). Isaac followed the same procedure (Gen 26:25), as well as Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1,3,7). As Moses entered into his indispensable ministry, he built an altar (Ex 17:15). The Old Covenant centered in an altar, upon which atoning sacrifices were made (Ex 20:24-26; 27:1-7; 28:43, etc.). An altar was essential to Divine acceptance!

Altars did not begin or end with the First Covenant. It is written, ***“We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat”*** (Heb 13:10). This is a reference to the vicarious, or substitutionary death of Christ Jesus. It speaks of the **basis** of our acceptance with God. It is why we can come into His presence.

As you must know, the professed church is significantly divided on

how men approach. Some teach it is only through an earthly priest, or representative—or even through Mary, the mother of our Lord. Some affirm it is upon the basis of a prescribed discipline, or liturgy. Throughout the Apostolic writings, particularly those of Paul, the issue of approaching God on the basis of works, or personal achievement, is the issue. In that case, the altar is of man's making, and the **primary** sacrifice is that of the individual. More of this type of teaching exists than we care to acknowledge.

John is commanded to measure the altar. How are men approaching to the Living God. The Galatians were doing so through a system of law (Gal 3:2-3). The Ephesians came upon the basis of theological exactness (Rev 2:1-4). The Colossians were being pulled into a system of personal discipline (Col 2:20-23). In these cases, neither the Lord nor the Apostles were gentle. Too much was at stake.

Consider the firmness of the proclamation our altar, and the danger of deviating from it. ***“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”*** (Gal 5:4). ***“I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain”*** (Gal 2:21). Like John, *Paul was measuring the altar!* He found some who, like the Jews of old, were ***“seeking to establish their own righteousness,”*** and thus had ***“not submitted to the righteousness of God”*** (Rom 10:3). There is never ambiguity on this subject!

Speaking of the altar, Jesus affirmed, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day”*** (John 6:53-54). This saying offended many that heard it, constraining them to leave Jesus and walk no more with Him (John 6:66). *Our Lord was measuring the altar!* He has not ceased this activity.

If the altar, or means of reconciliation, is to be measured by God, we do well to accentuate that means in our preaching. Over the years, I have found this to be an area of consistent deficiency in the churches. Here—at the altar—is where confidence and assurance are obtained. The conscience is cleansed here, and boldness to enter the presence of the Almighty is experienced. There will be a measurement of the altar!

The priests of old ate from the altar, or were “*partakers of the altar.*” Their sustenance came from the sacrifice (1 Cor 10:18; Lev 7:11-17). Likewise, those in Christ are sustained by the sacrifice of the altar. We not only come to God through Christ’s sacrifice, we are continually sustained by it. When the Lord measured the altar at Corinth, He found it deficient. They had viewed the altar with contempt, not discerning the Lord’s body at the Lord’s table. For this reason they were judged (1 Cor 11:26-32).

Here is a matter rarely considered in many churches: the altar provided by the Lord. The atoning death of Christ is rarely mentioned among countless congregations. Legion is the name of the churches and affiliates who hold before us their achievements in the flesh as their recommendation to God. When John is dispatched to *measure the altar* he will see what position the Lamb of God really occupies. Just as the altar was the center of activity in the court, and the means of entrance into the tabernacle, so the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus is the solitary means of our approach to God. It is the center of our activity.

“*The altar*” also includes the altar of incense, where the atonement was actually made (Ex 30:9-10). The brazen altar was where the sacrifice was made. The altar of incense is where it was presented. Both aspects are seen in the altar we “*have*” (Heb 13:10).

The only valid appeal to God is through Christ Jesus. The only means of acceptance is Christ Himself. It is His blood that cleanses (Rev 1:5), sanctifies (Heb 10:29), and by which we are justified (Rom 5:9). We have ***“redemption through His blood”*** (Eph 1:7). All of this is involved in ***“the altar.”***

If the altar, or means of reconciliation, is to be measured by God, we do well to accentuate that means in our preaching. Over the years, I have found this to be an area of consistent deficiency in the churches. Here—at the altar—is where confidence and assurance are obtained. The conscience is cleansed here, and boldness to enter the presence of the Almighty is experienced. There will be a measurement of the altar!

### **Them That Worship Therein**

People will be measured by God. Those who have claimed identity with the Lord will under the measuring reed! Those in Christ are described as ***“the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”*** (Phil 3:3). They have experienced the ***“circumcision of Christ,”*** having the ***“body of the sins of the flesh”*** removed (Col 2:11-12). That is not something that SHOULD occur—**it has already occurred!** It is not said that they OUGHT to worship God, but that they DO! Rejoicing in Christ Jesus is not an objective for them, but the experience of them. They are not under a grievous and burdensome commandment to have no confidence in the flesh. Rather, they simply do not have any! These are all realities produced by regeneration. They are evidence of salvation, and aspects of the New Covenant.

Jesus told a woman from Samaria that God is looking for worshipers – ***“true worshipers”*** (John 4:23). These ***“worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”*** Again, worship is not an objective, but a spiritual posture and experience. Notice what the Savior affirms! **God is NOT seeking worship.** Those accentuating worship have made a grievous

error. Their vision has become distorted by an institutionalized religion. Jesus said, *“the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers”* (John 4:24, NASB). God is seeking *“worshipers,”* and He finds them kin Christ Jesus. There will be worship, to be sure, for that is what makes worshipers *“worshipers.”* Such are not compelled by methods and techniques to worship God. They do so *“in spirit.”* It comes from their basic spiritual constitution. Their worship is not on the surface, or merely soulish. It is not an exhibition of undiscerning emotion. They worship “in truth”—i.e., their worship is real. It is the outpouring of their persons. They know God. Like Moses, they see Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27).

You already know such individuals are relatively scarce in the professed church. There are a phenomenal number of pretenders about us. It is not our purpose to point fingers and become the judges of other people. It is, however, imperative that everyone be alerted: **God will measure the worshipers .**

The conditions we see all about us had already started in John’s time. Jesus had measured only seven churches in Asia, finding the worshipers in five of them deficient. John would now extend the measurement throughout the world. It is this kind of activity that caused bitterness in his belly. It is difficult on the man of God to assess those who come short of the glory of God. That is only a faint reflection of the effects of such things upon the Lord Jesus. As Head of the church, the greatest impact of a deficient church registers upon Him.

## OMIT THE OUTER COURT

Here we begin to come to grips with the condition of the church. Remarkable deterioration had already set in, and it was going to get worse. It was not easy for the aged Apostle to be confronted with these things. His heart had been knit with the Lord, and he also ***“loved the church.”***

“But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles” (11:2a). Here we begin to come to grips with the condition of the church. Remarkable deterioration had already set in, and it was going to get worse. It was not easy for the aged Apostle to be confronted with these things. His heart had been knit with the Lord, and he also ***“loved the church.”*** Already, many had left the company of the faithful to disseminate erroneous doctrines. Earlier, John wrote, ***“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us”*** (1 John 2:18-19). We now deal with the Divine reaction to that corruption.

Remember, the three key areas to be measured are, ❶ The dwelling place of God—the Temple. ❷ The means by which atonement was obtained—the Altar. ❸ Those within Temple, who claim to be worshipers of God. There is, however, one key area left out. It is ***“the court which is outside the temple,”*** better known as ***“the outer court.”*** John is to spend no time evaluating it, or measuring it. He is not to save it until last, or give it only a cursory measurement. He is **NOT** to measure it at all. ***“Leave out the court which is outside the temple!”***

The language here is unusually strong. ***“Leave out the court which is without the temple.”*** The RSV and NRSV read, ***“do not measure the court outside the temple.”*** The NIV reads, ***“But exclude the outer court!”*** The word carries all of the strength of the command to

measure the Temple, Altar, and worshipers. The word “leave out” comes from ἔκβαλε (ek-bal'-le), and means *cast (forth, out), drive (out), expel, leave, pluck (pull, take, thrust) out, put forth (out), send away (forth, out)* . An even more extended definition includes the following. (1) *as ejection by force throw out, expel, drive out (MT 8.16)*; (2) *as expelling or excluding without force repudiate, send away, let go (JN 6.37)*; (3) *as taking out or removing from something, bring out, bring forth (MT 12.35)*; *take out (LU 10.35)*; *pull out, tear out and throw away (MK 9.47)*; *leave out (of consideration), omit (RV 11.2)*.

This is the rejection of something noxious and offensive. It is the same word used for casting the beam out of our own eye that we may clearly see to cast the mote out of our brother’s eye (Matt 7:5). Jesus also used this word when challenging men *to “pluck out”* the eye that offends them (Mark 9:47). It is also used by Paul when referring to God’s word to Abraham, **“Cast out the bondwoman with her son”** (Gal 4:30). A strong word, indeed! Here is an area that has been rejected. It is not an acceptable place to stay, and there is no hope for those who choose to reside there.

The outer court was the realm of preparation and approach. The sacrifice was made there, and washing was accomplished. But entrance was not found in that court. The light of the golden candlestick was not there. The nourishing loaves of showbread were not there. The pleasing fragrance of the golden altar of incense could not be detected in the outer court. There was not intercession there, nor Divine communication. It was a court **“without,”** or outside the tabernacle and temple.

The **“outer court”** was for the people of God. Only Jews entered into it. This was the court that surrounded the tabernacle. A wall of curtains formed its perimeter—an area 300' X 75'. Two key items were in this court: the laver and the altar. Both were made of brass, and were

essential to entering into the tabernacle. The laver was used for washing. The matter was so critical that Aaron and his sons were told they would “*die*” if they entered the tabernacle without washing (Ex 30:18-21). The altar was the provided for sacrifices, the blood of which was taken within the holy place. As you can see, the outer court was not incidental. Yet, John is told to exclude it from the appointed measurement.

### **Presented in Type**

The “*court without the Temple*” was the area of approach. There was no communion in this court. God did not speak with the High Priest in the outer court. The blood was not presented here, and the incense was not offered here. It was a place of preparation and approach, both of which were imperative. But they were not enough of themselves! Access to God began here, but was not brought to its culmination. The empowering Presence of the Almighty was not here. Some have called this court “the worshipers square, “ where the people of God were allowed access, though they could not enter the tabernacle itself.

### **A Significant Distinction**

A distinction is made between those worshiping in the temple, and any that might be in the court without the temple. Only those **WITHIN** are to be measured – those who are not merely approaching, but are inside, the dwelling place of God. The casually interested are excluded! Those who are approaching are omitted. Those dwelling in the outer limits are banned from the measurement. “*The court that is without, leave out!*”

This is another way of saying, “*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God*” (1 Pet 4:17). Understand, this is not primarily a search for excellence, but the exposure of inexcusable shortcoming and spiritual dereliction.

## Introduced by Ezekiel

It accords perfectly with the revelation given to Ezekiel. In his day, God's judgment came against Jerusalem. Before it was executed, you will recall, those who ***“sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof”*** were marked. They were not to be touched by the messengers of judgment. The mandate to six angels is frightening, but we must hear it once again. ***“Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women . . . ”*** Two special directives were given. In them, we behold a portent of the text with which we are dealing. ***“. . . but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and BEGIN AT MY SANCTUARY”*** (Ezek 9:5-6).

## No safety Outside the Temple

One might imagine that some degree of safety exists in the outer court, since it is left out of the measurement. But this is not at all the case. All but the faithful in the Temple will be utterly destroyed, as confirmed by Ezekiel's vision. The exclusion of the court ***“without the Temple”*** is only for this time of special measurement. Judgment ***“begins with the house of God,”*** but it does not end there!

## WHY THE OUTER COURT IS LEFT OUT

The angel is specific about WHY the court that is without the Temple is excluded from the measurement. ***“for it is given unto the Gentiles.”*** Herein is a most awesome aspect of the reign of Jesus! *Provision has been made for approach without entrance, for introduction without acquaintance, for form without power.*

The outer court was the realm of preparation and approach. The sacrifice was made there, and washing was accomplished. But entrance was not found in that court. The light of the golden candlestick was not there. The nourishing loaves of showbread were not there. The pleasing fragrance of the golden altar of incense could not be detected in the outer court. There was not intercession there, nor Divine communication. It was a court **“without,”** or outside the tabernacle and temple.

But the King limits the place where their corruption can spread. They cannot bring it into the Holy Place. There is no way it can be brought into the Holiest Place. It is confined to **“the court without the Temple.”** Those who **“know not God,”** although intensely religious, cannot purvey their corruption in the realm of Divine intimacy! They can only barter in the outer court.

If corruption comes, it will come in the outer court! It will not be found in the Holy Place, or the Most Holy place.

### *The Gentiles*

Who are **“the Gentiles”** to whom this outer court is given? From one perspective, these are the nations of the world. They are first mentioned in Genesis 10:5, when the first division of mankind is recorded. That was before Abraham and the Jews. From that point on, however, the Gentiles are generally viewed as all non-Jewish peoples. Paul is very specific in his definition of **“the Gentiles”**: **“. . . the Gentiles who do not know God”** (1 Thess 4:5). These are the people who have had no access to God—to whom no revelation was given, and who were not in covenant with the Lord of all. That is the general view of the word in Apostolic writings (Rom 2:14,24; 3:29; 9:24,30; 11:11; 1 Cor 5:1; 10:20; 1 Pet 2:12; 4:3). The phrase **“the nations”** is used throughout Revelation in this sense (2:26; 11:18; 16:19; 18:3,23; 19:15; 20:3,8).

***“The Gentiles”*** of our text are the people who do not know God, who are not in covenant relation with Him through Christ Jesus. In this case, we will find they are religious, but not in an acceptable manner. These have a ***“form of godliness, but deny the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5). They are, in fact, part of a great ***“falling away,”*** have embraced the ***“doctrines of men”*** (2 Thess 2:3; Col 2:22). They are responsible for the introduction of corruption.

But the King limits the place where their corruption can spread. He cannot bring it into the Holy Place. There is no way it can be brought into the Holiest Place. It is confined to ***“the court without the Temple.”*** Those who ***“know not God,”*** although intensely religious, cannot purvey their corruption in the realm of Divine intimacy! They can only barter in the outer court. That area, and that area alone, is ***“given to the Gentiles.”*** Spiritual imposters and pretenders roam about in the vestibule of truth, but they cannot enter into interior! Praise the Lord!

**The outer court is not measured because it has been rejected!** Those who remain in that area are not accepted. It is therefore unworthy of measurement, for there is no hope for those lingering in the realm of approach. If men do not come into Divine fellowship, there is actually no purpose for the outer court! In the tabernacle shadows, **there was no purpose for a sacrifice and cleansing apart from entrance into the tabernacle proper!**

### *Outer Court Religion*

We are living in the time of outer court religion. There is an enormous amount of activity in the ***“court without the Temple,”*** but precious little, proportionately, in the Holy Place and Holiest Place.

Nearly all areas of corruption have to do with approaching God. Ponder the corruption of *how to be saved*. Denominations present such a distorted picture in this matter, it is a wonder any are saved at all. We have everything from a *sinner's prayer*, to fulfilling a moral code. Although there is "**one baptism**," outer court propagators cannot agree as to what it is. Confusion reigns on how to come into Christ, how to receive the Spirit, and how to live the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit identifies the rudimentary matters of doctrine. "① **repentance from dead works, and of** ② **faith toward God, of** ③ **the doctrine of baptisms, and of** ④ **laying on of hands, and of** ⑤ **resurrection of the dead, and of** ⑥ **eternal judgment**" (Heb 6:1-2). It will suffice to say these areas have all been misrepresented by "**the Gentiles**." These are, so to speak, within the outer court. They are not to be despised, nor are they to be abandoned. They have to do with preparing to enter the Presence of the Lord. But if people do not go forward from these, they will be rejected!

If anyone doubts this is the case, ponder the continued reasoning of the

It should be apparent, there is danger if one chooses to linger in the outer court! Being satisfied with introductory views puts the soul in jeopardy of being rejected by God. It is that serious.

Spirit on this matter. "**And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open**

*shame*” (Heb 6:3-6). When spiritual advance, or entering into the *“Holiest”* (Heb 10:19), does not take place, there will be an exclusion from Divine measurement. In other words, there will be Divine rejection.

Again, this is too strong for some to receive – yet it is the truth. The Spirit is very specific at this point. *“For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned”* (Heb 6:7-8). This is an aspect of the Kingdom of God that is hardly known in the church-world! See—the outer court has been *“given to the Gentiles.”*

### *The Danger of Outer Court Religion*

It should be apparent, there is danger if one chooses to linger in the outer court! Being satisfied with introductory views puts the soul in jeopardy of being rejected by God. It is that serious. Staying in the *“court that is without the Temple”* subjects the soul to delusion, for that area has been *“given to the Gentiles.”*

The outward extremity of the Kingdom has been given over to those possessing no real knowledge of the living God. This does not mean everyone there is hopeless, for we all began there. It DOES mean that everyone remaining there is in danger. Just as there is protection in close proximity to the Throne, so there is peril when remaining at a distance from that Throne. The Throne does not move to us, we move to it!

The seriousness of the our time is seen in the remarkable lack of spiritual appetite. There is a notable satisfaction with shallow views and

brevity. Scriptural literacy has nearly vanished, and solid spiritual commitment is exceeding rare. This is the time of outer court religion!

### **Draw near!!**

We are admonished to ***“draw near,”*** having ***“boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus”*** (Heb 10:19,22). Growing in Christ is a Divine requirement (1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18; Eph 4:15; 2 Thess 1:3). The economy of redemption is calculated to get us out of the area of beginnings (Eph 4:14-20; Heb 6:1-8). With a sense of urgency, we are admonished to ***“Go on to perfection”*** (Heb 6:1), ***“Put off the old man”*** and ***“Put on the new man”*** (Eph 4:22-24), ***“Be no more children”*** (Eph 4:14), ***“Fight the good fight of faith”*** (1 Tim 6:12), ***“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Rom 13:14), etc., etc.

The reason for these admonitions is clear. The “outer court,” or the area of approach, ***“is given to the Gentiles.”*** It is the area where delusion lurks, and jeopardy is found. Exhortations such as the ones cited are calculated to get us out of the outer court, and into the holiest place.

Those who content themselves with spiritual shallowness have not the slightest notion of their coming plight. The reigning Lamb will not long endure such a condition. His atonement threw the door of heaven wide open for concourse with God! To refuse to enter into His presence will not be viewed as a mere oversight. If Jesus ***“once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God”*** (1 Pet 3:18), what will be the portion of those who stubbornly refuse to come to God. What will be the destiny of those who remained at a supposedly comfortable distance from God, when Jesus died to bring them near? To ask the question is to answer it! It is that apparent!

## **CONTROLLED WICKEDNESS**

This speaks of a time of apostasy, corruption, obscurity of the truth, and a general reign of spiritual darkness. The sun of righteousness does not shine brightly in this time. This is not owing to any reduction of its light, but because of obscuring and deceptive clouds.

“And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months” (11:2b). Although the condition is grievous, it is under Divine control. Notice here that we move from the *“court that is without the Temple”* to the *“holy city.”* The corruption of the outer court led to the desecration of *“the holy city.”* In the Jewish economy, the *“holy city”* was Jerusalem, where God had placed His name. Neh 11:1,18; Isa 52:1; Matt 4:5; 27:53). It was the larger environment, the outer court the area of approach unto God, and the Temple itself the place of communion. Using this figure, John is now given to see one aspect of the government of Jesus that causes bitterness in his belly.

### **The Principles Involved**

First, the focus of God is upon the Temple itself, the means of access to it, and those who are within it. Second, the approach to God is not intended to be a permanent place of residence. Third, there is a larger realm related to God—a city, as it were. This third area is the realm of theology itself. It represents the domain in which religious (particularly Christian) thought, and works are accomplished.

Those who defiled the outer court were not content to confine their activity to that area. They ran roughshod over the entire city,

debauching the whole of religion.

This speaks of a time of apostasy, corruption, obscurity of the truth, and a general reign of spiritual darkness. The sun of righteousness does not shine brightly in this time. This is not owing to any reduction of its light, but because of obscuring and deceptive clouds.

Keep in mind, the outer court *“has been given to the Gentiles.”* They did not wrest it from the hand of the King—it was **GIVEN** to them. Their despicable trampling of *“the holy city”* reveals the wretchedness of their hearts and the maliciousness of their intent. Not only, however, was the *“court that is without the Temple”* given to them, they were limited in the time they could possess it. Behold the strict Divine control! The saints are safe in the hands of their Lord, *“nothing shall by any means hurt”* them (Lk 10:19).

### **Forty Two Months**

This is a significant period in Scripture. It is brought up several times under different figures. The variety of ways used to describe it tells us a precisely defined time is not the thing being emphasized. Although we will find a remarkably precise period of time in history that reveals the significance of this text, we must not allow ourselves to be confined to such a view.

This period is identified in three different ways. There is something common in all of these references.

❶ **Forty-two months.** The first reference affirms the *“holy city”* will be trodden under foot by the Gentiles for that period (Rev 11:2). The second reference states an opponent empowered by Satan himself

would speak great things and blasphemies for this length of time (Rev 13:2).

② **One thousand two hundred and sixty days.** Using a 30-day month, forty-two months equals 1,260 days. The first use of this expression declares God's witnesses will prophesy "*clothed in sackcloth*" for that period (Rev 11:3). The second use of this phrase tells us the people of God will be secretly nourished by the Lord during satanic assault for that length of time (Rev 12:6). Nourishment amidst oppression.

③ **Time, times, and half a time.** The word "*time*," in this instance, means a year. It is used in this manner elsewhere in Scripture (Dan 4:16,23,25). This, then, would be 3-1/2 years. Again, dividing 42 months by 12 equals 3-1/2 years. Too, dividing 1,260 days by 30 equals 3-1/2 years. It is referring to the same period of time. There are three references to this period of time: two in Daniel, and one in Revelation. The first speaks of a wicked being which *shall "wear out the saints"* for that length of time (Dan 7:25). The second affirms the shattering of "*the power of the holy people*" for that duration (Dan 12:7). The third refers to the people of God being nourished "*from the face of the serpent*" for that time (Rev 12:14).

### *A Brief Recap*

The gravity of the circumstance to which we are being introduced can be seen in a brief review of these texts. Here are conditions associated with this period of time.

- ① The Holy City trodden under foot.
- ② The speaking of blasphemous words by an evil power.
- ③ The testimony of God's witnesses is subdued.

- ④ The church driven to a secret place in the wilderness.
- ⑤ The wearing out of the saints of God.
- ⑥ The shattering of the power of the holy people.
- ⑦ The church nourished secretly from the face of the aggressive serpent.

Anyone imagining that simplicity characterizes the Kingdom of God must rethink the matter! Those who tamper with the truth, or do not devote themselves wholly to laying hold of eternal life, must be told of this passage! It declares a judgment of God upon those who lost their appetite for the truth!

Here is a time when those hungering and thirsting for righteousness must hide themselves. The saints become weary and heavy laden, while their enemy speaks with brashness and boldness. Spiritual nourishment is scarce, and spiritual corruption is common. And it is all under the government of Jesus! The outer court was “*GIVEN*” to the Gentiles! The witnesses are sustained by God. A place is prepared for the woman. The woman is sustained by God. The blaspheming beast is “GIVEN” a mouth to peak great blasphemies. The saints will be “GIVEN” into the hands of an opponent to be worn out. However difficult it may be to receive, these are the affirmations of Scripture!

In this sacred place, we learn to approach salvation with sobriety and solemnity. Those who boast of *having fun* in their religion are not wise in either speech or conduct! God will not long abide such shallow approaches to the salvation that cost the life of His only begotten Son!

### **What Is This Period?**

In principle, this is a period of time during which the people of God will suffer oppression. It will be unusual tyranny, during which religious opponents will appear to have control. It is a time when the rudiments are the focus, and the heart and core of spiritual life is thrust from the masses.

### *Thessalonian Reference*

There is a remarkable reference to such a period in the letter to the Thessalonians. It will be profitable to briefly view it here. ***“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do***

*Here is outer court religion* : a falling away and not receiving a love of the truth. *The truth is obscured* : power, signs, lying wonders. One who sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. *The church must flee the situation*: let no man deceive you by any means. *The saints aggressively opposed*: who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped. *Blasphemous words are spoken*: with all unrighteous deception.

you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:3-12, NKJV).

*Here is outer court religion* : a falling away and not receiving a love of the truth. *The truth is obscured* : power, signs, lying wonders. One who sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. *The church must flee the situation*: let no man deceive you by any means. *The saints aggressively opposed*: who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped. *Blasphemous words are spoken*: with all unrighteous deception.

Here is a time when those hungering and thirsting for righteousness must hide themselves. The saints become weary and heavy laden, while their enemy speaks with brashness and boldness. Spiritual nourishment is scarce, and spiritual corruption is common. And it is all under the government of Jesus!

This is spiritual corruption, termed a *“falling away.”* Although it is under Divine control, it is for a lengthy period of time. In the early centuries, heathenism, with its idolatry, were the greatest threats to the church. There also came a time in history when worldly wisdom was vaunted to the place of God, and sought to supplant faith in God. But idolatry and irreligious philosophy are the greatest foes of the people of God. They are not what causes the darkest clouds on the horizon of understanding. Rather, it is when unbelief stands in the *“court that is without the Temple”* that the greatest danger exists. It is when men move about within the proximity of the Throne, but never quite before it, that the soul is lulled to sleep.

Our next lesson will explore the period of time to which we have been introduced in the last very of this discourse. We know the significance of this period by the number of times it is mentioned. Our hearts must grasp the message the Spirit is giving! It is a most solemn

warning!

## CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the heart and purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ. In accordance with the will of God the Father, this is a message that is to be given to *“the churches.”* While the immediate custodians of the message were the seven churches of Asia, its contents are not confined to them. Whoever has “an ear,” or the capacity to hear the Lord, is to *“hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”* The people of God are strangers and pilgrims in this world. They do not fit into the realm or its manner. Here, they become companions *“in tribulation,”* and are led through fire and water to the promised land. Often, the affliction is so great, it becomes a distraction. Still, the saints have a promise from God. *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you”* (Isa 43:2). This was the promise of God under the Old Covenant, but it is expounded more fully in the New Covenant.

In this wonderful book, the Lord Jesus expounds the matter of suffering more fully. He does so for the consolation of His people. They are given to see things never before divulged.

**First** , their greatest foes are found in the realm of religion—among those who have a form of godliness, but deny its effectual power. The saints must not become insensitive to the dangers inherent in dead religion! We live in a time when this is scarcely known. That is one of the reasons the times are *“perilous.”*

**Second**, believers must avail themselves of every Divine resource in

order to stand against this subtle attack by the evil one. It is vain to attempt to stand in the energy of the flesh. The forces that are aligned against us are superior to nature in its loftiest and most proficient state.

**Third**, the Lord Jesus is reigning in the very midst of their tribulation. Every aspect of the saint's experience is under the government of Jesus. He places limitations on the source of the trouble, the nature of the trouble, and the length of the trouble.

**Fourth**, all evil shall be recompensed, and all righteousness will be rewarded. Although it often appears as though the wicked are going unnoticed, they are not. Too, we may be tempted to think the righteousness of the saints is also overlooked. This is not so. Everything is being logged in the books!

**Fifth**, the assault against them is an organized. Satan has a purpose—an objective to fulfill against the church. He is shrewd in the execution of that purpose. Even though he is under the authority of Jesus, and is limited in what he can do, the saints must maintain closeness to their Lord. There is no provision in salvation for remaining at a distance from the King.

All of this has been seen in our studies to this point, and further elaboration will be seen. Behind the imagery, symbols, and analogies of this book, there is a resounding message, and we must discern it. The government is not only on Christ's shoulder, it is being faithfully administered. The purpose of the Almighty is being brought to a grand conclusion! The saints have been called into this working. They are participating in the fulfillment of God's "*eternal purpose.*"

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 21

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET #3

"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. (Revelation 11:3-14, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

I ever want to keep before you that in this book, God is unveiling His

purpose through Jesus Christ. *This is not a Divine commentary on the affairs of men, but an elaboration of the reign of the conquering Lamb.* It is given for the comfort of suffering saints. At the very threshold of this book, John reminds his readers of this . ***“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ . . . ”*** (Rev 1:9). We must not allow ourselves to lose this perspective by being drawn into novel views of the Revelation. The things seen by John involve great Kingdom principles that are fulfilled in world history. They may also be seen at the individual level. The point, however, is not their historical fulfillment, or the realization of them at a personal level. This is food for triumphant faith, written to assure our hearts that the purpose of God is being brought to a precise and predetermined conclusion.

### **An Effective Reign**

The reign of the Lord Jesus is an effective one, with no interruption or cessation. As it is written, ***“And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”*** (Lk 1:33). All opposing powers will be dashed into pieces, that without exception! Daniel was given to see this: ***“ . . . it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”*** (Dan 2:44). John is shown the same truth. ***“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever”*** (Rev 11:15).

### **Not A Simplistic Message**

This certain triumph, however, does not take place in a moment of time. The ***“eternal purpose”*** of God is being accomplished in a moral arena—one in which choices are made, determination is required, and opposition is realized. Satan, the original and arch-foe of God, institutes an organized effort to overthrow ***“the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”*** His endeavor is marked by cunningness, remarkable influence, and supernatural strength. He is given power to

work seeming havoc upon the earth, causing the death of saints, obscuring the truth of God, and marshaling nations against the Lord and His Christ. Yet, all of His efforts are wrought within the perimeter of Christ's government. Not one hair falls from one head without Divine approval. A single blade of green grass cannot be scorched without authority from the Throne.

### **The Dichotomy of Experience**

Every child of God is the target of Satan's initiative, but is also under the protection and Sovereign watch care of the King. Every congregation of believers is subject to the tactical hatred of the devil, but is also the appointed depository for grace and truth.

Because the purpose of God is so grand, the realm in which it is being accomplished is intense with activity. Friend and foe are present, as well as truth and the lie. The powers of both heaven and the bottomless pit are employed, and the saints of God themselves are involved in the conflict.

Once but a portion of these things is seen, simplistic views of the Kingdom of God and spiritual life will be dashed to the ground. The absurdity of self-centeredness becomes clear. Placing an emphasis upon personal or institutional objectives is foolish in the light of the conflict of the ages! Those who shine the spotlight of attention on social issues have unwittingly sided with the wicked one. Their thoughts have not risen high enough, thus causing the things of this world to be exaggerated.

### **Heavenly Priorities**

John wrote during a time of social injustice and political corruption. Yet, he did not write to correct those matters, or mount a reactionary

campaign among the faithful. Rather, he joined with the reigning Christ in sustaining the saints, comforting them in tribulation. The glorified and reigning Lamb dominated his vision while he wrote. The outcome of Christ's rule is set before the saints, showing that every opponent will be subdued, and every child of God vindicated and exonerated. How God's people need to hear these things proclaimed to them with power and consistency!

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The weight of this passage can be appreciated by briefly considering the language therein employed. I review these words with an acute awareness of the proscription of the Almighty concerning distorting the words of this book. ***“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book”*** (22:18-19, NRSV).

### **This is an Epoch**

We are reading of an epoch—something, from one point of view, that is unusual. Yet, from another view, this is the manner of the Kingdom. The superiority of Divine power is seen. The animosity and corruption of the unregenerate are seen. The aggressiveness of the devil is affirmed. The extremities of the saints experience in the world are seen—both for good and for evil.

✓ The secret to Kingdom effectiveness is declared. ***“I will give power to My two witnesses.”***

✓ The testimony of God is sometimes accomplished under less-than-ideal circumstances. ***“They shall prophesy . . . clothed in sackcloth.”***

Just as the Lord pinpoints the comfort of the saints,  
so He ministers judgment on His enemies with  
remarkable precision

✓ The work presented is being accomplished under the power and care of the Almighty. ***“These are . . . standing before the God of the earth.”***

✓ The enemies of God cannot thwart the work of God. ***“ . . . fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies.”***

✓ There are Divine reprisals for opposing the work of God. ***“If any man will hurt them., he must in this manner be killed.”***

✓ There is a participation with the Lord in His government, and that to a remarkable degree. ***“They have power to shut heaven . . . They . . . have power over waters to turn them to blood . . . They . . . have power to smite the earth with plagues, as often as they will.”***

✓ When the love of the truth is lost, the world begins to triumph. ***“The beast . . . shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.”***

✓ An animosity exists between the world and the people of God. It is especially made known during their adversity. ***“They that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them . . . because these two prophets***

*tormented them that dwell upon the earth.”*

✓ Resurrection power prompts the people and cause of the Lord to rise again. *“The Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet.”*

✓ There is an appointed escape from the enemies of God. *“They ascended up into heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.”*

✓ Just as the Lord pinpoints the comfort of the saints, so He ministers judgment on His enemies with remarkable precision. *“There was a great earthquake . . . the tenth part of the city fell . . . seven thousand men were slain.”*

In this passage we will behold three marvelous views of the saints of God. Each of these perspectives is consistently developed throughout this book.

❶ **The church in conflict and/or degradation.** The fact that saints are *“kings and priests”* does not mean they have no conflict. Neither, indeed, are they to imagine that a state of spiritual deterioration is not possible.

❷ **The church being preserved or sustained by the Lord.** Regardless of the degree and duration of opposition, those who trust in the Lord will be sustained by Him. They will finish their work.

❸ **The church triumphant over all of her enemies.** For the saints, all conflict and hardship is temporary. Ultimately, they will triumph over

every foe.

All of these perspectives are seen in this unique text. If we can grasp these perspectives, the text will become personal, and minister edification to our hearts. We will thus find it to be a source of rich comfort.

## POWERFUL WITNESSES

*“And I will give power to my two witnesses . . . ”* (Verse 3a). This is the Lord Jesus speaking. It is He, and He alone, Who ultimately gives power, or authority, that cannot be neutralized by the wicked one. Think of the remarkable references to this aspect of Christ’s reign. He promises overcomers he will give them “*power over the nations*” (2:26). He gave *power* to the rider on the red horse to take peace from the earth (6:4). *Power* was given to the rider on the pale horse to bring death over a fourth part of the earth with the sword, hunger, death, and the beasts of the earth (6:8). An invading horde of locusts was given *power*, but could not hurt those with the seal of God upon them (9:3). All *power* in heaven and earth has been given to our Lord (Matt 28:18). That is more than the statement of an official theological tenet. This is power that is delegated to His subjects, both good and evil, at the discretion of the King! In this case, heavenly authority is given to those speaking for the exalted Lamb—those who are His oracles.

### Powerful Witnesses

Remember that all Scripture, and all history as well, are bent around the purpose of God. The Law, with its attendant ceremonies, was a faint reflection of

things in the heavenlies (Heb 8:5). Too, history has been orchestrated by the Lord to reflect His own purpose

The idea of **powerful** witnesses is edifying to the soul. Much of the religion to which we are regularly subjected is powerless. It is unable to minister strength to the faithful or neutralize the power of the enemy. *But this is not the case with Christ's witnesses!*

When Jesus first sent out the twelve, He gave them **power** (Mark 6:7). When He sent out the seventy, He also gave them **power** (Lk 10:9). **1** Before the Lord ascended back into heaven, He told His Apostles they would receive "**power**" to be His witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Paul affirmed he had been given "**power**" to build up the saints of God (2 Cor 13:10). He also confessed he had received "**power**" to become an effective minister for Jesus (Eph 3:7). This, then, is familiar language—witnesses being given power from heaven. **There is no valid Kingdom work for which Divine power is not both required and dispensed!**

## Two Witnesses

Remember that all Scripture, and all history as well, are bent around the purpose of God. The Law, with its attendant ceremonies, was a faint reflection of things in the heavenlies (Heb 8:5). Too, history has been orchestrated by the Lord to reflect His own purpose (i.e., Cain and Abel, the Flood, the tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Joseph and Egypt, etc., etc.).

### *Introduced in the Law*

In regard to having two witnesses, the Law affirmed, "**Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or**

*three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness . . . One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established”* (Deut 17:6; 19;15). In both of these laws, **judgment** was the point—the accusation of those who had violated the law of God.

### *Witness against*

In keeping with the Law of Moses, these witnesses are rising in judgment. Remember, the temple, altar, and worshipers are being measured. We are being exposed to a time of judgment. These witnesses are empowered to speak the Divine estimation of things.

### *Harmonious Witness*

Too, their witness is harmonious. Under the Law, those who witnessed against the transgressor were to be in agreement. Differing testimonies were not acceptable. In Christ’s trial, particular attention was devoted to this detail—the witnesses against Him could not agree (Mark 14:56-59). When, finally, a twofold witness was produced, they are identified *as “false witnesses”* (Matt 26:60).

The *“two witnesses”* of our text are *harmonious* in their witness, calling down the judgment of God against His enemies. Their ministry includes ❶ Fire proceeding out of their mouth and devouring their enemies (11:5), ❷ shutting heaven (11:6a), and ❸ turning water to blood and smiting the earth with all plagues (11:6b). **Theirs is a ministry of judgment.**

### **A Sackcloth Ministry**

*“ . . . and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty*

*days, clothed in sackcloth*” (Verse 3b). Sackcloth is apparel of mourning and woe. When Jacob thought Joseph had been killed, he *“put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned”* (Gen 37:34). When Abner, Saul’s chief military man, died, David commanded the people with him, *“gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner”* (2 Sam 3:31). In his affliction, Job put on sackcloth and mourned (Job 16:15). There were times when God called for putting on sackcloth and mourning (Isa 22:12; 32:11; Jer 4:8; 6:26; Joel 1:13).

### *While the Holy City is Trodden*

Here is a ministry that takes place while the **“Holy City”** is being trodden down by the Gentiles, and the approach to God is defiled and corrupted (11:2). *This is a ministry like that of the holy prophets, who were empowered to speak against their generation and herald the coming of a better day.* It is much like the ministry of Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. It is not a pleasant ministry, but it is a necessary one.

### **The Duration of Their Ministry**

Christ’s **“two witnesses”** are empowered to prophesy over a period described as **“a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”** We have already identified this as a period of spiritual oppression and degradation. It is referred to no less than seven times in Scripture under three figures. In each figure, a time of great difficulty is portrayed.

❶ Forty two months (Rev 11:2; 13:5). Under this period there is oppression—the **“Holy City”** : is trodden under foot, and the beast speaks blasphemies.

❷ 1,260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6). Under this figure, a ministry of judgment occurs, and the people of God are secretly nourished from the

face of the serpent.

③ 3-1/2 years (Time, times, and half a time (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:13). In this time, the saints are worn out, the power of the holy people is shattered, and the real church is hidden.

### *The Principle*

First, there is a principle to be seen in this text. **Even in a time of spiritual oppression and decline, God does not leave Himself without witnesses!** If the church retrogresses, God will raise up witnesses to speak against its wickedness. Such witnesses will not be popular, but they will be necessary.

While the longsuffering of God ***“waits,”*** He ministers through His witnesses! Such was the case while Noah, the preacher of righteousness, prepared for 120 years for the coming flood. This type of allotment is called ***“space to repent”*** (Rev 2:21), and is consistently found throughout history. During such a time, a ministry like that of Jeremiah is instituted. ***“See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant”*** (Jer 1:10).

### *Historical Fulfillment*

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

### The Reign of Terror, 1793-94

The Montagnard Convention then had to contend with invasion, royalist civil war, and widespread provincial revolts against "the dictatorship of Paris." Initially, Georges Danton tried to placate the provinces, and the democratic Constitution of 1793 was approved by plebiscite and celebrated at a Festival of Unity (August 10). After July, however, Maximilien Robespierre's influence prevailed, and armies were sent to subdue rebellious cities. When the city of Toulon voluntarily surrendered to the British, a

demonstration in Paris compelled the National Convention to establish (September 5) the repressive regime known as the Terror. A fearful time ensued: the Committee of Public Safety strove to organize the economy and the war effort; the Revolutionary Tribunal sent state prisoners, including the Girondists, to the guillotine; and agents of the Convention known as Representatives of the People enforced bloody repression throughout France. *A campaign of dechristianization, marked by a new Revolutionary Calendar computed from Sept. 22, 1792 (1 Vendemiaire, Year I), led to the closing of all churches on 3 Frimaire, Year II (Nov. 23, 1793).* – *Grollier's Encyclopedia, 1998*

Although it does not thoroughly satisfy the text, there is a time in history during which the truth of this text can be seen. It was a time during which the truth was trodden down, and the souls of men were oppressed.

It began in 533 A.D., when Justinian, from the Imperial throne of Rome, declared the Romish Pope to be “Lord of the Church” (D’Aubigne’s *Reformation*, Vol 1, Pg 42 ) . There was an official alliance formed between “*the church*” and the government. For the first time, but not the last, the world order recognized professed Christendom as good and valid—a condition still sought by undiscerning souls. *Imagine! The ungodly ruler of a heathen kingdom sanctions the claims of a spiritual intruder to supremacy over the Lord’s body!* This was an epoch of significance! Neither Pilate, Herod, nor Nero sanctioned the Lord Jesus and His holy Apostles. At the first, the church was described by outsiders as “*this sect . . . that every where it is spoken against*” (Acts 28:22). But with the launching of this period (1,260 prophetic days), this was no longer the case. With the welding together of church and state, the treading down of the “*Holy City*” began! At that point, the “*court that is without the Temple*” was given over to the Gentiles, who wrought within it all manner of corruption.

A sackcloth ministry now began, as men sought to mingle the truth of God with the wisdom and power of this world. The men of God were led into a ministry that was largely reactionary— *a sackcloth ministry* .

Whether it is a Samuel, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, John the Beloved, or Martin Luther, Christ will raise up and empower His witnesses. They will confront spiritual decline with a powerful testimony from heaven.

This period lasted for 1,260 years, or until 1,792. At that time, atheism rose in then dominate France. Napoleon led away the pope (formerly declared “*Lord of the Church*”) captive, and in chains. The French Revolution inducted the era of atheism, where militant war was made against anything termed “Christian.” Humanism sprang into prominence, and the sciences replaced the Scriptures as the authority of beginnings.

### *Corruption of Unparalleled Magnitude*

During this time ***higher criticism***, “*the attempt to examine the Bible from a purely scholarly point of view*” came into prominence, reaching its apex in the nineteenth century. Men now bowed the knee to human reasoning. This period is erroneously called “*The Enlightenment.*” Of it, Grollier’s Encyclopedia says the following.

The Enlightenment is a name given by historians to an intellectual movement that was predominant in the Western world during the 18th century. Strongly influenced by the rise of modern science and by the aftermath of the long religious conflict that followed the Reformation, the thinkers of the Enlightenment (called philosophes in France, and Aufklärer in Germany) were committed to secular views based on reason or human understanding only, which they hoped would provide a basis for beneficial changes affecting every area of life and thought. The more extreme and radical of them--Denis Diderot, Claude Adrien Helvetius, Baron d'Holbach, the Marquis de Condorcet, and Julien Offroy de La Mettrie (1709-51)--advocated a philosophical rationalism deriving its methods from science and natural philosophy that would replace religion as the means of knowing nature and destiny of humanity; these men were materialists, pantheists, or atheists. Other enlightened thinkers, such as Pierre Bayle, Voltaire, David Hume, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, and Immanuel Kant, opposed fanaticism, but were either agnostic or left room for some kind of religious faith.

This age of “*enlightenment*,” according to secular history, came to an end “*after the upheavals of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era*” (The Philosophy of Enlightenment by Fritz Koelin ). It was during this time that an evil coalition was formed between religion and the world. Ideas sprang into prominence that denied personal affiliation with God through Christ, and the purity of Scripture.

*It has reached our time*

The ripples of this damnable era have reached into our very time. Today, in Bible Colleges and Seminaries throughout the world, the precise approach to Scripture is being taken that was pioneered by the humanists of the eighteenth century; i.e., “*the attempt to examine the Bible from a purely scholarly point of view.*”

This type of spiritual environment produces at least two results. First, *there is an increase in religious corruption* . Second, *the real witnesses of Christ denounce the decline* , throwing down imaginations and every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

It is not my purpose to dwell upon this aspect of the Revelation. However, it is important to note that such corruption is duly noted in heaven, and will not go unpunished. Whether it is a Samuel, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, John the Beloved, or Martin Luther, Christ will raise up and empower His witnesses. They will confront spiritual decline with a powerful testimony from heaven. Their ministry will be an effective one!

## WHO ARE THE WITNESSES?

There have been numerous attempts to identify these witnesses. Some

believe they are Moses and Elijah. Others see them as Enoch and Elijah, neither of which experienced death. We will find, however, that the Spirit approaches their identity quite differently than flesh prefers. It appeals to principle. ***“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth”*** (Verse 4).

### **Not Enoch, Moses, or Elijah**

It should be evident this is not Moses and Elijah, returning to minister under adverse circumstances. This does not mean this is not possible. We do know, however, this righteous pair (Moses and Elijah) had already appeared on earth to speak with Jesus concerning the death He was to accomplish (Matt 17:3; Lk 9:30-31). Their testimony would not carry unusual weight among men, especially unbelievers (Lk 16:27-30). Too, it is not likely that God would place them again in the arena of suffering, having already delivered them from it. The same reasoning can be applied to the return of Enoch, who, like Elijah, did not ***“see death.”***

### *Specific personalities not the point*

As throughout this book, principles are adduced to be more prominent than historical people are events.

This does not exclude the application of the text to specific people and times. It does, however, eliminate this as the *primary* meaning of the text.

It appears to me that specific personalities are not the point in reference. As throughout this book, principles are adduced to be more prominent than historical people are events. This does not exclude the application of the text to specific people and times. It does, however, eliminate this as the *primary* meaning of the text. The Lord can speak with remarkable specificity, and often does. Here, however, He speaks in the language of typology. ***“These are the two olive trees and***

*the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.”*

### **Zechariah’s Vision**

In accordance with the Divine manner, the language of the prophets is used. In this case, Zechariah was given the same figure. On the occasion of reference, an angel awakened Zechariah, challenging him with the question, *“What do you see?”* Looking intently, the prophet replied, *“I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left”* (Zech 4:1-3). The fact that John is told of *“two lampstands”* signifies a fuller revelation that the one received by Zechariah.

Zechariah cannot identify significance of the olive trees and lampstand, and therefore asks the angel, *“What are these, my lord?”* The angel is, so to speak, taken back by the prophet’s question. The answer is apparent to the angel, but not to the prophet. *“Do you not know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’”* (Zech 4:5). The angel’s answer seems evasive, but it is not. *“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts”* (Zech 4:6).

The vision is of a *message—a message of Divine support during difficult times*. It identifies **how** the work of the Lord will be accomplished when it seemed impossible for it to be accomplished at all.

The prophet is not satisfied with the answer, still pondering the significance of the olive trees and lampstand. He asks, *“What are these two olive trees; at the right of the lampstand and at its left?”* (Zech 4:11-12). Once again, the angel answers, *“Do you not know what these are?”* The prophet replies, *“No, my lord”* (Zech 4:13).

The answer of the angel reflects a heavenly view. It was satisfactory for Zechariah. ***“These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth”*** (Zech 4:14). For the prophet Zechariah, these ***“anointed ones”*** were Joshua the High Priest, and Zerubbabael the Governor. Both were appointed by God: the first to administer in things pertaining to God, the second in things concerning civil matters. In the matter before them, however, both were going to join together in the building of the house of the Lord. **Through their efforts, as they were strengthened by the Spirit of God, the work and worship of the almighty would be preserved.** Their work was to restore the Temple, and reinstitute the worship of God.

### *The Divine manner*

Often, in the beginning of great spiritual epochs, God has used two witnesses to keep spiritual matters alive. There was Moses the prophet, and Aaron the high priest, both standing before the Lord at the time of the exodus (Deut 34:10; Ex 31:10). During the Babylonian captivity, there was Ezekiel the Prophet and Daniel the ruler (Ezek 1:3; Dan 6:1-3).

A key to Zechariah’s vision is the declared **purpose** of the two olive trees. They stood on either side of a single lampstand, *provided a constant flow of oil for continual illumination* (Zech 4:12). This differs slightly from

**Though seemingly invincible, the opponents of the church will face tenacious witnesses that will hold their feet to the fire of Divine judgment! We have received a Kingdom that cannot be moved!**

the vision of John. There is only one lampstand in Zechariah’s vision, but two in John’s. The difference is the twofold witness of the Apostles AND Prophets in the reign of Christ.

Only the lamp of the Old Covenant existed in the time of Zechariah, a shadow of things to come. But in Christ Jesus, there are two lamps—one to bring us to Christ for salvation, and the other to bring us to God for fellowship. **More light exists in the Gospel than has ever been realized prior to its proclamation!**

### **Keeping the testimony alive**

Here is a depiction of God using sanctified individuals to keep alive His Word and purpose. This is accomplished through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, as revealed to Zachariah. ***“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts”*** (Zech 4:6).

The witnesses are not specifically identified, because that is not the point. *Rather, it is that during this time of spiritual corruption and intense opposition of the wicked one, the Lord will raise up His witnesses.* They will faithfully declare His Word, and denounce the pollution the court without the temple.

### **They stand before God**

These ***“stand before the God of the earth,”*** ministering with an acute awareness of Him and His will. He will sustain them for their work. The people of God are not to concern themselves with whether or not the truth will survive. They are to hold on their way, keeping the faith and cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. The Lord will not leave Himself without a witness—not even during a falling away.

### *A significant period of time*

There is one other thing to be seen here. **Here is a trial that is of significant length.** Truth will *appear* to be subservient to the lie for a long period of time. Satan will *seem* to have the dominancy, and God’s

people will *appear* inferior and weak. But the saints of God are not to be deceived by the circumstances. The Lamb is on the throne, reigning for the purpose of bringing His Father's purpose to a grand and successful conclusion—and He will do so! **Even though there are opponents, there will be witnesses.** Even though driven into a wilderness, the church will receive nourishment. Though seemingly invincible, the opponents of the church will face tenacious witnesses that will hold their feet to the fire of Divine judgment! We have received a Kingdom that cannot be moved!

## FOR THE TIME, THEY ARE INVINCIBLE

*“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner”* (Verse 5). The point of this section is not the *means* by which the enemies of God are destroyed. Rather, it is that **God's witnesses are invincible until their testimony is finished**. This is the same type of circumstance the Apostles experienced. Remember the words of our Lord to the twelve? *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish”* (Lk 21:187). Or, the word of the glorified Christ to Paul: *“For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee”* (Acts 18:10).

All of the Apostles, excluding John, died a martyr's death, seemingly contradicting what was promised. **But their death did not come until their work was finished—just as with our Lord!** Moses did not die until he had brought the people to the borders of the promised land. John the Baptist did not begin to decrease until the One for Whom he was preparing the way arrived. It was only then—when his ministry was finished—that men could do to him *“whatever they wished”* (Matt 17:12). Paul was not slain until he had *“finished”* his course (2 Tim 4:7).

The Spirit now speaks in the language of the prophets, assuring the hearts of suffering believers that they are not the only ones that are

Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, persecution, hatred, betrayal, the rise of false prophets – **all evidence of heaven being closed !** Famines, pestilences, earthquakes – **evidence of the earth being smitten !** Social agitation, political upheaval, and natural calamity are all evidence of the Divine reaction to unbelief and carnality!

appointed to suffer. Those opposing Christ's two witnesses will be devoured by fire. The clear allusion is to the experiences of both Moses and Elijah. At the uprising of Korah against Moses, "***there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense***" (Num 16:35; 26:10). Although they sought to interrupt the ministry of Moses, they were not allowed to do so. The other event occurred when king Ahaziah twice sent a group of fifty soldiers to bring Elijah to him. Because of the backslidden condition of Ahaziah, Elijah twice called down fire which consumed two bands of fifty soldiers (2 Kgs 1:10,12).

### **The Truth has Survived!**

In the conquest of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of this world, there are lengthy periods of spiritual decline and opposition to God. But the truth of God has survived them all. Whether it is relentless and bloody persecution, the misnamed age of *Enlightenment*, or the entrance of corruption into the church, the cause of the Lord has ultimately prevailed, and always will.

*Power over the elements*

*“These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire”* (Verse 6). How reminiscent these words are of both Moses and Elijah. Moses turned water into blood, and smote Egypt with all manner of plagues (Ex 7-12). Elijah shut heaven with his prayer, so that it *“rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months”* (James 5:17). In both cases, the power was exerted in the very presence of their enemies, and in spite of all opposition.

These witnesses are reigning with Christ, for they can *“strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”* While they are opposed, and their witness is rejected by most, yet they are ruling with Jesus! *Their power is not inhibited by opposition.* The very same power that supported Moses and Elijah supports these two witnesses.

The principle declared by this text is this: **those who reject the testimony of heaven will not receive benefits from heaven**. One man has said, *“The dews of Divine grace are withheld from all who scorn them”* (Wordsworth). The point is the world’s rejection of the witnesses was not without penalty. The benefits of the Gospel cannot be enjoyed when the Gospel itself is rejected.

Jesus described the conditions of the world worsening to the degree of its rejection of the Gospel. His description reminds us of our text in Revelation. *“And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one*

***another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many”***  
(Matt 24:6-11).

Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, persecution, hatred, betrayal, the rise of false prophets – **all evidence of heaven being closed !** Famines, pestilences, earthquakes – **evidence of the earth being smitten !** Social agitation, political upheaval, and natural calamity are all evidence of the Divine reaction to unbelief and carnality!

### *A Consistent Reaction*

A perusal of history will find nations that were generally receptive to the Gospel enjoyed times of quietness and prosperity. But it is not so with those nations who spurn the Gospel – who hate God’s witnesses! Their’s is a tale of woe!

When wicked Ahab and Jezebel were at the helm of the government, there was a grievous famine in the land (1 Kgs 18:2-5). During the time of the mighty prophet Elisha, when his words were despised, there was a **“great famine in Samaria”** –so grievous people ate their own children (2 Kgs 6:25-31). Egypt fell because of its opposition of the people of God, as well as Babylon, Media and Persia, Greece, and Rome. In modern history, the same may be said of Germany and Russia! **When the witnesses of God are not received–i.e., when their testimony must be one of sackcloth–enormous and grievous penalties will be paid!**

It is not possible for those who oppose the Lord to ultimately prosper! Thus it is written, **“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”** (Prov 29:1). Sennacherib may boast himself to be somebody, but when he assumes to oppose the people of God, his demise is sure. His entire army was slain by an angel, and he himself was killed by his own sons while he

was worshiping an idol (2 Kgs 19:36-37). Herod may appear to have successfully opposed the holy Apostles, even killing James. But when he made an oration, and the people praised him as a god, the angel of the Lord struck him dead (Acts 12:1,21-23). Rome flourished in governmental splendor, but when it rejected the testimony of God, opposing the saints of God, it was brought down to the ground!

### **Historical Consistency**

There is a consistency of this type of judgment throughout history. Sodom rejected Lot, and was destroyed. Egypt rejected the God of Israel, and was destroyed. When God's witnesses are not received, and must prophesy in sackcloth, judgment is imminent! The same God Who gave them their message, will visit those who reject that message.

### **Strong Consolation**

What a strong consolation to those who are suffering for Christ! Think of John, exiled on Patmos because of his testimony! It appeared as though his opponents were invincible, but they were not! The saints who were being slain for the word of their testimony appeared to be weak, and subject to heathen governments, but they were not!

### **We need this word**

Our generation needs a good dose of the message of this book. It will bring boldness to the proclaimers of God's truth when they realize those who reject them, if they do not repent, will suffer reappraisal from God. It brings no delight to us to consider this. Rather, it causes bitterness to the belly, as eating the book did to John. But God is for His ministers, and none can effectively be against them! Scripture affirms, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"*

## **THE COMPLETION OF THEIR TESTIMONY**

The Revelation is not given in an academic manner, nor does it comport with the ordinary manner of foretelling events, times, and places. The point is, these witnesses did not have a pleasant ministry. They prophesied while clothed in sackcloth. Under ordinary circumstances, the preference would be for such a witness to be for a short time. But this is not the case here. They must minister under adverse circumstances for a long time.

“When they finish their testimony . . .” God’s witnesses finish their testimony, complete their mission, and fulfill their ministry. This is so because they are “*workers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9). Just as no man could hurt Jesus prior to His death (John 7:6-8; Lk 4:29-30), and none could set on Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:10), so it is with all who are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20). God will protect and enable them!

### **They Testify For A Long Time**

The Holy Spirit revealed the duration of the testimony of these two witnesses: 1,260 days. That is a lengthy time, from one perspective, but not lengthy enough to change the hearts of wicked men! In my opinion, the actual duration of their testimony is not the point, although it does accord with some historical data. The Revelation is not given in an academic manner, nor does it comport with the ordinary manner of foretelling events, times, and places. The point is, these witnesses did not have a pleasant ministry. They prophesied while clothed in sackcloth. Under ordinary circumstances, the preference would be for such a witness to be for a short time. But this is not the case here. They must minister under adverse circumstances for a long time.

Through John, Jesus is telling His suffering brethren that although an apostasy comes, it will not thwart His witnesses. The truth will still be declared. Sinners in Zion will still be rebuked. The people of God will still hear God's word, even though its proclaimers are clothed in sackcloth!

The Enemy of Time

Time has beaten down many a professed servant of God. Legion is the name of those who have given up, throwing in the towel when faced with inimical forces. Even mighty Elijah grew faint under opposition, even though it was not for long (1 Kgs 19:10-14). The Apostle Paul also spoke of a time when he, and those with him, *“were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life”* (2 Cor 1:8).

God does not call us to beds of ease—to ministries that are accompanied by the accolades of men and pleasant circumstances. Most of us must *“finish”* our testimony in the midst of conflict. If, however, we keep our eye on the goal, and our heart tender toward our Lord, we will be able to complete the work given to us, and finish the race set before us.

### **The Testimony is Finished!**

These witnesses finish their testimony—they complete the lengthy assignment given to them. They finish it while clothed in sackcloth. They finish it when the outer court is excluded from Divine measurement, being given over to those who know not God. They finish it while the Holy City is being trodden down by the Gentiles. They finish it while the opponent of God spews out his venom with apparent success. But they finish it, by the grace of God!

Remember, these two witnesses are the two olive trees that stand by the lampstands. They are the ones that fuel those who shed light in a darkened world. Their persons and ministry is blessed with the Holy Spirit of God, which is to them as the oil was the lampstands.

Through John, Jesus is telling His suffering brethren that although an apostasy comes, it will not thwart His witnesses. The truth will still be declared. Sinners in Zion will still be rebuked. The people of God will still hear God's word, even though its proclaimers are clothed in sackcloth!

### **The Witnesses Are Overcome**

***“ . . . the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them”*** (Verse 7). My heart grows heavy when I read this section. This is part of the ***“bitterness”*** John experienced in his belly. The consolation is that this does not occur until the testimony of the witnesses is ***“finished.”*** This passage will help to overthrow simplistic and fanciful views of the work of the Lord. Remember, we are speaking about Christ's witnesses, who have been given power to destroy their enemies, shut heaven, and smite the earth with plagues. **Their power, however, lasts only as long as their testimony!**

### *Opposition from Hell*

It appears from history that opposition rose from despotic government. But that is the secondary view. John is given to see the real source of oppositions ***“the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit.”***

This is the first time ***“the beast”*** is mentioned in Revelation. There

are thirty-one other references to ***“the beast”*** in the rest of the book (13:2, 3, 4, 14, 15, 17, 18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 10,13; 17:7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20; 20:4, 10). Two different beasts are mentioned: one from the sea (13:1), and one from the earth (13:11). Both are animated by the devil himself, i.e., ***“the dragon”*** (13:2,12).

The introduction of ***“the beast”*** in this text paves the way for the remainder of the book. **It is a depiction of a Satanic initiative against the people of God.** First, it will take the form of political government. Then it will be expressed as a religious empire, organized after the manner of worldly bureaucracy. In this initial appearance, as well as those that follow, the initiative of the devil is being introduced.

The realm from which this opposition is originated is ***“the bottomless pit,”*** which is the exact opposite as ***“the heavenly places”*** (Eph 1:3,20; 2:6). It is the place in which iniquity is spawned, and from which evil is perpetrated.

### *Controlled by Jesus*

The key to the ***“bottomless pit”*** is under the control of Jesus, so that it cannot release its corruption at will. This ***“pit”*** is mentioned seven times—all in the Revelation (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). It is described as the source of delusion and torment (9:1,2), presided over by the devil himself, called ***“Abaddon,”*** or destroyer. This is the aspect of our adversary to which Jesus referred when He said, ***“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”*** (John 10:10).

The impact of this ***“war”*** has cast a wake reaching into our very time. It is the mother that gave birth to higher and textual

criticism, and a purely academic approach to comprehending the Scriptures. Rippling into even Bible Colleges and Seminaries, it has spawned a skeptical view of Scripture that flies under the banner of religious scholarship and textual expertise.

In our text, ***“the bottomless pit”*** is the source of an initiative against the saints of God (11:7). Later, a fierce opponent shall rise from the pit to go to perdition, or condemnation (17:8). Finally, it is a place where Satan is confined for a period, before being loosed for the last time (20:1-3).

Here, then, is a place we desire to be closed. Yet, when the world does not receive a love of the truth, the ***“bottomless pit”*** is opened. This is the judgment to which Paul referred. ***“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”*** (2 Thess 2:11-12).

When there is an aggressive spread of religious confusion, or when iniquity abounds, ***“the bottomless pit”*** has been opened. This circumstance is usually a judgment from God, incurred because of the hardheartedness of those subjected to the Word of the Lord. From Satan’s perspective, however, it is always an effort to remove the truth of God and the people of God from the earth.

### *War Initiated*

***“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them . . . ”*** The war is not initiated until their testimony is completed! Then, however, a Satanic initiative is unleashed against God’s witnesses. While the source of the opposition is the ***“bottomless pit,”*** it will be expressed through people. Just as the witness of God is accomplished through souls empowered by Him, so opposition to that witness comes

from people empowered by Satan. Such opposition is always on a timely basis, and is never allowed to be premature.

*Seen in Jesus Christ*

This principle is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ. Until the time came for His death, men could not touch Him. As He affirmed in the Garden, ***“When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness”*** (Lk 22:53). His witness must first be finished, then the bottomless pit was opened, so to speak. The same is seen in the entrance of Satan into Judas. It occurred after Christ’s witness has been completed. ***“And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly”*** (John 13:27). It was then that the fierce conflict began. Until then, there were only light and inconsequential skirmishes between the Lord and His enemies.

So it is in our text. There was opposition to the two witnesses before the beast ascended out of the bottomless pit. However, that opposition was not effective. The testimony of the witnesses had to be concluded.

Now an initiative is unleashed against the testimony of God! It is aggressive, and will prove to be effective. Historically, such a campaign took place when France declared Christianity illegal, and human reason was elevated to the throne—the age of *The Enlightenment*. As I understand, this is the solitary time in history when there was a deliberate legislative enactment that abolished all religion. Of it (as already quoted), it is said, ***“A campaign of dechristianization, marked by a new Revolutionary Calendar computed from Sept. 22, 1792 (1 Vendemiaire, Year I), led to the closing of all churches on 3 Frimaire, Year II (Nov. 23, 1793)”*** *Grolliers Encyclopedia, 1998.*

The impact of this “*war*” has cast a wake reaching into our very time. It is the mother that gave birth to higher and textual criticism, and a purely academic approach to comprehending the Scriptures. Rippling into even Bible Colleges and Seminaries, it has spawned a skeptical view of Scripture that flies under the banner of religious scholarship and textual expertise.

But when the work of the witness is completed, there is no further need for the witness to remain! That is involved in the Pauline expression, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). The **ONLY** purpose for Christ’s witnesses was their testimony! Apart from that, there was not real need for them to remain on the earth.

From an historical point of view, the aim of this war was to vaunt human reasoning. From a heavenly point of view, it was the power of hell unleashed to subdue the testimony of God’s witnesses. It was a war **AGAINST** the Word of the Lord. It could NOT begin, however, until its testimony had been “*finished.*”

*Jesus’ Witnesses Are*

*Overcome and Killed*

Here are some of the most lamentable words in all of Scripture. “***The beast . . . shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.***” Like the death of our blessed Lord, it appeared as though men were stronger than God—that the enemies of the Lord were able to overthrow His purpose. But this is not at all the case! Jesus **finished** His work before He died! Moses **finished** his work before he died, and his brother Aaron did as well. Neither Enoch nor Elijah were translated

until their work was **done** . Stephen was not stoned until his work was **finished** . Nero was powerless to take the lives of Peter and Paul until their testimony was complete! **Neither the Son of God nor those abiding in Him will die prematurely!** Satan and all of his ministers only flay their arms and stir up harmless dust until the testimony of God's witnesses is finished!

**But when the work of the witness is completed, there is no further need for the witness to remain!** That is involved in the Pauline expression, "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil 1:21). The **ONLY** purpose for Christ's witnesses was their testimony! Apart from that, there was not real need for them to remain on the earth.

What a refreshing thought! *It is only as we prepare to leave that our enemies are granted access to us.* The holy Prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, and the holy Apostles, delivered their testimony faithfully until their work was completed. Only then could the "*beast*" arise, so to speak.

Allow me to state it another way. *It is only when true religion is weak and insipid—when the witnesses have finished their testimony—that the enemies of God make effective war* . When the early church was persecuted, "*they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word*" (Acts 8:4). Their testimony had not yet been completed!

### *The Testimony of Daniel*

Daniel spoke of the very thing we are now considering. Here are his words. "*I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them*" (Dan 7:21). The effects of this despotic power are remarkable. Hear the Word of the Lord. "*Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and*

*he cast truth down to the ground . He did all this and prospered . . . His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, And shall prosper and thrive ; He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people . . . it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered , all these things shall be finished” (Dan 8:12,24; 12:7).*

Time does not allow us to probe this prophecy extensively. Suffice it to say, it may have involved the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is certainly not confined to that judgment. We know this is the case because of the events that follow the effective war of Daniel’s “*horn.*” Following his momentary triumph, the kingdom is said to be given over to the saints of the Most High God (Dan 7:18,22,27). His despotic reign was a prelude to an appointed shift of power.

#### *World not worthy*

From a high perspective, the testimony of Christ’s witnesses was completed, and their enemies granted power over them, **because the world was not worthy of them!** This view of things is also declared in the book of Hebrews, where believers from the introductory periods of the world are mentioned. A cluster of people are presented that, from all appearance, were dominated by their enemies. Do you remember what was said of them? “*Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy . They wandered in deserts and mountains” (Heb 11:36-38, NKJV).*

In the language of our text, the testimony of these witnesses had been finished. Thus the beast rose from the bottomless pit to make war against them, even killing them.

God is doing more than *trying* (as some would have it) to save people. He is also unveiling to both men and angels the depravity of the natural man. He is showing how hard men can become when they do not receive the love of the truth. The extent of the enmity between the natural man and the spiritual man is revealed in these things. Satan's aggressiveness and power is also revealed. In the last day, when the human race stands before the Living God, the righteousness of the saints and the wickedness of the wicked shall have been sufficiently demonstrated.

Jesus has given John a revelation that perfectly comports with the general tenor of Scripture. **God still has witnesses.** These witnesses are given a testimony to complete. They are invincible until their testimony is finished. When that testimony is finished, there is no further need for them to remain.

### *God's Ways Are High*

Here, the wisdom and ways of God soar beyond the grasp of the finite mind. It is ever true, "***For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts***" (Isa 55:9). One might suppose that it would be best to simply translate the witnesses to heaven when their testimony was completed—like God did with Elijah. Or, at least die a peaceful death like Jacob, Moses, and Aaron. Why should their enemies be granted power to make war against them and kill them? Why should Herod be allowed to behead John the Baptist and James, the brother of John the beloved? Why should the Jewish council be allowed to stone Stephen to death?

*It is because God's agenda is broad in its scope.* He is doing more than *trying* (as some would have it) to save people. He is also unveiling to both men and angels the depravity of the natural man. He is showing how hard men can become when they do not receive the love of the

truth. The extent of the enmity between the natural man and the spiritual man is revealed in these things. Satan's aggressiveness and power is also revealed. In the last day, when the human race stands before the Living God, the righteousness of the saints and the wickedness of the wicked shall have been sufficiently demonstrated. God will be justified in the condemnation of the wicked, as well as in the justification of the wicked.

### **Dead in the Great City**

***“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified”*** (Verse 8). Here truth is subject to scorn and unspeakable abuse. Scriptural phrases that speak of such a thing are plentiful. Isaiah said, ***“Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street , And equity cannot enter. So truth fails . . . ”*** (Isa 59:14-15). Jeremiah said, ***“Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth”*** (Jer 7:28). Peter declared, ***“the way of truth will be blasphemed”*** (2 Pet 2:2). Paul spoke of a condition when ***“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles”*** (Rom 2:24), and of a circumstance when the name of God and His doctrine could be ***“blasphemed”*** or defamed (1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2:5).

This is a condition in which only the shell of the truth remains, having finished its witness. It is like having the Bible, but lacking the power of God. It is when the text of Scripture is subject to the ridicule of its enemies, and the message of the Gospel is trampled underfoot by the very ones it condemns.

The ***“dead bodies”*** of Christ's witnesses lying in the street portrays a most dreadful condition. The Word is judged to be, at best, a mere literary work, containing things unworthy to be believed and embraced by those who think themselves to be wise.

## The Great City

For the first time, we are introduced to the *“great city.”* It will be mentioned eight more times in the chapters that follow (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10,16,18,19,21). It will appear dominate until the final and truly *“great city”* descends out of heaven from God, when God Himself will take up residency with the redeemed (21:10).

The *“great city . . . where also our Lord was crucified”* is a spiritual city—a citadel of Satanic opposition. In it, the forces of evil unite under the auspices of the devil, just as Herod, Pilate, the high priest, and the people united against Jesus

This *“great city”* is noted for making the nations drink of the *“wine of her fornication”* (14:8). It is also called *“Babylon,”* and will be made to drink the *“wine of the fierceness of the wrath”* of God (16:19; 18:10). It is portrayed as having great influence, reigning over the kings of the earth (17:18). **This is a spiritual entity** noted for flourishing and unusual success (18:16,18,19). Yet, it will be *“thrown down”* with violence (18:21).

It is as though it were Satan’s capital city. Just as Jerusalem was where God placed His name (1 Kgs 11:36; 21:4,7; 2 Chron 6:6; 33:4), *“that great city”* is where Satan has placed his name. It is a place where his initiatives begin. Just as the Gospel issued out of Jerusalem, so Satan’s opposition issues from his *“great city.”* Historically, this city is Rome, from which both political and religious oppression were originated. It was a fountain of corruption, unequaled in its initiative against the Lord and His Christ. But we must not limit this *“great city”*

to Rome, lest we become insensitive to Satanic initiatives in our time. This city will later be called ***“the mother of harlots”*** (17:5). Alas, we are still contending with many of her daughters!

### *Her Spiritual Designation*

Jesus told us not to judge according to appearance (John 7:24), and here is an example of the danger of doing so. The truth has been slain, and is lying in the street. It appears as though the enemy has triumphed. But look! This *“great city”* is revealed from a heavenly point of view. Spiritually, it is both a city and a nation—***“Sodom and Egypt.”*** Sodom was noted for its iniquity, and its hatred of a righteous man. Egypt was noted for its enslavement of the people of God. Both were heathen cultures, and both were destroyed by God. The people of God were ill-at-ease in both of them, and God was intolerant of them.

What a dreadful condition—to be likened to Sodom and Egypt! They are chosen as a type of what is evil (Deut 32:32; Isa 1:10; 10:24; 19:3; Ezek 16:46; 20:7). Sodom was noted for its immorality, and Egypt for its idolatry—i.e., false religion. These are twin foes of the truth of God.

### *The reason for Sodom and Egypt*

The existence of this *“great city”* is the reason why we have the record of Sodom and Egypt. Their presence in the historical record is in order that we might comprehend the manner in which our adversary works. Too, such a place is always consigned to destruction, and cannot be recovered. Both places hated the Word of God. The people of God also had to escape from both places.

### *Where our Lord was crucified*

Some have supposed this to be a reference to Jerusalem. And,

indeed, on the surface this does appear to be the case. However, we are told this is a spiritual designation. Were this not the case, you would have the one city where God placed His name being called “*Sodom*” and “*Egypt*,” a notion exceedingly difficult for me to receive. To my understanding, no such view of the city of Jerusalem is plainly developed in Scripture.

The same “*power of darkness*” (Lk 22:53) that exerted itself in the crucifixion of Jesus, has been active throughout history in the opposition of the truth. Furthermore, it has tended to take the form of religion in the idolatrous emperor-worship of Rome, or the corruption of papal Rome. The “*great city . . . where also our Lord was crucified*” is a spiritual city—a citadel of Satanic opposition. In it, the forces of evil unite under the auspices of the devil, just as Herod, Pilate, the high priest, and the people united against Jesus (Acts 4:27-28).

### *Lying in the Street*

The bodies of the witnesses lying in the street provide two possible perspectives. *First* , the truth of God being subject to scorn and derision. *Second* , the enemies could not get rid of the witnesses. God’s Word still remained before them, though seemingly stripped of its power. Both of these are true.

It is a glad day for Satan’s camp when the truth of God appears powerless, posing no threat to them. They think nothing of dead witnesses lying in their streets. It is a living witness that they fear. Consequently, the Holy Spirit paints a most vivid picture of the reaction of the wicked to the

## suppression of the truth.

From one point of view, the enemies of truth gloated in their apparent triumph over God's witnesses. They did not realize they only had power because the testimony of the witnesses was ***“finished.”*** From another point of view, the witnesses remained, for they would be resurrected soon before the very eyes of their enemies. *Truth was not prominent, but neither was it extinct.*

### Their Bodies Will Be Seen

***“ Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves”*** (Verse 9). The seeming demise of the truth will be public. Throughout the world, it will seem as though God's opponents have triumphed. This has often been the case. In the early days of Samuel, this was also the case, for ***“there was no open vision”*** (1 Sam 3:1). It is how things appeared in Elijah's day (1 Kgs 19:10-14). The days of Isaiah and Jeremiah were also so characterized (Isa 59:14; Jer 7:28). In the closing days of Paul's effective ministry, he wrote of a similar condition. ***“For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus”*** (Phil 2:21). Alas, it is a dreadful time when the bodies of God's witnesses lie motionless before the enemies of God—when there is a ***“form of godliness”*** that lacks ***“the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5).

### *A Short Time*

But this is not the end of the truth! This deadness will last only for a short time—***“ three-and-a-half days.”*** This is the only section of Scripture where this expression is found. It is not the same as ***“time, times, and half a time.”*** That is a wording denoting years, not days (Dan 4:16,23,25,32). During this time, the enemies of God did ***“not allow”*** the truth to be utterly removed. Apparently thinking to mock the truth of God, using it as a sort of philosophical ball, they kept it in their presence, while giving it no recognition or honor. However, from a higher point of view, God was keeping the witnesses present because

more would be heard from them!

### **The World Is Glad**

It is a glad day for Satan's camp when the truth of God appears powerless, posing no threat to them. They think nothing of dead witnesses lying in their streets. It is a living witness that they fear. Consequently, the Holy Spirit paints a most vivid picture of the reaction of the wicked to the suppression of the truth.

*Those who dwell on the earth*

***“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another . . . ”*** (Verse 10a). When France abolished the Bible and God, Atheism became the law of the state. The decree was made that there would be *“no gods but reason and liberty.”* Famous infidels and skeptics arose who scoffed at Scripture, mocked God, and challenged Divinity to do something. Voltaire and Rousseau led the attack in France. Frederick the Great did the same in Germany. Thomas Paine, Hume, Gibbon, and Holingbroke championed the Satanic cause in England. Thomas Jefferson (noted for being a *“naturalist”* –that nature is the origin of all things) and Paine (famous for his blasphemous book, *“The Age of Reason”* ) did the same in America, exalting reason above revelation. With devilish glee

It is an irrevocable trait of those who ***“dwell upon the earth”*** to delight when truth is no longer vibrant and powerful among them. It is ever true, ***“the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be”*** (Rom 8:7). I am reminded of the reaction of the ***“chief priests”*** when Judas agreed to betray Jesus. ***“And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money”*** (Mk 14:11). David said of his enemies, ***“But in mine adversity they rejoiced”*** (Psa 35;15).

Mark it well, the closer one lives to *“the earth,”* the more they are tormented by the words of God. Here is the explanation for the contemporary church’s insistence on spiritual brevity, increased entertainment, and less of the Word. It is *“tormented”* by the Word of the Lord, whereas saints are edified and strengthened by it!

Such is the character of the enemies of Jesus. They are glad and rejoice when they no longer feel the heat of Divine rebuke, and are not bothered with the penetrating words of Christ’s witnesses. In the grip of belief, they shout out, *“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us”* (Psa 2:3). But their rejoicing is short-lived. As it is written, *“He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision”* (Psa 2:4). The Psalmist prophesied of the exaltation coming Messiah, in spite of the shallow wrath of His enemies. Yet, he enunciated a principle that continues to this very day.

### *The reason for their joy*

The world does not divulge the effect of Christ’s witnesses upon them. We must learn never to judge the effect of our words by the response they produce. Take, for example, the testimony of these two witnesses. A worldly reporter would say they wasted their time. After a lengthy period of sackcloth ministry, they are ruthlessly killed, and their bodies lie exposed in the street. Surely, they were not effective in their testimony. But this is not the case at all. They were killed *“... because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth”* (Verse 10b).

Mark it well, the closer one lives to *“the earth,”* the more they are tormented by the words of God. Here is the explanation for the

contemporary church's insistence on spiritual brevity, increased entertainment, and less of the Word. It is ***"tormented"*** by the Word of the Lord, whereas saints are edified and strengthened by it!

The devil, all of his hosts, and those who are dominated by them, are afflicted by the truth. You may recall when the demons Jesus confronted in the country of the Gadarenes cried out, ***"Have You come here to torment us before the time?"*** (Matt 8:29). This is the influence caused by Stephen's words to a devil-dominated council. It is said of them, ***"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth"*** (Acts 7:54).

Those who labor for the Lord must reckon on this reaction among those who reject them. It is still ***"hard to kick against the pricks"*** caused by the faithful witnesses of Jesus (Acts 9:5). There are times when the knowledge of this circumstance is almost the only consolation you will receive.

## GOD RAISES THE WITNESSES AGAIN

***"Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them"*** (Verse 11). What a turn of events! The witnesses testified wearing sackcloth for a lengthy period. Upon the completion of their testimony, a power rises from the bottomless pit to kill them. They lie exposed to the derision of the wicked, who suppose they are at last rid of the tormenting word of the witnesses.

There is gladness among those who dwell upon the earth, together with a celebrating exchange of gifts. An unpopular message, a completed work, successful opposition, and derision! From a worldly

point of view (which is not a valid alternative) this appeared to be a fruitless endeavor – but it was not. A heavenly gallery of witnesses had seen it all! The enemies of God had felt the tormenting power of a faithful witness.

For three-and-a-half days, the witnesses lie lifeless, their testimony stopped, and their message stilled. The world was not able to get the witnesses out of their site, so set themselves to rejoice in the carcasses. But then something happened –something upon which those who dwell upon the earth had not reckoned.

Suddenly, in strict accord with the will of the Sovereign of the universe, “ ***the breath of life from God entered them.***” This is life the world cannot extinguish! It is superior to the Satanic animations that occur among the unregenerate. *This is regenerative power*, experienced by everyone that is in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “***For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death***” (Rom 8:2). Every soul in Jesus is brought back from death “***in trespasses and sins***” by this great power (Eph 2:1-3). It is the mighty power of God which “***He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come***” (Eph 1:20-21). This is nothing less than “***the power of His resurrection,***” for which Paul gladly suffered the loss of all things (Phil 3:8-10).

This power enables Christ’s witnesses to recover from the worse the world could deliver! Little wonder Jesus said, “***Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do***” (Lk 12:4). Remember, after Paul was stoned at Lystra and dumped outside the city, “***when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city***” (Acts 14:19). Until his testimony was finished, the

enemies of Christ could not keep His witness down!

### **The Ability to Come Back!**

Resurrection power is the ability to come back—to rise, as it were, from the dead! For Christ’s witnesses, the last work is not that of the world, but that which comes from Christ. He really is “*the Beginning and the END*” (Rev 21:6). Even if Christ’s witnesses are “*cast down,*” they cannot be “*destroyed*” (2 Cor 4:9). Peter may be arrested and incarcerated, but his enemies cannot keep him down until his testimony is “*finished,*” while the one who imprisoned him will be struck dead by the angel of the Lord (Acts 12:6-24).

This truth is a great consolation to those who have “*laid down their own necks*” for the cause of the King (Rom 16:4).

### *An Historical Fulfillment*

Coincidentally, between three and four years after religion had been supposedly stilled by atheistic France, atheism was repealed by that very country, and Christianity became the religion of the State. I give you the following quotation from Grollier’s 1998 encyclopedia. “*The Enlightenment came to an end in western Europe after the upheavals of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era (1789-1815) . . . The skepticism of the philosophies was swept away in the religious revival of the 1790s and early 1800s, and the cultural leadership of the landed aristocracy and professional men who had supported the Enlightenment was eroded by the growth of a new wealthy educated class of businessmen, products of the Industrial Revolution.*”

What Christian history calls “**The Second Great Awakening**” took place at this time. The following comments on that awakening are taken from Holman’s Bible handbook. “*From 1800 until 1850 the*

*churches in America experienced another blaze of revival, which is known as the Second Great Awakening. This movement began with campus revivals in the East, particularly at Yale College under the leadership of Timothy Dwight. On the frontier it took the form of sensational camp meetings such as the one held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. Peter Cartwright, a pioneer evangelist and church planter, helped spread the fires of revival throughout the frontier regions of the nation. ” More information can be added. This will suffice, however, to substantiate that religious awakenings have occurred after an apparent deathblow has been dealt by the world.*

In addition, the circulation of Scripture became remarkable at this time. In the nineteenth century an effort was initiated to place the Bible into every written tongue in then world. His witnesses were alive and well!

To this, of course, may be added the many revivals that took place in Scripture, when all seemed hopeless, the faith was subjected to ridicule, and the holy prophets were persecuted. Just to name a few spiritual awakenings.

- *Under Joshua–Joshua 5*
- *Under Samuel–1 Samuel 7*
- *Under Elijah–1 Kings 18*
- *Under Jehoash and Jehoida–2 Kings 11*
- *Under Hezekiah–2 Kings 18*
- *Under Josiah–2 Kings 22*
- *Under Asa–2 Chronicles 14*
- *Under Manasseh–2 Chronicles 33*
- *In Nineveh–Jonah 3*
- *At Pentecost–Acts 2*

**Recovery! Recovery!**

This is a precious Kingdom principle that will, if embraced, keep hope alive! Israel came out of Egypt after 430 years (Ex 12:40-41). The dry bones of Ezekiel's valley were resurrected to a great army (Ezek 37). In the Gospel, a man blind from birth was given sight (John 9:2-32), and a man lame for thirty-eight years was made to walk (John 5:5-12). Lazarus came out of the tomb after four days. And the Gospel which we have believed, and by which we are being saved, affirms that Jesus was ***“raised from the dead”*** (1 Cor 15:3).

*God will not allow the enemies of His people to have the last word!*

### **Fear comes upon the enemy**

Fear fell upon the people who thought they had seen an end of the witnesses: ***“and great fear fell upon them which saw them.”*** It was like the awakening of a valley of dry bones! There came a resurgence of the faith the earth imagined it had subdued! It was frightening to them.

### **Out of Sight!**

***“And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them”*** (Verse 12). When Jesus had finished His work upon earth, He ascended into heaven in the site of His disciples, who had received His testimony. When these witnesses left, they also ascended into heaven in a cloud, but their enemies saw them.

A ***“loud voice”*** summoned them into the realm inaccessible to those ***“who dwell upon the earth.”*** The idea here is that Christ's witnesses are vindicated before their enemies. There are several examples of this principle in Scripture. Noah's enemies saw the ark. Israel's enemies saw them leave Egypt. Stephen's enemies saw his face shining.

We know from the verses that follow that this is not the end of the world. Consequently, this cannot be a depiction of the resurrection of the righteous. Neither, indeed, can it be the account of a secret rapture, for the enemies of the witnesses behold them ascend into heaven. As with the rest of this book, this is symbolic language. **In my understanding, what we have here is not the removal of God's witnesses, but their exaltation.**

This is a revival of the truth once rejected. The cause for which the witnesses died, and of which they testified, begins to flourish. The enemies know this is what is occurring, and that is why fear comes upon them. The very thing they rejected, outlawed, and maligned, now begins to dominate. Power returns to the church, truth begins to flourish, and the sackcloth is thrown off! What a glorious picture of the triumph of truth! May we see it in our time also.

## A SEVERE REACTION

The Word of God cannot be ultimately suppressed. Any seeming triumph of its enemies is only momentary. Christ's witnesses always rise again! The testimony of God has withstood the fires of burning and the persecution of its speakers. It has passed through the waters of affliction, crossed the deserts of trial, and overcome the mountains of forgetfulness

The Word of God cannot be ultimately suppressed. Any seeming triumph of its enemies is only momentary. Christ's witnesses always rise again! The testimony of God has withstood the fires of burning and the persecution of its speakers. It has passed through the waters of affliction, crossed the deserts of trial, and overcome the mountains of forgetfulness. It is still a mighty lamp, a balm in Gilead, and a beacon to glory. It has outlasted all opposition! It has been ousted from the government, thrown out of the

schools, criticized in higher schools of learning, and scoffed at by the rebels of this world. Yet, from time to time, it rises to the consternation of its enemies, and is empowered by the breath of the Almighty! The Spirit of truth is a resurrection Spirit that cannot be held down! Slay the witnesses, and let their bodies lie open in the street. But in due time, the Spirit of life from God will enter them, and truth shall again triumph!

With the exaltation of the witnesses, the earth experiences trouble. Judgment comes when the truth is suppressed, and it also comes when it is exalted! ***“In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven”*** (Verse 13).

The city will fall by stages, gradually and effectively.

The Lord will show angelic hosts, as well as discerning men, that opposing the truth will not go unrequited. This is a significant fall, yet not a total one.

This is not a geological disturbance in the world, but a moral and spiritual shaking. It is religious commotion and disruption of thought. This sort of thing preceded the coming of Jesus, in accordance with the prophecy of Haggai . ***“And I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the LORD of hosts”*** (Hag 2:7). It is also depicted in the nature of the heavenly Kingdom, which is to ***“break in pieces and consume”*** the kingdoms of this world (Dan 2:44).

With the triumph of the Word of God, imaginations and high thoughts are cast down with spiritual violence. That is how powerful the weapons of our warfare are. As it is written, ***“For the weapons of our***

*warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).*

### **A Principle to be Seen**

There is a principle to be seen here. **When the truth is exalted, the lie is cast down.** Think how this truth has been inscribed in Kingdom history! When Israel was delivered through the Red Sea, the Egyptians were drowned (Ex 14-15). When Daniel was delivered from the lion’s den, his accusers were cast into the den (Dan 6:24). When the three Hebrew children were delivered from the fiery furnace, those casting them in were slain (Dan 3:22). When James was exalted in death, and Peter was exalted in deliverance, Herod was smitten by the angel (Acts 12:2,18ff).

The impact of the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses is immediate: *“In the same hour.”* There is a *“great earthquake”* –a visitation from God Almighty! The account reminds me of the prophecy of Isaiah against the enemies of the Lord. *“You will be punished by the LORD of hosts With thunder and earthquake and great noise, With storm and tempest And the flame of devouring fire”* (Isa 29:6, NKJV). It is also sent in vindication of Christ’s messengers–much like the earthquake that was produced earlier by the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:4-5).

Whenever God’s people come into His focused consideration, whether in their prayers or in their exaltation, the earth suffers reprisals for its mockery of the truth. This kind of language is also used by Ezekiel when he spoke of the judgment of wayward Israel. *“For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all*

*creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground” (Ezek 38:19-20).*

In short, we have read of the overcoming of the witnesses. Now we read of the fall of their oppressors.

### **A Tenth Part Falls**

This is the language of exactness and precision. Prior to this judgment, the enemies of God had refused to give Him His due (9:20-21). Now, the Lord exacts His due from them. It is as though He takes the tithe from them. The very people who refused to recognize the Lord are now forced to do so, man’s free will notwithstanding.

The city will fall by stages, gradually and effectively. The Lord will show angelic hosts, as well as discerning men, that opposing the truth will not go unrequited. This is a significant fall, yet not a total one.

### **Seven Thousand People Die**

I gather this is a significant and complete number. Whether it speaks of possible leaders in the rebellion or not, I do not know. If we marvel that 3,000 died at the giving of the Law, and 3,000 were saved on the day of Pentecost, we should equally marvel that 7,000 are said to die in this judgment. This is a significant sentence. Think of it this way, the beast from the bottomless pit killed two witnesses. The judgment of the Almighty slew 7,000 men! Not only will the wicked reap what they sow, they will reap an exponential harvest!

In the end, no one will be able to charge the Lord with being unjust, or failing to give recalcitrant men sufficient space to repent. All mouths will be stopped as the universe stands before its Lord.

I think there is a parallel here to the 7,000 reserved men Elijah's day. They could not be forced to bow the knee to Baal, and these 7,000 could not be protected from Divine wrath. In both cases, the Lord had His way, preserving some, and judging others. They were surely mighty men, like the 7,000 Syrians slain by David—men expert in chariot warfare (1 Chron 19:18).

### **The Rest Are Terrified**

A tenth part of the city falls, and seven thousand men are killed. The remaining nine tenths of *the “great city,”* and men that survived the judgment, cease their rejoicing over the dead witnesses. They are now forced to acknowledge their own inferiority, as fear grips their heart.

This reminds me of what happened when Ananias and Sapphira were judged for lying to the Holy Spirit: *“and great fear came on all them that heard these things”* (Acts 5:5). Suffice it to say, it is far better to receive the testimony of the witnesses.

### **The Rest Gave Glory to God**

This signifies there was repentance. Earlier it is said men *“repented not of the works of their hands”* (Rev 9:20). Later, we will also read of hardheartedness and spiritual obstinance. *“And men were scorched*

*with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory ” (Rev 16:9,11).*

This is the whole purpose of Divine working—for God to receive glory. We learn in this book that some will never willingly give God glory. This particular text speaks of those who will, under duress and pain, give Him glory. Let us be numbered among those who give Him glory willingly and instantly—when His witnesses declare His Word.

In my opinion, this text is speaking of a sort of miniature revival that takes place in the very place where truth was maligned and slain. Such did occur following the French Revolution, and will no doubt occur again in response to coming judgments.

### **More Is To Come**

When once the wrath of God is unleashed, it will not stop until His enemies are ground to powder. Jesus referred to this principle when He said, *“And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder”* (Matt 21:44). Never doubt it, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”*

*“The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly”* (Verse 14). We are still in the judgment of the sixth trumpet. The first woe occurred in Revelation 9:12, at the sounding of the fifth trumpet. In that judgment, strong delusion was sent upon the Lord’s enemies. It came because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. The second woe is sent because men took upon themselves to kill God’s witnesses. Even though the witnesses had finished their testimony, men were still judged for siding against them.

There is some mercy in this judgment. Only a tenth part of the city falls, and only 7,000 men are slain. He does not delight in the death of the wicked, even though they are deserving of the same! In the end, no one will be able to charge the Lord with being unjust, or failing to give recalcitrant men sufficient space to repent. All mouths will be stopped as the universe stands before its Lord, to give an account for its deeds.

## CONCLUSION

Let every soul who speaks for God take courage! None should be surprised at opposition of the world. Remember the words of our blessed Lord. ***“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33). Again, in explanation of this circumstance, He said, ***“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also”*** (John 15:18-20). There is no acceptable way of avoiding this opposition! If one bears witness for the Lord, particularly one of exposure (i.e., a sackcloth ministry), the world will react with malice and hatred. Often, this will opposition will come from religious peers. But the witness must continue to declare the Word of God, even if asked to do so for a lengthy period of time.

Know, that in due time, the truth will triumph! The spirit of life from God will again energize the Word, either in you or another generation. If Stephen is slain, the Spirit will raise up a Paul. If James is beheaded, Peter and John will carry the torch! But know, that truth will triumph.

Too, the enemies of God have not gone unnoticed. Heaven has logged their wickedness, and in due time the King of all will confront them. Our role is to faithfully hold out the truth, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, and refusing to be silent.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 22

## THE SEVENTH TRUMPET #4

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth. Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail." (Revelation 11:15-19, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus is showing John what *“must shortly take place”* (1:1, NASB). This is language addressed to faith, and is not to be judged according to the perspective of flesh. If it is not for us to *“know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power”* (Acts 1:7), you may rest assured *“times and seasons”* will never be the emphasis of revelation.

This by no means suggests *“times and seasons”* are not important, or that they are never mentioned in Scripture. We must not, however, allow them to dominate our perspective of God’s Word. **WHAT** God does consistently takes the precedence over **WHEN** He does it. Thus, **WHAT** was accomplished in Christ’s death is emphasized, rather than **WHEN** His indispensable death occurred.

Some teach that this language ( *“must shortly take place”* ) confirms the events of this book all occurred in the first Century, or *“shortly”* after they were written. The view taints the entire Word of God, robbing men of the power of comfort, and disarming them concerning jeopardous times to come. If everything in this remarkable book was fulfilled in the first century, the following events have already taken

place.

### **If “shortly” means “right away”**

The “*great day*” of Christ’s “*wrath*” has come (6:13-17).

A vast number of “*all the house of Israel*” have been sealed (7:4-8).

Saints have “*come out of great tribulation,*” and are no more subject to the stresses of this world (7:15-17).

The “*time of the dead*” has come, when they were judged (11:18).

The wicked are being tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb (14:10-11).

The devil has been cast into the lake of fire, together with the beast and the false prophet (20:10).

Thus the book of Revelation has had comforting power throughout the centuries, since Jesus ascended into heaven. As the redeemed have looked at things that are “unseen,” time, with its challenges, no longer seems so lengthy. The greatest duration is now assigned to the blessing, not the curse.

☉ All of the dead, including those in the sea, have been raised (20:12-14).

The final judgment has taken place (20:11-15).

The new heaven and new earth have already come (21:1).

The people of God, His holy city, have already been glorified (21:2-3).

All tears have been wiped away (21:4).

The people of God now see His face, and there is no more curse (22:3-5).

Jesus has come and rewarded every person according to their work (22:12).

It takes an unusually productive imagination to conclude these things have already taken place. Aside from the position being untrue, it is utterly absurd, betraying a level of spiritual ignorance that is inexcusable.

### **Not An Historical Chronology**

This book is not an historical chronology, although it does contain historical information, as well as some chronology. **Suffering saints, however, cannot be comforted by history.** It takes more than a chronological recitation of coming or past events to enable the persecuted ones to be faithful until the end. History, however intriguing it may be, has no power—no spiritual power.

### **A Heavenly Perspective**

We are seeing the key events of this world from the heavenly perspective—i.e., as they relate to the fulfillment God's "**eternal purpose.**" John had to "**come up higher**" to perceive it, and so do we! Satanic initiatives are unfolded, as well as Divine interpositions. The idea conveyed in the word "**shortly,**" is that things will move along according to Divine intent, with no delay. Thus Satan will be "**bruised**" under the saint's feet "**shortly**" (Rom 16:20). Faith can take hold of a

word like this!

Thus the book of Revelation has had comforting power throughout the centuries, since Jesus ascended into heaven. As the redeemed have looked at things that are “*unseen*,” time, with its challenges, no longer seems so lengthy. **The greatest duration is now assigned to the blessing, not the curse.**

As confirmed in Abraham, faith views the temporary order as incidental, looking forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise. Thus it is written, “*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:9-10). From the perspective of faith, the “*city*” for which he looked was to appear “*shortly*,” even though, from an earthly perspective, many years have passed. That is why Abraham “*looked*” for it. Faith brought the blessing close to him.

Among other things, this book is written to confirm to the saints their faith is not in vain. The things for which they hope will surely come. The wicked will surely fall. Their enemies will surely be judged. They themselves will surely possess the Kingdom. The faithful Creator beholds them with a sensitive eye, and will not allow their enemies to ultimately triumph.

Too, throughout history, the condition of the church has been a source of vexation to the righteous. The corruption of the Gospel and the institutionalization of *Christianity* have been as devastating to the work of God as Imperial Rome and the aggression of idolatrous heathenism. The section we are currently examining brings special consolation to those oppressed by the propagation of false approaches

to God.

### **A Brief Review**

The seven seals dealt with the history of the world from the standpoint of the church. The calamities of the world were seen as impotent against the people of God. They came through every test, every fire, every opposition. The seals ended with a period of silence, as the faithful entered into their rest.

The trumpets are unveiling history with the world and its governments in mind. The demise of bureaucracies is seen as a judgment from heaven because of their rejection of the reign of the conquering Lamb, and their opposition of the saints. Whereas the church passes through history to enter into eternal rest, its enemies will confront the loss of everything they valued, and stand trembling before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord sustains His people in trouble. However, he visits the sins of the wicked upon them—even now. There are consequences to sin!

Faith is never vain, and unbelief is always vain! Involvement in the work of the Lord is never pointless, and opposition of the work is always pointless! Jesus never really loses, and Satan never really wins! The people of God can live triumphantly with a grasp of these things!

## **THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET**

We have been given a glimpse of Satan's ultimate strategy—to defile the approach to God! This was

allowed by God in order that those who are approved might be made manifest, or revealed.

“Then the seventh angel sounded . . .” There has been a lengthy interlude between the beginning of the sounding of the sixth trumpet (9:13) until the sounding of the seventh (11:15). What we have had between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets is significant, though brief. We have been given a glimpse of Satan’s ultimate strategy—to defile the approach to God! This was allowed by God in order that those who are approved might be made manifest, or revealed. As it is written, ***“For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you”*** (1 Cor 11:19). Those who live in the holiest place are not deceived by this scheme.

What we are reading perfectly accords with the remainder of Scripture—particularly the Apostolic writings. They wrote of a falling away—a defection from the faith from within the church (2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 4:3-4; 2 Pet 2:1-2). The apostasy is seen in the prophesying of the witnesses in sackcloth. The spiritual animosity created by the departure from the truth is seen in the slaying of the two witnesses. **When an allegiance to the truth is reduced, the effectiveness of Satan is increased.** When men do not draw from the well of the water of life, they will confront influences from ***“the bottomless pit.”***

Now the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet. The time has come! We are entering into the last phase of the second cycle of the vision given to John. Remember, we are seeing the fulfillment of the purpose of God. The seventh trumpet was scheduled to sound! It was written in the book held and opened by the conquering Lamb. Satan could not stop the trumpet from sounding! **Neither opposition nor a deterioration of a love for the truth can stop the purpose of God from being brought to fulfillment.** The only question is whether or not individuals are willingly involved in that purpose.

## Loud Voices in Heaven

*“And there were loud voices in heaven . . . ”* As the seventh seal is opened, there is not silence in heaven, as with the seventh seal. Rather, there are *“voices” – “loud voices!”* We have heard these voices before. In the fourth chapter, they proceeded *“out of the throne”* (4:5). In the eighth chapter, they were heard when fiery judgments were hurled to the earth (8:5). Twice they are heard in the eleventh chapter (11:15,19). They will be heard again in the sixteenth chapter, when the seventh vial is poured out into the earth (16:18).

Those uttering the voices are not precisely identified. We do not know if they are angels, the four living creatures, or the twenty-four elders who are mentioned next. It is enough to know this is heaven’s response, where there is absolute unanimity.

**This is a depiction of heaven’s perception of, and involvement in, the workings of God in the earth.** Those who imagine things are running without Divine intervention are simply wrong. Equally true, those in close proximity to God become involved in His workings. The closer they are to Him, the more instant and fervent is their response. Throughout Scripture, the lack of response reveals a lack of involvement, whether in matters of initial obedience, or in participation in the work of the Lord.

While men continue to be impressed with the achievements of their peers, heaven is impressed with the working of the Lord. There is a keen interest in Divine activity among the hosts of heaven. To the

degree we have been joined to that host, there is a keen interest among us also.

**Heavenly personalities do not lift their voices in response to the working of men, but to the working of their Lord.** While men continue to be impressed with the achievements of their peers, heaven is impressed with the working of the Lord. There is a keen interest in Divine activity among the hosts of heaven. To the degree we have been joined to that host, there is a keen interest among us also. And, make no mistake about it, in Christ Jesus we HAVE been joined to them (Heb 12:22-24).

### **Enemies Made His Footstool**

*“ . . . saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ . . . ”* At last, the determined objective has come to pass! When Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, the Father said, *“Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”* (Psa 110:1; Lk 20:42-43; Heb 1:3). These *“enemies”* are precisely defined in Scripture. In one of His parables, the Lord Jesus said of them, *“But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them”* (Lk 19:27, NKJV).

That condition—not wanting King Jesus to reign over, or govern, the individual—makes one an *“enemy”* of God and Christ. All such people will be subdued, and made to bow the knee before Christ and confess He is Lord (Rom 14:11). God the Father has pledged this will happen, and it shall! In the meantime, their rebellion has no effect whatsoever upon the Lord Jesus. He continues to rule *“in the midst”* of His enemies, bringing the purpose of God to fruition (Psa 110:2).

These are the kingdoms Satan offered to Jesus in the wilderness temptation (Matt 4:8-9; Lk 4:5-8). Showing them and their glory to

Jesus ***“in a moment of time”*** (Lk 4:5), the Tempter offered them to the Son. In that temptation (and it WAS a temptation), the devil affirmed these kingdoms had been given to him. He also said he could give them to whoever he desired (Lk 4:6). The Lord Jesus did not contest that claim. However, they have only been given to our adversary for a time. Jesus will soon take them back, as it were!

### **Man’s Wrath and God’s Power**

When man’s wrath rises in opposition to the reigning Christ, that very wrath is made to praise God. At the point that ceases to occur, human wrath and indignation is restrained, or brought to a grinding halt. Thus it is written, ***“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain”*** (Psa 76:10). A graphic statement of this very principle is found in Psalm 46:6. ***“The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.”***

For that matter, the very text we are reviewing is a declaration of this truth. The enemies of Christ rose up against Him, persecuting His people and denying His truth. In all of that, God’s people overcame the enemy, thereby bringing praise to God. When the purposes of God were served, however, the wrath of men was forthrightly subdued by Divine judgment! It is still true, ***“The deceived and the deceiver are His. He leads counselors away plundered, And makes fools of the judges”*** (Job 12:16-17), NKJV). The knowledge of this brings great comfort to suffering saints!

Thus, the reign of the Lord Jesus

is seen in a twofold sense. ❶ The support and protection of His people. ❷ The government and ultimate subduing of their enemies. The kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ particularly have to do with the latter.

## Jesus Is Ruling Now

Even now, the Lord Jesus is the *“Governor among the nations”* (Psa 22:28), ruling over them with unquestionable authority. Not only has *“all power in heaven and in earth”* been given to Him (Matt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22), He is presently using that power. We are not to read this passage supposing Jesus is not now ruling precisely and effectively.

We must never look at the rulers of this world as though they conducted their affairs independently of the government of God. It is still true, *“O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?”* (2 Chron 20:6). And again, *“O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth”* (Isa 37:16). This is the *“government”* that is presently on the shoulder of Jesus (Isa 9:6-7). Our text speaks of the time when it will become evident.

## His Rule Will Become Apparent

While students of Scripture are divided on their understanding of these prophecies, it is imperative that they be united in the acknowledgment of their truth. There will come a time when *“the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea”*

The kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ is the same as Christ’s enemies becoming His footstool. It speaks of an **apparent subjugation**

– when the Rule of the Lord Jesus will become obvious to all. To put it another way, when the impotence of earthly powers to effectively oppose the Lord and His Christ will become prominent and plain.

God is going to **“show”** Jesus in all of His glory, and every eye will see it. As it is written, **“which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords”** (1 Tim 6:15, NKJV). At that time, there will be universal acknowledgment of the supremacy of Christ Jesus. For some, it will be unto condemnation. For others, it will be the confirmation of salvation. There will be no earthly kingdoms then, for they shall all be dissolved, as they fall beneath the mighty weight of the **“mountain”** of the kingdom of Christ. This will be the fulfillment of the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar, and interpreted by Daniel (Dan 2:35-45).

### **A Secondary View**

There is yet another way in which Christ’s rule becomes apparent. It is secondary to the ultimate revelation, which will occur at His second coming. This occurs when men own Jesus as their King in this world—particularly when they do so on a large scale. The prophets spoke of a time when this would take place. While students of Scripture are divided on their understanding of these prophecies, it is imperative that they be united in the acknowledgment of their truth. There will come a time when **“the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea”** (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). That is a preliminary fulfillment of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.

The prophets also spoke of a time when **“all nations”** would voluntarily **“flow”** to the place of the Lord’s presence and blessing (Isa 2:2). Paul elaborated on this time, associating it with the spiritual awakening of Israel. **“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater**

*riches will their fullness bring!”* (Rom 11:12, NIV). And again, *“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”* (Rom 11:15, KJV).

In this effectual spread of the Gospel, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ. In this instance, the kingdoms surrender willingly. In the case of the coming of the Lord, they will be forced to confess the King against their will.

### **His Christ**

The relationship of the Son to the Father, or of Christ to God, is not commonly expounded. Some have chosen to distort the truth by affirming there is only one Person in the Godhead, performing three different roles—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, this is not the case at all. *“The Christ,”* or the *“Anointed”* and sanctioned One, belongs to God. He is *“HIS Christ.”* This is another way of saying the purpose belongs to God, and the fulfillment of it is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One appointed and anointed to execute the will of God. To acknowledge Christ is to acknowledge God, and to reject Christ is to reject God. Thus it is written, *“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son”* (1 John 2:22). Again it is written, *“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also”* (1 John 2:23, NKJV).

### **Summation**

The Lord Jesus is reigning, and will continue to do so until all of His enemies have been openly subjugated to Him and acknowledge Him! There is no way this will fail to be fulfilled. As it is written, *“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet”* (1 Cor 15:25). The ultimate accomplishment of this will take place when Jesus appears in all of His glory, destroying His foes with the breath of His

mouth (2 Thess 2:8). Preliminary to that, an unprecedented spread of the Gospel will occur in which the kingdoms of this world will cease to hold people within their grip, as they embrace the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Solitary King**

**“ . . . and He shall reign forever and ever!”** In history, it appears as though there are multiple kingdoms and numerous kings—but that is only the way it looks. In reality, there is only One King—the Lord Jesus Christ, Who has been **“crowned with glory and honor.”** His Kingdom is the only enduring one. By Divine determination, all others are destined for extinction!

Here, in this time, God has been gracious in allowing us to participate in His Kingdom before its ultimate revelation. In salvation, we are **“translated,”** or conveyed, **“into the kingdom of His dear Son”** (Col 1:13). Some versions use the word **“transferred”** rather than **“translate”** or **“convey.”** For some, that is too impersonal. God has, as it were, *escorted* us into Christ’s Kingdom. While it involves a legal transaction, it is intensely personal and experiential. It is **“of (or by) God”** that we are **“in Christ Jesus”** (1 Cor 1:30). **We have become part of something that will never end!**

For those in Christ Jesus, the kingdoms of this world have already given way to the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. Our primary citizenship is now in heaven, from whence we look for our Savior (Phil 3:20-21). Praise the Lord!

### **A HEAVENLY RESPONSE**

This is the heavenly response to the demise of worldly kingdoms. It refers to the public subjugation of all of Christ's enemies. What, in this case, appears to be catastrophe on the earth, is seen as the occasion for praise in heaven. This is because everything is seen within the framework of God Himself, and the execution of His purpose through Christ Jesus.

### The Worship of God

*“And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God . . . ”* This is the heavenly response to the demise of worldly kingdoms. It refers to the public subjugation of all of Christ's enemies. What, in this case, appears to be catastrophe on the earth, is seen as the occasion for praise in heaven. This is because everything is seen within the framework of God Himself, and the execution of His purpose through Christ Jesus. It is important that we see this, because we have been called to the same vision—the same perspective.

There are three essential things to observe here. *First* , **WHO** worshiped God. *Second* , **WHERE** they were when they worshiped God. Third, **HOW** they worshiped.

#### *Who worshiped*

These are willing and perceptive worshipers, which are the only kind recognized in heaven. They are identified as *“the twenty four elders,”* to whom we have already been introduced (4:4,10; 5:8,14). These personalities have participated in the revelation to John, both in executing the purpose of God, and in responding to His working (5:5,6,11; 7:11,13).

These are exalted heavenly personages, being identified with the redeemed. In fact, some of their praise includes a recognition of their own redemption (Rev 5:9-10). At the very least, these personalities speak for all of the redeemed, ascribing praise to God for the subduing of the kingdoms of this world. They speak from a lofty and clearly insightful view, setting the tone for our own response when the kingdoms of this world crumble.

### *Where they worshiped*

These are not occupying the low ground of carnality, and consequently their view is not that of the world. **They praise God as they sit before Him, and are upon their thrones.** That is, they are fully aware of God, and are occupying their stewardship. Their's is the response of kings– reigning with Christ. This is not the rejoinder of the spiritually blind, or the slothful and indolent!

### *How they worshiped*

Behold this sanctified group! They “*fell upon their faces and worshiped God.*” Once before they

Many a soul has never risen that high! They are not able to give thanks for Who God is, what He has done, and what He will do. Their world is too small, too restricted. If they cannot see God in their present circumstance, their lips become sealed, as though God had gone to sleep, or ceased to work.

were found in this posture (Rev 7:11). It is a mark of humility produced by spiritual insight. **Glory, with all of its advantages, will not free us from humility!** Before the Lord, the prone position is always right! It is only before created beings that we rise to our feet from that position (Rev

19:10; 22:9). The light of God's glory subdues every created one, be it angel or man!

### What They Say

The worship of God involves more than posture! Although there are times when men have simply bowed speechless before the Lord (Ex 4:31; 12:27; 1 Chron 29:20; 2 Chron 29:29; Neh 8:6), there have been times when insightful words were also spoken. In fact, the more aware the people were of the Person and purpose of God, the more apt they were to speak when they worshiped (Gen 24:48; Ex 34:8-9; 2 Chron 7:3). During Christ's earthly ministry, people often worshiped Him SAYING something (Matt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25).

### *There Is A Point*

There is a point to mentioning this. Worship with insightful words is a heavenly manner, and is greatly to be coveted. **Too many of God's people have never had their tongues loosened to praise the Lord!** One of the marks of the New Covenant was prophesied by Isaiah. *"Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge, And the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly"* (Isa 32:4).

### The Words of the Elders

*" . . . saying: We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come . . . "* For what do they give thanks? In a sense, it is impersonal. Although they themselves had been *"redeemed,"* they did not thank God for a personal experience. Their minds were so enraptured with the Lord, they were able to rejoice in a work not immediately associated with them. They gloried in His *"might."* They praised Him for His being— *"Who IS."* They gave thanks for His past workings— *"Who WAS!"* They were thankful He was going to be revealed more fully— *"Who is to COME!"*

Many a soul has never risen that high! They are not able to give thanks for Who God is, what He has done, and what He will do. Their world is too small, too restricted. If they cannot see God in their present circumstance, their lips become sealed, as though God had gone to sleep, or ceased to work. But such is not the case with the twenty-four elders. Their persons have been joined with God's Person, and He now consumes their vision.

We are being introduced to the heavenly manner, and we do well to give heed to what we see. **Self-serving, man-exalting religion is a bane, and is to be shunned with great zeal.** To this very day, the most powerful preaching and the most invigorating insight finds focus in *“the wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11).

### **Divine Intervention**

Those who suppose God has ceased to intervene in the affairs of men do well to rethink the matter. All of the finely spun theology notwithstanding, God has forced Himself into the affairs of men against their wills. It happened in the flood, and again at Babel. It happened in Egypt, and again in the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar! God gave Canaan to Israel against the will of seven larger nations that occupied the land (Deut 7:1; Acts 13:19)! He wrested the kingdom from Saul, and gave it to David (1 Sam 18:12; Acts 13:22). He thrust Belshazzar from the Chaldean kingdom by violent death, and gave it to sixty-two year old Darius (Dan 5:1-30). Herod was instantly deposed by death when he took too much glory for himself (Acts 12:21-23).

There simply is too much in God's Word on this matter to question it. It is still true, *“But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another”* (Psa 75:7). No wonder we are admonished, *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”* (John

7:24).

This is the very perception that stimulates the thanksgiving of the twenty-four elders! “. . . *Because You have taken Your great power. . .*” Notice the strength of their words! “*You have TAKEN Your great power . . .*” The word used here ( “*taken*” ) is one denoting a violent act! **The Lord SEIZED, or snatched the power.** He took it by force, overpowering those who had misused it!

History provides repeated occasions where God wrested the power of despots from them, taking it to Himself. He did it when he wanted to, and none could “stay His hand, or say What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:35). Such historical occasions were examples of what will be done to all of Christ’s foes. Their demise will be public, and it will be thorough!

What a perspective we have here! Pharaoh had power, and God took it!  
Nebuchadnezzar had power, and God took it! Belshazzar had power, and God took it!  
Darius had power, and God took it! Herod had power, and God took it! Nero had power, and God took it! Hitler had power, and God took it!

History provides repeated occasions where God wrested the power of despots from them, taking it to Himself. He did it when he wanted to, and none could “*stay His hand, or say What doest Thou?*” (Dan 4:35). Such historical occasions were examples of what will be done to all of Christ’s foes. Their demise will be public, and it will be thorough!

**All Power Is From God**

The Lord is praised because He took **HIS** great power and reigned! Little wonder it is written, ***“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”*** (Rom 13:1). High sounding arguments may be presented in an attempt to reject this affirmation, but it remains true, and will eventually be acknowledged by all!

Although wicked men appear to have seized their power on their own, this is not the case. Their power was given to them for the accomplishment of Divine objectives! Pharaoh is a case in point. Of Him God declared, ***“But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth”*** (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). When Pharaoh used his power to oppose God and afflict His people, God took it back, drowning him and his armies in the sea through which His people were delivered (Ex 14:18,28).

### *Promotion Comes from God*

The Word of God is clear on this matter. Men are not vaulted into political prominence by mere vote, or shrewd and ruthless tactics. ***“For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another”*** (Psa 75:6-7). God’s people do well to remember this, not allowing themselves to be caught up in political wrangling. While we do not condone wicked men in high places, nor cast our vote for them, we are not distraught at their corruptness. Their power came from God, and in due time, He will take it back!

The ultimate example of this is seen in the ***“old serpent”*** himself. He too has been given power—but only in the area of ***“darkness”*** (Lk 22:53; Acts 26:18; Eph 6:12; Col 1:13). When the purpose of God is completed, however, Satan will be instantly and effectively stripped of his power. Jesus will take it back, and consign him to the lake of fire.

## And Reigned!!

Not only did the Lord's Christ take His power back, it is added, "***and reigned.***" Are we to conclude from this that He was not reigning before? Indeed not! It is written, "***For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet***" (1 Cor 15:25). He will not reign *when* His enemies are subdued, but "***UNTIL***" they are vanquished.

If this were not the case, His enemies would triumph over His people. Remember, the primary reason for the current reign of Jesus is "***bringing many sons to glory***" (Heb 2:10). Their salvation, nurture and guidance are the purpose for rule. In that process, He subdues the malicious intentions of His enemies, not allowing them to negate His great salvation. But, when all of the children are in, the purpose of God fulfilled, and all that the words of the holy prophets accomplished, He will take His power unto Himself, dashing His enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psa 2:9).

The phrase "***and reigned***" does not signify the commencement of His government, but its continuance. It is a comparative statement: i.e., *the kingdoms of this world have been thrown down, yet Your kingdom continues uninterrupted.* Remember, of His kingdom it is written, "***Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end***" (Isa 9:7).

The thanksgiving is offered because of the apparency of these things. The kingdom of Christ will openly triumph in the earth, just as it has in you personally. He will be publically displayed and vindicated. Although His enemies appear to have triumphed over Him, all will see the real King over all the earth. The day of that revelation has been appointed, and will surely come. Satan and his hosts dread it, but saints anticipate it!

## DISPLEASURE AMONG THE NATIONS

A hostility exists between the nations and God that transcends anything we dare to imagine. Sin has reduced them to enemies. Divine confrontation causes anger to spring up in them, with all of its defilements.

***“The nations were angry . . . ”*** Our attention is now turned to the nations. Their real character is made known, however civilized and advanced they may have appeared among men. This is the raging of which the Psalmist spoke. ***“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel’”*** (Psa 2:1-9).

### *The Depravity of the Nations*

Throughout history, ***“the nations”*** have consistently opposed God. If, for a while, they appeared to be peaceable, they finally came out openly against the Lord and His Christ. They rebelled against the Israelites in

Canaan. They opposed the servants of God, the prophets. They even crucified the Lord of glory (Acts 4:25-26). In their rebellion against the Lord, they martyred the Apostles, and killed the saints. Our text brings us to the conclusion of the rebellion, as well as to the revelation of the King.

These nations were governed by “*the kings of the earth*” (Psa 76:12; 110:5). They are the “*nations*” out of which the Lord brought His people in an exercise of Sovereignty and grace (Acts 10:35; Rev 5:9).

### **They WERE Angry**

Our text does not say the nations ARE angry, but that they “**WERE**” angry. This is not an insignificant distinction. The point is NOT that the nations were angry **when** Christ took His great power and reigned, but that **He took it when they were in their most volatile state**. The Psalmist states the case well for us. They were “*angry*” because of the restraining power of the King of glory. They were frustrated in their attempts to do all they desired.

Their anger was fueled by the consistent condemnation of their ways by the messengers and Messenger of the Lord. The presence of the Lord and His people constituted “*bonds*” and “*cords*” of restraint to His enemies. They could not get rid of the truth!

Too, the nations were “*angry*” because they were constantly reminded of a superior order—a higher Government! They also could not make the people of God bow to their gods or their ways. They “**WERE angry.**”

The nations could not stop the Law from being given, or the holy Prophets from prophesying. They could not frustrate the ministry of

John the Baptist, nor abort the birth of Messiah. They could not stop Him from growing up, ministering, dying, rising from the dead, or ascending into heaven. Strengthened by hell, and fortified with all of the corruption of the bottomless pit, they were still confronted with their sin and the proclamation of a great Gospel. They ***“WERE angry.”***

A hostility exists between the nations and God that transcends anything we dare to imagine. Sin has reduced them to enemies. Divine confrontation causes anger to spring up in them, with all of its defilements.

### **Wrath Is Come**

***“ . . . and Your wrath has come.”*** When the ***“wrath of the Lamb”*** comes, the kingdoms of this world fall—instantly! The wrath of the Lamb is justified because of the

It is the time when He will be unveiled in all of His splendor, to the complete consternation of His enemies. The thorough demise of all earthly kingdoms will occur when the Kingdom of Christ (His people) is unveiled in all of its glory.

wickedness of the nations, their refusal to bow to Him, and their persecution of His people. That very wrath has been ***“stored”*** up during a period of longsuffering. Time did not diminish the wrath, but rather increased it. ***“The wrath of God”*** is mentioned ten times in Scripture (Psa 78:31; John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Rev 14:10,19; 15:1,7). Once we read of ***“the wrath of the Lamb”*** (Rev 6:16). The ***“day of wrath”*** is mentioned four times (Job 21:30; Prov 11:4; Zeph 1:15; Rom 2:5). Thirty-one times we read of ***“His wrath,”*** and thirteen times of ***“the wrath of the Lord.”*** Job 21:20 mentions ***“the wrath of the Almighty,”*** and Revelation 19:15 ***“the wrath of Almighty God.”*** Twenty times God refers to ***“my wrath.”*** It is called ***“great wrath”*** (2 Kgs 23:26; Zech 7:12), and ***“fierce wrath”***

(Ex 32:12; 2 Chron 28:11). There is simply too much about this aspect of the Divine nature for us to ignore it!

### **Not A Popular Message**

We live in a day when it is not fashionable to speak of the wrath of the **“Lord God Almighty.”** It simply does not fit into the nominal Christian agenda. However, this is a message Jesus wants the church to know. There is a **“day of wrath”** on the Divine agenda (Job 21;30; Rom 2:5). It is a day when the indignation of God will break forth without restraint against everything and everyone contrary to Himself. The Spirit reminds us this **“wrath”** will come upon **“the children of disobedience”** (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). Salvation, from this perspective, is actually deliverance **“from the wrath to come”** (1 Thess 1:10).

### **The Day of Christ**

This is **“the day of Christ”** from the world’s perspective (Phil 1:6,10; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Pet 3:10). It is the time when He will be unveiled in all of His splendor, to the complete consternation of His enemies. The thorough demise of all earthly kingdoms will occur when the Kingdom of Christ (His people) is unveiled in all of its glory. As it is written, **“ . . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe . . . ”** (2 Thess 1:7-10).

**When the ultimate blessing is bestowed on the saints, the ultimate curse will be experienced by the ungodly!** When salvation is experienced in its fulness by the people of God, unmixed wrath will be experienced by the children of the wicked one.

In our text, this day is particularly associated with *the “kingdoms of this world.”* There are at least four reasons for this. ❶ Theirs is an organized conspiracy. ❷ Theirs is a studied, or contemplated, rebellion. ❸ Theirs is an intelligently pursued opposition, over an extended period, and with great diligence. ❹ Theirs is an influential insurgence, even causing many to cast off the faith. Over time, the *“kingdoms of this world”* have proved their opposition to Christ! Governments have only found acceptance with God when they have renounced the course of this world. Such governments have been few and far between, and short-lived when they occurred.

All through the *“day of salvation,”* this *“wrath”* has been subdued, as the goodness of God leads men to repentance (Rom 2:4). But this time has a scheduled end! *“The time of the dead”* will conclude this day, inducting the day of wrath for sinners.

## THE TIME OF THE DEAD

*“And the time of the dead, that they should be judged.”* For those in the world, death ends it all. The lament of Solomon has been taken up by all who remain ignorant of *“life and immortality,”* which have now been brought to light (2 Tim 1:10). *“As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, This also is vanity. For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool! Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind”* (Eccl 2:15-17). Suffice it to say, this is not the highest view of death!

Solomon's view of death is not the Gospel outlook!  
Those in Christ Jesus do NOT view death as did  
Solomon. His wisdom did not extend as far as our faith.  
For those in Christ Jesus, ***“to die is gain”*** (Phil 1:21).  
While the thought of death was foreboding to Solomon,  
it was gloriously refreshing to Paul.

Solomon's view of death is not the Gospel outlook! Those in Christ Jesus do NOT view death as did Solomon. His wisdom did not extend as far as our faith. For those in Christ Jesus, ***“to die is gain”*** (Phil 1:21). While the thought of death was foreboding to Solomon, it was gloriously refreshing to Paul. ***“For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”*** (Phil 1:23).

### **The Dead Still Exist**

***“The dead”*** are neither non-existent nor unconscious! Death cannot separate us from the experience of God's love in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:35-39). While it is an ***“enemy”*** (1 Cor 15:26), it still belongs to us (1 Cor 3:22). Moses (who died), and Elijah (who was translated) were both conscious and involved in God's will long after they left this world (Matt 17:3; Lk 9:30-31). Jesus spoke of Abraham, after his death, having obtained knowledge unavailable to him when he was in the world. He also referred to one who was being comforted after he died, and another who was in torment (Lk 16:25-31). In this very book, John saw ***“the souls of them that were slain for the word of God,”*** and they were conscious and perceptive—even of affairs upon the earth (Rev 6:9). The dead, indeed, have not ceased to be!

### **A Vast Multitude**

Now, our text turns to this vast multitude of departed persons— ***“the dead.”*** They ranged in age from Methuselah, who lived for 969 years (Gen 5:27), to infants slain when yet newborn (Matt 2:16-18). Both

good and evil are among them, righteous and unrighteous, saved and lost. The enemies of God and the sons of God are found in this amalgamation of spirits.

While they have been apparently laid to rest, and have not been openly active, **their time now comes** ! They will be summoned from ***“the land of the enemy”*** (Jer 31;16). The mighty voice of Jesus will call them forth! As it is written, ***“the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”*** (John 5:28-29). It will be their day, their time– ***“the time of the dead.”***

Those who look for novel doctrines in the book of the Revelation do well to behold the fundamental doctrines declared therein! We are witnessing the resurrection and the consequent day of judgment.

### **Ultimate Confrontations**

Cain will face Abel! Pilate will behold those whose blood he mingled with their sacrifices. Herod will again encounter John the Baptist. The Jewish council will again confront Stephen! Nero will see Peter and Paul! Hitler will come face-to-face with the Jews whose death he ordered! This is a time ***“appointed,”*** in which the world will be judged in righteousness (Psa 9:8; Acts 17:31).

### **Everyone Will Be There**

The ***“dead”*** will all stand before the Lord of glory! They will all be summoned to appear. As it is written, ***“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in***

***the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev 20:12-13).***

As for the wicked, within the framework of earthly government, they had judged the prophets, the Lord Jesus, His holy Apostles, and His saints. They had counted them unworthy to live, opposing them with unholy delight. They had determined the Gospel was unworthy of proclamation, and thus opposed it and those who brought it. But now they all stand before the One with Whom they have to do! Their protecting kingdoms have all fallen, and they have been utterly stripped of their seeming power. It is ***“the time of the dead.”***

At this time, the world will be judged by the very ones it opposed, for the ***“saints will judge the world”*** (1 Cor 6:2). They will ***“reign with Christ”*** in the execution of Divine judgment. It is ***“the time of the dead.”*** How the saints need to hear of this time, lest they despair when opposed, maligned, and even persecuted! It is a message for suffering saints! In the crucible of opposition and testing, they need to hear about their future!

## THE TIME OF RECOMPENSE

***“And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great.”***

Those who have counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and have received persecution from the world, will come into a time of Divine

recognition. What a time it will be! The Lord Jesus WILL reward His servants! The prophets and the saints are included. Everyone who obtained the fear of the Lord will be duly recognized and rewarded.

At ***“the time of the dead,”*** those who have lived in the world’s rejection, often hounded from pillar to post by the ungodly, will come into their own! Those who have counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and have received persecution from the world, will come into a time of Divine recognition. What a time it will be! The Lord Jesus WILL reward His servants! The prophets and the saints are included. Everyone who obtained the fear of the Lord will be duly recognized and rewarded. The ***“small*** (notice, they are mentioned first) ***and the great”*** are all included.

Although you do not hear much these days about Divine ***“rewards,”*** they are prominent in the Word. God appeals to us through offering rewards. In fact, all of His ***“exceeding great and precious promises”*** contain the pledge of reward. The ***“reward”*** factor is what makes the promises PROMISES—otherwise, they are simply impersonal predictions.

Do not remove from me the idea of rewards! This is what compels the believer to ***“labor for the meat . . . which endures to everlasting life”*** (John 6:27). Jesus spoke of a ***“great reward in heaven”*** to those who were persecuted for righteousness sake (Matt 5:12). He also promised a ***“reward”*** that would be ***“open,”*** or public (Matt 6:4,6,18). Even the most minute ministrations to His disciples receives this commitment: ***“verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”*** (Matt 10:42).

## **A Personal Reward**

A personal reward is promised, as distinguished from a group recompense: ***“and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor”*** (1 Cor 3:8). It is my persuasion that many professed believers have never spent time pondering this aspect of the Kingdom. Their most noble consideration of the coming glory is when we are finally all together, and participate in a blessed state. That IS involved, of course, but spiritual consistency requires more extensive consideration than that!

When the prophets, saints, and those who fear the Lord are rewarded, the promise will be fulfilled, ***“then shall every man have praise of God”*** (1 Cor 4:5). Faith sees this up ahead, and engages the forces of darkness now. It lays hold of the promise, and drives the individual possessing faith into joyful involvement in the good will of God.

The effectiveness of considering what lies ahead for the faithful is seen in our Lord Jesus. ***“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (Heb 12:2).

Lest someone imagine this to be irrelevant to the good fight of faith, I would remind you that it is written as an incentive for us. ***“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy . . . ”*** (Heb 12:1-2a).

## **The Prophets**

God’s ***“servants the prophets”*** were an unappreciated group in the world. Most of them were *loners* , or *mavericks*, laboring without the benefit of surrounding brethren. They were largely rejected—even

killed—because of their word. Wicked Jezebel was noted for killing God’s **“servants the prophets”** (2 Kgs 9:7). They were sent **“early”** to the transgressing people of God, summoning them back to the Lord (Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Zech 1;6). But they were not received.

Although the blood of the prophets was shed, and they were largely forgotten, Jesus reminded His generation they were NOT forgotten by God. **“I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation”** (Lk 11:49-51).

The early church walked, or lived out their lives, **“in the fear of the Lord”** (Acts 9:31). They conducted themselves with a dominating consideration of the Lord. The world did not honor them for this, or recognize the value of such a perspective.

The vindication of the prophets was partially fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem, when the holy city was given over to the Gentiles. But they have not yet been fully exonerated. The world judged the prophets unworthy of life . **“The time of the dead”** will find the tables reversed. The assembled universe will see the prophets exalted and rewarded – held out as unequaled among their peers.

### **The Saints**

Here is a more general classification. All prophets are saints, but all

saints are not prophets. ***“The saints”*** are the rank and file of God’s people—the *holy ones* . They have received righteousness from God, having it ***“imputed”*** to them (Rom 4:11.22-24). But that is not all! They have also lived it out, fighting the good fight of faith, and ***“doing righteousness”*** (1 John 2:29; 3:7).

The world opposed the saints because of their holiness. Like Noah, they ***“condemned the world”*** in their obedience and godly living (Heb 11:7). Although they *were* ***“the salt of the earth”*** and ***“the light of the world”*** (Matt 5:13,14), they were not so recognized in the world. Politicians, entertainers, and athletes received more recognition than they! But it was not so in heaven! Their very names are written in heaven (Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23), and they will be acknowledged, honored, and rewarded! For them , ***“the time of the dead”*** will be a time of blessing and great joy!

### **Those Who Fear Your Name**

These are not a different class of people, but a different aspect of the people. All prophets and saints fear the name of the Lord. To ***“fear the name of the Lord”*** is to revere His Person. It is to draw back from any tendency to disobey or reproach Him. Even if confronted with death, the person fearing the name of the Lord will not denounce or renounce Him!

The early church walked, or lived out their lives, ***“in the fear of the Lord”*** (Acts 9:31). They conducted themselves with a dominating consideration of the Lord. The world did not honor them for this, or recognize the value of such a perspective. But the saints found such ***“fear”*** to be ***“clean”*** and purifying (Psa 19:9). Those possessing this indispensable quality are repulsed by sin and drawn by righteousness. They have seen enough of God to want more, and have seen enough of the world to deny it a prominent place in their hearts.

Now, their time comes— *“the time of the dead.”* God will honor them for fearing Him, and will do it publically. They shall have a reward from Him because they *“feared His name.”* Among other things, we see that fearing the Lord is more than an obligation. Fulfilling obligation, while essential, is not the basis of our reward. Jesus once said, *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’* (Luke 17:0). Those then, who are said to *“fear the name of the Lord”* did so willingly. They chose to do this because of their knowledge of the Lord. To put it another way, their faith produced their fear of the name of the Lord.

### **Reward! Reward! Reward!**

It is coming! It is coming! It is coming! The *“time of the dead”* and the dispensing of *“great reward”* is on the way. Like Moses, you can mold your life around the coming reward, even though, from the view of time, it may be far from you. It is said of faithful Moses, he *“refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward”* (Heb 11:24-26).

**The resurrection of the dead is thus considered as a goal, or objective, of life!** We do not live for this time, or for the flesh, or for the lusts of the flesh. **We live for the resurrection of the dead!** We do so because of the blessings associated with that time.

There will be public exoneration, reward, and recognition!

The contemplation of “the reward” was a more powerful incentive to Moses than a mere sense of obligation. It was stronger than any temptation to fear the wrath of the king. Considering “*the reward*” still has a powerful and effective influence upon the faithful. It is ever true, “*But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile*” (Rom 2:10). It is possible—yea, necessary—that you “*that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ*” (Col 3:24).

Alas, there is not enough said of the coming reward to the saints of our time. Sometimes men even speak derisively of the coming reward, glibly referring to “*pie in the sky bye and bye.*” Some have even dared to emphasize blessing in this world above that which is to come, thereby betraying their fundamental ignorance of the situation. But no one filled with the Spirit speaks in such a manner—only those dominated by the flesh.

### **Attaining the Resurrection**

Receiving reward *at “the time of the dead”* is elsewhere referred to as “*attaining unto the resurrection of the dead*” (Phil 3:11). “*Attaining*” the resurrection is appropriating the benefits that will be dispensed at that time. Technically, all will be raised from the dead, but all will not “*attain*” unto it.

The word Paul uses for “*attaining to the resurrection of the dead*” is **καταντήσω** (kat-an-tah'-so), and means *come to, reach, arrive at, as finishing a journey, or arriving at a goal*. What a blessed view of the spiritual life!

**The resurrection of the dead is thus considered as a goal, or objective, of life!** We do not live for this time, or for the flesh, or for the lusts of the flesh. **We live for the resurrection of the dead!** We do

so because of the blessings associated with that time. There will be public exoneration, reward, and recognition! How we must hold ***“the time of the dead”*** before the people, reminding them of the real reason for living!

Confessing his own anticipation of the resurrection, Paul affirmed before his enemies, ***“concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”*** (Acts 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:6-8). The near-total absence of this type of confession among the churches only confirms how far they have drifted from Christ!

### **The Wicked**

The wicked also will be called into account for their misdeeds. The manner in which reference to them is made is most intriguing. ***“And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”*** This is unusually strong language! The word ***“destroy”*** means to utterly decay, rot, and perish. Here, the demise of the entire earth is said to be caused by the wicked—in particular, those who have rejected Christ, opposing and persecuting His people!

Scripture affirms that creation has been ***“subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope”*** (Rom 8:20, NKJV). Death—even in creation—entered because of man’s sin (Rom 5:12). But note, the destruction of the world is not said to be caused by Adam (as in Romans 5), or by mankind in general. Here, the whole responsibility is laid at the feet of the godless! We know this is the case, because God is going to ***“destroy”*** them—something that will **not** occur to the godly. Those who will be destroyed are identified as ***“those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (2 Thess 1:8-9).

*Why Only the Godless?*

Why is the responsibility for the destruction of the earth charged only to the godless? Do not all men share in this responsibility? From one point of view, this is true—but it is not the ultimate viewpoint. **Salvation extricates us from this classification.** We have not only been delivered from sin, the power of darkness, and death itself, we have also been delivered from the guilt of destroying the earth. Now, by the grace of God, we are among *“the sons of God.”* Nature itself is awaiting our manifestation, for then it will be delivered from its current *“bondage of corruption”* (Rom 8:19-21).

### **Sowing and Reaping**

We cannot leave this section without observing that it is a declaration of the law of sowing and reaping. Reaping what we sow is an inviolable rule of the Christ’s kingdom. *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Gal 6:7-10). Believers are motivated by their understanding of this law, or principle. They know their investment in eternity will pay large dividends. They also know investing in the flesh and temporal things will bring corruption and judgment!

Later in the Revelation, we will again read of this principle. *“He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints”* (Rev 13:10). Right now, in this time, men are either accruing heavenly rewards or Divine wrath! An awesome consideration, indeed, and one which, it is increasingly obvious, is not generally known or accepted.

Paul appealed to this principle when dealing with a collection for poor saints. *“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”* (2 Cor 9:6). It

is not possible to successfully ignore the Divinely appointed law of sowing and reaping. Not only will we reap the same substance, so to speak, we have sown, it will be reaped in exponential proportions. Whether righteous or unrighteous, what we invest in now is what we will receive in *“the time of the dead.”* If we have been attentive to the Lord, He will be attentive to us. If we have ignored and denied Him, He will also ignore and deny us. For those who live by faith, that opens a lot of possibilities! Now is the time to invest in eternity! That investment will bring rich dividends!

## THE REAL THINGS ARE REVEALED

In my judgment, it is not on the part of wisdom to devote our lives wholly to governmental enterprises. Whether Joseph, Moses, or Daniel, godly men in high stations of earthly government have always kept their focus on God, His Word, and His purpose.

We have witnessed the demise of the nations, as they are ground to powder. All through this book, we have seen the inferiority of earthly kingdoms. In their most powerful and seemingly glorious condition, they are still destined for destruction. Before giving our allegiance to them, it is well to consider their end. In my judgment, it is not on the part of wisdom to devote our lives wholly to governmental enterprises. Whether Joseph, Moses, or Daniel, godly men in high stations of earthly government have always kept their focus on God, His Word, and His purpose.

### **The Temple of God Opened**

*“Then the temple of God was opened in heaven . . . ”* This temple

has always existed! During the day of salvation, it is the place where Jesus rules, making constant intercession for the saints. Earlier, Jesus referred to this **“temple”** as the ultimate residence of the people of God. **“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God . . . ”** (Rev 3:12). The ages to come, we are told, will find the saints serving God **“day and night in His temple”** (Rev 7:15). This is the place from which an angel will come, to summon the Lord to reap the earth (Rev 14:15-17).

### *The Place of Rule*

**“The temple of God”** is the place of Divine rule. Both blessings and judgments come from this **“temple.”** Divine intercession is made there, and messengers are dispatched from there. Elsewhere, it is called **“the temple of heaven, from the throne”** (Rev 16:17).

### *Presently Hidden*

From the dawn of creation, this **“temple”** has not been visible to mankind—especially after the fall. The administration of **“Law,”** contained projections of this **“temple”** in types and shadows, but the **“temple”** itself remained unseen and inaccessible to men. During **“the day of salvation”** and the **“acceptable year of the Lord”** (the present day of grace—2 Cor 6:2; Lk 4:19), this **“temple”** remains hidden. Mortal eyes cannot pierce the realm of the unseen!

### *Faith Accesses the Temple Now*

In Christ, an acute awareness of this **“temple”** is developed by faith. We are even urged to come into the inmost part of the temple, the **“holiest by the blood of Jesus”** (Heb 10:19). That is, after all, where Jesus Himself has entered (Heb 9:12,24). Faith makes us more conscious of the heavenly **“temple”** than the most exalted places of this world.

## *An Appointed Time*

There is coming an appointed time when ***“the temple of God”*** will be ***“opened in heaven”*** – a time when the Source and environment of all things will be revealed to all personalities. For some, it will be the pinnacle of blessing. For others, it will be the consummate curse.

There is coming an appointed time when ***“the temple of God”*** will be ***“opened in heaven”*** – a time when the Source and environment of all things will be revealed to all personalities. For some, it will be the pinnacle of blessing. For others, it will be the consummate curse. Those who have lived in fellowship with ***“the temple of God”*** will leap for joy. Those who have denied and resisted it will weep and lament. **In Christ, we are now being oriented to behold that opening with joy.**

Saints will behold the place from which they were nourished! They will see the realm where intercession was faithfully made for them. They will witness the place where atonement was made, the One Who made the atonement, and the One with Whom the atonement was made.

The wicked will see the One they have rejected. They will behold the realm they spurned, and the power they denied. ***“The Temple of God”*** will be thrown open to their utter consternation, as the earth for which they lived passes away.

## **Some Principles**

Now, **to the degree we see heavenly things, the earth is seen as it really is.** That vision is what enables the saints to overcome the world, refusing to be absorbed into its fashion.

**Only to the degree that the earth ceases to dominate our vision do we see heavenly things clearly.** As long as this world is prominent, heaven is hidden! This accounts for the remarkable ignorance of the things of God that exists in the contemporary church. The earth dominates its vision, and thus the things of God cannot be seen. It is the same condition that is described in John 12:39. ***“Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.”***

Two conditions can be seen in this situation. *First* , the choice to ignore the Lord’s Christ put the truth beyond their reach. *Second* , their choice was ratified by God making it irreversible. We do not know when this circumstance occurs, nor is it necessary for us to know. It is enough to be persuaded that if *the “the things that are unseen”* (2 Cor 4:17-18) do not dominate us now, they will condemn us when they are revealed.

### **Not Strange**

When the ***“temple of God is opened in heaven,”*** it will not be strange or offensive to the saved. Even though we have not yet seen into it, and do not have a full understanding of it, a certain sensitivity to, and preference for, the ***“the temple of God”*** is developed in salvation.

One of the unspeakable benefits of ***“walking in the light,” “living by faith,”*** and ***“looking unto Jesus”*** is the results that will be experienced in the great and notable day of the Lord. When the glory of God and the

things of God are unveiled, they will bring joy to the heart of the redeemed. Life in Christ has acquainted them with these things. In Him we develop a fondness and preference for them. It is possible to live your life in earnest expectation of the temple opening!

### **The Ark of His Testament**

**“ . . . and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple.”** At once the imagery of the tabernacle and Solomonic temple come to mind. Moses, you will recall, was given a **“copy and shadow of heavenly things”** in the tabernacle. Within the **“Most Holy”** (Ex 26:23; Heb 9:12,25) or **“Holiest of all”** (Heb 9:3,8) a single piece of furniture was placed—the ark of the covenant. This was an elaborate piece—perhaps the most elaborate of all. It was made of acacia wood, and overlaid with pure gold within and without (Ex 25:10-11).

A cover was placed upon it made of pure gold, called **“a mercy seat.”** Two cherubim were positioned at the **“two ends of the mercy seat.”** The cherubim had outstretched wings that covered the mercy seat. They **“faced each other,”** and were to be **“toward the mercy seat.”** This elaborate **“mercy seat,”** with the cherubim, was to be made of a single beaten piece of gold (Ex 25:17-21).

#### *A Place of Communication*

It was there, over the mercy seat, that God promised, **“I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel”** (Ex 25:22). It was a place of communication!

#### *A Place of Atonement*

The blood of the sin offering was also sprinkled on the mercy seat, as well as before it (Lev 16:14), signifying an atonement for the people.

### *Inside the Ark*

The same God who kept and blessed the Jews had kept and blessed the church—those in Christ Jesus. Even during the oppression of the saints, when the Word of God was largely rejected, the Lord had been mindful of His people! While the governments of this world rejected them, the Kingdom of heaven accepted and blessed them.

Significant items were also placed within the ark of the covenant. Of this ark, the Spirit witnesses, ***“in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant”*** (Heb 9:4; Ex 16:33-34; Num 17:10; Ex 25:16,21). In these articles, we find ❶ Divine provision (the manna), ❷ Divine direction (Aaron’s rod), and ❸ Divine commitment (the tables of the covenant).

### *Maintained in Secret*

Only the High priest was ever allowed to see this ark, and only once a year, when he made atonement (Ex 16:34; 30:10; Heb 9:7). Even then, the ark was never opened, allowing the High Priest to look into it.

### *A Source of Blessing*

It was a sacred piece of furniture, depicting the very Presence and blessing of the Lord. When Israel entered Canaan, the priests who carried the ark stood in the middle of the Jordan River, on dry ground,

allowing the entire nation to walk through Jordan on dry land as long as they stood there with the ark (Josh 3:17).

### *A Source of Cursing*

On one occasion, after the Philistines had captured and returned the ark of the covenant to Israel, the men of Beth-shemesh dared to look into it. Of that event it is written, ***“And He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men . . . ”*** (1 Sam 6:19).

### **The New Testament**

Notice with what care the record of this vision is stated: ***“and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple”*** (NKJV). The New Covenant is HIS covenant, and it is maintained in HIS temple! It is **not** the result of man’s accomplishment, and it is **not** maintained by human activity.

The same God who kept and blessed the Jews had kept and blessed the church—those in Christ Jesus. Even during the oppression of the saints, when the Word of God was largely rejected, the Lord had been mindful of His people! While the governments of this world rejected them, the Kingdom of heaven accepted and blessed them.

### *God Did Not Forget!*

Not once did God forget His covenant in Christ Jesus! It was never overlooked or placed into the background! Now, after the smoke of the battleground has cleared--after the tribulation of His people has ceased--after the earth has been shaken down to its foundation, what do we see? God’s covenant of blessing! Still the Law was written in the hearts of His people and remained in their minds! Their sins were still forgiven,

and they were still accepted. God was still identified with the saints, and the saints remained identified with Him. **The ark of the covenant was seen in heaven, a token of Divine acceptance and faithfulness!**

### *The Impotence of Our Enemies*

Earth's general opposition could not remove the blessing and acceptance of the Lord. The edicts of earth's corrupt governments could not void the covenant, or cause a wedge to be driven between God and His people. The experiences of poverty and extreme inconvenience could not shut heaven to the saints, or take the law of God out of their hearts and minds. Even spiritual Babylon, with all of its religious corruption, could not void the New Covenant! When the Temple of God was opened in heaven, there was the ark of the covenant, in tact, and undamaged!

### *The Faithfulness of God*

**This is nothing less than a depiction of the faithfulness of God.** It is ever true, ***“You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You”*** (Psa 9:10). His faithfulness not only reaches into the heavens (Psa 36:5), it is experienced upon earth (1 Cor 10:13). Our very call into the fellowship of Christ Jesus was prompted by God's faithfulness (1 Cor 1:9). The stability of the saints in this world is owing to the faithfulness of God (1 Thess 5:23-24). Throughout the ages, those who have suffered according to the will of God have committed the keeping of their souls to Him, ***“as unto a faithful Creator”*** (1 Pet 4:19). All of that, and more, is involved in seeing the ark of the covenant in God's temple.

### **But Wait!**

As soon as the temple of God was opened, the ark of the covenant was seen! **That means there was no veil!** What was declared in the Gospel is confirmed in the vision—free access to God was opened when Jesus

made an end of sin.

There really is no separation between God and His people! The promise of God is made available in Christ Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant! Heavenly sustenance, fellowship, and blessing are now within the grasp of the saints. Their opponents do not believe it, and this antagonizes them. Some of the saints themselves have difficulty accepting this truth. **Yet, when it is all ended, the temple of God will be opened, and the universe will see that what the Gospel proclaimed was true to the most exacting detail!**

What we have here is the assurance that the work of Christ will stand the tests of life in this world. It stands the test of time. It holds up the saints in persecution. Deprivation could not rob the saints of covenantal blessing. Warfare could not thrust the blessing from them. The success of the Gospel and man's attempt to corrupt it were also impotent to separate the saints from the love of God. The ark of the testament remained in heaven, depicting free and constant access to the blessing!

## THE FINAL DISRUPTION

The book of Revelation has carefully portrayed the Lord and His Christ as invincible, and man as impotent. It is God's purpose that will be brought to completion, not man's! It is the government of Christ that will dominate, not the governments of men!

5 *“And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake,*

*and great hail.*” This is language characterizing the conclusion of all things. That conclusion will come by Divine intervention—an abrupt intrusion into the affairs of men. Whatever men may think about the free will of man, or his innovation, he is impotent—utterly impotent—when the Lord raises His omnipotent hand! When God calls for an end of time, the supposed ingenuity of man will not be able to extend time for one nano-second!

### **Omnipotence!**

The book of Revelation has carefully portrayed the Lord and His Christ as invincible, and man as impotent. It is God’s purpose that will be brought to completion, not man’s! It the the government of Christ that will dominate, not the governments of men! God’s people will be the triumphant ones, not those who opposed them!

It is essential that the Gospel be preached with this perspective. The people of God must not be taught as though everything depended upon them, or as though their enemies were invincible. God will prevail! The government of Jesus will dominate! The purpose of God will be accomplished! Those who live by faith will triumph! All of these are vividly portrayed in Revelation. They are also declared throughout the writings of the Apostles and Prophets.

A humanistic theology, i.e., one which exalts human capability, is a damnable one. This includes popular approaches to Scripture like linguistics, hermeneutics, higher criticism, contextual considerations, historical backgrounds, etc. While none of these things are of themselves sinful, they do tend to overstate man’s ability, and push Divinity into the background—more in a supporting role.

The book of revelation, however, presents quite a different picture. In

it, the purposes of men are overthrown— violently and decisively. Their objectives are utterly frustrated, and they are reduced to begging and lamentation at the intrusion of the Almighty. **They cannot rid themselves of God or His people, but God can rid Himself and His people of them!**

As thunderings shatter the silence, drawing attention to Divine power, so Divine interventions burst through the activities of time. As an earthquake unexpectedly shakes the very foundations of the earth, so the arm of the Lord will be thrust into time, revealing the weakness of all that is made, and the impregnability of His counsel.

*“Lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail,”* speak of Divine intrusion that cannot be avoided, resisted, or nullified. It represents something the wicked do NOT want, yet which they cannot stop. As lightning breaks through the course of nature, so the working of God breaks through history, finally bringing it to a swift and decisive end. As thunderings shatter the silence, drawing attention to Divine power, so Divine interventions burst through the activities of time. As an earthquake unexpectedly shakes the very foundations of the earth, so the arm of the Lord will be thrust into time, revealing the weakness of all that is made, and the impregnability of His counsel. Just as great hail falls suddenly from heaven, with certain destruction, so the Lord will bring a conclusion to the affairs of men, destroying their devices.

This is a view of God that is imperative! At any time, our troubles may end! At any time, we may be delivered! At any time, the wicked may fall, never to rise again!

## *The Free Will of Man*

At this point, a word about this over-used term is in order. *The free will of man* is a theological term developed by men, and used to buttress their view of things. It is **never** used in Scripture in the manner commonly used by theologians. While I do not want to strain at a gnat, so to speak, it is essential that we think in a godly manner.

The term “**freewill**” (a single word) is used 17 times in the KJV, 18 times in the NKJV, 23 times in the NASB, 24 times in the RSV, and 22 times in the NIV. **ALL** of the references are in the writings of Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy). **ALL** of them have to do with offerings ( “**freewill offerings**” or “**freewill offering**” ). The KJV uses “**willing offering**” in some places. The prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, nor the Apostles ever used this expression in reference to salvation—never!

This does not mean man is not free to choose the Lord – it **does** mean the matter is not simplistic. It is God Who is Sovereign, not man! The Word of God does speak of those who “**could not believe**” (John 12:39), and others whose hearts were “**hardened**” by God (Ex 7:13). God “**hardened the spirit**” of Sihon, and “**made his heart obstinate**” (Deut 2:30). He also “**poured out the spirit of deep sleep**” upon some, even closing their eyes (Isa 29:10; Rom 11:8). The Spirit testifies of those to whom God sent “**strong delusion, that they should believe a lie**” (2 Thess 2:9-12).

However *free* men may imagine their will to be, they are not at liberty to resist God with impunity! Those who are continually reprov'd, yet remain obstinate, “**shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy**” (Prov 29:1) – free will or not! When Pharaoh hardened his heart, God confirmed his choice by making it irreversible!

It is ever true, “*whosoever will may come*” (Rev 22:17). However, those who desire to do something else, not coming to the feast prepared by God, will pay the price. Their desires will not prevail!

### **The Connection with Our Text**

It might appear this has little to do with our text—but that is not the case. In the seven trumpets, we have seen the will of man clashing with the will of God. God’s people have been opposed. God’s truth has been denied. All of this has been an expression of the human will. But it has all been in vain! The Lamb still conquered, with the kingdoms of this world becoming His own. The truth still remained, sanctifying and strengthening all who embraced it. The presence of God’s people could not be reversed, though men sought to do so with bloody persecution. The devil (who also has a will) could not triumph over the Lamb, the truth, or His saints.

When the time comes for the end of all things, a Divine intrusion will bring about “the end”: i.e., “*Lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.*” Even though the wicked join hand in hand, the intrusion cannot be averted. God is Almighty, not man! His purpose is sure, not that of man!

As our faith takes hold of these things, we will surely triumph! That is why they have been written—to assure our hearts our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Our enemies cannot triumph! Their cause cannot ultimately flourish. The saints will not always be the seeming “*tail.*” The time is appointed when they will become “*the head*” (Deut 28:13).

The Lamb is obscure to the unbeliever now, but that will not always be the case! A day is appointed when He will come again, and “*every eye shall see Him,*” even those who hate and oppose Him (Rev 1:7). The covenant of God is not apparent to unbelievers now, but someday

the temple of God will be opened, and the covenant they have despised will become evident, to their condemnation. As the prophet would say, ***“For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry”*** (Hab 2:3). Look for the lightning and listen for the thunder! The end of the world will be the beginning of glory for us! So hold on! Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life!

## CONCLUSION

The seven trumpets have revealed the judgment of God against the enemies of God, and the sure triumph of His Christ. They were sounded in answer to the plea of those who lost their lives because they spoke for Christ (Rev 6:10). The Living God shaped history around the requests of His martyrs, because they lived in fellowship with Him. They embraced His Son, and followed Him wherever He led—even to the death.

To the world, it looked as though they had been forgotten. But in heaven, their names had been inscribed on the Lord’s palms, and He was ever mindful of them (Isa 49:16). They were supported in the furnace of affliction, heard as they cried under the altar, and revealed as His people in the glory.

It is not vain to serve the Lord—it is not pointless, in any sense! Suffering saints must not faint, though weak. When they are opposed, maligned, and persecuted, they must lift up their heads and continue the race.

The Holy Spirit sounds the clarion call, ***“Therefore strengthen the***

*hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”* (Heb 12:12). You have every reason to do so! The Lord has shown us the end of all things. He has revealed the destiny of our enemies. He has made known His heart concerning His people. They will be fully vindicated! Their cause will ultimately triumph! Hold on! Hold on!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 23

# THE APOCALYPTIC GOSPEL

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony

of Jesus Christ. " (Revelation 12:1-17, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus has a burning message for His people – a powerful word for His churches. It is a word that is to be heard by everyone who *“has an ear to hear.”* It is not a word of mere information, designed to enhance the theological expertise of His people. Jesus is reigning for one supreme reason—to bring God’s sons to glory (Heb 2:10). They required the redemption He achieved when crucified *“through weakness”* (2 Cor 13:14). He has given them a good beginning, and *they need to know it.* He also sees them as they are, whether

Redemption would be initiated by God amidst a realm of animosity. The ultimate Offspring would engage in mortal conflict with the perpetrator of all iniquity. Evil, together with its originator, would be thoroughly cast down by One from the very race overcome by evil.

striving for perfection or drawing back in unbelief—and *they need to know it.* As well, He wants them to know the purpose is His, not theirs. It is the will of the Lord that is being fulfilled, not the will of fallen humanity. God has graciously chosen to fulfill that will in His church through the power of the Spirit—and *they need to know it.* Their adversary is fierce and relentless, but cannot overthrow what Jesus is doing—and *the church needs to know it.* All of this is particularly true for a suffering church, a persecuted people, and a rejected and oppressed society. *A church that is comfortably ensconced in this world will realize little profit in the book of Revelation!*

## A Grand Overview

There are several portions of God's Word that provide a grand overview of Divine purpose. In relatively few words, great periods of time, and often time itself, is viewed from one particular vantage point. In such passages, details are not the point, but the objective being addressed. Because this is the type of passage before us, a few examples of this approach will serve to prepare us. Our thinking will become broader in its scope. Our understanding will be significantly expanded.

### *In the Garden*

Before the guilty pair were thrust from the Edenic paradise, God proclaimed His intention. The history of the world was compressed into His brief summation. ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel”*** (Gen 3:15, NKJV). Redemption would be initiated by God amidst a realm of animosity. The ultimate Offspring would engage in mortal conflict with the perpetrator of all iniquity. Evil, together with its originator, would be thoroughly cast down by One from the very race overcome by evil. All of history is packed into that statement!

Another example of Divine summation is found in God's promise to Abraham. In this case, the outcome of Divine initiative is seen to involve more than the overthrow of the enemy. To Abraham God said, ***“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”*** (Gen 12:2-3, NKJV). Again, the entire history of the world is covered from yet another perspective. The central nation, chosen for bringing forth the Messiah, will be Abraham's progeny—Israel. The whole world will be blessed through the promised Seed to the glory of God. Both blessing and cursing will be determined by response to the ones blessed by God—specifically Christ Jesus Himself.

One more example will suffice to confirm this Divine manner of summation. As spiritual light became greater, a clearer picture of the panorama of history is revealed. An example of this is found in Romans 8:29-30. ***“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”*** Here is a perspective that spans from eternity past ( ***“whom He foreknew”*** ) to eternity future ( ***“He also glorified”*** ). The people upon whom God focuses are identified, and the objective determined for them is specified. The means through which the process will be accomplished is even given. Here again, time is delineated in its entirety from the standpoint of God’s great salvation.

### *The Text Before Us*

Having established that it is the manner of the Lord to present concise views of the world, we now turn to our text. As with all Divine presentation, the purpose of God is the center around which everything revolves. We are going to see the objective of God, and the response of the devil. The provision of God and the attack of Satan will be seen. We will be exposed to the beginning of evil, and the beginning of everlasting righteousness for humanity. A vicious assault of the destroyer will be seen, as well as Divine protection and nourishment for those who are being attacked.

## THE MEANING OF “APOCALYPTIC”

I have called this section **“The Apocalyptic Gospel.”** A word of explanation is in order. The word “apocalypse,” from which we derive “apocalyptic,” comes from the Greek word **Αποκάλυψις** (ap-ok-al'-oop-sis), which means *uncovering, disclosing, or revealing* . The word

is used in Revelation 1:1 as a particular form of disclosure, in particular, as a vision.

This is a form of teaching that employs types and symbols. Forty-two times in Revelation, John said he “*saw*” something (1:12,17; 4:4; 5:1,2; 6:1,2,9; 7:1,2; 8:2; 9:1,17; 10:1,5; 13:2,3; 14:6; 15:1,2; 16:13; 17:3,6; 18:1; 19:11,17,19; 20:1,2,11,12; 21:1,22) . Various other forms of this word are used at least sixteen times (1:11,12,19,20; 6:1,3,5,6,7; 11:19; 18:8,12,15,16,18; 22:8).

We find in Revelation a display in imagery of things taught elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus, using metaphors, analogies, or comparisons, shows John what is elsewhere declared in doctrine, or teaching. There is a glorious harmony between what John saw, and what Paul and Peter wrote.

Some Examples

It is as though truth were displayed on a screen, as opposed to spoken into the ear—a sort of spiritual animation. There is “*the Lamb*” (5:6), “*Lion of the tribe of Judah*” (5:5), “*living creatures*” (4:6,7), and two fierce “*beasts*” (13:1,11). There is a pure “*woman*” (12:4-17) and a defiled “*woman*” (17:4-18). We read of a “*dragon*” (12:3; 13:2; 20:2). John sees a corrupt “*city*” (11:8; 17:18; 18:10), and a “*holy city*” (21:2-19). There are “*locusts*” (9:3), “*rivers*” (8:10), “*smoke*” (9:2-3), and “*horses*” with their riders (6:2-8). We read of an evil “*mark*” placed upon men (16:2), and the name of God, the city of God, and the Son of God being placed on individuals (3:12; 22:4). There is a “*star*” that falls (8:10), and a “*morning Star*” (2:28; 22:16). We are told of a “*mountain*” hurled into the sea (8:8), and a “*great and high mountain*” from which the “*holy Jerusalem*” is seen “*descending out of heaven*”

*from God*” (21:10). There are also two fiery “*witnesses*” speaking for God (11:3-5), as well as two beasts belching blasphemous words (13:2; 16:13). **This is apocalyptic language.**

**The Point is NOT the Figures,  
but the Realities Conveyed by the Figures or Symbols**

As you must know, men greatly err in attempting to make these images real. One might as well look for the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to appear in time (Dan 2:31-33), and a small stone to fall out of a mountain, only to grow into a literal mountain that swallows up the earth (Dan 2:34-45).

We find in Revelation a display in imagery of things taught elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus, using metaphors, analogies, or comparisons, shows John what is elsewhere declared in doctrine, or teaching. There is a glorious harmony between what John saw, and what Paul and Peter wrote.

**Why Speak in this Manner?**

In a sense, the book of Revelation is like a parable. The design of the book is to comfort suffering saints, and to do so in a manner the world will not understand. You may recall Jesus said to His disciples, “*To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand*” (Luke 8:10). Thus, humanity is seen as comprised of two differing groups. Some are granted the privilege of knowing of Divine workings, and some are not. Those who, like the ostrich are “*deprived of wisdom*” (Job 39:13-17), hear of wonderful things in terms they cannot understand.

This very principle is employed in Revelation. The saints of God are addressed in words that will appear meaningless and superstitious to their enemies. They will derive great comfort, and even instruction, by things that appear to be nonsense to those who persecute them. When your heart grasps the truth conveyed by John's Patmos' vision, the effectiveness of Revelation will become apparent to you.

### **Familiarity with Scripture Necessary**

There is an underlying assumption in this book: that the readers are acquainted with the Word of God—that they have a working knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. If this is not the case, it will be extremely difficult to obtain lasting benefit from its indispensable message. *Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan, employs the very same method of communication. Saints have, through the centuries, gained great comfort and confidence from this volume. They recognized in it the very things they themselves had experienced. Such will be the case with everyone who sees behind the symbols of this book, grasping what they already know to be the truth.

### **A SIGN OF PERSPECTIVE**

*“Now a great sign (‘wonder,’ KJV) appeared in heaven. . . “ (12:1).*

This is the *first time* anything John saw is called a “**sign**” or “**wonder.**” Coming from the word **σημεῖον** (say-mi'-on), the word “sign” means *what serves as a pointer to aid perception or insight.*

### **As Used in Scripture**

We will behold things from heaven's viewpoint.  
Even as the earth appears smaller and more compressed from a high altitude, so the truth of God becomes concise and observable from heavenly places. You might say, this is a view of holy angels.

This very word was used to identify the Christ child to the shepherds. They were told of the "sign" of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (Lk 2:12). It is also used to describe Abrahamic circumcision, which was a seal, or mark, of the righteousness he had by faith (Rom 4:11).

In both of these cases, the "*sign*" itself was not the point, but the reality of which it spoke. A person would greatly err to continue to view Jesus as a babe in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. That "*sign*" identified a Person greater than either swaddling clothes or mangers! The Savior of the world was as real as that child. His effectiveness would be as real as those swaddling clothes, and His salvation as accessible as that manger!

Too, with Abraham, the circumcision itself, while required, conveyed a greater reality—the possession of righteousness. His righteousness, given by God, was as real and effective as the circumcision of his flesh.

### **A Significant "Sign"**

We are now introduced to something of great significance. This is no novelty! There is a great body of reality displayed in this "*wonder.*" The fact that it appears "*in heaven*" indicates it is a heavenly perspective. We will behold things from heaven's viewpoint. Even as the earth appears smaller and more compressed from a high altitude, so the truth of God becomes concise and observable from heavenly places. You might say, this is a view of holy angels.

## Broad in Scope

There will be detail in this “*sign*,” but details will not be the point. It is a kingdom principle that **the higher you rise in the Spirit, the less prominent details become**. Objectives and outcomes are more the focus when we see things from heaven’s point of view.

**It is imperative that this view be seen by suffering saints if they are to receive comfort!** As long as they are preoccupied with the details of life, they will be overcome by them! We must rise high enough in the Spirit where details shrink in the light of “*eternal purpose*.”

## A WOMAN IS SEEN

“*. . . a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars*” (Verse 1b). Remember, we are viewing history from a heavenly point of view. Here is what God beholds, what angels view, and what saints consider.

This is a picture of the people of God – “*a woman*.” We will see them to be the means through which the Savior is brought into the world. As Paul said, speaking of the same thing, “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman . . .*” (Gal 4:4, NKJV). Herein is seen the great wisdom of God. The fall came through the woman, who was deceived (1 Tim 2:14). **However, to the utter dismay and frustration of the devil, salvation also came through the woman!**

The word “*woman*” is used in a general sense, although specifics are involved. It includes the consideration of Eve, who first heard of a Savior being the “*Seed of the woman*.” “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it*

*shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15).*

Without Him, humanity is naked and shameful before God. With Him, they are fully clothed! God has provided Him for a covering like He provided coats of skin for the covering of Adam and Eve

It also includes the nation of Israel, formed and cultured by God to be the people through whom he Deliverer would come. ***“Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”*** (Rom 9:5). God once referred to His people Israel as ***“a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit”*** (Isa 54:6). Again, the Lord said of Israel, ***“I have likened the daughter of Zion To a lovely and delicate woman”*** (Jer 6:2).

There is also the perspective of the entire human race from whom the Savior came, and with whom He was identified. ***“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”*** (Heb 2:14-15).

### *Clothed with the Sun*

Here the beauty of ***the “offspring of God”*** (Acts 17:27-28) is seen. God has set His love upon this fallen race (John 3:16), providing a Redeemer and inheritance for them. As the sun lightens the earth, so the ***“Sun of righteousness”*** enlightens and heals those struck down by sin (Mal 4:2).

In every good and noble sense, the Lord Jesus Christ is “*the Light of the world*” (John 8:12). Without Him, humanity is naked and shameful before God. With Him, they are fully clothed! God has provided Him for a covering like He provided coats of skin for the covering of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). Little wonder the holy life is described as “*putting on Christ*” (Gal 3:27).

### *The Moon Under Her Feet*

I gather this accentuates the permanent nature of redeemed humanity. The moon is the source of natural change, i.e., the seasons. As it is written, “*He appointed the moon for seasons*” (Psa 104:19). From the wintery blast and fiery summer to the swelling tide, the moon causes change. In this heavenly “*sign*” however, the moon is under the feet of the woman.

The “*sign*” shown to John reveals the lack of “*change*” in Divine purpose. Change is subordinate to God’s objective, and never takes place unless it serves that purpose in some manner. **While change serves the Lord, the Lord never serves change.** The appointed entrance of God’s Son into the world placed all change under the foot, so to speak.

### *A Crown of Twelve Stars*

A garland of stars! What a picture! It is something nature could not produce. This is the working of the Lord! Remember, the image is not the point, but the truth conveyed by the image.

Those acquainted with Scripture immediately think of two things when they hear the word “*twelve*.” The “*twelve tribes of Israel*” (Gen 49:28; Ex 24:4; Ezek 47:13; Matt 19:28; Lk 22:30), and the “*twelve Apostles*” (Matt 10:2; Lk 22:14; Rev 21:14). How do they fit into this

marvelous sign?

It is as though they were the sanctifying element of the human race—apart from the Lord’s Christ, the most productive of its members. Prior to Jesus, the *“twelve tribes of Israel”* served to preserve the race, as well as being the depository of Divine benefit. Of them it is written, *“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”* (Rom 9:4-5). They are like a garland of luminaries about sanctified humanity!

The *“twelve Apostles”* raise the standard even higher. To them was unfolded realities kept secret from the foundation of the world. Especially selected by the Son of God Himself, they were given to see things beyond the grasp of mere mortals. Of them it is written, *“ . . . the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles . . . ”* (Eph 3:4-5). They too are a starry crown upon the head of redeemed humanity!

*Why only twelve stars?*

The woman herself was not the point of the vision.

Rather, it was the Child to which she would give birth. As throughout Revelation, our attention will now be drawn to the Savior of the world, and Satan’s vain efforts to thwart Divine intent.

One might suppose twenty-four stars would be more proper than twelve. Only twelve

are given, however, because **a single purpose** was being served. Whether it is the twelve tribes of Israel, used to introduce the Law, or the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, Jesus was the point behind them all! *In these twelve stars we find a perfect depiction of sanctifying agents within a once fallen, but now redeemed, race.*

Suffice it to say, the number **“twelve”** is significant, always speaking of Divine involvements. Not only were there twelve tribes of Israel and twelve Apostles, Revelation also introduces us to the **“Holy City,”** which had **“twelve gates of twelve pearls”** (21:12), and **“twelve foundations”** (21:14). The trees on either side of the river of life had **“twelve manner of fruits”** with healing properties (22:2). When Jesus fed the multitudes, the fragments were gathered in **“twelve baskets”** (Matt 14:20). On a broader scale, the twelve stars show the woman as surrounded and protected by Divine activity.

### **The Purposed Birth**

**“Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth”** (12:2). The woman herself was not the point of the vision. Rather, it was the Child to which she would give birth. As throughout Revelation, our attention will now be drawn to the Savior of the world, and Satan’s vain efforts to thwart Divine intent.

From the very threshold of history, humanity was found in travail, anxiously awaiting the birth of the Deliverer! Whether we are considering Eve receiving a man **“from the Lord”** (Gen 4:1), the travail of aged Sarah in the birth of promised Isaac (Gen 17:15-21), or the labor of the nation of Israel to bring forth the Messiah (Rom 9:5), **the purpose of God’s chosen ones was to bring forth the Savior!** His is the ultimate birth, the most significant entrance into the world, the most majestic and meaningful nativity. His conception transcends all others. His birth towers over every other birth!

Notice, the “*woman*” (God’s people) cries out in “*labor and pain to give birth.*” Here the groaning of illumined humanity is graphically shown. Having received the promise of a coming Messiah, insightful souls yearned for His coming. Everything pointed to His coming, like birth pains point to the deliverance of a child. The tears of the faithful, their discontent with the world, and their tenacious hope, were the groaning of travail! This is how heaven viewed humanity! The Lord saw our race embodied in the travailing cry of his people.

## THE ARCH-FOE APPEARS

*“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads”* (12:3). We are abruptly reminded that God’s purpose is fulfilled in an arena of fierce conflict. The faithful do not travail in a bed, but in a cauldron of opposition. After all, the good news of a coming Deliverer was first announced to Satan himself (Gen 3;15). If you have not thought of it before, Satan DID take note of that promise. It is as though the Lord had prodded the old serpent, challenging him to thwart the birth of the Savior, if he could. We will find him utterly impotent to do so!

### *The Location of the Sign*

Our text says John saw “*another sign*” –another spiritual depiction. This time, we are given to see Satan from heaven’s point of view. Too, we will see his realm of operation is in “*high places*” (Eph 2:1-2; 6:12). While he is under Christ, he is above those unaffiliated with Christ.

### *As He Really Is*

Satan is now seen as he really is. He is not seen as Eve first saw him, in the form of a serpent, *“full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”* (Gen 3:1; Ezek 28:12-13). There is nothing about Satan now that makes him attractive, or attracts us to him—not really. He is a *“great, fiery red dragon,”* dangerous and threatening. His intentions are wicked, and his purpose intent. If there is any doubt that we are now beholding the enemy of both God and man, it is later said, *“the great dragon . . . that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world . . . ”* (12:9; 20:2).

## THE NUMBER SEVEN

**(1) Ritual use of seven** -- The number 7 plays a conspicuous part in a multitude of passages giving rules for worship or purification, or recording ritual actions. The 7th day of the week was holy (see SABBATH). There were 7 days of unleavened bread (<Exo 34:18>, etc.), and 7 days of the Feast of Tabernacles <Lev 23:34>. The 7th year was the sabbatical year (<Exo 21:2>, etc.). The Moabite Balak built Balaam on three occasions 7 altars and provided in each case 7 bullocks and 7 rams <Num 23:1,14,29>. The Mosaic law prescribed 7 he-lambs for several festal offerings (<Num 28:11,19,27>, etc.). The 7-fold sprinkling of blood is enjoined in the ritual of the Day of Atonement <Lev 16:14,19>, and elsewhere. Seven-fold sprinkling is also repeatedly mentioned in the rules for the purification of the leper and the leprous house <Lev 14:7,16,27,51>. The leprous Naaman was ordered to bathe 7 times in the Jordan <2 Kin 5:10>. In cases of real or suspected uncleanness through leprosy, or the presence of a corpse, or for other reasons, 7 days' seclusion was necessary (<Lev 12:2>, etc.). Circumcision took place after 7 days <Lev 12:3>. An animal must be 7 days old before it could be offered in sacrifice <Exo 22:30>. Three periods of 7 days each are mentioned in the rules for the consecration of priests <Exo 29:30,35,37>. An oath seems to have been in the first instance by 7 holy things (<Gen 21:29> ff and the Hebrew word for "swear"). The number 7 also entered into the structure of sacred objects, for instance the candlestick or lamp-stand in the tabernacle and the second temple each of which had 7 lights <Num 8:2; Zec 4:2>. Many other instances of the ritual use of 7 in the Old Testament and many instructive parallels from Babylonian texts could be given.

**(2) Historical use of seven** -- The number 7 also figures prominently in a large number of passages which occur in historical narrative, in a way which reminds us of its symbolic significance. The following are some of the most remarkable: Jacob's 7 years' service for Rachel (<Gen 29:20>; compare verses 27 f), and his

bowing down 7 times to Esau <Gen 33:3>; the 7 years of plenty, and the 7 years of famine (<Gen 41:53> f); Samson's 7 days' marriage feast (<Judg 14:12> ff; compare <Gen 29:27>), 7 locks of hair <Judg 16:19>, and the 7 withes with which he was bound (verses 7 f); the 7 daughters of Jethro <Exo 2:16>, the 7 sons of Jesse <1 Sam 16:10>, the 7 sons of Saul <2 Sam 21:6>, and the 7 sons of Job (<Job 1:2>; compare <42:13>); the 7 days' march of the 7 priests blowing 7 trumpets round the walls of Jericho, and the 7-fold march on the 7th day (<Josh 6:8> ff); the 7 ascents of Elijah's servant to the top of Carmel (<1 Kin 18:43> f); the 7 sneezes of the Shunammitish woman's son <2 Kin 4:35>; the heating of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace 7 times more than it was wont to be heated <Dan 8:19>, and the king's madness for 7 times or years <4:16,23,25,32>; Anna's 7 years of wedded life <Lk 2:36>; the 7 loaves of the 4,000 (<Mt 15:34-36> parallel) and the 7 baskets full of fragments (<Mt 15:37> parallel); the 7 brothers in the conundrum of the Sadducees (<Mt 22:25> parallel); the 7 demons cast out of Mary Magdalene (<Mk 16:9> parallel <Lk 8:2>); the 7 ministers in the church at Jerusalem (<Acts 6:3> ff), and the 7 sons of Sceva (<19:14>, but the Western text represents them as only 2). The number must no doubt be understood literally in many of these passages, but even then its symbolic meaning is probably hinted at by the historian. When a man was said to have had 7 sons or daughters, or an action was reported as done or to be done 7 times, whether by design or accident, the number was noted, and its symbolic force remembered. It cannot indeed be regarded in all these cases as a sacred number, but its association with sacred matters which was kept alive among the Jews by the institution of the Sabbath, was seldom, if ever, entirely overlooked.

**(3) Didactic or literary use of seven** -- The symbolic use of 7 naturally led to its employment by poets and teachers for the vivid expression of multitude or intensity. This use is sometimes evident, and sometimes latent. (a) Evident examples are the 7-fold curse predicted for the murderer of Cain <Gen 4:15>; fleeing 7 ways <Deut 28:7,25>; deliverance from 7 troubles <Job 5:19>; praise of God 7 times a day <Ps 119:164>; 7 abominations (<Prov 26:25>; compare <6:16>); silver purified 7 times, that is, thoroughly purified <Ps 12:6>; 7-fold sin; 7-fold repentance, and 7-fold forgiveness (<Lk 17:4>; compare <Mt 18:21>); 7 evil spirits (<Mt 12:45> parallel <Lk 11:26>). The last of these, as well as the previous reference to the 7 demons cast out of Mary Magdalene reminds us of the 7 spirits of Beliar (Testament to the Twelve Patriarchs, Reuben chapters 2 and 3) and of the 7 evil spirits so often referred to in Babylonian exorcisms (compare Hehn, op. cit., 26 ff), but it is not safe to connect Our Lord's words with either. The Babylonian belief may indeed have influenced popular ideas to some extent, but there is no need to find a trace of it in the Gospels. The 7 demons of the latter are sufficiently accounted for by the common symbolic use of 7. For other passages which come under this head compare <Deut 28:7,25; Ruth 4:15; 1 Sam 2:5; Ps 79:12> (*from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

John speaks of this **“dragon”** no less than fourteen times in Revelation (12:3,4,7,9,13,16,17; 13:2,4,11; 16:13; 20:2). This is our paramount foe, the consummate enemy of our souls! He is formidable (**great**), destructive (**fiery red**), and dangerous (**dragon**).

### *Seven Heads and Ten Horns*

This is a significant description. This phrase ( **“seven heads and ten horns”** ) is found no less than four times in Revelation (12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7). Here, the heads and horns are found on the devil himself. In 13:1, they are found on a beast that rises out of the sea. The seventeenth chapter (17:3,7) associates them with a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast. In all of the instances, they are identified with aggressive and planned opposition. At the very outset, we see that the purpose of God is being fulfilled in an amphitheater, as it were, of intense warfare. That combat is both subtle and violent, indirect and predatory.

The **“seven heads and ten horns”** are specifically identified in chapter seventeen. **“The seven heads are seven mountains,”** and **“the ten horns . . . are ten kings”** (17:9,12). Because we will deal with this description extensively in later chapters, a few remarks on the principles here revealed will suffice.

### *Significant Numbers*

Both **“seven”** and **“ten”** are generally considered to be numbers of completeness (Dan 1:12,14,15,20; 3:17; 4:16,23,25,32; 7:7,10,20,24; Rev 1:4; 2:10; 5:1,11; 12:1 13:1 17:3). Both are prominent in Scripture. An analysis of the significance of these numbers, together with Scripture references, is found in this section.

### *General Description*

Satan is aligned against God and the people of God. He employs those under his control to carry out this opposition. In this case, we have the

totality of his power marshaled for an assault against the people of God. He uses earthly people and organizations that are invested the power of darkness.

In particular, the seven heads and ten horns portray organized and extended power—like the governments of this world. We know this is the case, because “*seven crowns*” upon the dragon’s seven heads. This is an organized opposition through duly constituted earthly powers. In John’s time, as well as several succeeding ages, this power was concentrated in Rome, once the greatest of all temporal governments.

This world is no friend to the people of God. The more quickly we recognize and receive this truth, the more progress we will make in the faith. Those who accommodate themselves to this world rob their own souls, restrict the flow of life from heaven, and become spiritually ignorant.

### **The Heavenly Insurrection**

“*His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth*” (12:4a). Here is an allusion which many have desired were more fully explained. The Lord gives us enough information so we will know we are facing a powerful and influential adversary.

The devil did not fall by himself. Pointedly, Scripture speaks of “*everlasting fire*” being “*prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt 25:41). Our text twice speaks of “*the dragon and his angels*” (12:7,9). He is the head of a diabolical and dark society.

Both Peter and Jude speak of his angels separately, and apart from their association with Satan. Peter refers to them as “*the angels that*

*sinned*” (2 Pet 2:4). Jude speaks of them as *“the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode”* (Jude 6, NKJV). These are, then, **fallen** angels. Like the devil, they were not always evil, but descended into that state.

### The Number Ten

As the basis of the decimal system, which probably originated in counting with the fingers, 10 has been a significant number in all historical ages. The 10 antediluvian patriarchs (<Gen 5>; compare the 10 Babylonian kings of Berossus, and 10 in early Iranian and far-Eastern myths); the 10 righteous men who would have saved Sodom <Gen 18:32>; the 10 plagues of Egypt; the 10 commandments (<Exo 20:2-17> parallel <Deut 5:6-21>; the 10 commandments found by some in <Exo 34:14-26> are not clearly made out); the 10 servants of Gideon <Judg 6:27>; the 10 elders who accompanied Boaz <Ruth 4:2>; the 10 virgins of the parable <Mt 25:1>; the 10 pieces of silver <Lk 15:8>; the 10 servants intrusted with 10 pounds (<Lk 19:13> ff), the most capable of whom was placed over 10 cities (verse 17); the 10 days' tribulation predicted for the church of Smyrna <Rev 2:10>; the use of "10 times" in the sense of "many times" (<Gen 31:7; Neh 4:12; Dan 1:20>, etc., an idiom met with repeatedly in Tell el-Amarna Letters); and the use of 10 in sacred measurements and in the widely diffused custom of tithe, and many other examples show plainly that 10 was a favorite symbolic number suggestive of a rounded total, large or small, according to circumstances. The number played a prominent part in later Jewish life and thought. Ten times was the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) uttered by the high priest on the Day of Atonement; 10 persons must be present at a nuptial benediction; 10 constituted a congregation in the synagogue; 10 was the usual number of a company at the paschal meal, and of a row of comforters of the bereaved. The world was created, said the rabbis, by ten words, and Abraham was visited with 10 temptations (Ab v. 1 and 4; several other illustrations are found in the context). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Our text gives a brief elaboration of their fall. It was the devil himself that influenced them. The graphic imagery John saw spells it out. *“His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth”* (12:4). Candidly, this is a staggering consideration— *“a third part.”*

Whether the expression denotes mathematical precision or merely a significant number is of no consequence. Even at this time, the holy angels (or the ones remaining) are ***“an innumerable company of angels”*** (Heb 12:22). We are speaking of numbers (if I may even use that term) that transcend human comprehension.

The point of our text is that the most influential personality for evil in the universe has focused on the people of God. His opposition is not to be taken lightly, for he has brought down greater personalities than us. Although he is not honored, he is even respected by such notables as Michael the arch-angel (Jude 9).

If the church knew nothing else than that the devil is aligned against them, and aggressively so, it would be enough to bring great sobriety and earnestness to its people.

### **The Devil’s Intent**

***“And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born”*** (12:4b). Remember– ***“the woman”*** is the people of God, ranging from solitary Eve, to the nation of Israel. From the threshold of history, throughout the tenure of the nation of Israel, a coming Deliverer was announced. Isaiah declared, ***“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this”*** (Isa 9:6-7, NKJV). Isaiah even announced the child would be born of a ***“virgin”*** (Isa 7:14), while Micah declared the birth would take place in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). Every devout person longed for the birth of the Messiah.

Our text reminds us that Satan also heard these prophecies. Not being omniscient, as our Lord, God must first speak it before the devil can know it.

### *Crouching Over Humanity*

Now Satan is seen crouching, as it were, over humanity, seeking to thwart the purpose of God. He is determined to stop ***“the man Child”*** from being born.

This single statement unfolds much of sacred history for us. Remember, the first man born was Cain, ***“who was of the wicked one.”*** Because Satan could not stop the birth of righteous Abel, he provoked Cain to kill him (1 John 3;12). His strategy was doubtless to abort the Divine promise.

Seeing Abraham was ***“the friend of God,”*** Satan was no doubt instrumental in causing the barrenness of Sarah (Gen 11:30; Rom 4:19). There was also the barrenness of Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 29:31), the mother of Samson (Judges 13:2), Hannah (mother of Samuel, 1 Sam 1:6ff), and Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist (Lk 1:7). While God was in all of this, so was the devil, working under Divine authority, yet with malice.

But our text states the dragon, Satan, was waiting to devour the Man Child that was destined to be born. His intent is seen in the slaughter of the innocents by Pharaoh, at the time of Moses' birth (Ex 1;15,16). It is also seen in the murder of ***“all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under”*** (Matt 1:16-18). However, praise the Lord, the devil was not able to accomplish his invidious intention! The Lord's Christ was born ***“in the***

*fulness of the time,”* dragon or not (Gal 4:4). God sent His Son into the world in spite of the subtle strategy of the adversary! Satan is impotent to overthrow the purpose of Almighty God! Our faith in Christ will confirm this to be the case.

## THE RULER COMES AND GOES

*“She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne”* (12:5). Here is one of the most concise statements in all of Scripture. With one broad sweep of the Divine pen, the entire earthly life of the Christ is described—from beginning to end. The Child destined to subdue every enemy, and before Whom every knee will bow, was born. He was born by the precise individual and the exact people determined *“before the foundation of the world.”* He was born in the determined city, and at the appointed time. All of this in spite of a fierce and relentless adversary that plotted to stop the birth from occurring. Whatever one may think of Satan, he is incapable of thwarting the will of the Lord! If ever you can get into the flow of that will, you have entered the realm where Satan cannot fulfill his intentions.

### *Caught Up!*

But look at this text again. The Child was not only born, but *“caught up to God and His (own) throne.”* Do not suppose for a moment that this took place without the wicked one endeavoring with all of his might to stop it. When Jesus was but a small child, Satan sought to *“destroy”* Him (Matt 2:13). While we are not provided with the details, Satan doubtless sought to destroy him as He grew *“in favor with God and man”* (Lk 2:52). Like you, the maturing Jesus was protected by the grace of God. It is said of Him, during His younger years, *“the grace of God was upon him”* (Lk 2:40).

### *Satan Assaults Christ in His Ministry*

As our Lord embarked upon His ministry, the devil tempted Him sorely, throwing his wicked arsenal against the Son of God (Matt 4:1-11). During His ministry, he moved people to make attempts to “**destroy Him**” (Matt 12:14). On one occasion the devil even provoked those who heard Jesus to lead Him “**unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.**” Our Lord “**passing through the midst of them went his way,**” as though nothing had happened

(Lk 4:29) Another time they “**took up stones to cast at Him,**” but again, He simply passed through the midst of them (John 8:59).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus confronted adversaries, stirred up by the wicked one, who was seeking to circumvent the purpose of the Almighty. He could not do it then, and he cannot do it now!

### *Christ Enters Heaven*

Remember, Jesus returned to heaven by passing through the very high places dominated by Satan (Eph 2:2; 6:12). Like king Sihon of old (Deut 2:10), Satan refused to let him pass through his territory. But Jesus passed through it anyway, bringing destruction to Satan’s realm, and releasing those held captive by it.

Jesus being “**caught up to God**” speaks of His triumphant ascension from Olivet to glory. That ascension confirmed that He had finished the redemptive work assigned to Him. He accomplished it in the devil’s own arena, while surrounded with impediments. When He ascended, He “**led captivity captive,**” spoiling principalities and powers, and liberating the captives (Eph 4:8). Having accomplished His death, He also entered into “**heaven itself**” with His own blood, thereby making

full atonement for the sin of humanity (Heb 9:12,24).

Remember, Jesus returned to heaven by passing through the very high places dominated by Satan (Eph 2:2; 6:12). Like king Sihon of old (Deut 2:10), Satan refused to let him pass through his territory. But Jesus passed through it anyway, bringing destruction to Satan's realm, and releasing those held captive by it.

### *To His Throne*

Jesus ascended to "**His throne**"—i.e., to begin a reign of righteousness. Jesus has been "**highly exalted**" (Phil 2:9), and now occupies "**the throne of David**" (Acts 2:30-31). Satan could not stop Jesus from being born. He could not stop Him from growing up. He could not postpone or thwart His ministry. He was powerless to stop Jesus from reconciling the world to God and taking away its sin. The devil was impotent to keep our Lord from rising from the dead, appearing to and teaching His disciples, and ascending into heaven. All of the powers of darkness could not prevent Jesus from being seated on the Throne. All of that is in this verse!

### **Saints Need to Know This**

It is imperative that the people of God hear this proclamation—particularly when they are oppressed by the wicked one. Satan is powerless against the Son of God, and that is where God has placed you (1 Cor 1:30). Hope now blooms eternal, scattering the shades of night!

## **DIVINE PROTECTION AND SUSTENANCE**

***“Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days”*** (12:6). ***“The woman”*** represents the people of God. Just as Jesus began His ministry with a wilderness temptation, so do His people. Jesus was *driven* by the Spirit into the wilderness (Mk 1:12). The people of God ***“fled into the wilderness.”*** They ***“fled”*** from something to something. They not only escaped from the anger and intent of the devil, but to a place of Divine nourishment. That place is a ***“wilderness”*** from the earthly point of view. It is ***“heavenly places”*** from the higher point of view. Our entrance into it is mandatory, and possible!

### **Fleeing**

It is written that ***“the woman fled.”*** This is spiritual language representing an aggressive departure from ***“the course of this world”*** (Eph 2:2). It describes a corrupt and defiling environment from which escape is mandatory. Needless to say, this is a strange concept to the average churchman. However, much is said about it in Scripture, and the sensitive heart will immediately recognize its relevance.

Those who come to Christ are said to have ***“fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before”*** them (Heb 6:18). The situation was introduced by God in the Old Covenant. The Lord established ***“cities of refuge”*** for those accused of anyone killing a person ***“unawares,”*** or accidentally (Num 35:11). There were six of them, strategically located throughout the land (Num 35:13). Those in the dilemma of accidentally killing someone were to quickly run to one of these ***“cities for refuge from the avenger”*** (Num 35:12a). Once within the city, they were safe until standing ***“before the congregation in judgment”*** (Num 35:12b).

While a provision of mercy for the Israelites is seen here, a still greater provision is seen. *Men were here introduced to protection in the midst of jeopardy.* Those in Christ Jesus would be faced with a fierce

adversary—an avenger—who sought their lives because of their commitment to the Lord Jesus. In their case, they did kill a man accidentally, but come away from death deliberately. Their escape was not casual, any more than an accidental man-slayer was nonchalant about running to a city of refuge.

Right here we see the danger of a casual approach to Jesus—you might say a “seeker-friendly” approach, which is nothing but a human innovation. There is an urgency about coming to Jesus (Who is our city of refuge) that is scarcely known in our day. **No half-hearted effort will yield entrance into Christ!**

Right here we see the danger of a casual approach to Jesus—you might say a “*seeker-friendly*” approach, which is nothing but a human innovation. There is an urgency about coming to Jesus (Who is our city of refuge) that is scarcely known in our day. **No half-hearted effort will yield entrance into Christ!**

### **The Wilderness**

Just as a vast wilderness lay between Israel and Canaan, so a spiritual wilderness stands between us ultimate glory. It is a moral wilderness in which Divine supplies are essential. Like Israel, if God does not provide water, we will die of thirst (Ex 17:3-6). If He does not provide bread, we will die of hunger (Ex 16:3-4). In the wilderness, both Israel and the church are cast upon their Lord. There simply is no other source to sustain their life in Christ Jesus.

***Faith brings us into a place where the world cannot feed us.*** In this

sense, we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” in the world. Not only are we no longer citizens of the world, we have received a life that cannot be nourished or sustained by the world order. *When those who feed the saints give them concepts of the world, they starve God’s people. Those who serve up psychological jargon and numerous little anecdotes are depriving the people of God of nourishment. Such carnal ministers have drawn water from a dry corrupt well, and served up polluted bread.*

### **A Prepared Place**

*The people of God must be nourished!* They are away from their home, and are dwelling in a hostile and desolate world! This is why God Himself prepares a place of nourishment for them. While there is occasional nourishment in the presence of their enemies (Psa 23:5), that is not the primary place of feeding!

When the Lord began to unfold precious truth to His disciples, He took them way from the multitudes (Matt 8:25; 14:22; 24:3; Mark 3:7; 6:32; Lk 9:10; 10:23-24). When God communicated with Moses, He took him away from the multitude (Ex 24:1-2). **Those who insist on lingering close to the world, refusing to flee into the wilderness, will receive no sustenance from the Lord!**

This facet of the Kingdom is scarcely known in our time. Countless professed believers linger on the edge of the world, splashing about in carnal waters with glee, as though there were no dangers. Let such hear the word of the King. **“Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits”** (1 Cor 15:33). The flood of carnality that has swept over many professed church members has occurred because they remained in the place where the world’s dangerous waters flow!

*Assemblies and Feeding*

Those who denigrate the frequent gathering of the saints, betray a level of spiritual ignorance that is lethal to the soul. The place that has been prepared for the nourishment of the soul is occupied by more than yourself. Of old time, the Lord taught Israel the value of godly assemblies (Ex 3:16; Lev 8:3; Num 8:9; 11:16; 20:8). Although Israel corrupted the feasts, they were intended to be a place of consecration and blessing.

During a time of great spiritual deterioration, the prophet Malachi wrote; ***“Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name. They shall be Mine, says the LORD of hosts, On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him”*** (Mal 3:16-17). Like all scripture, this is written ***“for our learning”*** (Rom 15:4) and ***“admonition”*** (1 Cor 10:11).

The benefit of the day of Pentecost was realized when ***“the multitude came together”*** (Acts 2:6). Early disciples ***“came together to break bread”*** (Acts 20:7). These times, when we ***“come together”*** (1 Cor 11:17,20,33; 14:23,26), do play a significant role in our lives. They are especially a place prepared by God where spiritual nourishment is enjoyed.

The Psalmist spoke of such assemblies when he wrote, ***“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing; Life forevermore”*** (Psa 133:1-3).

## **The Duration of the Nourishment**

The prepared place will yield spiritual nourishment for ***“one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”*** We have already identified this period of time as one of severe trial and opposition. It speaks generally of the time of our sojourning in the world. It speaks specifically of times of increased oppression and persecution of the people of God. In short, it is a time when the devil hurls his worst at the saints. It is also a time when, in seclusion from the course of this world, they receive the best from their Lord.

### **An underlying Assumption**

I cannot leave this section without emphasizing the necessity of nourishing the soul. The people of God cannot fly to glory on automatic pilot. Their souls cannot survive if they are not fed. Their strength will dissipate if they do not feed on the good things of God.

No believer, regardless of their circumstances, is obligated to remain where their soul is not fed. You already know that God has prepared a place in the wilderness where you can be fed. If you are being spiritually starved, you are not in that place. It is just that simple. Take whatever measure are necessary to be fed!

## **THE HEAVENLY WAR**

***“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer”*** (Rev 12:7-8). The language jars upon the soul— ***“war broke out in heaven.”*** Remember, we are seeing a vision, not hearing an academic explanation of events. This particular war immediately relates to the birth, exaltation, and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to

see that something of great significance occurred in the heavenly realms when Jesus reconciled the world to God.

### *The Case of Job*

Prior to ***“the day of salvation”*** (2 Cor 6:2), Satan had been seen in heaven. The most notable example is probably that of the patriarch Job. At least two appearances of Satan in the very presence of God are recorded for us in the book of Job. ***“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them . . . Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD”*** (Job 1:6; 2:1, NKJV).

### *Joshua the High Priest*

Another occasion is mentioned in the book of Zechariah. ***“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him”*** (Zech 3:1). That this referred to the very presence of the Lord is clear by the following verse, in which ***“the LORD said to Satan, The LORD rebuke you, Satan!”*** (Zech 3:2).

### *The Prophet Micaiah Speaks*

Yet another occasion mentions an evil spirit (or one of Satan’s angels) in the very throne room of God. The prophet Micaiah told the king of Israel he ***“saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left.”*** From among that august assembly surfaced one who would be a ***“lying spirit,”*** sent to deceive the hard-hearted king (1 Kgs 22:19-23; 2 Chron 18:18-22).

## The Text Before Us

The dragon and his angels are the same personalities mentioned in the text before us. Following the exaltation of Christ, a conflict began in heaven. It was **not** between the Son of God and Satan, but between ***“Michael and his angels”*** and the rulers of darkness.

While ***“the dragon and his angels”*** fought aggressively, there was no longer any place for them in the heavenly places. They ***“did not prevail”*** because they had no more position. At this point, their strength was not the point, but their location. The same evil personalities that found a place in Job’s day, lost that place. The same wicked host that surfaced when Joshua the high priest stood before the Lord no longer had a place to stand. The spirits that were deceiving spirits were not out of place before the Lord!

### *Cast Out!*

***“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him”*** (12:9). The exalted Christ introduced a circumstance that found Satan and his hosts being hurled from the heavenly chambers. If there is any doubt that ***“the great dragon”*** is, in fact, Satan himself, the record is clear. The dragon is defined as ***“that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan.”***

### *Into the earth*

Notice, the devil and his angels were not cast into the lake of fire, their final appointed destination (Rev 20:10; Matt 25:41,46). Instead, the evil horde is cast into the earth, where the saints have been sequestered for Divine nourishment.

Our attention will now be turned to the good fight of faith. We will behold the situation into which our faith has placed us. The need for nourishment will be apparent. We will also see that severe limitations are upon Satan.

## SALVATION HAS COME

There is a tendency in men to speculate about the Word of God, often imposing their own theology upon it. Our text leaves no room for such a procedure. We will be able to understand what has occurred in the expulsion of Satan by the heavenly response to it. The Lord will now set before us a vivid portrayal of His great salvation.

With the removal of sin, Satan could no longer accuse Christ's brethren before the throne. They had been justified! Salvation had come, together with the Gospel, which was God's power, or means, unto salvation. Strength was granted to the believers to "*resist*" the devil, and the power of a defiled conscience was smitten to the ground!

Justification

*"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down"* (12:10, NKJV). We have before us a high view—the **effect** of salvation. Mind you, it is not salvation itself that is being described, but the **effect** it has had in the heavenly realms.

Prior to the sacrifice and enthronement of the Lamb, sin maintained an unbreakable hold upon the human race. Like a mighty black shroud, guilt covered the human conscience, driving humanity from the presence of the Lord. Sin had not been removed, and there was a basis for accusation before the Lord. Satan could hurl accusations at those possessing faith, because sin had not yet been **“put away”** (Heb 9:26). In His death, Jesus took away **“the sins (not sins) of the world”** (John 1:29), and in His resurrection, God attested to the effectiveness of His Son’s work (Rom 1:4). Sin in its totality was removed, and now the issue was the Son Himself.

With the removal of sin, Satan could no longer accuse Christ’s brethren before the throne. They had been justified! Salvation had come, together with the Gospel, which was God’s power, or means, unto salvation. Strength was granted to the believers to **“resist”** the devil, and the power of a defiled conscience was smitten to the ground!

Thus, the devil, who had been accusing those with faith **“night and day”** had no further basis of accusation. Jesus had **“made an end of sins,”** and brought in **“everlasting righteousness”** (Dan 9:24). Robbed of his power, Satan was now expelled from heaven.

### *Heavenly Things Purified*

The powerful effects of justification are affirmed in the book of Hebrews. At first, the words used are startling. **“Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these”** (Heb 9:23). The **“copies of things in the heavens”** were found in the tabernacle of old. The blood of sacrificial animals was employed in the purification of the tabernacle itself, the furniture within it, the vessels of ministry, and the priests. In this way,

they became suitable for use by the people, and acceptable to God in His service or worship.

Christ's blood purified heavenly things by sanctifying them for our blessing and use. Involved in this was the expulsion of *the "accuser of the brethren."* In this regard, because there was no further basis for condemnation (Rom 8:1), the heavenly things were purified for us. Thus, the devil and his angels were expelled from the seat of accusation, having nothing more to say against us.

Prior to the commencement of Christ's intercessory ministry, the most holy people were overcome by the devil. Those who were exemplary in most every way would often do things that cause us to marvel.

#### *A Prelude Seen in Christ's Ministry*

A prelude to this triumph took place when Jesus sent out seventy disciples with power. Upon their return, they joyfully reported, "**Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.**" Jesus immediately diffused any notions that what occurred was owing to their power. He replied, "**I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven**" (Lk 10:17-18). Satan did not fall because of the power of the disciples! Rather, they had power because he had fallen by the Word of the King.

**If, when He was upon earth, the Lord Jesus could plunder Satan's power, what do you suppose has occurred now that sin has been removed, and He is seated at the right hand of God?** More now occurs than the demons fleeing! Salvation has come! For this reason, Satan and his hosts no longer are where accusations may be heard by the Living God! This is nothing less than JUSTIFICATION!

## Sanctification

With the expulsion of the devil came power to overcome him. This is “*sanctification*,” or the spiritual life. Listen to the triumphant shout. *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!”* (12:11, NKJV).

Prior to the commencement of Christ’s intercessory ministry, the most holy people were overcome by the devil. Those who were exemplary in most every way would often do things that cause us to marvel. In anger, Moses forgot what God had said and struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Num 20:12). It cost him entrance into the promised land. His brother Aaron constructed a golden calf at the behest of faithless Israel (Exodus 32). Samson, used mightily of God, fell to the lust of the flesh (Judges 16), as well as mighty David (2 Sam 11). Numerous other examples are known by most believers.

These saints are not to be judged as though they lived in the blazing light of the Gospel of Christ. Nor, indeed, are they excused as though they did not sin. They lived, however, when Satan had more accusing power than he has now. The conscience was more easily defiled, and not really purged, in those days. An understanding of this will answer a lot of troublesome questions.

You will note that such things are the exception in Christ Jesus, and are never excused or treated lightly. It is out of order for those in Christ to compare themselves with Israel, thereby excusing their unbelief and lapses into carnality. Redemption has been wrought, and Satan has been driven out of heaven as an accuser. There is no excuse for being overcome by the devil—none at all!

### *Saints Participate in the Victory*

Three elements are mentioned in the triumph of the saints. *First* and foremost, they overcome the devil “**by the blood of the Lamb.**” That is what removed their sins, thereby relieving them of a defiled conscience and granting them peace with God (Rom 5:1).

*Second*, they are so integral to the Kingdom of God, that the word of their own testimony plays a role in their victory over Satan. Their “**testimony**” is their acknowledgment of participation with Christ. It is THEIR testimony, or witness. It comes from their mouths, and is attested to by their lives. **Satan cannot contend with what the saints say or the manner in which they conduct their lives.**

*Third*, being “**joined to the Lord**” has moved them to a high plateau of living. They have willingly forfeited their own lives, taking up the cause of their King. It is not them that lives, but Christ that lives in them (Gal 2:20). They thus overcome the evil one because his appeal is to our lives in this world. All of sin, and all of Satan’s temptations, are confined to this world. They are summarized as “**all that is in the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life**” (1 John 2:15-17). Since such things are now detestable to those in the Spirit, they overcome the devil. His ploys have thus been robbed of their power.

### **A Fierce Adversary**

One might suppose that Satan has become a vacillating and powerless foe, posing no threat to humanity. However, this is not the case at all! A

solemn warning is sent to all who are in the world.

One might suppose that Satan has become a vacillating and powerless foe, posing no threat to humanity. However, this is not the case at all! A solemn warning is sent to all who are in the world. ***“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time”*** (12:12, NKJV).

Those of us who remain ***“in the body”*** (Heb 13:3), and are confessed ***“strangers and pilgrims on the earth”*** (Heb 11:13), remain in the danger zone. If heaven cries a warning, who is the fool who would make the saints think there is no jeopardy for believers? Remember, this message is written ***“to the churches,”*** not the unregenerate and ungodly. The ***“earth and the sea”*** describe the realm of the curse, where there is danger and turmoil.

### **Satan has Not Quit**

Although the devil and his angels have been banished from heaven, they have not given up. They remain determined in their diabolical objective. They cannot accuse us ***“before our God night and day,”*** but they can sure stir things up in the earth!

Satan has been bruised in his head, but has not yet suffered the full affects of it. With great anger, he now targets those who are in Christ Jesus. No longer having access to the throne, he now focuses on those whose lives are ***“hid with Christ in God”*** (Col 3:2). He does not have recourse to the martyrs under the altar (Rev 6:9). They are out of his reach. He is limited to ***“the inhabitants of the earth.”***

### *Having Great Wrath*

Satan’s nature may be seen in the brute creation. I understand that a

wounded lion or bear is even more dangerous than one that is not. Their wound inflames them, making them more vicious, and more determined to do away with their oppressor. So it is with ***“our adversary the devil”*** (1 Pet 5:8). He not only prowls about ***“as a roaring lion,”*** but one that has been mortally wounded. It is one thing for a man to have ***“great wrath,”*** it is quite another for the devil to have it.

Satan’s expulsion has made him more subtle, more cunning, more crafty. He is more like a subtle snake than a raging bull. With his anger, he becomes more shrewd and calculating. Remember, it is heaven that cries out ***“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth!”*** If such a warning does not fit into your theology, then change it, for it is wrong and will destroy you. Satan is angry with YOU! He is angry because you had the faith to take hold of and obey the Gospel. He is enraged because you are fighting the good fight of faith and cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. He is infuriated because you have renounced him, his ways, and his lies. He has, in every sense of the word, ***“come down to you having great wrath.”*** However, you, like saints before you, can overcome Him because of the glorified Christ!

### **He Knows!**

Satan is an intelligent being. He is angry, but he is not thoughtless. He knows something many saints either do not know, or readily forget: ***“he hath but a short time.”*** Oh saint of God, the devil’s time is running out, and he knows it. It makes him angry, but it makes us glad!

If Satan’s knowledge of the brevity of time causes him to work with more intensity, what ought that knowledge to do for us? He knows what was said to John, and it is our business to know it even better. ***“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and***

*the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer”* (Rev 10:5-6). Like a sweet elixir, the Word of the Lord declares, *“For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry”* (Heb 10:37).

Dear child of God, you will not always be engaged in a battle! The Lord has appointed a time when fighting will cease, and swords will be beaten into plowshares (Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3). Preachers and teachers, declare with power and expectation the soon consummation of time! It speaks of the demise of Satan and the cessation of having to deal with his devices. Strengthen the people of God for the battle, and help them overcome the devil, instead of the devil overcoming them. You serve them well when you put them in mind of these things. You hurt them when you do not.

In the meantime, let us give heed to the solemn warning concerning our adversary. Let us not live as though he were stupid and we were invincible. Our adversary is real, and so is the warfare in which we are engaged!

## AGGRESSION AGAINST THE SAINTS

All persecution of the godly is instigated by the devil. It makes no difference what form it takes, whether it is the mannerly snicker of the skeptic, or a violent and aggressive opposition of a persecutor.

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child” (12:13. NKJV). For at least forty

centuries, the devil had focused on stopping the birth of the promised **“Seed of the woman.”** This does not mean he had not sorely tempted humanity. In fact, while involved in his vain effort to keep the Messiah from being born, he had successfully **“deceived the whole world”** (1 John 5:19; Rev 12:9). He had also instigated opposition to, and persecutions of, the greatest of our race until Jesus. Included in those attacks were Abel (1 John 3:12), Joseph (Gen 49:23), Job (Job 12:4,5), David (Psa 11:2), Jeremiah (Jer 11:19; 15:10), and others. It has ever been true that the righteous have felt the pain of rejection, the bitterness of insult, the sorrow of mocking, and the wearing effect of opposition. From the beginning, this has always been the case (Psa 37:32; 56:5; 94:5; Prov 29:10,27; Isa 59:15; Amos 5:10).

### **Opposition Increases**

Now, however, the Satanic opposition of the saints has picked up, being increased because of Satan’s expulsion from heaven. No wonder Paul wrote, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”** (2 Tim 3:12, NKJV). There came a time when, in some sense, it registered with Satan that he had been **“cast to the earth.”** He had operated before in the earth, but had not been confined to it as he is now. The situation enraged him.

Satan is angry – not so much at the people of God, but because of the brevity of time that remains. He delights to do iniquity, and can do no good. The thought of his time being limited has caused him to rage. That seething anger is taken out on the people of God– **“the woman who gave birth to the male child.”**

All persecution of the godly is instigated by the devil. It makes no difference what form it takes, whether it is the mannerly snicker of the skeptic, or a violent and aggressive opposition of a persecutor. But there is something else to see here. It is not you personally that is Satan’s focus, but **“the woman who gave birth to the man child.”** Even

if godly Stephen is killed, and removed from the battle arena, the devil's wrath is not assuaged! He seeks to remove the people of God, not merely a few representatives from within them. His attacks are personal—make no mistake about that. However, his intention is to eliminate the people of God, not just some of them.

This condition, among other things, is what provoked Paul to pray so much for the church—the people of God (Phil 1:9; Eph 1:16; 3:15; Col 1:9; 2 Thess 1:11). He knew the ferocity of their adversary, and therefore was constrained to pray for them.

### **The Larger Picture**

How our prayers should rise for the church of God—the woman that is being persecuted by the devil! After all, Jerusalem which is above, is *“the mother of us all”* (Gal 4:26). While God is our Father, our mother is His people. There comes a time when we must forget about ourselves and consider our *“mother.”* She is under attack from an angry and subtle adversary. There must come times when my own interests—even the interests of a local congregation—are placed into the background. It is then that we pray, *“Lead US not into temptation, but deliver US from the devil one”* (Matt 6:13).

### **Think of the Mother**

It is true that there have been, and continue to be, failings in the body of Christ. False prophets have invaded her. She has made errors in judgment. Unfaithfulness has been found within her ranks. Some of her number have swerved aside. Some have even cast off their first faith, left their first love, and are seeing their works ready to die. But my prayer still rises for her! She is still my mother! She is still the target of Satan's aggression. I love her! The sweet Psalmist put it well when he said of Zion, *“All my springs are in you”* (Psa 87:7).

Again, the spirit of which I speak is articulated by the Psalmist in regard to Jerusalem. In his case, it was a city upon earth. In our case, it is the people of God. ***“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth; If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy”*** (Psa 137:5-6).

### **The Spirit of Sectarianism**

One of the many blights of sectarianism is its failure to consider ***“the woman that brought forth the man child.”*** Legion is the name of the congregations whose thoughts never extend beyond themselves. For many, their local congregation represents the totality of their involvement with the people of God.

In view of our text, such an attitude is reprehensible and inexcusable. It must not be allowed to surface among us, but must be subdued in the power of the Spirit. If Satan has targeted the persecution of ***“the woman,”*** we just seek her welfare, her edification, her strength, and her preservation.

### **THE SECRET PLACE**

For God’s people, provisions are not sparse. They are bountiful, and appropriate for the realm in which they are living by faith. Solomon spoke of a ***“flying sparrow”*** (Prov 26:2), but the people of God are not given the wings of a sparrow. Sparrows fly too low! The nature of the persecution leveled against them, and the exceeding greatness of the reward set before them, requires that unusual strength be given to them.

The devil is not the only one thinking about the people of God! In His wisdom, and in strict accord with His **“eternal purpose,”** the Lord has made provision for a people under attack. **“But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent”** 12:14, NKJV).

For God’s people, provisions are not sparse. They are bountiful, and appropriate for the realm in which they are living by faith. Solomon spoke of a **“flying sparrow”** (Prov 26:2), but the people of God are not given the wings of a sparrow. Sparrows fly too low! The nature of the persecution leveled against them, and the exceeding greatness of the reward set before them, requires that unusual strength be given to them. Although in a defiled realm, **“the woman”** will be granted a means of escape. That escape is imperative for her survival.

### **A Gift**

The means of escape hinge upon a gift. The woman was **“GIVEN two wings of an eagle.”** She does not escape the intentions of the devil by her own ingenuity, or some gift she possesses by nature. *Her escape comes by Divine provision.* As it is written, **“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”** (Isa 40:31). This signifies that the appropriation of the Divine means will be granted within an acute consciousness of the Lord. The **“wings of an eagle”** will not be given to those who choose to live at a distance from the Lord!

### **Escape Upward**

Second, the escape is upward! We do not hide from the devil, but soar into the area from which he has been expelled! The **“heavenly places”** are the place where spiritual blessings are appropriated (Eph 1:3,6; 2:6).

## Protection in Obscurity

Third, the required nourishment is found in *“her place.”* This *“place”* is not found in the world system, or *“fashion of this world”* (1 Cor 7:31). Too, it is not found in the earth, into which Satan has been cast. If the people of God are to experience spiritual nourishment and strength, they must get to their *“place”* –the *“heavenly places.”* The closer the church is to the world, the further she is from *“her place.”* This accounts for the emaciated state of many believers.

## Nourishment Is Vital

Fourth, the nourishment received by the people of God is vital to their survival. The nourishment lasts as long as the persecution, for she cannot survive without it. The spiritual sustenance she enjoys is for *“for a time and times and half a time,”* which is the same length as 1,260 days. However, in the presence of the Lord, where the nourishment is received, there is less of a sense of time than when we are conscious of persecution. Pretended religious leaders who do not *“feed the flock of God”* (1 Pet 5:2) have sinned against God and His people. Unless believers can overcome such ministers, they will fall to the devices of the wicked one.

## From the Face of the Serpent

Fifth, the sustenance realized is *“from the face of the serpent,”* or *“out of the serpent’s reach”* (NIV). While she is feeding, the devil cannot reach her, for she occupies the realm from which he has been expelled. This is why it is written, *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal 5:16). We also learn from this text that we are receiving from *“the face of the serpent”* or *“the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor 4:6). Those who are not eating at Jesus’ table, are feasting at the table of the devil.

## **Take Hold of this Truth!**

It is imperative that the people of God take hold of this truth! God is serious about saving us. The Lord Jesus is serious about providing for us. The Holy Spirit is serious about strengthening us. The holy angels are serious about ministering to us. The devil is serious about persecuting us. If we attempt to live in such an arena with a half-hearted spirit, there is no hope of survival. If we do not engage all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength in a quest for eternal life, there is no hope of obtaining it. I will tell you that this attitude is so scarce it boggles the mind.

## **THE TROUBLED REALM**

In my opinion, we are experiencing such a flood in our time. There has been a dramatic increase in wicked trends, wicked customs, moral depravity, religious decay, corrupt laws, evil rulers, bad schools, bad literature, and base entertainment. It is a flood from the mouth of the serpent.

“So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood” (12:15, NKJV). The devil knows about the place prepared for the people of God, but cannot enter into it. In the bosom of Jesus, we become inaccessible to Satan. However, he remains relentless in his efforts to destroy us. One thing you can say about him, he certainly is not a quitter. In this respect, he is more comely than many professed Christians.

With great subtlety, the serpent sends a gigantic flood “*out of his*

***mouth,***” seeking to destroy the woman from a distance. This deed is related to, what is later called, the release of Satan for a season (Rev 20:3). It speaks of an unprecedented rise in iniquity, sin, and moral defilement. Isaiah referred to this type of action as the enemy coming in ***“like a flood”*** (Isa 59:19). Jesus referred to it as iniquity abounding (Matt 24:12). Paul spoke of it as ***“perilous times”*** (2 Tim 3:1). Speaking of this kind of experience, the Psalmist said, ***“The floods have lifted up, O LORD, The floods have lifted up their voice; The floods lift up their waves”*** (Psa 93:3, NKJV).

In my opinion, we are experiencing such a flood in our time. There has been a dramatic increase in wicked trends, wicked customs, moral depravity, religious decay, corrupt laws, evil rulers, bad schools, bad literature, and base entertainment. It is a flood from the mouth of the serpent.

### **The Target Is the Woman**

Satan’s target is ***“the woman”***—the people of God. Although society in general suffers from his attack, society in general is not his focus. Those who attempt to live on the periphery of the Kingdom will be affected by this flood. Jesus described such people in these words. ***“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”*** (Matt 24:12).

Our adversary cannot reach us ***“in the Spirit”*** (Gal 5:16,25), or when our lives are experientially hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). He seeks, however, to mitigate our love for the Savior, make us lukewarm, and lure us out of the place of nourishment. He knows that if he can entice us to come away from the place prepared for Divine sustenance, he can overthrow us. Oh, that every professed believer knew as much about their condition as Satan does!

## Appointed Relief

When we see wars, plagues, pestilence, earthquakes, floods, winds, and drought, let us ponder what we have read! In those things, Satan designs to reach the people of God--to dislodge them from the secret place prepared for them, where they are receiving nourishment.

“But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (12:16, NKJV). Here is a most marvelous thing. I believe it is the only place such a statement is found in Scripture: ***“the earth helped the woman.”*** The principle is stated several times by the prophets, and it is a most awesome consideration. We will see that the protection of the godly has cost the lives of many ungodly. If that is too difficult to receive, let us hear the Word of the Lord.

***“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life ”*** (Isa 43:2-4). If this was true of Israel (included in ***“the woman”***), how much more is it true of the body of Christ! Solomon also articulated this principle. ***“The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, And the unfaithful for the upright”*** (Prov 21:18).

It is as though God said, *I exchanged the wicked for the righteous. I did not permit Satan to touch you, but rather allowed the wicked to*

*absorb the shock of his flood. “The earth helped the woman!”*

When we see wars, plagues, pestilence, earthquakes, floods, winds, and drought, let us ponder what we have read! In those things, Satan designs to reach the people of God--to dislodge them from the secret place prepared for them, where they are receiving nourishment. Too, the sudden rise of iniquity is a Satanic effort to lure believers from heavenly places.

### *There Are Other Ways*

But there are others ways in which the earth helps the woman. It yields its bread to us, and provides an arena in which we can care for our own. Here we receive outlets for lawful creativity and industry. There are relationships in the earth that **“help”** us in our walk, including marriage, family life, personal relationships, and enjoyable and lawful activities. Indeed the earth does help the woman, because it belongs to her (1 Cor 3:21-23), and will soon be given to her in a purified state (Matt 5:5).

There is one final way in which **“the earth helps the woman.”** It is the *only* realm in which the saints will experience opposition, hardship, chastening, and sorrow! It helps by absorbing all of those things. When we leave this world, we shall leave everything that is against us. Then, there will be no more **“flood,”** sent from the serpent’s mouth to destroy. Then, we shall be free from all Satanic initiatives.

## THE WAR IS ON

***“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of***

***God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ***” (12:17, NKJV). The nature of spiritual life is seen here from the underside. It is an aspect of life in Christ that is not often mentioned. It ought to make every believer sober to hear of Satan being ***“enraged with the woman.”*** No wonder Peter wrote, ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”*** (1 Pet 5:8-9, NKJV). He was describing an enraged adversary. His activities are associated with ***“sufferings”*** being ***“experienced”*** by the people of God. No person, regardless of their gifts and abilities, can contend with this adversary without being steadfast and consistent in the faith. If Satan is not resisted, or withstood, he will run roughshod over you. Your **ONLY** power is found in the place prepared for nourishment. Leave it, and there is no hope.

Satan’s failure to wash away the people of God collectively has not caused him to abandon his wicked initiative. He now turns to individuals, fighting on a personal level. Generally speaking, ***“the rest of her offspring”*** are those remaining in the world—who have not yet died.

Satan’s failure to wash away the people of God collectively has not caused him to abandon his wicked initiative. He now turns to individuals, fighting on a personal level. Generally speaking, ***“the rest of her offspring”*** are those remaining in the world—who have not yet died. Specifically, they are individuals who ***“keep the commandments of God, and maintain their testimony of Jesus.”*** While the people of God may be tempted to approach their life with something less than an aggressive effort, their adversary has declared ***“war.”***

From another perspective, the “*remnant of her seed,*” or the “*rest of her offspring,*” are those who survived his attack. They did not die in a persecution, nor did they throw the faith overboard. This group of people are often called the “*remnant*” (Isa 11:11; 37:31; Ezek 6:8; Amos 5:15; Rom 9:27; 11:5). This group of faithful ones confirm the following.

- Satan cannot remove the church from the world.
- Delusion cannot undue the work of Jesus.
- Faith does overcome the world.
- As long as there is a world, God will not leave Himself without a witness.
- Satan does have limitations.
- Spiritual nourishment is effective.
- After Satan’s most vicious attacks, some are left that have not been consumed.

### **The Remnant Specified**

The Lord does not leave us wondering about the identity of this remnant. They are not mere religious professors, or members of a religious organization. Satan does not make war with such. Instead, such wayward souls are the enemies of God, who is at war with them (James 4:4)!

### *Keep the Commandments*

These are God-conscious people! They keep, or retain, His commandments, hiding them in their hearts that they sin not against Him (Psa 119:11). In Christ, of course, keeping the commandments of God has a high priority. As it is written, “*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*” (1 Cor 7:19).

These are not merely the Ten Commandments, as some professed believers affirm. The phrase ***“the commandments of God”*** is much broader than that! There are pivotal commandments that are not mentioned in the decalogue. ***“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ . . . ”*** (1 John 3:23-24).

The meaning of ***“keeping the commandments of God”*** relates to the heart. As Joshua, referring to the Law, once said, ***“Therefore be very courageous to keep AND to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses”*** (Josh 23:6). Before Joshua, Moses had said the same thing (Deut 7:12). Even more specifically Moses said, ***“For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them . . . ”*** (Deut 11:22).

By saying the remnant keeps the commandments of God, the Lord is emphasizing their preference for what God has said. They live to do His bidding, and love His commandments, which are not grievous to them (1 John 5:3). Satan has declared war on all such people!

It seems to me that in our day there is a need for a revival of interest in ***“the commandments of God.”*** You might refer to such a frame of spirit as a ***“what wilt Thou have me to do”*** attitude. Religion has become so refined and cultured that ***“the commandments of God”*** are of little interest to many. But this is not the attitude of the remnant! Their love for God is identified by their attitude toward His commandments (1 John 5:2-3). This is what prompts the Lord to answer their prayers (1 John 3:22). It is also the means of knowing they are in Him (1 John 2:3,4).

### *The Testimony of Jesus*

This is not speaking of a personal testimony, as ordinarily conceived.

Rather, it speaks of what Jesus has testified being retained by those who have heard it. The Spirit refers to such Divine testimony. The Ephesians, for example, were told of the effectiveness of this testimony. ***“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus”*** (Eph 4:20-21). The very book we are studying is called ***“the testimony of Jesus Christ”*** (Rev 1:2). The Gospel is called ***“the testimony that God has given of His Son”*** (1 John 5:10-11).

Those keeping ***“the testimony of Jesus”*** are those who have heard and retained the good news of the Gospel. They have joyfully received the ministry of Jesus in opening that Gospel to them, and expanding on its greatness. Satan has declared war on all such people! They are his enemies, because they are a threat to his kingdom of darkness. Their presence inhibits his will, and thwarts his purpose. He knows he has but a short time, and thus vigorously opposes them.

## CONCLUSION

Thus you have heard the Apocalyptic Gospel. It has been declared in a vision, and a most effective one at that. God’s purpose has been affirmed, and the character of His people has been declared. The effectiveness of redemption has been seen, together with the impact it has had upon our adversary. The ferocity of the devil has been delineated, together with the focus of his attack. Even the ministry of the cursed earth has been declared, showing us that God is working everything together for our good.

Settle it in you heart: **the devil has made war, but he will not win the war!** Also consider that Satan hates the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus so much, he makes war against everyone that retains them. Our safety, however, lies in cleaving to the very things

Satan hates so vehemently. As we rejoice in them, refusing to let them go, we frustrate the devil. If it ever comes to the point where the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus are grievous to us, and hard to bear, Satan has influenced us.

It is not possible to take this passage seriously and conclude that the **“good fight of faith”** is not important. Every person receiving the truth herein declared will see the absolute necessity of spiritual nourishment, and getting to the place where it is ministered. Availing themselves of Divine enablements, they will fly to realms Satan cannot enter, and receive what he cannot take away!

Blessed be the name of the Lord for His merciful consideration of our situation. All praise to Him for alerting us to the nature of our adversary and his wicked intentions. Thanks to Him for a prepared place!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 24

## THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. "

(Revelation 13:1-10, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The stage has been set for the conflict of the ages. The conquering Lamb has dealt so thoroughly with sin that there is no longer a basis for accusing the saints before God. Thus, Satan has been cast out of heaven—hurled, as it were, into the lower realms. Unlike debilitated humanity, Satan does not give up. Realizing he has been decidedly lost the skirmish with the Son of God, he now turns his attention to the people of God. He makes war with them—aggressive and consistent war. As it is written, ***“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”*** (Rev 12:17). This war, as we will find, is to be taken seriously by the saints

## **Satan Is to be Taken Seriously**

The offensive of the powers of darkness is to be taken seriously by

every child of God. I fear the modern church, particularly the Western segment of it, has not taken this assault seriously. The casualness, and even indifference, that characterizes *Christianity* betrays its condition. As David was caught off-guard on the roof time in the time of war, so the modern church is falling to the devices of the wicked one. How well the Holy Spirit speaks to this matter. ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”*** (1 Pet 5:8-9).

- CAME FROM THE SEA
- SEVEN HEADS
- TEN HORNS
- TEN CROWNS
- NAME OF BLASPHEMY
- LIKE A LEOPARD
- FEET OF A BEAR
- MOUTH OF A LION
- DRAGON GAVE HIM POWER, THRONE, AND AUTHORITY.
- ONE OF HEADS MORTALLY WOUNDED
- DEADLY WOUND WAS HEALED
- ALL THE WORLD MARVELED AT BEAST
- ALL THE WORLD FOLLOWED THE BEAST
- WORLD WORSHIPED THE DRAGON
- WORLD WORSHIPED THE BEAST
- BEAST GIVEN BLASPHEMOUS MOUTH
- BEAST GRANTED TO CONTINUE FOR 42 MONTHS
- BLASPHEMED GOD
- BLASPHEMED GOD’S NAME
- BLASPHEMED GOD’S TABERNACLE
- BLASPHEMED THOSE WHO DWELL IN HEAVEN
- GRANTED TO MAKE WAR WITH SAINTS
- GRANTED TO OVERCOME THE SAINTS
- GRANTED POWER OVER ALL NATIONS
- ALL ON EARTH WHOSE NAMES ARE NOT WRITTEN

An Intelligent Aggression

Although Satan has great wrath, he is not like a raging bull. His attack

is shrewd, calculated, and marked by wicked strategy. He has an objective he seeks to fulfill, and he has marshaled all of his corrupted powers to fulfill it. When he makes war, it is not without intelligence. The flood he spewed out after the woman was a strategic one, marked by deception as well as violence, and craftiness that will snare the unexpected.

### *A Shrewd Adversary*

A decadent society, immersed in immorality and fleshly indulgences, is one dominated by Satan. However, do not think for a moment that this is the only manifestation of Satan. With serpentine craftiness he attacks believers with corrupt thought patterns. He does not confine his initiatives to sins of passion and fleshly outbursts. He also employs philosophy, religious reasoning—strong appeals to the mind.

### **Unintelligent Religion**

Because of this situation, an unintelligent religion is most foolish. An approach to God that is based upon emotion is destined to fail. Neither an individual nor a church can face the scheming devil with nothing in their head, and charged by frail emotion. Religious hype, so popular in our day, may be impressive to men, but it is impotent when it comes to resisting the devil. Only faith, which employs heart, soul, mind, and strength can empower the individual to effectively resist the devil.

### **The Nature of Satan's Attack**

The Lord Jesus now reveals to us the nature of Satan's attack against the saints. He will use two strategies to overthrow the people of God. Remember, he is making war with those who ***“keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.”*** These are his target. He is not attacking the heathen nations—they are already within his grasp. He is not targeting unbelievers who have access to the

truth, but have failed to embrace it. They also are already dominated by his power. Those who have escaped his domain are his targets.

### **Focusing on the saints**

For this very reason, the focus of every kingdom-laborer must be the building up of the saints. If they are the objective of Satan's attack, they had best be the object of our ministry. These are the ones for whom Jesus intercedes. These are the ones to whom the angels minister. These are the ones the Father has given to the Son. I realize this does not mean those in darkness are not to be reached, and the Gospel preached to every creature. The *thrust* of ministry, however, must be on the edifying side, else Satan will have the advantage in the war he has made.

### **The Absence of this Perspective**

There is a near-total absence of this emphasis within the institutional church. It thinks little of the saints, who are the target of Satan's virulent attack. Recruitment is its emphasis, and it speaks as though believers were so safe and secure they required no edification—as though their strength never dissipated, and they were in no danger.

There are theologies that aggressively oppose a "*once-saved-always-saved*," yet approach their entire work as though the heresy were true. They train their leaders, organize their programs, and develop their strategies as though Satan had forgotten about the saints. Jesus will have none of such folly! He reveals to John that the focus of the devil is the church! He sends a message to the churches, telling them of the enemy they are facing. He even announces their enemy will have measured success against them. It requires an extraordinarily dull conscience and hard heart to miss the gravity of the message.

Those who are not mindful of the saints of God cannot effectively minister to them. Their activities will only give the advantage to Satan. While that is a strong word, it is a true one. Jesus affirmed those who were not **“for”** Him were **“against”** Him (Mk 9:10; Lk 11:23). Never is that more true than in the matter of building up the people of God! To assist us in having the correct perspective, I remind you of the words uttered by Jesus in His high priestly prayer. As He approached the time when he would lay down His life, submitting to the curse of God, His mind was immersed in the will of His Father. He is not thinking of the world, the poor, the oppressed, or the condition of Jerusalem—not then. His prayer assists us in obtaining clear spiritual vision. ***“I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them”*** (John 17:9-10).

Let no one suppose Jesus had no heart for lost humanity – He died for them all! However, the saints were at the heart of his consideration, not on the periphery. This is the perspective to which we are now subjected. Let those with an ear, hear what is said.

## THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE BEAST

### THE IMAGERY OF THE BEAST

1. CAME FROM THE SEA    Arose from social agitation
2. SEVEN HEADS    Seven mountains
3. TEN HORNS    Ten kings
4. TEN CROWNS    Political power
5. NAME OF BLASPHEMY    Defiant toward God
6. LIKE A LEOPARD    Swift and bloodthirsty
7. FEET OF A BEAR    Crushing, brutal power
8. MOUTH OF A LION    Lordly rule and dominion
9. DRAGON GAVE HIM POWER, THRONE, AND AUTHORITY    Instrument of Satan
10. ONE OF HEADS MORTALLY WOUNDED    Struck down by Divine

- purpose
11. DEADLY WOUND WAS HEALED    Recuperated for another assault
  12. ALL THE WORLD MARVELED AT BEAST    Drew global attention and admiration
  13. ALL THE WORLD FOLLOWED THE BEAST    Peoples of the world committed to
  14. WORLD WORSHIPED THE DRAGON    As God sees the matter
  15. WORLD WORSHIPED THE BEAST    As men see the matter
  16. BEAST GIVEN BLASPHEMOUS MOUTH    Not struck down, but allowed to blaspheme
  17. BEAST GRANTED TO CONTINUE FOR 42 MONTHS    Active in time of truth's suppression
  18. BLASPHEMED GOD    Desecrated and profaned God's Person
  19. BLASPHEMED GOD'S NAME    Desecrated and profaned Divine character
  20. BLASPHEMED GOD'S TABERNACLE    Desecrated and profaned Divine service
  21. BLASPHEMED THOSE WHO DWELL IN HEAVEN    Desecrated and profaned believers
  22. GRANTED TO MAKE WAR WITH SAINTS    Given leave from God to oppose saints
  23. GRANTED TO OVERCOME THE SAINTS    Granted power to end earthly lives
  24. GRANTED POWER OVER ALL NATIONS    Dominated the world
  25. ALL ON EARTH WHOSE NAMES ARE NOT WRITTEN  
IN THE BOOK OF LIFE WORSHIP THE BEAST    Unbeliever give themselves to

Here John's own trial recedes into the background, grievous though it was. He was exiled on Patmos, surrounded by the sea, but that is of little importance now. He is elevated to a position where his own world shrinks, and the purpose of God is enlarged.

There is a fellowship with Christ that transcends self-interests. It is an affiliation where we are given to see things as the Lord sees them. In that broader picture our own hardships and dangers are reduced.

Standing ***“upon the sand of the sea”*** John does not behold his own dilemma, but that of the body of Christ. His attention is not drawn to the jeopardy of people oppressed by the godless Roman government, but to the saints of God who are being attacked by the devil. Precious few are the people who have occupied such lofty heights. Yet, this is an area to which we must aspire if we are to be used by God.

***“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name”*** (Verse 1). My heart stands at attention and my ears tingle at this word! The Lord Jesus brings a most vivid characterization of spiritual warfare before the aged Apostle. It is awesome in appearance, and more imposing still in significance. He beholds in Divine imagery Satan’s fierce aggression.

#### *From the Sea—A Cursed Realm*

The second beast will come from the earth (13:11)—this one comes from the sea. Both the earth and the sea are realms of the curse. God has promised he will ***“shake”*** them both, bringing them to a swift conclusion (Hag 2:6). While the Savior came ***“from heaven”*** (John 3:13,31; 6:38), our opposition comes from the lower realm. Satan raises up antagonists from the cursed domain. Those who minister edification do so from ***“heavenly places.”*** Without dwelling upon this, those who chose to focus on the lower realms are not wise. That is Satan’s territory.

#### *From the Sea—A Troubled Realm*

The sea is a picture of trouble and turmoil, of unrest and turbulence. It is depicted in Scripture as the aggregation of the wicked. ***“But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, Says my God, for the wicked”*** (Isa 57:20-21, NKJV).

A beast rising from the sea speaks of an oppressor springing out of political unrest and social agitation and disturbance. *National trouble and community discord prove to be the cauldron from which Satan brings spiritual opponents.* The restless condition of the globe produces enemies for God's people! While the fruits of righteousness are "sown in peace," initiatives against the saints are sown in the realm of trouble and commotion.

For this reason, we are admonished to pray ***"for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty"*** (1 Tim 2:1-2). It is not for the salvation of those in authority that we are to pray—although there is surely no sin in that. Rather, we pray God will provide us with a ***"quiet and peaceable life,"*** in which the fruits of righteousness are more readily sown. Also, such a atmosphere is less likely to produce aggressors against the body of Christ.

### *Earthly Government*

Satan raises up antagonists from the cursed domain. Those who minister edification do so from ***"heavenly places."*** Without dwelling upon this, those who chose to focus on the lower realms are not wise. That is Satan's territory.

I understand this first beast to be a portrayal of earthly government. God has appointed such to be the suppressor of evil and the rewarder of good (Rom 13:3-4). However, Satan has consistently used governments to oppress the church—particularly when they departed from their God-ordained role. History confirms that all governments have eventually oppressed the saints, whether in suppressing their expression or in bloody persecution.

### *Parallel to Daniel's Vision*

In this vision, then, we shall see Satan employing social organization—in particular, political power—to oppress the people of God. It parallels the vision given to Daniel (Dan 7). In his vision, four fierce beasts were seen coming **“up from the sea”** (7:3). They were devouring and oppressing beasts associated with kings and dominions (i.e., governments).

### *Do Not Trust In Government!*

It is no wonder God’s people are strictly charged not to rely upon the governments of men! **“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, And rely on horses, Who trust in chariots because they are many, And in horsemen because they are very strong, But who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, Nor seek the LORD!”** (Isa 31:1; 30:1-7). During the supremacy of the Egyptian government the Lord said, **“Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him”** (Isa 36:6). Like Egypt, all earthly government is like a broken reed, ready to fall. It is unworthy of our trust. Those who depend upon such institutions are debasing themselves, and descending into the pit (Isa 57:9).

Those who immerse themselves in political activism, whatever their justification, do well to remember these things. We should not be surprised when we are opposed by the government.

### *Seven heads and Ten Horns*

These are later defined *as* **“seven mountains”** and **“ten kings”** (17:9-12). Throughout history, Rome has been known as *“the seven-hilled-city.”* Both poets and historians have so referred to the ancient municipality. The seven mountains upon which the city was situated are Mt. Aventin, Mt. Capitaline, Mt. Palatine, Mt. Esquiline, the Caelian Mount, Mt. Quirinal, and Mt. Viminal. Jerome once wrote to a

Christian lady (in 342 A.D.), “*Read what is written in the Apocalypse of the seven hills.*” The “**kings,**” in this case, relate to the government of ancient Rome, then ruler of the world. In chapter seventeen, I will pursue this subject more fully.

While I am inclined to this view (the seven mountains are those upon which ancient Rome was built), it is a speculative view. In my judgment, we must not allow our minds to stop with that consideration. There is a larger picture to be seen—one of Kingdom principles.

### *The Greater Picture*

While the historical fulfillment of this vision has merit, and can be justified to a decided degree, the strength of the vision is not found there. The immediate thing that should strike our attention is this: **the first beast has precisely the same characteristics as the dragon.** Remember, it was said of the dragon, “*a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns*” (12:3). Just as all blessing comes from God, all evil comes from Satan. *It is Satan that is attacking the church through earthly government!*

The governments of this world are more readily available to Satan. They are built upon pride, and have themselves as their focus. With Divine certitude we are told, “***For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he is the governor among the nations***” (Psa 22:28). With remarkable consistency, however, this has not been the recognition of earthly governments. Even in our own nation, where once God was honored, there is significant opposition to His Sovereignty, Laws, and direction. It is the tendency of all worldly government to deteriorate, and to finally reject the King of kings, and oppose His people.

What our text is revealing is a Satanic strategy to capitalize on the governments of this world—to use them in a determined effort to

remove the people of God from the face of the earth.

### *A Blasphemous Name*

While the historical fulfillment of this vision has merit, and can be justified to a decided degree, the strength of the vision is not found there. The immediate thing that should strike our attention is this: the first beast has precisely the same characteristics as the dragon.

Here we are introduced to the religious approach our adversary employs. All seven of the heads of this formidable beast have a ***“blasphemous name.”*** It is a single name, and not seven different names. Later, we are told the mouth of this beast belched out ***“blasphemies”*** (13:5). Blasphemy is a mark of Satan’s aggression against the church (Dan 7:25; 11:36; 2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev 13:5-6; 17:3,5).

The word ***“blasphemy”*** means *vilification (especially against God): evil speaking, railing, slander, and insulting talk*. Such speech is a challenge to the Person and power of God, the rejection of His authority, and the questioning of His Word and deeds. Blasphemy is involved in the third commandment, ***“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”*** (Ex 20:7). This type of speaking seeks to justify self at the expense of the Living God.

This arch foe denies the Godhood of God, and rejects His authority. He will not submit to the King of kings, but chooses to exalt himself above the most high. This is precisely what Satan himself did (Isa 14:13). It also is a trait of the religious foe of whom Paul spoke (2

Thess 2:4).

### *Contemporary Examples*

Some contemporary examples of blasphemy are the contention that religion has no part in public life, being angry with God when things do not go well, and questioning His Word. While these things are not considered serious by religious sophists, they are actually evidence of the influence of the wicked one.

### *Its Nature*

The “**beast**” will challenge the people of God much like David’s enemies challenged him. “**Where is your God?**” (Psa 42:3,10). It chides the saints like Sennacherib taunted the Israelites, “**Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?**” (2 Kgs 19:10-11). We will see that circumstances will seem to justify the blasphemy proceeding from this beast. However, that seeming support will be overthrown by the conquering Lamb.

### *A Brief Summary*

Briefly stated, the dominating governments of this world will appear to prevail as they are used by Satan to oppose the saints of God. They will play a significant role in the spewing of a flood from the dragon’s mouth, designed to drown the people of God.

### **Ravenous and Ferocious**

***“Now the beast which I saw was***

Whatever one may think of Satan, he has greater power than any person, or all combined persons, outside of Christ. The wisdom of the world is impotent against such a assailant! Oh, that those who sit complacently within the walls of religious institutionalism knew this!

like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion” (Verse 2a). This is a spiritual depiction of the opponent raised up and empowered by Satan. The description reminds us of the beasts seen by Daniel. That prophet saw **“four beasts”** rise out of the sea. They bore the same traits as this single beast. How awesome was the scene. ***“The first was like a lion . . . and a man's heart was given to it . . .***

***And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear . . . and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh . . . lo another, like a leopard . . . and dominion was given to it . . . ”*** (Dan 7:1-7).

Here the creatures are combined in a single foe. The foe is lordly and intelligent as a stalking lion. It is fierce and ruthless like a bear. It is also swift and dominating like leopard.

*Jesus is telling the church it will face a foe for which no human gifts and abilities will be adequate.* The arm of flesh will yield no benefits against this foe. Lifeless and stilted religion will not equip the people of God to stand against such a calculating and merciless attack. Whatever one may think of Satan, he has greater power than any person, or all combined persons, outside of Christ. The wisdom of the world is impotent against such a assailant! Oh, that those who sit complacently within the walls of religious institutionalism knew this!

## Empowered by Satan

***“The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority”*** (Verse 2b). Satan has been cast out of heaven, but he remains in the earth, into which he has been hurled. He once offered the kingdoms of this world to Jesus, together with all of their pomp and splendor (Matt 4:8-9; Lk 4:5-7). Our Lord refused the offer, knowing they would all eventually succumb to His Kingdom. The beast, however, accepts the offer. This ***“beast”*** is quite willing to forfeit the blessing of God for the glory of this world. It has no difficulty subordinating any inclination to worship and serve the Living God, in order to gain temporary advantage.

Notice, the devil grants earthly government three things: ❶ *His power* , ❷ *his throne* , and ❸ *great authority* . Although the powers of this world imagine they have gained their position by themselves, they are deluded. First, it has been ***“given to them”*** from God Almighty to be seemingly successful. However, God has only done this in order that He might be justified in casting them down. Too, their effectiveness does not come from their evil schemes. It is the devil himself that has orchestrated and empowered their position!

Let no man wonder at the success of wicked rulers, or stand in amazement as though everything were out of control! The Lord is still the ***“Governor among the nations”*** (Psa 22:28). These insurrections will ***“proceed no further”*** than is required to fulfill the will of the Lord.

In the meantime, their achievements are owing to Satanic power. It is not the result of election campaigns, senate caucuses, and shrewd political wisdom. All of that is but the underside of the coin. Satan is the compelling force behind them! It is the devil that we really fight.

## RESURRECTED EVIL

***“And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed . . . ”*** (Verse 3a). Here the Holy Spirit strikes spiritual naivety to the ground! This dreaded opponent had already received a mortal wound. This was administered by the ***“heel”*** of Jesus as he crushed, or bruised, the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15; Eph 4:7; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8). However, do not allow carnal simplicity to cause you to imagine Satan is powerless in all realms, or that you have nothing to fear from him! Do not think that “spoiled” and plundered principalities and powers have no more ability, and pose no further threat! If you still have trouble with your flesh, which has been crucified with Christ (Gal 5:24), what do you suppose you will encounter from the devil?

Later, this beast is referred to as ***“the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed”*** (13:12). In this text, it states ***“one of his heads”*** was wounded. The beast, then, had been partially disabled, but not thoroughly removed. Notice the language of the text. The wounded part ***“seemed to have had a fatal wound”*** (NIV). The wound itself had been healed, yet a gruesome scar remained, as it were, testifying to the severity of the blow delivered.

Ordinarily, ***“fatal,” ‘deadly,”*** or ***“mortal”*** means that recovery is not possible. The expression ***“deadly wound”*** means *a wound that consummated in death* . Thus it is translated ***“wounded to death”*** (KJV), ***“fatal wound”*** (NIV, NASB), ***“mortal wound”*** (RSV), and ***“slain to death”*** (Darby’s). Here, however, a wound that is ***“mortal”*** is healed.

### *The Wound Is A Mortal One*

We will see later that ***“the beast”*** is finally destroyed from his wound. His recovery is only temporary. It is written, ***“Then the beast was***

*captured [and] . . . cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone . . . The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast [is] . . . ”* (19:20; 20:10). The recovery we are witnessing, therefore, is only temporary—something like a death reflex, although more significant. In this case, the “*reflex*” is accompanied with intelligence, diabolical objective, and focused energy. The power of

The beast, then, had been partially disabled, but not thoroughly removed. Notice the language of the text.

The wounded part “*seemed to have had a fatal wound*” (NIV). The wound itself had been healed, yet a gruesome scar remained, as it were, testifying to the severity of the blow delivered.

darkness recovered from the blow dealt to it at the cross, and Satan recuperated temporarily from the vicious blow given to Him in Christ’s death.

### *An Example in Christ’s Temptation*

If all of this seems beyond reason, think back to the temptation of our Lord. In that temptation, Satan was thoroughly frustrated. He could not lure the Savior into forbidden territory. At the conclusion of that skirmish, it is written, “*And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season*” (Lk 4;13). The wicked one, as it were, retreated and regrouped after the wilderness defeat.

### *A Different Kind of Opposition*

Satan has been “*destroyed,*” but has not ceased to be active. To put it another way, he has once and for all lost in His conflict with the “*Seed*” of the woman. He has, therefore, been cast out of heaven, never to fight with the Lamb again. Jesus will never again do battle with the devil!

Chapter twelve informs us this does not mean the end of Satan. He has now taken up the battle against *“the woman”*—the people of God. Lest we be distracted by carnal reasoning, the ones with whom the wicked one now does battle are defined as those *“who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (12:17). As these saints confront the devil, he looks as though he is not mortally wounded. Judging from his activity, the *“deadly wound”* has been *“healed.”* Understand, however, this is referring to his activity in the earth. The martyrs under the altar, for example, are experiencing no attacks from the devil. But for *“the remnant”* who remain in the world, it is quite another matter.

With Divine initiative Satan was frustrated in his attempts to stop the Messiah from being born. Again, he was stymied in his efforts to keep Him from growing up. In the wilderness temptation, the devil was once again foiled, as well as throughout the earthly ministry of our Lord. Even in Christ’s death, Satan was mortally wounded. Finally, when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to enthronement on High, the mortal bruise began its festering work. Even when he fomented a persecution against the early church, scattering them to the four winds, they went *“everywhere, preaching the Word”* (Acts 8:4).

### *The First Roman Persecution*

Yet, his deadly wound appears healed, as he regroups his energies for an unparalleled assault against the church. His activity now in a different realm—the *“earth.”* Now, through the governments of the world, to whom he has given power, thrones, and authority, Satan takes up a ferocious battle against the saints of the Most High God. It is first seen in Rome, by whom Paul, Peter, and millions of saints, were slaughtered. In 67 A.D., Nero unleashed a vicious persecution against the saints. To Peter and Paul were added such notables as Erastus, Aristarchus, Trophimus, Joseph, and Ananias of Damascus.

### *The Second Roman Persecution*

In 81 A.D., Domitian instituted the second great Roman persecution. He commanded all of the lineage of David to be exterminated. During this persecution, John the beloved was boiled in oil, but survived. It was then that he was banished to Patmos, where he received the vision of Revelation. Even Timothy was killed in this persecution.

### *The Third Roman Persecution*

In 108 A.D., Trajan began the third Roman persecution. Great numbers of believers were crucified in this persecution, some crowned with thorns, and others thrust through their sides with spears.

### *The Fourth Roman Persecution*

The fourth Roman persecution was inaugurated by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus in A.D. 162. Such cruelties were inflicted upon believers, we are told, that many of the spectators shuddered at the sight. The venerable Polycarp was martyred in this persecution, together with Justin.

### *The Fifth Roman Persecution*

Rome instituted yet a fifth persecution in A.D. 192. In this oppression Origen was beheaded, with the persecution extending into Africa.

### *The Sixth Roman Persecution*

In A.D. 235, the sixth Roman persecution was launched under Maximus. Great numbers of believers were slain without trial and buried in mass graves without the least expression of decency.

### *The Seventh Roman Persecution*

Many have traced the rise of superficial and institutional Christianity to the time of Constantine. I look at his time as one of relief for the saints, and extended mercy.

The seventh Roman persecution was started in A.D. 249 under Decius. During this persecution, as though weakened by the bloody onslaughts, certain errors crept into the church. It was during this time that human reasoning was placed in competition with revelation, being elevated to a position nearly equal with Scripture. Fortunately, under the capable ministry of able teachers, these errors were dashed to the ground. Oh, that we had more of such men among us today!

### *The Eighth Roman Persecution*

The eighth Roman persecution took place in 257 under Valerian. It continued uninterrupted for three years and ten months. Thousands in Africa were martyred during this persecution.

### *The Ninth Roman Persecution*

In A.D. 274, the ninth persecution began under Aurelian. Several notable believers were slain during this persecution.

### *The Tenth Roman Persecution*

Under the Roman emperors, the tenth persecution was started under Diocletian in A.D. 303. In this persecution, the buildings and books of believers were also burned in an effort to stamp out Christianity. This persecution even reached into Spain.

### *Some Relief for the Saints*

These bloody persecutions finally ended around A.D. 313, after nearly 250 years of continual persecution. It was Constantine who was used of God to ease the carnage against the saints. He passed laws that favored Christians, establishing peace for the church. That peace continued for nearly 1,000 years, until the time of John Wickliffe.

Many have traced the rise of superficial and institutional Christianity to the time of Constantine. I look at his time as one of relief for the saints, and extended mercy. It is true that the church did not do the best with this period of respite. But that is no fault of those used by God to induct a time of peace.

### **The Beast Still Exists**

Rome was, for over nearly two and one-half centuries, the opponent of the church. But it did not end when she was brought down. Germany, and Russia were noted for their opposition to believers after the turn of the twentieth century.

Contemporary governments persecuting believers include Sudan, North Korea, China, Cuba, Laos, Iran, Pakistan, Mexico, and more. Even our own country has outlawed prayer, public displays of some Christian materials, and a certain public espousals of the Lord Jesus. The Bible has been thrust from our public schools, and especially reprehensible sins treated as though they were diseases. The beast lives on, with its deadly wound healed.

### **What Can We Learn From This?**

The world is no friend to those in Christ Jesus. When given leave to

do so, it will oppress the people of God. At its loftiest and most organized state, it has consistently become the enemy of the truth.

We must not take lightly the Divine injunction to pray for rulers and those in authority, that we might lead ***“a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”*** (1 Tim 2:1-2). Such times are to be used to ***“grow up into Christ in all things”*** (Eph 4:15).

Periods of quietness are not to be interpreted as times when ***“pure religion”*** is popular. Rather, it is a time of rest, given by the Lord Himself (Josh 21:44; 2 Chron 15:15; Acts 9:31). Use them for the strengthening of your soul, and count them to be precious, indeed!

### *Expect Evil to Recuperate*

Too, we must learn to expect the powers of darkness to regain strength after we have experienced some degree of victory over them. Jesus triumphed over them once, never again to contend with them. However, until He receives you unto Himself in the glory, you will face renewed initiatives from Satan and his hosts.

## THE WORLD MARVELS AND FOLLOWS

### **The World and the Beast**

***“And all the world marveled and followed the beast.”*** (Verse 3b). Remember, the ***“beast”*** is worldly government–humanity organized into a confederacy based upon earthly wisdom and devoid of Divine power. No person is to recoil from such a thought. After all, all of the kingdoms of this world are going to become ***“the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ”*** (Rev 11:15). The Kingdom of God is going to

decimate all of the kingdoms of men—without exception. As it is written, ***“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever”*** (Dan 2:44).

It must once and for all be settled in our hearts that the kingdoms of this world are inferior in every way to the Kingdom of God. They are not going to be allowed to continue! The principles under which they operate contradict those of the heavenly Kingdom. Jesus stated the principle in this way. ***“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called***

Enamored of its fading luster, the world ***“marvels”*** at the beast. Unduly impressed with its glory, it admires such a form of administration. Mind you, it cares nothing for the bureaucracy of heaven—but it loves that of ***“the beast.”***

'Benefactors.' But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant” (Lk 22:25-26). The Kingdom of God operates with ethics that differ from those of worldly governments. They are standards that are compatible with eternity.

All of this is confirmed by the response of the world to ***“the beast.”*** Enamored of its fading luster, the world ***“marvels”*** at the beast. Unduly impressed with its glory, it admires such a form of administration. Mind you, it cares nothing for the bureaucracy of heaven—but it loves that of ***“the beast.”***

This is ***“the world”*** that is dominated by the devil. As it is written, ***“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”*** (1 John 5:19,

NASB). Of course, the world marvels at, or admires, ***“the beast”*** because they are both of the same order. They are also both ruled by Satan. While a despot could never become a Prophet or an Apostle, one can become a king, governor, or president! Wicked men are forbidden to be elders, or deacons, or have any role whatsoever in the body of Christ. But they can be a senator, representative, or government official. The world will vaunt its own! As Jesus said, ***“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”*** (John 15:19).

This does not mean we owe no allegiance to those who bear political rule over us. In good conscience, we ***“submit to ever ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake”*** (1 Pet 2:13). For ***“conscience sake,”*** we are subject to them without fear, paying taxes and giving tribute where it is due (Rom 13:5-6). But we will not give God’s glory to them! At the very best, we are second-class citizens in this world, having been crucified to it (Gal 6:14).

### **They Worshiped the Dragon**

Now comes the Divine assessment of the world’s admiration of the beast. ***“So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’”*** (Verse 4). Those so described might object vehemently to the charge that they worshiped ***“the dragon,”*** who is Satan (Rev 20:2). If someone from ancient Rome were granted to explain their allegiance, they would say they were worshiping the Emperor according to the laws of the land. They would see themselves much like the subjects of Nebuchadnezzar, who demanded them to bow before an image of his making (Dan 3:1-10).

The Lord, however, provides us with the real circumstance. They are worshiping the devil! He is the one who ***“gave authority to the beast,”***

and those worshiping that **“beast”** actually worship him! It is the same type of situation that is seen in our attitude toward the Son. Our view of the Son reflects our view of the Father. How often our Lord affirmed this to be the case. **“He that hateth me hateth my Father also”** (John 15:23). **“All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him”** (John 5:23). John adds this testimony: **“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also”** (1 John 2:23). Our view of the Son is our view of the Father.

The **“beast”** is to Satan what Jesus is to the Father. Just as our relationship to Jesus precisely defines our relation to the Father, so the world’s association with the **“beast”** reveals its allegiance to the devil. This situation is not apparent to the world, for it has been deceived by the wicked one. Nevertheless, it is a precise statement of the case.

### *Elsewhere Declared in Scripture*

We are not left to conjecture on this point. Of old time, the Lord revealed that the worship of images, whether of lifeless material or in an organization, is the worship of the power of darkness.

We are not left to conjecture on this point. Of old time, the Lord revealed that the worship of images, whether of lifeless material or in an organization, is the worship of the power of darkness. In assessing Israel’s past, the Lord told Moses they had sacrificed to demons. **“They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot”** (Lev 17:7, NKJV). In a stern rebuke of the nation, Moses said in his valedictory address, **“They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God”** (Deut 32:16-17, NKJV).

Through Paul, the Spirit adds this word on the matter. ***“Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.”*** Showing the relevance of this situation to the Corinthians, He continues, ***“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons”*** (1 Cor 10:20-21). Let it be clear, those who give their hearts and souls to ***“the beast”*** have given them to the devil.

One further word is necessary on this matter. Satan works through means to gain the hearts of men. In this text, he works through the governments of this world. He also works through the doctrines of men, drawing worship and allegiance to himself. The Holy Spirit alerts us to this circumstance in First Timothy. ***“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving [seducing, KJV] spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth”*** (2 Tim 3:1-2, NKJV).

### *The Solicitation of Worship*

Satan is soliciting worship, adoration, and service. He draws men by causing them to esteem his power, might, and rule. He causes them to overestimate power and external force, bowing at its shrine. He has raised up a competitive government—a ***“beast”*** that is ruthless, even though it at first appears admirable. He first raised up this beast on a plain in the land of Shinar. There they thought to build a tower that reached into heaven. In their own words, they sought to ***“make a name”*** for themselves (Gen 11:2-5).

That was the first expression of “*the beast.*” In succeeding years, the devil refined the presentation, imparting a certain “*glory*” to earthly kingdoms that made them appealing. However, behind it all is his solicitation of worship, whether at Babel, in Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Germany, or a government of our time.

### *Something to Ponder*

Legion is the name of those who have offered more to their country than they have to their God. Who would dare to number the people who have fought more zealously for a nation than for their Redeemer. Countless millions have been more conscientious about paying tribute to the government than of bringing all the tithes into the storehouse. Indeed, the worship of the beast has not ceased! We will render to Caesar what is His. But we belong to God, and we will render to Him what belongs to Him.

### *We must be wise*

It is imperative that the church be aware of the battle arena in which it is found. It is disastrous to be drawn into the snare of assessing things after the flesh, and judging according to appearance! We are confronted with an angry foe. He is subtle, and has developed strategies that cannot be detected or overcome by worldly wisdom. If we do not walk in the light, and in blessed fellowship with the Son, there is no hope of surviving. In the Son, however, God “*which always causeth us to triumph*” (2 Cor 2:14). Our faith in Christ guarantees our victory (1 John 5:4-5)! In Him, God **CAUSES** us always to triumph—even though we sometimes must wait! Furthermore, “*victory*” presumes fierce and relentless battle.

## DIVINE APPORTIONMENT

*“And he was GIVEN a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was GIVEN authority to continue for forty-two months”* (Verse 5). Once again, Divine control is affirmed. The devil does not, and cannot, operate at will. He has great power, but can only use it within the circumference of Divine purpose. Now we are confronted with a ferocious opponent of the people of God. Satan empowers this opponent to make war with the saints. Of *“the beast”* it is said, *“and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority”* (13:2). However, that is not the end of the matter. In verse five, the ultimate source of the empowerment is not Satan, but the Lord. While Satan is, indeed, instrumental in this, it is the Lord Who is in control.

### **The Principle Involved**

While, on the surface, it appears as though Satan’s competing purpose is being served, it is actually the will of God that is being fulfilled. The vision given by Jesus to John is confirming this to be the case: i.e., that the vicious attack against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus is within the Divine agenda. It will ultimately turn to the glory of God and the advantage of His people. We must not stagger at this manner of Divine working.

#### *The case of Joseph*

**The devil does not, and cannot, operate at will. He has great power, but can only use it within the circumference of Divine purpose.**

Remember the case of Joseph. He was opposed and sold into slavery by his brothers.

His tenure in Egypt was marked by imprisonment brought on by a lie. He was also forgotten in prison by those who said they would mention his case to the Pharaoh.

After the passing of his trial, Joseph assessed the time during which he was oppressed. ***“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive”*** (Gen 50:20, NKJV). Approximately 700 years later, David was inspired to also speak of Joseph’s trial. ***“Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him”*** (Psa 105:16-19).

### *An Imminent Lord*

The Lord is imminent in the trials and testings of His people. This has always been true. Whether we consider Joseph, Israel in Egyptian bondage, Jeremiah in a pit, Daniel in a lion’s den, or the three Hebrew children in a furnace, *the trials of the faithful have never been out of control*.

### *Satan Never wins*

Satan has never realized his full intention. He did not in the garden of Eden, in the slaying of Abel, or the sin that provoked the sending of the ancient flood. The purpose ultimately served has always been that of the Lord. Satan, though allowed to work, has always been frustrated. This principle is seen in its fullest application in the arrest, trial, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The powers of darkness did, indeed, have their ***“hour,”*** and they seized it with zeal (Lk 22:53). But in the end, the will of the Lord was fulfilled, not the will of Satan.

## Textual Perspective

Our text is to be understood within the greater context of Divine purpose. The occasion described is not the point. It is but a part of the whole. **God is working His will in a hostile arena.** Not only is His revealed purpose opposed, it is resisted by the prince of the power of the air himself. The conspiracy against the ministry of reconciliation is an organized one, operating under a seemingly invincible banner. If men think the organization of Babel was significant, it is nothing when compared with the evil complicity seen in the beast from the sea. This is Satan's effort to stamp out the people of God. But it is all under heaven's strict Government.

## A Mouth Is Given

*“And he was GIVEN a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . . ”* Among other things, it should be noted that wicked words cannot even be uttered without Divine approval—not approval of the words themselves, but approval to speak them. The reigning Lamb can silence the blasphemous words of men in an instant, as He did with Herod (Acts 12:23).

## *Daniel's Testimony*

Satan has never realized his full intention. He did not in the garden of Eden, in the slaying of Abel, or the sin that provoked the sending of the ancient flood. The purpose ultimately served has always been that of the Lord. Satan, though allowed to work, has always been frustrated.

Daniel also referred to an arch-foe of God's people. He said the foe had *“a mouth*

*speaking great [pompous] things . . . great words”* (Dan 7:8,11). The Prophet further described these words as *“great words against the most High”* (Dan 7:25). In a remarkable statement that parallels our text, Daniel said of a wicked potentate, *“And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation [wrath] be accomplished: for that is determined shall be done ”* (Dan 11;36).

Daniel’s words are germane to our text. They speak of the execution of Divine wrath through a wicked instrument. They also affirm the continuance of blasphemous oppression for a *determined* period of time. The nature of the opposition is also defined as ultimately against God Himself, although directed toward His people.

### *Paul’s Testimony*

The Spirit revealed to Paul the coming of a controlled adversary. He would oppose the people of God, and assume Divine prerogatives. This impostor is called *“the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan , with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false”* (2 Thess 2:8-12, NASB).

While this word extends beyond our present text, we will find it has a great deal to do with the remaining events of the thirteenth chapter of Revelation. The following observations will suffice. ❶ Satan does empower forces upon earth. ❷ Decisive power is given to those under Satanic influence. ❸ The effectiveness of the foe is realized among those who are perishing. ❹ The influence of such wickedness is traced back to Divine judgment. ❺ The failure of men to receive a love of the truth was the impetus behind the surfacing of dominating wickedness.

*The role now delineated was assigned from heaven, but implemented from hell.*

### **Great Things and Blasphemies**

The words spoken by this spiritual opponent are “**great**” in appearance, but not in content. Peter and Jude referred to such speech as “**great swelling words of vanity**” (2 Pet 2:18). Such words draw attention to the speaker, and not to the Lord. They compete with the Word of God, pulling the minds of men downward, and blotting out the consideration of the truth. *They are delusions, and tend to be of a religious nature.* They are also words that solicit the admiration of men, being impressive to the flesh.

Blasphemies are intentional indignities toward God. Such speech involves “**contradicting**” the Word of the Lord (Acts 13:45). Blasphemy is not confined to the denigration of the Person of God alone, but also to His doctrine, or teaching (1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2:5). The Spirit will now elaborate on the nature of this blasphemy. Remember, we are dealing with a phenomenon that is under strict Divine control. The will of the Lord is being served, and Satan will lose. The saints will overcome every assault of the wicked one, while everyone else will be caught in the maelstrom.

## **THE NATURE OF THE BLASPHEMY**

*“Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven”* (Verse 6). Here is an adversarial power that rose from among the people—the agitated sea of society. Yet, this power does not seek the advantage of the masses from which it surfaced. Nor, indeed, does it

recognize the God who created and sustains mankind. The present commonality of blasphemy is a commentary on the effectiveness of this “*beast*” from the sea – this spiritually despotic power empowered by Satan and given leave to operate by the almighty God. Here is verbal, intelligent, and deliberate opposition.

The aggressiveness of this wanton attack is seen in the words, “*Then he opened his mouth.*” This is not a spontaneous, or reflexive, response. It is deliberate, calculating, and objective. What Satan can no longer do in heavenly realms, he is now doing in the earth. Removed from an angelic society, he now works among men. Remember, he is targeting those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

This beast, earthly government, has oppressed many unbelievers. However, Satan has empowered it to attack believers. The description of his poisonous speech will confirm this to be the case.

### **Blasphemy Against God**

One of the things provoking “*the beast*” from the sea to blaspheme the God of heaven is the apparent weakness of His people. Not realizing his power has been given to him by God, he speaks derisively of His Person, as though He did not exist.

This describes speech against the **Person** of God—His very being. Remember, Satan’s aspiration was to elevate himself. His ancient thoughts are give to us through Isaiah. “*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the*

*clouds; I will be like the most High*” (Isa 14:14). Satan’s nature remains unchanged. Now he expresses himself through the words of alienated humanity. In the text before us, it is through government. This is an “official” word, so to speak.

All world governments have challenged the notion of a Sovereign God in heaven. Whether Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, or Rome—all have spoken blasphemies “*against God.*” They have invented unto themselves other gods, rejecting the one true God. Atheism and idolatry have consistently been promoted by the governments of this world.

Hezekiah described this kind of speech in his prayer concerning the threats of Sennacherib. “*And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem*” (2 Chron 32:19). To blaspheme against God is to deny His existence—to scoff as though He was the product of human imagination.

One of the things provoking “*the beast*” from the sea to blaspheme the God of heaven is the apparent weakness of His people. Not realizing his power has been given to him by God, he speaks derisively of His Person, as though He did not exist.

### **Blasphemy Against His Name**

This is blasphemy against the **character** of God—His ways. In this case, there is not a denial that God exists. Rather, His manners are repudiated, and His Word rejected. Such blasphemies may begin with words like this, “*If there is a God, why does He . . . .*” Or, “*If God is so good, why does He . . . .*”

The seriousness of such intemperate speech is seen in the Law of God.

***“Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death”*** (Lev 24:16, NASB). The name of the Lord is to be feared (Rev 11:18). Blaspheming His name is the exact opposite of fearing it.

The boldness of such charges are evident in the very society in which we live. The Divine Nature requires that we live for Him, and imbibe His Word, depending upon Him. But earthly government challenges this, and refuses to do so. It considers such conditions unwarranted, and summarily rejects them with official edicts and proclamations.

Such blasphemies were expressed by Israel as they were delivered from Egypt and began their trek to Canaan. ***“Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? . . . Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food”*** (Ex 14:11; Num 21:5, NASB). These expressions were blasphemies against the Name of God. They were a verbalization of discontent with His ways. It was God that brought them out of Egypt and fed them with bread from heaven. But they objected to that manner, and thus blasphemed His name.

Now, Satan raises an official organ, or mouthpiece, of blasphemy. He, as it were, institutionalizes blasphemy. He constrains men to shout in the face of God, ***“Why hast Thou made me thus?”*** (Rom 9:20). Under the government of this ***“beast,”*** men think nothing of questioning the holiness and Sovereignty of God.

### **Blasphemy Against His Tabernacle**

The Divine Nature requires that we live for Him, and imbibe His Word, depending upon Him. But earthly government challenges this, and refuses to do so. It considers such conditions unwarranted, and summarily rejects them with official edicts and proclamations.

This is blasphemy against the dwelling place of God—the church of the Living God. The *church* thus becomes a “*sect . . . that . . . is spoken against everywhere*” (Acts 28:22). Politicians, whether emperors or subordinates, think nothing of speaking against the body of the redeemed. Those who blaspheme the tabernacle of God, like former opponents of the church, charge it with troubling their cities, and throwing them into confusion (Acts 16:20-21).

Charges like “*These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also*” (Acts 17:6) are blasphemy against the tabernacle of God. They are a charge that the church is the source of the difficulty, and not the devil.

### **Blasphemy Against Those Who Dwell in Heaven**

This is blasphemy against those who are citizens of heaven—the individuals themselves. While it may involve saints who have been removed from the earth (as Moses, target of Satan’s disputation with Michael—Jude 9), it is more likely those “*who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus.*” The more one is aligned with this world, the more the people of God are despised.

#### *Examples of Blaspheming*

Examples of blasphemy against “*those who dwell in heaven*” can be

found throughout Scripture. Satan blasphemed against Job when he said, ***“But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face”*** (Job 1:11). David endured indignities from his enemies. As he wrote, ***“My enemies speak evil of me: When will he die, and his name perish?”*** (Psa 41:5). The Scribes and Pharisees cast aspersions at Jesus when they said, ***“This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils”*** (Matt 12:24), and ***“Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”*** (John 8:48, NASB). Paul endured the same indignities when they said of him, ***“this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes”*** (Acts 24:5).

#### *A Word from Jesus*

While such blasphemies are often grievous to be born, Jesus reminds us, ***“Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets”*** (Luke 6:22-23, NKJV).

#### *Official Indignities*

Our text, however, does not speak of the normal indignities to which believers are subjected. These are *official* stances against the saints. During such blasphemy, it is unlawful to be a Christian, and wearing the name of Christ is illegal. Such things have already begun in our country. It is illegal to pray under many circumstances and in many places. The closer one is to the Lord, the more likely it is that reproaches and blasphemies will be hurled against him. Isaiah spoke of such times when he wrote, ***“Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey”*** (Isa 59:15).

## *Satan Is Behind It All*

This beast arose from agitated peoples who had rejected the truth. It represents a system that has no respect for God, His name, His dwelling, or His people. Every head of this beast bears a single name— ***“the name of blasphemy.”*** The harsh words spoken against God and His people will appear to justify the harsh treatment of the saints.

But we must not forget the source of this opposition. The devil—the ***“old serpent”***—is behind it all. The attack belongs to him as he shuffles godless men and institutions about to serve his own purpose. Those who have not received the love of the truth are ***“taken captive by him to do his will”*** (2 Tim 2:26). Oh, that men were more mindful of this situation. In this case, it is a whole political system, focused against God—in particular, against the people of God. Satan’s hatred for Christ is thus turned against saints.

## AUTHORITY TO WAGE WAR

***“It was granted to him to make war with the saints . . . ”*** (Verse 7). Again, the reign of the Lamb is confirmed with remarkable clarity. The beast from the sea (which I have identified as political government) proceeded with haste against the people of God. However, he can only ***“make war with the saints”*** when he is allowed to do so by God. Our Lord, Who is faithful, will not allow the saints to be tempted above their ability (1 Cor 10:13). While the devil empowers this ***“beast,”*** the devil’s purpose will not be fulfilled.

### **War With the Saints**

Faith does put us into a hostile worldly amphitheater. It does appear as though this circumstance has eluded many believers in our country. They conduct their lives as though there were no real dangers.

Remember, the “**war**” is made by a formidable opponent. The term “**beast**” appropriately describes the

can only “**make war with the saints**” when he is allowed to do so by God. Our Lord, Who is faithful, will not allow the saints to be tempted above their ability (1 Cor 10:13). While the devil empowers this “**beast**,” the devil’s purpose will not be fulfilled.

foe: barbaric, fierce, savage, and sadistic. Lordly and awesome like a lion, swift like a leopard, and powerfully ruthless like a bear! Such an entity was given power “**to make war with the saints.**” Why is such a war allowed? I believe I can adduce at least three plausible answers.

❶ To make known to principalities and powers in heavenly places the inferiority of Satan and the entire worldly order. He is impotent to fulfill his purpose, even though granted temporary power against the saints.

❷ To confirm to saints that the most aggressive initiative of the devil, although ending in the seeming defeat of the saints, will eventually be hurled to the ground. All of this would be meaningless, of course, if this world were the only world.

❸ The transient effectiveness of the beast corroborates that our home is not in this world. As Jesus affirmed, “**In the world**” we “**will have tribulation**” (John 16:33). Believers have always encountered opposition from the world. Sodom opposed Lot, Egypt opposed Israel, and Syria and Babylon fought against God’s people. But in each case, as with our text, they made war ONLY as they were “**given**” to make war.

I again want to emphasize that Satan focuses his energies against those ***“who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.”*** In view of the ***“war”*** leveled against the people of God, it is imperative that we are mindful of them. This is why the edification of believers is necessary. It is why we are to ***“do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith ”*** (Gal 6:10). The current practice of withholding nourishment from the people of God is so serious it cannot be overlooked or overstated.

### **Overcoming the Saints**

***“ . . . and to overcome them.*** Here is the part that is difficult for many, and pleasant for none. The overcoming of saints, or apparent triumphing over them, was granted to the beast.

#### *Daniel’s Vision*

Daniel referred to this situation also. ***“I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them”*** (Dan 7:21). This overpowering, however, was not permanent in Daniel, nor is it in the Revelation. Daniel was told the overpowering he witnessed was ***“Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom”*** (Dan 7:22).

The remarkable turn of events found the very ones that were overcome taking charge of the kingdom. This was no small matter. The extent of the reign of the saints far exceeds that of their momentary enemy. Of their reign, Daniel said, ***“And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them ”*** (Dan 7:27, RSV).

In this world Abel can be slain by Cain, Joseph imprisoned because of Potiphars's wife, and Israelite babies slain by Pharaoh. Herod can behead John the Baptist and have James killed. Saintly Stephen can be stoned to death, and the saints can be dispersed by persecution.

In this world Abel can be slain by Cain, Joseph imprisoned because of Potiphars's wife, and Israelite babies slain by Pharaoh. Herod can behead John the Baptist and have James killed. Saintly Stephen can be stoned to death, and the saints can be dispersed by persecution.

### *The Example of our Lord*

The supreme example is the Lord Jesus Christ. The inferior rulers of this world ***“gathered together”*** against Him. In a monumental prayer, early believers referred to this wicked gathering. ***“The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together”*** (Acts 4:26-27).

It looked as though the enemies of Jesus triumphed. Jesus was, from this perspective ***“crucified through weakness”*** (2 Cor 13:4). They arrested Him, beat Him, mocked Him, and crucified Him—all in apparent triumph.

But that is not the total picture. The early church knew the will of God was fulfilled in all of this, and not the will of the devil. In their prayer concerning the gathering of the earth's rulers against Jesus, they said,

***“to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”*** (Acts 4:28, NKJV). Jesus told those who arrested Him, ***“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”*** (Lk 22:53). He also told Pilate, ***“You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above”*** (John 19:11).

Look what a blessing God brought from the death of His Son! In it, the world was reconciled (Rom 5:10), peace made with God (Col 1:20), and the sins of the world taken away (John 1:29). The devil was destroyed (Heb 2:14), principalities and powers spoiled (Col 2:15), and the handwriting of ordinances that was against us blotted out (Col 2:14).

We will see that a blessing will come from this momentary triumph of the wicked also. *Only unbelief stands aghast at this spectacle, unable to accept it as allowed by God.* But this is not the end of the matter. God will be fully justified in allowing this to happen, and the saints will be exonerated and rewarded in an unusual way. *The point is that this is not a strange thing.*

### **Universal Authority**

***“ . . . And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.”*** Here is a move against the righteous that is world-wide. It is not local, as it was in Jerusalem when the church first began. This should not be a strange thought to us. God also gave ***Cyrus “all the kingdoms of the earth”*** (Ezra 1:2). It was God Who gave Nebuchadnezzar a universal dominion-- ***“a kingdom, power, strength, and glory”*** (Dan 2:37).

*God Gives Political Power*

The wide dominion of the saint's adversary wide dominion of the saint's adversary matched the wide departure from the faith that had taken place. Yet, in the judgment, none of the righteous were pushed beyond their measure of endurance. Also, in all of this, God will be glorified, and the saints eventually elevated to high and eternal positions.

God has always been represented as giving rulers what they appear to have taken unto themselves. He gave Seir to Esau (Deut 2:5), Ar to the children of Lot (Deut 2:9), and Canaan to Israel (Josh 24:13). The Lord gave Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 29:20), Gilead to Machir (Deut 3:15), and Ethiopia and Seba for Israel (Isa 43:3). He gave Jericho, its king, and all of its mighty men of valor to Israel (Josh 6:2). He gave the inhabitants of the land into the hand of David (1 Chron 22:18).

It is ever true, ***“For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another”*** (Psa 75:6-7). God took the kingdom from Saul, and gave it to David (1 Sam 15:28).

### *Why Dominion Was Given*

As to why this dominion was given, the Lord provides us with an excellent example in Nebuchadnezzar. Israel had not been faithful, so God empowered her enemies to triumph over her. His words are arresting. ***“I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the***

*pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand”* (Jer 27:5-8, NKJV).

### *What About the Innocent?*

Some might ask why innocent people suffer, as they did in the war made by the beast against the saints. Although the judgment was against Israel for her unfaithfulness, there were many who had not been unfaithful. We know the names of several of them—people who suffered in the judgment involving Nebuchadnezzar and succeeding kings, even though they themselves had not sinned. There were Daniel and the three Hebrew children. There were also Ezra and Nehemiah, and others with them. What about the prophets that lived in that period? Habakkuk, Joel, Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah.

God always triumphs, and Satan always loses. Our faith must take hold on this.

## THE WORLD IS THE BEAST’S REALM

*“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”* (Verse 8). The remarkable authority of the beast (political government) is a source of wonderment to those upon the earth. It is NOT impressive to those in heavenly realms. The throne of the universe is there. Like Satan and his angels, this *“beast”* has *“no place”* in heaven. The only place that can feel his influence is *“the earth.”*

Remember, Satan and his angels have been cast down *“to the earth”* (Rev 12:13). Now we read of a *“beast”* with universal dominion,

empowered by Satan, who is also in the earth. It simply is not possible for those who ***“love the world”*** to escape the dominion of Satan and his beast. They are, as it were, invincible in the worldly realm. Mark well what is declared in this text. ***“All who dwell on the earth will worship him.”*** Not a selective few, but ***“ALL.”*** Not just the weak, but ***“ALL.”*** Not the uneducated and underprivileged, but ***“ALL.”***

### **Who Are Those Who Dwell Upon the Earth?**

Some have concocted doctrines that provide convenient explanations for this text. They declare this refers to those who are left in the world AFTER the rapture has taken place. Mind you, no such doctrine is ever the point Apostolic elaboration. That is left for the purveyors of contemporary religious literature. I want to say emphatically that this is NOT the case.

First, the beast makes war ***“with the saints,”*** who are defined as those who ***“keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.”*** Were the saints removed from the earth, this would not be possible, for Satan and his hosts have no further access to heavenly realms from which they have been expelled.

Second, this is a letter written ***“to the churches.”*** It relates to the good fight of faith, and requires the attentiveness of all believers. Anyone who has an ***“ear to hear”*** is to give consideration to what is being said. It is an utter absurdity to think our hearts are to be enraptured by the contemplation of something wholly unrelated to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Those who ***“dwell upon the earth”*** are defined for us. There is no need for speculation, even though the remainder of Scripture clearly defines these people also. These are individuals ***“whose names are not written in the book of life”*** (Verse 8b). They are unrelated to ***“the***

***Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.***” They are not born again, and remain ***“dead in trespasses and sins”*** (Eph 2:1-2).

Just as God gave Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, He has given all who have rejected His Son to the beast. They will be unduly impressed by this worldly power, and give their allegiance to it. Their purported wisdom will not deliver them from the tyranny of this despotic power.

These are not ***“alive unto God,”*** do not have ***“ears to hear,”*** and are not a ***“new creation in Christ Jesus”*** (Rom 6:11; Deut 29:4; 2 Cor 5:17). They are dominated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). The love of the Father is not in them, and they have not been ***“joined to the Lord”*** (1 Cor 6:17).

Just as God gave Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, He has given all who have rejected His Son to the beast. They will be unduly impressed by this worldly power, and give their allegiance to it. Their purported wisdom will not deliver them from the tyranny of this despotic power.

### *A Brief Commentary*

History is strewn with the record of despots that have risen to rule over peoples who have rejected the King of kings. Those dominated by worldly wisdom theorize on how people should be able to come away from such dictators. They speak of how they should be overthrown, voted out, or displaced by some other means. Such people do not take a Sovereign God into consideration, who gives rebellious sinners into the hand of vicious rulers.

### *Our Own Country*

Our very own country is a case in point. With a noble beginning, good focus, and a prominent place for faith, this nation had its genesis. But over the years, it has veered from the course it once established. Overtaken by a quest for wealth, pleasure, and prominence, it is now dominated by the spirit of the wicked one. Politicians, entertainers, business men, philosophers, and purported scholars join forces to direct the affairs of men. But they all have something in common. They ***“dwell upon the earth.”*** Their minds are too small and their hearts too hard to rise into the heavenlies. Thus, they have been given over to the ***“beast”*** of worldly government. **It is quite possible that what we are experiencing is Divine judgment, not merely a miscarriage of justice.**

### **The Saints Have Nothing to Fear**

Those who do not ***“worship”*** the beast have nothing to fear from him. He will not be able to sever their connection with the Lord. Just as Egypt could not sever Joseph from his faith, nor Babylon destroy the faith of Daniel and the three Hebrew children, so the beast is powerless to cast the saints down. He cannot take their inheritance, destroy their faith, mitigate their joy, or cause them to be cut off from their God.

### *Some Will Suffer*

Do not suppose this means no believer will be subject to difficulty. Jesus warned His disciples of antagonism—opposition from high places. ***“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls”*** (Lk 21:16-19). The Lamb will sustain His people in the severest of times, as well as in the best of them. He does not say He will lift us out of trouble, but sustain us in it.

Let us have done with naive views of the Kingdom of God! We are

living in a world in which Satan, his angels, and his organizations are granted power! Those who dwell upon the earth will give their hearts and lives to ***“the beast.”*** They will shape their conduct by its demands, and subscribe to its edicts. But they only do so because their names are ***“not written in the book of life.”***

### **The Lamb Slain**

The ***“book of life”*** belongs to the Lamb! But notice what is said of this Lamb. He was ***“slain from the foundation of the world.”*** Some versions ascribe ***“from the foundation of the world”*** to the writing of the names in the book of life (NASB, RSV, NRSV). While this does not appear to be the intent of this verse, the teaching itself is not false. Elsewhere we are told believers were ***“chosen in Him before the foundation of the world”*** (Eph 1:4), and that they will receive a kingdom prepared for them ***“from the foundation of the world”*** (Matt 25:34).

The point of the text is that when our Savior was in the world, He was ***“slain”*** – ***“slain,”*** as it were, by the very spirit that empowered this beast. His death was in strict accord with Divine intent, and fulfilled an eternal purpose. Yet, in Christ’s death, we catch a glimpse of the spirit of the world. Hear the Spirit as he fairly shouts to us. ***“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”*** (1 Cor 2:7-8, NKJV).

Those who ***“dwell upon the earth”*** do not consider what it did to Jesus! They are ignorant of the fact that this is Satan’s realm, and that he is its ***“god”*** and ***“prince”*** (2 Cor 4:4; John 14:30). These are the people who ***“worship the beast.”*** These are the ones who ***“give their kingdom unto the beast”*** (Rev 17:17), and agree with its godless edicts. They gravitate to it because they rejected the Lord. No person

disbelieves with impunity.

## THE MESSAGE IS TO BE HEEDED

*“If anyone has an ear, let him hear”* (Verse 9). We have heard a somber message—but we are to listen to it! We presently occupy a hostile and dangerous realm. Satan is moving to and fro throughout the world. His principalities and powers are exercising influence in this realm. His demons concoct and perpetrate doctrines among men. As he is given authority by God, he empowers beast-like organizations that oppress saints and solicit the worship and adoration of sinners.

We are to arm ourselves for battle, while cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. How appropriate is the Spirit’s exhortation. *“Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against*

Get your mind up out of the earth, setting it on things above! Separate your affection from the temporal, and seek the things that are above. **Your only hope of survival is to have a heart for what is eternal!**

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:11-12). We are facing formidable foes, indeed!

This is equivalent to saying, *“If anyone has an ear, let him hear!”* Get your mind up out of the earth, setting it on things above! Separate your affection from the temporal, and seek the things that are above. **Your only hope of survival is to have a heart for what is eternal!** Be alert! Tune your spirit to the heavenly frequency! Stir up yourself to

take hold of God (Isa 64:7). Resist the devil, and do not be a partaker of the spirit of this world.

That is what it means to **“hear!”** It is not simply listening, but taking appropriate action. It is to bring these considerations into our thinking processes, where they are continually within the reach of our meditations.

### The Ultimate Outcome

**“He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword . . . ”** (Verse 10a). The beast, though he appears invincible, and even overcomes the saints, will realize utter defeat. In him God will demonstrate before an assembled universe that everyone reaps what they sow. Violence will be met with violence, and death with death. Thus it is written, **“Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity”** (Jer 15:2). Jesus also said, **“for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”** (Matt 26:52). Those with a propensity to violence do well to ponder these words!

The very means employed by worldly government to subdue others will be the means of its own demise. There really is no need to comment extensively on this. History confirms this to be the case. Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. The Medes and Persians fell to Greece. Greece fell to Rome. Rome fell to its enemies . . . etc., etc., etc.

Throughout the ages, the heavenly gallery has beheld the saints of God blessing their enemies, and submitting to such atrocities as

boggle the minds of men.

**The Patience and Faith  
of the Saints**

*“ . . . Here is the patience and the faith of the saints”* (Verse 10b). How is it that this phrase is found in this text? For one thing, it confirms the saints have not been removed from the earth, for both *“patience and faith”* are spiritual qualities experienced in this world.

The idea is that even though the saints are oppressed by this despotical power (to the point of being overcome), they do not retaliate! They refuse to avenge themselves, knowing that vengeance belongs to the lord alone. As it is written, *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:19-21).

Throughout the ages, the heavenly gallery has beheld the saints of God blessing their enemies, and submitting to such atrocities as boggle the minds of men. They saw Abel fall beneath the blows of his own brother, who was dominated by the one who animates the beast. They beheld Stephen stoned to death by those who worshiped the beast, while he prayed for their forgiveness. Above all, they beheld as the Son of Man was taken by *“the beast,”* beaten beyond recognition, and crucified in hatred and cruelty. Even then, He prayed for His oppressors. There *is “patience and faith”* exemplified in its fulness! It has proved superior to every assault of the devil, and the future will be no exception. Therefore, we do not worship the beast, but our Lord. We are equal to Satan’s venomous attack!

## CONCLUSION

We have considered an awesome text! In it are found a number of Kingdom principles—things that are consistently taught throughout Scripture. While we have been “*blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,*” we remain in a war zone. Satan has been empowered to exercise unspeakable influence in the world, and there are times when he is given to have remarkable influence. Saints will not always ride on the crest of the wave in this world, and those who imagine that is the case have been deceived. Unless they recover from this deception, their erroneous persuasion will be the means of their spiritual downfall.

It is time to declare war on naive and simplistic views of the life of faith. There are complexities related to our life in Christ that simply cannot be explained on an earthly level. The wisdom of men cannot account for the saints being overcome by an adversary by Divine permission. It cannot explain the rise of oppressive power, and the seeming invincibility of evil. All of man’s purported expertise cannot rid the world of violence or oppression. It withers and dies in the blazing heat of human experience. Those who resort to men, whether by books, political process, or earthly counsel, have stumbled over the Stumbling Stone.

We are not to be unduly impressed by appearances – like a powerful beast to whom is given global authority. Sometimes, *might* may appear more powerful than *right*. But that is only a temporary condition. Do not expect that your commitment to Christ will yield continuous apparent triumph. We are still in the time of testing and trial—the 1,260 days, as it were. Too, the fact that we are surrounded by a turbulent sea is not to cause us to tremble. There is grace to be in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, even when you are exiled on Patmos! The saints can have faith and patience, even in oppression and seeming defeat.

There is really only One who is the ultimate Conqueror, the Lord Jesus Christ. His triumph has been declared as already accomplished. Ours is promised, and is based upon His victory. Just as surely as Jesus was tried, so will you be tried. Even as He faced things that forced ***“strong cryings and tears”*** from Him, so you will face tests that cause you to cry out. Satan opposed and tempted Jesus, and he will do the same to you! Jesus was ***“crucified through weakness,”*** and you will also suffer setbacks through your weakness. The disciple is not above his Master.

But the end is not yet! The church will ultimately triumph over all its enemies—the devil, the beast, and the false prophet! As God brought the faithful Israelites through the wilderness to Canaan, so He will bring you through the earth to the world to come and your inheritance. Hold on, child of God! Hold on! Have faith and patience! They both come from God, and in abundant supplies! You can stand against the wiles of the devil! Required resources belong to you!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 25

## THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." (*Revelation 13:11-18, NKJV*)

## INTRODUCTION

In a rage, the devil has unleashed an attack against the people of God—***“the woman.”*** His attack is relentless, and it is calculating and shrewd. Under the strict control of the King of kings, he continues his assault until this very day.

When the church is weak, and loses its love for the truth, Satan is allowed to work more aggressively. He is effective in his objectives when truth is thrust into the background, and tradition is embraced as though it were from God Himself.

As I have pointed out, there are innocent people that suffer in these

attacks—individuals that have kept the faith, and have not compromised their love of the truth. Like Daniel was carried away in the Babylonian captivity, so these faithful ones are caught in the maelstrom of the wicked one. Yet, they do not lose their faith, and will be rewarded abundantly for keeping their grip on eternal life.

### **Another Adversary**

In this text, the devil raises up another adversary. Having failed to stamp out the church by means of earthly government and its legalized bloodshed of the saints, he now uses a different tactic. The objective is the same, and the spirit of iniquity will still prevail. This is “another *beast*,” although it appears docile and harmless. Remember, this is Satan’s besiegement of the church. Heaven has cried out “*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time*” (12:12). The cry is to be taken seriously! While “*He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4), His greatness is made effective to us only through our faith.

### **A Summons From Jesus**

Jesus summons the church into an acute awareness of their situation. They are to arm themselves for both defense and offense. Their adversary is seething with anger, and has a ceaseless hatred for them. Satan is creative in his aggression against believers. For this reason, they cannot be casual in their spiritual lives. They are not in a static situation, but one that is packed with intense activity. As the Spirit testifies, “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*” (Eph 6:12-13). Every believer must arm himself against an aggressive opponent!

We now confront a second *“beast”* that again confirms the essentiality of sobriety and vigilance. Whereas the first beast was obvious, and the confrontation more open, this attack is subtle. This foe does not rise from the agitation of society, but out of social calmness and serenity.

We are seeing a conflict of kingdoms. The *“kingdoms of the world”* are in direct contradiction to *“the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.”* His is an *“everlasting kingdom,”* while the kingdoms of this world are temporal, destined to be swallowed up by His unending Kingdom (Psa 145:13; Dan 4:3; 7:27; 2 Pet 1:11). Both beasts are from the earth—the temporal domain. They are raised up of Satan to draw men downward, to perdition. It is, after all, a beastly tendency to have our minds riveted to a passing world. Yet, that is the whole focus of Satan’s efforts. We are to prepare to resist his efforts.

## THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE SECOND BEAST

- Came from the earth
- Two horns like a lamb
- Spoke like a dragon
- Exercised power of first beast
- Caused earth to worship the first beast
- Does great wonders
- Deceives those in the earth
- Demanded men to make an image to the beast
- Had power to give life to the image
- Those not worshiping beast to be killed
- Caused all to receive a mark in right hand or forehead
- No man could buy or sell without the mark or number of his name
- His number is 666

*“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon”* (Verse 1). While the

first openly opposed the people of God, the second will seek to deceive them. Satan's first attempt to remove "*the woman*" from the earth was to swallow her up with violence. It did appear as though he was successful, for "*it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them*" (Rev 13:7). His attack did not, however, remove the saints, the faith, or the Scriptures from the face of the earth. The saints were driven underground, so to speak. They were, in the words of the Spirit, given wings to fly to a secret place, where a location of nourishment was prepared for them (Rev 12:14). Now, the devil seeks to lure them from their habitation by means of deception.

### **From the Earth**

This foe does not come from a turbulent society, but from one that has been settled under the orderliness of government. This foe is characterized by earthly wisdom, as well as a certain attractiveness. Earth is its habitat, with all of its wisdom and lure. It rises from the cursed realm, not the one that has been blessed.

### **Satan Employs Earthly Powers**

We learn from this that Satan employs earthly powers and capabilities in his insurrection against Christ, and His opposition of the people of God. The closer a person is to "*this present evil world,*" the more apt he is to be used by Satan. That is where Satan obtains his motley forces—the earth. "*This world*" is a seed bed for the growth of distraction (Matt 13:22). It is the realm to which Jesus does NOT belong, and from which His Kingdom is separate (John 8:23; 18:36). Satan is its "*prince*" (John 16:11), and its "*fashion,*" or present form, is "*passing away*" (12 Cor 7:31). *Whatever, therefore, has its genesis in that realm is not good.* It is something Satan employs against the saints of the Most High God.

### **Horns Like A Lamb**

Until this time, there has only been one Personality associated with a lamb – the Son of the Living God (5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8). He will be the dominant One throughout the remainder of this book– ***“the Lamb”*** (14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:14,22,23; 22:1,3). But here is a single reference to another entity that bears some resemblance to a lamb.

This beast does not look like a lamb, but only has a single trait that is likened to that of this gentle creature. This is the only reference in all of Scripture to ***“horns like a lamb.”*** Abraham found a ram with horns (Gen 22:13). The Psalmist spoke of ***“the horns”*** of the unicorn, or wild oxen (Psa 22:21), as well as those of an ox and bullock (Psa 69:31). But none of those references are parallel to the one that is now before us.

### **Prophet’s Mentioned Horns**

The war now moves to a more dangerous arena, where iniquity is not quite as evident. If Satan is going to lure the people of God into the cursed realm, he must do his best to replicate the Son of God.

Daniel saw a ram with ***“two horns.”*** The horns did not originate simultaneously, and were not of the same size. The one which came last grew to be the highest (Dan 8:3). He was later told, ***“The ram which you saw, having the two horns; they are the kings of Media and Persia”*** (Dan 8:20, NKJV). Zechariah saw four horns, depicting kingdoms that had scattered the children of Israel (Zech 1:18-21). In the visions of Daniel and Zechariah, horns depicted adversarial kings and kingdoms. But that is not the case before us. Rams are aggressive, but lambs are not.

## **Satan's Emulation of Jesus**

Here is the devil's attempt to emulate the Lord Jesus. You may recall the conquering Lamb had "*seven horns,*" depicting perfect and complete power (Rev 5:6). What we behold in "*two horns like a lamb*" is partial and delegated power. They are horns "*like a lamb,*" but are not the horns OF a lamb. This is a depiction of a peaceful appearance: i.e., non-threatening. This beast does not have apparent traits like a leopard, lion, or bear. Rather, it comes veiled as a gentle and amenable lamb.

### **A Religious Appearance**

This is a religious appearance. The war now moves to a more dangerous arena, where iniquity is not quite as evident. If Satan is going to lure the people of God into the cursed realm, he must do his best to replicate the Son of God. Indeed, this what he does, raising up an adversary that appears related to Christ. It is orderly, not seemingly hostile, and attractive to those dwelling upon the earth.

### **Spoke Like A Dragon**

We are not allowed to linger on this vision long without being alerted to the nature of this second "*beast.*" It had horns like a lamb, but not the mouth of a lamb. When he spoke, his intent became more obvious. He "*spoke like a dragon.*" His appearance was of a godly order, but what he said was of an ungodly order.

The appearance of this beast bears some resemblance to the appearance of the "*old serpent*" to Eve. It was not the appearance of the serpent that derailed Eve, but his words. The serpent, we are apprized, was not more powerful than any beast of the field., but "*more subtle*" (Gen 3:1). Now, after several millennia, "*the enemy*" again resorts to craftiness. He raises an opponent whose words are subverting,

perverse, and evil. They will lure men toward the bottomless pit in the name of religion.

### **False Teachers To Come**

Peter , Jude, and Paul warned of this devilish tactic. ***“Even as there shall be false teachers among you , who privily shall bring in damnable heresies”*** (2 Pet 2:1). ***“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Jude 4). ***“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you , not sparing the flock”*** (Acts 20:29).

### **The Undoing of Many**

Many who could not be intimidated by bloody persecution, were successfully deceived by specious reasoning. That is the most dangerous of all attacks. Carnal men imagine that bodily harm is the worst of all aggression. But that is not so. The invasion of the realm of thought has proved to be a greater weapon against the saints. Those who have the horns of a lamb, but the mouth of a dragon, are more to be feared than those who are swift like a leopard, ruthless as a bear, and dominating as a lion. Remember, it was a lie that brought our race down at the first.

## **LIKE THE FIRST BEAST, AND ALIGNED WITH SATAN**

***“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence . . . ”*** (Verse 12). If the people of God are to be overcomers, they must expect to face an opponent like this. God does not promise

the faithful will be spared from confronting such a subtle and dangerous foe. Mark it well, if Satan's objective is to destroy "*the woman*" – the people of God– why would anyone imagine we are reading of a period of time when there were no people of God, no church, no one aligned with the conquering lamb? The very notion is too foolish to embrace.

### **The Church Is Not Gone**

And what is there about the ungodly that would require such subtlety on Satan's part? Why would he come disguised as a lamb if there were no one following the lamb? Why is such an elaborate strategy required if the church had already been snatched from the earth–removed from the God-glorifying arena of warfare? Those who embrace such theologies need to listen to the message of this book!

### **Satan In his Most Subtle Assault**

Here is Satan in his most deceptive approach. While the foe *looks* different, it is not. "***He exercises ALL the authority of the first beast.***" Satan's original intent has not been abandoned. He has only changed his appearance! It is one thing to face an angry foe, it is quite another to face one that is shrewd, calculating, and scheming. This is the one aspect of Satan's opposition that concerned Paul the most. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians, "***But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ***" (2 Cor 11:3, NKJV).

### *Organized Forces*

Working through organized forces, Satan will now seek to corrupt

The devil will embark upon an initiative of gigantic proportions. The political endeavors he fostered were

unspeakably large and influential. Now he will initiate a religious offensive that will bear the same traits.

and defile the truth. He will leave men thinking they have embraced the truth, yet actually having embraced a lie—that is deception. The words of the second beast will have the character of the dragon, but they will appear to be of Christ. The devil will embark upon an initiative of gigantic proportions. The political endeavors he fostered were unspeakably large and influential. Now he will initiate a religious offensive that will bear the same traits. It will come in the name of Christ (horns of a lamb), but will have the character of Satan (mouth like a dragon).

### *Delusion Is Powerful*

Do not imagine that delusion is somehow less powerful, less dangerous, or less to be feared! This second beast ***“exercised all the power of the first beast.”*** He only appeared less powerful, but it was not any less effective! A person with a trained and disciplined mind might think himself adequate for any challenge to the mind, but such a posture is an imagination of the worst order. If pure and undefiled Eve, possessed of undefiled wisdom and without contamination, could be deceived by Satan, what will be the lot of those who have ***“sinned and come short of the glory of God?”*** Men do well not to bow at the shrine of worldly wisdom, human logic, or other forms of philosophy.

### **Some Differences In The Beasts**

Before going further, I want to point out some differences between the two beasts. These differences will emphasize the nature of Satan’s shrewd hostility against the people of God.

- The first makes war (13:4-7). The second deceives with miracles (13:14).
- The first succeeds by force (13:7-10). The second makes gains by persuasion (13:14).

- The first rules with fear (13:4). The second rules with craft and chicaneries (13:13-14).
- The first teaches to worship the dragon (13:4). The second teaches to worship the first beast (15:15).
- The first slays openly (13:10). The second puts men under social ban (13:16-17).
- The first has power from the dragon (13:2). The second has power from the first beast (13:12-15).
- The first blasphemes openly (13:1,6). The second deceives (13:15).

### **Both Forms Employed Simultaneously**

Today, both forms of oppression are being experienced – political and religious; oppression and deception. Many grieve over the bloody and heartless persecution of fellow believers throughout the world—and grieve we must. We are to remember those suffering in this manner—our brethren. ***“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them; those who are mistreated; since you yourselves are in the body also”*** (Heb 13:3).

However, there are precious few who lament the other type of tyranny leveled against the saints—that of deception. Throughout history, this has always been Satan’s most successful ploy. It has also been the subject of the most stern Apostolic warnings. The second beast does not appear as dangerous, but it has dragged more souls into hell than the first one! Satan’s assaults against the church increase in intensity, as they are allowed by God to be initiated.

### **Points of Similarity**

Seeing the similarities between the two beasts will assist us in seeing the danger of the one we are now considering.

- Both are opponents of God, the truth, and the saints.

- Both are haughty, heaping attention unto themselves.
- Both bring suffering to those who will not give heed to them .
- Both try the patience and faith of the saints.
- Both have exceedingly broad power.
- Both are phenomenally successful from earth's point of view.
- Both are aligned with Satan.
- There is perfect unity between them.

If ever there was a time for the saints to be sober and vigilant, it is today. It is a time when both beasts are trampling upon the truth and the people of God. While there were historical periods where only one beast ruled at a time, now both are active and powerful. If believers are going to overcome the devil, they must be armed to stand against persecution AND delusion. Their hearts must be so knit with the Lord they can withstand threats of death and perils of being ostracized.

### *We Are To Be Serious*

Right here we strike at the heart of the matter. The first beast is earthly government, promoting itself as the object of trust. Thus Satan brings individuals to place confidence in men rather than in God; to trust in horses rather than the Lord. That is what makes it so beastly!

Satan is serious in his aggression. We are to be serious in our determination to lay hold on eternal life. This is not the time for casual religion! Let every child of God ***“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”*** (Eph 6:11). It will be adequate to withstand the assaults of Satan from the first and second beasts.

## Causes Worship of the First Beast

“ . . . and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Verse 13b). Remember, the first beast is a representation of earthly government—of the confederation of men. Such unification is not for God’s glory, but is always focused upon men making a name for themselves. Coalitions like this started at Babel. It displeased God then, and similar partnerships still displease Him (Gen 11:1-8). At that time, the people feared being scattered, and so came together to make for themselves “*a name*.” They imagined that protection would be guaranteed by such an alliance. God was displeased with the whole affair because they did not put their trust in Him. They proceeded just as though there was no God at all.

### *The Nature of the First beast*

The first beast is Satan’s capitalization on this kind of confederation for purposes of opposing the church. Let no man take it upon himself to “*despise government*” (2 Pet 2:10), as though every man was an island unto himself. Believers are to “*honor the king*” (1 Pet 2:17). **However, their faith is to be in God not the king!**

Right here we strike at the heart of the matter. The first beast is earthly government, promoting itself as the object of trust. Thus Satan brings individuals to place confidence in men rather than in God; to trust in horses rather than the Lord. That is what makes it so beastly!

### *Worship of the First Beast Promoted*

The second beast promotes the worship of the first beast. This is not a superficial promotion. It is written that he “*causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast*.” The consolidation of human influences is thus viewed as superior to the God of heaven. Under the

jurisdiction of the second beast, men come to highly regard human organization—particularly when it is religious. The church itself is seen as taking the place of God. The Father is no longer seen as Sovereign and active. The Son is not perceived as ruling and reigning. The Holy Spirit is not considered indispensable to the execution of the will of God. The holy angels are not thought integral to the whole matter of our salvation. In fact, truth itself is put into a secondary position.

### *When The Institution Is Dominant*

**Under such an arrangement, the institution is everything!** The first beast is “*worshiped*” when men give their minds and lives to the institutionalized church. Those in religious high places put themselves into the place of God, requiring of men what God has not required of them. I will develop this subject more fully in this lesson. Suffice it to say, this represents a most serious Satanic initiative. While men have learned to live with it, there must arise some who will not concede to this beastly attack.

## SUPERNATURAL POWERS

*“ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men ”* (Verse 13). Here is a vivid depiction of delusion or deception. Those with a penchant for the supernatural will surely fall prey to Satan’s devices. It is one thing to long for the Lord to work in the behalf of His people, like Gideon did (Judges 6:13). It is quite another to want to see something supernatural. The occult, mystic, and soothsayer can produce things beyond the realm of nature as well. **Our hearts had best be ravished with truth, not external phenomena!**

### **Satan Has Done This Before**

The “**signs**” performed by this beast are not mediocre, if there be such a thing. They are “**great signs.**” Let it be clear, Satan has always employed this method when given leave by God to do so. The magicians of Egypt turned their rods into serpents, turned water into blood, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt (Ex 7:10-12,22; 8:7). Moses spoke of false prophets that cause a sign or wonder to come to pass, then call men to follow a false god (Deut 13:1-2). Jesus spoke of the coming of false christs and false prophets that would “**show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect**” (Matt 24:24). King Saul, after having defected from God, confronted the witch of Endor, who brought up Samuel from the unseen world (much to her own consternation, 1 Sam 28:7-21). After the enthronement of Jesus, a sorcerer named Simon “**bewitched the people of Samaria,**” using his sorceries (Acts 8:9-11). Paul wrote of a time of apostasy attended **by “signs and lying wonders”** (2 Thess 2:9-12).

Some men, sifting truth through their pseudo-scholarship, choose to denigrate the very notion of miracles. Our text, will affirm they were the very means by which Satan deceived those dwelling upon the earth.

#### *No More Miracles?*

There are some purported scholars who deny supernatural phenomenon has occurred at the instigation of Satan. They affirm such things are mere apparitions. But they do greatly err, and disarm the people of God with their scholastic nonsense. Satan himself is transcendent to nature, and employs tactics with which the natural man cannot contend. Jesus spoke of those who would, in the day of judgment, profess they had “**cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders**” in His name (Matt 7:22). Our Lord did not charge them with lying, but affirmed He did not know them—i.e., they had not

worked in alliance with Him.

Some men, sifting truth through their pseudo-scholarship, choose to denigrate the very notion of miracles. Our text, will affirm they were the very means by which Satan deceived those dwelling upon the earth.

### **He Makes Fire Come Down**

Here is the beast's attempt to replicate the real power of God. You may recall that destructive power came from God's two witnesses. What is said of that fire differs, however, from what this beast does. ***“And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner”*** (Rev 11:5). While the two witnesses brought fire from their mouths, the beast calls it down from heaven. It might be thought that this miracle was like that of Elijah, who also called fire down from heaven (2 Kgs 1:12-14). However, there is a difference. The fire that proceeded from the mouth of the two witnesses, and the fire called down by Elijah, destroyed their enemies. The second beast, however, causes fire to come down from heaven, but with no destructive power upon its enemies, who are the saints.

#### *In The Lower Climes*

What this beast does is appropriately described as ***“on the earth in the sight of men.”*** The arena in which this arch-foe operates in the cursed realm. By way of comparison, what the Lord is doing is a matter of intrigue to holy angels (Eph 3:10-11), departed saints (Rev 6:9-11), and the four living creatures (Rev 5:6-14). But the second beast, only impresses those who choose to dwell below- upon the earth. It should be noted, our only safety is in the heavenly places.

## **DECEPTION AND SUBTLETY**

*“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived”* (Verse 14). The passage parallels a revelation given in Second Thessalonians. There, delusion is said to come from God because men refused to receive the love of the truth. *“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thess 2:8-12).

The *“lawless one”* is associated with this *“second beast.”* Working in alliance with Satan, he comes with all power, signs, and lying wonders, with all unrighteous deception among perishing ones. That parallels the second beast deceiving those dwelling upon the earth with signs. The fact that God sends the strong delusion is another way of saying the enemy had been *“granted”* authority to work these deceptive signs.

### **Dwelling Upon the earth**

A church whose mind is pinned to the earth will be overcome by Satan! There is not the slightest chance of survival while occupied with this present evil world. While this is obvious from Scripture, it is virtually unknown in the nominal church.

The ones deceived are those dwelling upon the earth. Those are precisely the ones who worshiped the first beast, giving him the honor due the Lord alone (13:8). This is a description of those whose affection is placed upon earthly things. It does not speak of the physical, but the spiritual condition. Herein is the reason for the admonition, ***“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”*** (Col 3:2). For believers, their vulnerable part is their ***“members which are upon the earth”*** (Col 3:5)—their natural, or Adamic, part. While they are on the earth, they are ***“strangers and pilgrims”*** in it (Heb 11:13). Our text speaks of those who ***“dwell on the earth”***—who are at home here, and have placed their affection here. This is the spiritual portrait of their condition.

### **The Contradiction of a Carnal Church**

A church whose mind is pinned to the earth will be overcome by Satan! There is not the slightest chance of survival while occupied with this present evil world. While this is obvious from Scripture, it is virtually unknown in the nominal church. Congregations, familiar to many of us, are filled with people who, in the language of our text, ***“dwell upon the earth.”*** Their thoughts are not godly, heaven-centered, or dominated by a love of the truth. They fall into the category of ***“those who dwell upon the earth.”***

To be ***“carnal and walk as men”*** (1 Cor 3:3-4) is never a commendable situation, and always a jeopardous one. Those who are a friend of the world are THE enemies of God (James 4:4). The ***“carnal”*** mind is the epitome of enmity, or hostility, toward God. Those dominated by such a mind are, in the words of our text, ***“dwellers in the earth.”***

And what will be the portion of such individuals? ***“God will send them strong delusion!”*** They will be taken in by the deceptions of the second beast! They will not be able to survive the Satanic assault, for

the Lord will not allow them to do so. If men will not trust in the Living God, they will fall prey to the deceptions of the devil. There is no way to avoid this from happening.

### *The Spiritual Will Be Victorious*

Those who are granted to “*sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:6) will not be deceived by this religious beast. From their lofty position, and because they have received the love of the truth, they are made superior to the beastly tactics of the evil one. Thus is the Scripture fulfilled, “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

I know of few spiritual perspectives so universally rejected as this one. Most of the *Christianity* with which we are confronted is nothing more than the prating of the second beast. **The church institutionalized is, in fact, the second beast.** It has trusted in organization for its power and effectiveness, and walks aloof from God.

### *Institutionalism*

Perhaps an explanation of how I am using “*institutionalized*” is in order. An “*institution,*” as I am using the term, is a confederation of men without the animating Spirit of God. It is a religious organization that has, at best, only the shell, or form, of the truth. It denies the power of the truth, choosing rather to trust in human wisdom.

### *Perilous Times*

This is what the Spirit referred to when He spoke of perilous times. “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving,*

*unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* The reaction of the saints to such powerless religion is mandated from heaven. *“And from such people turn away!”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). That word is to be taken seriously!

### *The Weakness of Institutionalism*

The reign of the second beast is the age of spiritual delusion – a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while denying the power thereof. The tactics employed in such a time are declared by the Spirit.

An institutionalized church has a lot of trouble with sin—sin in all forms. That is because humanly-devised plans and disciplines have no Divine power. At the very best, they can only get at the shell of the truth, but never at its power. The very existence of powerless religion is evidence of the working of Satan. This is the second beast. It comes with horns like a meek and lowly lamb, but a mouth that belches out Satanic delusions.

### *Some Examples*

Throughout church history, there have been signs and lying wonders wrought before dwellers on the earth. Time would fail us to mention but a sampling of them. Romish traditions are recorded in the Breviar. Of this book, Grollier’s Encyclopedia says, *In Roman Catholic worship, the breviary--from the Latin breviarium (summary, compendium)--is a book or books containing the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, a collection of prayers, psalms, and biblical readings recited at different hours of the day. It dates from the Middle Ages, when it formed the basis of the Book of Hours. The breviary has been revised several times in recent years.*

The following accounts are recorded in this official volume.

- St. Francis turned enough salt water into fresh water to save the lives of 500 travelers who were perishing of thirst. The surplus was sent over the world and performed miraculous cures.
- St. Raymond laid his cloak upon the sea and sailed upon it, as a boat, 150 miles in six hours.
- The dying Juliana could not swallow when the priest came to offer her the consecrated wafer. He laid it on her stomach, and it immediately disappeared from view.

(A Vision of the Ages, p150, B.W. Johnson)

Let none suppose that this constitutes a denial of the miraculous order. The signs and lying wonders wrought by the second beast are not for the glory of God, but for the honor of the beast. They lure men from the truth, and obscure the Gospel to their hearts. In such signs, the institution is the point, and not the souls of men.

### **The Age of Delusion**

The reign of the second beast is the age of spiritual delusion – a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while denying the power thereof. The tactics employed in such a time are declared by the Spirit.

*Smooth Words and Flattering Speech*     ***“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”*** (Rom 16:18). Satan attempts to penetrate the minds of men by appealing to the flesh. He does not promote edification or the clarifying of the truth, but the pacification of the carnal nature. The second beast formalizes this approach.

### *Peddling the Word*

***“For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ”*** (2 Cor 2:17). In this case, the Word of God is used to bolster human objectives. It is not declared to implement Divine purposes, but to promote an earthly agenda. Such approaches do not have eternity in focus. The second beast institutionalizes this approach.

### *Deceitful Workers*

***“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”*** (2 Cor 11:13-15). The devil, working through men, and particularly institutions, replicates apostles and ministers of righteousness. He comes wearing the mask of *Christianity*. However, he is the one behind the efforts so described. The second beast will organize this type of effort.

### *Trickery of Men*

***“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting”*** (Eph 4:14). In this case, human wisdom is vaunted above the wisdom of God. The human mind is exalted to a place of prominence, assigning to it Divine qualities. Men are not thus ***“persuaded”*** by spiritual reasoning (Acts 26:28; 2 Cor 5:11). Rather, deceptive tactics are employed that convince men they are receiving more than is actually delivered. The second beast systematizes this approach, making it an official organ of religion.

## *Not Holding the Head*

The devil, working through men, and particularly institutions, replicates apostles and ministers of righteousness. He comes wearing the mask of *Christianity*. However, he is the one behind the efforts so described. The second beast will organize this type of effort.

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments” (Col 2:18-19). While real ministers of God speak what they **“know”** (John 4:22; 2 Tim 1:12), Satan’s messengers do not so speak. Coming in the name of Christ, they speak of things they do not understand. They cannot handle eternal things, yet they speak of them. The second beast institutionalizes this approach, making it common in religious circles.

## *Fables and Endless Genealogies*

***“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia; remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith”*** (1 Tim 1:3-4). One of the greatest enemies of the people of God is institutionalized folklore. Scripture calls it the ***“tradition of men”*** (Mark 7:8; Col 2:8). Such leads men to trust in a heritage rather than the Lord. It leads them to have confidence in a position rather than in the Lord. The second beast so structures this approach that it will have strong appeal to those living at a distance from God.

## *Idle Talkers and Deceivers*

***“For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain”*** (Tit 1:10-11). An idle, or vain, talker, is someone who brings no real benefit to the saints. Their speech is like the wind, giving no advantage to the individual fighting the good fight of faith. The second beast formalizes such speaking, bringing acclaim to those foolish enough to accept his postulates.

### *Trying to Deceive*

***“These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you”*** (1 John 2:26). Real men and women of God make every attempt to edify, strengthen, and equip the people of God. The second beast, however, has its own agenda, and deceives men into adopting that program. It functions without Jesus, the Spirit, or the truth of God. It requires no Intercessor, no reward in heaven, and no vivifying hope.

### **Make An Image**

***“ . . . telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.”*** The beast speaks persuasively to those who ***“dwell on the earth,”*** telling them to ***“make an image to the beast.”*** It is the same beast that had already received a mortal wound, but was still alive. Earlier, we are told, ***“the deadly wound was healed”*** (13:3). Although the first beast suffered a devastating defeat, yet the world is persuaded something good remains in it.

I have said the first beast is political power—the organization of men and the institution of a humanly devised object of trust. Such government found its apex in Rome, but was dashed to the ground after more than a millennium of global reign. Now, under the auspices of Satan, the principle of earthly government, already proved to be

inferior, is again aggressively and effectively promoted.

The *“image of the beast”* is prominent in the remainder of this book. It is linked with *“the beast,”* being a projection of its purpose. This *“image”* is mentioned four times in verses 13 and 14. The image is *“made,”* given *“life”* and *“speaks,”* causes the death of those who refuse to worship it, and is worshiped by those dwelling upon the earth.

Other references made to the *“image”* of the beast are found in 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. They include his *“mark,”* *“worship,”* and those gaining the victory over it. We do well to get a grasp of its significance. It represents our adversary as a very crafty one.

## POWER IS GIVEN TO DESTROY

*“He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed”* (Verse 15). When we read of such judgments, we are bound to exclaim with the Apostle, *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”* (Rom 11:33-36, NKJV). We are beholding the inscrutable workings of the Lord. This is how He is *“working salvation in the midst of the earth”* (Psa 74:12). It is involved in the *“whole earth”* being *“full of His glory”* (Isa 6:3).

### Breath to the Image

Not only is this enemy granted to deceive those dwelling upon the earth through miracles, he is also granted to empower the image of the beast. A very fundamental perspective is unveiled in this text. First, *the image has no life of itself*. It is but a shell, or form, with no real attractiveness or ability. It is the creation of men, and as such must be made to *appear* alive and powerful.

This is language that speaks of deceit, duplicity, and trickery. Stripped of its imagery, power was granted to the second beast to make political power appear preferable, mighty, and to be obeyed. The organization of mortals and the institution of human laws are made to appear more productive than they really are. Remember, this is an ***“image of the beast”*** – a Satanic means of ascribing preeminence to human confederations.

### **The Embodiment of Pride**

Here is human pride institutionalized. Scripture frequently associates pride with mighty men, or the earth’s concept of power. A single example will suffice to confirm this point. ***“Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength”*** (1 Sam 2:3-4). Ultimately, this is a trait of the devil himself, who is the power behind both the first and second beasts. Solemnly, the Lord warned Israel to avoid this attitude, which has characterized all earthly governments. ***“Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God . . . Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein . . . Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God . . . And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth . . . ”*** (Deut 8:11-20).

This is a human trait, fostered by Satan, that constrains groups of men

to forget they are but men. They know nothing of the perception of the Psalmist, ***“Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah”*** (Psa 9:20). Arrogantly, such confederations blot God from their memory. Of them it is written, ***“Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names”*** (Psa 49:11). They draw attention to themselves, ***“proclaiming their own goodness”*** (Prov 20:6).

### **Destined to failure**

The ***“image of the beast”*** is the aggressive promotion of this view of greatness. In it, Divine qualities such as provision, protection, and enablement, are ascribed to human organization. The institution, whether political or religious, is imagined to be everything. It alone can qualify the individual for acceptance. The spirit was first promoted at Babel—the first known attempt of institutionalism (Gen 11:1-10). God frustrated the effort then, and will ultimately bring down all similar attempts.

It makes little difference to the deceived that the Almighty brought down the most majestic and impressive forms of such power. Assyria, Babylon and Persia, Greece and Rome, all fell—even though they were the epitome of organization and convention. In them was fulfilled the word of the Lord, ***“Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished”*** (Prov 11:21, NKJV).

### **Granted Power to**

### **Give the Image Life**

Even though history confirms the futility of organization that obviates God, the notion of its superiority and preference is revived. It is contrary to reason and revelation, yet is made attractive to men. This is

a vivid portrayal of “*strong delusion.*” It is sent by God, but implemented by the devil through those who are alienated from the life of God.

This is the church organized after the manner of the world. God is not at the heart of things, but men are the heartbeat of the organization. The organization itself is the point, and not the purpose of God.

Notice, while the first beast is said to have recovered from its deadly wound (13:12), it is not the one that empowers its image. It is the second beast who is granted authority to enliven the corrupt notion that human alliance is somehow superior. Those who know the Lord are persuaded of the foolishness of such an imagination. Adam fell. Babel fell. Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome fell. For this reason, Satan does not use the first beast to give life to its image—the thought that it is superior. *To put it another way, he does not raise up another impressive political power.* The old serpent, when given authority to move, does not produce another world empire.

### **A Religious Power**

This time, the shape of political power will be replicated in a religious institution. This will sanctify the thought in the mind of the lifeless masses—those who dwell upon the earth. It will have a religious appearance (the horns of a lamb), but the character of the devil ( the mouth of a dragon).

This “*image*” will have all of the marks of human ambition and pride, yet come in the name of the Lord. Satan made an attempt to draw the very disciples of Christ into the vortex of this delusion. Remember when they disputed among themselves “*who should be the greatest*” (Mk 9:33-34)? That is the frame of spirit that is formalized in the image

of the beast. It is a religious system in which men seek honor from one another, instead of seeking it from God alone (John 5:44).

### **Government Plus Religion, with Government Being Dominant**

Giving life to the image of the beast is nothing less than an attempted coalition of earthly government with religion. In this alliance, however, human government is the dominating influence, not religion. This represents a new and formidable initiative by Satan against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

#### *The Church Organized Like the World*

This is the church organized after the manner of the world. God is not at the heart of things, but men are the heartbeat of the organization. The organization itself is the point, and not the purpose of God. Historically, State religions, which are the most apparent form of this attack, came into prominence. In them, the shell of the truth was maintained to some degree, but the power was in the organization.

The mother of such coalitions is the Roman Catholic Church, which first brought governmental pomp and splendor into the religious arena. But it certainly did not end there. There is the German Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, English Anglican, Greek Orthodox, etc. This is not intended to denigrate any individual associated with these organizations. *In such alliances, however, the political framework has always overridden the spiritual substance.* Those who have resisted or opposed the authority of the organization have consistently been viewed as its enemies, and threats to its existence.

We will find *that “the image of the beast”* is not confined to large State-churches. It can be found down to the congregational level, where a worldly perspective of authority is instituted and honored. You may

recall that such a spirit was found of old time in Diotrophes, who *“loved to have the preeminence,”* and refused to recognize the Apostles (3 John 9). This spirit is still thriving.

### **Non-Worshippers Killed**

The second beast is also granted power to cause *“as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”* Under the reign of the second beast, the acid test of acceptance will be allegiance to the worldly concept of power. Those who refuse to bow will be *“killed.”* This is to be taken both literally and spiritually. Some of the most dreadful of all persecutions have been instituted by, what we call, State-churches. A most notable example was *“Bloody Mary,”* who ruled England as Queen Mary I from 1553. A devout Roman Catholic, she *“earned the epithet Bloody Mary for the executions of Protestants that occurred during her reign”* (Grollier’s Encyclopedia) . The sin of those she slaughtered was their failure to recognize the power of the Catholic church. History says of the Mennonites, *“Because Mennonites refused to assume state offices, to serve as police or soldiers, or to take*

The papal Inquisition was formally instituted by Pope Gregory IX in 1231. Following a law of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, enacted for Lombardy in 1224 and extended to the entire empire in 1232, Gregory ordered convicted heretics to be seized by the secular authorities and burned. Like Frederick, Gregory also mandated that heretics be sought out and tried before a church court. For this purpose, he first appointed special inquisitors (for example, Conrad of Marburg in Germany and Robert le Bougre in Burgundy) and later entrusted the task to members of the newly established Dominican and Franciscan orders of friars. The independent authority of the inquisitors was a frequent cause of friction with the local clergy and bishops.

### **Procedures**

During the 13th century, the typical procedure began with the arrival of the inquisitors in a specific locality. A period of grace was proclaimed for penitent heretics, after which time denunciations were accepted from anyone, even criminals and other heretics. Two informants whose identity was unknown to the victim were usually sufficient for a charge. The court then summoned the suspect, conducted an interrogation, and tried to obtain the confession that was necessary for conviction. In order to do this, assisting secular authorities frequently applied physical torture. This practice probably started in Italy under the impact of rediscovered Roman civil law and made use of such painful procedures as stretching of limbs on the rack, burning with live coals, squeezing of

fingers and toes, or the strappado, a vertical rack.

At the beginning of the interrogation, which was recorded summarily in Latin by a clerk, suspects and witnesses had to swear under oath that they would reveal everything. Unwillingness to take the oath was interpreted as a sign of adherence to heresy. If a person confessed and was willing to submit, the judges prescribed minor penances like flogging, fasts, prayers, pilgrimages, or fines. In more severe cases the wearing of a yellow "cross of infamy," with its resulting social ostracism, or imprisonment could be imposed. Denial of the charges without counterproof, obstinate refusal to confess, and persistence in the heresy resulted in the most severe punishments: life imprisonment or execution accompanied by total confiscation of property. Since the church was not permitted to shed blood, the sentenced heretic was surrendered to the secular authorities for execution, usually by burning at the stake. When the Inquisition had completed its investigations, the sentences were pronounced in a solemn ceremony, known as the *sermo generalis* ("general address") or, in Spain, as the *auto-da-fe* ("act of faith"), attended by local dignitaries, clergy, and townspeople. Here the penitents abjured their errors and received their penalties; obstinate heretics were solemnly cursed and handed over to be burned immediately in public.

Several inquisitors' manuals have survived, among them those of Bernard Gui and Nicolas Eymeric. Other sources include checklists of standard questions and numerous official minutes of local inquisitions. Some of these materials have been published, but most exist in manuscript only.

The first inquisitors worked in central Europe (Germany, northern Italy, eastern France). Later centers of the Inquisition were established in the Mediterranean regions, especially southern France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The tribunal was used in England to suppress the Lollards (followers of the 14th-century reformer John Wycliffe). Queen Mary I of England (r. 1553-58) used the tribunal in her effort to reverse the Protestant Reformation.

oaths of loyalty, they were considered subversive and as such severely persecuted” (Grollier’s).

Several inquisitions were formed against Christians who refused to bow to earthly religious power. Officially defined, *“The Inquisition was a medieval church court instituted to seek out and prosecute heretics.”* **Under figure #1** , I have recorded a rather lengthy statement concerning the inquisitions from Grollier’s Encyclopedia. There are countless historic and encyclopedic references to confirm the existence of this opposition, should you choose to research it.

## **They Would Not Worship The Image of the Beast**

And what was the transgression of these multitudes that were slain by the State in the name of devotion to true religion? They ***“would not worship the image of the beast!”*** They refused to recognize the supremacy of earth-centered power! Oh, the tragedy of such a blotch on human history! But when religious men lose their love for the truth, and submit to join hands with the wicked, the pure in heart will be oppressed! It is no wonder Jehu said to king Jehosaphat, ***“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?”*** (2 Chron 18:1; 19:2; 20:35).

Whatever may be said for the union of church and state, such alliances have left a bloody trail in history. It should be apparent to every discerning soul that human pride and organization will not bow the knee to Jesus or submit to operate under His Headship! Conversely, the real saints refuse to bow to it. There is an unavoidable clash between the powers of this world and the saints of the Most High God.

## **THE MARK OF THE BEAST**

***“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads . . . ”*** (Verse 16-17). We now come to an extremely controversial section of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is imperative that we remove our hearts from idle curiosity, and refuse to be dominated by human wisdom. Our text is exposing us to the tactical move of the devil. It is his effort to destroy the saints. If we forget that, we will fall into the sea of confusion.

### **Not Omniscient**

At first our text states the second beast caused all who would not

worship the image of the first beast to be killed. The individuals who refused to acknowledge the authority of religious demagogues were thus slain. But the matter does not end there. The second beast is not omniscient. He does not know all of the people of God, any more than Jezebel knew all of the prophets of God (1 Kgs 19:18). Therefore, the second beast institutes a procedure that will restrict, both buying and selling, receiving and giving. Only those who submit to his power will be permitted to make exchange.

### **Spiritual Perspective Required**

Some choose to believe this passage has reference to restrictions in social commerce. This view of the text, however, does not blend well with the message Christ gives. This is not to mean that such a ban could not occur, or that the procurement and distribution of commodities will, not be restricted by some despot. But that is not the intent of these words.

This is a system that attempts to combine earth with heaven. In such a combination, earth always dominates. Flesh plus Spirit always equals flesh. This world plus heaven always equals this world. When an attempt is made to join the things of God with the transitory things of this world, the things of God are always lost.

This is a system that attempts to combine earth with heaven. In such a combination, earth always dominates. Flesh plus Spirit always equals flesh. This world plus heaven always equals this world. When an attempt is made to join the things of God with the transitory things of this world, the things of God are always lost.

The objective of the second beast is to promote the worship of the first. In other words, to cause men to subject themselves to the authority of men rather than that of God. He does this under the guise of a religious appearance, as a representative of Christ.

### **Indiscriminate in Application**

*“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave . . . ”* Because of the limited knowledge of this beast, he imposes a restriction on all men. The purpose of the attempt is to get at the people of God. It is the same tactic Herod used in his diabolical effort to get rid of the Christ-child. He had ALL the infants under two years of age killed, hoping to kill Jesus in the process (Matt 2:16). This is a tactic of the evil one.

There is an interesting thing to see in this approach. *Small, poor, and slaves* are considered as much of a threat as *great, rich, and free*. Outside of Christ, such distinctions are not necessary. Faith, however, brings with it Divine influence and power. It makes one a threat to the world system, particularly when found in a religious setting. Further, you may expect those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus to be found in all of these categories. The saints are not limited to a particular social grouping, and this is confusing to the devil.

### **The Place of the Mark**

*“ . . . to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads. . . ”* An identifying mark is placed upon men—a mark that will qualify them for the blessing of the second beast. Remember, he is promoting the worship of the first beast, who is animated by the devil himself. The ultimate purpose of this *“mark”* is to bring honor to the power God has rejected and cursed.

The mark can be received one of two places – the beast appears to be liberal in his requirements of men. It can be in the ***“right hand or on their foreheads.”*** We must not allow ourselves to think of a physical mark, or an imbedded computer chip of some sort. Again, I am not saying such a thing is not possible, but that it is not what Jesus is showing to John.

### *The mark in the Right Hand*

A mark in the ***“right hand”*** signifies a devotion to working for the beast, or acting in the behalf of religious institutionalism. This can be done without actually subscribing to the way the beast thinks. It is a form of compromise where the conscience is violated, and the knowledge of what is right is suppressed. It involves knowing what is wrong, yet doing it in order to lessen the suffering incurred by publically living for the Lord.

There are examples in Scripture of the principle here declared. During Christ’s earthly ministry, there were a number of “chief rulers” that believed on Him. Notwithstanding, ***“because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”*** (John 12:42-43). They, so to speak, received the mark in their hand. They continued to be identified with the synagogue, knowing that confessing Christ would cause them to be expelled.

Another example of this type of conduct is found in the parents of a blind man Jesus healed. When Christ’s enemies interrogated them concerning the healing of their son, they said they did not know what means healed his blindness, or who it was that did it. The Spirit informs us this was not the truth. ***“These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him”*** (John 9:22-23).

Again, here is an example of receiving the mark in the hand. The knew the truth, yet chose to remain in good standing with those who did not believe in Jesus.

Satan, though he does not prefer it, will settle for the individual remaining where he knows Jesus is not present. As long as the person will work for him, the devil does not mind personal disagreement with him.

When the Word of God speaks about doing, it often refers to the hand. God spoke to Israel of what they put their **“hands to do”** (Deut 12:18). Solomon spoke of man’s productivity as **“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do”** (Eccl 9:10). In our text, having the mark upon the hand involves working for the institutions of men.

### *Satan Settles for Silent Commitment*

Satan, though he does not prefer it, will settle for the individual remaining where he knows Jesus is not present. As long as the person will work for him, the devil does not mind personal disagreement with him. The second beast also has this mind-set, being empowered by our adversary the devil. If a person will agree to be identified with the organization, he will be accepted. That soul may actually disagree with what is being done, and have some settled convictions about it. Yet, if they will just receive the mark on the right hand, agreeing to be a representative of the institution, they will be accepted.

### *The mark on the Forehead*

This is actually the beast’s preference, for it is represents the most thorough committal. A mark **“on their foreheads”** denotes thinking like the beast. In this case, the person accepts the thoughts of the beast.

The entire life is reshaped around these thoughts, accepting them to be truth. Those who think like the beast have his mark upon their forehead. They do not have ***“the mind of Christ”*** (1 Cor 2:16) or ***“the mind of the Lord”*** (Lev 24:12). The beast persuades them he is right, and that the world’s concept of power and effectiveness is right.

### *Classic Example*

The classic example of receiving a mark in the forehead occurs early in Scripture. Satan confronted Eve with a perspective in sharp conflict with the Divine mind. Do you remember his words? ***“Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”*** (Gen 3:4-5). It is not possible for a greater variance to exist than is found between Satan’s words and those of the Lord (Gen 2:17). Eve, however, changed her mind about the tree after hearing words from the mouth of the the devil. ***“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat”*** (Gen 3:6). She had received the mark in her forehead.

In Scripture, the ***“forehead”*** also speaks of determination or resolve. Speaking of a resolute confrontation of God’s enemies, the Lord told Ezekiel, ***“Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead”*** (Ezek 3:8-9). His devotion to the Lord, and determination to serve Him, would outweigh the resolve of his enemies.

### **An Attempt to Emulate the Lord**

This is an effort of the beast to emulate the Lord, Who also places a mark upon His people. The beast’s mark is called ***“the mark of his***

**name**” (Rev 14:11). That is his character reflected in the minds of men. What a dreadful consideration!

Think of the glorious mark of the Lord upon His people. There are those who have **“the seal of God in their foreheads”** (Rev 9:4). Some are described as having **“His (the Lamb) Father's name written in their foreheads”** (Rev 14:1). It is said of the redeemed, **“And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads”** (Rev 22:4). Jesus promised the overcomers, **“I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name”** (Rev 3:12). That speaks of a thorough conformity to the image of the Son—a Divine determination (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-2).

### *Spiritual Pretension*

We are living in time when the beast has become very subtle in his aggression against the saints. It will allow a lot of religious education, social involvement, and innovation—but only as it profits the institution. Many of us who have refused to wear the mark have suffered ostracization.

Here, then, the second beast covers his diabolical effort with a shroud of religiosity. He will call his work the work of the Lord, and speak of commitment to his cause as commitment to the Lord Himself. He will ascribe Divine qualities to personalities and agenda. Whether it is a title like **“Lord God the Pope,”** or **“The True New testament Church,”** he seeks to bring a sanctifying religious flavor to what he is doing.

I cannot begin to tell you of the multitudes that have fallen prey to this tactic. They refer to religious activities as the work of the Lord, in which not a spark of Divine involvement can be found. Their works bolster the flesh and foster carnality. In them the natural man flourishes, and the spiritual man starves. Christ is emulated, but not possessed. Such people are part of a system that has horns like a lamb, but has the mouth of a dragon.

### **The Inhibition**

*“ . . . and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”* And now we get to the heart of the matter. The devil desires for exchange to take place among men and women, *but not righteous exchange* . He resists his kingdom of darkness being penetrated with the *“light of life.”* For this reason, working through the second beast, Satan sets strategies in motion that suppress the spread of the truth. In this text we behold a scheme that has proved remarkably effective.

This is the beast’s artifice. Unless the individual is in some way formally associated with the institution, he cannot *“buy or sell.”* The beast will not sanction the formal exchange of ideas from those unwilling to wear its mark. The beast will make it convenient for the person, offering credentials and other religious paraphernalia that will bring official acceptance. But one must either serve the institution or think like it.

### *Martin Luther*

Martin Luther, for example, can study as much as he wants, as long as he remains in the monastery and thinks in a traditional fashion. But as soon as that monk changes his mind and ceases to serve the purposes of the organization, he will not longer be allowed to speak. When he sheds the mark of the beast in his forehead, and shakes it from his hand, he is

excluded from buying and selling. That is the tactic of the beast, and an effective one at that.

### *Our Time*

We are living in time when the beast has become very subtle in his aggression against the saints. It will allow a lot of religious education, social involvement, and innovation—but only as it profits the institution. Many of us who have refused to wear the mark have suffered ostracization.

Understand, no person can dictate to another the proper course of action to take. However, you had better *refuse “the mark”* in both your hand and your forehead. Whatever you do with your hand is to be unto the Lord. Your mind is to be transformed as you come to *“know Him”* more fully. The seal you have must be that of God and not that of men. As it is written, *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim 2:19).

It is never right to align yourself with a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. Nor, indeed, are you given the liberty to concede to the beast what it wants. In standing against the devil, you must also stand against the second beast. It is religion organized after the manner of the world. Beware of it!

Historically, this type of religion was introduced by the Roman church. It brought a government into the spiritual arena that was driven by men, not God. It institutionalized truth by means of human authority, and gave the gory belonging to God to an organization. But the effort did not end with Rome.

## *The Sabbatarian Approach*

As you might expect, there are a number of differing views about ***“the mark of the beast.”*** Of particular interest is the position of those who bind Sabbath day observance on the Christian community. The most prominent group advocating this position is the Seventh Day Adventists—although this view is not limited to them. They feel that observing Sunday as the Lord’s day is ***“the mark of the beast.”*** Their reasoning is as follows.

Referring to Daniel 7:25, Sabbatarian theology states that the beast will ***“change the times and the law.”*** That change, they insist, involves the fourth commandment which reads, ***“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy”*** (Ex 20:9). That Sabbath (which means rest) is affirmed in Exodus 20:9, to be the ***“seventh day.”***

The Council of Trent, ordered by Pope Pius V, is cited as the time when the Sabbath law was changed by the Catholics to Sunday. This council was held in Northern Italy between 1545 and 1563. The conclusion of the Sabbatarian is that observing Sunday is ***“the mark of the beast.”***

This view, however, does not fulfill the text before us. The ***“mark”*** of reference was used to suppress the spread of the truth. While more could be said on this subject, it is not profitable to do so at this point. I have only shared it to show the extent to which some will go to justify their view. Such a procedure is more related to the activity of the second beast than to that of the Son of God. In the next section, more will be said on the many attempts to interpret ***“the mark of the beast.”***

## *Concluding Thought*

I cannot leave this section without once again observing the dominance of this condition in the Western church. God has been supplanted by the organization, which is nothing more than a formalized valley of dry bones. Commitment to an institution may suffice for *“the beast,”* but it is not acceptable to the Lord Jesus. Whether it is a nation, a State-church, or some other form of human organization, our association with it must be subordinate to our commitment to the King of kings and Lord of lords. It should be evident that no other posture is acceptable. The Lord Jesus will not take second place. He must have the preeminence.

## DIVINE INSIGHT IS GIVEN

*“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666”* (Verse 18). We must never forget we are considering a *“beast”*—a power employed by Satan to oppose the saints and suppress the truth. We cannot, therefore, settle for some novel view of this text. It is imperative that we have an accurate perception of our enemy, and not a mythical and powerless one.

### **The Intent of the Beast**

In order to better understand this segment of the vision, a brief review of the beast is in order. We have been exposed to his *“image,” “mark,”* and now *“name.”*

#### *God Almighty*

This type of language is best understood within the context of redemption. For example, we also read of the *“image”* of God (Col 1:15; 3:10; Rom 8:29; Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4), the *“mark”* or *“seal”* of God (Ezek 9:4,6; Rev 7:3; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22), and the

**“name”** of God (Rev 3:12; 14:1; 19:12; 22:4). Each of these representations have to do with men becoming like God. In particular, this takes place through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are recreated in His likeness ( **“image”**). We are also identified as uniquely His ( **“mark”**). We also partake of His nature or character ( **“name”**).

In this passage devil is using the **“beast”** to make men like himself—to transmit to them his character or nature. The **“beast”** is to Satan what Jesus is to God—the means of making individuals like himself. If we lose sight of this malicious intent, the passage before us will become obscure, and we will gravitate to a carnal view of it.

What we have here is picturesque language denoting the propagation of the beast’s nature among men—the transmittal of his character to Adam’s sons. The devil knows that will disqualify any mortal from eternal life and Divine approval.

### **A Number**

Here is the language of limitation. Anything or anyone that can be numbered is marked by limitation. Allow me to elaborate.

*God has no number*

*There is no limitation in God. He is infinite, without boundaries of any sort. He cannot be contained in a certain place, nor can He be fully*

# comprehended.

Nowhere in all of Scripture is there a numeric representation of the Living God. Not seven, thousand, million, billion—there is no number that can be given to God. He is transcendent to quantification. **There is no number assigned to Jesus Christ.** He has a name, but not a number. He is called “*First and Last,*” but never a number. Men refer to Jesus as *the Second Member of the Godhead*—but that is theological language, not a Scriptural expression. **The Holy Spirit is never represented by a number.** Some has referred to Him as *the Third Member of the Godhead*. Again, that is not a representation found in God’s Word. However precise it may appear to those who traffic in scholastics, it is, at best, a flawed and deficient description.

*There is no limitation in God.* He is infinite, without boundaries of any sort. He cannot be contained in a certain place, nor can He be fully comprehended.

## Limitation

*Numbers are used to denote limitations.* The redeemed, for example, are so vast they are said to be “*a great multitude, which no man could number*” (Rev 7:9). THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER! The angels of God are said to be “*an innumerable company*” (Heb 12:22). THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER! Even the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea shore are said to be “*innumerable*” (Heb 11:12). THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER!

The fact that the beast has a “*number*” first signifies he is limited! He is not invincible or all-powerful, even though he presents himself to be so. His power is limited. His influence is limited. His time is limited! **Hallelujah for a foe that is limited, and for a God that is NOT limited!** When Scriptures speak of something being “*numbered,*” it means limitations have been established. The demise, for example, of

Belshazzar's kingdom, was expressed in miraculous handwriting upon the wall. It said, "***God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it***" (Dan 5:26).

I want to press this point, for it is pivotal to an understanding of this text. *Something or someone with a number is limited.* Divine control is over anything with a number, and its duration has been established. The brevity of life is depicted in the phrase, "***teach us to number our days***" (Psa 90:12).

As we view this arch-foe of the people of God, then, we must gather courage. *He is limited!*

### **A Small Number**

The multitude of angels are said to be "***ten thousand times ten thousand***" (Dan 7:10). Revelation describes them as "***ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands***" (Rev 5:11). BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666!

The vision given to John portrays the days of the church's trial as 1,260 (11:3; 12:6;). BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666! Each tribe of Israel has 12,000 sealed with the seal of God: 144,000 in total (7:4-8). BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666!

We must know that Satan has but a "***short time***" (Rev 12:12). Consequently, everything aligned with him has a relatively short duration. In the end, glory will outweigh trial. Blessings will be more numerous than hardship.

## What Does the Number Signify?

As you might imagine, attempts to identify the beast with a specific person have been countless. Each attempt assigns a numeric value to letters, then adds them up to 666. **Mind you, the text does NOT say that is the secret to identifying the beast!** In fact, using this method, men can be quite creative. One has said, *There are three rules by the help of which I believe an ingenious man could find the required sum of any given name. First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title. Secondly, if the sum cannot be found in the Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin. Third, do not be too particular about the spelling.* (A Plummer)

Following the above procedures, there have been a wide range of people said to be “*the beast.*” Included in the number are Caligula, Trajan, Julian the Apostate, Genseric the Vandal, the Pope, various specific Popes (Benedict IX and Paul V), Mohamet, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Beza, and Napoleon Bonaparte. In each of these cases, the interpretation was driven by the times and circumstances, not by wisdom.

Martin Luther was of the opinion it was a year, A.D. 666, “*when the pope became uncontrollable.*” Faber said it stood for “*Apostate.*” W. Jones calculated that it stood for “*Christians, strangers to the cross.*” Scot said it means “*marked out for destruction.*” Wordsworth said it was “*the number of the world.*”

A traditional view that has gained wide acceptance among conservative believers sees “**666**” as signifying a kingdom rather than an individual. This view affirms it to symbolize the Latin Kingdom (Rome). The method employed to calculate the name, uses Greek letters, and is as follows.

30 - L

1 - a

300 - t

5 - e

10 - i

50 - n

70 - o

200 - s

---

666

Latinos

The name “Lateinos” identifies the reputed founder of the Latin race. The following reasoning is then offered. Rome is the ancient capital of the Latin race. The Roman Catholic Church is officially called the Latin church, and wrote all of its sacred books in Latin, thereby distinguishing it from the Greek Church. For centuries, the worship of the Roman church was conducted universally in Latin. The conclusion: *“The papacy, beyond possibility of doubt, is the beast”* (Vision of the Ages, B.W. Johnson). Ashley S. Johnson says, *“Six hundred and sixty-six is the number of a man, and that man is the pope of Rome beyond a doubt”* (The Voice of Seven Thunders).

Early in church history, **Irenaeus** suggested the number stood for Euanthas (E=5; U=400; A=1; N=50; TH(theta)=9; A=1; S=200). More recently, William Barclay used some creativity to say the beast was Nero (N=50; E=6; R=500; O=60; N=50). He said the Hebrews letters

also added up to 666. Here is his conclusion. *“There is little doubt that the number of the beast stands for Nero; and that John is forecasting the coming of Antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to the world”* (The Revelation of John) .

## SOMETHING IN COMMON

In my understanding, there is something all of these views have in common. They all tend to diffuse the power of the text, making it merely academic. They also employ an approach upon which it will be exceedingly difficult to unite. The procedure itself gives man too much power, and God too little. It tends to exalt human understanding rather than Divine wisdom.

I do not question that there are elements of truth in all of them. Further, it is possible that *“the beast”* was present in all of them. When, however, a view of Scripture makes it irrelevant for a given generation, it is not likely that it is right. This is particularly true of the book of Revelation. It is not limited to a certain period of time, or a specific locality. With great consistency, everyone with a capacity to *“hear”* is told to give heed to its message.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NUMBER

The requirement to comprehend the significance of this number is *“wisdom”*—*“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast.”* The expression *“Here is wisdom”* does not introduce the answer, but what is required to obtain the answer. Other versions clarify this by translating the verse, *“This calls for wisdom”* (RSV, NIV). This is *“the spirit of wisdom and understanding”* that is referred to in Ephesians 1:17. It is wisdom that comes from God, not from a logistic procedure. If identifying the number simply involved adding up numerical equivalents of Greek or Hebrew letters, Divine wisdom would not be required. The spirit is not calling for a scholar,

but for a person who has *“the wisdom that is from above”* (James 13:17).

### **Why Is Wisdom required?**

Wisdom is required to identify the beast. The reason for the requirement is obvious. This is the embodiment of Satan’s effort to deceive, mislead, and beguile. There is only one way to survive an assault of deception: have wisdom! **Divine wisdom is the only effective antidote for delusion!**

We are not reading of a demand for literary or scholastic expertise! I do not know that such an approach is ever made by God to understanding His Word. Whatever value is assigned to learning and research disciplines, you will have to read the books of men to get them. This simply is not the approach of the Spirit to true understanding. *This does not require a denigration of learning disciplines, it does forbid the exaltation of them.*

The identity of the beast is necessary to the survival of the elect. If men are not able to identify their foe, they are not apt overcome him. It is no novel requirement to understand *“the number of the beast.”* It is necessary to avoid being overcome by it. It is indispensable if men are to escape being deceived, thereby falling into the snare of the devil.

### **It Is The Number of A Man**

Many have understood this to mean *a specific man—a certain person.*

If this is the case, we have in this text a departure from the nature of Scriptural warnings. First, we are categorically told we are not wrestling *“against flesh and blood”* (Eph 6:12). Second, Jesus solemnly told us *“judge NOT according to appearance”* (John 7:24).

Do not suppose this means there has never been unusually wicked men who have pioneered opposition to the saints. That is not the case, and this word is not intended to say such despots will not rise again.

We are not reading of a demand for literary or scholastic expertise! I do not know that such an approach is ever made by God to understanding His Word. Whatever value is assigned to learning and research disciplines, you will have to read the books of men to get them. This simply is not the approach of the Spirit to true understanding.

### **Antichrist**

John told us *“even now are there many antichrists.”* In the same breath he reminded believers they had heard *“the Antichrist is coming”* (1 John 2:18, NKJV). If we suppose *“the Antichrist”* is a mortal, then we have one major Antichrist preceded by many smaller ones. But if it is a spiritual power, we have quite another situation. John referred to *“the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world”* (1 John 4:3, NKJV). John spoke of a larger foe than a man. It was something that animated men, drawing them into aggressive opposition against the Lord and His people. It parallels the beast which we are now considering.

The phrase *“It is the number of a man”* can be seen in different ways. It can be seen as a way of saying, *This is a particular individual—i.e. the number of A man.* It can also be understood as

meaning, *This is a human manner—man’s number*. The NIV translates the verse in this way: **“for it is man’s number.”** The RSV says, **“for it is a human number.”** The expression (ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ) is literally translated **“the number for man.”**

I am going to say **this phrase means man-centered**. It is something that comes in the name of Christ, but finds its locus in man, his wisdom, and his ways. The number **“666,”** in this case, stands for the ultimate in human ingenuity and glory—yet something coming far short of the glory of God. It is shy of perfection, never entering into the rest of God—like the sixth day of creation. Man was dominate on that day, but God was accentuated on the seventh!

### **IDENTIFIED**

**“666”** is like the signature of flesh. It has no God in it, no Divine power, no eternal purpose. As I see this text, this is nothing less than the church wedded to the world, and having the world as its wedded name. It is the church organized and functioning according to human wisdom. This sort of approach was pioneered by Rome, but has penetrated into virtually every aspect of *Christianity* . For the most part, this is what we confront when we look at the contemporary church—**the second beast** . The court of Caiaphas the high priest is but a footman compared to this horseman!

Later, this same entity will be identified as **“Babylon the Great,”** a **“woman”** on a scarlet beast, and a **“harlot”** that sits upon many waters (17:3,5,7; 17:1,15,16; 18:2; 19:2). But it is all speaking of the same thing—the corruption of the church. Satan is shown here as assaulting the people of God with *Christian* institutionalism! While it appears harmless, it is not!

### **CONCLUSION**

To me, there are few texts of Scripture as sobering as this one. What I have offered to you is to be weighed as any other mortal observation. Our view of this passage is not to become the basis of our fellowship. It is, however, to be a key ingredient in fighting the good fight of faith. It should teach you to take quite seriously any corruption of the truth. Lifeless religion is lethal, and is to be so considered. When human wisdom supplants the wisdom that comes from above, we are being assaulted by the wicked one. Those who assign an inordinate value to human understanding are a threat to your faith.

I admonish you to seek spiritual understanding of the good fight of faith. At all cost, appropriate the spiritual weaponry that has been provided for you in Christ Jesus. With haste and resolution, put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil! Be as relentless and determined to lay hold on eternal life as Satan is to thwart you in the effort.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 26

## **VIEWING THE OVERCOMERS**

"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God." (Revelation 14:1-5, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The deep love of Jesus for His church is confirmed in this remarkable book. You will recall it is written, "***Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it***" (Eph 5:25). Again, we read, "***Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor***" (Eph 5:2).

His great love, however, did not end when He gave Himself for the church, submitting to the curse of God, the ravages of the devil, and the rejection of men. That love continues in His care and feeding of the church. He "***nourishes***" as well as "***cherishes***" the body of the redeemed (Eph 5:29). With a consistency faith can grasp, the Lord is ensuring the faithful are both nourished and stabilized. Their only hope of survival is found in spiritual "***health and healing***" (Jer 33:6).

Never is Christ's loving care of the church more evident than when he teaches them, unveiling things pertaining to life and godliness. Our

Lord desires for His people to be close enough to Him to hear His words of guidance. Even His stern admonitions, as with the flawed churches (2:5,16,22; 3:3,16), were a Divine effort to bring the wayward back to the place where He could speak comfortably to them. God's people are not to be as the ***“horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you”*** (Psa 32:9).

The Lord will, and prefers to, guide His people with His eye (Psa 32:8). He is bringing them to glory (Heb 2:10), but requires their attention to do so.

The book of Revelation is best understood from this perspective. With tender care, He is bringing the sons to glory. The process involves informing them of their adversary and his cunning attempt to lure them from the place of nourishment. If they are not knowledgeable of Satan's devices, they will surely be snared by them.

Jesus has opened to us the devil's attempt to seduce the saints by a powerless form of religion. With great solemnity, He has shown us that power is granted to the devil to do this because of the failure of the professed church to take hold on the truth. ***“Strong delusion”*** (that is, delusion that overcomes all but those who are dominated by faith) is inevitable where the heart is lulled to sleep. It is remarkable how very few professing *Christians* are persuaded of this. They appear to approach, what is nominally called *the Christian life*, as though commitment and consistency were not even required. Such people neglect their souls, refusing to eat the bread of life and drink the water of life. They are, however, deluded in this matter. The present ministry of Jesus is absolutely essential to the salvation of His elect. If those who purport to be His disciples do not hear Him now, they will not dwell with Him then.

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE LAMB

*“Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion . . . ”* Throughout this book, *“the Lamb”* is central. We must not allow our vision to be distracted from *“the Lamb”* to lesser considerations. While some have chosen to focus their attention on the tribulation, or the mark of the beast, or some other aspect of the good fight of faith, *heaven has focused upon the Lamb*. He, and He alone, is the object of their attention. We do well to make Him the center of our concentration as well.

### Speaking to the Churches

The first three chapters of this book were devoted to an assessment of the churches. It was no novel or casual appraisal, but one which summoned believers into fellowship with the Lamb. Dwelling at a distance from Him, there is no hope of surviving the onslaught of the wicked one.

Thus Jesus works in power to convince those who are distant from Him of the unacceptableness of their condition. He warns them to repent or suffer the consequences of exclusion from the book of life. He will not overlook piety without love, or the godless toleration of false doctrine that pulls men into the flesh. Nor,

The first three chapters of this book were devoted to an assessment of the churches. It was no novel or casual appraisal, but one which summoned believers into fellowship with the Lamb. Dwelling at a distance from Him, there is no hope of surviving the onslaught of the wicked one.

indeed, will He allow for a lukewarm condition where those professing His name are neither hot nor cold. Such conditions are completely at variance with salvation, and must be abandoned forthrightly and quickly.

On the other hand, those who are fighting a good fight, yet whose strength is dissipated, are encouraged to hold on. They are promised strength, and an open door. With passion, the Savior informs such that He is with them, knows them, and will provide for them. He holds out to them promises that are a challenge to the most disciplined spiritual thinker. Hear Him speak of a reign, of being given power, made a pillar in God's temple, and going no more out. What marvelous incentives the Lamb holds out to his people.

But if you take away the matter of salvation, these words have little or no weight. They are nothing more than law which brings an even greater burden to the saints. Those who take this book and spend their time telling us of a ruthless political ruler, times of economic scarcity, and the oppression of those excluded from the mythical rapture, have betrayed their stunted view of salvation. They have allowed the flood of Satan to wash away a clear view of *“the Lamb.”* Remember, *“the Lamb”* has to do exclusively with redemption—its initiation and conclusion.

### **The Lamb and Redemption**

The *“four living creatures”* and the *“twenty four elders”* fall down and worship the Lamb (Rev 5:8)—but it is the church that He loves and nourishes! *“The Lamb”* has no immediate relevancy for angelic hosts. That is a reference to his capacity as the Savior of mankind. He was not sacrificed for angels—even arch angels, or cherubim or seraphim. He was *“slain”* for men, and has received *“power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing”* for them (5:12). *“The wrath of the Lamb”* is particularly directed toward those who have rejected His great salvation (6:16; 14:10). The blood that saves is

the ***“blood of the Lamb”*** (7:14). The book in which the names of the saved are written is ***“the book of life of the Lamb”*** (13:8). The most significant marriage is ***“the marriage of the Lamb”*** (19:7). The most extensive banquet is the ***“marriage supper of the Lamb”*** (19:9).

All of this is to affirm that ***“the Lamb”*** is a consideration of the Son in His redemptive capacity . Until the heavens and earth pass away, heaven is preoccupied with getting the sons of God to glory. All of the resources of heaven have been marshaled for this work. They do not work for the political stabilization of a favored nation. Nor, indeed, are they devoted to the development of domestic and economic excellence. Whatever value may be attached to these things, it is but a weightless mote on the balances of eternity.

### **Salvation is not Secondary**

A nation is not the heart of Revelation, but the Lamb. A blessed condition for the saints in this world is certainly not the emphasis, but the Lamb. That means salvation—which is the sole reason for the existence of the Lamb—is everything. It is no more secondary than the Lamb, but lies at the very heart of all Divine involvements with humanity.

Salvation refers to the whole work initiated, and to be completed, by ***“the Lamb.”*** Experientially, it begins with remission. However, it consummates in glory. The whole of that process is called ***“salvation,”*** and it is ***“ready to be revealed in the last time”*** (1 Pet 1:5). Salvation is not completed until those who are ***“justified”*** are ***“glorified”*** (Rom 8:29). The sons—all of them—are being brought ***“to glory”*** by the Lamb (Heb 2:10). Until that mission is accomplished, no mortal can assume safety, or conclude they are out of danger. Such notions are imaginations, and foolish ones at that.

## Jesus Has Revealed the Warfare

“The Lamb” is a consideration of the Son in His redemptive capacity. Until the heavens and earth pass away, heaven is preoccupied with getting the sons of God to glory. All of the resources of heaven have been marshaled for this work.

Jesus has shown John the intensity with which Satan seeks to thwart the salvation of the church. He cares nothing for the blind and misguided of the world, who are already within his grasp. He works in them at will (2 Tim 2:26), so has no special initiative to delude them. But the saints are another matter. They have been given wings to escape his ferocity, and wing their way to a place of nourishment. With an aggression that dwarfs any effort of humanity, he seeks to lure them from their place of feeding. His attacks are not only ruthless, but shrewd and cunning.

### THE STANDING LAMB

John looks, peering, as it were, into the ages to come. He sees the Lamb *“standing on Mount Zion.”* Normally, we think of Jesus as sitting. He has, after all, been made to *“sit”* on the right hand of God (Heb 1:3,13; 10:12). The seated position denotes one of rule and reign—i.e., seated upon the throne (5:7).

Lest we be tempted to think inactivity is associated with His redemptive reign, the Lamb is seen standing. Our briefing on the present reign of Jesus was introduced in the fifth chapter. *“In the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth”* (5.6). Our Savior is presiding over the Kingdom, reigning until his enemies are *“made His footstool”* (Heb 10:13).

Mind you, John has just beheld two beasts. Both of them were animated by Satan himself, and attacked the saints relentlessly. But John does not allow his vision to remain upon the beasts. He looks toward Mount Zion— **the redemptive mountain** . How will the battle conclude? What will be the outcome of the initiative of these beasts against the saints? Remember, no matter what the circumstance, or how grievous the plight, LOOK TO JESUS! That is the secret to overcoming. As it is written, *“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb 12:1-2).

John is not disappointed when he looks. *“And lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Zion.”* Satan’s initiative had not changed anything in the heavenly places! The only realm in which he can bring results is *“the earth.”* The NIV reads, *“there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion.”* This was more Jesus showing Himself to John than John’s vision penetrating the heavenly realms. The Lord Jesus is confirming to John that all is well, and will end well, for those who *“keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.”*

In Scripture, beholding Jesus is equated with saving faith. It describes the experience of being dominated by the insightful consideration of the Son of God. Looking to Jesus does not speak of a casual glance, or an afterthought. Rather, it speaks of focus and profound contemplation. After all, the knowledge or comprehension of the glory of God is seen *“in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor 4:6). Too, it is in that vision that we are transformed into Christ’s likeness, from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

## **Mount Zion**

What is the significance of *“Mount Zion?”* First, this is where we have been brought in Christ Jesus. As it is written, *“you have come to*

**Mount Zion**” (Heb 12:22). This is the place where God dwells (Psa 9:11; 76:2; Joel 3:21). It is the hub of heavenly enterprise—a term that describes Divine activity in the behalf of the saved.

The point here is that Jesus remains in the heavenly places—Mount Zion. Our identity with Him involves remaining there ourselves, having our affection set on things above (Col 3:1-3). When we seek the things that are **“above”** we are coming to Jesus.

Here, in Mount Zion, is where the **“Corner Stone”** has been placed. As it is written, **“Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste”** (Isa 28:16; 1 Pet 2:6). This is another way of saying **“heavenly places,”** where Jesus has been raised, and where believers have been made to sit (Eph 1:20; 2:6).

The resurrection and enthronement of Jesus was prophesied by David in these words, **“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion”** (Psa 2:6). This is the realm of triumph and victory—being where the Lamb is. If people will, by faith, dwell with Christ, they will surely overcome the devil and all of his machinations. If they persistently remain **“with Christ,”** where they were raised in regeneration (Rom 6:8; Eph 2:5; Col 2:20; 3:1,3), the victory will be their’s! There is no way Satan can prevail over those abiding in Christ (John 15:4,7; 1 John 2:27-28).

The point here is that Jesus remains in the heavenly places—Mount Zion. Our identity with Him involves remaining there ourselves, having our affection set on things above (Col 3:1-3). When we seek the things

that are ***“above”*** we are coming to Jesus.

Just as Jerusalem of old was called ***“Zion”*** (1 Kgs 8:1), so the Jerusalem with which we are associated is now Zion, and is the ***“mother of us all”*** (Gal 4:26). We began our new life by being placed there. It is our business to stay there. All of the grace required to do this is supplied in Him.

## THE 144,000

***“ . . . and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.”*** We have already been introduced to this multitude. Before destroying forces were loosed upon the earth, a word went out from the throne. ***“Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed”*** (Rev 7:3-4). Now we will see the outcome of that sealing.

This is the redeemed of the Lord who have come from among the ancient people. When we were introduced to them in chapter seven, a time of severe trial was at hand. Now we see them in a gloriously triumphant stance. Their position is a tribute to the faithfulness of God.

Nowhere is the Gentile church referred to under the heading ***“all the tribes of the children of Israel.”*** Nowhere is it called ***“the twelve tribes of the children of Israel”*** (Rev 21:12). Those who insist this section of Revelation, as well as the seventh chapter, are referring to the redeemed of all ages, without reference to the Jews, are in great error. Imagining they have been summarily cut off, and excluded from the promises,

such sophists insist on *spiritualizing* this text (although they are surely unspiritual in doing so). The notion that God has finished with the Jews betrays a condition of spiritual blindness that is inexcusable.

The Lord has gone out of His way, so to speak, to identify the 144,000. With remarkable clarity, He identifies them with the twelve tribes of Israel: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin (Rev 7:5-9). Where is such a reference made to the non-Jewish church, or the body of Christ in general?

### **The Whole House of Israel**

This is nothing less than the ***“whole house of Israel”*** (Ezek 37:11; 39:25). This expression is **not** a way of saying *every single person* . Rather, it is a Divine way of saying *the majority at a given point in time* . Thus God spoke to Ezekiel in this manner. ***“all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted”*** (Ezek 3:7). He did not mean every single person was this way. Ezekiel himself was not. Later, God would require the sealing of a number of people that also were not this way (Ezek 9:4-6).

Remember, Israel remains a covenanted people—many theologians notwithstanding. The Spirit affirms their present stubbornness as a people (2 Cor 3:14-16). Such recognition would not be possible if they were not still viewed in the aggregate by God.

### *Partially Blind—For a Time*

God Himself testifies in this matter. He will not allow us to denigrate His purpose, His Son, and His people

by imagining He is finished with them. He never made a covenant with the Gentiles to take away their sins!

Too, Paul reasoned concerning their present blindness, affirming it to be temporary. ***“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”*** (Rom 11:25). There is a time coming when ***“the full number of the Gentiles”*** will be reached. That occasion is a line of demarcation, at which the partial blindness of Israel will cease.

#### *All Israel Will Be Saved*

***“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob”*** (Rom 11:26). While the term ***“all Israel”*** includes all saints, when viewed as those possessing faith (Rom 9:6), the focus of this text is the Jewish portion of that body. We know this is the case, for Jesus (***“the Deliverer”***) will ultimately ***“turn away ungodliness from Jacob”*** (a term never applied to the church in general). We are seeing the result of that work in the fourteenth chapter of Revelation.

#### *A Divine Commitment*

***“For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins”*** (Rom 11:27). God Himself testifies in this matter. He will not allow us to denigrate His purpose, His Son, and His people by imagining He is finished with them. He never made a covenant with the Gentiles to take away their sins! The new covenant is clearly said to be ***“a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”*** (Jer 31:31). The Spirit affirms in Hebrews 8:8-13) that this is the very covenant currently being administered by the exalted Christ.

God's covenant has not yet been fulfilled toward them—but it shall be! Isaiah is the prophet Paul quotes in the eleventh chapter of Romans. The Spirit spoke resolutely through him. ***“The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, Says the LORD. As for Me, says the LORD, this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants, says the LORD, from this time and forevermore”*** (Isa 59:20-21, NKJV).

Taking up this prophecy, and speaking through the Spirit, Paul affirms the Redeemer will not only ***“come to Zion,”*** but will ***“banish ungodliness from Jacob”*** (Rom 11:26, RSV), and ***“remove ungodliness from Jacob”*** (NASB. This is a Divine covenant with Israel. Who is the person who will dare to affirm it is no longer applicable!

### *Spiritual Reasoning*

***“Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers”*** (Rom 11:28). The Spirit takes this matter even further. It is as though the Lord will not allow us to imagine untruth on this subject. It is true that, at this time, they are ***“enemies.”*** But that is only so the Gospel can be brought to the us Gentiles. However, when it comes to the matter of ***“election”*** –Divine choice—they remain ***“beloved”*** because of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). God is still known as ***“the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”*** (Matt 22:32; Lk 13:28; Acts 3:13; 7:32).

### *The Divine Nature*

***“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”*** (Rom 11:29).

The Spirit clinches the matter by affirming the irreversibility of God's benefactions and summons. Admittedly, He is speaking on a high plain. We do well, however, to learn to navigate in these realms, leaving the lower climes of human reasoning. The Lord will give us "*hinds feet*" to negotiate these towering peaks of Divine affirmation (2 Sam 22:34; Psa 18:33; Hab 3:19).

### **WHY THE 144,000?**

Knowing that this message is to the churches, why is reference made to the 144,000? Why is a connection made with "*the tribes of the children of Israel*" within the context of God's great salvation? There is a reason.

Every book of Scripture has been written with the entirety of Divine purpose in mind. This is involved in "*all Scripture*" being given by the "*inspiration of God*" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Not only is the message itself of Divine origin, but the backdrop against which the message is to be seen is also inspired.

#### *Salvation Is of the Jews*

When it comes to salvation, Jesus spoke clearly: "*Salvation is of the Jews*" (John 4:22). Jesus Himself came from this chosen people (Gen 49:10; Rom 9:5; Heb 7:14). The Jews themselves were the custodians of all of the preparations for salvation (Rom 9:4-5). From them salvation would be brought to the entire world—and that by Divine design. The promises were made to the Jews. The Savior made His entrance into the world from them. The Gospel was preached for the first time to both Jew and Gentile by them. Truly, "*Salvation is of the Jews.*"

Notice, the promised covenant was to both Israel and

Judah—all the posterity of Abraham. Their kingdom was divided at the time of Rehoboam, successor to Solomon, and third king of Israel. Yet, part of the benefit of the New Covenant would be realized in making the people one again.

### *The Jews Bear Us*

Gentiles believers are wild olive branches, grafted into, and supported by, the Jewish tree. The Holy Spirit would have us learn this lesson well. ***“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you ”*** (Rom 11:17-18).

The glorious benefits we receive in Christ Jesus belong to Israel by promise. The ***“root and fatness”*** of their tree still remains, nourishing those who are in Jesus. There persists a richness in that ancient ***“root”*** that is not to be contradicted.

Let it be clear that ***“God is able to graft them in again”*** (Rom 11:23). Of course, that would be an absurd statement to make, had all hope for them been removed. What we are seeing in the fourteenth chapter of Revelation is their engrafting into their own blessed olive tree.

### *The Covenant Made with Them*

The New Covenant was promised to, and has been made with, the house of Israel. That is the express statement of Scripture. First, it is

affirmed that the “*covenants*” pertained, or applied, to them (Rom 9:4). Second, looking forward to the New Covenant, the Lord promised, “*a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah*” (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8). Notice, the promised covenant was to both Israel and Judah—all the posterity of Abraham. Their kingdom was divided at the time of Rehoboam, successor to Solomon, and third king of Israel. Yet, part of the benefit of the New Covenant would be realized in making the people one again.

Although the Jews rejected Christ, the promises still remained in tact. They are, to be sure, only realized in Christ Jesus.

### **Salvation for the world inducted and expanded by them**

With arresting language, the Holy Spirit opens to our understanding the role of Israel in the salvation of the world. The Gospel was first preached by the Jews, and the last great ingathering will be accomplished through them. “*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not ! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles* ” (Rom 11:11).

A vivid description of the offering of salvation to the Gentiles, and the effect of that offer, is provided in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. “*But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'* Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been

*appointed to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:45-48).

There the principle declared in Romans 11:11 is lived out. The Gentiles were provoked to jealousy by the glorious good news declared to the Jews. When the Jews rejected the message, it was declared to the Gentiles, much to their joy.

*Their Fall brought Riches—Their fullness will bring much more*

If their **“acceptance”** were an impossibility—or even if it were a mere possibility—such lofty reasoning would be out of order. These words are an appeal to our faith, and are rooted in the very nature of God. They reflect His eternal purpose.

Hear the Spirit as He takes this matter further. **“Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!”** (Rom 11:12). Remember, this is the Divine manner of both purpose and thought. If, when the Jews **“fell,”** stumbling over the Stone, what will happen when they rise again? If their **“failure”** brought riches, what will their reinstatement bring?

When Scripture speaks of Israel’s **“fulness”** it means their **“full inclusion”** (RSV) or **“fulfillment”** (NASB). If the impact of salvation was great among the Gentiles when Israel rejected it, it will be **“much more”** when they embrace it.

*When They Were Cast Away, the World Was Reconciled—When They Are Accepted, There Will be Life From the Dead*

***“For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*** (Rom 11:15). Remember, the entire nation of Israel was not ***“cast away.”*** Rather, it was ***“some of the branches”*** (Verse 17). Yet, even in the casting away of ***“some of the branches,”*** the reconciliation of the world was accomplished. Who but God can do such wondrous things?

### *Greater Results to Come*

Now, the Spirit reasons their ***“acceptance”*** will produce even greater results. When He says ***“life from the dead,”*** the Spirit refers to a spiritual awakening—a resurrection to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). It is a vibrant identity with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places—and it will come through the acceptance of the Jews—the re-grafting of them into their own olive tree.

If their ***“acceptance”*** were an impossibility—or even if it were a mere possibility—such lofty reasoning would be out of order. These words are an appeal to our faith, and are rooted in the very nature of God. They reflect His eternal purpose.

### *The Gentiles Obtained Mercy When Disobedient—So Will the Jews*

***“For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all”*** (Rom 11:30-32). We are trafficking in lofty realms! The very mind of the Lord is being articulated, and we do well to receive it by faith. We Gentiles obtained mercy ***“through”*** the ***“disobedience”*** of the Jews. What appeared to be an overthrow of Divine objective occasioned the opening of salvation to the world! Here is another sense in which ***“Salvation is of the Jews!”***

### *A Marvelous Consideration*

Now the Spirit elevates our thinking to rarified climes. The Jews who ***“have now been disobedient”*** will obtain mercy ***“through the mercy”*** that has been shown to the Gentiles. In other words, they will be provoked to jealousy, as it is written (Deut 32:21; Rom 10:19; 11:11).

The Divine intent is then proclaimed, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ***“ For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”*** Rather than speculate about this extraordinary expression, we must join with Paul in exclaiming the profoundness of the Lord’s wisdom, knowledge, judgment, and ways (Rom 11:33).

All have fallen into sin. All have become disobedient. Salvation is only by the mercy of God. Woe to the individual who adopts a theology that excludes the Jews from that mercy—particularly since the Spirit has gone to great lengths to trace our salvation back to them.

### **BUT WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH THE 144,000?**

We are trafficking in lofty realms! The very mind of the Lord is being articulated, and we do well to receive it by faith. We Gentiles obtained mercy ***“through”*** the ***“disobedience”*** of the Jews.

The text before us is one of triumph, where the redeemed are seen in clear affiliation with the Lamb. Why are the people specified as the 144,000, who have already been identified as individuals ***“from all the tribes of Israel?”*** Surely, the following blessings are not for the Jews alone! (1) Standing with the Lamb, (2) having the Father’s name written on the forehead, (3) singing a new song, (4) being undefiled, (5) following the Lamb, (6) being redeemed, (7) being firstfruits to God and the Lamb, (8) having no

guile, and (9) standing faultless before the throne.

It is true, these are experienced by all that are born again. There is, however a specific message that is being conveyed by this text. It can be seen from two different perspectives.

### *The Olive Tree*

First, the 144,000 are mentioned because they represent the olive tree into which we Gentiles have been grafted. It is their root that carries us, and not ours that carries them. As it is written, ***“remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you”*** (Rom 11:18). Thus we see the ancient people, with whom the New Covenant was made, together with all that have come into that covenant through Jesus. In this case, the part (Jews) stand for the whole (all of the redeemed).

### *A Precursor to Revival*

Our introduction to the conversion of Israel was in the seventh chapter. Following their sealing, a great multitude which no man could number was seen. They were from ***“all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues”*** (7:9), and stood before the Lamb. The turning of Israel, therefore, is seen as inducting a great harvest of souls. This coincides with the Spirit’s depiction of global awakening at the turning of ungodliness away from Jacob (Rom 11:12,15).

In a most glorious depiction of this, Isaiah wrote of a time when God’s light would rise upon Israel. The result is declared, and is glorious. ***“But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you***

*shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you” (Isa 60:2-6).*

I am careful to say those in Christ Jesus have already tasted of this benefit. But it shall yet occur on a larger scale than men have dared to imagine. Because I have dealt with this subject extensively in previous lessons, I will not go further with it. A few cursory remarks will suffice.

That this is, in fact, what is being shown in this chapter is confirmed by verses 6-20. There is a rapid spread of the *“everlasting Gospel,”* a collapse of the religious imposter, Babylon the great, followed by the harvesting of the earth.

The knowledge of the Lord will, indeed, cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). That effective Gospel initiative will, as I understand it, follow the turning of ungodliness from Jacob.

### **Having His Father’s Name Written in Their Foreheads**

This is where the Jewish remnant had been *“sealed”* (7:3). When the *“bottomless pit”* was opened, only those with *“the seal of God in their foreheads”* were spared (9:4). The language is a symbolic way of saying *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). It is another way of saying, *“I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people, and “all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:10-11).

The Father’s name written in the forehead also symbolizes the blessing of the New Covenant, as described in the following words, *“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts”* (Heb 8:10). This is a condition where the individual possesses *“the mind of*

**Christ**” (1 Cor 2:16), and is transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). Although the reality of this experience is debated among Bible students, those who dwell **“in the secret place of the Most High”** (Psa 91:1), know it to be a reality.

Like all that come into Christ, these do not merely have the mark of Satan removed. They also have the mark of the Father inscribed. They not only cease to be like the devil and do his will, they begin to be like God and do His will.

Like all that come into Christ, these do not merely have the mark of Satan removed. They also have the mark of the Father inscribed. They not only cease to be like the devil and do his will, they begin to be like God and do His will. This is transformation or regeneration, and it is the unique thing about the New Covenant.

When we see a body of people **“with the Lamb”** on **“Mount Zion,”** with the name of Christ’s Father written in their **“forehead,”** we are witnessing the effects of **“receiving the atonement,”** or reconciliation (Rom 5:11). This is regeneration, and there is no salvation without it! It is what is glaringly absent in the nominal church, thereby betraying its dead condition. It is not possible to be saved without being with the Lamb, in Mount Zion, with His Father’s name written upon our foreheads. Our text confirms Israel will also be brought into that blessed state. We should not think this too difficult for God to accomplish. After all, He did make us, who were not a people, the people of God, and the sheep of His pasture.

### **A Brief Summary**

Amidst the resurrection of Satan’s power in religious apostasy—when two malicious beasts are assaulting the people of God under the

empowerment of the devil— **Israel is turned to the Lord** ! Hallelujah for such a marvelous work! My heart fairly shouts, ***“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest Thou?”*** (Dan 4:35).

The faith of the saints is anchored in their God. They must hear of the triumph of His purpose, even under seemingly impossible circumstances. God, Who made a commitment to Israel, will not fail to fulfill it. Neither, indeed, will He fail in His promise to all who have ***“received”*** His Son (John 1:12). You have good reason to put your trust in the Lord!

Millenniums may come and go, and centuries waft along until men forget what God has promised. But the Word of God will not fail! If God did not let any of Samuel’s words ***“fall to the ground”*** (1 Sam 3:19), what of His own words—His own precious promises? When the Lord of hosts ***“purposes,”*** no one can ***“annul”*** it. When His hand stretches out to do a thing, no one can ***“turn it back”*** (Isa 14:27). It is ever true, ***“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations”*** (Psa 33:11).

This truth is confirmed in John’s vision of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. It depicts the fulfillment of God’s covenant with them. He promised to take away their sin, and He will do it (Rom 11:27). Now, a suffering saint can trust in a God like that, and hold on his way.

## DIVINE AFFIRMATION

*“And I heard a voice from heaven . . . ”* Once again, our attention is drawn away from the spectacle upon the earth to the heavens which *“do rule”* (Dan 4:26). It is not as important to know what is happening, or will happen, upon the earth as it is to know the effect of those things in heavenly realms. Throughout this book, the Lord develops our consciousness of heaven. We are made aware of heavenly personalities, both from angelic orders and the redeemed from the earth. Our hearts are sensitized to God, and to the Lamb of God. Everything is considered from this perspective.

We are never asked to view things as men, or to consider them from an earthly point of view. If we see Jesus, it is from a heavenly perspective—we see the glorified Christ. If we see the martyrs, it is from heaven’s view—under the altar. When we are given to see our opponents, they are seen through heaven’s eyes—a dragon, a beast from the earth, and a beast from the sea. God’s people must master this way of seeing things.

Thank God for the *“voice from heaven.”* It means heaven is opened, and are not “shut” as they have been during lengthy periods of human history (1 Sam 3:1; 2 Chron 15:3; Psa 74:9; Amos 8:11-12). The triumph of the Lamb has opened the heavens to humanity!

### **Like the Voice of Many Waters**

*“ . . . like the voice of many waters . . . ”* In the first chapter, we

We are never asked to view things as men, or to consider them from an earthly point of view. If we see Jesus, it is from a heavenly perspective—we see the glorified Christ. If we see the martyrs, it is from heaven’s view—under the altar. When we are given to see our opponents, they are seen through heaven’s eyes—a dragon, a beast from the earth, and a beast from the sea. God’s people must master this way of seeing things.

were introduced to the glorified Christ, whose voice is described ***“as the sound of many waters”*** (Rev 1:15). The thrust of the passage before us indicates the voice of the glorified Christ alone is not the point. Remember, we have seen the Lamb on Mount Zion together WITH a vast number having His Father’s name upon their foreheads. I gather this ***“voice”*** comes from the redeemed multitude.

### *A Spiritual Picture*

There is a spiritual picture painted here that is worthy of mention. In the sense of this text, I believe, ***“waters”*** speaks of ***“peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues,”*** as in Revelation 17:5). It is the same kind of ***“voice”*** described in Revelation 19:6: ***“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”*** This is the voice of the saved, speaking in concert with the Lamb Who delivered them, turning away ungodliness from them.

A picture is seen, then, of a multitude delivered from a multitude; of a remnant saved from a mass. It is like Jesus coming out of Nazareth, and Daniel surfacing in Babylon. It reminds us of Peter, James, and John coming out of Galilee, and Lot coming out of Sodom. It stirs recollections of Saul coming from Tarsus, and the eunuch being delivered from Ethiopia.

A voice is heard from a vast throng that has come from the very realm dominated by Satan—where false religion and spiritual tyranny reigns seemingly uncontested. God, through His great power, and in strict accord with His eternal purpose, brought about a great spiritual resurrection. It was an awakening of unparalleled proportion, among a people who appeared to be hopeless.

## *Like the Voice of Loud Thunder*

“ . . . *and like the voice of loud thunder . . .* ” Again, in this book, we have heard of a voice like thunder before (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 19:6). Always, it has been in response to the corruptions of the earth, and in direct relation to redemption. The Divine agenda is seen throughout this book.

In this text, we are hearing a heavenly response to the ruthless reign of the beasts. It is the voice of brands that have been plucked out of the fire (Zech 3:2), and a multitude that have had ungodliness turned from them.

**The strongest protest against corruption is regeneration—standing with the Lamb of God on Mount Zion.** No stronger statement can be made against religious debauchery than to “*come out from among them, and be ye separate*” (2 Cor 6:17). Such separation is like a thunderous voice from heaven, uttered in harmony with the delivering Lamb, Who is enthroned in heaven. Sin and delusion are never more thoroughly exposed than when a person is saved “*by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.*” Great glory is brought to God by those who “gladly receive the Word,” abandoning the ways of the world, and fleeing for refuge to Jesus. Like Noah, in obedience, they condemn the world.

## HARPING HARPISTS

“ *And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.* ” The group before us has already been identified as “*the whole house of Israel*” (7:4-8). According to the Divine promise, the Deliver has come out of Zion, turning away ungodliness from them (Rom 11:25-26). Now they are with Him, rather than rejecting Him and being aligned against Him.

### *A Marvelous Work*

We are beholding a marvelous work, indeed! It seems to me that one of the great deficiencies of contemporary religion is its lack of heavenly greatness. Among those with whom I have walked, the work of regeneration is not at all evident. In fact, great segments of that brotherhood deny the reality of the new birth, affirming it to be a metaphor. It is no wonder that in such an environment little, if any, Divine working is evident.

But this is not the circumstance with which we are now being confronted. Those formerly rejecting the Lamb—who did not receive Him (John 1:11)—are now with Him. The very people who *“killed the Lord Jesus”* (1 Thess 2:15), are now found alive in Him. What a wonder it this!

Known as a singing people, those who had carried them away captive asked for a happy song from them, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” Alas, it was too difficult for them to do it. Pining away they said, “How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”

This multitude is **willingly** with the Lamb. Their minds have been renewed and transformed, as indicated by the name of the Lamb's Father being upon their foreheads. Their deliverance was not like that of Israel from Egypt, when they remained unchanged in their character, murmuring against their Deliverer.

Every instance of regeneration is a wonderful Divine work. However, when a nation is *“brought forth all at once,”* it is particularly

marvelous (Isa 66:8, NASB). Just as the deliverance of Israel from Egypt transcended the deliverance of Lot from Sodom, so the conversion of Israel shines brighter on the horizon of Divine purpose than the conversion of a single person. We do not demean the work of God in saying this, or minimize the conversion of any individual. Remember, the reception of Israel is equated, to an extraordinary degree, with ***“life from the dead,”*** the ***“riches of the Gentiles,”*** and ***“the fulness of the Gentiles”*** (Rom 11;12,15).

### **The Voice of Harpists**

Some poor souls could never express the joy of converted beings in such language. The notion of ***“harpists”*** being with the Lamb jars the soul of many a legalist. This is, however, the language employed by the Spirit of God, and we do well to take it into our thinking. It is by no means a Divine trait to take unlawful things and use them as containers depicting heavenly joy and adoration.

Since the Babylonian captivity, the Jews have not been a singing people. The shroud of spiritual melancholy and gloom hangs over their hearts to this day. There is a most poignant portrayal of this condition in the 137 th Psalm. There, the ancient people are characterized as sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping when they ***“remembered Zion”*** (Verse 1). With great sorrow, they confess, ***“We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it”*** (Verse 2). Known as a singing people, those who had carried them away captive asked for a happy song from them, saying, ***“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*** (Verse 3). Alas, it was too difficult for them to do it. Pining away they said, ***“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”*** (Verse 4). Their recollections of former blessing only wrenched their hearts and cause rivers to flow from their eyes.

Oh, in past times, in the time of David, when they had reached their apex as a nation, it was different. Then, ***“David and all the house of***

***Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals***” (2 Sam 6:5). But that time was brought to a grinding halt. Their singing subsided, as a whole, until this very day.

### *Something New and Fresh*

But our text declares something new and fresh has happened. The harps of Israel are no longer hanging upon the trees of a captivating nation. Nor, indeed, are their enemies chiding them by requesting mirth from them in a time of unparalleled sorrow. No! John hears ***“the sound of harpists playing on their harps”*** –and it is no sad sound that he hears. Here the 108 th Psalm is brought to fulfillment. ***“Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds”*** (Verses 2-4).

The phrase indicates a dexterity proceeding from regeneration. It is the sort of thing David spoke of when he wrote, ***“I will open my dark saying upon the harp”*** (Psa 49:4). Their whole person, and all they possess, have been blended together for the glory of God.

Notice how the harpers and their harps are blended into one: ***“the voice of harpists playing on their harps.”*** The phrase indicates a dexterity proceeding from regeneration. It is the sort of thing David spoke of when he wrote, ***“I will open my dark saying upon the harp”*** (Psa 49:4). Their whole person, and all they possess, have been blended together for the glory of God.

What a marvelous portrayal of regeneration. It is another way of saying, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”*** (2 Cor 5:17). In our text, this is on a national scale, which is even more wonderful. It is something for which we pray.

### *An Expression of Victory*

In the book of Revelation, gaining the victory over Satan’s devices is related to harps. The language is very precise, and is worthy of our attention. ***“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God”*** (Rev 15:2). David declared he would express the joy of being delivered by the Lord upon the harp (Psa 43:1-4).

***“The voice of harpists playing their harps,”*** therefore, is nothing less than the offering of praise to God for having been delivered. Just as Israel ***“sang”*** on the banks of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1), so will Israel sing joyfully upon their deliverance from spiritual blindness and alienation.

Here, also, Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled. ***“So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away”*** (Isa 51:11).

May the Lord hasten the day when the Deliverer comes out of Zion and turns away ungodliness from Jacob! It will be a glad day, indeed, and the occasion of most unusual praise, when the redeemed of Israel stand with the Lamb in the heavenly places! What praise will be heard

at that time. Lord, tune our hearts to so sing now! By Your infinite grace bring honor to Your name through us.

Is it not refreshing to consider the powerful effects of the Gospel upon those who gladly receive it? How great is this salvation!

## A NEW SONG

***“They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders . . . ”*** Redemption is something that takes place ***“before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders.”*** Whether on an individual or collective basis, it is a reality beheld by heavenly personalities, and is primarily appreciated by them. In salvation, an acute awareness of heavenly realms grips the heart. They do not sing before men, but before the throne!

All of the expressions that flow from salvation are also uttered before heaven’s august assembly. Frequently, this Kingdom demeanor is expressed by holy men. ***“I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels”*** (1 Tim 5:21). And again, ***“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (2 Tim 4:1). The degree to which one has participated in the Divine nature is, among other things, gauged by such a frame of spirit. James says one of the marks of ***“pure religion”*** is that it is ***“before God”*** (James 1:27). Without lingering on this point, the fact that this is so uncommon in our time is evidence of a massive departure from the Lord.

### A New Song

It is no average song that this multitude sings before the throne! It is not a new *kind* of singing, a new *rhythm* , or a new *style* . It is a ***“new***

**SONG!**” Not only are its contents new, the perception of the singers is new. In fact, the newness of the people is what makes the song new. It is an illuminated song, sung by enlightened singers.

All of the expressions that flow from salvation are also uttered before heaven’s august assembly. Frequently, this Kingdom demeanor is expressed by holy men.

Have you not enjoyed singing such a song—when you saw things in the words you never saw before? Many an old song has been made new by an illuminated heart. Such songs are sung with greater fervency. More of the singer, in such a case, is in the song.

How often we read of such a song in Scripture. The admonition is sounded, **“Sing unto him a new song”** (Psa 33:1). And again, **“O sing unto the LORD a new song : sing unto the LORD, all the earth”** (Psa 96:1). Such a song comes from the perception of the working of the Lord. As it is written, **“O sing unto the LORD a new song ; for He hath done marvelous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory”** (Psa 98:1).

Such songs are placed in the mouth by the Lord Himself: **“And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God”** (Psa 40:3). This is the result of giving the people a new heart, and writing His Law therein. Those enjoying this benefit affirm, **“I will sing a new song unto thee, O God”** (Psa 144:9).

### *A Different Kind of Song*

A **“new song”** is a different kind of song. It is of another order. It is not a soulish song, but a spiritual one. It does not come from the flesh,

but from the Spirit. The heart is tuned by grace, the mind renewed by insight, and the lips sanctified by the Spirit. Never does a soul sing more beautifully than when it comprehends the song it sings, and is caught up in the spirit of it.

One of the invariable marks of the redeemed is their praise to God. They sing a new song, and they sing it ***“before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders.”***

### *Freshness in the Song*

But here we see the 144,000 singing this new song. It is new to them, and, in a sense, new to the rest of the world. There is a freshness in this song that has not been seen in the world for a long time—if, indeed, it has ever been seen. It peals like thunder through the heavenly realms, and roars like a thousand cataracts of cascading waterfalls.

It is not the song of a solitary shepherd on the hillside that we hear, but one of a great multitude. With one heart and one spirit, they sing in harmony only heaven itself can give.

### **No One Can Learn the Song**

Herein is a marvelous thing. ***“No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.”*** Only those extricated from the condemned world—delivered from this present evil world—can learn this song. It is not for those who live on the surface of life, with their roots never settling into the richness of God’s grace. Neither godly life nor spiritual expression can be emulated. The ungodly cannot participate in either. They cannot ***“learn that song.”***

When it comes to a body of people, no one has ever, or will ever, sing it like Israel, when the veil is lifted from their eyes (2 Cor 3:15-16). The prophets spoke of this time. ***“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”*** (Isa 35:10; 51:11). They spoke of a time when the lower parts of the earth would break forth into singing because ***“the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel”*** (Isa 44:23). That is the very thing we are witnessing in our text.

Still, some doubt that this is a proper representation of the case. Allow me to call Jeremiah to the witness stand. He will speak for God on the matter. ***“For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion , and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden ; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy , and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow . And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness , saith the LORD”*** (Jer 31:11-14).

When reading this marvelous text, I am impressed how it will not fit into stilted theology. If men imagine that God has once and for all rejected Israel, and there is no more hope for them as a nation, then this promise has fallen to the ground unfulfilled. It has returned void to the Lord, and not accomplished that whereunto He sent it (Isa 55:11). If all of this has reference to *the church* , as ordinarily conceived, then we have God comforting His ancient people by speaking of something they will never attain. Both views are foolish, and unworthy of further consideration.

This song is not for those who live on the surface of life, with their roots never settling into the richness of God's grace. Neither godly life nor spiritual expression can be emulated. The ungodly cannot participate in either.

Some will counter that this is the very thing we Gentiles have experienced—and that is true. We who are in Christ Jesus have, indeed, joined in the singing of the song of redemption. But we have done so ONLY because we have been grafted into their olive tree. We are partakers of the root and fatness of their tree, and have become the children of their progenitor, Abraham.

However, we should not suppose that we have learned to sing it to the same degree Israel will learn it when the veil is lifted from their eyes. The fervor that will grip their hearts when they become associated with the Lamb will dwarf what has occurred in the Gentile church. It will spark a revival in the world that will cause the last harvest to be the greatest one. The song will affect them more than it has the Gentile church. That is why "*the times of the Gentiles*" will be brought to an end (Lk 21:24; Rom 11:25).

We know this is the case because of the wording of this text. The song is not said to be learned simply by those "*redeemed from the earth.*" Rather, the song is said to have been learned ONLY by "*the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.*" Once again, that number has been defined as a vast number "*of all the tribes of the children of Israel*" (Rev 7:4).

The meaning of the text, then, is that the reborn and united children of Israel will have more of the spirit of the New Covenant than the

combined Gentile church. If one views the history of the times during which *“the fulness of the Gentiles”* is being gathered, it will become apparent they have not learned the song. There is a level of division and disharmony in the Gentile church that boggles the mind. Scarcely a place can be found on the globe where believers are harmonious. There is a level of corruption within the church that has brought unspeakable sorrow and discouragement to myriads of souls.

This does not mean an individual cannot sing the song of redemption with the spirit and with the understanding. It will, however, be an exception to the professed Christian norm, as any insightful soul will confess. Notwithstanding, we thank God for all who have learned the song. We intend as well to become expert in singing it ourselves.

## UNDEFILED

*“These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.”* This phrase denotes spiritual purity, where the soul has not played the harlot with other gods. *“Women,”* in this case, indicates competing influences, whether idols, the world itself, or self interests. *“Virgins”* describes the purity resulting from the refusal to become involved in such things. *“Defiled”* depicts a spiritual condition that makes a person or nation unacceptable to God.

### In Prior Times

In prior times, this could not be said of Israel. It was noted for its harlotry—for prostituting her affection for the Living God. How frequently God would cry out to them, *“thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD”* (Jer 3:1). The Lord said to Josiah, *“Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under*

*every green tree, and there hath played the harlot*” (Jer 3:6). Through Ezekiel, the Lord said, *“Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldst not be satisfied”* (Ezek 16:28). Even though God has solemnly commanded them, *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* (Ex 20:3), the history of Israel is spotted with repeated reversions to idolatry Judges 2:12; 1 Sam 8:8; 1 Kgs 14:9; Jer 1:16).

With the conversion of Israel, however, idolatry is put far from them. In fact, after the Babylonian captivity, their propensity to idolatry began to wane.

### **The Requisite for Purity**

One of the marks of regeneration is the absence of defilement. Moral and spiritual purity is an absolute requisite to walking with Jesus!

One of the marks of regeneration is the absence of defilement. Moral and spiritual purity is an absolute requisite to walking with Jesus! The objective of redemption is to enable the saved to stand before the Lord *“faultless”* (Jude 24), *“without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing”* (Eph 5:27). Salvation extricates from sin, cleanses from its defilement, and brings one into harmony with the Holy God. The notion of the Lord countenancing defilement is absurd. Only the *“pure in heart”* are promised they will *“see God”* (Matt 5:8). The *“end,”* or aim, of the commandment is *“love out of a pure heart”* (1 Tim 1:5). *The “mystery of the faith,”* or the understanding of what faith grasps, can only be held in a *“pure conscience”* (1 Tim 3:9). It is no marvel the exhortation is given, *“keep thyself pure!”* (1 Tim 5:22).

### **The Prelude of Purity**

We are witnessing the conversion of Israel and a consequent world-wide awakening. Purity is a necessary prelude to that awakening. ***“These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste”*** (NASB).

When Israel turns to the Lord, and the veil is removed from their hearts (2 Cor 3:15-16), they will not bring the defilements of the world with them. At that time, the promise will be fulfilled to them, ***“And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail”*** (Deut 28:13). Their purity will yield the harvest of headship and prominence in the earth being ***“filled with the knowledge of the Lord”*** (Hab 2:14).

As a matter of principle, no one will be used mightily by God who is defiled. God is not served by routine and contaminated affections. These are blotches upon the contemporary church that are reprehensible. No amount of institutional organization, evangelistic programs, or missionary initiatives will compensate for the presence of defilement. In my judgment, because the Gentile church has refused to address the matter of defilement, its time is rapidly coming to a close.

### *Purge Out the Old Leaven*

Moral and spiritual adulteration are common **within** the nominal church. Indeed, major so-called *ministries* have been created to deal with this growing blight. The early church was told to ***“purge out the old leaven,”*** not try and recover it (1 Cor 5:7-8). Peter did not appoint a group to recover Ananias and Sapphira. Paul did not institute a recovery program for Demas, Alexander, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Phygellus, or Hermogenes (2 Tim 2:17; 1;15; 4:10,14).

This is not to be construed as an expression of opposition to recovering those caught in the snare of the devil. There is certainly a place for this (Gal 6:1-2; 2 Tim 2:24-26). The existence of defilement

in the church, however, is to be taken with the utmost seriousness. Only the spiritual are to engage in recovery efforts (Gal 6:1). Furthermore, they are to “*consider*” themselves in the activity lest they “*also be tempted.*” Too, those who engage in an effort to recover the fallen are to remember that God must “*give repentance*” to such individuals (2 Tim 2:25).

All of this accentuates the seriousness of defilement, and the blessedness of its absence. The greatest spiritual awakenings are spearheaded by pure and undefiled people. *Those aligned with the world, bring contamination upon themselves.* They exclude themselves from Divine employment. Whether it is defilement in thought, deed, attire, or other expressions. God will **NOT** use the impure. Those with a penchant for customs, fads, and the likes, do well to ponder these things. The commonality of such preferences is most serious.

Because joining in affinity with the ungodly defiles, such alliances are shunned by the pure. This will be a mark of the ancient people when the Deliverer turns ungodliness away from them. It is a blessed thing to consider these realities. There are certain advantages to purity! They are not to be gainsayed, but appropriated.

## FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS

***“These are the ones who follow the Lamb WHEREVER He goes.”*** There is such a thing as desiring the Lord to follow men in THEIR pursuits. This is not, however, the manner of the Kingdom. The redeemed multitude we are witnessing are so resolute in their commitment to the Lamb, they follow Him ***“WHEREVER HE GOES!”***

It is not that this is an unusual thing in life with the Son. This is

actually the ONLY way to be identified with the Lamb. Through the years, however, this condition has become very rare. Even in the first century, when some suppose pristine purity existed, Paul wrote, ***“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s”*** (Phil 2:21). To Timothy Paul wrote, ***“that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me”*** (2 Tim 1:15). This parallels the expression of Isaiah concerning his time. ***“Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own***

Remember, because of the departure of men from the faith, and their failure to receive the love of the truth, Satan was allowed to spread ***“strong delusion”*** in the world.

way, every one for his gain, from his quarter” (Isa 56:11). Such a condition is tragic beyond words.

Remember, because of the departure of men from the faith, and their failure to receive the love of the truth, Satan was allowed to spread ***“strong delusion”*** in the world. Under his auspices, Christianity was institutionalized. It adopted a ***“form of godliness”*** that ***“denied*** (or refused) ***the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5). Affiliation with the institution was now sufficient, with no vital connection with the Lord required. The ***“mind of Christ”*** was no longer the standard, and men took to themselves the authority belonging to the Lamb alone. This religious corruption became dominate, causing judgment to come from heaven.

Now, in the very midst of this spiritual defilement, the Deliverer turns ungodliness from Jacob, fulfilling God’s covenant to them. This redeemed multitude will not subscribe to the corruptions of men. Instead, they ***“follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”*** They are Christ-centered, not church-centered. They do not follow the Lamb in a discriminating way, selecting only the favorable and more convenient places. They ***“follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”*** They adopt His agenda, and embrace His determinations. His very character is reflected

in them: ***“not My will, but Yours, be done”*** (Lk 22:42).

### **This is the Standard**

Although the consistency of the 144,000 is unusual in the earth, it is standard in the heavenlies. In fact, no other frame of spirit is acceptable. Those who cease following the Lord are no longer blessed by Him. Those who will be saved **MUST** have an appetite and preference for Him; i.e., His word, guidance, counsel, and comfort. If anyone can do without Jesus, they will not taste of His salvation, or be mightily used in His Kingdom! But those following the Lamb realize Divine employment, and are effective in their work.

### *A Requirement*

Jesus spoke in a straightforward manner about the necessity of following Him. He made absolutely no provision for those who refused to do this. We do well to hear His words. ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”*** (Matt 16:24). This was not a periodic requirement, but a daily one. ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”*** (Lk 9:23).

Do you want to serve Christ? Is it your desire to be employed by Him, and utilized in the execution of His will? Hear His words. ***“If any man serve me, let him follow me.”*** He does not, however, allow a sporadic following. Coming after Christ involves being where He is! ***“. . . and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor”*** (John 12:26).

In a vivid description of His people, the Lord Jesus described their

nature to follow, or pursue, Him. “ the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. “ . . . *the sheep follow him , for they know his voice . Yet they will by no means follow a stranger , but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers . . . I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own . . . And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice . . . My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me* ” (John 10:3-27).

Jesus spoke in a straightforward manner about the necessity of following Him. He made absolutely no provision for those who refused to do this.

These are the characteristics of Christ’s people—of those who are saved. ( 1) They follow Him. (2) They know Him. (3) They will not follow an imposter. (4) They do now recognize the voice of charlatans. (5) They hear His voice. Let it be clear, in salvation there is no provision made for any other frame of spirit!

### *Summary*

Our text, then, portrays a multitude “*from all the tribes of Israel*” as genuinely regenerated. They have not merely adopted some Gentile manner, or embraced a hollow form of the truth. Their hearts have been circumcised (Rom 2:29; Col 2:12), the law has put into their mind and written upon their hearts (Heb 10:16), and they have been “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17). Their’s is not a profession of allegiance to the Lamb, but a very real and perceptible one. Their commitment is obvious.

I want to make clear these are not super-saints. The description given is that of every person Christ receives to the glory of God (Rom 15:7).

It does, however, represent a large-scale work of God, for which He has often been known. His great salvation is sometimes evidenced in the turning of great multitudes from sin to Christ. Such turnings, however, never reflect a comprise of Christ's established requirements.

The world **will** be covered with the knowledge of the Lord—but not through defiled and uncommitted people! Lifeless religion cannot produce spiritual life. Those who do not follow the Lamb wherever He goes cannot “*turn many to righteousness,*” or “*shine as the brightness of the firmament*” (Dan 12:3). Spiritual awakenings, whether on a small or large scale, do not come through those who are not found following the Lamb wherever He goes, preferring Him above all else.

Here, then, the whole house of Israel is seen embracing the Messiah they once rejected. Blessed day, when such a mighty resurrection occurs!

## REDEEMED TO GOD AND THE LAMB

“*These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.*” The conversion of the Jews will take place through the ordained means—the Gospel of Christ. They will embrace the Savior through faith, just as everyone else found in Him. Their turning is special, but the means through which it is accomplished are ordinary. The Gospel of Christ “*is THE power of God unto salvation, TO THE JEW FIRST*” (Rom 1:16). Our text confirms that “*power.*”

### They Were Redeemed

By saying they were “*redeemed,*” the accent is placed on Divine activity rather than human decision. They were repossessed, or

reclaimed—and that at great cost. Justification by grace is ever **“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Rom 3:24). **Sin thrust men from God, redemption brings them back to Him!** It reclaims the soul that was **“sold under sin”** (Rom 7:21), like Joseph was sold into Egypt.

Redemption involves paying a price—an awesome price. In this case, it is **“redemption through His blood”** (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). *The price was paid BY Christ TO God.* Redemption was made effective when Jesus entered **“heaven itself”** with His own blood (Heb 9:14-17,24). Thus men are redeemed **“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”** (1 Pet 1:18).

For the 144,000, like all other who experience it, **redemption is realized by acceptance**. God is satisfied with Christ’s sacrifice (Isa 53:11). It is only realized, however, when men are also satisfied with that blessed offering. This is what Scripture calls, **“receiving the atonement,”** or reconciliation (Rom 5:11).

*“Until”*

The word **“until”** is an expression of expectation and limitation. It is used 129 times in the New Testament writings, and is always a line of demarcation between two appointed events.

What we have before us is an immense **throng “from all the tribes of Israel”** renouncing their former ways in favor of the Lord’s Christ. The very day that occurs, their spiritual blindness and hard heartedness will come to a grinding halt. Jesus pointed to this time when He cried, **“For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”** (Matt

23:39).

The word “*until*” is an expression of expectation and limitation. It is used 129 times in the New Testament writings, and is always a line of demarcation between two appointed events. Jesus used the word 66 times in this manner ( *examples*: Matt 10:23; 11:12; 22:44; Mark 14:25; Lk 21:24; John 13:39). Apostolic writings use the word in the same way ( *examples*: Gal 3:19; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 4:15; Heb 9:10; 2 Pet 1:19). To my knowledge, the word “*until*” is never used of something uncertain or impossible.

### **From all iniquity**

Redemption is not only “*unto God*,” it is “*from all iniquity*” (Tit 2:14). The redeemed are no longer enslaved to sin, and thus do not continue in it. They are made pure by cleansing, and maintain that purity by preference and with resolution. Jesus “*gave Himself to purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*” Purifying and removing them from all sin is requisite for being His “*special people.*” Thus, again, Israel is seen partaking of the very salvation that has been accomplished for “*all men.*”

### **From Among Men**

Salvation, whether on an individual basis, or that of an entire nation, always involves redemption from the masses—i.e., “*from among men.*” A separation from the populace occurs with identity with “*the Lamb.*” While, in a sense, the saved are “*in the world*” (Phil 2:15; 1 Pet 5:9), they are not “*of the world.*” Jesus told His disciples, “*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (John 15:19). That expression reflects the same condition as “*redeemed from among men.*”

Those used effectively by God will be separated from the world. They will not think like the world, or be characterized by its *“fashion”* (1 Cor 7:31). A worldly church—if there be such a thing—will not be used by Jesus, for it does not follow Him.

### **Being Firstfruits**

Here the word *“firstfruits”* indicates a coming harvest of souls. The term *“firstfruits”* is always used as a pledge of a future abundant harvest. It was used in that way under the first covenant, in reference to the harvest of crops (Ex 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:10). It is used of the experience of salvation itself, which is a pledge of the fulness to come (Rom 8:23). The Lord Jesus Himself is *the “Firstfruits of them that slept”*—His resurrection being the pledge of the universal resurrection in the last day (1 Cor 15:20,23).

Even in the book of Revelation, care is taken to maintain Divine priorities. The Lord will not allow the introduction of mere intellectual novelties! The perceived multitude are redeemed from among men *“to God.”*

Note the largeness of the *“firstfruits”*—144,000. That betokens the enormity of the harvest that will follow! Remember, God has affirmed the earth will be *“filled with the knowledge of the Lord”* (Hab 2:14). This is no isolated declaration. David prophesied, *“All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations”* (Psa 22:27, NKJV). Again, the Psalmist wrote, *“All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name”* (Psa 86:9, NKJV). Isaiah avowed *“the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa 11:9).

Salvation is an exceeding large enterprise! The Father promised the Son, ***“Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession”*** (Psa 2:6). Do not doubt the possibility of such a thing! During times of oppression, God’s people may imagine that such greatness will never happen—that it is only a vain wish. However, our text affirms this is not the case. Believe what God says!

There will yet be a Divine initiative that will bring great glory to the Lord. It will be preceded by the turning of Israel, who will be the ***“firstfruits from among men .”*** They will set the tone for discipleship and identity with the Lamb. Jesus will yet be honored by a multitude of followers that willingly abandon all competing interests.

### **To God**

Even in the book of Revelation, care is taken to maintain Divine priorities. The Lord will not allow the introduction of mere intellectual novelties! The perceived multitude are redeemed from among men ***“to God.”*** They are brought back to Him, and will be used in His purpose. After all, Jesus did reconcile us ***“unto God”*** (Rom 5:10). Those in Him are made ***“free from sin”*** and ***become “servants unto God”*** (Rom 6:22). There is no such thing as a person in Christ who is not God-conscience, or is not employed by God. Spiritual Babylon has introduced this kind of concept, but it is not honored in heaven.

### **And to the Lamb**

The multitude has also been redeemed to the Lamb. They are in His care and employ; protected by Him and used by Him. God has no work that is not accomplished through the Son. There is no Kingdom endeavor that is discharged independently of the Son. Those who are

redeemed to God are also redeemed to the Lamb. The Father gives them into the hand of the Son. Not only will the Lamb bring them to glory (Heb 2:10) and to God (1 Pet 3:18), He will accomplish His reign through them!

On one occasion Jesus said, ***“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd”*** (John 10:16). He was speaking of the Gentiles, or nations. And how will Jesus bring these multitudes to Himself? How will the ***“one fold”*** under ***“one Shepherd”*** be realized?

It will be through those who have been redeemed from the earth, and have chosen to follow Him wherever He goes. Those in such a condition confess, ***“for me to live is Christ”*** (Phil 1:21). He is everything to them, and they refuse to follow another. This, of course, is the manner of the Kingdom. Christ has no people who do not maintain this attitude.

## THE IMPACT OF REDEMPTION

***“And in their mouth was found no deceit . . . ”*** The Lord continues to describe this great multitude that will be instrumental in His work. Redemption has an impact upon those who experience it. It is not a mere formality that leaves people fundamentally the same as they were before. Much of Christendom acknowledges there is no basic difference between it and the world. Trite little sayings have been created to make sinners comfortable in Zion. ***“After all, we are all sinners, “Christians are the sinners that get up after they fall,”*** etc. However, this is not heaven’s perspective at all.

A very real transformation takes place in the new birth. The redeemed partake of Christ and the Divine nature (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). Old things do pass away, and all things become new (2 Cor 5:17).

The 144,000 possess the very trait of Jesus: no guile or deceit is found in their mouth! It is said of Jess, ***“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”*** (1 Pet 2:22). He never misrepresented Himself, His God, or the Word. He never made men feel comfortable in sin, or the contrite feel uncomfortable. Only truth came from His lips.

***“Guile,”*** or ***“deceit”*** is a devilish trait. It speaks of subtlety and craftiness. It brings people to an undesirable state by deception and trickery. Satan used this tactic in deceiving Eve (2 Cor 11:3). His ministers use this approach to beguile unstable souls, bringing them down to destruction (2 Pet 2:14; Eph 4:14). Such tactics were never employed by our blessed Lord.

Nominal *Christianity* is, unfortunately, noted for its craftiness. Legion is the name of teachers and leaders who snare people with the words of their mouth. They offer more than they can deliver. What contrite soul is there who has not experienced the impact of such delusion—who has not tasted of a religion without power. Satan’s messengers, camouflaged as ***“ministers of righteousness”*** (2 Cor 11:15), speak with guile. In so doing, they have separated themselves from Christ, Who will have nothing to do with misrepresentation, exaggeration, or sinful embellishment.

A very real transformation takes place in the new birth. The redeemed partake of Christ and the Divine nature. Old things do pass away, and all things

become new.

See, the 144,000 have the mouth of the Lamb as well as the mind of Christ! Redemption has affected their speech. Once the **“poison of asps”** was under their lips, and their throat was like an **“open sepulcher”** (Rom 3;13). But now they have **“the lip of truth”** (Prov 12:19). They represent the Lord truthfully, and their words are accurate and reliable. They will not misrepresent themselves, the truth, God, or Christ. This is another way of saying they **“speak the truth in love.”**

### *The Ingathering of Souls*

An ingathering of souls will never be accomplished by human strategy or shrewd plans. The truth, spoken by lovers of truth, is the appointed means of awakening slumbering souls. As I understand it, Israel will be used mightily in this way. When their eyes are opened, they will proclaim the truth in a guileless manner. In them will be fulfilled this word: **“Surely they are my people, children that will not lie”** (Isa 63:8).

You can see this is the manner of the Kingdom. There really is no other acceptable posture for the people of God. Under the Gentiles, however, the church has degenerated into a state of unacceptability. Lukewarmness, inattentiveness, and at-homeness in this world have become common among those professing the name of Christ. For this reason, **“the times of the Gentiles”** will come to an end.

The last great harvest will not be accomplished under the leading of the Gentiles. Rather, it will occur under the influence of a large number of redeemed **“from the tribes of Israel.”** Their tree will flourish once again. They will yet be found on Mount Zion, in company with the Lamb.

## The Means Are Not New

Once again, we are witnessing the nature of salvation itself. No new Gospel is affirmed. A new spiritual condition is not created. The redeemed of the Lord do not acquire different traits than have always been experienced in salvation. What we are seeing is a restoration of spiritual life in a large body of people. They are taken from among “*the tribes of Israel,*” but represent the norm of the Kingdom. Their description and demeanor is that of every person in Christ Jesus.

In our time, the church must be encouraged to use Divine means to accomplish Divine results. There has been far too many human resources gathered into the church. Their presence has made it impotent. It will not again be powerful until it is purged of these defiling influences. If this appears to be too strong, it is really not strong enough.

## BEFORE THE THRONE AT LAST

“ . . . *for they are without fault before the throne of God.*” Here again the very nature of salvation in Christ Jesus is described. Redemption brings people before the very throne of God, and does so effectively. Although the number we are seeing were once noted for crucifying the “*Lord of glory*” (1 Cor 2:8), and not receiving the Lord Who came to them (John 1:11), they are now “*without fault before the throne of God.*” Once their house was “*left desolate*” (Lk 13:35), but now they flourish again. We are seeing “*life from the dead.*”

The covering of the earth with the knowledge of the Lord will be facilitated through a holy people. **In fact, a walk with Christ is predicated upon purity.** Where a lack of purity

exists in professed believers, the work of the Lord will not be evident.

They have been ***“justified from all things,”*** from which they could ***“not be justified by the Law of Moses”*** (Acts 13:39). The ***“first covenant”*** was NOT ***“faultless”*** (Heb 8:7), but now they are! In fulfillment of God’s own promise, the Deliver has come out of Zion and ***“turned away ungodliness from Jacob”*** (Rom 11:26).

### The Ultimate Test

The ultimate test comes ***“before the throne of God.”*** It is how God sees men that is the real issue, not how they see themselves, or how their peers see them.

What will be true of the entire body of the redeemed is here declared of a throng ***“from all the tribes of Israel”*** – ***“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”*** (Eph 5:27). As Peter would say, they are ***“found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”*** (2 Pet 3:14). In keeping with Divine aptitude, the Lord has presented them ***“faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”*** (Jude 24).

This is real faultlessness! Redemption has removed the stain of sin so thoroughly the eye of Omnipotence perceives the redeemed as ***“without fault.”*** It is not an imagination, nor is it an overstatement or exaggeration. The unspeakable sin of Israel—a sin which brought a curse upon them—has been purged. Whether on an individual level, a national, or a global level, when the salvation of God is received, a condition of irreproachable purity ensues.

Only justified people, cleansed from sin in both character and conscience, will be used mightily by God. Defilement always excludes

one from Divine service. Oh, that men were more aware of this. Unfortunately, it may be said of many in the church, just as it was of those in Israel of old, ***“They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation”*** (Isa 32:5). Such people are not ***“vessels for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work”*** (2 Tim 2:21). It appears from the present condition of things that this is not generally acknowledged.

The covering of the earth with the knowledge of the Lord will be facilitated through a holy people. **In fact, a walk with Christ is predicated upon purity.** Where a lack of purity exists in professed believers, the work of the Lord will not be evident.

### **The Eventual State**

Ultimately, this will be the state of all of the redeemed— ***“without fault before the throne of God.”*** Everything pertaining to life and godliness is supplied in Christ to see to it this happens. Provision is made for continual cleansing (1 John 1:9). There is uninterrupted intercession by the Lord Jesus Himself (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34). The Holy Spirit has been given to us to assist us in appropriating the blessing and being spiritually productive. Even the innumerable angels have been marshaled to minister to us. Our prayers are heard by an attentive Father, and the power of the foe has been neutralized.

All of this is provided by a God who is ***“able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”*** (Jude 24). Hallelujah to the Lamb for such a marvelous and effectual salvation!

## **CONCLUSION**

What we have witnessed in the opening of the fourteenth chapter is worthy of your extended consideration. In spite of Satan's aggressive and effective attack of the people of God, the Deliverer turns away ungodliness from Jacob. The ancient people are restored to God through Christ. Under their leadership, the promises of global affectation by the knowledge of God will be realized in an unprecedented way. How blessed to ponder these things.

Although this work is supernatural, it employs the means of salvation with which we are familiar. There is no new Gospel. The Lord Jesus draws through His vicarious death. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment, as He is appointed (John 16:7-11). The veil is lifted from their eyes in the reading of Scripture. The Law is written upon their hearts and placed into their minds just as the New Covenant declares. They know the Lord, as promised, and their sins and iniquities are remembered no more. They are with Christ in heavenly places, and follow Him wherever He goes.

This is salvation as it is consistently represented in the Word of God. New hearts, new spirits, a new song, purity of speech, faultlessness before God—these are always resident in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus!

These traits, however, are NOT common within the professed church. In fact, they are exceedingly rare. This accounts for the impotence of the nominal church. A falling away has occurred in which the love of the truth has been rejected, and a preference for this world fostered. This has all occurred as men have succumbed to the delusions of the devil.

But let it be clear in your mind. The Gospel has not lost its power!

The Holy Spirit has not become impotent! The intercession of Christ is still effective! The holy angels are still devoted to ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation. The ear of the Father is still open to the prayers of the righteous, and His eyes are ever upon them.

Nothing has changed in the heavenly realms! Men may still enter the holiest place with boldness. They can still obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need. Everything still belongs to those in the Son. The whole armor of God can be put on, the devil effectively resisted, and the eyes of the understanding opened.

These things are lost when men's hearts grow cold toward the Lord. When the affection is removed from things above, they no longer become accessible. But wherever there is a sensitive soul, who will look to Jesus and seek the things that are above, all of the things said of the 144,000 will be experienced. Such individuals will be with the Lamb on Mount Zion. They will be undefiled, and no guile will be found in their mouths. They will be without fault before the throne of God, and will be employed by Him! This is the heritage of the saints, and all of them can possess it!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 27

## THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOSPEL

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth; to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people; saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs" (Revelation 14:6-20, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus is showing John things determined and controlled by heaven. We must ever keep before us that ***“the heavens do rule”*** (Dan 4:26), and that an ***“eternal purpose”*** (Eph 3:10-11) is being executed in the earth. As the six-singed seraphim of Isaiah’s vision cried, ***“The whole earth is full of His glory”*** (Isa 6:3). Everywhere, *God is at work*. In the blessing of humanity, *He is at work* (Psa 24:5). In the sending of delusion, *He is at work* (Isa 66:4; 2 Thess 2:11). In the raising up of kings and kingdoms, *He is at work* (1 Sam 2:8; Psa 75:6). In the casting down of kings and kingdoms, *He is at work* (Isa 2:12; 26:5; Dan 2:21). The world is His stage, and His purpose is being fulfilled in its history. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, saw the hand of the Lord in the punishment of the ancient people. In his sorrow, he uttered a truth that is most relevant to us. ***“The LORD hath done that which He had devised; He hath fulfilled His word that He had commanded in the days of old”*** (Lam 2:17).

### Heaven Beholds

With zeal, we must avoid being caught up in a view of the book of Revelation that obscures the working and purpose of the Lord. We simply cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in curious views of the beast, his mark, and other components of the vision.

The observation of the Lord’s working is a privilege vouchsafed to heavenly beings. When the hand of the Lord moves, both the heavens and the lower regions of this earth are summoned to give Him glory. As Isaiah said, ***“Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth***

*into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!”* (Isa 44:23).

### **Consider! Consider!**

The book of Revelation is a sort of Divine subpoena to consider the activities of this world as the outworking of God’s purpose. In that enactment, there is an final view to be seen. Ultimately, evil will go down in utter frustration, and righteousness will be exalted. The devil and all of his wicked forces will be summarily cast into the lake of fire, while those who follow Him will be exalted to reign with Him, **“world without end”** (Eph 3:21). Satan cannot win, and Jesus cannot lose! The wicked cannot end up in prominence, and the righteous cannot end up in ignominy and shame! These are things that must be seen and embraced if we are to remain **“faithful until death”** (Rev 2:10).

### **History Is Not an End of Itself**

History is never an end of itself, and the relating of historical facts do not carry the greatest weight in the Kingdom of God. It is the WORKER behind the facts, and the REASON for them that brings profit to the soul. In this book, we are beholding the WORKING OF THE LORD. In that working, His will is the ultimate thing being accomplished. Satan, although intensely active, is being frustrated on every hand, and his diabolical purpose being thwarted. Too, there are intentions—high and lofty purposes—being served in this Divine working. The saints are being oriented for glory, and the wicked are being shown to be worthy of condemnation. The Lamb of God is being vindicated and extolled, while Satan is being exposed and overthrown.

### **Avoid Distraction**

With zeal, we must avoid being caught up in a view of the book of Revelation that obscures the working and purpose of the Lord. We

simply cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in curious views of the beast, his mark, and other components of the vision. The hearts of believers are to be comforted and blessed by the Revelation, not thrust into a state of fear and distraction. Christ is seeking to comfort His people!

### **Another Cycle**

We will now embark on another view of *“the end”* –the time when God’s *“eternal purpose”* shall have been fulfilled. The history of this world is moving toward the consummation we will consider. These things are not statements of the ideal, or things the saints simply desire to happen. These are a depiction of realities that have been determined in heaven. They are sure to come. Our aim: be ready for them! These will *SURELY* come to pass, and will not fail of fulfillment.

## **PHENOMENAL HEAVENLY ACTIVITY**

If it is true that we are beholding the execution of the will of God, we should expect heaven to be active in the process. A view of the Kingdom that leaves us thinking God is inactive is wholly inadequate. It misrepresents the Lord and disarms the saints.

God is never presented as determining matters in which He Himself is not involved. He is a “very present Help in trouble” (Psa 46:1). Jeremiah spoke to our hearts when he said for God, *“Am I a God near at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off?”* (Jer 23:23).

*The “heavens do rule,”* but not in absentia, or apart from a direct involvement. They are ever active in the affairs of men, and particularly in salvation. The persuasion of this reality will bring joy and strength to suffering saints, enabling them to finish their course.

## **Satan Is Active**

We have already seen Satanic activity of large proportions. Employing the governments of this world and corrupt religion, he has maintained an constant initiative against the saints of the Most High God. He has not been successful in His intent, however, because he operates strictly within the boundary of God's will. He is ***“under authority,”*** praise the Lord! Of the exalted and enthroned Christ it is written, ***“Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him”*** (1 Pet 3:22). These include Satan's ***“angels”*** (Rev 12:9), as well as the ***“holy angels”*** (Matt 25:31).

With great subtlety, the devil has injected wicked concepts into the mainstream of theological thought. He would have us believe that the Lord instituted a powerful movement at the first, with Divine fellowship and intervention being prominent. Now, however, all of that has come to a grinding halt, and men are basically on their own. Armed with the Word of God and good minds, they are to understand the things of God and extend the borders of the Kingdom. At least that is what our adversary would have us believe. But this is not at all the case.

## **Heaven Is Involved—Believe it!**

Repeatedly, the book of Revelation confirms the involvement of heaven in the life of the church. There is activity in heaven on the behalf of God's people. The Father Himself is active ((1:1-2; 4:8; 5:10; 17:17; 18:20), together with the Son (1:8; 2:23; 5:13; 17:14), the Holy Spirit (2:7; 11:11; 22:17), and all of the holy angels (5:11; 7:1; 17:1). There are lofty heavenly personages who work in the behalf of God's people, like the ***“four living creatures”*** (Rev 4:6-9), cherubim (Psa 80:1), and seraphim (Isa 6:1-2). There are also special categories of angels who work in our behalf. They include ***“mighty”*** angels (Rev 10:1) and ***“archangels”*** (1 Thess 4:16). They are all engaged in the the

purpose of God to bring “*many sons to glory*” through the Lord Jesus Christ.

With great subtlety, the devil has injected wicked concepts into the mainstream of theological thought. He would have us believe that the Lord instituted a powerful movement at the first, with Divine fellowship and intervention being prominent.

This is in perfect accord with the remainder of Scripture that consistently presents heaven as active in our behalf. Any view of salvation that leaves man on his own is seriously flawed. It will, if not abandoned, drag the individual back into the very pit from whence he once was taken!

### Numerous Angels

At least six different angels are prominent in this vision. The *first* has “*the everlasting Gospel*” (Verse 6). The *second* cries out “*Babylon is fallen!*” (Verse 8). A *third* angel affirms that all who worshiped the beast and received his mark would taste of God’s wrath (Verses 9-11). A *fourth* angel comes out of the Temple of heaven and tells the reigning Christ the time for reaping has come (Verse 15). A *fifth* angel also comes out of heaven’s temple having a sharp reaping sickle (Verse 17). A *sixth* angel with power over fire comes out from the Altar telling the angel with the sickle to reap the vine of the earth (Verse 18). How glorious is the heavenly involvement in this!

There is a note of authority and effectiveness found in these angels. They do not sound an uncertain message, or make fruitless attempts to execute the will of God. What they carry is eternal. What they announce is sure. They are beheld coming out of the very temple of heaven, where God and the Lamb reside. They are also directly

involved in the reaping of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

We must learn from these involvements that all of these things will work for the ultimate good and blessing of the people of God.

### **A Voice from Heaven**

John hears a voice from heaven affirming the blessedness of those who die in the Lord (Verse 13). The Holy Spirit affirms the truthfulness of the words by saying **“YES!”** This voice was heard over the crashing of the waves on Patmos, and the blasphemies belched forth from the beast. The ravages of the earth could not suppress the heavenly voice!

### **The Son Is Seen**

The Son of Man Himself is seen on a cloud, with a harvesting sickle in His hand (Verse 14). Note, He is not beheld as the Lamb, but as the primary Man—the **“*Son of man.*”** The harvest of humanity will be under the supervision of the **“*Second Man*”** and **“*Last Adam.*”** He does, in fact, thrust His sickle into the earth, and it is reaped (Verse 16).

The **“*vine of the earth*”** is finally plucked out of the domain of men, and cast into the **“*winepress of the wrath of God*”** (Verse 10-20). Judgment has come for all who chose to connect themselves with **“*this present evil world.*”**

### **Against the Backdrop of**

### **Satan’s Initiative**

The marvel of our text is found in its setting. It takes place in the realm of agitation, corruption, and cursing. All of this text forms an

abrupt intrusion into the affairs of the wicked. While Satan has been busy attempting to disrupt the work of the Lord, now his working is obstructed by the judgment of the Almighty!

This is something you must see with some degree of clarity. The affairs of this earth, though grievous, are not out of control. The Lord will bring down the curtain of time and conclude the work of our adversary. He shall do so without facing any resistance whatsoever. The Gospel will be preached without being deterred. Those who have aligned themselves with the devil will fall. When the earth is reaped, the devil will be powerless to stop it. The church, bless God, is in good hands. Our faith in Christ is well founded, and will be richly rewarded.

## THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

*“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth; to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. . .”* Why is it that *“an angel”* is seen *“having the everlasting Gospel?”* And why is he seen *“flying in the midst of heaven?”*

It might interest you to know this is the ONLY place in all of John’s writings where the word *“Gospel”* is mentioned. This has led some to believe it is not the Gospel of Christ, but a special word for a special time (i.e., the fall of Babylon, etc.). I reject this view because of the attachment of *“eternal”* to the *“Gospel.”* Something that is *“eternal”* cannot be anchored in, or confined, to time. An unending Gospel cannot be confined to the fall of an enemy or the demise of an empire. It must be a message that carries its power and implications into eternity itself. It also must have been in the mind of the Lord before the foundation of the world. Such qualities are, in fact, associated with the Gospel of Christ (Matt 25:34; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 1 Pet

1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8).

## **Is the Gospel Preached by the Angel?**

The angel is not carrying the

Now, an angel comes to prepare the way for the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. He summons the heavenly gallery to give heed to what is about to happen. The end of all things is at hand, and a final harvest will be reaped for the glory of God.

Gospel through the midst of heaven to proclaim it himself, but to see to it that it is proclaimed. This should not surprise us. Angels were present at the giving of the Law. In fact, the Law **“was ordained by angels,”** and **“spoken”** by them as well (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). These holy beings play an active role in the dissemination Divine messages.

They also have a keen interest in the Gospel, which has been preached to us with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven (1 Pet 1:12). When the Apostles were placed in prison, **“the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life”** (Acts 5:19-20). An angel directed Philip to go down to Gaza and confront a political official with the Gospel (Acts 8:26). An angel orchestrated the events that led to Cornelius hearing the Gospel (Acts 10:3-32).

Now, an angel comes to prepare the way for the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. He summons the heavenly gallery to give heed to what is about to happen. The end of all things is at hand, and a final harvest will be reaped for the glory of God. The corrupt church will

also be brought down to the ground, proving it was an imposter.

### **The True Gospel Reaffirmed**

The angel carrying the “*everlasting Gospel*” bears some resemblance to the discovery of the Word of God in the temple of God during the reign of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8). Just as Israel had corrupted the Law, causing it to disappear from consideration, so the Gentiles have so corrupted the Gospel that is scarcely can be found in all of its purity. With the institutionalization of religion and the professionalism of its promoters has come unparalleled corruption. Our text is declaring the reaffirmation of the true Gospel, without regard to the promotion of human organizations. It is nothing less than the overthrow of Satan’s corruption of the church.

### **The Gentiles Come In**

Remember, in the previous verses the restoration of the ancient people was portrayed. I have said this is the appointed prelude to a world-wide awakening—something that has never before occurred. To my knowledge, every spiritual awakening to date has been provincial, circumscribed by geographical boundaries. While the Gospel was, indeed, “*preached to every creature which is under heaven*” (Col 1:23), a greater measure of effectiveness will yet be experienced.

Our present text is a prelude to the end of the world, and not the end itself. We know this is the case because an “*everlasting Gospel*” is going to be preached “*to those who dwell upon the earth.*” We are, therefore, yet within the boundaries of

“*The day of salvation*” and “*acceptable year of the Lord.*” We are witnessing the results of a genuinely converted people. We are also seeing the fulfillment of God’s covenant to Israel, when He takes away their sin (Rom 11:27). The matter of their conversion will not end with

them. Rather, it will be a means of effectively reaching the mass of mankind.

### **In Harmony With Scripture**

With the institutionalization of religion and the professionalism of its promoters has come unparalleled corruption. Our text is declaring the reaffirmation of the true Gospel, without regard to the promotion of human organizations.

No one should stumble at this truth. The Word of the Lord has spoken often of this blessing. Allow me to mention several of these promises. They are to be read with the recollection that God cannot lie or renounce His Word.

***“The Gentiles shall come to your light , And kings to the brightness of your rising ”*** (Isa 60:3). ***“The Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth . . . ”*** (Jer 16:19). ***“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it , to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts”*** (Jer 3:17). ***“ All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee”*** (Psa 22:27). ***“God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him ”*** (Psa 67:7). ***“All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name”*** (Psa 86:9). ***“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”*** (Isa 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2).

*“ And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah His portion in the holy land , and shall choose Jerusalem again ” (Zech 2:11-12). “Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem , and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew , saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you ” (Zech 8:22-23). “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles ; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen , saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal 1:11).*

I realize this is extremely controversial, yet feel compelled to say more. All of these promises present the Gentiles in a **seeking** position. They come to Jerusalem. They seek the Lord. They flow into the city. They are resolved to **“go up”** where the Lord is. They ask for God to be shown unto them. This simply has not been the pattern of things until this time. There has been more of a quest to go to the Gentiles than for the Gentiles to come to those who possess the knowledge of God.

Too, our text is declaring something that takes place just prior to the conclusion of all things. At this present time, the most powerful and extensive effectiveness of the Gospel appears to have been at the *beginning* of the age. You will note that the earth is reaped following this great spread of the **“everlasting Gospel.”** That means we are viewing the conclusion of time rather than the beginning of the day of salvation. Further, this cannot be a view of the **“end of the world”** (Heb 9:26), or **“these last days”** (Heb 1:1-3), as used in reference to the **“day of salvation.”** Such usage is attended by thoughts of opportunity rather than the announcement of harvest. In my judgment, the Lord is exposing us to the powerful effects of the good news of Jesus Christ.

## The Essentiality of Conversion

There is a principle to be seen here—one that is too easily overlooked in this day of professionalized and institutionalized religion. **The effectiveness of the Gospel must be preceded by real conversion.** Those who bear the vessels of the Lord MUST be “*clean*” (Isa 52:11). Conversion involves the initial cleansing process. Although God can disseminate the Gospel through individuals who are themselves contentious (Phil 1:16-18), this is not the ordinary manner in which He works. The “*ministry of reconciliation*” is effective only when carried forward by those who themselves have been reconciled to God. Although I blush to say so, this is not an apparent requisite in the contemporary church.

We are living in time when preaching is generally deprecated. Religious sophists have chosen to emphasize everything from entertainment to small group discussions to bring about renewal.

In our text, before the everlasting Gospel is preached, a multitude is seen on Mount Zion “*with the Lamb.*” Evangelistic efforts that are not accompanied by such an affiliation will not yield abundant fruit. While the text speaks specifically of the people of Israel, it speaks generally of all who labor in the Lord’s vineyard.

## Preaching—the Appointed Means

Notice that the PREACHING of the “*everlasting Gospel*” precedes the fall of false religion and the harvest of the world. This is the appointed means of affecting the will of God among men. We are living in time when preaching is generally deprecated. Religious

sophists have chosen to emphasize everything from entertainment to small group discussions to bring about renewal. Contrary to this, preaching has consistently been the Divine means of affecting the new birth and revival.

Jesus was introduced to the world by a John the Baptist, who came **“preaching”** (Matt 3:1). The Lord Jesus Himself was found **“teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom”** (Matt 4:23; 9:35). The early church, when scattered by persecution, **“went every where preaching the word”** (Acts 8:4). Paul said saints were **“established”** by the **“preaching of Jesus Christ”** (Rom 16:25). The **“preaching of the cross”** is affirmed to be **“the power of God”** (1 Cor 1:18). Such **“preaching”** is the ordained means through which it pleases God to **“save them that believe”** (1 Cor 1:21). In these last times, the Spirit declares, God has **“manifested His Word through preaching”** (Tit 1:3).

The **“everlasting Gospel”** is thus seen as the subject of preaching. That is what is announced, reported, or proclaimed. As you must know, much of what is called *preaching* is not an announcement, report, or proclamation. Too many times, I fear, it is nothing more than a dry lecture, a malicious tirade, or a boring excursion into scholasticism. It is no wonder such efforts are futile!

The message to be made known to **“every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people”** is not a sectarian message. It is not the promotion of a particular theological position, or the advancement of a particular gathering of people. The heart of the Gospel is Jesus Christ, and the body of it relates to His vicarious atonement. That is why it is called **“the record that God gave of His Son”** (1 John 5:10-11).

In my judgment, the Gentiles have been sadly lacking in this area.

***“The preaching of the cross”*** has not been at an acceptable level. That is one of the primary reasons the nominal church has not effectively reached the world for Christ.

### **A Universal Gospel**

The ***“everlasting Gospel”*** is so designated, among other things, because of its universality. There is neither age nor people for whom it is not suited. There is no time or person in which it will not accomplish the will of God. Note, our text states this Gospel is to be preached ***“unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”*** That accords perfectly with the initial commission of Jesus (Mark 16:15). At the beginning of ***“the day of salvation,”*** and during its close, the Gospel will play a most prominent position. It has lost neither power nor relevance through the centuries!

This is not a Gospel for fallen angels, but for those who ***“dwell upon the earth.”*** It reaches as far as the effects of sin have reached. It is for every political body– ***“every nation!”*** It is for every ethnic group – ***“every kindred (tribe).”*** It is for every group united by speech– ***“every language.”*** It is for every amalgamation of personalities, wherever they may be found– ***“every people.”*** Sin infected the entire race, and therefore the Gospel is for the entire race.

The Gospel does not adjust to social climates, but lifts men to the realm of eternal resolution. It never becomes obsolete or ineffective! It only needs to be discovered and proclaimed for Divine results to be realized.

### **Ezekiel’s Healing Waters**

We have here a picture of the renewed spread of the ***“glorious Gospel of the blessed God”*** (1 Tim 1:11). It is being spread in its purity,

without regard to sectarian interests. This circumstance is portrayed in Ezekiel's vision of the healing waters—and it is glorious.

This is not a Gospel for fallen angels, but for those who ***“dwell upon the earth.”*** It reaches as far as the effects of sin have reached.

In the vision of reference, Ezekiel saw ***“water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east.”*** It was coursing ***“from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.”*** A heavenly visitor showed the prophet the waters were flowing from the temple, through the outer gate, to regions outside of the city of Jerusalem and country of Israel. Normally, waters flowing out of the city were sewage, but these waters were pure and refreshing.

As these waters flowed, they became deeper. First they were up to the ***“ankles”*** (v. 3), then the ***“knees,”*** then the ***“waist,”*** or loins (v. 4). Then the waters became a massive river that was ***“too deep”*** to be crossed by walking. They were ***“waters in which one must swim”*** (v. 5). As these waters flowed, they reached the Dead Sea, and ***“its waters are healed”*** (v. 8). Everywhere the waters flowed ***“every living thing that moved”*** lived, including a ***“multitude of fish”*** (v. 9). Fisherman are seen ***“from En Gedi to En Eglaim,”*** spreading their nets and catching ***“exceeding many”*** fish. These two cities are at the Southern and Northern extremities of the Dead Sea (v. 10).

There were, however, some ***“swamps and marshes”*** that were not healed, but were ***“given over to salt”*** (v. 11). On either bank of this healing river grew ***“all kinds of trees used for food.”*** Because of ***“the waters”*** flowing from the sanctuary, they yielded fruit every month, never failing to produce. Even their leaves were ***“for medicine”***—a

prelude to glory(v. 12; Rev 22:2).

### **An Effective Gospel**

Ezekiel saw a depiction of the effectiveness of the Gospel, and it was on a large scale. In principle, the waters began flowing on Pentecost, and reached into every segment of the world, bringing healing and health of soul. However, they did not heal on a grand scale, nor were there but a few marshy places. Converts were more like a sampling of the nations, or firstfruits. The Gospel was preached with effectiveness, but did not accomplish the grand results seen in Ezekiel's vision. The national depositories of of delusion and corruption were not healed, and certainly could not be classified as a few "*marshy places.*" The Gospel was preached, praise the Lord, but it was also resisted, maligned, and vigorously opposed.

God, however, will yet show His mighty arm in a fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. It is my understanding that it will occur under the leadership of Israel. There are several prophecies that speak of this type of Gospel spread. "*For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore*" (Isa 2:3-4). "*And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations*" (Isa 25:7).

In the conversion of an individual, these very things are realized. The prophecies, however, speak of multitudes being affected, and "*all the ends of the earth*" fearing the Lord and beholding the "*salvation of our God*" (Psa 67:7; Isa 52:10). One cannot help but be impressed with the largeness of the vision. It does not speak of a few among many being recovered, but of the mass being recovered, and a few remaining

unhealed. It is an exact reversal of our present experience.

Whatever view a person may have of the end times, it is still written, ***“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations”*** (Psa 22:27-28). This cannot refer to every knee bowing and every tongue confessing in the day of judgment, for many in that day will do so to their condemnation. The Word of the Lord speaks here of remembering and turning to the Lord, and worshiping before Him. That is the language of conversion and spiritual healing. If one doubts that such a thing is possible, ***“the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations.”***

## **WHY DEAL WITH SUCH A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT?**

Admittedly, this is an extremely controversial area. For that reason, some would rather leave it alone. First, of course, God's Word has spoken to this subject. We do well to declare what God has promised, and do so with confidence. Second, the church is suffering from a minuscule view of God. It has grown accustomed to stunted views of the Kingdom that are not honoring to Christ, and bring no glory to the Lord.

God is ***“able to save by many or by few”*** (1 Sam 14:6). Ordinarily, we consider this to be an affirmation that God normally saves by using only ***“a few.”*** And, indeed, that has been the case to this time. However, He is also able to ***“save by many.”*** In some respects, that is as great a sign of Divine power as saving ***“by few.”*** We must not allow ourselves to rule out this possibility. God does not say He always saves with ***“few”*** and never with ***“many.”*** He does not say He prefers to save with ***“many”*** and disdains saving with ***“few.”*** He is able to do both, and affirms both situations in His Word.

One further observation: what we see here is an elaboration of what occurred after the sealing of the 144,000 in the seventh chapter. Immediately following that sealing, John saw ***“a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,”*** standing before the throne and the Lamb clothed in white robes (7:9). Our current text is affirming this world will not conclude without the powerful effects of the Gospel being realized. This is not asserted to provide a theological template, but to encourage the hearts of suffering saints. The cause for which they labor has been underwritten by God Almighty, and will not fail. The purpose of this is not to aid men in predicting when the world will end, but to assist them in keeping the faith under great duress – to hold on their way when they are oppressed and truth appears to have fallen in the street. There are Divine appointments that guarantee the reward of the faithful and the demise of the wicked!

## THE HOUR OF JUDGMENT

***“ . . . saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’ ”*** When the truth is proclaimed and believed, it has an immediate effect upon opposing forces. Unfortunately, this is not generally known. Nominal Christendom has all but washed this from human recollection. It is easy for some to think of a *“moral majority”* that are being dominated by a wicked few. Some can conceive of a gigantic revival or spiritual awakening that occurs simultaneously with an outbreak of iniquity and corruption. But this is not a fair representation of the case. Our text will show us that the effective spread of the Gospel will produce a downfall of what is evil.

Whether we are speaking on an individual or a national scale, turning

to the Lord involves turning from iniquity. When the truth is accepted, the lie is rejected. When faith dominates, unbelief is overthrown. If there has not been a massive overthrow of wickedness, there has not been a massive embrace of the truth. If righteousness is not embraced by the majority, the majority have not believed. If the nation is wicked, it is because the people are wicked.

A message now accompanies the sounding of the ***“everlasting Gospel.”*** It is a trumpeting alert, arresting the attention of the world. This message is not the Gospel itself, but an accompaniment to it. ***“Fear God and give glory to Him.”*** God is going to bare His holy arm ***“in the eye of all the nations”*** (Isa 52:10).

The ***“hour of HIS judgment is come,”*** and God is to be worshiped as that judgment is beheld. Until this time, the saints have been pictured under oppression by the world. Spiritual corruption has been introduced in the second beast, and its corrupt judgment has been affirmed. Under Satanic leadership, the truth has been judged, as well as those who embraced it. A religion has been spread abroad that has ***“a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5). This adulteration has flourished, even causing the demise of God’s witnesses.

However, none of this has escaped the attention of our Lord! False religion has only been ***“treasuring up” “wrath”*** (Rom 2:5) in its insurrection against the King of kings. That judgment will be poured out in its fulness in the day of the Lord— ***“the day of wrath.”*** But there will be a preliminary judgment also, and that is what is now being announced.

### **Fear God!**

This is not a fear like that of Adam in Eden, or Israel at Sinai. It is not a fear that thrusts men from God, causing them to hide. Rather, it is a

fear that draws men close to God, causing them to be especially alert to His working. This is the “fear” of which Jesus spoke. ***“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”*** (Matt 10:28). All of God’s opponents will learn what Israel learned, ***“be sure your sin will find you out”*** (Num 32:23).

### **Give Glory to Him!**

God is about to work—behold Him in the working. See His purpose being fulfilled, and His will being done! Give credit to Him for what is being done! How often this admonition is found in Scripture! ***“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name”*** (Psa 29:2). ***“Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength”*** (Psa 96:7). A religion that is not able to properly recognize and trace Divine working back to God, is a false one.

### **The Hour of His Judgment Is Come**

Those who oppose the Lord must face an hour of reckoning. Involved in this is an answer to the souls who cried out under the altar: ***“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”*** (Rev 6:10). We must learn that the demise of everything false has been appointed. The wicked cannot ultimately prevail, nor can the righteous remain un-vindicated. Whether it is the Antediluvians (Gen 6), Sodom (Gen 19), the Egyptians (Ex 7-12), or Jerusalem being judged for rejecting Jesus (Matt 23:38; Lk 19:43-44), the day of reckoning will come for those opposing the Lord.

### **Worship Him!**

As ***“the hour of judgment”*** arrives, men are not to stand aghast, startled that such things have occurred. Rather, they are to behold the Lord in the matter, and acknowledge the rightness of it all. In worshipping Him, they are recognizing His judgment and acquiescing to it.

This is something in which the Gentile church has been very deficient—the worship of God! The current trend in “*worship*” is a far cry from what we see in our text. Here, the worship of God occurs when men behold His judgment upon His enemies. It is a worship of perception, not ritual. God revealed to Israel the effects of perfunctory worship upon Himself—and it was not good (Amos 5:21-26).

This is a summons for men to acknowledge the working of the Lord in the overthrow of false religion. It includes the recognition of His work, as well as a love and preference for it. God recognizes such faithful souls.

## THE FALL OF BABYLON

*“And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’”* For the first time in this book, we are introduced to “*Babylon.*” In the remainder of Revelation, we will of this city frequently.

### Introduction

1. Here we are told it is a “*great city,*” noted for corrupting the world with her fornication. We are speaking, then, of an extensive and impressive influence with a global impact. It is a spiritual city, and not a fleshly one.
2. Later, Divine judgment will “*divide*” this city, causing massive disruption in the world (16:19). The demise of this “*city*” will be disruptive to everything and everyone affected or influenced by it.

3. With unusual clarity, it will also be depicted as a fornicating woman, sitting on blasphemous beast, with a cup of abominations in her hand. She is vividly described as ***“THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”*** (17:5). Here is a Satanic means of promoting unfaithfulness to God. Even though it appears dainty and harmless as a beautiful woman, it mothers both spiritual corruption and things hated by, and abominable to, God.
  
4. It will also be seen as a fallen city that has *“become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!”* (18:2). Here is a city where Satan and his cohorts feel at home. Neither God nor Jesus have any part in her, but the realm of unclean spirits do.
  
5. The *“kings of the earth”* will grieve over her sudden and thorough fall (18:9-10). This form of religious corruption has formed a profitable alliance with the world. That is why the rulers of this world lament when she falls.
  
6. Later, a mighty angel will affirm that ***“with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore”*** (18:21). Though the city prospers for a season, gaining the acceptance of the sinful world, it will come down. It will not simply crumble from within, but will be brought down by spiritual aggression. The fall will be the result of opposition, not old age, so to speak.

### **This Is Not Jerusalem**

This city is one of a primary keys to the book of Revelation. For some, it is the city of Jerusalem. The fall of it is therefore viewed as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jerusalem,. However, did not corrupt the world with her fornication. Nor, indeed, did the kings of the

earth mourn over her fall. Too, she is still found, and was not utterly removed from the earth when she was judged. That view simply will not fit into this text.

## Symbolic Language

All through this book we have been exposed to symbols. The churches were seen as *“candlesticks”* (1:20a). Their messengers were seen as *“stars”* in the hand of the Lord (1:20b). The Lord Jesus is seen as a *“Lamb”* (5:6), and the purpose of God as a seven-sealed *“book”* (5:1-2). Satan is seen as a *“dragon”* (12:3), and the organizations he uses to oppose God’s people as *“beasts”* (13:1,11). The people of God are perceived as *“the woman”* (12:4), and Satan’s aggression against them as *“a flood”* (12:15). Sustaining fellowship with the Lord is seen as *“a place prepared in the wilderness”* (12:6). The faithful testimony of the truth is perceived as *“two witnesses”* (11:3).

Now we are seeing the primary assault of Satan in symbolic language. It is like a gigantic city, with order, purpose, and abundance. It offers refuge, commerce, and productivity. It is Satan’s simulation of *“the holy city, the new Jerusalem,”* which is *“the mother of us all”* (Rev 21:2; Gal 4:26).

A *“city”* is an amalgamation of people. Abraham sought such a place: *“the city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God”* (Heb 11:10). God, we are told, has *“prepared”* such a *“city”* for those living by faith (Heb 11:16). The residence of the faithful is nothing less than *“the city of the Living God”* (Heb 12:22). Those who have embraced Christ are identified as *“the light of the world.”* They are *“a city that is set upon a hill,”* and *“cannot be hidden”* (Matt 5:14). Even so, in this world, we do not have the fulness of that city, but we *“seek one to come”* (Heb 13:14).

## The Language of Typology

The term “**Babylon**” is understood within the context of Scripture. It stirs up the memory of Israel’s captivity of old. Because of their disobedience, the ancient people were “**carried away**” into Babylon. This was accomplished under Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 20;17; 24:11-16; 2 Chron 9:1). In this judgment, Nebuchadnezzar was the “**servant**” of the Lord, doing His bidding (Jer 27:6).

However, Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon were judged for doing the very thing God called them to do. The reason for this judgment is revealed in Scripture. “**For behold, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon An assembly of great nations from the north country, And they shall array themselves against her; From there she shall be captured. Their arrows shall be like those of an expert warrior; None shall return in vain. And Chaldea shall become plunder; All who plunder her shall be satisfied,**” says the LORD. **Because you were glad, because you rejoiced, You destroyers of My heritage**” (Jer 50:9-11). Although they were used of God to punish His people, Nebuchadnezzar and his devouring hosts took delight in it. They were “**glad**” and “**rejoiced**” in the pillage of God’s “**heritage.**” Thus, they were judged.

We have a precise parallel of this in Revelation. The church degenerated into an unacceptable state, rejecting the truth and embracing a “**form of godliness**” while “**denying the power thereof**” (2 Tim 3:5). For this cause, God “**sent them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie**” (2 Thess 2:11). That “**strong delusion**” was found in a religious container. However, like Babylon of old, it took delight in oppressing the saints. It took glory for itself, and developed its own agenda. For this reason, Divine judgment will come upon the false church—and righteously so.

## Babylon the Great

This is nothing less than the false church – the church wedded to the world, with the world as its wedded name. It is the apostasy of which Paul spoke (2 Thess 2:3-5; 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 3:1-7; 4:3-4). That is why it is called “*the great whore*” (17:1). She is unfaithful to Christ, having a preference for “*this present evil world.*” She has committed the same transgression as Babel of old—making a name for herself (Gen 11:4).

This form of corruption has captivated the church like Babylon captivated Israel. It is guilty of obscuring the truth, even shedding the blood of the saints (16:6; 17:6; 18:24). With aggressiveness, it has sought the approval of the world, which is alienated from the life of God. Listen

If you want to know what the Lord thinks of a *worldly church* , you are beholding it in this passage. He has an intolerant attitude toward the corruption of His truth and the prostitution of the love and affection due Him.

to the vivid description of her fornication. “*She made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication . . . With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication . . . For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies . . . the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication*” (14:8; 17:2; 18:3; 19:2).

If you want to know what the Lord thinks of a *worldly church* , you are beholding it in this passage. He has an intolerant attitude toward the corruption of His truth and the prostitution of the love and affection due Him. Remember what our Lord said of Israel’s perfunctory feasts.

***“Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood”*** (Isa 1:13-15). Keep in mind, the feasts God despised were the very ones He had ordained. Yet, their observance had been corrupted by the defiled hearts of the people.

Such is spiritual Babylon. The defiled hearts of the people has blemished all of their imagined worship and service. As it is written, ***“to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work”*** (Tit 1:15-16).

This is not a matter of novicehood—new believers that simply do not have a grasp of the truth. It is a matter of ***“fornication”*** – of having a preference for this world. God is going to bring all such *religion* down, not allowing it to continue. Further, He will do it BEFORE the Lord comes and the end of the world. Just as the political governments of this world have been proved inferior and vulnerable, so will all religious corruption be dashed to the ground.

### **She Corrupted All Nations**

Whereas the church is ***“the salt of the earth”*** and ***“the light of the world,”*** Babylon brings corruption and defilement to the world. The inhabitants of the world are worse because of her. Rather than helping the condition sin introduced, this vile city has made it worse. The nations have been thrust further from God because of her. She actually taught men to be unfaithful to God.

Mark it well, wherever there is spiritual corruption, the Lord lays the responsibility at the door of spiritual Babylon. One might object, saying the false church is not the only purveyor of error and misrepresentation. But that is not the point. The generation favored with the presence of Jesus Christ had not personally killed all of the prophets. Yet, the Lord charged them with the responsibility of it all. ***“Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation”*** (Lk 11:49-51).

This, then, is the Divine manner, and righteously so. Those who choose to ignore the Christ, and even corrupt His Gospel, will be charged with similar responses of former generations. This may not fit well into stereotyped theology, but it is what is taught in Scripture.

Error falls in the wake of truth, and sin is overthrown as men become righteous. False and damaging Gospels are exposed by the preaching of the real Gospel. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

### **Associated with the Gospel**

Observe that the collapse of spiritual Babylon is directly related to the preaching of the ***“everlasting Gospel.”*** Error falls in the wake of truth, and sin is overthrown as men become righteous. False and damaging Gospels are exposed by the preaching of the real Gospel. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

I understand this passage to mean that, following ungodliness being turned away from Jacob, the Gospel will be preached in its purity by a purified people. At that time, *Christianity*, as we know it, will come crashing to the ground. Thus will come to a *conclusion* “*the times of the Gentiles*” (Lk 21:24). This is the “*fulness of the Gentiles*” to which Paul referred (Rom 11:25).

Just as with Israel, there is a “*remnant*” in the present church who have not adopted the ways of the world. They will lose nothing by the overthrow of spiritual corruption. In the meantime, it is good for God’s people to give diligence to avoid any teaching that will not stand in the blazing light of the unvarnished Gospel. Let us avoid any emphasis that must be abandoned when the record of God’s Son is embraced. It is my settled conviction that much of contemporary religion is so off-center it is rather easy to abandon when once Christ and His great salvation are seen. This is a tragic circumstance. Truth will expose error, and effectively so, inducing the believer to abandon it with haste.

## DIVINE RETRIBUTION

We will now be exposed to the fierceness of Divine wrath against those who settle for spiritual corruption. It is an awesome consideration, and must not be ignored. Just as God’s mercy is directed toward all who believe His “*everlasting Gospel*,” so His wrath is directed against all who allow themselves to be taken in by Satan’s misrepresentation of the same.

*“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of*

*the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’”*

The language is astonishing. A soul cannot remain lethargic and indifferent when these words sink down into its ears! There is no question about this judgment. It is certain, and is with eternal consequences. There is nothing casual about this declaration. To assure us of its truth, an *angel* shouts the message. For now, it is a solemn warning not to become enmeshed in worldly religion. I will tell you that these words will frighten many a soul. But it is not necessary for this to be the case. Those who embrace the Son and come away from the course of this world have nothing to fear in this proclamation.

### **Swift Movement**

Rapidly we have moved from the awakening of a people to the fall of a system, and now enter into “*eternal judgment*” (Heb 6:2). The quickness of the transitions are not meant to reflect a brief period of time—although it is quite possible for that to occur. *This is the language of certainty*. It is declaring that nothing can interfere with this Divine determination. Israel *shall* be turned! The “*everlasting Gospel*” *will* be sent like a gigantic flood into the world! Spiritual corruption *shall* fall! Those who chose corruption over truth *will* suffer the wrath of God!

### **Collective, Yet Personal**

Just as salvation is personal, so is condemnation. “*If any one . . . he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God . . . he shall be tormented.*” When Babylon comes down, all who were aligned with her will not disappear. There will remain a body of people who have

chosen corrupt religion to the purity of the Gospel. Their city has fallen, yet they are not forgotten, nor has their insurrection been blotted from God's memory. This passage confirms to our hearts that embracing a lie is never innocent. Just as the Lord takes faith personally, so preferring what Satan offers is considered a personal affront to Him, a re-crucifixion of His Son, and a treading of Him under foot (Heb 6:6; 10:29).

### **The Reason**

***“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand.”*** There are places in Revelation where the condemned are identified as generally immoral and disobedient people (21:8). Those whose names are NOT written in the Lamb's book of life are also said to be condemned (13:8; 17:8). Here, however, we see quite another view. Here is a picture

When Babylon comes down, all who were aligned with her will not disappear. There will remain a body of people who have chosen corrupt religion to the purity of the Gospel.

of those who have been contaminated with defiled religion. Satan raised up fraudulent *Christianity*, and they embraced it. They either adopted the pattern of thought, or served the institution in what they did. In so doing, however, they gave their allegiance to the devil, and took it away from the Lord's Christ. The Kingdom of God is ***“in power”*** (1 Cor 4:20), but they chose a ***“form of godliness that denied (rejected) the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5).

### **The Penalty**

And, what will be the portion of those making such a choice? ***“ . . . he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God.”*** Forever blot from your mind the notion that such unfaithfulness will be ignored by

the Lord. Babylon had something to drink also – ***“the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”*** Later, the horrid mixture is called ***“a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication”*** (17:4). The idea is that of a poisoned mixture—one that brings sure death. But the death will not come from Babylon. Rather, it will come from God Himself. Those who chose to serve a fleshly religion will be made to drink of ***“the wine of the wrath of God.”*** The thought of a drink consisting of ***“wrath”*** is arresting. Those who imagine God never makes His creatures do something against their will do well to consider this passage. It is true, He will not force one to drink of the ***“water of life.”*** Yet, if the individual chooses not to drink that sweet elixir, he will drink the wine of God’s wrath.

This is the very wrath from which Jesus has delivered us (1 Thess 1:10). Rather than enjoying that deliverance, those who followed Satan’s ***“beast”*** will have God’s wrath expended upon them. Twelve times this wrath is mentioned in Revelation. It is called ***“the wrath of the Lamb,”*** because it is under His supervision (6:16). Because the time of its administration is appointed, it is called ***“the day of His wrath,”*** and is said to have ***“come”*** (6:17; 11:18). It is an expression of the Divine nature, and is therefore called ***“the wrath of God”*** (14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1). Because it cannot be averted, it is called ***“the wrath of Almighty God”*** (19:15). Due to its all-consuming nature, it is appropriately called ***“the fierceness of His wrath”*** (16:19).

This is a portrayal of the hatred and indignation of the Lord. It is an aspect of Him to which you must resolve NOT to be exposed. He has already revealed those toward whom this wrath will be directed. It is now our business to zealously separate ourselves from that class of people.

### No Mercy

***“ . . . which is poured out full strength into the cup of His***

**indignation.**” As if the description were not alarming enough, a further explanation is provided. This wrath will be unlike any historical display. It will be greater than the wrath suffered by those in the flood, or Sodom, or Egypt. There was mercy present in all of those instances. Noah and his family were saved from the flood. Lot and his daughters were saved from Sodom. Israel came out of Egypt.

Holy men have been known to pray, **“in wrath remember mercy”** (Hab 3:2). When seeking to destroy Israel, Moses moved upon God to be merciful (Ex 32:10-12). With Israel, the Lord **“many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath”** (Psa 78:38). But this is not the case with the wrath we are beholding in this text. It is not mingled with mercy, and there is no turning from it. There will be no recovery, no opportunity for change, and no diminishment its severity. It will be **“without mixture”** – and all because those who drink it chose alignment with **“the beast.”**

### Not Private

**“He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”** Some punishment has been administered in privacy – like the death of Judas. The torment of those who took hold on lifeless religion, however, will be dreadful. They will be **“tormented with fire and brimstone.”** Torment speaks of extended and increasing suffering. Jesus once told of a **“rich man”** who died and woke up **“in hell.”** That man said, **“I am tormented in this flame”** (Lk 16:24-25).

As if the torment itself was not enough, it will be **“in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”** I gather this refers to their vision, and not that of the angels and the Lamb—although there is nothing in Scripture to rule that out. The thought is that their torment will be accentuated by seeing the One they rejected, and the ones who could have ministered to them. But all of that was forfeited when they

made the choice to follow the beast. You may recall, the *“rich man”* saw both Abraham and Lazarus from *“hell”* (Lk 16:23).

### Permanent

*“And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”* Those who are *“chastened of the Lord”* in this world, are given opportunity to recover. In fact, that is the reason for the chastening (1 Cor 11:32). But what we are here beholding is not chastening. Their torment is permanent, and extraction from it is not possible. There is no cessation of the torment – no time of rest and recuperation.

Some punishment has been administered in privacy – like the death of Judas. The torment of those who took hold on lifeless religion, however, will be dreadful.

The phrase *“the smoke of their torment”* is an intriguing one. Some affirm the wicked will eventually be consumed by the fire of hell, ceasing to exist at all. They see the *“smoke”* as the aftermath of their destruction by fire. However, the text does not say *“the smoke of their destruction.”* Rather, it is *“the smoke of their torment.”* Coming from βασανισμοῦ (bas-an-is-moo), the word *“torment”* means *“torture, torment, or extreme distress.”* There is nothing in the word itself, or in the context in which it is used, that suggests it is temporal.

Just as *“smoke”* is ordinarily the evidence of fire, so this *“smoke”* is the evidence of the suffering of the wicked—a suffering that will have no termination. It indicates NO cessation of their torment, for that is

what it evidences.

This is the same type of language used by Jesus in the ninth chapter of Mark. He describes *“hell” as “the fire that shall never be quenched; where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched”* (Verses 43-48). Note, it is *“their worm,”* not *“the”* worm. The expression *“their worm”* equates to *“their torment.”* It emphasizes an aspect of their torment, which is a gnawing conscience. Just as the *“smoke of their torment”* cannot exist without the ones being tormented, so *“their worm”* cannot exist if the ones owning it no longer remain.

Lest we forget, being caught up in the figures of speech employed, the Spirit reminds us of the identity of these people. They are those *“who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”*

To say the least, this depiction should cause any soul in a state of indecision to run out of Babylon. The Lord has already told us the predetermined destiny of all who align themselves with Satan’s fabrication of the church.

### **No Hope for Babylon the Great**

Integral to this whole section is the truth that there is no hope for spiritual Babylon. Satan himself cannot be reformed. Neither, indeed, can the two beasts he raises up be changed for the better, or made acceptable to God.

So it is with Babylon. It cannot be converted or changed. Just as the devil which gave her birth, it has been condemned. The curse of God is

upon it. The cry comes from heaven itself, ***“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues”*** (Rev 18:4). I know very well this is not a popular message. Yet, it is to be received without reluctance. Our Lord Himself declared the principle involved. ***“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”*** (Matt 15:13). It is not possible for this NOT to occur!

## THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

***“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”*** This is not the first time we have read of the ***“patience”*** of the saints. Earlier, ***“the patience and faith of the saints”*** were declared as the means through which the first beast was overcome (13:10). At the very beginning of the book, John described himself as a ***“companion”*** in the ***“patience of Jesus Christ,”*** indicating he was not being overcome by his own exile (1:9).

In Scripture, ***“patience”*** is endurance, or perseverance. In this text, it refers to those who do NOT worship the beast or his image, and refuse affiliation with him. Thus they survive the deceptive attack of the wicked one. Even at the expense of losing their lives, they avoid identity with the enemies of the Lord. They will not embrace a form of godliness that lacks the power, and refuse to give honor to corrupt religion. From heaven’s point of view, that is endurance, or patience. It is something sorely needed in our time.

In preference to the offerings of the beast, the ***“saints”*** keep ***“the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”*** First, this reveals Satan’s ultimate goal. He tempts men to relinquish their hold upon the commandments of God. He seeks to cause them to abandon the faith authored by Jesus, as though it were a worthless thing. If he can turn

people from a consideration of Divine demands and reliance on the Lamb, he shall have lured them into condemnation.

Those who ***“keep the commandments of God”*** refuse to loosen their grip upon them. They will not allow a flood of worldly care to wash them from their memory.

The people of God were also described earlier as those who ***“keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”*** (12:10). It is edifying to read this description of the saints. They are not simply people who have adopted a certain religious position, or identified with a particular movement. While carnal men boast in such things, the saints do not. When it comes to submission, they think of ***“the commandments of God.”*** That is what they choose to retain in their minds. They know that, in Christ, ***“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters”*** (1 Cor 7:19). Further, you can boil these commandments down to their essence. The word ***“commandments”*** are not limited to a moral code. The Law summarized the commandments in this manner. ***“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these”*** (Mark 12:30-31). The apostles provided an even more definitive view. ***“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment”*** (1 John 3:23).

Those who ***“keep the commandments of God”*** refuse to loosen their grip upon them. They will not allow a flood of worldly care to wash them from their memory. Nor, indeed, will they permit devotion to

lifeless religion to deprive them of a walk in the light of the Lord.

*“The faith of Jesus”* is a phrase denoting faith IN Jesus. It also assumes Him to be the Origin of that faith. He is, after all, the **“Author and Finisher of our faith”** (Heb 12:2). The word “Author” literally means *one who causes something to begin, originator, founder, initiator*. Those who **“keep the faith of Jesus”** maintain their persuasion of and reliance upon the Jesus. They refuse to give their allegiance to Satan’s substitute, and thus overcome him.

In Christ, we receive **“a kingdom that cannot be shaken”** (Heb 12:28). Where this is known and embraced, strength will be granted to withstand the delusional floods of Satan. But where this is NOT known, the artifices of the devil will not be withstood.

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF DYING IN THE LORD

Now, amidst a view of two notable events (the recovery of Jacob and the fall of Babylon), heaven speaks concerning death. Why is such a matter introduced at this time? The answer should be obvious. We have just been provided with a view of the end of those classified with **“the beast.”** Their end is not a good one. But what of the saints? What of those who kept the commandments of God and maintained the faith that had been given to them? What will their end be? Heaven itself speaks to this matter. **“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’”** What a contrast to the destiny of the wicked! The wicked were cursed, while the righteous are blessed – and we are talking about a common experience– **“death.”**

### What Is Death?

It may appear strange to ask such a trite question. However, there is a growing persuasion among otherwise conservative believers, that death is a sleep of both body and sou. The view is that there is no consciousness after death until the resurrection of the dead. God has, however, referred to death in a manner that discourages such a view.

Of old time, saints were said to yielded up their spirit and been gathered to their people (Gen 49:33). When Jesus died, it is written that He “*yielded up His Spirit*” (Matt 27:50). Paul referred to death as *the “earthly house”* of this “*tabernacle*” being “*dissolved,*” stating “*we*” existed beyond that time, possessing another “*house*” (2 Cor 5:1). Later, he referred to death as being “*absent from the body*” and “*present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). Peter referred to it as “*putting off*” his “*tabernacle*” (2 Pet 1:13-14).

Now the Spirit contrasts those who keep the  
commandments of God and faith in Christ with those  
who gave themselves to the beast. **The saints are  
advantaged by death!**

In all of these, death is seen as a separation of the unseen part of man from his seen and temporal part.

But now we come to another view of the matter—and it too is a heavenly assessment. A blessing is pronounced upon “*the dead*” who “*die in the Lord.*” He does not say “*the dead*” WILL be blessed, but that they “*ARE*” blessed. The word “*blessed*” means *characterized by transcendent happiness, joyfully blessed, and happy*. It is the word used by Jesus throughout the beatitudes (Matt 5:3-11). Twenty-six times, this precise word is used in the New Testament writings. Without exception, it is used to describe a conscious state, where enjoyment and

benefit are knowingly attained.

Now the Spirit contrasts those who keep the commandments of God and faith in Christ with those who gave themselves to the beast. **The saints are advantaged by death!** They lived unto the Lord, and now they die *“unto the Lord”* (Rom 14:8). For them to live was *“Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil 1:21). Death was not able to *“separate”* them from the love of God; i.e., from a conscious realization of it as well as the benefit of it (Rom 8:38). Death only concluded their labors and suffering, not their existence or their consciousness. I do not know that Scripture ever presents unconscious persons as being *“blessed.”*

### **From Henceforth**

When the voice said *“from henceforth,”* it did not mean the condition had never existed before. Rather, this is a word to those who remain in the body and are being subjected to the *“beast.”* Such are to understand that Satan’s initiative has not diminished the blessing of the righteous one whit. The reign of the Lord Jesus is again confirmed in the blessedness of the saints AFTER the devil has done his worse.

### **The Response of the Holy Spirit**

*“‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”* The Holy Spirit joins in the comfort. He responds to the glorious announcement by shouting a confirming *“YES!”* It is a most glorious thing when the Holy Spirit agrees with what is being said!

Now the Spirit enlarges the picture for us. He declares that the condition of those dying in the Lord will be enhanced by their death. This is revealed in two ways. First, they *“rest from their labors.”* Second, *“their works follow them.”*

***“Their labors”*** are the activities related to keeping the commandments of God and faith in Christ. These efforts had to be maintained in an arena of opposition and hostility. When the saints die, however, they move to a peaceful realm, where ***“the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest”*** (Job 3:17).

In saying ***“their works do follow them,”*** the Spirit confirms the acceptance of their works before God. Too, the effects of the labors continued even after their death. Think of the continued impact of the works of Paul, Peter, John, and others. Later saints, such as Luther, Calvin, Campbell, and others, continue to have an impact upon mankind.

Remember, the ***“works”*** of the saints followed them. If they became non-existent following their death, their works would also cease to have influence. The fact that their works live on is proof they also are alive and blessed. The knowledge of this condition is a great consolation to those in the crucible of suffering.

## THE REAPER AND HIS SICKLE

***“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.”*** Here is a fresh phase of the vision, yet one which reflects strict Divine sequence. There should be no question about the subject of the vision. John sees the Redeemer ready to reap the harvest.

### *The White Cloud*

Clouds frequently speak of *Divine glory*. In Israel’s deliverance from

Egypt, the Lord ***“led”*** them ***“in a pillar of cloud”*** (Ex 13:21-22). When God revealed Himself to the children of Israel, ***“behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud”*** (Ex 16:10). When the Law was given from Sinai, the ***“glory of the Lord”*** was on Mount Sinai in a cloud that ***“covered the mount”*** (Ex 24:15). All through the wilderness wanderings, a cloud hovered over the tabernacle. That cloud was called ***“the cloud of the Lord”*** (Ex 40:38). The movement of the children of Israel was determined by the movement of that cloud (Num 9:22). The strength of God is said to be ***“in the clouds”*** (Psa 68:34).

At Christ’s baptism, God affirmed His Sonship by speaking ***“out of the cloud”*** (Lk 9:35). When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, ***“a cloud came and overshadowed them”*** (Mark 9:7). Also, when He ascended to heaven, ***“a cloud received Him out of”*** the sight of the disciples (Acts 1:9).

Clouds are consistently related to the glory *and working* of the Lord. The devil, for example, is never associated with the clouds. The horde of locusts that were unleashed upon the world came out of ***“smoke,”*** not a cloud (Rev 9:3). Divine processes, however, have been connected with ***“clouds”*** in the book of Revelation (10:1; 11:12).

A ***“white cloud”*** particularly denotes the determined and pure work of the Lord—the fulfillment of an appointed purpose. This is not a review of history, but a declaration of something God Almighty has determined.

### *Christ’s Second Coming and Clouds*

We are doubtless being shown a facet of the coming of Christ. His return is consistently associated with the clouds. Jesus spoke of His return as the time when ***“they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”*** (Lk 21:27). He also affirmed he would

come ***“in the clouds of heaven”*** (Matt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62). Earlier in Revelation it was said, ***“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him”*** (Rev 1:7). There can be no doubt that John is being introduced to the close of earthly history—the time when the Lord Jesus will come again.

### *Like the Son of Man*

The phrase ***“like the Son of Man”*** does not mean this was NOT the Son Himself. Prior to this, the Savior had appeared ***“a Lamb,”*** emphasizing His redemptive role (5:6; 14:1). He had also been seen as rider on a horse, going forth conquering and to conquer, depicting His kingly role (6:2).

Here, however, He is seen as *the Man through whom the world will be judged* (Acts 17:30-31). Poised and without agitation, the glorified Man sits upon the cloud awaiting the appointed hour. On His head is a ***“golden crown,”*** confirming He is in charge of the situation. This is an aspect of His reign.

### *The Sickle*

The ***“sickle”*** speaks of harvest. Jeremiah mentioned ***“him who handles the sickle at harvest time”*** (Jer 50:16). Harvesting indicates a *condition* as well as a time. Joel, using the same words as are found in our text, said, ***“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe”*** (Joel 3:13). The Son, then, is seen as *ready* to harvest the earth, which is ready to be harvested.

This world is the appointed place for maturity – where both good and evil people advance toward a time of universal harvest. We are moving toward an appointed conclusion. Everyone is being readied for the harvest, and none will be excluded.

## The Time Has Come!

***“And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’”***

Some of the last words Jesus said when upon earth included a unique reference to His return. ***“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”*** (Mk 13:22). It is my understanding that the Savior has voluntarily forfeited this knowledge. Thus He fellowships with us more fully in the expectation of that time.

But now the appointed time has come. Having received the Word from God, the angel exits the heavenly Temple. He now informs the Son of Man that the hour has come. This is a designated time. Note, the ***“time”*** is related to the *condition* of the world. ***“The harvest of the earth is ripe.”***

There is no question about the time being described. This is not the description of a temporal judgment. In the poignant parable of the tares of the field, Jesus affirmed, ***“the harvest is the end of the world”*** (Matt 13:39). Thus time will come to a conclusion, the day of salvation will end, and the purpose for the present heavens and earth shall have been served.

When the earth is reaped, there will be no more movement from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). No further

washing and justification will be done.

From the viewpoint of our text, that time is when ***“the earth is ripe.”*** It is, after all, ***“the field,”*** or place of development (Matt 13:38). When God’s purpose is served, there will be no further reason for its existence. Therefore, it will be reaped by the Son of Man Himself. He is the One who ***“sowed the seed”*** (Matt 13:37), and He shall reap the harvest.

### **The Earth Is Reaped**

***“So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.”*** There is no resistance to the reaping, nor is there delay. This is an appointed time, managed by the appointed Reaper.

The phrase ***“the earth was reaped”*** speaks of the gathering of God’s people. They are the ones for whom the world was created, or the field prepared. Elsewhere, we are told the angels carry out the harvest under the control of Jesus. They are called ***“the reapers”*** (Matt 13:39). Through them, the Savior will gather us together to Himself (2 Thess 2:1). He will ***“receive us”*** to Himself through the ministry of holy angels. ***“He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven”*** (Mark 13:27).

The harvesting of the earth is the gathering of the wheat into the barn. At the very threshold of the day of salvation, John the Baptist said, ***“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”*** (Matt 3:12). Now, in our text, that time has arrived, and Jesus cleans out the threshing floor—the earth, where the development and sifting processes were culminated.

When the earth is reaped, there will be no more movement from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13). No further washing and justification will be done. The day of salvation will come to a close with the harvest of the earth. Everyone's state will be fixed, and moral change will be possible no longer.

### *The Foundation of the World*

Ten times, the phrase ***“the foundation of the world”*** is used in Scripture (Matt 13:35; 25:34; Lk 11:50; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8). The NIV version erroneously translates this phrase *“creation of the world”* (9 times) and *“beginning of the world”* (1 time). This expression, however, is not one relating to time, or point, of origin. Rather, it is a term of purpose or objective.

In every text the phrase ***“foundation of the world”*** is found, the word **καταβολῆς** (kat-ab-ol-as) is used. The word more literally means *conceived*, and refers to the purpose for which the world was created. That purpose was to create an environment in which the sons of God could be born and brought to maturity. Just as a field is meant to receive and mature seed, so the world was conceived in Divine purpose to receive and mature the sons of God—to prepare them for eternity.

All of history is moving toward this point in time—the gathering of the wheat into the barn! All of creation groans and travails in expectation of this harvest (Rom 9:19-22). Too, one of the sure marks of spiritual maturity is when we also anticipate the time.

The ***“harvest,”*** therefore, is when that purpose will be fully realized.

One further observation on this matter. Those who believe *winning souls*, or bringing people into Christ, is the primary work of the church, do well to rethink their position. Scripture consistently indicates that the maturity of believers is the primary Divine objective. God has appointed our Intercessor to assure the process is completed (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). He has given us the Holy Spirit to change us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). He has also appointed the holy angels to minister in the behalf of the elect, to ensure their safe development to maturity.

### **Once Again**

Once again, the reaping of the earth denotes the gathering of God's people to Christ through the instrumentality of holy angels. It is not meant to reflect chronology, but priority. Those who imagine this is a reference to a secret rapture have missed the point. God's purpose for the world shall have been served when the people of God are ready to be gathered unto their Lord!

All of history is moving toward this point in time—the gathering of the wheat into the barn! All of creation groans and travails in expectation of this harvest (Rom 9:19-22). Too, one of the sure marks of spiritual maturity is when we also anticipate the time. Where men are not anticipation of the harvest, they are not living by faith. They have adopted the ways of the world, and thus become enmeshed in its ways and end.

## **THE REAPING OF THE WICKED**

Here we will clash with humanly-conceived views of the end of time. The Revelation will establish that the harvest will conclude earth's history. The removal of the wicked will occur at harvest, as is clearly

taught by Jesus (Matt 13:41-41, 49-50). Paul also taught this with remarkable clarity. ***“The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed”*** (2 Thess 1:7-10).

Notice, the punishment of the ungodly will occur WHEN Jesus comes to be glorified in His saints. This is the subject of the section we are now entering.

### **Divinely Ordered**

***“Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.”*** The event now described occurs when the earth is reaped—at the harvesting of the righteous— ***“THEN!”*** Remember, John the Baptist declared that when the reaping floor was purged, the wheat would be gathered into the barn, and the chaff would be burned. So, as soon as the harvest of the earth is announced, a reaping angel comes out of the heavenly temple. He has a ***“sharp sickle,”*** that is ready for reaping. No further preparation is required. The time has come.

### **The Vine of the Earth**

***“And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’”*** I continue to marvel at the amount of angelic activity in this matter! This is nothing less than

a glorious elaboration of Christ's words, "*the reapers are the angels*" (Mat 13:39).

### *From the altar*

The angel who commissions the harvest comes "*out from the altar.*" He has power over fire, with which the Lord Jesus will be revealed (2 Thess 1:8). The fact that he comes "*out from the altar*" provides the true perspective of what ensues. The harvest that follows will be in view of the atonement of Jesus. Just as the saved are harvested in light of their acceptance of Christ, so the wicked will be reaped in relation to their rejection of His great salvation.

### **The Vine of the earth**

Here the wicked are seen as connected to, and deriving strength from, the earth. That is what cut them off from the Lamb of God! Alliance with this world is not taken lightly in heaven. It will, in fact, determine the harvest in which we will participate—and everyone will take part in one.

The earth is like a "*vine*" to which people can become attached. It nourishes those connected to it with a way of thought, as well as a manner of living. "*The carnal mind*" is nothing less than evidence of being connected to the "*vine of the earth*" (Rom 8:7). Living "*according to the flesh,*" or walking "*according to the course of this world,*" is being connected to the "*vine of the earth*" (Rom 8:5,12,13; Eph 2:2).

Those attached to this "*vine*" love the world, and the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15-17). They have received, and delight in, the "*wisdom of this world*" (1 Cor 1:20; 2:6; 3:19).

*“The vine of the earth”* cultures worldly-mindedness. It anchors people to the seen, and influences them to live for themselves and in ignorance of God.

God has often spoken in this manner, relating the *source of life* , whether corrupt or pure, to a vine. There is reference to *“the vine of Sodom”* (Deut 32:32), a *“wild vine”* (2 Kgs 4:39), *“noble vine”* (Jer 2:21), a *“vine of low stature”* (Ezek 17:6), a *“goodly vine”* (Ezek 17:8), and an *“empty vine”* (Hos 10:1).

I cannot leave this section without expressing my sorrow at the dominance of *“the vine of the earth”* in contemporary religion. There is too much of the world in the church, and too much of its wisdom being purveyed by its ministers. It has formed an alliance with this world that will, if not averted, result in its condemnation.

### **Ripe Grapes**

There will come a time when all who are united to *“the vine of the earth”* will become *“ripe.”* At that time, their destiny will be sealed, with no possibility of change or deliverance. In our text, the entire world is seen from this perspective. All of the wheat are ready to be harvested, and all of the wicked are *“ripe.”*

### **Utter destruction**

*“So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”*

Often, this passage is used to buttress a view of the battle of Armageddon. It requires a prolific imagination to associate the “*harvest*” of the earth and the reaping of the “*vine of the earth*” with further worldly activities. This is a REMOVAL of the vine of the earth, not provision for its final expression!

### *The Vine is Gathered*

The angel has no difficulty removing the vine and its grapes from the earth. He faces no resistance or delay. When his sickle is thrust into the earth, the earth’s “*vine*” and those nourished by it are abruptly removed.

This is an apocalyptic view of the angels gathering “*out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity*” (Matt 13:41). In strict accord with the words of Christ, we are beholding “*the end of the world: [when] the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just*” (Matt 13:49).

### **The Winepress of God’s Wrath**

Here, the wicked are seen as wed to the world. They have derived their strength from the cursed order, and thus must perish with it.

The wicked—*ripe grapes upon the earth’s vine*—are not simply moved to another place. Nor, indeed, are they allowed to remain in activity upon the earth. With Divine violence, they are thrown into a crushing winepress of God’s wrath. There is no mercy in this winepress! Nor, indeed, will there be recovery for those who are cast into it. All of God’s indignation and fury will be directed toward these who chose to remain connected to the world. Its “*fashion,*” though passing away (1 Cor 7:31), so enamored these people that they forfeited reconciliation

to God to maintain their association with it.

Consistently, we are warned about the wrath of God. It will surely come upon ***“the children of disobedience”*** (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). That indignation will be fully released at an appointed time, and will not be assuaged to any degree or for any reason. That will be ***“the wrath to come”*** from which Jesus alone can deliver (Matt 3:7; 1 Thess 1:10).

### Without the City

***“And the winepress was trampled outside the city . . . ”*** The trampling of the winepress is language taken from the prophets. It relates to the punishment of the wicked. Isaiah said, ***“I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come”*** (Isa 63:3-4). His prophecy related more specifically to Christ tasting death for every man, enduring the curse of the Almighty alone. In Him, the Father dealt with the sins of the world. However, in our text, it is the wicked themselves that are ***“trodden in the winepress.”***

By saying ***“outside the city,”*** the separation of the ungodly from God Himself is emphasized. They will ***“suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”*** (2 Thess 1:9, RSV).

***“Outside the city”*** describes a situation where there is no hope, and no mercy. It is a dreadful and eternal circumstance, proceeding from being wed to the world.

No one is capable of measuring the immensity of God's wrath against the ungodly. It is not meant to be measured—that is why this type of description is given.

The wrath of God is to be avoided through Christ Jesus, not analyzed and speculated upon.

### **Blood to the Horses Bridles**

*“ . . . and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”* The Lord is not revealing a fleshly situation, but a spiritual condition. The punishment of the wicked will not be a vicious war upon the earth, and such a thought is ludicrous. The *“blood”* is that of the grape, not of human bodies. The image depicts the thorough removal of the life and influence of the wicked.

Blood [of the grapes] up to the horses bridles for 1,600 furlongs, is equivalent to blood about six feet deep and 180 miles long. It is a staggering consideration—beyond human imagination! The idea is that the overthrow of the wicked will be as thorough as the exaltation of the righteous. Just as there will not be a single righteous person omitted in the harvesting of the earth, so there will not be a single godless person missed in the reaping of the earth's vine.

When God destroyed the world with a flood, evil again surfaced. When the vine of the earth, with its ripe clusters, is cast into the winepress of God's wrath, evil will never again surface! The destruction will be thorough and obvious—like a 180 miles of blood to the horses bridles. No one throughout all of heaven will wonder if Satan will ever rise again, or iniquity will ever again assert itself.

No one is capable of measuring the immensity of God's wrath against the ungodly. It is not meant to be measured—that is why this type of description is given. The wrath of God is to be avoided through Christ Jesus, not analyzed and speculated upon. That is why this comforting description is given. Harvest time is coming! Are you ready?

## CONCLUSION

We have briefly viewed a most awesome text. It is comforting to those who are keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. It is frightening to those who are too closely allied with the world. Indeed, the vision is calculated to produce those results. Those who are living by faith have nothing to fear in the end of the world, the coming of the Lord Jesus, or the unleashing of the wrath of Almighty God.

On the other hand, those who choose to attach themselves to this world— *“the vine of the earth”*—have everything to fear in these events. Just as the coming of Christ cannot hurt the righteous, so it cannot help the unrighteous.

Both the exaltation of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be awesome. It will also be thorough or complete. Everyone in Christ will be included in His harvest, and everyone attached to the world will be included in the reaping of the vine of the earth.

Now, in this time, we are determining our participation in the final harvest. Everything has graciously been supplied for an abundant entrance into the presence of the Lord. There is no reason why you cannot be included! Make sure you are being nourished by the right Source!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 28

## THE HEAVENLY SCENE

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested." After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. (Rev 15:1-8, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Revelation a positive note is apparent. The Lord Jesus is unveiling Divinely appointed certainties to His people. This is necessary for our faith to flourish. Faith, by its very nature, cannot stand on a shifting or uncertain foundation. A lack of assurance is always evidence of a lack of faith and the presence of unbelief. Spiritual life is always advanced by faith, and unregenerate life is

always advanced by unbelief. There are no exceptions to these extremities of life.

When the vision of the ages is considered with certainties in mind, a edifying freshness is imparted to the book. The hearts of the faithful are warmed by such considerations, and those who are spiritually lethargic become more acutely aware of their jeopardy. Think for a moment of these things—all certainties.

[1] Jesus is surely exalted, and will surely come (Chapter 1).

[2] The churches are certainly being evaluated by Jesus, and will be appropriately rewarded (Chapters 2-3).

[3] The heavens are certainly ruling, dominated by tranquility and praise (Chapter 4).

[4] Jesus alone possesses the power to unfold the book of Divine destiny, and is in strict control of the destiny He unfolds (Chapters 4-10).

[5] The truth of God will be repudiated where once it was embraced, yet it will prevail (Chapter 11).

[6] The devil could not thwart the entrance of Jesus into the world, or the work He came to do (Chapter 12:1-11).

[7] The devil is fierce, and has directed all of his diabolical powers against the church (Chapter 12:12-13:18).

[8] All Israel shall be saved (Chapter 14:1-7).

[9] Satan's simulation of the church shall ultimately fail, being cast down by the Almighty (14:8-20).

Those who resist and oppose Him will be brought down in ignominy and shame. This includes Satan and his angels, the despotic powers he has raised against the people of God, and all who have embraced his delusion.

There is no possibility of these appointments failing! Those who, by personal faith, align themselves with the Lamb **will** triumph. Those who choose to fit into this world **will** be condemned. The Lord Jesus Christ **cannot** lose, and Satan **cannot** win. The truth of the Gospel will **not** be reduced to obsolescence, and the fabrications of the devil will **not** ultimately succeed.

Although I have made this point repeatedly, I must do so again. A failure to take hold of this truth will result in the thwarting influence of both fear and delusion. The Living God reigns in the affairs of men. He has not abdicated the throne, nor has He left the reign of the Kingdom in the hands of wicked men. This reality is affirmed over and over in Scripture. The repetition of the declaration confirms men are slow to apprehend it. This condition exists because circumstance appears to contradict it.

The very term “***Most High God***” declares His unquestionable Sovereignty. This is affirmed in every age, or dispensation (Gen 14:18; Psa 78:56; Dan 3:26; Mark 5:7; Acts 16:17; Heb 7:11). Our God ***is “the Highest”*** in every conceivable, and inconceivable, sense of the word (Psa 18:13; Lk 1:32; Lk 6:35). He can “***command deliverances***” (Psa 44:4), and is “***a great King over all the earth***” (Psa 47:2). From old time until this very hour, He is “***working salvation in the midst of the earth***” (Psa 74:12). He alone is the “***Judge,***” putting down one and setting up another (Psa 75:6). All men are to come to the knowledge that He “***alone is the LORD . . . the Most High over all the earth***” (Psa 83:18).

It is ever true, ***“Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places”*** (Psa 135:6). Those who resist and oppose Him will be brought down in ignominy and shame. This includes Satan and his angels, the despotic powers he has raised against the people of God, and all who have embraced his delusion. Conversely, those who receive the Son and live by faith are ***“more than conquerors.”*** They will be upheld during all trial, and their faith will be richly rewarded in the world to come.

### **The Scene Shifts**

Now the scene shifts. We have seen the unleashing of the unmixed wrath of God. An absolute overthrow of all who sided with the Lord’s adversaries has been witnessed. We will again scrutinize the ***“last time.”*** Two realities will again be confirmed. *First* , Divine wrath is reserved for the enemies of God. *Second* , the faithful will not be hurt by that wrath. There is a body of people that have been delivered from the wrath to come! Their faith is their assurance of that great deliverance. God be praised for that reality!

## **ANOTHER SIGN**

***“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous . . . ”*** The last time John recorded *seeing “a sign”* in heaven was at the beginning of the twelfth chapter. ***“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars”*** (Rev 12:1, NKJV). There, the beginning of a fierce war between Satan and the saints was initiated. This was launched by the devil because he had no more access to the Son, and therefore turned his attention to those joined to the Son by faith.

The sign is said to be “*great and marvelous.*” The vision is significant. It depicts the execution of Divine purpose, and is anything but incidental. This is not history foretold before it happens, but a revelation of heavenly objective. God is not a heavenly commentator on the affairs of men, but the Governor among the nations. What John sees is “*great*” because it cannot be averted. It is “*marvelous*” because it enraptures the heart of those who perceive it. This is not something novel or entertaining. It is not a matter for speculation, but for spiritual contemplation. This is a declaration of the work of the Lord.

The saints are the reason for the world, and the world is the appointed “*field*” in which their maturity is being realized! Bringing them into the picture confirms their appointed destiny will be realized, their adversary notwithstanding.

It is interesting that in both cases, the vision begins with a depiction of the triumphant and glorified saints. In the twelfth chapter, they are seen as “*a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.*” In the text before us, they are seen as those “*who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name*” (15:2). In both cases, the saints are opposed by Satan, and in both Satan is utterly frustrated. In the first, the Messiah was brought forth and returned triumphantly to glory, in spite of Satan’s efforts to stop it from happening. In the second, the saints follow the same course, passing through the world and arriving safe in the presence of the Lord, Satan’s subtle opposition notwithstanding.

### **Why Start With the Saints?**

Why, when dealing with Satan’s opposition to, and frustration by, the

Living God, are we confronted with the saints? Because this world is the appointed amphitheater in which the saints are being readied for their reign with Jesus. Satan is the *“prince of this world”* (John 12:31), but the world does not belong to him. He is the *“god of this world”* (2 Cor 4:4), but is not sovereign over it. *“All that is in the world”* (1 John 2:16) is employed by the devil to subvert the saints, yet the *“the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof”* (Psa 24:1). Satan walks to and fro in this world, *“seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8), but the purpose for the world did not originate with him!

### **The Saints Are the Reason**

The saints are the reason for the world, and the world is the appointed *“field”* in which their maturity is being realized! Bringing them into the picture confirms their appointed destiny will be realized, their adversary notwithstanding.

### **We Need to Know**

Suffering saints need to be apprized of this again and again. There are many things crying for their attention. They represent the world, and life in it, as the end of all things. To obtain comfort and recognition here is set forth as the greatest of all objectives. But it is not!

There is another world, and another time, for which faith prepares us. There is a sea that is not agitated like those of the world, but is calm as an ocean of glass. Those who safely arrive at this haven of rest shall have passed through tempestuous waters. They will have successfully endured the assaults of the wicked one. The fabrications foisted upon the world by the devil will all have been in vain. Their progress was not impeded by the most crafty approaches, nor by the most ruthless.

So, we begin with the saints, for they are the *“apple”* of God’s eye

(Psa 17:8; Zech 2:8). Christ *“loved”* them, and *“gave Himself”* for them (Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25). This Revelation was given to John with the body of Christ in mind. It is not a commentary on the devil, the beast, or the false prophet. Its purpose is not to expound the effectiveness of an antichrist, but the triumph of the Christ! The center of this vision is not a beast, but the Lamb! The *“seat of Satan”* (Rev 2:13) is not the object of Divine exposition, but the *“Throne of the Lamb”* (Rev 21:1,3). Those who succumb to the artifices of the beast are not the theme, but those who triumph over the beast!

The *“sign”* concerns what **God** is doing, *not* what the devil is doing! It appears in heaven because *“the heavens do rule”* (Dan 4:26). We must not lose this perspective! It is a revealed and indispensable one. It will sustain the soul of the saint. All glory to God for such a view!

## WRATH THAT IS COMPLETE

*“ . . . seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.”* To this point, there have been numerous judgments poured out upon the wicked. They have been partial, designed to do at least two things. *First* , they were executed to alert sensitive hearts to the necessity of repentance. *Second* , they served as proof that the reprobate could not mend their ways or come to repentance. Still, all such judgments were partial. Thus we read of the destruction of a *“third part of the trees,”* a *“third part of the seas,”* and a *“third part of the creatures”* in the sea dying (8:7-10). A *“third part of the waters,”* the *“sun,”* the *“moon,”* and *“the stars”* were also stricken (8:11-12). Even a *“third part of men”* are said to have been slain (9:15). Earlier, a *“fourth part of the earth”* was ravished (6:8). A *“tenth part”* of a corrupt city fell, *“seven thousand men”* were *“slain,”* and *“the remnant”* became frightened (11:13).

**Partial judgment! Partial judgment! Partial judgment !** All such judgment is but introductory to what is coming! As grievous as such judgments may have appeared, they were but fragmentary and mixed with mercy. There is, however, an appointed “*day of wrath*” that will not be partial. It is “*the wrath to come,*” from which Jesus has “*delivered us*” (1 Thess 1:10). At that time, every opposing and obstinate person and group of persons – every competing influence – will be dashed to the ground, never to rise again.

Until that day, it is possible for lethargic souls to grow accustomed to the partial judgments of God—the execution of measured wrath. Such wicked men imagine there will always come a time of relief, and that recovery will always be an option for them. But this is all an imagination. At this very moment, the wrath of God is all in place, ready to be poured out upon those who reject His Son, despise His mercy, and make havoc of His people. In these times, it is not fashionable these days to speak of such things, but that is only because of the dominance of sin.

Do not shrink back from viewing this picture! It is both accurate and stimulating to the soul. The day of wrath is so significant that it requires seven angels, so to speak, to manage the ferocity of Divine indignation. It is so extensive, that only “*seven last plagues*” begin to describe it suitably.

Every person, and every institution, is making an investment in the future. Either mercy or wrath is being treasured up – accruing unimaginable yields for those who

are storing them up.

It is no wonder Scripture speaks of **“heaping”** up wrath (Job 36:16). Paul spoke of those who **“treasured up wrath”** for themselves **“in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”** (Rom 2:5). James, brother of our Lord, wrote of **“heaping up treasure for the last days”** (James 5:3). All of these statements were driven by an acute awareness of what is coming. Although personal and collective sin may appear to have gone unnoticed, they have not.

### **Investments in the Future**

Every person, and every institution, is making an investment in the future. Either mercy or wrath is being treasured up – accruing unimaginable yields for those who are storing them up. Satan was **“destroyed”** by means of Christ’s death (Heb 2:14)—but that was but a down payment of what is to come. The godless governments of this world were overthrown by Divine judgment—however, that is but a faint reflection of what is to come. Spiritual Babylon will be overthrown, together with all who promoted and served her—but that is only a sample of the coming wrath that will be poured out.

When you are tempted to feel sympathetic toward those who oppose the Lord and seek to corrupt His truth, think of the day of wrath. It will serve to diffuse any temptation to be naive about the seriousness of such things. This is not intended to encourage hateful attitudes toward people, for that is also rebellion against the Lord, Who forbids such responses. The purpose of honing up our sensitivity in this area is in order to avoid our own involvement in Satan’s insurrection.

### **The LAST Plagues**

The phraseology is important. These are not merely torments to be concentrated upon the ungodly. They are **“seven plagues, which are**

*the last*” (NASB)—the final and complete outpouring of Divine indignation.

“**LAST**” is a term peculiarly associated with Deity. Emphasizing that anything that is “*last*” is administered by the Lord, Jesus first revealed Himself to John as “*the First and the Last*” (1:11). By this He meant nothing is started without Him, and nothing is finished without Him. He has the first word, and He has the last word. Satan cannot institute an initiative without the Lord’s approval. And, Satan can finish nothing. The Lord alone is the Finisher!

None of Satan’s projects will ever be truly completed! In the end,

Should a person choose to continue spurning this invitation, there will come a time in this world when they will not be able to believe (John 12:39). Their hardened hearts and seared consciences will finally be rendered impervious to the heavenly solicitation.

only the will of the Lord will be thoroughly executed! When, therefore, we read of “*the seven LAST plagues,*” we are confronted with the final overthrow of Satan’s work. In a display of *irresistible power*, the kingdom of Satan will be brought down with telling precision. Not a single pillar of his purpose will be left standing. No person who remained captive by him will escape. There will not be a single amalgamation of personalities aligned against the Lamb of God that will remain standing. Their empires will fall, their knees shall bow, and their tongues confess that Christ IS Lord, to the glory of God (Isa 45:23; Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10).

In the end, the promise of Hosea will be fulfilled against not only the grave, but everything inimical to mankind and in rebellion against God. “*O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes*” (Hos 13:14). Sinners only imagine they

will escape this sevenfold outpouring. This final effusion is so certain, it is mentioned as already in place, only awaiting the finalization of time.

### **A Word About Free Will**

During *“the day of salvation,”* the word is sounded throughout the world: *“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”* These words are shouted by the Holy Spirit, and those in Christ Jesus join in sounding the invitation (Rev 22:17). Every individual, at some time, is free to accept this invitation. This has been called *“free will”* by some, even though the Holy Spirit never uses the term in that manner. Should a person choose to continue spurning this invitation, there will come a time in this world when they will not be able to believe (John 12:39). Their hardened hearts and seared consciences will finally be rendered impervious to the heavenly solicitation.

Our text, however, declares a time when the will of unregenerate men has no place whatsoever. They will be overthrown whether they want to be or not. They will be thrust out from the presence of the Lord, whether they want to be or not. Their wills, in the day of God’s wrath, will be utterly impotent. If they want rocks and mountains to fall on them, their desire will not be granted. If they desire to be hidden from the face of the Lamb, their request will not be honored.

If men are going to employ their wills in obtaining the salvation of the Lord, they had better do it now. Their will is fragile, and can be taken from them, like Nebuchadnezzar’s was from him (Dan 4:33; 5:21). It may appear that men are free to spurn the invitation of God and oppose His Sovereign will. But it only appears to be so. There is an appointed day in which all such freedom will be summarily withdrawn. Wayward souls and lethargic believers must be reminded of these sobering realities.

## The Wrath of God Is Finished

The very expression startles the soul – *“for in them is filled up the wrath of God.”* This speaks of the full and unreserved expression of Divine wrath. It is as though God divested Himself of that trait, depositing it in the place to be occupied by the damned—a frightening thought.

Other versions read this way. *“For in them the wrath of God is complete ”* (NKJV), *“because in them the wrath of God is finished ”* (NASB), *“for with them the wrath of God is ended ”* (RSV), and *“last, because with them God's wrath is completed ”* (NIV). The will of God does not have an end, but His wrath does! The love of God will never conclude, but His wrath will!

The day will finally dawn when there will be no further need for plagues. Chastisement will be a thing of the past, and the wrath of God will no longer be an incentive to flee to Christ. The very thought of this is arresting. The seven last plagues do not suggest Satan and all of his hosts will cease to be tormented. It does mean such torment will never again be initiated, or have a beginning.

## VICTORY, TRANQUILITY, AND JOY

*“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.”* Before the wrath of God is poured out, we are again given to glimpse the triumphant ones. Although their foe was fierce and cunning, yet they gained the victory over all of his machinations. Even though they lived with the handicap of an earthen vessel, yet they were *“more than conquerors”* through Christ Who

loved them (Rom 8:37). They gained the victory in a savage war zone and with, what appeared to be, insurmountable handicaps.

Here is a vision every struggling believer needs to see! Their faith is able to peer into the future. They can behold the outcome of the good fight of faith, and the vision will sustain them in times of difficulty. While it is imperative that we be aware of our adversary, and expert in the use of spiritual weaponry, there comes a time when we must lift up our eyes. By faith we need to consider what awaits us on the other side.

### **Like A Sea of Glass**

*“And I saw something like a sea of glass . . . ”* John is given to see a placid sea – a vast body of celestial water characterized by calmness and serenity. There is never trouble and turmoil in heaven—only upon the earth. Furthermore, there comes a time when our eyes must behold the state of things in the heavenly places, where we have been raised in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

There is far too much said these days about what is happening on the earth, and too little about what is happening in heaven. All too frequently, more is said about the affects of situations in the earth. Saints need to know how the heavenly realms have been influenced by what occurs in the world.

The Divine character is held in tact, and the realm of heaven is undisturbed. The wrath of God, depicted by the fire, is always executed in strict conformity with both God’s character and purpose. It never flares out

of control, or in opposition to His Divine constitution.

The “*sea*” we here behold is nothing less than the habitation of God’s throne. As it is written, “*Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal*” (Rev 4:6). The closer you get to the Throne, the less agitation can be found! This glassy sea speaks of absolute calmness and order. It declares the absence of agitation and turmoil. Shaking and disruption may appear in the earth, but it is not found in heaven!

The wicked, and the realm of the wicked, are the exact opposite of God and His glorious habitation. As it is written., “*But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. ‘There is no peace,’ Says my God, ‘for the wicked’*” (Isa 57:20-21).

No less than twenty-three times “*the sea*” is mentioned in Revelation. Three of these texts deal with the heaven’s environment (15:2), the sounding of praise (5:13), and the resurrection of the dead from the sea (20:13). All of the remaining references are associated with either judgment or agitation of some sort (7:1,2,3; 8:8,9; 10:2,5,6,8; 12:12; 13:1; 14:7; 16:3; 18:17,19,21; 19:8).

The glimpse we are now afforded lifts us from earth’s trouble. We are given to rise higher than difficulty can reach—beyond the wake of disturbance.

### **Mingled with Fire**

“ . . . *mingled with fire* . . . ” Here is a most vivid picture of Divine wrath in control. It does not break forth unrestrained and ungoverned. The Divine character is held in tact, and the realm of heaven is undisturbed. The wrath of God, depicted by the fire, is always executed

in strict conformity with both God's character and purpose. It never flares out of control, or in opposition to His Divine constitution.

This is not a sea of fire, but is only mingled with fire. Hell is described as "***the lake of fire***" (Rev 19:20; 20:10,14,15). The sea we behold now, however, is one reflecting the environment in which Divine purpose was conceived and will be completed. It has to do with the Throne of the universe, and not the punishment of those rebelling against it. This is a picture of Divine control.

### **Those Who Have the Victory**

***“ . . . and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name . . . ”*** The wrath of the almighty in all of its fierceness does not touch those who have triumphed in Christ Jesus. Not only have they laid hold on eternal life, they have gained the victory over Satan's fabrication of the church. Mind you, the devil leveled an assault against them that has no equal. He raised up emperors and their kingdoms against them. He sought to drown them in a flood of corrupt and "***damnable heresies***" (2 Pet 2:1).

Judging by appearance and the historical prattling of men, it looks as though the adversary's assault was effective. We look upon the earth, and key Kingdom people are counted as "***the filth and offscouring of all things***" (1 Cor 4:13). Abraham is gone. Isaac and Jacob are gone. The holy prophets are martyred and gone. The Apostles of the Lamb are gone. Timothy, Titus, Luke, Mark. Epaphroditus—all gone! Their names are not in the history books used in public schools. Instead, the very ones who persecuted and slew them are written up as though they were great men. We study in schools of ancient Rome, but not of the saints it slaughtered. Our children are taught of the religious of the world, but not the saints over which they were granted temporal power.

In this book, we are given to see the judgment of the Lord upon these despots. *The “vine of the earth,”* which judged the saints of God to be unworthy of life, will be plucked up from the earth. Those it nourished will be thrown into the winepress of the wrath of God.

And what of the saints of God? How do they fair during this outpouring of Divine wrath and indignation? If you peer closely, you will see them in the peaceful and heavenly realm—untroubled, free, and home at last!

We study in schools of ancient Rome, but not of the saints it slaughtered. Our children are taught of the religious of the world, but not the saints over which they were granted temporal power.

From earth’s perspective, the saints are losers. No aspect of the wisdom of this world would consider them conquerors. The *“beast”* raised up by Satan refused them prominence, and became the apparently dominant force in the world. Agreement with the beast and its agenda became the touchstone of acceptability. But what is heaven’s assessment of these rejected people? They are declared to have *“gotten the victory over the beast,”* which ruled the world! Although an *“image”* was made to the beast, and all men required to worship it, the saints triumphed over that *“image.”* Even though the whole world was willing to receive the *“mark of the beast,”* rendering service to it, those with the Lamb gained the victory over that *“mark,”* refusing to receive the commendation of Christ’s foe. Oh, that more of this mind might be realized in our time.

Once more, the *“beast”* is a depiction of the competitive force of *earthly government* . The *“image”* is the same force, or power, of

government in *a religious shroud* . The “**mark**” is the *effective influence* of Satan’s organized effort upon the individual. The grace of God enables those who receive it to overcome all of these Satanic initiatives.

### **Standing with harps**

“ . . . *standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.*” What a different sight than was beheld when these saints were still upon the earth! How often were they tossed on the billows of circumstance, and jostled with the high waves of trouble! Often their frail barques seemed as though they would break apart as these saints sailed through great difficulties and sore troubles.

The saints are not sinking or drowning in the sea—they are standing upon it. They are in harmony with heaven, and have remained in God’s favor. The fall of the wicked and the reaping of the “*vine of the earth*” has had no effect upon them at all!

The “*harps*” they hold are not their own. They do not represent an achievement, but rather portray a gift. The phrase “*the harps of God*” signifies insightful praise. These triumphant souls, like David of old, “*disclose*” the glorious mysteries of God “*upon the harp*” (Psa 49:4). Once these were struggling against wicked forces. Now they are singing the song of victory. On earth, they fought the good fight. Now they sing! The smoke of battle has cleared. The kingdoms of this world have been overthrown. False religion has fallen to the ground. The vine of the earth has been plucked up. And what of the saints? They are rejoicing!

### **A Word of Comfort**

Every child of God can be assured of ultimate safety from the wrath

of the Almighty. This text carefully shows us triumphant saints BEFORE the pouring out of God's complete wrath.

Satan will tempt us to fear being caught in that wrath—or perhaps even in the oppressions initiated by the devil. But such temptations are to be resisted with zeal. Those who put their trust in Christ will stand at last on glory's tranquil sea. They will enter into eternal safety, and sing insightful praise to their God. The Lord will give them His own harps, and they will hold them confidently and joyfully. Their persons and their praise will be acceptable. Faith excludes us from God's wrath, and protects us from the devices of Satan! Fight to keep it, and ask God to help your unbelief!

## THE TRIUMPHANT SONG

The Spirit now elaborates on the song of the redeemed. Their song is as specific as their faith. It is a two-fold song, having both height and depth. ***“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.’”***

How differently this multitude sings than the religious multitudes of the earth. They sing of the **“works”** of the Lord. They proclaim the **“ways”** of the Lord, and **“glorify”** his name. They recognize Him as the ONLY holy One. They worship Him, and confess that His judgments have been revealed. They are Christ-centered in the glory because they were Christ-centered in the earth.

## The Song of Moses and the Lamb

Ordinarily, Moses and Christ are contrasted in Scripture. As it is written, ***“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*** (John 1:17). Again, the righteousness of which Moses spoke is contrasted with the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ (Rom 10:5-10). When it comes to the administrations over which they presided, there is a vast difference between Moses and ***“the***

But there is another aspect of this song that is important. It speaks of the ***“works”*** and the ***“ways”*** of God. His ***“works”*** were made apparent before the eyes of men through Moses—and that in an unparalleled manner. His ***“ways”*** are realized by believers in Christ Jesus. The redeemed will sing of what God has done, and of His righteousness in doing so.

Lamb.” Moses brought Law, to which absolute conformity was required. The Lamb brought grace, which addressed the deficiencies and incapacities of men. Moses gave something ***to*** men. The Lamb offered Himself ***for*** men. Moses prescribed offerings. The Lamb was Himself the offering. There is a contrast between Moses and the Lamb.

Those standing triumphantly on the sea of glass do not sing the song of Moses the Lawgiver, but of ***“Moses, the servant of God.”*** They are singing the song of deliverance, as Israel did on the banks of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1-19). Deliverance is one verse of the song. It was prefigured in Israel’s emancipation from Egypt. It is realized in its fulness in ***“the Lamb.”*** Too, in Christ both Jew and Gentile are joined together as ***“one new man”*** (Eph 2:15). They **can** sing together in this world. They **will** sing together in the world to come!

But there is another aspect of this song that is important. It speaks of the “*works*” and the “*ways*” of God. His “*works*” were made apparent before the eyes of men through Moses—and that in an unparalleled manner. His “*ways*” are realized by believers in Christ Jesus. The redeemed will sing of what God has done, and of His righteousness in doing so.

The point here is that the saints are not only grateful for the destruction of the wicked, but with the righteousness of that destruction. Also, they not only glory in their personal deliverance, but in the uprightness of that deliverance.

In this world, these two perspective—the works of God and the ways of God—are not united in men’s understanding. Too often, they tend to think of God’s character without regard to His working. Conversely, some are prone to consider His works without discerning their righteousness. But in the world to come, the triumphant saints will sing both verses of the song!

### **King of Saints**

This is the only place in Scripture this phrase is used. Elsewhere in this book, the Lamb is called “*King of kings*” (17:14; 19:16). Other translations say “*King the nations*” (NASB, RSV) and “*King of the ages*” (NIV). The phrase “*King of nations*” is also applied to the Lord in Jeremiah 10:7. Purported textual scholars say that Erasmus inserted the phrase “*King of saints*” into the text. All of this adieu is unwarranted. Revelation views the saints themselves as “*nations*” in 21:24. Those with faith in God have always been the sanctifying element in the nations. The phrase “*King of saints,*” therefore, presents the REASON for Christ’s kingship. He is not only OVER the saints, He is reigning to “*bring them to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). To put it another way,

He is governing the world with a mind to accomplish this objective. The song of the redeemed is not the mere statement of a theological tenet. It is the affirmation of insightful souls. Satan's aggression was against the saints, but Christ's reign was for them. The two beasts instituted initiatives against the saints, but Christ has initiated a reign in their behalf.

### **Who Shall Not Fear Thee?**

*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord . . .* "Now that God prepares to pour out His wrath, who will fail to fear Him? In His temporal judgments, many refuse to fear Him, or to repent of the transgressions (Rev 9:20; 16:9,11). When the Lord bares His holy arm, there will not remain a solitary personality who will not fear Him! This language speaks of the subduing of all resistance. It also addresses the voluntary acknowledgment of the righteousness of God by the saints.

The fear of the Lord should be cultured in this world, so it will not be to ones condemnation in the next world. Develop a godly fear, and shrink not from it. Learn to live, move, and speak, with an acute awareness of the presence of the Lord!

The fear of the Lord should be cultured in this world, so it will not be to ones condemnation in the next world. Develop a godly fear, and shrink not from it. Learn to live, move, and speak, with an acute awareness of the presence of the Lord! All of the marvelous promises to those who fear the Lord are made to those who obtain that fear in world. ***"Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You "*** (Psa 31:19). ***"You have given a banner to those who fear You , That it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah"*** (Psa 60:4). ***"Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, And the strength of salvation; The fear of the LORD is His treasure"*** (Isa 33:6).

Fearing the Lord is being acutely aware of His presence. In the day when God prepares to empty His wrath upon the ungodly, there shall not be a solitary soul unaware of Him—not a single one!

### **Who Shall Not . . . Glorify Thy Name?**

***“Who shall . . . glorify thy name?”*** In this case, to glorify God is to exalt His Person, or draw attention to Him. This is done by verbalizing His praise, or failing to declare ones self—i.e., laying the hand upon the mouth (Job 40:4; Psa 39:9).

Though unrecognized in this world, the day is coming when ***“every eye shall see Him,” “every tongue”*** confess Him, and ***“every knee”*** bow to Him (Rev 1:7; Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10). At that time God will be ***“justified in all of His sayings,”*** and openly overcome all who have contradicted Him (Rom 3:4; Psa 51:4). Whether through praise for salvation or in acknowledgment of wrongness, God will be glorified!

### **God Alone Is Holy**

***“ . . . for thou only art holy.”*** What a confession! God alone did what was right! The enemies of the Lord will mount no platform then. Blasphemies will not be belching from the mouth of the beast, nor will spiritual Babylon be drawing attention to itself. No cause that is in contention with God’s eternal purpose will be declared or defended in that day!

God is holy, pure, and unmixed with any lower attributes. His righteousness is not imputed, but is inherent. At some point the soul must be brought to acknowledge this. If that acknowledgment takes place in this world by faith, it will be a blessed confession in that day!

## All Nations Will Come

*“ . . . for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”* It is right that this should take place, for our God is the *“Governor among the nations”* (Psa 22:28; Isa 40:15; Jer 10:7). Although *“the nations”* appeared to have been in charge of their own destiny, they were in the hands of the Lord. He raised up their leaders, and set them down. It is true, whether perceived or not, *“And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding”* (Dan 2:21).

First, the nations are the result of the Lord’s doing. They are not the product of human ingenuity. They all owe their origin to the Living God. Not only that, the Lord placed them in certain areas, and determined the times of their rising and falling. This was done in such a manner as would provoke them to seek the Lord.

Our text speaks of the time when this will be publically acknowledged. The judgments of God will be *“manifest,”* or apparent, as He prepares to pour forth His wrath. Not only will individuals confess that He is Lord, nations will do so also. This is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture. *“Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him”* (Psa 72:11). *“All nations shall call Him blessed”* (Psa 72:17). *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it”* (Isa 2:2).

There is a preliminary sense in which this text is fulfilled. As nations turn to the Lord, as prophesied in Isaiah 2:2, they come and worship, acknowledging the one true God. That will occur when ***“the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea”*** (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). It will also occur at the threshold of eternity, when ***“all nations”*** will acknowledge the Lord alone is ***“King over all the earth”*** (Psa 47:2 ; Zech 14:9).

### **The Logic Behind the Situation**

It may seem but incidental that ***“the nations”*** come and worship before the Lord. But this is not the case. There are reasons why the nations must stand before the Lord and acknowledge His holiness and superiority.

#### *The Lord Formed the Nations*

First, the nations are the result of the Lord’s doing. They are not the product of human ingenuity. They all owe their origin to the Living God. Not only that, the Lord placed them in certain areas, and determined the times of their rising and falling. This was done in such a manner as would provoke them to seek the Lord. Here is how Paul stated the case. ***“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us”*** (Acts 17:26-27). A common source was established from which ***“all nations”*** sprang: ***“one blood”*** (Adam). Later, the Spirit affirms the ***“whole earth was populated”*** by means of ***“the three sons of Noah”*** (Gen 9:19). Under Divine guidance, ***“the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands,”*** with unique languages, families, and nations (Gen 10:5).

Any view of ***“the nations”*** that does not have God at its center cannot

be true. The sociologist may expend energies analyzing the rise and fall of nations. Seemingly plausible explanations for various cultures may be developed, and classifications of men be generated and received. But the nations will not give glory to the sociologists and historians. They will eventually give glory to God for their existence. They will also give an account to Him for how they responded to the advantages He gave them.

The time of history occupied by the nations, as well as their geographical boundaries, were established by the Lord. It is right, therefore, that all nations should eventually acknowledge the Lord—willingly or unwillingly.

### *Salvation Wrought Before the Nations*

God's great salvation extends to the extremities reached by sin. Sin affected "***all nations,***" and so did salvation. The prophets foretold this reality in glorious language. "***The LORD has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations; And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God***" (Isa 52:10). In a preliminary sense, this took place on the day of Pentecost, when devout men "***out of every nation under heaven***" heard the Gospel of Christ (Acts 2:5). There was a lively sense of the universality of the Gospel. It had relevance and deliverance for every nation—even to those who were "***afar off***" (Acts 2:39). Anywhere and everywhere the Gospel is preached, its application to "***all nations***" becomes apparent.

***"For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations"*** (Isa 61:11). God has salted the earth with His people—individuals who willingly and aggressively praise the Lord. As a witness to the effectiveness of His salvation, He has caused this praise to erupt "***before all nations.***"

While we are not saved in groups, Scriptures reveal that the day of judgment will include the testimony of clusters of people. This is an awesome consideration.

***“For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory”*** (Isa 66:18). God has determined that ***“all nations”*** will ***“come”*** to behold His glory. There will be a universal awakening of unparalleled proportions, for the Lord has declared it. Do not hesitate to believe it.

***“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts”*** (Jer 3:17). This was introduced at Pentecost. All nations, nevertheless, were not ***“gathered”*** to Jerusalem at that time. The Lord has declared, however, that this will happen. We do well to believe it.

And what does all of this have to do with our text. A great deal, indeed! It shows the righteousness of all nations worshiping before the Lord. They owe their origin to Him. They were strategically placed so they would seek after Him. He revealed Himself to them in the propagation of a glorious Gospel. It is right, therefore, that they should acknowledge Him!

This view of the nations is not common in our time. Rather than viewing the peoples of the world according to the Scriptures, the contemporary church has allowed scientists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists to define humanity. This is inexcusable! It is neither right nor innocent. God has simply said too much about the nations of the earth to justify the acceptance of human classifications. Our text

speaks of a time when all of this will become clear. For some, it will be to condemnation. For others it will be a time of vindication.

### **Groups in the Last Day**

While we are not saved in groups, Scriptures reveal that the day of judgment will include the testimony of clusters of people. This is an awesome consideration. ***“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here”*** (Matt 12:41). The people of Nineveh will give honor to God in that day! How do you suppose the city of Joplin will compare with Nineveh in that day, not to mention Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles—London, Paris, or Mexico City? There are bodies of people that have received great advantages from the Lord. They will have to acknowledge those advantages, either to their condemnation or justification!

***“But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you”*** (Lk 10:14). The day of God’s wrath will include a comparison of peoples. We are not to compare ourselves with ourselves, but God will contrast nations, cities, and other people groups. Tyre and Sidon were judged for their sin (Isa 23:1-18; Ezek 26:1-28:26; 29:18; Amos 1:9-10). But those ancient cities did not have the advantages of hearing the Gospel. A comparison will be made of those cities with those subjected to ***“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God”*** (1 Tim 1:11).

***“And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”*** (Mark 6:11). Here is a sobering contemplation! Think of Sodom and Gomorrah receiving more Divine lenience in the day of wrath than Joplin,

Springfield, Tulsa, Moscow, or Melbourne. All of this is involved in the nations worshiping God and giving glory to Him. No person, no nation, no body of personalities will be excluded from the grand confrontation. All will be aware of His wrath. All will realize the supremacy and righteousness of the Lord. For some, it will be a confirmation of what they acknowledged by grace when they were in the world. For others, it will be the prelude to condemnation. We do well to consider these realities, and prepare for the consummation. The day is scheduled!

## THE TEMPLE IS OPENED

As the end looms before us, we are drawn closer to the Throne. Our minds are no longer focused upon the earth and the affairs of men, but upon the determinations and judgments of God. The significant thing about the last time is not what men do, but what the Lord does. As elementary as that may appear, it has eluded many a soul. Not a few interpretations of this book major on the activities of men rather than the working of the Lord. World governments, centralized economies, and restricted commerce are too often declared to be the heart of this book. Such representations ignore the Lord, degrade His Gospel, and give too much honor to men. They also produce fear, and are of no comfort to suffering saints. The perpetrators of these contrived views have not gone unnoticed by our Lord! They have caused men to think less of Christ, and motivated them to fear men and circumstance more than the living God. That, dear reader, is very serious.

*“After these things”* is the beginning of a new, but related, consideration. We have seen the triumphant saints, safe on the glassy sea BEFORE the finishing of God’s wrath. We have also witnessed the summoning of all nations before the Divine tribunal to behold the manifestation of the judgments of the Lord. Our vision, however, is not allowed to remain on the saints. Nor, indeed, are we permitted to linger

in perusal of the nations. Rather, our minds are drawn to the citadel of the heavenly sanctuary.

What we are beholding must be

We have even been reminded of the activities of the saints. All of these things have taken place under the government of the exalted Lamb. But now we are going to be faced with the Lord's doing—and it will be *“marvelous in our eyes”*

understood from a heavenly point of view! The *“fleshly mind”* is never more out of order than in the consideration of last things! The scholar and the linguist cannot help us here! The historian and the sociologist stand with their hands upon their mouths as we consider the outpouring of Divine wrath. Even the stately theologian, with his finely spun system of theology, must step aside here. We are dealing with Divine determinations, not human achievements. We are confronting the government of God, not the bureaucracy of men. Here is the outcome of eternal purpose, not the fruition of human intent. The judgment that is going to be poured forth is coming from God! Previously, we have seen Satan's activity. We have been told of the deeds of two malicious beasts. We have even been reminded of the activities of the saints. All of these things have taken place under the government of the exalted Lamb. But now we are going to be faced with the Lord's doing—and it will be *“marvelous in our eyes”* (Psa 118:23).

### **The Temple of the Tabernacle**

*“After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.”* The language is borrowed from the ancient tabernacle worship. The term *“temple”* refers to the holy of holies, which was hidden from view. The phrase *“tabernacle of the testimony”* is found in Numbers 10:11. *“The*

*testimony*” refers to the ark of the covenant, in which the law of God was placed. The tabernacle, in that case, was for the housing of *“the ark of the testimony”* (Ex 25:22). The ark itself remained closed.

The imagery is describing the act of revelation. The Lord is going to unveil the destiny of the wicked. In particular, the judgment that has already been determined and will surely be executed. Satan had a plan, and sought to execute it against the people of God (12:15). The first beast had a plan, and initiated it against the saints (13:7). The second beast also had a purpose, and sought to fulfill it (13:12-17). Now, the purpose of the Lord will be divulged, and it shall be executed in its fullness.

The word *“opened”* is used numerous times in this book. It is nearly always used to describe Divine activity. I believe the only exception is when the beast *“opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven”* (13:6). Even in that case his mouth was *“given”* to him—an expression of Divine government (13:5).

Earlier, a door was *“opened”* in heaven, revealing the activeness of the Lord (4:1). The book of Divine destiny had seven seals, each one being *“opened”* by the Lord. This depicted the unveiling of God’s purpose (6:1,3,5,7,9,12; 8:1). The bottomless pit was *“opened”* by an angel from heaven (9:2). The *“temple of God was opened in heaven,”* again disclosing heavenly intentions (11:19).

John has seen a dragon – but it did not come from the temple! He saw a first beast that rose out of the sea, not from the temple! He saw a second beast come from the earth, not from

the temple! That means those foes, though formidable, would not have the final word! They were not invincible, nor would their cause continue to flourish. Only what comes “*from the temple*” will last, whether blessing or cursing!

Now the Lord unveils His judgment. He does not tell us how things will *turn out*, as it were, for the ungodly. Rather, He reveals what He is going to DO to the ungodly. The devil and sin will not merely run their course. They will be brought to an end by an act of judgment. It is not that they merely have been allotted a period of time, after which they become powerless. The conclusion of the wicked will not be found in their ineffectiveness, but in their judgment by God Almighty!

This is a view that must be apprehended by every believer! *They must come away from any tendency to think of the end of all things as though God were not in control.* When we consider Satan and his initiatives, we must flee to the “*temple of the tabernacle of the testimony.*” We must take hold on a heavenly view of things.

### **Seven Mighty Angels**

*“And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.”* As John gazes at the opened “*temple,*” he beholds seven angels proceeding from that sacred area.

John has seen a dragon – but it did not come from the temple! He saw a first beast that rose out of the sea, not from the temple! He saw a second beast come from the earth, not from the temple! That means those foes, though formidable, would not have the final word! They were not invincible, nor would their cause continue to flourish. Only what comes “*from the temple*” will last, whether blessing or cursing! The beasts cursed the faithful and blessed the wicked. But the faithful

did not remain cursed, nor did the wicked remain blessed!

Remember, angels have been sent to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). These mighty angels are no exception to that rule. They come from God, and they come for the ultimate benefit of the saints. While men major on the beast and his mark, the Lord opens heaven's temple and shows us holy angels sent forth to execute judgment! Some poor saints are never given this view by those who supposedly minister to them.

God always uses means. His judgments are executed by His servants. In this case, the final and complete judgment of the wicked will be administered by angels. We have no record of a holy angel failing in his mission—and these shall not fail in theirs! The ***“last plagues”*** possessed by these angels have been given to them by the Lord of glory. He has determined to punish ***“with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”*** all who ***“know not God and obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (2 Thess 1:8-9). That appointment will never be reversed. Salvation, in fact, delivers us from the coming wrath (1 Thess 1:10). Now come the angels, possessing the last outpouring of Divine wrath.

They are clothed in ***“pure bright linen,”*** depicting the righteousness of their mission. Those who speculate about whether God is capable of such fierce wrath or not, do well to consider these angels. Behold what they carry, and the garments they wear. Their's is a holy purpose, as seen in the ***“golden bands”*** about their chests. What they are about to do is right, and is to be so considered by every person. Let us cry, ***“True and righteous are Your judgments”*** (Rev 16:7). Not a single aspect of these plagues extends beyond the perimeter of God's will or righteousness. They are together right. They are in strict control, and will accomplish a predetermined purpose. Saints have nothing to fear from these plagues. However, those who reject Christ have everything

to fear from them, for they are leveled against them..

## DIVINE DETERMINATION

*“Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.”*

Men will not be used to execute this judgment. Men were employed in the bringing down of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. But holy angels will bring down the ungodly.

There is a harmony in heaven that is glorious to behold! In the earth, it is exceeding rare to find harmony, even among those bearing Christ’s name. But it is not so in heaven. Within the proximity of the Throne there is always perfect accord and consonance. See, one of the four living creatures joins in this judgment. We were introduced to these exalted personalities in the fourth chapter (4:6-9). They have played a prominent role throughout the Revelation (5:6-14; 6:1,6; 7:11; 14:3).

There is a note of finality in this text that should awaken every lethargic soul. There are seven angels, representing a thorough execution of the judgment. There are seven gold bowls, depicting the extensive nature of destruction. These bowls are *“full of the wrath of God,”* showing that nothing but wrath will be experienced by those upon whom the plagues are poured. They are *“golden bowls,”* denoting the purity and value of the judgment.

This is not a tentative judgment, but that of *“God who lives forever and ever.”* His wrath has always been reserved for the ungodly, even

though He was forbearing with them.

Men will not be used to execute this judgment. Men were employed in the bringing down of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. But holy angels will bring down the ungodly.

### **No Way To Avert the Judgment**

***“The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”*** This language confirms the impossibility of averting this judgment. Once the hour of judgment arrives, nothing will be able to stop it.

The language comes from the dedication of both the tabernacle and the temple, prefigurements of eternal purpose. Ex 30:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10-11). When the glory of the Lord filled those holy sanctuaries, no person could enter them! No service was rendered by men! No sacrifice was made, and no intercession was accomplished.

You may recall that there were times when holy men made effective intercession for other men. Moses made intercession for Israel, turning the wrath of God from them (Ex 32:11-14). Samuel prayed for the people, moving God to spare them (1 Sam 12:19-25). Even now, the Lord Jesus is making intercession for the saints of God (Heb 7:25). Believers are urged make intercessions for all men (1 Tim 2:1). Those beholding a brother sin a sin that is not unto death can pray for him, expecting life to be granted because of their prayer (1 John 5:16). Great benefits have surely been realized through intercession.

But when the ***“day of His wrath is come,”*** no further intercession will

be made. The temple will be so filled that no one can enter to plead for another! Having brought the saved safely through the wilderness of life, God will devote Himself to the destruction of the wicked. That destruction will be thorough. It will not be in phases, with periodic interruptions of peace and tranquility. No one ***“will be able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels”*** are ***“completed.”***

Although some do not believe this is possible, God will ***“shut up His tender mercies”*** in the day of His wrath (Psa 77:9). Repentance will be ***“hid”*** from His eyes (Hos 13:14). He will not change His mind about the wicked in that day, give them space to repent, or dull the edge of His mighty sword. Doubt it not, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*** (Heb 10:31). Take hold of this truth!

## CONCLUSION

The awesomeness of this passage is designed to do several things. *First*, it promotes an aggressive faith. Those who believe God will pour out His wrath upon the wicked will exercise diligence to be excluded from that number. They will fight the good fight of faith, gaining ground in the Spirit. *Second*, it neutralizes any temptation to think the wrath of man works the righteousness of God (James 1:20). When you are tempted to retaliate against the wicked, think of the wrath that awaits them if they do not repent. It will provide an incentive to ***“bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”*** (Matt 5:44). *Third*, the consideration of these things makes sin less appealing. Those who fall into sin have forgotten what awaits sinners.

I cannot close this lesson without observing the effect of this passage on tendencies to embrace novel interpretations of Revelation. We are living in a time when earthy explanations of this book are being aggressively promoted. In their wonderment about one world

government, a common money system, and the mark of the beast, people are forgetting the wrath of God. Their attention has been turned to what “*man can do*” to them—even though Jesus forbids such thinking (Matt 10:28). Such fears are not innocent or harmless. They neutralize faith, obscure heaven, and accentuate life in this world.

Take hold of the message of this book, and do not let it go. Jesus has given it to the churches, and it belongs to them. God will uphold His people, even though Satan opposes them. The wicked will be punished, even though they appear to prosper. In the end, the saints will stand in perfect peace and joy while the wicked are destroyed.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 29

## THE SEVEN VIALS

(FIRST six)

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth." So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. (Rev 16:1-16 NKJV)

# INTRODUCTION

Although I have said this frequently, it bears repetition. The book of Revelation contains Christ’s message to the churches. With great solemnity, everyone who has “*an ear*” is admonished to “*hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Among other things, this confirms the relevancy of the message. This is not a novel story, a mere recording of history in advance, or a mystery that

## **A comparison of the trumpets and the vials.**

<b>SEVEN TRUMPETS</b>	<b>SEVEN VIALS</b>
<i>#1 Hail, fire, and blood cast upon the earth, one-third of trees, etc. burnt.</i>	<i>#1 Sore falls upon those who have aligned themselves with the beast.</i>
<i>#2 One-third of sea made blood, one-third of creature and ships destroyed .</i>	<i>#2 Sea becomes as blood of dead men, and every soul in it dies.</i>
<i>#3 One-third of the waters made bitter, and man men destroyed .</i>	<i>#3 Rivers made blood, and God’s wrath comes on all evil men.</i>
<i>#4 One-third of the sun struck, and one-third of the day is darkened.</i>	<i>#4 Sun is stricken, men are scorched, blaspheme, and refuse to repent.</i>
<i>#5 Star from heaven falls into the pit, locusts are sent forth, and men seek death.</i>	<i>#5 Throne/kingdom of the beast struck, men in pain, blaspheme, and repent not.</i>
<i>#6 Armies from Euphrates destroy one-third of men, and the rest repent not.</i>	<i>#6 The way is prepared for the kings beyond the Euphrates.</i>
<b>Scene:</b> <i>God’s two witnesses speak for Him and work miracles. Beast opposes them.</i>	<b>Scene:</b> <i>3 Unclean spirits witness for the dragon, work miracles for him—then war.</i>
<i>#7 Voices in heaven, judgment, an earthquake, and hail.</i>	<i>#7 Voices in heaven, fall of Babylon, an earthquake, and fail.</i>

The trumpets were a portent of coming judgment. They were partial, but complete judgment is coming. Those in Christ experience a foretaste of coming glories *before* their fulness is to be realized. The wicked also experience a foretaste of coming indignation in order to induce them to repentance. A day has been appointed, however,

that will provide no incentives to repent—a day when God’s wrath will no longer be held back.

we are incapable of understanding. The message is critical to all saints of all ages. While John sent it to **“the seven churches which are in Asia,”** it is not confined to them.

## A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

The message begins with an affirmation of the control of the exalted Lamb (Chapter 5). It unveils the aggression of the devil against the people of God (Chapter 12). The overthrow of the devil is heralded, together with all of his devices (20:10). The triumph of the righteous is announced (21:1-4; 22:3-5). The resurrection of the dead is declared (20:13-14), together with the universal judgment (20:11-15). Realities of decisive importance to all ages are mentioned: √ *The Son of God* (2:18), √ *The devil* (2:10; 12:9,12; 20:2,10), √ *The testimony of Jesus* (1:2,9 12:17; 19:10), √ *The throne of God* (7:15; 14:5; 22:1,3), √ *The Word of God* (1:2,9; 6:9; 19:13; ; 20:4), √ *The lake of fire* (19:20; 20:10,,14,15), √ *The Spirit* (1:10; 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 11:11; 14:13; 22:17) , √ *The bride* (21:9; 22:17), √ *The water of life* (21:6; 22:1,17), √ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (22:21), √ *The coming of the Lord* (3:11; 16:15; 22:7,12,20). These are only representative of the language used in this book—language that is common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

There is nothing about this type of language that can be confined to a historical period or period. It is universal language, and is found throughout the Apostolic writings. This nomenclature tells us the reference points of this book—the pillars, as it were, upon which it stands. The terms themselves are like building blocks, used to form a message for every child of God.

## Different Views of One Purpose

Throughout the vision given to John, various things are underscored. The saints will ultimately survive all of the attacks against them. Their primary foe is the devil. Their secondary foes are all who are aligned with the *“old serpent.”* All of the oppressions and hardships experienced by the faithful come from the wicked one and the hosts of darkness.

The wicked, however, experience neither opposition nor harm from the saints. This is essential to grasp, else our hearts will grow faint. The Lord Himself is the one Who punishes the wicked. The final demise of the wicked will now be affirmed. Wickedness will be overthrown in all of its aspects. Whether personal or corporate, it will be judged. The propagators of the lie and those who embrace it will be brought down together.

This is one of the fundamental things to grasp in the Revelation. The saints will experience opposition in this world, but ultimately overcome. The wicked will enjoy a measure of success in this world, but ultimately be brought down. The seven vials, or bowls, deal with the ultimate demise.

### **Men Are Still Responsible**

It is true that Satan works in men—that the evil they do is prompted by the devil. Satan is called *“the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”* (Eph 2:2). There are people who have *“been taken captive by him to do his will”* (2 Tim 2:26). Notwithstanding this situation, those in Satan’s grasp will experience the wrath of God. They will not be able to plead innocence because Satan worked in them.

The reason for this is apparent. The devil cannot work in a person who does not initially allow him to do so. Eve had to listen to the serpent, consider his tempting words, and act as though they were the

truth. Those ***“captured”*** by Satan have yielded so consistently to him that their wills and heart have become hardened.

When the Lord pours out His wrath upon the ungodly, it will not be without cause. It will be just in every sense of the word. The wicked ARE deserving of the wrath of God and that reality will be apparent to all.

## THE MINISTRATION OF WRATH

***“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”*** Again, the locus, or center, of activity is ***“the temple.”*** This is a depiction of the place occupied by God. It is not a ***“temple”*** as seen upon earth. The temple built by Solomon was built according to strict Divine instructions, which were given to David. That temple, with all of its contents and intricacies, was laid out in ***“the pattern of all that he had by the spirit”*** (1 Chron 28:12). The NIV reads, ***“the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind.”*** That temple was a faint reflection of the temple of reference in the book of Revelation—the heavenly Temple.

### A Necessary Overview

The use of this language ( ***“temple”*** ) brings the Divine residence within our perception. Here is God rules. Here is where Jesus has been exalted to the throne, and where He is presently executing unquestionable dominion. This is not the realm of response as much as it is the domain of decision. Men are tempted to think of the earth as the primary location, with God responding to both the good and evil that occur there. The proper view, however, is that the heavens are the primary place, and the earth is a place where God’s will is being executed with remarkable precision.

A multiplicity of personalities are involved in this reign, which are devoted to the accomplishment of an “*eternal purpose.*” The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved. There is also a massive group of angelic beings, beyond number, within the proximity of the throne. These are impeccably “*holy,*” and are consistently employed in the execution of Divine intent.

There are also a vast host of wicked personalities, including the devil, and his angels. Among this immense empire of darkness are principalities, powers, spiritual wickedness in high places, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. A sub culture of demons are also included in this group.

There are also a vast host of wicked personalities, including the devil, and his angels. Among this immense empire of darkness are principalities, powers, spiritual wickedness in high places, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. A sub culture of demons are also included in this group.

Then, upon the earth, is humanity, an enormous number of personalities created in the image of God. They extend from one border of time to the other, and include both righteous and godly, good and evil, approved and unapproved. From this amalgamation of persons bearing the Divine image, God is extracting a people for His own glory (Acts 15:14). This is being accomplished righteously and effectively, even though sin had dominated the mass of humanity.

In the administration of God’s will, there are intricate involvements of all of these personalities. This involves the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, holy angels, arch angels, cherubim, seraphim, the devil, evil angels,

principalities, powers, spiritual wickedness, rulers of darkness, men, and women. Struggle and warfare are involved, as well as absolute dominion and rule. In all of it, God is Sovereign, Jesus is ruling, and the Holy Spirit is implementing.

Both blessing and cursing are found within the context of this vast array of personalities. Rebellion and obedience are to be interpreted within this framework. No person is an island unto himself. No group can be considered in isolation of this array of personalities. They are all involved in even the most minute details of life.

The person who lives without an awareness of this situation cannot live wisely or effectively. An organization that chooses to ignore this complex arena of influences is destined to failure.

### **Rise Higher!**

The higher we rise in the Spirit, the less significant names and places, as ordinarily conceived, appear. This is the case in this text. We are closer to the Temple, as it were, than to the earth—a blessed condition, indeed! We are not beholding mere history, but Divine intent. Here we will behold God's effective judgment against the very ones who troubled and opposed His people! His wrath will be decisive, irresistible, and effective.

### **Do Not Be Overwhelmed!**

As we near a new millennium, men are beginning to fear. That fear, however, is consistently produced by a failure to consider God our Savior. We must take

courage from our text! Even if the most fearful of all things occurs, God will FIRST remember His people. He will ensure their ultimate safety in glory. Wrath will NEVER be poured out at the expense of the children of God.

In our consideration of these things, we must not be overwhelmed. Those who are in Christ Jesus have come to a massive body of personalities that are all aligned with them, and support them in the good fight of faith. That group includes God, Jesus, innumerable angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and all the redeemed on the earth (Heb 12:22-25).

### **The point of the Text**

The text reveals that the activities taking place on the earth are the result of heaven's rule. In this case, wrath will be poured out—but not indiscriminately. The directive comes from *“the Temple,”* where God and the Lamb are enthroned. It is also executed by holy angels, each of which are in perfect harmony with their Lord.

God does not hide from us what He will do. It is imperative, however, that we see that He is doing it. Why so? Because that will remove the element of fear from our hearts. **If our Father is doing it, and we are reconciled to Him, it will not be ultimately harmful to us!** Jesus spoke of a time of great shaking in the world. Of that time He said, *“men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken”* (Luke 21:26). This need not be the case with you.

As we near a new millennium, men are beginning to fear. That fear, however, is consistently produced by a failure to consider God our Savior. We must take courage from our text! Even if the most fearful of all things occurs, God will FIRST remember His people. He will ensure their ultimate safety in glory. Wrath will NEVER be poured out at the

expense of the children of God. They will NEVER be caught in the wake of Divine anger. If suffering comes, faith will make them equal to it.

This is precisely the approach Jesus has taken in this passage. Before the summons to pour out the wrath of God is given, the people of God are seen safely on the sea of glass. The churches are to be convinced of their position in Christ!

### **Not a Strict Chronological Record**

Remember, the book of Revelation is not a chronological record, as some suppose. It is a book of perspective that allows the child of God to increase in faith and become stable in a seemingly unstable world. I say *seemingly unstable*, because the Lord God Omnipotent reigns, and nothing it out of control. A chronology is addressed to the intellect, while perspective is addressed to the heart.

The Lord Jesus has FIRST revealed the destiny of the righteous. They will finally stand on the tranquil sea of glass, with harps in their hands, rejoicing in the Lord. Now, the Lord will show us the destiny of the wicked. The point is NOT that the wrath will not be poured out upon the wicked until the righteous are removed, or raptured, from the earth. That bit of theological distortion has brought great solace to many a frightened soul. However, our comfort is to be found in the Lord of circumstance, not deliverance from the circumstance—and there is a vast difference between the two.

The saints of God will be impervious to the unmixed wrath of God—just as much as their Lord, to whose image they will have been conformed. A promise has been given to them, and it is sure. ***“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”*** (Rev 2:11).

## The Time Has Come

Now the time has come! For long centuries, it looked to the undiscerning as though it would never come—or that the whole notion was just a myth. Oh, Satan and his demonic forces know it is coming, but they are incapable of change. The devil ***“knows that he has a short time”*** (Rev 12:12). The demons are acutely aware of ***“the time”*** when they will be tormented forever (Matt 8:29). Zealously, the powers of darkness have worked to drag men into perdition with them. But now, the appointed time has come, and they, and will who followed them, will not escape. The cry comes from the place of Divine rule, ***“Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.”*** Seven vials depict completeness. They also convey the idea of accumulated wrath—wrath that has been ***“heaped up”*** and ***“treasured”*** (Job 36:13; Rom 2:5).

## We Have Been Delivered!

This is the ***“wrath”*** from which Jesus has delivered us. As it is written, ***“His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come”*** (1 Thess 1:10). Some imagine this is *the great tribulation*, a temporal judgment that will fall upon the earth in the last day. But this is not the case. James was not delivered from the wrath of Herod, nor Peter and Paul from the wrath of Nero. Of old time, many saints were not delivered from the wrath of men who were responsible for grievous afflictions poured out upon the faithful. Of these saints it is written, ***“others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”*** (Heb 11:35-38). The inventors of sordid theologies will have to explain to

these saints why they concocted such a distortion! Not to mention the millions of believers mercilessly slain by both pagan and papal Rome.

The inventors of sordid theologies will have to explain to these saints why they concocted such a distortion! Not to mention the millions of believers mercilessly slain by both pagan and papal Rome.

The Ministry of Angels

To assure us of the certainty of this judgment, we are told it will be accomplished through “*seven angels.*” This is comforting to consider. Angels are precise and immediate in fulfilling their commission. Of them it is said, “*Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure*” (Psa 103:20-21). Elsewhere they are also called “*His ministers a flame of fire*” (Heb 1:7). Their obedience is not delayed, nor does it fall short of the heavenly demand. You must know this is not the case with men. Their obedience is often prolonged and flawed. The most holy of men were often slow to comprehend the Lord’s will. For example, even after Peter announced salvation was for Gentiles, who were “*afar off,*” it was 10-15 years before the Gospel was taken to them (Acts 2:39; 10:10-28).

In our own case, truth gradually dawns upon the soul. The experience is referred to as “*the day dawning and the Day Star rising in our heart*” (2 Pet 1:19). The eyes of our understanding must be opened, often bringing insight long after we FIRST heard the truth (Eph 1:7-20).

But this is NOT the case with the holy angels. They do God’s will

instantly. When, therefore, they are commissioned to pour out the vials of God's wrath upon the earth, they will do so instantly, without delay. They will not be affected by the response of men, or be tempted to restrain themselves. We are to derive comfort from this, knowing that the will of our Father will be faithfully and fully executed.

The sureness of the coming wrath is best described in the words of Hosea. Though spoken of death and the grave, it is true for all enemies. ***"I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes"*** (Hos 13:14). If it has ever seemed as though sin and corruption is invincible, ask the Lord to help your unbelief! The end of wickedness has been scheduled in heaven, and it will come to pass.

## THE FIRST VIAL

***"So the FIRST went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image."*** Once again, sequence is not the emphasis of this text, but thoroughness. God's wrath will be experienced by ALL ***"who know not God and obey not the Gospel"*** (2 Thess 1:8). Everyone whose name is ***"not found written in the book of life"*** will also taste of the wrath of God (Rev 20:15). In this text, however, the Divine spotlight is placed upon a particularly reprehensible category of sinners. They are described as ***"the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image."*** These are the ones who succumbed to Satan's religious assault against the saints—the initiative of the second beast. Their sin is particularly abominable because it involved embracing a false Christ instead of the One exalted by the Father for their salvation. These people had embraced a ***"form of godliness,"*** while refusing the ***"power"*** made accessible to them in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:5). They had been exposed to the truth of the Gospel, but elected to reject ***"the love of the truth"*** in preference for the delusions presented by the ***"prince of the power of***

*the air*” (2 Thess 2:10; Eph 2:2).

Contemporary Christianity is too casual in its approach to powerless religion. It is too tolerant of it, and is not aggressive in its opposition to it. This does not reflect the Divine view of things at all. Here we behold the heart of God on this matter, and it is awesome to consider. The purpose for this message is to encourage faith in God’s people. But it is not a mere intellectual view that is inspired. The Lord is promoting a faith that will reject the offensive of the devil, and heartily embrace the salvation of God.

These are the ones who succumbed to Satan’s religious assault against the saints—the initiative of the second beast. Their sin is particularly abominable because it involved embracing a false Christ instead of the One exalted by the Father for their salvation.

Notice the vivid description. *“A foul and loathsome sore came upon”* this disobedient amalgamation of people. They aligned themselves with lifeless religion, thinking it would bring them advantage. This is always the objective of Satan—to cause people to imagine there is an advantage in yielding to his suggestions. Eve did not accept the lie until she thought she would gain an advantage by doing so (Gen 3:6). Achan disobeyed God because he thought he would be the better for it (Josh 7:21). Judas betrayed Jesus for what appeared to be an advantage (Matt 26:15-16).

So it is with those who yield to the beast who speaks like a lamb—to Satan’s substitute who allows people to remain religious without maintaining fellowship with the Son, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). They are deceived into thinking they are the better for such an

alliance. Our text, however, provides the real situation. They are being nurtured for *“a foul and loathsome sore,”* or *“noisome and grievous sore”* (KJV). The idea is that of a malignant sore that will consummate in their absolute removal from *“the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power”* (1 Thess 1:9).

### Preparatory Depiction

The Lord has given an example of this type of judgment. The example was historical—in the flesh. However, it was but a prelude to the type of judgment declared in our text.

#### *Upon Egypt*

The first is seen in the sixth plague brought upon Egypt. In that judgment *“festering boils broke out on men and animals”* Ex 9:10, NIV). The powerful affect of this judgment is seen in the words, *“the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians”* (Ex 9:11). The judgment resulted in the cessation of the magician’s opposition to Moses. Never again did they challenge him.

### The Point

In one sense, the destruction of the wicked will be sudden and without warning (1 Thess 5:3). From another point of view (as revealed in this text), it will come in such a manner as to reveal to extreme wickedness of those who have succumbed to Satan.

Egypt was finally overthrown in the drowning of its army in the Red Sea. That climactic judgment, however, was preceded by a series of plagues that revealed the worthiness of the final destruction. So will it be with the destruction of the wicked. God will not only be vindicated

in their final overthrow, but in a series of judgments that reveal the utter corruption that is in them.

A review of history will confirm that the opponents of God's people were all judged and overthrown in this world. You can see the pattern in Divine history. The flood, Babel, Egypt, the seven nations of Canaan,

Lest we are tempted to view the corrupt church in an accommodating way, our text informs us this judgment is reserved for all who supported and sympathized with it. Those described as having "*the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image*" are people who accepted Satan's substitute.

the Philistines, the Midianites, Syria, Babylon, the Medio-Persian empire, Greece, and Rome. Wicked cities have been overthrown, including Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Nineveh, and even Jerusalem. In this very century, nations that once threatened the world, and were noted for their opposition to God's people, have been brought down. These include Japan, Germany, and Russia. Let no one doubt it, the wicked will suffer preliminary judgment in this world, and final destruction in the end.

### What We Will See

We will see that men are not saved by "*sores,*" but by the grace of God. Repentance is not induced by pain, but by "*the goodness of God*" (Rom 2:4). While the first trumpet affected only one-third, the first vial will touch all of the wicked. The emphasis of our text is that all those who settled for the powerless religion promoted by the beast will suffer grievously for it.

When the Spirit says, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb 10:31), His words are to be taken quite seriously. Those who reject Jesus, corrupt his Word, and malign His people will

not go unpunished. Also, those who dare to align themselves with these opponents of Christ will be grouped with them. They will all suffer the most fierce reprisal for sin that Divinity can inflict. The suffering is of such a magnitude that it cannot be described in the language of men. Therefore, it is seen as ***“foul and loathsome sores”*** forced upon men. This is a vivid description of pain and suffering that transcends any adequate description. Even now, this judgment is all in place—reserved ***“until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”*** (2 Pet 3:7). Of that day of reckoning it is said, ***“And they shall not escape”*** (1 Thess 5:3).

### A Final Word

Lest we are tempted to view the corrupt church in an accommodating way, our text informs us this judgment is reserved for all who supported and sympathized with it. Those described as having ***“the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image”*** are people who accepted Satan’s substitute. They embraced a ***“form of godliness,”*** but rejected ***“the power thereof.”*** They chose to quench the Spirit, refused to hear Him who is speaking from heaven, and walked after the flesh—all the while wearing the name of Jesus. The seriousness of their condition is rarely, if ever, mentioned by the nominal church.

## THE SECOND VIAL

***“Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.”***

The first vial, or bowl, was poured out upon the earth, directed to individuals. Now the wrath of God is seen in a more extensive way. It is depicted as wrath poured out upon the sea, vast in its expanse, and

seemingly unconquerable. No one has ever been able to control the sea. It is another part of creation over which mortals have no power whatsoever.

### **The Nations of the World**

This is a sketch of this world from a national point of view. The nations—where safety is imagined to be found. The nations—the consolidation of people for safety. Here is where men suppose they can find safety. It is where human imaginations are thought to become indestructible. Nations are like a vast ocean upon which commerce, pleasure, and initiatives are launched.

The prophet Ezekiel makes an allusion to this view of nations. *“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up”* (Ezek 26:3). In this text, however, rather than nations coming up against someone, God is coming against the nations. In the day of salvation, God blessed the nations in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise (Gen 18:18; 22:18). Now, however, the wrath of God is poured out upon the sea of peoples because of their unbelief. These are the *“nations”* that were formerly described as *“angry”* (Rev 11:18).

### **An Introduction in Divine History**

The judgment is much like the first plague against Egypt, when the waters were turned into blood (Ex 7:17-20). That was a temporal judgment against a single nation that oppressed God’s people. Remember, the second trumpet resulted in one third of the sea being made blood—a temporal judgment of the nations (Rev 8:8-9).

Now, however, the entire sea becomes blood, and every living thing in

it is destroyed. This includes more than men. Nothing that thrived on or in the sea capitalize on it any longer. There is no life in it, no productivity, no advantage.

### **Prelude to Destruction**

Before the wicked are utterly destroyed, their resources will dry up. They will fully realize the impotence of their enterprises, which seemed invincible. The highest form of fleshly power— *the nations* —will become the source of death as God smites all unholy alliances. Oh, that this were seen more clearly by the multitudes. It would soon bring a grinding halt to the inordinate affection men have developed for nations and their governments. They will not last. Nor, indeed, will a religion endure that is patterned after worldly concepts. We are to separate from the world.

## **THE THIRD VIAL**

*“Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood . . . “*

Today, the fashionable thing is to borrow illustrations and applications from contemporary life. Many a minister imagines this makes the truth of God relevant—but they are sorely mistaken. Such methods are a bed that is *“too short,”* and covers that are *“too narrow”*

Both rivers and springs of water are judged in this vial. Again, the Holy Spirit reaches

into the Word of God to develop our sense of Divine wrath. The nation of Egypt suffered a plague upon its water sources, as they became blood. The Lord told Moses to instruct Aaron as follows. ***“Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone”*** (Ex 7:19). Thus life-giving sources were contaminated, and rendered useless to the people.

In that ancient judgment, the Lord introduced us to a type of His judgment. Those who refuse to rely upon Him will eventually see their resources dissipate. In nature, this occurred when the Lord ***“called for a famine”*** (2 Kgs 8:1; Psa 105:16), ***“withheld rain”*** (Amos 4:7), or sent destructive ***“blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers”*** (2 Chron 6:28). The prophets referred to this condition as broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer 2:13), or putting money into a bag with holes (Hag 1:6). Sinners are often judged by having their resources cursed.

#### *A Principle to be Seen*

There is an important principle here. God has orchestrated both history and Scripture to provide a basis for comprehending His ways. What men call *“history”* is infinitely more than a mere record of preceding eras and events. The things that occurred, and the language used to record them, serve a high purpose. They provide both a nomenclature and concepts that assist us in understanding the ways of God.

Have you not seen the remarkable parallels found Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and our deliverance from sin? Or, how about their wilderness wanderings en route to the promised land, where they needed Divine provision and encountered enemies. Is that not a depiction of our earthly pilgrimage? What marvelous building blocks for understanding are found in the tabernacle, sacrifices, and feasts, priesthood. Proper concepts of *“washing,” “sanctification,”* and *“justification,”* were all developed in those Divinely ordered circumstances.

Today, the fashionable thing is to borrow illustrations and applications from contemporary life. Many a minister imagines this makes the truth of God relevant—but they are sorely mistaken. Such methods are a bed that is *“too short,”* and covers that are *“too narrow”* (Isa 28:20). What men call the *Old Testament* is really God’s dictionary and encyclopedia. It is where God developed a nomenclature that could hold truth, and sanctify it to our hearts.

Remember, we are not speaking of the administration of blessing, but of the pouring out of the wrath of God. God is impeccably righteous in all that He does— particularly in His judgments. Those who glibly speak about being angry with God have, in their response, suggested He is not righteous.

Sources that are Not Divine

Whereas the sea portrays the nations and the *expression* of corrupt life, rivers and springs denote its *source*. These are sources that have NOT been given by God for the building of the soul. For centuries they have sustained the world, its governments, and its princes. But they will fail. In being turned into blood, they cause death instead of life.

Some of those sources are *“the wisdom of this world”* (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19), the *“arm of flesh”* (2 Chron 32:8), *“riches”* (Mark 10:24) and sinners joining in hand, or unholy alliances (Prov 11:21).

When these contaminated resources are used to promote the cause of Christ, the mark of the beast has been received. These are accouterments that cannot last. They are all destined to fail. Riches are called ***“uncertain riches”*** (1 Tim 6:17). The wisdom of this world is defined by God as ***“foolish”*** (1 Cor 1:20). Trusting in men is like leaning on sharp reed that ***“goes into the hand and pierces it”*** (Isa 36:6).

The pouring of the second vial upon the waters, and they become blood, is the drying up of carnal resources. It is possible that we are already beginning to see this happen—at least to a measurable degree. Today we have more experts and specialists than we have ever had before—particularly in the nominal church. But their strength has departed from them—if they ever had any. They cannot keep immorality out of the church, chicanery out of the pulpit, or charlatans out of religion. There is significant moral and spiritual decline all about us, while our universities are bulging, and our churches are filled with professionals. The rivers and springs are being turned into blood!

### **A Righteous Judgment**

***“And I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things.”*** Here is an aspect of Divine judgment we must never forget. Remember, we are not speaking of the administration of blessing, but of the pouring out of the wrath of God. God is impeccably righteous in all that He does—particularly in His judgments. Those who glibly speak about being angry with God have, in their response, suggested He is not righteous. How wrong they are—willingly wrong.

The wrath of God has been poured out upon the waters. Who expresses praise for God’s righteousness in this judgment? No less than ***“the angel of the waters!”*** Here as an area of stewardship upon which

the wrath of God was poured, and righteousness is ascribed to the Lord! He was above both the steward and the stewardship. Everything was derived from Him, for he ***“is, and was, and is to be.”***

There are examples in Scripture of holy men who acknowledged God’s righteousness in His judgments. For example, when Hezekiah was told of the coming captivity of his own sons, he responded in faith. ***“The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good! For he said, Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?”*** (2 Kgs 20;19). By this he meant God was both righteous and merciful. He was righteous in executing judgment against the wayward Israelites. He was merciful in not doing it in Hezekiah’s day.

On another occasion, young Samuel was told by god to tell aged Eli of the coming judgment of his house. It would be fierce, and his sons would die. Upon hearing the grievous message, Eli responded, ***“It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him.”*** (1 Sam 3:18).

In a remarkable display of strong faith, David spoke of the righteousness of God. At the time, he was exiled from the city of God. He gave directions for the ark of the covenant by be carried “back into the city,” even though he was not able to

Oh, that this type of faith were more common in our day! This is the day of salvation and Divine acceptance!

You see the heavenly manner in our text. After an outpouring of the fierce indignation of God, righteousness was ascribed to Him—righteousness because of the judgment just portrayed.

accompany it. Then he added these words. ***“If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling***

*place. But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him"* (1 Sam 15:25-26).

Oh, that this type of faith were more common in our day! This is the day of salvation and Divine acceptance! You see the heavenly manner in our text. After an outpouring of the fierce indignation of God, righteousness was ascribed to Him—righteousness because of the judgment just portrayed.

### **Their Just Due**

*"For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due."* In this marvelous day of grace, sinners can be reconciled to the God they have offended. The door to heaven has been opened through the vicarious death of the Lamb of God. But this condition will not always exist! Those who boast of not receiving from God what they deserve had best walk in the light as He is in the light—and do it with zeal. The day of Divine reprisal is coming!

Notice that our attention is being focused on those who *"have shed the blood of saints and prophets."* Men tend to forget God's martyrs, but they are not forgotten in heaven! Their blood will be avenged! The language is too offensive for some to take into their mouths: *"You have given them blood to drink."* In another place the Lord promises, *"all who take the sword will perish by the sword"* (Matt 26:52). Early in this book those with an ear tuned to heaven are told, *"If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword"* (13:9-10). Speaking of Divine retribution, the prophet Isaiah wrote, *"For behold, the LORD comes out of His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; The earth will also disclose her blood, And will no more cover her slain"* (Isa 26:21).

The aggression of Christ's enemies against His people will be met by Divine aggression. It will be righteous, and it will be thorough. The ungodly, particularly those who have killed the saints and the prophets, are richly deserving of this wrath. In it, they will receive ***“what they deserve”*** (NRSV).

We do well to make friends of God's people, bringing blessing and advantages to them. We are living in a time of great apathy toward the saints. Many of their own leaders manifest very little concern for them, and often are stumbling blocks and sources of sorrow to them. But God ***“is not unrighteous” to forget “the work and labor of love”*** His people have shown. By His own word, it would be unrighteous for Him to ignore their work, or cause it to go without recognition. Remember, the martyrs under the altar cried out for vengeance (Rev 6:10). Their prayer is being answered in our text.

### **True and Righteous**

***“And I heard another from the altar saying, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”*** The heavenly realms are alert to Divine workings. Throughout this book there are responses, voice, and praises issuing from the proximity of the Throne. Once again, the confession is made about the reality and uprightness of these judgments. They are fierce, but they are ***“righteous.”*** They are depicted by symbols, but they are ***“true.”*** These are the Lord's judgments, not the retaliation of men.

## **THE FOURTH VIAL**

***“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched***

*with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.*” I am careful to remind you this is a vision-something that is seen. The language conveys the extent of Divine judgment, and is not to be construed as a commentary on the state of nature. With all visions, the truth they depict is to be the focus of our attention. For example, it would be foolish focus our attention on the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision, treating it as though the demolition of a statue was God’s intention (Dan 2:31-45). Also, the vision Peter had on the rooftop is was not a Divine commentary on dietary rules. It would be out of order to establish a legalistic approach to diet based on that passage (Acts 10:11-21).

The focus of this passage is not a disruption in earth’s climate, although that may very well occur in these end times. Jesus did say, *“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring”* (Lk 21:25). This cannot, however, be the thrust of this passage. The reason should be apparent: the pouring out of the wrath of God is the point. God in His wrath will *“shake all things”* (Isa 13:13; Hag 2:6,21), His wrath is directed personalities, not creation.

### **The Source of Devilish Knowledge**

The fourth vial, or bowl, of wrath is poured out upon the sun. Again, the language is taken from the plagues of Egypt. In that plague, the Lord commanded Moses, *“Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt”* (Ex 10:21). There was a disruption of unity during that judgment, for *“They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days”* (Ex 10:23).

In this judgement the *“wisdom from beneath”* dries up, offering no means implementing human strategies. Christ’s opponents will, so to

speaking, stay in their own houses. Their caucuses will cease, and their initiatives will come to an abrupt halt. The depravity of human wisdom will be *“felt”* like Egypt felt the thick darkness for three days. The sun of human wisdom will turn to darkness, and the light of carnal hope will fail.

The picture is remarkably vivid. Remember, God is judging those who have opposed His people. The wisdom and power which had seemed so effective against the saints is now reduced to rubble.

There remains a notion among some people that hard times necessarily drive men to God. In the Second World War it was common to hear people say there were no atheists in foxholes. It all sounds good enough, but it is not true. With each sin the heart grows harder. The longer a person maintains form of godliness without the power, the more difficult repentance becomes.

Joel wrote of Divine judgment as the blotting out of light. When God sent a people *“great and strong”* against His wayward people, He described the effects of that judgment in this way. *“The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness”* (Joel 2:1,2,10; 3:15). Everything that has previously sustained them withered and died. So will it be prior to *“the end.”* Like Pharaoh’s army attempting to pass through the Red sea, the wheels of their chariots will come off, and what was once an asset will become their liability (Ex 14:25).

**Pain to the Oppressors**

By saying men are ***“scorched with great heat,”*** the Spirit emphasizes the affliction associated with the dissipation of power, wisdom, and influence. Because the wicked trust in the wisdom and resources of this world, it is painful to them when they are taken away by Divine judgment.

At this point, the depravity of those aligned with corrupt religion becomes evident. Although all of their resources have been taken, and great pain inflicted upon them, ***“they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.”*** Their harsh words were directed to the very God by Whom they were being judged. He not only had the power to send the plagues, He also had power to call them back. Yet, these sinners did not ***“repent,”*** thereby giving God glory. Sin had so hardened them they were impervious to Divine wrath. God was righteous in pouring out His wrath upon them!

There remains a notion among some people that hard times necessarily drive men to God. In the Second World War it was common to hear people say there were no atheists in foxholes. It all sounds good enough, but it is not true. With each sin the heart grows harder. The longer a person maintains form of godliness without the power, the more difficult repentance becomes. Finally, all hope of recovery is removed, and condemnation becomes sure. For such people, the wrath of Almighty God cannot close their blasphemous mouth or produce a moment of repentance. This condition will be demonstrated prior to ***“the end,”*** as the futility of form without power is made evident. It is possible to reach an unchangeable position judgement cannot correct.

## THE FIFTH VIAL

***“Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast,***

*and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.*” Now we come to the heart of this passage. The “*beast*” has lifted itself against the Lamb, oppressed the people of God, and brought great handicap to the world. However, its seeming invincible reign will cease. The fifth angel directs God’s wrath toward the “*throne of the beast*” –the seat of its power.

In this judgment, false religion becomes desolate. It has no more impetus, and can spread no further. It will offer no more salve for the consciences of corrupt souls. Its meager offerings will cease to be set before men, and its dominion will cease. See, under the canopy of worldly wisdom, false religion has spread to the far corners of the earth. It has placed restrictions upon all who refuse to give their allegiance to it. But it will not always be this way.

### **Historical Preludes**

Throughout history, governments have fallen. That is another way of saying their thrones—or seats of government—failed. These defiled governments have fallen one by one. But in the end, they will all fall at once.

The “*seat of the beast*” is the fountain of earthly power, particularly in the religious realm. By saying it becomes “*full of darkness*” its impotence and death are accentuated. When the “*throne of the beast*” was struck down by God, everything that came from that throne was covered with the mantel of death.

This Divinely imposed “*darkness*” describes a situation where men cannot believe, and find no place

for repentance (John 12:39; Heb12:17). It is similar to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, from which he simply could not recover.

This Divinely imposed "*darkness*" describes a situation where men cannot believe, and find no place for repentance (John 12:39; Heb12:17). It is similar to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, from which he simply could not recover.

### The Response

What will be the response of those who supported the beast? How will they react to the demise of their mother? They will "*gnaw their tongues for pain,*" an expression denoting great suffering of mind and conscience. These adjusted their lives so everything was supplied by "*the beast.*" But now the "*throne of the beast*" has been struck with the wrath of the Almighty. It can sustain them no more, and the affects are dreadful.

Still, there is no change in these reprobates. Their religion has made them dead and unresponsive to God. When everything is taken from them, and the source of their spiritual corruption is judged, they blaspheme the God of heaven because of their suffering. This is the outcome of the apostasy of which the Apostle wrote. "*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*" (2 Tim 3:13).

There is no more corrupt condition than being unwilling and unable to respond to Divine judgment. Yet, that is where lifeless religion takes a person! In the worst of times, these souls will level charges against the living God while they gnaw their tongues for pain. They will NOT repent, even though their opposition is being judged with great

harshness.

It is not possible to say too much about the danger of beastly religion—form without power. The highly polished organizations of men, however effective they may appear, will not be allowed to continue. Those with spiritual insight must break free from such delusions while they can. In the last day there will be no change.

## THE SIXTH VIAL

*“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.”* The sixth trumpet heralded the coming of armies from the Euphrates to destroy a third part of men. That was a preliminary judgment that produced no repentance among those who persecuted the people of God. Now comes the final outpouring of wrath, and it will be directed to the river Euphrates again. This speaks of the area of the East from which God will raise powers of destruction against Babylon the Great – the whorish church.

The river Euphrates speaks of overthrow, and is so employed by the prophets. When Cyrus took Babylon captive, for example, he did so by diverting the river Euphrates (Isa 13; 44:27-28; Jer 46:2,6,10; 51:31-32).

How often were waters *“dried up”* by the Lord. When Israel crossed the Red Sea, it became *“dry land”* (Ex 14:21). When Israel crossed over to the promised land at Jericho, they *“passed over on dry ground”* (Josh 3:17). Thus, as the rivers were dried up, the people were able to pass over—the exact imagery presented in our text.

Both Jeremiah and Zechariah spoke of Divine judgment as drying up the waters (Jer 51:36; Zech 10:11). This is not something initiated by men, but by God. As we move toward the time of the end, the Lord will execute special judgments that will get rid of obstacles long endured.

The enemies of God, therefore, are associated with the river Euphrates. The drying up of the river signifies the removal of those standing in the way of spiritual progress.

### **The Kings of the East**

Both Jeremiah and Zechariah spoke of Divine judgment as drying up the waters (Jer 51:36; Zech 10:11). This is not something initiated by men, but by God. As we move toward the time of the end, the Lord will execute special judgments that will get rid of obstacles long endured.

The judgment of the Euphrates was in order to free up the passage for *“the kings of the East.”* I am not sure of the identity of these *“kings,”* nor am I persuaded that their identity is essential for us to know. I understand these *“kings”* to be the means through which spiritual Babylon will be overthrown. They are therefore aligned with God, and are not false prophets—opponents that are mentioned later.

It is important to remember we are not dealing with strict chronology, but with different perspectives of the judgment of the wicked. From an individual viewpoint, all who have been deceived by the beast, or corrupt religion, will taste of God’s wrath (the first vial). From the standpoint of nations, great empires that have been held in tact by

corrupt religion will fall (the second vial). Viewed from another perspective, God will render profitless forms of religion that have supposedly sustained people and nations over long periods of time (the third vial). From yet another view, the wisdom of this world, so highly vaunted by the nominal church, will be brought down by the Almighty, revealing its utter impotence (The fourth vial). Divine wrath will also be revealed in removing everything that is a hindrance to the fall of spiritual Babylon.

At this point, I am giving you my opinion. Although it is a studied opinion, it is, nevertheless, an opinion. I see these ***“kings from the East”*** as the 144,000, a number denoting the converted tribes of Israel. It is through them that God will bring down the nominal church—the corruption of the Gentiles. All obstacles to the rapid and effective spread of the ***“everlasting Gospel”*** will be removed. These Jews are said to be ***“with the Lamb”*** on Mount Zion—a description designating the reign of spiritual kings and priests.

I do not pretend to know the obstacles that stand in the way of this being accomplished. Nor, indeed, do I believe this is the point of the text. Babylon will come down, and everything that is hindering that from happening will be removed.

### **Satan Reacts**

***“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.”*** Our spirits are now lifted into spiritual realms, as we are given to see the reaction of the wicked one to the beginnings of Divine wrath. At this point, God’s wrath is not poured out upon the devil—although it will be thus directed. Again, we are not see things from the perspective of time—either brief or extended.

The point here is that Satan will unleash a barrage of delusion before the end. Notice the hierarch of evil. First the devil ( *dragon* ), then the beast ( *the worldly form of rule* ), then the “false prophet” ( *corrupt religion* ). These represent Satan’s strategy, and compare to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The devil is the power behind the beast and the false prophet, and both bring honor to him.

This is the first time we read of “*the false prophet*” in Revelation. It is not A false prophet, but THE false prophet. I do not believe it is a particular individual, any more than the “*beast*” is a particular government. Rather, they are the means Satan uses to implement his purpose—coercive power and delusion. All of his initiatives are within those categories.

What emanates from this unholy triad is defiled and defiling: “*three unclean spirits like frogs.*” They are not frogs, but are “*spirits LIKE frogs.*” It is interesting to compare the form taken by the Holy Spirit versus that taken by Satan’s influences. The Spirit came in the form of a “*dove*”—a clear fowl (Matt 3:16). We are introduced to the defiling influence of frogs in the Egyptian plague (Ex 8:1-13). They brought corruption and defilement everywhere they went.

Remember, the bowls of wrath have been poured out upon those having the mark of the beast—but on the the beast himself. They have been powered out upon the seat of the beast—but not on the beast itself. Thus, while yet in the death-throes of the defeat he suffered in Jesus’ death, the devil unleashes a final attack.

Remember, the bowls of wrath have been poured out upon those having the mark of the beast—but on the

the beast himself. They have been powered out upon the seat of the beast—but not on the beast itself. Thus, while yet in the death-throes of the defeat he suffered in Jesus’ death, the devil unleashes a final attack.

***“For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”*** Those who doubt the realm of the supernatural are not aware of the extent of Satan’s power. The frogs John saw were really demons. Scripture confirms these diabolical spirits did not pass away when Jesus was exalted, even through they lost considerable influence. Idolatry is nothing less than the worship of demons (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20). There are doctrines perpetrated by demons (1 Tim 4:1). To this very day, the demons “believe there is one God, and tremble” (James 2:19). They still set a table and a cup before the people of God, inviting them to drink their poison (1 Cor 10:21).

And what do these demons do? First, they perform signs, by which they deceive souls at a distance from God. They go out to the ***“kings of the earth”***—to those who are elevated in the worldly realm. It is no normal work that they are pictured doing. They are seen marshaling forces for one final battle: ***“the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”***

Although these forces have been waging war throughout history, they will launch a final assault. The language of this verse is intriguing, forcing us to think beyond the norm: ***“the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”*** This cannot be the day of judgment, for there will be no battle then. It cannot be the end of the world, for men will flee, not side with demons to do battle.

It is apparent that a final aggressive effort will be made by Satan

against the people of God. Some are of the opinion we are in the middle of that battle now. I do not believe, however, that this could be called ***“that great day of God Almighty.”*** Notwithstanding, we do well to prepare ourselves for an unparalleled Satanic initiative. We have been duly warned, and we must not fall asleep. The last revival, we will find, will also spark a resurgence of Satanic delusion. We do well to reject any form of theology that views Satan and his hosts as inactive, impotent, and unable to rally the wicked together. Too, let us zealous remain detached from this present evil world. Those who insist on being worldly will be ultimately gathered by Satan against Christ. Too, they will be destroyed by Him.

## JESUS IS COMING!

***“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”*** Here is a marvelous word of comfort. We have read of the wrath of God being poured out. We have also heard of Satan rallying spiritual despots for ***“the battle of the great day of God Almighty.”*** All of this might tend to strike fear into the hearts of believers. Thus comes a word of comfort from the King. ***“I am coming!”*** it is that coming that is the blessed hope of the church (Tit 2:11-12). But we must not hold to that coming as a mere doctrine. Our hearts must embrace it, allowing it to assist us in purifying ourselves (1 John 3:3-4).

And for what are we to ***“watch?”*** This is a vital point. Are we to watch for the battle of Armageddon? The ***“battle of the great day of God Almighty?”*** The rise of the beast, or the mark of his name? Indeed not! While countless numbers of people are looking for these things, we are to look for our Lord. That anticipation will evidence itself in consistent watching and moral and spiritual purity.

If He comes and finds us in the embrace of a powerless religion, we will be ashamed! If He comes and finds us possessing a form of godliness, yet denying the power thereof, we will be ashamed.

But that is not all. Those who are ashamed will be witnessed by the assembled universe. “***THEY see his shame!***” Settle it in your hearts to be ready for the return of Christ Jesus!

## SATAN PREPARES

***“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”*** This is the first and only mentioning of this word in Scripture. It is mentioned in no other form anywhere else. There is a great deal of mystery surrounding this verse. Still, certain men have taken it upon themselves to develop lengthy and detailed doctrines around it. Such freedom with the text of Scripture is not to be commended.

The word means “*Mountain of Megiddo.*” This, some suppose, is associated with the Plain of Megiddo, which was known as a gathering place for decisive battles. Zechariah referred to it as a place of anguish (Zech 12:11). That is where Josiah was overthrown and killed (2 Kgs 23:29). A battle with the “***kings of Canaan***” was fought there (Judges 5:19). Ahaziah also died there (2 Kgs 9:27).

Enough is told us so we will know God is glory to get great glory for Himself in the end. The best has actually been reserved for last. Texts like this should not be brushed aside as meaningless, but pondered with great sobriety. Anything that involves the marshaling of the kings of the earth by demons of hell, and a “***battle of the great day of God Almighty,***” must not be taken lightly. Texts like this are highly

disruptive to stilted theology.

Let us be content to believe that God's eternal purpose involves things of a greater magnitude than is commonly believed. Satan is more aggressive than lethargic souls want to believe. If he is getting ready for the "*battle, of the great day of God Almighty,*" what of us? What of you? Is that day not worthy of preparation?

## CONCLUSION

There are several weighty things to be observed in this text. We must not allow the symbolic language to hide these things from us. They are matters necessary for our preparation for the coming of the Lord.

(1) First, they speak of God's wrath. Jesus has delivered us from this, and the Spirit will enable us to avoid being caught in its wake. The presence of the seven vials, or bowls, confirms Jesus wants us to know about Divine wrath. It will assist us to avoid ensnarement by the wicked one.

(2) The seven vials introduce us to the judgment of the deceived—the people with a form of godliness that deny the power thereof. While men try to disarm us concerning powerless religion, this text serves to awaken us to its danger.

(3) God will punish those who have slain His people. The martyrs are not just statistics. Their blood will be avenged, down to the person. Until that time of vengeance, God has given these enemies space to repent.

(4) Behold the unspeakable hardness of the those who persecute the saints. When severely punished by the Lord, they blaspheme His holy name in the very midst of great pain.

(5) We are introduced to the irretrievability of the reprobate. There is a state from which repentance is not possible, even though sore judgments are poured out upon the transgressor.

(6) Satan is pictured as marshaling the kings of the earth to do battle in the great day of God Almighty. We ought not, therefore, develop an inordinate love for such kings and governments.

(7) Under Satan's guidance, heresies and great delusions are perpetrated among men. They are aided by miracles wrought by the spirits of demons.

(8) The influence of the wicked one defiles, corrupts, and renders unsuitable to stand before the Almighty. The spirits emitting from the dragon, beast, and false prophet, were all "unclean."

(9) At the foundation of this book, we are continually confronted with the coming of the Lord, the judgment of the wicked, and the reward of the righteous. These must have a prominent place in our thinking.

(10) There is a judgment that is final, and a day of wrath that is complete. We must prepare for both!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 30

## THE SEVENTH VIAL

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. (Rev 16:17-21, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

We are beholding the Lord's sure judgment upon His enemies. The particular focus is upon religious corruption, the greatest of all Satan's initiatives. Throughout the writings of the Apostles, solemn warnings are given concerning a great apostasy – a falling away from the faith. In my judgment, the warnings have not been taken seriously by the professed church. That circumstance indicates we are in this falling away, which has caused the hearts and consciences of professed believers to become dull and insensitive.

Jesus revealed that the nature of His Kingdom did not exclude the human propensity to spiritual dullness. The parable of the sower made known the lurking liabilities with which hearers wrestle. Not only are there hard hearts into which the Word cannot penetrate, there are hearts in which noble beginnings are experienced, but God-glorifying conclusions are not realized. Our Lord described two of these situations.

The first received the Word ***“immediately with joy.”*** However, this hearer develops no root – i.e., his religion, so to speak, is only on the surface. For a while, all seems well. However, when the heat of trial arises like the blast of the noon-day sun, this person withers and dies. In the words of our Lord, ***“For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles”*** (Matt 13:20-21).

There is another type of listener described by Jesus. This class of hearer also hears the Word, giving attention to it. That attention, however, is not total. The religion of this person leaves his heart divided, with other interests. Those competing concerns soon dominate the heart, smothering the interest in things eternal. Jesus said it like this. ***“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful”*** (Matt 13:22).

Satan has developed and promoted a religion that raises all of these distractions—giving them a religious flavor, and thereby sanctifying them in the minds of spiritual juveniles.

Our Lord also described a time when iniquity, or lawlessness, would be so dominate ***“the love of many will grow cold”*** (Matt 24:12). It simply will not be fashionable to have a fervent love for the Lord—even in the professed church. Such people will be misfits, and obstacles to the fulfillment of the organizational agenda. Their fervency for the Lord, and single-hearted commitment to Him, are seen as threats to the organization.

### **Ephesian Elders Warned**

For three years the Apostle warned these leaders,

alerting them to the dangers of corrupt teaching and recruitment occurring in their very presence. I fear the contemporary church has not viewed this matter as seriously as it is represented in the Word of God.

The Ephesian elders were warned of a coming departure from the Lord. Paul told them it would be initiated by those within the leadership of God's people. ***“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”*** (Acts 20:30-31). For three years the Apostle warned these leaders, alerting them to the dangers of corrupt teaching and recruitment occurring in their very presence. I fear the contemporary church has not viewed this matter as seriously as it is represented in the Word of God.

### **A Falling Away**

The Spirit revealed to the church at Thessalonica a coming apostasy—***“a falling away.”*** It would occur BEFORE the return of the Lord Jesus, and would be fostered by a religious spirit. In that ***“falling away”*** the ***“man of sin,”*** or ***“son of perdition,”*** would become apparent. This would be an anti-Christ spirit, who would come in the name of Christ, opposing the Lord and exalting him self above the Most High. He will assume the prerogatives of God Himself. This is nothing less than a Satanic initiative against the people of God. The rise of this spiritually lethal opponent is said to be ***“according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”***

From an even higher vantage point, this is God sending ***“strong delusion”*** upon corrupt religious people, compelling them to ***“believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth***

*but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:3-12).*

Religious sophists have sought to identify the personality used in this deception. In so doing, however, they have become insensitive to the *“falling away”* itself. *The point being made by the apostle is not the one through whom the apostasy is promoted, but the apostasy itself.*

### **The Spirit Speaks Expressly**

With great zeal and clarity, the Holy Spirit spoke of the apostasy of reference. Young Timothy was informed of its coming. *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:1-3).*

Following the alluring doctrines promoted by demons, *“some”* would *“depart from the faith.”* They would do so to embrace a religious system rather than a living Christ. In fact, they would take hold of a religion that taught men there was virtue in obeying rules that contradicted the very Word of God. Such corrupt doctrines would be advanced in the name of Christ, but would be under the auspices of demons.

### **Form Without Power**

With great solemnity, Paul told Timothy of the induction of an era when the power of God would be rejected, yet allegiance to Him professed. These times are termed *“perilous,”* because they bring great jeopardy to the saints. Personal interests and human agendas would be aggressively promoted. The sins from which Jesus delivers men would

become prominent in religious circles. These *“perilous times”* are referred to as an era when men retain *“a form of godliness but denying its power”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). Denying the power involves thrusting it from us—rejecting it. Such a condition is NOT taken lightly by God or His people! It successfully removes one from salvation.

## SPIRITUAL BABYLON

This apostasy is the spiritual Babylon to which we are being introduced. It is what God is judging in our text. Over the years, men have grown accustomed to this religious corruption, and have even sought to justify its existence. Great tolerance for lifeless religion is promoted by those threatened by real spiritual life. It even appears as though God has been forbearing of this corruption. But He has not! Over the years—even centuries—His wrath against this encroachment has been stored up.

Now *“great Babylon”* comes into God’s remembrance. She will receive no mercy, no Divine consideration, no compassion.

She has willingly embraced the devil’s delusion, and has espoused the teachings of demons. She is guilty of *“the great transgression”* (Psa 19:13), which seeks to impose the will of the created upon the Creator.

Now *“great Babylon”* comes into God’s remembrance. She will receive no mercy, no Divine consideration, no compassion. She has willingly embraced the devil’s delusion, and has espoused the teachings of demons. She is guilty of *“the great transgression”* (Psa 19:13), which seeks to impose the will of the created upon the Creator. Such transgression is never overlooked by the Lord. It is serious beyond measure, and is to be avoided at all cost. God will judge such sin!

## Why God Waits

Some wonder why God does not judge presumptuous sin immediately—why His judgment lingers so long. Why do the enemies of the saints sometimes seem invincible? In addressing this question, the Spirit is quite precise. ***“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and [in order] that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory”*** (Rom 9:22-23).

Two objectives are seen in the Lord’s lingering judgment. **First**, He is revealing the riches of His glory in those for whom both mercy and glory are reserved. These ***“vessels of mercy”*** are vouchsafed Divine benefits in the very midst of adversity—even during the seeming reign of their opponents. **Second**, even though the Lord desires to ***“show His wrath and make His power known,”*** He holds that wrath back for a season. In this restraint, He distinguishes His wrath from that of men, which breaks forth uncontrolled and without righteousness (James 1:20). He confirms His willingness that none should perish, but that all come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). The ultimate destruction of the wicked (and particularly spiritual Babylon) will be just. None caught in the wake of Divine wrath will be able to find fault with the Almighty.

## The Principle Declared to Abraham

Our text tells us that great Babylon ***“came up in remembrance before God.”*** She did NOT begin to be wicked at that point, but had been wicked all along. Her wickedness now reached its apex, and could not longer be endured.

Earlier, in God’s dealings with His friend Abraham, the Lord revealed

this aspect of His nature. He told Abraham of the time when his offspring would be delivered from a long period of Egyptian bondage—no less than four hundred years (Gen 15:13). They would come out of Egypt ***“with great substance,”*** and would be brought into the land God promised Abraham.

At the time Abraham received this commitment, there were inhabitants in the land of promise. These very residents would remain in the land until Israel received it according to God’s promise. They were wicked people, yet God would tolerate them for several centuries before expelling them from the land. His tolerance of them was not owing to any virtue on their part. Nor, indeed, did they possess some small hint of goodness. Rather, Divine forbearance was revealed—an unwillingness to destroy them without showing His longsuffering.

The Lord spoke of this longsuffering to Abraham, revealing this marvelous aspect of His nature. ***“But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete ”*** (Gen 15:16).

### **The Principle Declared to Daniel**

The very same principle of Divine endurance was expressed to Daniel. ***“And in the latter time of their kingdom, When the transgressors have reached their fullness , A king shall arise, Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes”*** (Dan 8:23). By this, the Spirit signified the loosing of a fierce opponent WHEN sin had reached its culmination, and could no longer be tolerated—even by God Himself.

### **The Principle Declared by Jesus**

The Lord Jesus addressed a sinful generation concerning this subject. He informed them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in arresting

words. ***“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt”*** (Matt 23:31-32).

### **The Principle Declared by Paul**

Paul also referred to the persecuting Jews in this manner. ***“Who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins ; but wrath has come upon them to the utmost”*** (1 Thess 2:15-16).

### **What is Declared**

Now John is shown the conclusion of all things from a particular vantage point. The focus is not on the grand termination itself, but on WHAT is destined to fail—to be brought down by the Lord God Almighty.

Spiritual Babylon has appeared invincible—like Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. From all appearance, Satan’s substitute has seemed so formidable that many abandoned the faith to embrace its lies. The very power of God was rejected in favor of accepting Babylon the great. Form without power came into vogue. Spiritual deadness became acceptable. Men were declared leaders of the Kingdom upon the basis of earthly credentials, and the approval of Satan’s fabrication of the church. Even the world, which crucified Jesus, accepted this faithless *church* ! The blood of saints was shed by her, corrupt doctrines taught, and the Divine agenda rejected.

In John’s day, there were believers suffering at the hands of Christ’s enemies. They needed to know that all such enemies would be

destroyed by Jesus—that their cause would not, and could not, continue without being judged. Earlier, political oppressors were judged (the first beast). Now believers are told spiritual oppressors will also be judged.

There is coming a time when false religion will simply not be able to continue. It will be a time when God can no longer endure her false ways—a time when her iniquity will reach its fulness, and her cup will spill over its brim.

If you are ever tempted to be discouraged because of the dominance of lifeless religion, remember the scheduled fall of Babylon. If your ministry has been dulled by the influence of organized religion, ponder the coming judgment of “*great Babylon.*” If you are tempted to join hands with impotent religion, diffuse that temptation by considering its cup is filling up, and soon God will bring it down with irresistible and irreversible judgment. Think on these things! It will help rescue you from delusion, and empower you for Divine service.

## A BRIEF SUMMATION

Remember, we are considering the PRELUDE to the end of all things. There will come a time when the effectiveness of Christ’s enemies—especially those who wear His name—will be concluded by the Lord Himself. When Egypt pursued Israel by attempting to go through the Red Sea as Israel, their end was preceded by signs of coming disaster. It is written, *“Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians. Then the LORD*

*said to Moses, Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians"* (Ex 14:24-27). Before their end, an acute awareness of the futility of their aggression rushed in upon the Egyptians. Their chariots, in which they boasted, became a liability to them. Their bold pursuit of the people of God was turned to awesome fear. They realized God was fighting for Israel, and they knew their own efforts were absolutely futile. All of their effort was devoted to trying to escape, but they could not do so.

So will it be for those who oppose the truth, reject the power of God, and promote lifeless religion. Before they are destroyed at the brightness of Christ's coming (2 Thess 2:8), they will be made to realize their impotence. They will see they have actually opposed Christ Jesus, and that Christ is taking the side of His people, fighting for them. Like the *"kings of the earth,"* they will cry *"to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* (Rev 6:15-17). Because of their religion, they will be incapable of repentance. They will enter into the consummation of all things and the day of judgment with inexplicable fear and trepidation.

It is necessary to make one more general observation about this text. Some men have used this passage to strike fear into the hearts of God's people. They speak of the *"great tribulation"* in such a way as to make the hearts of the saints fear and quake. Such teachers do greatly error. **Those who must fear are those who have settled for lifeless religion!** Those who have promoted their own religious careers at the

expense of the edification of God's people are the ones to stand in fear! Their religious systems will all be broken up. Their organizations will fail. Anything and everything that was not originated by God will be violently uprooted. As the Lord Jesus affirmed, ***“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”*** (Matt 15:13). Religious institutionalism will not always flourish! Form without power will not always be dominant! That is the message of this passage. I cannot begin to tell you how this truth has encouraged me. I have tasted of the opposition of lifeless religion, and have been oppressed in some measure by it. The dominance of powerless religion is a great burden to my soul.

Yet, faith can take hold of the message of this marvelous book—that these conditions are scheduled to be terminated, abruptly, irreversibly, and without mercy. Believers must not despair because falseness flourishes.

If John could wait for such a day on the Isle of Patmos, we can confidently endure where we are. If early believers could cast their anchor within the veil and ***“hope to the end”*** (1 Pet 1:13), so can we! No seeming advantage is worth embracing a form of godliness that denies the power thereof! No real influence for Christ can be exerted where lifeless religion is accepted! In Scripture, no person of God has ever pursued such a course. They have, to a man, stood against the tide of devilish influences, preferring to stand alone rather than identify with a system from which Jesus Himself had withdrawn.

The list of such individuals is impressive. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, David, the holy Prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles of the Lamb, Timothy, Titus, Luke, James, Jude, and countless others. Of old time, there were those who chose torture to deliverance, rather than cave in to the demands of their enemies (Heb 11:35). Such notable saints will rise up in the day of judgment against those who compromised their faith and mitigated their doctrine to appease their enemies. Compromise will make no sense in that day, and

it really makes none now. This is a message we must heed!

## THE SEVENTH BOWL Poured OUT

The seventh vial includes the Divinely imposed disintegration of **“great Babylon.”** It only required the Lord’s **“remembrance”** of her to initiate this judgment. Proceeding through the world triumphantly, spiritual Babylon has run roughshod over the saints of God. It has corrupted the Gospel, and heaped honor to itself rather than to the risen Lord. Every consolidation of men that is out of harmony with God and His **“eternal purpose”** will be brought down.

All of this will happen BEFORE the **“end of all things.”** A lengthy time period is not necessary for this to happen. The armies of Egypt were vanquished in a short period of time (Ex 14:27,30). Sennacarib’s massive army was overthrown in a single night (2 Kgs 19:35). God does not require an extended period to eradicate powers that have stood for a long time.

### **Judgment Is Inevitable**

The point of this text is the inevitability of Divine judgment—particularly against those who have oppressed His people and maligned His truth. Circumstances lead the enemies of Christ to believe their cause will flourish, and they are not in jeopardy. But that is a delusion, as our text affirms.

***“Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud***

*voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'"*

### **Into the air**

*"The air"* is identified as the seat of Satan's power. The Spirit reminds all believers they were once under the domination this power. *"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others"* (Eph 2:1-3, NKJV). Notice this realm is associated with *"wrath"* –God's wrath. While we trafficked in those realms, we were not aware of this association. Yet, those dominated by the devil will inevitably taste of the wrath of the Almighty. The ONLY hope is to be removed from that jurisdiction.

### **Course of This World**

Those who are NOT in Christ Jesus live in strict accord with *"the course of this world."* Grammatically, this is an unusual combination of words. The word from which *"course"* is translated is **αιῶνα** (ai-on-a), which is ordinarily translated *"age"* or *"world."* The word *"world"* comes from **κόσμου** (kos-moo), which is translated *"world"* or *"universe."* The first word presents the world from the standpoint of time, i.e., *"age."* The second represents the world as a realm, or domain of activity, i.e., *"world."*

The phrase *"course of this world,"* therefore, refers to a manner of life bounded by time and limited to the created realm. While those in Christ do occupy the realm of time, and live *"in the world,"* they are by no means confined to it. Faith projects the believer into *"heavenly places,"*

from which those out of Christ are excluded. The ***“course of this world”*** is limited by time, and restricted to the natural order.

Those confined to time, and to the natural order, are, by that very circumstance, dominated by ***“the prince of the power of the air.”*** Such are ***“taken captive”*** by him, to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). There is no human initiative that can extricate the individual from this captivity. It is a condition from which only God can deliver us. That deliverance is experienced in Christ Jesus, and in Him alone.

### **Babylon Is Confined to This Word**

Spiritual Babylon is confined to this world, and operates in strict accord with its principles. It wears the name of Jesus, but does not experience His presence. It claims affiliation with His Word, yet does not have it dwelling richly within them. While this wicked conglomerate represents itself as Christ’s representative, it is actually animated by the devil, and is his representative. It offers more than it can give, and is cursed by God.

Remember, ***“Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”*** (James 4:4). There are no exceptions to this rule! Satan’s supremacy in the world mandates this situation.

Spiritual Babylon has formed an alliance with the ***“course of the world.”*** It imagines strength is found in that affiliation. Oblivious of the curse of this relationship, Babylon obtains its credentials from the world, allowing it to define the requirements of the institution. Because it has no power from God, it seeks to obtain it from the world. In so doing, it has incurred the wrath of God. It is only a matter of time until that wrath will be poured out upon it.

## **Satan Governs Babylon**

Babylon obtains its credentials from the world, allowing it to define the requirements of the institution. Because it has no power from God, it seeks to obtain it from the world.

Satanic forces and powers have controlled the rise of “*great Babylon,*” and cause it to flourish in the world system. This is his “*monster*” – the second beast. It is a devilish repository where error can be introduced and flourish without fear. “*Doctrines of demons*” are welcome here, and the truth is not loved. If Jesus is found in its vicinity at all, He is on the outside, calling out to those within, seeking to obtain entrance with those who will open the door to Him (Rev 3:20).

### **Poured Out Into the Air**

The pouring out of the seventh vial, or bowl, “*into the air,*” signifies the disruption of Satanic powers. These are the principalities that controlled Babylon, and without which it could not have existed.

#### *Seen in the Book of Daniel*

What occurs in this text is precisely pictured in the book of Daniel. Daniel was given to see the reason for the fall of Persia and the rise of the Greece. While military strategies were observable from the world’s point of view, something more significant occurred in the region of the air.

A mighty angel informed Daniel he had been sent from heaven as soon as Daniel’s prayer was uttered. However, for twenty-one days, this angel was detained in a remarkable conflict. In the words of the

angel, ***“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia”*** (Dan 10:13, NKJV). Later, this mighty angel affirmed he would return and resume this battle with the ***“prince of the kingdom of Persia,”*** then in dominance. ***“And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come”*** (Dan 10:20, NKJV).

The displacement of the kingdom of Persia is traced back to a high spiritual conflict—one which disrupted the domination of ***‘the prince of the power of the air.’***

Our text is portraying precisely this type of thing. The wrath of God is poured out ***“into the air,”*** unsettling the principalities and powers that undergird Babylon the great. It is not possible for those dominated by this power to avert its overthrow. When ***“the prince of the power of the air”*** is deposed, all those who operated in his realm are also vanquished.

Babylon is the devil’s enterprise, and when he is overthrown, Babylon will also fall. This is not only true on the collective level, it also occurs on the individual level. When a person is truly liberated from the tyranny of the devil, he is also liberated from enslavement to lifeless religion.

### **Divine assessment**

The judgment of God is never a pleasant thing, but it is always a righteous action. The throne of God is associated with judgment. ***“He has prepared His throne for judgment”*** (Psa 9:7). The judgment of God evidences His Sovereignty and reign. Throughout the entire earth, the judgments of God are being executed. As it is written, ***“His judgments are in all the earth”*** (Psa 105:7). They are always timely,

always righteous, and always thorough.

It should not surprise us that a heavenly response occurs when the judgment of the seventh vial is poured out. As the air is filled with the outpouring of Divine wrath, ***“a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’”*** We are not told precisely what was ***“done.”*** The Spirit is focusing our attention upon the rule of the Almighty, and the sure retribution of the wicked. Remember, He has already told us the outcome of those who kept the faith. They will stand at last on the tranquil sea of glass, with harps in their hands and praise in their mouths. The destiny of the false church, however, is as sure as that of the true one!

*It is determined*

The phrase ***“IT is done,”*** is the language of fulfillment. What God has determined will at last be accomplished. In no way will it fail of fulfillment, ***“though it tarry”*** (Hab 2:3). With God, the accomplishment is as assured as the purpose. What God has determined will come to pass—and He has determined the fall of ***“great Babylon.”***

How appropriate are the words of Isaiah on this point. They provide a most precise expression of God’s determination upon ***“great Babylon,”*** as well as against the wicked of Isaiah’s day. ***“For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon; That He may do His work, His awesome work, And bring to pass His act, His unusual act. Now therefore, do not be mockers, Lest your bonds be made strong; For I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts, A destruction determined even upon the whole earth”*** (Isa 28:22-23).

Daniel appears to have alluded to this judgment in his far-reaching words. ***“Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies***

***against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished ; for what has been determined shall be done ”*** (Dan 11:36, NKJV).

Here, principle is the point, not details. Just as surely as faith overcomes the world, unbelief will be overcome by God. Those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus cannot lose, and those who embrace Satan’s ways cannot win. As simplistic as that may seem, Satan continues to be aggressive in his attempts to persuade men this is not true. It is as though he said, *“Hath God said ‘Babylon will fall?’ it will not surely fall.”* Its fall, however, has been determined by Him whose counsel cannot fail!

*It is done*

The Lord declares ***“the end from the beginning,”*** and from ***“ancient times the things not yet done”*** (Isa 46:10). The Lord Jesus addresses the people of God concerning the demise of their most formidable foe. He declares it when it is beginning to grow and flourish. Circumstance seems to belie the announcement, but it is nevertheless true. The Lord still ***“calls those things which do not exist as though they did”*** (Rom 4:17).

There will come a time when the work of Satan is ***“finished,”*** just as Jesus’ work was completed (John 19:30). There is a difference in the conclusions of reference. Jesus himself ***“finished”*** the work given to Him. *The devil’s work will be finished by the Lord, not the devil!* You must believe this, and not be moved by appearances. Only Jesus is the “Finisher!”

**REAPING AND SOWING**

The sureness of reaping what is sown must not elude us. Throughout the Word of God, this principle is stated repeatedly. We are seeing it fulfilled in the Revelation. We do well to spend a moment on this aspect of the Kingdom, lest any of us be lulled into complacency through the fiery darts of the wicked one.

### *Render to Her Double*

***“Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow’”*** (Rev 18:6-7). This word is spoken concerning Babylon, the great-machination of the devil. Notice that she will reap more than she sowed. The phrase ***“repay her double”*** is not meant to convey the idea of mathematical precision. Rather, it affirms a Kingdom principle that is everywhere declared in scripture. Just as Babylon threw itself wholeheartedly AGAINST the Lord. So He will throw Himself wholeheartedly against it. The language is riveting: ***“repay her double . . . mix double for her . . . give her torment and sorrow.”*** All of this reveals how wicked it is to refuse the power of God, distort His truth, and malign His people.

### *Do Not Be Deceived!*

***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap”*** (Gal 6:7). This exhortation confirms a good deal of deception will be hurled at us concerning this reality. Legion is the name of people who believe they can get by with sin—but they cannot. This is particularly true in spiritual Babylon, where form without power is embraced heartily. But we must not be deceived! Those who refuse God’s power in this world, will NOT be protected by it in the end of the world and the final judgment! Those who have maintained a lack of interest in God, will find Him uninterested in them in the destruction of

the world.

### *Everyone will Give An Account*

Both retribution and reward will be in direct proportion to the measure used by the ones being judged. If men have been unusually aggressive to insist on total commitment to themselves, the Lord will use that standard of measurement in evaluating their conduct.

***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”*** (2 Cor 5:10). This is a reality that cannot be delayed or nullified. Whether an individual or an institution, all will give a strict account for how they conducted themselves in this world. The Lord Jesus, the only One worthy of service, will be the Evaluator and Rewarder. We are not apprized of this appointed time simply to increase our knowledge base. The awareness of this time is intended to constrain us to comport ourselves in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord.

### *Every Work Judged*

***“For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil”*** (Eccl 12:14). The works of individuals, cities, and nations will be brought into judgment. Cain and Judas will, together with John the Baptist and Paul the apostle, have their works brought into judgment. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed, and the cities of Nineveh and Samaria who repented, will come into judgment. Think of the nations whose works will be judged. Egypt, Syria, Persia, Greece, etc. Continents, noted for various traits, will come into judgment: Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Australia, etc.

Our text is confirming that judgment is also reserved for clusters of people joined by their commitment: i.e., spiritual Babylon. Wherever a purpose is being executed, whether good or evil, it will be brought into judgment. Those joining their hands together in an effort God does not snaction, will be judged by Him.

### *Everything Revealed*

***“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known”*** (Matt 10:26). There are hidden agendas being served. This has been the case from the beginning of time. From individuals to nations, people have been motivated by covetousness, as well as a quest to fellowship in Christ’s sufferings. But all will finally be exposed in the blazing light of Divine judgment.

### *Measured Back*

***“For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”*** (Matt 7:1). Both retribution and reward will be in direct proportion to the measure used by the ones being judged. If men have been unusually aggressive to insist on total commitment to themselves, the Lord will use that standard of measurement in evaluating their conduct. If they have been merciful and considerate in their judgments, the Judge of all the earth will do likewise. It is written, ***“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”*** (Matt 5:7). And again, ***“With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful”*** (Psa 18:25). However, with those who have shown harshness, eternal judgment will be harsh.

### *God Will Repay*

***“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay”*** (Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30). While these words may appear harsh, they are necessary to be said. Divine

vengeance is a reality, and not a mere threat. It will break forth upon all who have rejected the mercy of God, as offered in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord told Israel, ***“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense . . . ”*** (Deut 32:35). Again it is written, ***“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries”*** (Deut 32:43). The 94 th Psalm reminds us, ***“O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs”*** (verse 1). Nahum proclaimed, ***“God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies”*** (Nah 1:2).

While this is not a fashionable message, nor one in which we are to delight, it is a necessary one. The Lord will not overlook the determined and continued rejection of His Son, the oppression of His people, and devotion to lifeless religion. There is an appointed time during which His judgment will be unleashed against all that is false and debilitating. If we marvel at this, we must awaken our souls by the consideration of the record of Divine judgment upon the enemies of truth. Babel, the Amorites, Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, the seven nations of Canaan, Babylon, and Jerusalem stand as testimonies to the wrath of God. They are to be taken seriously, and will help us reject error.

## THE DISRUPTION OF INIMICAL FORCES

***“And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.”*** To say the very least, the language is arresting to the sensitive soul. It is the vocabulary of Divine intrusion—an intrusion that cannot be averted or diminished in any sense.

This is a judgment of an epochal nature—something that has not ***“occurred since men were on the earth.”*** It has to do with last things—

the final confrontation of false and insipid religion with the God it feigned to represent. Remember, this judgment is preceded by the words, ***“IT IS DONE!”*** The purpose of God has been completed, and the time of corruption has come to an end.

The thrust of this passage is a proclamation of the demise of Satan’s kingdom—particularly as it relates to the setting up of a false church. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of an upheaval within the natural order. Those who insist on limiting this to a spiritual application do not stand on solid ground. Throughout history, the Lord has revealed His judgments amidst colossal upheavals within the natural order.

✱ *The flood* (Gen 7:11-12).

✱ *Fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain* (Gen 19:24-25).

✱ *The plagues of Egypt* (Ex 9-12).

✱ *The giving of the Law* (Ex 19:18).

✱ *Great hailstones from heaven killed the enemies of Israel* (Josh 10:11).

✱ *A tremendous earthquake in the days of Uzziah* (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5).

✱ *When seemingly invincible Sisera was overthrown by God*, it is written, ***“They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera”*** (Judges 5:20).

These were very real occurrence—not symbols. They have been recorded to acquaint us with the Lord and His ways. As we draw near to the close of time, we must not allow ourselves to imagine such things cannot occur again. God has given us no reason to think He no

longer works in this manner.

Whatever one may think of this engrossing passage, it declares something very emphatically. God's latter dealing with his enemies will be more severe than any of His previous judgments against them. The flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are very faint reflections of what is reserved for the ungodly.

The people of God do well to acquaint themselves with the severity of Divine judgments that have already occurred. On one occasion, the Lord warned Israel of eminent judgment if they refused to walk in His ways. In words that startle the soul, He said, ***“then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters”*** (Lev 26:28-29; Deut 28:53-56).

While these are difficult things to talk about, they are required for the proper culturing of the soul. Whatever one may choose to believe about the Lord, it is ever true: ***“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*** (Heb 10:30-31). The only haven of rest is the Lord Jesus. He alone has ***“delivered us from the wrath to come”*** (1 Thess 1:10).

The prevalence of an academic approach to Scripture has robbed men of this perspective of the Lord. Sophists encourage us to think neither blessing nor cursing any longer occur at a supernatural level. But they are wrong. *A God that is transcendent to nature cannot be confined to it!*

### **Utter and Irresistible Destruction**

This is the language of utter and irresistible destruction. It will be total, and no effort can or will be made to resist it. The words ***“voices, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquakes”*** denote a unity of everything in heaven and earth against the enemies of Christ. They also denote a direct and immediate judgment from God, for these qualities are associated with His throne (Rev 4:5). This judgment will not come through their instrumentality of men. In history, there have been such judgments (the driving out of heathen nations by Israel, the overthrow of Jerusalem by Rome, etc). There have also been judgements that occurred independently of human intervention (Sodom, Egypt, etc.). Such will be this judgment. God Himself has been offended by His enemies, and God Himself will judge them.

### **Caused by the Presence of the Lord**

God is often depicted as *“fighting”* for His people, and against their enemies. Thus it is written, ***“The Lord will fight for you”*** (Ex 14:14), ***“He shall fight for you”*** (Deut 1:30), ***“the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies”*** (Deut 20:4), and ***“So the LORD of hosts will come down To fight for Mount Zion and for its hill”*** (Isa 31:).

Technically speaking, however, there is no fight! The wicked are destroyed by the mere ***“breath of His mouth,”*** and the ***“brightness of His coming”*** (2 Thess 2:8). The Lord ***“fights,”*** so to speak, by simply making Himself known. The entire natural order will disappear when His face is revealed. As it is written, ***“from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them”*** (Rev 20:11).

This is how it will be with the enemies of Christ. When they are aware of His Presence and power, their reign will come to a grinding halt. From this perspective, the only reason spiritual Babylon flourishes is because of its lack of awareness of the exalted Christ. But when He is

made known, it will be quite another circumstance. If the entire Egyptian host was *“troubled”* when the Lord *“looked”* at them through the pillar of fire and cloud (Ex 14:24), what do you suppose will happen when the Lord makes His enemies acutely aware of His presence? It is no wonder the response of His foes is recorded in these words, *“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”* (Rev 6:15-17).

### **Unequaled judgment**

This is unequaled judgment— greater than the flood, more intense than the destruction of Sodom, and more fierce than the plagues of Egypt. It will be worse than the curse poured out upon Jesus because of the sins of men. Worse, because Jesus recovered from the curse, but these enemies will not. There is no wrath like that which will be poured out upon the enemies of Christ Jesus and His people! This is particularly true of those who wear the name of His Son, yet reject His power.

## **UNITY CONCLUDED**

*“Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.”* The *“great city”* represents the devil’s most extensive and successful amalgamation of men. It is more comprehensive than the unity disrupted at Babel (Gen 11:6-8). It is greater than the evil unity forged between the *“five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon,”* who came against Gibeon (Josh 10:5).

## **The Wicked Join Forces**

The wicked have consistently joined themselves together in wicked alliances. One time, king Benhadad joined *“thirty-two kings”* to himself to besiege Samaria (1 Kgs 20;1). In prophetic language, the Psalmist spoke of the *“kings of the earth”* uniting themselves *“against the LORD, and against his anointed”* (Psa 2:2). The early church recognized this Satanic initiative, and prayed to God about it. *“The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ. For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together”* (Acts 4:26-27). They also knew God’s will would be triumphant in the whole arrangement. Their prayer continued, *“to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”* (Acts 4:28).

## **Such Unions Will Fail**

Solomon saw the principle, and wrote, *“Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished . . . Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished”* (Prov 11:21; 16:5). However, this does NOT appear to be the case while the wicked conspiracies of men flourish.

## **The Most Wicked of All Unions**

Never is the union of men more ungodly than when it pretends to be from God! It is an evil day indeed, when men engage in supposedly *Christian* efforts that requires neither God nor His Divine power.

Never is the union of men more ungodly than when it pretends to be from God! It is an evil day indeed, when men engage in supposedly *Christian* efforts that requires

neither God nor His Divine power. Such is spiritual Babylon—the “*great city*” Satan has raised up among men. As Jerusalem gloried in its “*buildings*” (Matt 24:1), so “*great Babylon*” glories in its religious structure. It has forged an alliance with the world like Jehosaphat, who “*helped the ungodly,*” and loved them that hated the Lord (2 Chron 19:2). John the beloved also wrote of those who, by condoning those who did not hold to the “*doctrine of Christ,*” “*shares in his evil deeds*” (2 John 10-11).

### **The Great City**

“*The great city*” has been mentioned before, and it will be mentioned following this text. It is “*Babylon,*” and is scheduled for a fall (Rev 14:8). Later, it will be depicted as a great harlot who reigns over the kings of the earth (17:18). It is a place in which the demons of hell feel at home, as well as every foul thing (18:2), and is declared to be a “*mighty city*” (18:10). It is made attractive with the world’s paraphernalia (18:16), and receives the world’s approval (18:17-19). But “*with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore*” (18:21). It cannot escape this appointment.

### **Like the Disruption of the Midianites**

Its unity will be Divinely disrupted without earthly weapon, and independently of the wisdom of men. Suddenly, what was once their strength will become their weakness, and the “*great city*” will not be able to hold together. The disruption of this diabolical union will be much like that of the overthrow of the Midianites. It is written, “*the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp*” (Judges 7:22).

### **Why Three Parts?**

Why is the “**great city**” divided into three parts? This is the language of *total destruction*. Both the unity of the Lord’s enemies and their monstrous empire will be brought down. The language is that of the prophet Ezekiel, who spoke similarly of the destruction of Jerusalem. The expressions are most vivid. “***You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them***” (Ezek 5:2). One third burned, one third killed with the sword, and one third scattered to the wind. That is total disruption—total destruction. The idea is that **recovery is impossible**. The Lord totally decimates the “**great city**” which dominated religion for centuries.

### God Remembers

“***And great Babylon was remembered before God.***” It is not that God ever forgot “**great Babylon.**” The expression “*was remembered before God,*” or “*came in remembrance before God*” (KJV), is synonymous with Babylon’s iniquity being “**full.**” As I have already mentioned, it is the concept introduced to Abraham when the Lord revealed the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. “***But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full***” (Gen 15:16). Daniel also spoke of “**transgressors**” coming “**to the full**” (Dan 8:23).

Babylon’s iniquity will finally reach its apex; i.e., it will come to the point where God can no longer tolerate it. It is what happened when the world became so evil God destroyed it with a flood. It happened when Sodom and Gomorrah, whose sin grew “**great in the face of the Lord**” (Gen 19:13).

It is at this point the Lord looks intently upon the offenders in question—in this case, “**great Babylon.**” His nature will not allow that prolonged look, as it were, to yield mercy for the transgressors. He does

not view Babylon with Jesus' intercession in mind, but with its wretched character in mind. He remembers what SHE has done.

When the Lord "**remembers**" great Babylon, the blood of the saints shed by her will come into His mind. Her distortion of the truth will come into His mind, together with her aggressive posture against His Son and His great salvation.

### **Why Is This Said?**

The saints of God are currently faced with much the same situation as Habakkuk. The prophet saw iniquity being flaunted in the face of God, and asked the Lord about it. "***You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?***" Hab 1:13). With heavy hearts, believers throughout the ages have had to battle distortions of the faith, false doctrines, and enemies from within its walls.

On the surface, it seems the Lord is indifferent to the situation. However, He is not, and His people need to know it. Babylon's time is running out! She is slated for demise and eternal judgment. Not one drop of blood she has shed has gone unnoticed. There is not a syllable of false doctrine that has not been heard by the Lord, and duly noted. The sighs of discouragement that have risen from the saints have been heard by their Lord. This record is given to assure their hearts victory will soon be evident.

### **Given a Cup**

" . . . ***to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.***" The word "**cup**" is a significant one in Scripture. It denotes the Divine apportionment of something to the individual or group. This

Jesus, when He was about to have the sins of the world laid upon Him, spoke of ***“the cup which My Father has given Me?”*** (John 18:11). With great fervency, He sought for a way to have this ***“cup”*** pass from Him (Matt 26:39-42). In His

case, the ***“cup”*** involved tasting ***“death for every man”*** (Heb 2:9). Although the Lord Jesus relinquished His own will in favor of the will of God, His was an imposed cup—something He was commanded to drink.

So it is with the cup given to Babylon. This ***“cup”*** is not offered to be accepted or rejected. It is forced upon her, and she will drink it to the fullest. The 73 rd Psalm will be fulfilled in her: ***“waters of a full cup are drained by them”*** (verse 10).

### **A Word Of Grace**

In this ***“day of salvation,”*** another ***“cup”*** is being offered to humanity. Those who drink from that cup have nothing to fear from the cup that will be given to ***“great Babylon.”*** In his inimitable way, the ***“sweet psalmist of Israel”*** referred to this ***“cup.”*** Realizing the unspeakable benefits he had received from the Lord, he asked a poignant question, then answered it. ***“What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD”*** (Psa 116:12-13). Blessed ***“cup,”*** indeed! Those who drink from this cup will not drink from the cup of God’s wrath!

Because of the presence of evil, and the seeming impregnability of worldly religion, the people of God are tempted to despair. But we must not allow the clouds of discouragement to hang long over our heads. By faith, we must rise into the heavenly places and breath the refreshing air of eternal purpose. Lifeless religion is scheduled to fall, and those who cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart are destined to

triumphantly judge the world and angels.

### *Ponder the Fall*

If your mind is given to ponder Babylon, think of its fall, not its present influence. Its dominance is temporary, and will yield without contest to the will of the Almighty.

### **Babylon's Turn to Drink**

That “*great city*” made the nations of the world to drink from her cup. It is said of her, “*Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication*” (Rev 14:8). Under the direction of the devil, she introduced a religion of admixture—attempting to mingle the Word of God with the wisdom and ways of the world. The world bought her sweet elixir, contributing even more to her comfortableness in “*this present evil world.*” But now it is Babylon's time to drink, and drink she will! There is no way she is able to avoid drinking her appointed cup.

### **No Help**

“*Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*” The mountains are often portrayed as a place of refuge (Song of Sol 2:17; Matt 24:26). In the time of the flood, the “*mountains were covered*” (Gen 7:20). But in the day of wrath, the mountains will be removed. There will never again be a place of safety for the godless—no refuge for the enemies of Christ.

This precise language was used at the opening of the sixth seal, which affirmed the conclusion of the natural order. “*And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island*

*were moved out of their places*” (6:14). The language denotes Divine disruption that removes all confidence and hope.

Thus all hope of recovery is removed, and there is no place to hide. The ultimate confrontation has come, and Babylon will not be able to stand. Suffering saints, take courage! The truth may be maligned now, but the day of recompense is coming. Your day is coming, praise the Lord!

## OVERWHELMING JUDGMENT, YET NO REPENTANCE

The language is unusually strong. *“And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent.”* While this is most likely figurative language, there is no reason to limit it to a figure. There have been remarkable judgments involving the use of hailstones. On one occasion, *“all the kings of the Amorites”* were gathered against the children of Israel. The Lord told Joshua not to fear—that he would put the enemy to flight without a single one of them left standing. It is written, *“the LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword”* (Josh 10:11). In the seventh plague upon Egypt, the Lord sent *“a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now”* (Ex 9:18). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

### It IS Possible

The God who can send a deluge that covered the entire earth (Gen 6), cause the sun to stand still (Josh 10:12), impose darkness over the earth (Lk 23:44), and loose natural forces and insects against a nation (Ex 9-

12), can send great hailstones upon His enemies. With God, all things are possible—whether blessing or cursing.

### **Devastating Judgment**

There are differing levels of Divine judgment. Some at Corinth were stricken with weakness and sickness, while others were smitten with death (1 Cor 11:30). The Lord can send fear upon people (Ex 30:13), cause their resources to diminish (Hag 1:6), or send a famine on the land (Psa 105:16).

What we are beholding here is devastating judgment from which recovery is not possible. It is the result of God's patience running out. Some doubt that such a state can be reached. Their theology will not allow such a conclusion. But they are seriously wrong, and are themselves testing the longsuffering of God by entertaining such a view.

These hailstones were each *“about the weight of a talent,”* or *“about a hundred pounds”* (NIV). Students of language tell us a *“talent”* ranged in weight from 108-130 pounds. Imagine a hailstone of that size! Whether this is literal or metaphorical hail does not change the intent of the passage. *The language confirms this is a supernatural, not a natural, phenomenon.*

### **Established Language**

Throughout Scripture, Divine judgment is depicted as a sort of hailstorm. Three times in the book of Revelation, *“hail”* is mentioned in association with Divine judgment (8:7; 11:19; 16:21). It is something over which man has absolutely no control. The Lord challenged Job with this question: *“Have you entered the treasury of snow, Or have you seen the treasury of hail, Which I have reserved for the time of trouble, For the day of battle and war?”* (Job 38:22-23).

This is a display of extraordinary hardness of heart. To deride and reproach the Living God during the ferocity of His judgment reveals a condition from which recovery is not possible.

The occasion of the giving of the law was described as a time of *“hailstones”* (Psa 18:12-13). His judgment against Egypt’s vines and cattle is described as being accomplished through *“hail”* (Psa 78:47-48; 105:32). *“Hail”* is said to be in the Divine arsenal—a means of fulfilling His word (Psa 148:8).

The prophet Isaiah referred to *“a tempest of hail”* as the means of destroying His enemies (Isa 28:2,17). Haggai used the same language (Hag 2:17). Thus, our text speaks of overwhelming Divine judgment. It was long in coming, yet sure in its execution.

### **No Character Change**

Sin brings men to a state where change is impossible. In Christ Jesus, God has provided a means of escape from sin. He sends a message of good news to lift the attention of men to the realm of promise. If that message is not heeded, sin continues its hardening and searing affect upon men. If, as in our text, men choose to corrupt that Gospel, sin becomes even more aggressive. Corrupt religion accelerates hardening, increments spiritual blindness, and desensitizes the soul. A confirmation of this is seen in the reaction of those upon whom judgment falls.

*“Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”* This is the third time in this chapter

that such a response is recorded. ***“And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God. . . They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores . . . Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail”*** (verses 9,11,21). It is one thing to blaspheme the Lord when times are going well, and self-reliance seems justified. It is quite another thing for such blasphemy to come from the lips of men when they are under Divine judgment. This is a display of extraordinary hardness of heart. To deride and reproach the Living God during the ferocity of His judgment reveals a condition from which recovery is not possible.

### **From the Second Beast**

Keep in mind that ***“blasphemy”*** was a particular trait of the second beast. ***“Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven”*** (13:6). This beast appeared docile, but spoke as a dragon, in perfect harmony with the devil. He was given authority ***“to make war with the saints and to overcome them”*** (13:7). This is nothing less than the source of ***“great Babylon,”*** which has come in remembrance before God.

Remember, the seventh vial of judgment is focused against corrupt religion—that ***“great city,”*** or ***“great Babylon.”*** Those who blaspheme God are the ones swept up in the current of false and lifeless religion. They have obtained the very nature of the second beast. That is why they ***“blaspheme God.”*** To be more precise, they have become like their ***“father the devil”*** (John 8:44). Suffice it to say, all men become like the master they serve – and they cannot serve two masters (Matt 10:25; Lk 6:13).

### **Because of the Plague**

The hearts of those upon whom the plague fell were not changed by

the plague. It only confirmed a condition that already existed--an irreversible condition. This is a Kingdom principle, and is worth noting. Solomon once said, ***“If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small”*** (Prov 24:10). From the stresses of life to the judgments of the Almighty, pressure reveals what we really are. They test the real metal of life.

When sore and unparalleled affliction was experienced by Job, his response revealed his character, ***“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him : but I will maintain mine own ways before Him . . . And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another”*** (Job 13:15).

David also responded in a godly manner to great difficulty. ***“Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out; My eye wastes away because of affliction. LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You . . . Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes”*** (Psa 88:7-9; 119:67-68, 71).

Those in Christ are brought on their way by means of tribulation. They are told, ***“that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”*** (Acts 14:22). Rather than working against them, tribulation is the appointed means through which godly perseverance is matured. ***“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance”*** (Rom 5:3).

## Why the Difference?

What is the difference between the saints of God and those comprising “*great Babylon*”? Why do difficulties develop a determination to reach the goal in the illuminated, and blasphemy in the deceived? When believers in past ages were sorely oppressed, they “*died in faith,*” acknowledging they were “*strangers and pilgrims in the earth*” (Heb 11:13). But it is not so with those who have been deceived by the wicked one. They have settled in this world, and are alienated from God.

The difference is owing to the truth. The righteous love and receive the truth. The wicked hate and reject it. That truth strengthens the heart of those loving it, enabling them to stand in storms and trials. Those who reject the truth, settling for the lie of the wicked one, because of that rejection, become weak and incapable of responding to the glory of God. This is involved in the glorious announcement of Jesus: “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). One aspect of that freedom is extrication from delusion and its perpetrators. Believers are admonished to “stand fast” in that liberty, and not be moved (Gal 5:1).

## PURPOSES FULFILLED IN THESE JUDGMENTS

Divine judgments are reactions, but not mere reactions. There are noble purposes served in the pouring out of judgments—particularly those at the conclusion of time. Just as blessings have a purpose, so do the judgments of the Almighty.

### Retribution for Persecution

The martyred saints had asked about the avenging of their blood, and were told it was on the Divine agenda (Rev 6:10). While vengeance is not proper for men (Rom 12:18-21), it is proper for our Lord. In fact,

vengeance belongs to the Lord. With Him, ***“it is a righteous thing . . . to repay with tribulation those who trouble”*** (2 Thess 1:6). Just as it would be ***“unrighteous”*** for God to ***“forget”*** the godly expressions of His people (Heb 6:10), so it would be contrary to the Divine nature to ignore the oppression of His people. Although appearance seems to contradict it, the people of God are the apple of His eye. As it is written, ***“he who touches you touches the apple of His eye”*** (Zech 2:8). Thus, in the pouring out of the vials of Divine wrath, those who have taken upon themselves to oppress the saints will be justly punished. This will be a revelation of the righteousness of the Living God.

### **The Worldly Spirit Judged**

The Lord has made clear how He feels about this world. It is defined as ***“this present evil world”*** (Gal 1:4). The concerns of this world render the Word of God powerless, competing against the Lord (Mark 4:19). In a poignant statement of the real situation, the Spirit says, ***“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”*** (James 4:4). The ***“carnal mind,”*** which is the worldly mind-set, is ***“enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God”*** (Rom 8:7-8). There is no possibility of the person enmeshed in the world serving or pleasing God. It simply is not possible! God has rejected them.

Yet, in spite of this revealed circumstance, ***“great Babylon”*** has sought to wed this alienated world with the one to come. It has endeavored to place the new wine of salvation in the old wineskin of flesh. In so doing, it has violated both the nature and purpose of the Almighty. His wrath will be poured out upon all who promoted such a view. It constrains one to quench the Spirit, and despise the blood of the covenant, wherewith we are sanctified.

## Wicked Confederation Visited

God made men for fellowship--to dwell with others. From the beginning, it was not good *“for man to be alone”* (Gen 2:18). By nature, man is gregarious, or sociable. That trait finds its lawful gratification in union with the Lord and His people.

*“Babylon the great,”* however, has sought to fulfill this tendency by unholy alliances. Like Babel of old, its unity excludes the Lord. To justify such an omission, it has constructed theologies that affirm God no longer has immediate involvements with men. The institution becomes the fundamental thing, and commitment to the organization the primary means of obtaining its approval—which sanction is essential for *ministry* in the group.

But this appraisal is seriously wrong, and is destined to be judged by God. He will not allow coalitions to continue that fail to focus upon Him. When His Son, around Whom all valid unity centers, is excluded in any sense, the wrath of God is being stored up against the offenders. It is just a matter of time until that judgment is unleashed. It is unspeakably wicked to align yourself with the realm that is dominated by the devil!

## CONCLUSION

We have dealt with a most awesome text—one which Satan will tempt us to ignore. It is an introduction to the following chapters, which shall go into some detail about *“the great city,” “great Babylon,”* or *“Babylon the great.”* As I have said before, this is Satan’s most formidable attack against the saints. It is his most extensive enterprise. Traffickers in sensual pleasure and drugs are nothing to compare with this consortium.

It is the business of every one in Christ to devote themselves to the truth and separate from everything that militates against it. Do not grow accustomed to lifeless religion. God and Christ have certainly not acclimated to it. Jesus stands on the outside of the lukewarm church, and solemnly warns the orthodox church that has left its first love.

This is a personal matter, and cannot be legislated by another person. The Lord Jesus presides over the entire universe in general, and His body the church in particular. He has told us what He will not tolerate, and we are to give heed to it. The abandonment of our *“first love”* will cause us to be removed unless we return to it (2:4). The toleration of doctrines that contribute to immorality and the worship of other things will be judged (2:14,20). Dead churches will be visited by Jesus in an inconvenient hour (3:1-3). Churches that are not aggressive for or against the truth will be spewed out of the mouth of Jesus (3:16). Our Lord has spoken plainly on these matters.

Yet, churches of this sort are all about us, cluttering the landscape of humanity. The world has crept into the church, and now it has been received with open arms. It sanctions our preachers, and teaches us about interpersonal relationships. It instructs us of economics, and brings its entertaining ways to us. Some of us cannot keep quiet about it. We already know the mind of the Lord about such things. Our Lord has reserved His fiercest wrath for spiritual corrupters.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 31

**THE HARLOT IS  
JUDGED**

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. "There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. "And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. "For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their

kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." (Rev 17:1-18, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

We are in a section of Scripture that is exceedingly difficult for many to receive. Jesus is here dealing with a circumstance that is particularly reprehensible to Him—one He will not continue to tolerate. In His opening message to the churches, our Lord spoke clearly and concisely about corruption among His people. It is more serious than debauchery in the government, debasement and degradation among the masses, and profligacy in education. A breakdown in the family structure is serious, but not as grave as a breakdown in the church! I know of no congregation of Scripture that was ever upbraided for having godless homes or living in a corrupt government. That does not mean the Lord sanctioned such conditions, which surely existed in those early days of the church. It DOES mean the Lord places priorities where they ought to be.

Five of the seven churches who were the immediate recipients of this book were rebuked. All of the censures were because of corruption within the church. It will be good for us to remember our Lord's assessment of these congregations, and the sobriety with which He spoke.

- EPHESUS: *A departure from their "first love."* "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place ; unless you repent" (2:4-5).
- PERGAMOS: *Individuals in the assembly who held to false doctrines.* "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the

children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality . . . Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth ” (2:14-16).

As broad and extensive as salvation is, there is absolutely no provision in it for spiritual deficiency or retardation. Grace is extensive, but makes no room for lethargy, indifference, toleration of false doctrine, immorality, or other forms of carnality.

- THYATIRA: *They tolerated a false prophetess to seduce His servants.* “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation , unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death , and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (2:20-23).
- SARDIS: *Although they had a good reputation, they were dead toward the Lord.* “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief , and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (3:1-3).
- LAODICEA: *This church was lukewarm—non-assertive for or against the Lord.* “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you

were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, *I will vomit you out of My mouth* . Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:15-17).

No such word was delivered to Nero, then emperor of Rome. The heathens who worshiped idols and lived in rank immorality were given no such word. This by no means indicates approval of the government, or of the immorality that dominated that culture. Our Lord Jesus exhibited His very nature in this judgment of His churches. He simply will not countenance decline among His people!

Lest we be tempted to confine these warnings to the backslidding churches of Asia, the Lord says after each warning: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" This message is not to be hidden from the churches! Their preachers and teachers are charged with the solemn responsibility of alerting them to the Divine assessment of spiritual decline and the absence of advance.

## **THE NATURE OF SALVATION**

Too often, the nature of salvation is obscured to the people. Because they are living too close to the world, Satan blinds them to the real character of redemption.

As broad and extensive as salvation is, there is absolutely no provision in it for spiritual deficiency or retardation. Grace is extensive, but makes no room for lethargy, indifference, toleration of false doctrine, immorality, or other forms of carnality. While every person in Christ possesses, and wrestles with, the "*flesh,*" or "*old man,*" grace makes no allowance for the expression of that nature—none at all!

There are no spiritual gifts for ministering to the immoral, or recovering those who have chosen to sin while wearing Jesus' name. This does NOT mean such people are hopelessly lost. It DOES mean nothing about this "great salvation" will contribute to the comfort of such people. The powerful and solitary message to such people is "REPENT . . . or else" (2:5,16).

There is such a remarkable consistency in this message that it is a marvel men

The contemporary church is so insipid about sin, some may wonder why the Spirit speaks with such stern tones. Everything about salvation contributes to the rescue of men from sin—both from its guilt and its power, or dominion.

could be deluded into ignoring it. "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God*" (Rom 8:7-8). "*But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him*" (Heb 10:39). "*Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*" (James 4:4). "*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*" (Eph 5:5-6).

### WHY SUCH STERNNESS?

The contemporary church is so insipid about sin, some may wonder why the Spirit speaks with such stern tones. Everything about salvation contributes to the rescue of men from sin—both from its guilt and its power, or dominion.

- All of the resources required to overcome sin have been supplied. They are called "*all things that pertain to life and godliness*" (2 Pet 1:3). No person who has come into Christ lacks what is required to live toward the Lord and be godly. If the godly life is not lived, it is because men do not want

to live it.

- The grace of God, copiously showered on us in Christ, *“has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age”* (Tit 2:11-12). The grace of God is a most effective instructor. Those who yield to sin simply have rejected such instruction.
- An Intercessor has been provided in order that we may obtain grace when it is needed. *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb 4:15-16). Those who do not appropriate this grace simply have not asked for it.

Thus the inappropriateness of all sin, drawing back, and godless toleration of spiritual flaw are seen. Provisions have been supplied in remarkably large quantities, and sufficient warnings have been issued with unusual clarity.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE THIS**

These observations are essential to the understanding of our text. Satan has, in fact, raised up a church that tolerates things our Lord does not endure. He has contrived a religious monster that removes the repulsiveness of sin, and countenances it within the religious realm. This is *“Babylon the Great,”* and it cannot escape the judgment of God. It is unchangeable, locked into its wretched state. The ONLY hope for anyone ensnared by its subtlety is to separate from the realm in which it is found.

The Divine judgment of this wicked conglomerate extends from chapter 16-18, and is among some of the most harsh and exacting sections of Scripture. There is not a spark of mercy shown toward this devilish emulation of the church of God. There is no hope held out for it. It is connected exclusively with the adversary of our soul.

# I WILL SHOW YOU

*“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me . . .”* The singularity of having a heavenly personality speak with John is worthy of noting. Such creatures are not at ease speaking with everyone! The fact that he spoke with John confirms the Apostle was in the realm where such communication was possible. Too, this is something John desired, and was qualified, to know. God has revealed He is disposed to share things with those close to Him, that could not otherwise be known. As it is written, *“The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant”* (Psa 25:14). Solomon also said, *“His secret counsel is with the upright”* (Prov 3:32). This is an aspect of the Divine nature that is most comforting to the heart of the believer.

## **An Involved Angel**

In the heavenly Kingdom, messengers are generally themselves involved in the working of the Lord. They are not outsiders commenting on things occurring outside the perimeter of their involvement. So it is with this angel. He is *“one of seven angels who had the seven bowls.”* He has been brought within the circumference of the Lord’s working, and thus can provide valuable insight concerning that operation.

The language of this text reveals the closeness of the redeemed with heavenly personalities. Realizing we must not probe into this fellowship too far, some observations are in order. The angel is said to have *“talked with”* John. This is not the language of casualness, but of ordained familiarity. It substantiates the statement made in Hebrews 12:22: *“But you have come to . . . an innumerable company of angels.”* These lofty personalities are at home in the presence of the redeemed!

The versatility of this angel may also be seen. Even though he had charge of one of the bowls of judgment, he was able to communicate some understanding to John. Such awesome judgments as those in which this angel was involved did not cause him to become unaware of John.

**Wherever there is contentment with spiritual ignorance, a most dire circumstance exists. Such a frame of spirit is completely out of harmony with heaven. It builds an impenetrable wall about the soul, robbing it of Divine resources, blessing, and advantage.**

Think also how heavenly personalities not only long to understand the working of the Lord themselves, but are eager for men to know them also. There is a discontent with ignorance in the heavenly realms. Angels long to “*look into*” this glorious Gospel we have heard (1 Pet 1:12). The martyrs “*under the altar*” yearned to know when their blood would be vindicated (Rev 6:10). The closer we come to those sacred environs, the more we will participate in this quality.

Wherever there is contentment with spiritual ignorance, a most dire circumstance exists. Such a frame of spirit is completely out of harmony with heaven. It builds an impenetrable wall about the soul, robbing it of Divine resources, blessing, and advantage. Yet, this is a spirit that is fostered by spiritual Babylon. The number of professed believers that are content to remain unlearned in Kingdom matters is staggering.

### **The Great Harlot**

“*Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot . . .*” This is the Divine commentary on the judgment we are beholding. Early, the wrath of God is said to have been poured out upon “*the men who had the mark of the beast and those who*

worshiped his image” (16:2). It is also said to have been emptied upon “*the throne of the beast, and his kingdom*” (16:10). Then reference is made to “*the great city,*” and “*great Babylon*” (16:19). Now, we read of “*the great harlot,*” or “*whore.*”

All of these references are to the same spiritual entity—the false church. This devilish corruption has many different facets, and not a one of them is good.

- **First,** this fabrication of the devil solicits the worship and service of men. It usurps the Lord of glory, demanding the allegiance that belongs to the Him alone. Thus we read of “*the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image*”.

- **Second,** this is a spiritual dominion—a government in which both power and influence are maintained by the devil. We therefore read of “*the throne of the beast, and his kingdom.*”

- **Third,** this is a great aggregation of humanity—a sort of confederation of people. They have been gathered together by the devil to oppose Jesus, even though some of them are not aware of that circumstance. We therefore read of “*the great city,*” and “*great Babylon.*”

- **Fourth,** this is a representation of unfaithfulness to the Lord. In order to embrace what Satan has offered, the Lord Jesus must be forsaken. For this reason, we read of “*the great harlot,*” or “*whore.*” She is the epitome, or embodiment of all corruption.

## SHE DOMINATES

“ . . . *who sits on many waters* . . . ” This is not a provincial corruption, or one limited to a certain geographic area. It is global in its impact. “*Many waters*” are

precisely defined in verse 15. “*The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.*” Just as Jesus is gathering a people “*out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” (Rev 5:9), so the devil is also amassing a people. His attempt to replicate the church is as precise as he is capable of making it.

The phrase “*sits on many waters*” denotes a posture of reigning, or presiding. This is no mere novelty we are witnessing, but a means through which the old serpent himself is reigning over the hearts of men. There is no continent in which this harlot is not found; no culture in which it has not dominated; no tongue that has not been corrupted with her jargon.

### **THE WORLD ORDER RECEIVES**

“ . . . *with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication* . . . ” The church of Jesus Christ and the kings of this world cannot be joined together! The “*kings of the earth*” CANNOT commit fornication with the body of Christ. However, they can, and do, engage in such unfaithfulness with Babylon the great.

These kings take what belongs to the Lord, and give it to the great harlot. They offer their service, commendation, riches, and influence to the false church. They withhold them, and rightly so, from the true church, the redeemed of the Lord.

**We should expect Satan to launch an extensive effort against the saints of God. Note: his initiative is not against the Lamb, but against the those who are joined to Him. The Lord Jesus has been exalted above the devil and his host and is no longer**

accessible to them. Thus they assault the church.

There have been corrupt offspring produced by this unholy union of “*the kings of the earth*” and the “*great harlot*.” This is seen in, though not limited to, the state religions that have defiled history. Any place and every place “*the kings of the earth*” have joined themselves in unholy union with a professed church, the State has ALWAYS dominated. This is the union that is called “*fornication*.” God, Jesus, the Spirit, and the Holy Scriptures are consistently pushed into the background in this wicked union. What belongs to the Lord is given to the State, and thus fornication is committed.

## THE WORLD CORRUPTED

### BY THE HARLOT

“ . . . and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” We should expect Satan to launch an extensive effort against the saints of God. Note: his initiative is not against the Lamb, but against the those who are joined to Him. The Lord Jesus has been exalted above the devil and his host and is no longer accessible to them. Thus they assault the church.

This is a global effort, in which the powers of this world are gathered together against saints. It is the most wicked of all corrupt alliances. With remarkable graphic language, we are shown how the “*inhabitants of the earth*” are made to imbibe the powerless religion of the great harlot: i.e., “*the wine of her fornication*.” This not merely the sampling of her wicked elixir, but something resulting in thorough intoxication— “*DRUNK with the wine of her fornication*.”

### The Kings of the Earth

This phrase is used no less than nine times in Revelation (1:5; 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9; 19:19; 21:24). These are consistently represented as opponents of Jesus, and are never set forth in a good light. Jesus is their prince, though not acknowledged by them (1:5). They hide themselves from the

revealed Christ (6:15). The spirits of demons works among them (16:14). They commit fornication with corrupt religion (17:2; 18:3,9). They are dominated by Satan's corruption (17:18). Ultimately, they gather together against Christ and His people (19:19). They will be forced to bring all of their glory to Jesus, acknowledging Him to be the Head over all (21:24). The Psalmist frequently spoke of "*the kings of the earth*," but rarely, if ever, with commendable words (Psa 2:2; 76:12; 89:27; 102:15; 138:4; 148:11).

This does not mean every king is corrupt, or that no politician can be godly. Joseph was a holy ruler, and Daniel was a godly political official—but they were exceptions to the rule.

Why are "*the kings of the earth*" said to have committed "*fornication*" with this spiritual harlot? It is specifically said, "*with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication*" (17:2). Remember, the power of government was ordained by God for the suppression of evil and the encouragement of good. As it is written, "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God . . . For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil . . . For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*" (Rom 13:1-4). The false church, however, has offered itself in the place of the God, to Whom government is accountable. The "*kings of the earth*" settled for an alliance with powerless religion, thereby committing fornication against God. This is what gave rise to State churches, which historically have caused great conflict for the saints. In these coalitions, the State has always taken the ascendancy when conflict arose. Frequently, the head of the State was also the head of the church.

Of old time, holy prophets and the people of God made kings of the earth acutely aware of the Living God and His will. Think of examples like Moses and Pharaoh (Ex 7-12), Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:7-10), Elijah and the king of Samaria (2 Kgs 1:3-4), Elijah and Jehoram (2 Chron 21:12-15), Elisha and the king of Israel (2 Kgs 6:21-22), Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:25-32), John the Baptist and Herod (Matt 14:4).

In the Word, men of God have always had the ascendancy over kings and rulers of State – but not in our text. Satan has developed a powerless church with which “*the kings of the earth*” feel comfortable. The wicked conglomerate does not convict “*the kings of the earth*,” but is willing to give them the prominence due only to Jesus. But their alliance is “*fornication*,” even though highly lauded by many in the religious community! Even though the Holy Spirit extends Himself to present “*the kings of the earth*” in this light, it is exceedingly rare to find a religious soul that speaks in this manner. That condition is evidence of the effectiveness of Satan’s fabrication of the church.

### **The Inhabitants of the Earth**

Spiritual whoredom is a sin of the greatest magnitude, and is so viewed in Scripture. It is committed by those who have seen enough of God to know they must do something about their lives, but are unwilling to come to the Lord on His terms. They are NOT willing to let the world go, but ARE willing to keep it under a religious guise.

The expression “*inhabitants of the earth*” is one denoting those alienated from God. It does not refer to all who are alive in this world, but to those who have joined themselves to the worldly order.

Whereas those at home in this world would not yield themselves to God, they do submit to the false church. They are willing to keep her laws, while violating the Word of God. They accept her message, while repudiating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They allow themselves to be directed by her, while refusing to be directed by God.

It should not be necessary to further expound this fact. It is abundantly evident to anyone casually familiar with the religious world. While powerless people choose to view this circumstance as acceptable, and one within which God is willing to work, this is not the case at all! This is expressing called “*fornication*”—unfaithfulness to Christ! It is giving to Babylon what is to be given to Christ Jesus alone!

Spiritual whoredom is a sin of the greatest magnitude, and is so viewed in Scripture. It is committed by those who have seen enough of God to know they must do something about their lives, but are unwilling to come to the Lord on His terms. They are NOT willing to let the world go, but ARE willing to keep it under a religious guise. They maintain their preference for temporal things, and their at-homeness in this world. They do so, however, covering their preference with a religious mantel. They are willing to have a church if it is a family church, or an entertaining church, or a politically active church, or a prospering church . . . etc. They are content to have preachers and teachers if they are educated ones, influential ones, impressively appearing ones—ones that do not make them ill-at-ease in the world.

But all of this is “*fornication!*” It is the prostitution of human affection—giving it to the world order in the name of religion. While the Lord Jesus came to deliver us “*from this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4), the “*great harlot*” allows people to remain “*of the world,*” yet maintain a religious identity.

This Satanic effort is a global one, and deals with the powers of this world as well as its inhabitants. Jesus is alerting His people to this evil with most sober words. He is informing us of a Satanic initiative that is unparalleled, and most effective. This is designed to awaken sleeping souls.

## I SAW A WOMAN

*“So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness.* The angel will now provide John with an accurate portrayal of spiritual harlotry. It will require him to be extricated from the realm of flesh, so He is *“carried away in the Spirit.”* This is a phrase denoting heavenly-mindedness: a state where the things of God are prominent, and the things of this world recede into the background. As you will recall, in the beginning of this Revelation, John was *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”* (1:10). That circumstance made him capable of receiving the Revelation.

Here, John is transported into the realm of ultimate reality.

We will be exposed to a heavenly view of an earthly phenomenon. Keep in mind, from an earthly perspective, what John will be shown does NOT appear to be corrupt or unfaithful. That is why John must be shown the real nature of spiritual corruption. If judged from the standpoint of appearance, this *“harlot”* looks like the church at Laodicea, which boasted, *“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”* (Rev 3:17). Like the church at Sardis, it has *“a name”* that it is alive, but is really *“dead”* (Rev 3:1). This is *“a form of godliness that denies the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5). It is so corrupt that those caught in its snare fall into a state that is *“is worse for them than the beginning”* (2 Pet 2:20).

### **Carried Away in the Spirit**

This is a portrayal of the luster of earthly government—something of which men have been enamored throughout history. Such power has a strong drawing force, for which some are willing to sell, as it were, their soul.

John is CARRIED away in the Spirit—transported to a realm more suitable for

impartation of spiritual understanding. The prophet Ezekiel also experienced this carrying away . . . *“So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away . . . He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem . . . Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the East Gate of the Lord's house . . . The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD”* (Ezek 3:14; 8:3; 11:1; 37:1). Later, John is given insight concerning the joining of the bride with the Lord Jesus Christ. Of that occasion, John wrote, *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God”* (21:10).

This is an experience where the human spirit is elevated above earthly considerations, becoming preoccupied with God and His purpose. It is not a human achievement, but a Divine benefit. It is not achieved by discipline or regimentation, but by spiritual sensitivity. Here the soul is exposed to realities that cannot be known apart from Divine revelation.

### **The wilderness**

THE WILDERNESS is a place of testing and revelation. It is isolated from the world, void of the distractions that tend to hide the truth from men. It will not be appropriate for John to hear of the judgment of religious corruption while he is beholding Rome, or Patmos, or even the churches. His heart and mind must be uncluttered from worldly distractions.

Again, this is the language of the prophets. Being brought into the wilderness denotes coming into a place where our dependence is totally upon the Lord. All earthly resources are stripped from the soul, as John is transported to a place where flesh is impotent and the world is forgotten. How often the Lord speaks in these terms. The lord brought *Israel “out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness,”* where He could lead and feed them (Ezek 20:9-10). Here—in the wilderness—is where the Lord can speak more directly with men: i.e., *“face to face”* (Ezek 20:35-36). Comforting words can be administered in the wilderness (Hos 2:14).

John is therefore brought by the Spirit to a place where his vision is dominated by the things of God. His heart is undistracted, because of this grace, from the views of flesh.

## I SAW THE WOMAN

*“And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy . . .”* What an awful sight John is given to see! Here is *“the great whore,”* carried along by a scarlet beast. Everything about this beast is blasphemous and reprehensible. There are no comely characteristics in it—no redeeming qualities.

From an earthly point of view, *“scarlet”* would be a picture of royalty, as when Jesus was mocked (Matt 27:28). From heaven’s perspective, however, it is a vivid depiction of sin—reprehensible sin (Isa 1:18).

This is a portrayal of the luster of earthly government—something of which men have been enamored throughout history. Such power has a strong drawing force, for which some are willing to sell, as it were, their soul. Men fight and lay their lives on the altar of sacrifice for the governments of this world. They often lie, cheat, steal, plunder, and forfeit their standards to obtain the world’s power. This is what Satan offered Jesus in His initial wilderness temptation (Lk 4:5-7).

These principles (those of worldly government) carry the false church. They are what sustains her. It is her unity with the world that has made her appear great and formidable. Think how the nominal church glories in the luster created by worldly government. Age, tradition, logic, art, pageantry, ceremonies, superstitions—all appealing to man’s desire for recognition and vain glory. It is not uncommon for religious bodies to glory in some history that is not found in Scripture: a movement, a person, a position, etc. The whole matter is a beast carrying an unfaithful church!

T.B. Braines, a notable child of God from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had something to say about this situation—and he said it well. *“To religious man, thee is something imposing in a system that can boast of antiquity so venerable, architecture so splendid, music so enchanting, organization so perfect, power so tremendous, pretension so overwhelming. But all of this is worthless in God’s sight.”* (Pulpit Commentary) How sorely this perspective is needed in our time!

Another insightful man, D. Thomas, writes, *“But what of conventional Christianity? It is an instrument for worldly gain and aggrandizement. Everywhere men trade in the Gospel,*

**There is a spiritual entity that Jesus calls a “*great whore,*” or “*harlot.*” Men may imagine that what carries her along is scholarly, intelligent, and accomplished. But to Jesus, it is a “*scarlet beast.*”**

and the trade is carried on with all the passionate avarice, foul fallacies, and flatulent puffings that characterize the market. Pulpits are regarded as a means of livelihood, chapels and churches are become shops, ecclesiastics are the grandees of the world, robed in costly attire and rolling in chariots of opulence. Institutions abound and multiply, baptized with the name of Christian, where men of feeble talent, but crawling craftiness, creep into offices of salary and show. I protest that conventional Christianity is not the Christianity of Christ—a Divine entity that ‘seeketh not her own.’ The Christ exhibited in the creeds and institutions is as unlike the Christ of the Gospels, as the mechanical force of the manufacturing machine, throwing off commodities for trade, is unlike the vital energy in nature which clothes the landscape with verdure and fills the earth and the water with countless tribes of life.” (Pulpit Commentary)

I have shared this rather lengthy quote to confirm I am not teaching something strange to people of faith. Do not suppose for one fleeting moment that godly men throughout the ages have not been concerned about the phenomenon to which this section of Revelation exposes us. We are living in a time when men have grown accustomed to lifeless religion. However, throughout the centuries,

men and women of faith have not been able to swallow what Jesus wants to spew out of His mouth!

The real issue here is **which world dominates**. For the people of God, it is "*the world to come*." For spiritual Babylon, it is this world. The "*beast*" that carries her is of this world. It rose from the land, and was not sent from heaven. It aspires for earthly recognition, and not the praise that comes from God alone. Thus it allows a world system to carry it, sustain it, and offer its critique of her mission and emphasis.

Powerless religion is offensive to our Lord, and ought not be allowed by those wearing the name of Jesus. Insipid and childish preachers should be expelled from the pulpits of the land. Teachers and leaders without spiritual understanding, and with an affinity with this world should be disallowed by the body of Christ. Institutions that promulgate carnality, godless humor, and various forms of religious entertainment ought to be thrust from the household of faith. God will not allow the purveyors of flesh to enter into heaven, and they ought to be forbidden to be identified with the people of God here.

To some, it seems unbecomingly strong to speak in this manner. But I have actually understated the case. When men and women give to an institution what belongs to the Lord alone, an offense of greatest magnitude has occurred. When individuals reject the richness of God's grace in order to obtain the approval of men, they have committed enormous transgression.

There is a spiritual entity that Jesus calls a "*great whore*," or "*harlot*." Men may imagine that what carries her along is scholarly, intelligent, and accomplished. But to Jesus, it is a "*scarlet beast*." It has the appearance of royalty, but is a devouring and ravaging beast that tears men's souls, oppresses the saints, and corrupting the Word of the Almighty.

## THE BEAST IDENTIFIED

“. . . *having seven heads and ten horns.*” Later, the spirit will identify the seven heads as “*seven mountains,*” and the ten horns as “*ten kings*” (verses 9,12). These details will be discussed later, when those particular verses are reviewed.

Suffice it to say at this point, we are speaking of a worldly power—an influence located in, and sustained by, this world. The whorish woman has nothing whatsoever to do with “*mount Zion*” or the “*King of kings.*” This is a world-system with a religious flavor. To put it another way, it is the professed church garbed with the world’s attire, and conducting itself as though there were no “*world to come.*” It is the church at home in this world, courting the world, and allowing it to set its standards. It listens and speaks primarily to the world, and draws strength from it.

## UNFAITHFULNESS

When the Spirit extends Himself to paint a vivid picture of unfaithfulness, it is for good reason. He is not speaking of political entities, evil though they may be. Those benighted souls that make no claim to being associated with Jesus are not the subject of this discourse. To be sure, they ARE wicked! However, they are NOT as wicked as those who pretend to be of Christ, yet reject the effectual working of His power (Eph 3:7). To profess to know God, yet deny Him in works (Tit 1:16), and to have a form of godliness but reject its power, is the worst sin of all!

### The Attire of the Woman

“*The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls . . .*” This language of worldly opulence is also used by Ezekiel. The passage is lengthy, but provides the spiritual reasoning contained in this passage.

Stated another way, spiritual Babylon presents herself to attract the world, not God. Her apparel is gaudy and uncomely because she is courting the world from which Jesus has delivered us.

*“I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord GOD. But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you; the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you; you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was, says the Lord GOD” (Ezek 16:10-17).*

The Lord provided His people with comely attire—the “*garments of salvation*” (Isa 61:10). However, when the people chose affiliation with the world over affinity with Deity, their attire became reprehensible. This, then, is the language of apostasy—of spiritual degeneration. Note the digression.

- Trusted in their own beauty.
- Played the harlot because of her fame.
- Disseminated her harlotry, pouring it out on everyone.

- Took what God had given her, and gave it to God's enemies.

Thus what was given to be a blessing was corrupted by forming an alliance with the world. The language depicts religious profession garbed with the world. Interestingly, this is the same language used to describe Satan, who fell from lofty heights. *"You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created"* (Ezek 28:13).

In this language, we can also see the attempt of Satan to emulate the church. The glorified body of Christ is described in these words: *"having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal"* (Rev 21:11).

Stated another way, spiritual Babylon presents herself to attract the world, not God. Her apparel is gaudy and uncomely because she is courting the world from which Jesus has delivered us.

### **The Drink She Has Chosen**

*" . . . having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication."* The vivid language again points out the seriousness of Babylon's condition. What she used to bring satisfaction to herself is an abomination to God. It is filthy and corrupting, and is evidence of her unfaithfulness to the Lord.

The cup is *"golden,"* but its contents are detestable. To say it another way, what she uses to bolster her pride looks good, but is actually evil. Jesus assessed the religion of the Pharisees with sternness. Their's was a theology of appearance with no substance. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-*

*indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also*” (Matt 23:25-26). This is precisely the assessment of “*great Babylon,*” the “*harlot.*” She appears good, but is evil. She appears rich, but is poor. She seems to be godly, but is ungodly. Her’s is the religion of fornication, unfaithfulness, and defilement.

This is a depiction of Babylon living for itself, satisfying its desires with the world’s baubles. In the eighteenth chapter, this trait will be expounded more fully. There it is said the harlot “*glorified herself and lived luxuriously*” (18:7). While the real body of Christ makes herself “*ready*” for being joined to her Lord (19:7), the counterfeit bride thinks only of herself. Being of the world, she satiates her depraved appetite with the things of this world—things that will pass away.

The strength of this language must be grasped. What appears a golden cup, or something of beauty and value, is actually filled with things that are “*abominations*” to Christ. They are tokens of her unfaithfulness to the One who bought her. To fill her cup with those things, she had to pour out on the ground what God had given her. To become satisfied with what the world offers, she had to become dissatisfied with what the Lord offers.

One further thing about this cup. It is a poignant picture of deception. Something that looks good, but is actually abominable and reprehensible. It is no wonder so many warnings are given to the people of God concerning subterfuge and pretense. “*Take heed that no one deceives you . . . Do not be deceived . . . Do not be deceived . . . Let no one deceive you with empty words . . . Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words*” (Matt 24:4; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 6:7; Eph 5:6; Col 2:4). In all of these texts, deception is declared as coming from religious sources. That is the most dangerous deception! The reason for the danger is that it disarms the soul, lulling it into spiritual sleep. In that case, safety is imagined while danger exists. Beyond all question, we are dealing with the most aggressive and dangerous of all Satanic initiatives. In it, he seeks to corrupt the fountain of life.

## IMPRESSIVE AND EFFECTIVE

*“And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”* The concept of a name written upon the forehead is found several places in Scripture. Under the Law, Aaron wore a plate of pure gold upon his forehead that read, *“HOLINESS TO THE LORD”* (Ex 28:38). You may recall *“the servants of God”* were *“sealed in their foreheads”* (7:3). The second *“beast,”* which is corrupt religion, promoted its contemptible cause by having people receive his mark in their forehead (14:9). In the world to come, those in Christ Jesus are said to have the Lord’s name *“in their foreheads”* (22:4).

Two things are portrayed in this language: identity and character. The name on the forehead signified the one with whom we are aligned, or have become identified. It also signifies the character, or inward nature, of the one having the mark.

Two things are portrayed in this language: identity and character. The name on the forehead signified the one with whom we are aligned, or have become identified. It also signifies the character, or inward nature, of the one having the mark.

While the name is on the forehead, its significant is only apparent to those with understanding. The phrase is not meant to connote apparency, or something that is obvious to everyone. Babylon does not appear to be a harlot to those choosing to limit themselves to this world. It seems beautiful and to be desired.

## THE NAME

The name is a compounded one. It is not simplistic, because evil and apostasy are not elementary. This is what draws men to spiritual Babylon – its seeming complexity and intricacy. But it is all a sham.

### *“Mystery”*

This word is associated with salvation also (Mk 4:11; Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:9; 3:3-4,9; 6:19; Col 1:26-27; 2:2; ; 4:3; 1 Tim 3:9,16). In the case of salvation, however, the use is quite different. The word denotes something good that is unveiled in Christ Jesus. With spiritual Babylon, the name *“Mystery”* indicates an influence that contradicts the Divine nature, and is thus obscured to the carnal mind. Just as the *“mystery of godliness”* contradicts the worldly mind set, and is thus obscure to those who are of the world, so Babylon contradicts the spiritual realities. In other words, it does not appear to be what it really is.

Inherent in this identity is another key consideration. The rise of spiritual Babylon contradicts all spiritual reasoning. There is nothing about redemption in Christ Jesus that promotes such a thing. Spiritual life, with all of its intricacies, contains nothing that allows for such a development. Babylon the great could not rise without the neglect of Jesus, the corruption of the Gospel, or the hatred of God’s people. Its presence is a violent and unreasonable intrusion into the affairs of men.

### *“Babylon the Great”*

This is a complex name. *“Babylon”* denotes both spiritual confusion and earthly glory. Among those seeking a city that has foundations, *Babylon the Great* brings confusion and disorientation, as was experienced at the tower of Babel. It ruthlessly enslaves the people of God as Babylon did under the rule of king Nebuchadnezzar. This is a city of flagrant contradiction. Like the second beast, it has the appearance of a lamb, but speaks as a dragon.

It is “*great*” because of its extensive influence. It is called “*the great city*” (16:19), “*the great whore*” (17:2; 19:2), “*Babylon the Great*” (17:5; 18:2), “*that great city*” (17:18; 18:18,19), and “*that great city Babylon*” (18:10). There has never been anything like it. No organization has ever enslaved as it does, or dealt such a devastating blow to the cause of truth as it has. That is why so much is devoted to its demise in the Revelation.

**Babylon not only condones abomination, but has structured a religion that encourages men to continue living in sin. It nurses their vices, and makes them comfortable in their sin.**

This is no small matter—not something inconsequential! We are beholding Satan’s most aggressive effort against the saints. It is not found in the promotion of immortality. It is not encapsulated in the aggressive advancement of a political agenda. This is an unparalleled religious initiative that is “*great*” and impressive. Make no mistake about it, the “*falling away*” of which the Spirit spoke (2 Thess 2:3) is not something incidental. It is not to be viewed as a sort of harmless historical phenomenon from which we have been excluded. Nor, indeed, are the saints to placidly fold their arms and view it as something that must happen, and therefore causing no alarm within us. God would not provide an extensive commentary like this on something that was a mere historical happening—something of no concern to us. We dare not stand at a distance from this.

### *Mother of Abominations*

We are told in Scripture of the leaven of wickedness affecting the church (1 Cor 5:7-8). Here, however, we are introduced to something of intriguing significance. Whereas righteousness fosters holiness (Rom 6:19,22), here is an entity that mothers, or nurses, abomination. It cares for abomination as a tender mother cares for her child. Babylon not only condones abomination, but

has structured a religion that encourages men to continue living in sin. It nurses their vices, and makes them comfortable in their sin.

Of this condition, D. Thomas wrote, *“Until conventional Christianity is banished from the land, and the Christianity of the sermon on the mount restored, the morality of the human race will sink lower and lower into devildom and corruption.”* (Pulpit Commentary) Strong words, indeed, and difficult to be received by the undiscerning! Do not imagine that this man, writing from the 1800's, is simply a reactionary. He, together with other men of God, have seen the wickedness of corrupt religion, and have sounded the alarm against it. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, the Wesley's the Campbells, and countless others have risen to blow the trumpet in Zion, summoning people to the greatest sobriety on this issue.

**Jesus lays the responsibility for the world's “abominations” at the doorstep of “great Babylon.”** Because she was not *“valiant for the truth,”* warning men of the eternal jeopardy of embracing that which occasioned Christ's death, she has actually encouraged sin. She has cast a mantel of approval upon rebellion by NOT speaking against it. She has anaesthetized the conscience of the condemned with her commitment to the flesh. Her tolerance of the intolerable has led men to view sin in an accommodating way.

What we are beholding is a most sobering vision! Our hearts and minds are to be alert as we enter into the sacred chamber of spiritual insight. This is no place for ignorance or naivety.

God has placed the church in the world as *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15). If those identified with this church do not call men from their sin, they will become responsible for abomination. God's people are a responsible people!

## OPPRESSION OF THE SAINTS

*“I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.”* The extreme wickedness of spiritual Babylon is seen in her aggressiveness to oppose those who do not agree with her. Because *“the woman”* has joined forces with the world, she has come to hate the people of God. Because their citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20-21), and they are *“not of the world”* (John 15:19), the *“great harlot”* cannot bear them.

At this point, there is something of significance to note. The REAL church is also pictured as a *“woman”* (Rev 12:1-6). She is **persecuted**. The false church, however, is a **persecutor**. What an arresting difference. One *“woman”* is oppressed, and the other one is an oppressor. One is afflicted, and the other afflicts. Herein the real nature of God’s people is revealed. Like their Savior, they come to bless and provide benefits for men.

They bring a message of hope, and place themselves into the background. But this is not the case with *“great Babylon.”* Like the devil who animates her, she comes to steal, kill, and destroy. She is not simply different from those who are not with her, but opposes them. There is no extent to which she will not go in this opposition. She will utilize as much liberty as is granted her from the Throne in her opposition of the saints—even down to killing them.

The language here is so arresting I cannot purge it from my mind. The whorish woman is *“drunk with the blood of the saints.”* She has satisfied herself, and furthered her agenda, by taking the lives of God’s people! Her cause could only be advanced by murdering the people of God!

### **Foreshadowed in the**

. . . when religion chose to court the world, seeking

its approval, it contaminated everything it did. The world is a condemned order, and as such cannot be joined with those who are citizens of heaven.

Prophets and Jesus

Religious oppression was foreshadowed in the prophets and the Lord Jesus. Both were opposed by religious people—the very ones to whom they ministered. Stephen spoke to such people with riveting words. *“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers”* (Acts 7:52). Jesus also addressed His enemies on this very subject. *“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.*

*In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation”* (Lk 11:47-49). Jesus Himself was crucified through religious zealots who saw Him as a threat to their institution.

### **Jeremiah’s Testimony**

If anyone doubts that a professing church can stoop to such debauchery, let them hear the words of Jeremiah. He uncovered hypocrisy within God’s people, and spoke of them shedding innocent blood. *“Why do you beautify your way to seek love? Therefore you have also taught The wicked women your ways. Also on your skirts is found The blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I have not found it by secret search, But plainly on all these things. Yet you say, 'Because I am innocent, Surely His anger shall turn from me.' Behold, I will plead My case”* (Jer 2:33-35).

Notice the remarkable parallel with the “*great harlot.*” Jeremiah charged the people with teaching wicked people their ways. This parallels being the mother of the abominations of the earth. God also found the blood of innocent people within her. This parallels being drunk with the blood of the saints.

## *The Persecution of Saints*

Throughout history, the saints of God have been persecuted. From one perspective, this opposition is totally unreasonable. God is good, His people are good, and their ways are good. They are not destructive, they institute no earthly wars, and they obey the laws of the land. They do not contribute to the crime rate, are industrious, and helpful. You might be prone to think such would be received by the world, and lauded for their character. But that is not the case. *Because “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (1 John 5:19), it CANNOT love the people of God. Our Lord stated the situation with precision: *“Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (John 15:19).

When, therefore, the nominal church joined hands with the world order, it obtained this hatred of the saints. This should not surprise us. When men attempt to mingle good and evil, evil ALWAYS dominates. Haggai states the principle in a most poignant way. He puts a question to the priests concerning how things become clean or defiled. *“If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy? Then the priests answered and said, ‘No.’ And Haggai said, If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?”* So the priests answered and said, *‘It shall be unclean.’* Then Haggai answered and said, *So is this people, and so is this nation before Me, says the LORD, and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean* ” (Hag 2:12-14). The Lord was saying, when men traffic in contaminated realms, it defiles everything they do.

Applying this principle to our text, when religion chose to court the world, seeking its approval, it contaminated everything it did. The world is a condemned order, and as such cannot be joined with those who are citizens of heaven. But *“great Babylon”* made the attempt anyway, and a bloodbath followed. The most striking confirmation of the wickedness of Babylon is its slaughter of the saints of God.

Historically, the worldly church thrived for some time, without any seeming opposition. However, there came a time when the saints began to again speak boldly the Gospel of Christ. When they did, the professed church initiated some of the harshest persecutions known to man against them. Those first aggressions are known historically as *papal persecutions* , and were initiated by the Pope, head of the Roman church. In that Roman church, there was a remarkable blending of religion and worldliness. It was, and continues to be, governed after the manner of this world.

These bloody persecutions were so crude and heartless, that even worldly people marveled at them. During the persecution of the **ALBIGENSES** , a single incident will serve to confirm the cruelty leveled against the saints.

All of this, and more, is depicted in Revelation as a whorish woman, seemingly attractive and successful, sitting on a beast, and drunk with the blood of the martyrs. This is the result of attempting to merge the church and the world!

**In the year 1524, at a town in France, called Melden, one John Clark setup a bill on the church door, wherein he called the pope Antichrist. For this offense he was repeatedly whipped, and then branded on the forehead. Going afterward to Mentz, in Lorraine, he demolished some images, for which he had his right hand and nose cut off, and his arms and breast torn with pincers. He sustained these cruelties with amazing fortitude, and was even sufficiently cool to sing the One hundredth and fifteenth Psalm, which expressly forbids idolatry; after which he was thrown into the fire, and burned to ashes.** (Foxes Book of Martyrs)

On August 22, 1572, under the authority of the Roman church, the Saint Bartholomew massacre began in Paris, France. The design of this slaughter was to eradicate Protestantism, which was perceived as a threat to *the church* . The brutality with which this was carried out is too harsh for tender hearts. History records the saints blood flowed like a stream through Paris. Foxe records,

“From Paris the destruction spread to all quarters of the realm.” At Orleans, 1,000 were slain, including even children. 6,000 were slaughtered in Rouen. In one week’s time, 100,000 Protestants were cut to pieces in this savage butchery. (Foxes Book of Martyrs)

Time does not permit the recounting of these religious persecutions. The French Revolution and Spanish Inquisition were times of intense persecution from the professed church. Other persecutions broke out in Italy, Bohemia, Germany, and the Netherlands. In England, under the reign of “Bloody Mary,” the slaughter of countless saints took place. In Scotland, under the reign of King Henry VIII the church unleashed another persecution against saints who would not bow to corrupt religion. Thousands were slaughtered in a religious persecution leveled against Protestants in France, during 1814-1820.

Well known men of God endured persecution from the state-churches of their times. These include Martin Luther, William Tyndale, John Bunyan, and John Wesley. Conservative estimates of those slaughtered in these persecutions exceed 50,000,000. The ONLY offense charged against these saints, is that they would not conform to corrupt religion, but rather opposed it.

All of this, and more, is depicted in Revelation as a whorish woman, seemingly attractive and successful, sitting on a beast, and drunk with the blood of the martyrs. This is the result of attempting to merge the church and the world! Crudely put, you end up with a “*whore*.” As if that were not wicked enough, that entity engages in a fierce persecution of the saints of God—even to blood, if allowed to do so.

### **Not Confined to Rome**

Some have limited this corruption to the Roman church. In so doing, they have overlooked the identity of this “*harlot*.” She is not the ONLY unfaithful one, but is expressly called “*the mother of harlots*” (17:5). She first combined the world with religion, but she is not the last to do so. Like the Roman form of

government (Republic) has been duplicated in other nations, so the Roman form of religion has been duplicated throughout the world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a *Christian* institution that is not patterned after the worldly order. While plausible explanations are offered to us for this attempt, the Roman church is the mother of the wicked offspring. Those within the denominational world (*divided Christendom*), have structured themselves after the Roman church. They may not employ the titles pope, cardinal, bishop, and priest – but the concept is the same. They have ruling bodies, institutional rules, and earthly qualifications. All of this may appear quite innocent, but it is not. The truth of the matter is that very few churches, or groups of churches, require the new birth, Scriptural insight, or holiness among their leaders. Their chief strength is their administration and camaraderie, not their godliness. That is precisely what makes the “*great city*” Babylon, and a harlot. It also sets it in opposition to those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit—for neither of those are required by the institution.

### **John Marvels At the Sight**

“*And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.*” John is taken back by what he sees. Our generation has grown accustomed to corrupt religion, even offering plausible arguments for its existence. But John did not engage in such corrupt reasoning. He did not reason that the inevitability of what he saw justified its existence. That is NOT a godly way of thinking.

John is, so to speak, stunned by the appearance spiritual harlotry! To him, it was incredible that professing *Christians* could be guilty of such atrocities: corrupting the truth, rejecting the power, and persecuting the saints of God. A faithless church is a gigantic contradiction on the landscape of humanity. Dead religion is spiritual freak, supported by neither reason nor ethics. Yet, it is all about us, and everyone with understanding knows it.

The term “*mystery of iniquity*” refers to Satanic

working in a religious culture. It is mysterious, not because it cannot be understood, but because it defies sound reasoning. The principle revealed in spiritual Babylon was already at work in Paul's day.

Perhaps John also reasoned "*How can such corruption be permitted?*" This is how the prophets also reasoned at times. "*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?*" (Hab 1:13). Lest we forget, recall the description of this monstrosity.

- Arrayed in exquisite raiment (17:4).
- Holding out an alluring cup (17:5).
- The mother of harlot (17:5).
- The mother of abominations (17:5).
- Drunk with the blood of saints (17:6).
- Corrupting the world (18:3).
- Names of blasphemy upon it (17:3).
- In a wilderness (17:3).
- Ruling over the kings of earth (17:18).
- Enriching earth's merchants (18:3).
- Imaging stability and security (18:7).
- Hated by those she rules (17:16)

It is no wonder that John " *marvels*" at the appearance of an entity that is in league with Satan, yet wears the name of Jesus! Here is something that taught men to be unfaithful to God—and even institutionalized the effort. How did it arise? Where was the protecting hand of the Lord? Had Satan overpowered the Lord of glory? If the Lord is Sovereign, why did He not stop this from happening? These are all aspects of marveling at the emergence of such wickedness.

John did not marvel with respect—that is not the meaning of "*admiration*" (KJV), or "*amazement*" (NKJV). The word, more literally, means "*surprise*," or "*astonishment*." This is like a wicked miracle—a sign from hell. It is a supernatural

phenomenon that cannot be accounted for by human involvements alone.

### **There Is A Reason!**

The appearance of this beast-riding harlot is the direct result of men departing from God. **Apostasy is the mother of delusion!** Although I have mentioned this before, it is well to again cite Paul's prophecy about these things. *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness"* (2 Thess 2:7-12, NASB).

The term *"mystery of iniquity"* refers to Satanic working in a religious culture. It is mysterious, not because it cannot be understood, but because it defies sound reasoning. The principle revealed in spiritual Babylon was already at work in Paul's day. It was *"restrained,"* however, by the dominancy of political power: to be specific, pagan Rome. However, when global government was cast down, universal spiritual corruption rose in its place, subverting the truth and oppressing the saints.

When men began to play at their religion, the bottomless pit was opened. When they used the truth only to promote their own enterprises, Satan was loosed. When they lost the love of the truth, the lie was released among them. When they served God with their mouth, while their heart was far from Him (Matt 15:8), God brought in *"strong delusion."* He will not allow men to tamper with His truth, despise His Son, and conduct their lives as though there were neither God nor judgment. Those imagining He is indifferent to such corruption will themselves begin to drink from the cup offered by the harlot. They soon will imbibe delusion, and absorb the manners of the world—all the

while wearing the name of Jesus. They will be lulled into *“the sleep of death”* by the very religion they embrace. No wonder John was, so to speak, confounded this could happen. His heart was tender toward the Lord, and thus duly impressed by the vision given to him!

Would God such sensitivity were more common in our da. It would surely yield fruit that would more readily glorify God, bringing great benefit to His people.

## WHY DID YOU MARVEL?

*“But the angel said to me, ‘Why did you marvel?’* Angels “desire” to look into the mysteries of the Gospel (1 Pet 1:12). But they are not ignorant of the ways and judgments of God. The angel marvels that John marveled at the woman on the beast. Remember, to the Lord, the best accomplishments of humanity are nothing. *“Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing”* (Isa 40:5). Man in his best and most impressive natural state is described as one *“whose breath is in his nostrils”* (Isa 2:22). His wisdom is *“foolishness”* with God (1 Cor 3:19). Well did David say, *“Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor”* (Psa 39:5). O, do learn that truth more fully!

Spiritual Babylon, from this perspective, is but the enterprise of men—men who are motivated by the devil. The false church is great, but the true church is greater! Spiritual corruption is impressive, but the truth is more impressive! Religious error is potent, but spiritual reality is invincible! False doctrine does sway men, but the Gospel of Christ is *“the power of God!”* He that is in the world is great, but He that is in you is *“greater!”*

We are often tempted to marvel more at evil than at good. *“Why did you marvel?”* We may be provoked to wonder at Satan more than at Jesus. *“Why did*

*you marvel?*” Your calamity may cause you to be more confounded than the blessing of the Almighty. *“Why did you marvel?”* Let no one be overwhelmed by the rapid spread of iniquity, the corruption of the truth, or the seeming success of wrong thinking. *“Why did you marvel?”* If we are going to marvel, let it be at the grace, wisdom, and power of our great God.

Make no mistake about it, there is a sense in which evil IS a marvel—that it could take place in God’s world! There are two times in Scripture that Jesus is said to have marveled, or was amazed. One was at remarkable faith in a Gentile (Matt 8;10). The other was at the unbelief among His own people (Mk 6:6). That same situation—only on a much larger scale—is found in spiritual Babylon. Yet, it is not to be the lingering focus of faithful hearts. This *“harlot”* will be brought down!

## THE MYSTERY DIVULGED

*“I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”* I will tell you that this explanation will NOT satisfy the carnal mind. There is a tendency in men to view the text of Revelation with great inconsistency. Men leap from peaks of *literal* to *symbolic* with great dexterity. One time a number is figurative, and another time it is literal. One time a mountain is metaphoric, and another time it is exacting. I do not deny that there appears, at times, to be some validity in this approach. However, for the most part, it generates a lot of confusion.

The use of the phrase, *“Here is wisdom,”* indicates we are not dealing with a definition as ordinarily conceived. Such an explanation would not require wisdom.

### **The Origin of the Beast That Carries The Harlot**

### *It Was*

*“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.”* Before launching into an explanation of the seven heads and ten horns, the Lord shows John the origin of the power carrying, or supporting, the apostate church. By saying *“was, and is not,”* the Spirit is affirming we have been introduced to this power before. It was seen in old Babylonia (Gen 10:8-11; 11:4). We were introduced to it in Assyria, with the ancient capital of Nineveh (2 Kgs 19:36; Nah 1:1; 2:8-10). New Babylonia and its king Nebuchadnezzar also were a display of this beast (Jer 21:7). The Medes and the Persians were an exhibition of this wickedness (Dan 5:24-28). It was also seen in the Grecian empire (Dan 10:20).

All of these were beastly kingdoms. They devoured, plundered, forced, and destroyed. They all utilized the principles of this world, seeking to (1) Make themselves a name, (2) Joining hand in hand, (3) Conspiring to destroy any that opposed them, and (4) Extending their empire by both force and delusion. In the book of Revelation, the Roman empire surfaces as one of these powers also. We are beholding global political power, or government. It is the *“beast which was.”*

### *And Is Not*

All of the previously mentioned beastly empires passed away. They *ARE NOT!* They were all removed by the same means they employed to sustain their cause—force. The ultimate epitaph over every world power, regardless of its duration and seeming invincibility, is *“AND IS NOT!”* All earthly kingdoms, including pagan Rome, fall into the category mentioned in Daniel 2:44. *“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”*

### *And Yet Is*

Although individual kings fell, never to rise again, the PRINCIPLE sustaining them did surface again. It is the same principle, the same iniquity, that comes into view again and again. In Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, that power was very evident. It was the primary thing. But in the vision before us, it SUPPORTS religious delusion, remaining somewhat obscure.

Just as the “*heavenly places*” are the realm of all blessings (Eph 1:3), the “*bottomless pit*” is the source of all defilement. This is where Satan’s wicked arsenal is maintained. Here is where the principles that carry the harlot, making her appear effective, originated— “*the bottomless pit.*”

The resurfacing of wickedness is a phenomenon often declared in Scripture. It is a reality with which we must learn to contend. The book of Judges, for example, exposes us to this sort of thing. “*When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD . . . Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD . . . Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD*” (Judges 4:1; 6:1; 13:1).

Allow me to briefly explore this principle. The tower of Babel was conceived AFTER the flood. Belshazzar fell AFTER his father Nebuchadnezzar became like the beasts of the field. In more recent times, Catholicism recovered from the blow dealt to it by Luther. The formalism exposed by the Wesleys surfaced again.

Incessant war must be waged against lifeless religion and influence that borrows principles from the world. It has the capacity to rise again, after suffering devastating defeat. Even on a personal level, the parts of your person that you have subdued in the power of the Spirit, can again resurface if not kept

upon the cross.

Spiritual Babylon, the great harlot, is sustained by the same power that upheld Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar, and Nero. To be even more relevant, it is the same power that supported Hitler and Stalin.

### *Out of the Pit*

“. . . and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit . . . ” Babylon is wed to the world, but it is not from the world. It actually comes from the “*bottomless pit*”—the source of all corruption! Just as the “*heavenly places*” are the realm of all blessings (Eph 1:3), the “*bottomless pit*” is the source of all defilement. This is where Satan’s wicked arsenal is maintained. Here is where the principles that carry the harlot, making her appear effective, originated—“*the bottomless pit.*”

### *Into Perdition*

“. . . and go into perdition.” Although this “*beast*” has surfaced from the bottomless pit again and again, its ultimate destiny is specified. It will go “*into perdition.*” “*Perdition*” is destruction wrought by the Lord. It refers to the ultimate judgment against all evil, when it will be removed from circulation, and will no longer exercise influence. It is mentioned eight times in Scripture, and always has to do with Divine cursing and judgment (John 17:12; Phil 1:28; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 6:9; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 17:8,11).

Lest we be tempted to be unduly impressed by this religious monstrosity, the Spirit reminds us of its destiny. There is no possible way for it to survive the judgment of the Lord. Although its influence may span generations and millennia, yet it will be brought to utter desolation. The kingdom of our Christ, on the other hand, will “*increase,*” and have “*no end*” (Isa 9:7). If your heart is ever weighed down with the considerations of false religion being dominant, recall this passage of Scripture. It will lighten the load, and strengthen you to resist its demands upon your soul.

## Those Snared By Her

*They dwell upon the earth*

*“And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”* With whom does this spiritual prostitute, riding on earthly power, have influence? Who is it that are enamored of her, and yield to her enticements?

The Spirit states the case, and states it well. They are those who “*dwell on the earth*”— whose native habitat is the realm of the curse. They are the ones who “*marvel*” at the woman, and give honor to the beast that carries her. They are “*friends of the world*,” and thus the enemies of God (James 4:4). They are dominated by the “*carnal mind*,” and therefore incapable of being subject to the law of God (Rom 8;7).

We have heard of these people before. They shed the blood of the faithful (6:10). They rejoiced at the silence of God’s witnesses, and were tormented by their presence (11;10). They worshiped the blaspheming beast, and are NOT written in the book of life (13:8). These are deceived by the miracles of the beast, and refuse to let it die (13;14). A motley group, indeed!

It is one thing to say these things, it is quite another to perceive them. Countless religious people maintain a primary association with this world, imagining they will still be able to detect spiritual error of false doctrine. They trust in their scholarship and reasoning powers to decipher truth from error. But both of these are utterly impotent apart from Divine affiliation. It is not possible for men to detect error or embrace the truth, while remaining an integral part of the cursed order. All such people, regardless of their religious upbringing, will be taken in by the harlot to which we are being exposed.

## *Not In the Book of Life*

I site these observations, not because they prove the point, but to show a rather remarkable consistency in the view students of Scripture have taken on this subject. While some variation exists in the views, there has been a general consensus among believers that apostate religion is, in fact, the subject of the passage.

“ . . . whose names are not written in the *Book of Life* from the foundation of the world.” Again, Satan will tempt men to deny this truth. The “*Book of life*” is a spiritual way of referring to those who are “*alive unto God*” (Rom 6:11). It is another way of referring to those who “*have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13), or know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

Stated another way, those who do not have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and do not live by faith, will be deceived by the “*great harlot*.” They WILL embrace the lie, give their allegiance to what is false, and be ensnared by the devil. There is no way to escape these tragedies if our names are not in the *Book of life* ! If we are not alive and sensitive to God, he will not keep us from what condemns!

O, that more people could embrace this truth. Churches are literally filled with people who live in practical alienation from God, yet imagine that they know the truth and are safe.

Let no soul be naive about this matter. Those who align themselves with the “*great harlot*” will share her destiny! Those who allow the world’s wisdom and power to support their religion, will suffer perdition with the beast.

## **The Mind of Wisdom**

*“Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.”*

The “*seven heads and ten horns*” have been mentioned before in this book. The twelfth chapter revealed the aggression of the devil against the people of God. There, he is depicted as “*a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns*” (12:3). Later, a beast rises out of the sea having the same traits. “*Then I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns*” (13:1). Preeminently, this speaks of the work of the devil. Secondarily, it emphasizes the means through which he executes his diabolical purpose—earthly government.

It is more than passing coincidence that the city of Rome was built upon seven hills. Historians frequently refer to it as “*the seven hilled city.*” The names of the seven hills are (1) Capitulinus, (2) Palatinus, (3) Aventinus, (4) Esquilinus, (5) Coelius, (6) Viminalis, and (7) Quirinalis. The four first of these mountains were taken in by Romulus, the first founder of Rome. The remaining three were taken in by Servius Tullius, when he expanded the city. I do not question that Rome is involved in this vision, but do not believe it exhausts the meaning of the passage—else it would not require “*wisdom*” to decipher the meaning. “*Wisdom*” and historical identity are not the same.

I agree with brother Milligan, who said of Babylon, “*Babylon embraces much more than Rome, and illustrations of what she is lie nearer our own door. Wherever professedly Christian men have thought the world’s favor better than its reproach; wherever they have esteemed its honors a more desirable possession than its shame; wherever they have courted ease rather than welcomed suffering, have loved self-*

*indulgence rather than self-sacrifice, and have substituted covetousness in grasping, for generosity in distributing what they had—there has been a part of the spirit of Babylon.”* (Milligan’s Commentary on Revelation)

I cite these observations, not because they prove the point, but to show a rather remarkable consistency in the view students of Scripture have taken on this subject. While some variation exists in the views, there has been a general consensus among believers that apostate religion is, in fact, the subject of the passage. I am not providing a peculiar view of the text, even though I have largely arrived at it on my own.

I conclude that we may look to Rome as the place where the opposing power was initiated, and after whose pattern it continues. In government, Rome brought a luster and dignity that was not common before it. In religion, it introduced a conglomeration of ritual, power, and religion that has proved to be the pattern for nearly all sectarian bodies.

The Lord then throws a bit of a wrinkle into the equation. *“There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time”* (v 10). Here, the word *“kings”* stands more for kingdoms than for individual rulers.

### *The King View*

The overriding truth affirmed in this passage is that the greatest enemies of God’s people are of this world, yet attempt to retain the shell of religion.

If we limit the city to Rome, taking the hills to be literal, the seven kings would be emperors of Rome. These are Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Cladius, and Nero (the first five). The existing ruler would be Vespasian, succeder of Nero, and the seventh Titus. This would place the writing of Revelation during the time of Nero, which does not appear plausible. Also, it is the manner of Revelation to speak more of principle than of particular individuals.

### *The Kingdom View*

If this is perceived as kingdoms, they would be Ancient Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylonia, Medes/Persians, and Grecia. The existing kingdom would be Rome, and the seventh would be a spiritual kingdom of great corruption. Were I to embrace a strictly historical view, this would be the most appealing one.

The overriding truth affirmed in this passage is that the greatest enemies of God's people are of this world, yet attempt to retain the shell of religion.

It is the devil that animates these opponents. The dragon himself had seven head and ten horns (12:1).

The devil also works through political means, an organized effort that employs the world's wisdom to make a name for itself. The beast from the sea has seven heads and ten horns (13:1).

However, the warfare of Satan against the saints reaches its crescendo in the false church, corrupt Christianity. The "*great harlot*" sat on a beast with seven heads and ten horns (17:7).

What we are beholding is an organized and unified effort. Satan is at its helm, earthly government is providing the principle of operation. But it is the corrupt church that represents the most extensive effort. By saying the woman rides on

a beast with seven heads and ten horns, the Lord is showing us this is the very same opposition the church faced at the beginning. It has taken a more subtle form, and been sanctified with a religious mantel. However, it is still the devil spewing out a flood to destroy the bride of Christ.

### **The Beast**

*"And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."* This is the principle of earthly government revived. The glory, as it were, of the ancient empire refurbished and utilized to oppose the saints. This time, however, instead of drawing attention to itself, it carries a spiritual harlot, who herself becomes the attraction.

By saying this *"beast" "is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven,"* the Lord is saying the beast is different, yet operates with the same hellish principles as the kingdoms of the world. It is a spiritual power that animates and supports the enemies of God's people. In reality, however, all of them, including the animating beast, draw from the same well. Satan is their ultimate root, and the world is the mine from which it draws its practical resources.

### **The Ten Horns**

*"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast."* It is generally understood that this represents the breakup of the Roman empire. The ten kings, or kingdoms, were not yet in existence when John received the Revelation: i.e., they had *"received no kingdom as yet."* Those kingdoms are acknowledged to be (1) Vandals in Spain and Africa, (2) Visigoths in Germany, (3) Suevi in Spain, (4) Alans in France, (5) Burgundians in France, (6) Franks, (7) Britons in Europe, (8) Huns in Asia, (9) Lombards in Hungary and Austria, (10) Ravenna in Italy.

*Their Power Given to the Beast*

Just as the dragon, Satan, gave power to the beast, so these kingdoms give their power and strength to the beast. That is another way of saying they serve the purpose of the beast, aligning themselves against the people of God. Not only, therefore, is political government itself the opponent of the saints, but the wicked combination of religion and politics now bring harm to the people of God.

These all gave their kingdoms to the “*beast*”— i.e., they became the citadels of false religion. State churches rose in nearly all of these kingdoms, which were lesser kingdoms than the global empires before them. Politically, they were diverse. Spiritually, they “*are of one mind.*”

Do not read this text, therefore, in anticipation of a great initiative against the Lord Jesus. Rather, read it looking forward to the unquestionable triumph of our Lord. It is written, He will overcome them because  
“*He IS Lord of lords and King of kings.*”

Some are of the opinion the ancient Roman empire will be revived in these ten kingdoms prior to the coming of the Lord. They see the present European confederacy as a development of that situation. That such a thing could happen cannot be denied. That it is focus of this passage is questionable, to say the least.

### **Divine Control**

The political entities receive “*authority for one hour as kings with the beast.*” They flourish in this alliance, but only for a limited time. Remember, we are speaking of opponents of the body of Christ. In particular, of corrupt Christianity. It was aggressively promoted through these governments, and the churches that joined hands with them.

## A Solemn Warning

While there is an element of mystery in this passage, some Kingdom principles are perceived. These represent the thrust of the passage, as it is not the manner of the Spirit to immerse us in the historical details of the future. We learn that Satan's initiative against the saints is an organized one. It reaches its apex when government and religion join together. In that unholy alliance, government consistently becomes dominant. Additionally, the alliance always becomes adversarial to those in Christ.

## Opponents of the Lamb of God

*“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings . . .”* Now we behold the real nature of earthly power. The word “these” refers to the ten kings or kingdoms just mentioned. While they might appear cultured and refined on the surface, they are the enemies of Christ. Limited to and dominated by the carnal mind, they are foolish enough to *“make war with the Lamb.”*

From one point of view, this war has extended throughout history. The point of this verse however, is not the war they waged, but the termination of it. This is a futile war, even though the kings of the earth conspire together to wage it. They gather in vain against the Lord's Christ.

By saying they are given *“one hour,”* the Spirit is declaring the vanity of their effort. In the words of the early church, they gather together *“to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”* (Acts 4:28). Do not read this text, therefore, in anticipation of a great initiative against the Lord Jesus. Rather, read it looking forward to the unquestionable triumph of our Lord. It is written, He will overcome them because *“He IS Lord of lords and King of kings.”*

*Those Who Are With Him*

The triumph of Jesus includes all who are “*with Him.*” Their presence does not guarantee the victory, but His presence assures they will triumph. Notice how the Lord has taken the Satanic aggression personally. From one point of view, Satan has spewed a flood out against the people of God. He is attacking the saints. From the higher view, the war is “*with the Lamb.*”

And what of those who are with the Lamb? They are identified in non-institutional terms. They are not linked with the “*great city*” and “*great harlot.*” The contrast with the corrupt church is remarkable. While it is rejected by Jesus and unfaithful, “*those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.*” That is not what they OUGHT to be, but what they are.

### **Real Commitment Not Present**

*“Then he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.’”* The Lord will judge Babylon through the very ones with whom she joined herself! Her demise will come from the world system in which she trusted.

This is the language of the prophet Ezekiel, who also spoke of the fall of corrupt religion. With Ezekiel, it was Israel, who had corrupted herself with the religions of the world. The passage is lengthy, but carries in it the very language of this text. Here is his description of the Divine judgment against her. “*Now then, O harlot , hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged ; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places . They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and*

*bare. They shall also bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot , and you shall no longer hire lovers. So I will lay to rest My fury toward you , and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more. Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things , surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head , says the Lord GOD. And you shall not commit lewdness in addition to all your abominations” (Ezek 16:35-43).*

From one point of view, the false church used the world to further her own evil agenda. But from another point of view, the world used the false church to further its own interests. When those interests have been served, the world will turn like a wild beast on “*the great harlot,*” bringing her down in infamy and shame. From one point of view, the harlot rode, or controlled, the beast. She “*reigned over the kings of the earth,*” taking the dominance. But it was all short-lived. Such wicked alliances cannot last. When God’s purpose has been served, she will come down. We must live in that anticipation.

## THE WHOLE MATTER IS OF GOD

Our text, however, tells us that God “*put it into their hearts*” to do so. Some sophists do not believe such a thing is possible. Speaking of free will, they choose to affirm God never does such a thing. But they are seriously in error, and their position is in sharp conflict with the word of the Lord.

“For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” The Spirit speaks very specifically on this matter. This is not the mere foreknowledge of future history, but the declaration of Divine intention. It was not coincidence

that the kings of the earth gave their kingdom to the beast, and worked in coalition with the “*great harlot*.” It is true, the devil, or “*great dragon*,” is the one who empowered the “*beast*” (13:4). Yet, it was not the devil’s purpose that was ultimately being served. “*For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose.*”

Remember, because men do not receive the love of the truth, God sends “*strong delusion, that they might believe a lie*” (2 Thess 2:11). That delusion takes a religious form—a *Christian* form, if you please. The Revelation has defined that form more precisely for us. It is religion organized and promoted using the principles employed by earthly government. The priority is placed upon the things of this world, and the wisdom of men becomes the engine of the organization. The touchstone that determines whether or not the organization receives a person or group is not that of God. God accepts people upon the basis of their reception of, and reliance upon, His only begotten Son. But it is not so with the “*great harlot*.” Agreement with the institution, and the adoption of its agenda, is the means of obtaining approval. Character or spirituality have very little to do with the sanction and blessing of the false church.

The seeming irony of the case, is that the kings of the world agreed to operate in harmony with the great harlot’s agenda. They were willing to put on the mantle of religion for a season. Our text, however, tells us that God “*put it into their hearts*” to do so. Some sophists do not believe such a thing is possible. Speaking of free will, they choose to affirm God never does such a thing. But they are seriously in error, and their position is in sharp conflict with the word of the Lord.

This is NOT strange language. Frequently God’s Word speaks of God putting things in the heart of a person. In Ezra’s day, the heathen king Artaxerxes determined to refurbish the house of the Lord. Of that determination Ezra said, “*Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, Who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart , to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem*” (Ezra 7:27). On one occasion, the Psalmist reminds us that God provoked the enemies of Israel to hate her. “*He turned their heart to hate His people , To deal craftily with His*

*servants*” (Psa 105:25). Solomon knew the Lord could turn the kings heart wherever He wanted: *“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes ”* (Prov 21:1). When Nehemiah conceived of producing a genealogy of the people, he said, *“Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy”* (Neh 7:5). This is, then, NOT an unconventional expression.

### **A Limitation**

The Sovereignty of God is seen in this judgment. The kings give their power to the beast, and do so with one mind—heartily endorsing the beast’s agenda. However, they only do it *“until the words of God are fulfilled.”* See, it is God’s purpose that is being fulfilled, not that of the devil. It is the Divine agenda that is being implemented, not that of the beast. The will of the Lord is being accomplished, not that of the great harlot. Whatever you may think of the devil and man’s free will, neither shall proceed one millimeter past the determined will of God. They are serving Him, He is NOT serving them!

This reminds me of the Spirit’s testimony concerning the conspiracy against the Lord Jesus—a machination that led to His death. At least, that is how it appeared to the eyes of men. What really occurred, however, is stated in a prayer by insightful saints. *“The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ. For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done ”* (Acts 4:26-28).

This is precisely what is being declared in the Revelation: the fulfillment of the determined purpose of God. The unanimity between the world and the church was, of itself, wicked. Yet, it was something sent as a judgment upon professed Christendom because of its lethargic ways and refusal to receive the love of the truth. That very condition condemns all religious deadness. Lifeless religion is, in any situation, inexcusable and a reproach to God.

## CONCLUSION

Thus we have been exposed to “*the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters*” (Rev 17:1). The picture has been graphic, and provides much insight into the devil’s assault against the people of God, and why it was allowed to happen. A brief review of what we have seen will be profitable. Remember, we are seeing a description of false religion – an apostasy that has occurred because men did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.

Thus we have been exposed to “*the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters*” (Rev 17:1).

The picture has been graphic, and provides much insight into the devil’s assault against the people of God, and why it was allowed to happen.

✍ **Seated on a beast with seven heads and ten horns** (17:3). Here is religion carried along by the same principles that sustain earthly government. It is the world’s concept of power that supports this wicked woman—corrupt religion.

✍ **Seated on seven hills** (17:9). The loftiest worldly location, seen in Rome, yet descriptive of the best location the world has to offer.

✍ **Seated on many waters** (17:15). Reigning over multitudes of people. This is no small enterprise, but a global one. From the human point of view, it is highly successful.

☞ **Attired with impressive clothing** (17:4). Externals are the emphasis of false religion. It is impressive only to the eye and the mind of the flesh. That is why corrupt religion attracts carnal people.

☞ **Holding an enticing cup** (17:4). Spiritual Babylon offers something that appears good, but is actually something reprehensible to God. This is so because what is offered does not have Christ as its center or eternal life as its objective.

☞ **The mother of harlots** (17:5). False religion produces many children—and all like itself. This is the Scriptural explanation for the proliferation of religious sects and divisions, all bearing the name of Christ.

☞ **The mother of the abominations of the earth** (17:5). False religion, rather than containing sin, actually promotes it. This condition exists because it salves the conscience of men, leading them to suppose they are all right, even though their nature has not been changed. They remain the same.

☞ **Drunk with the blood of the saints** (17:6). False religion will be aggressive against the saints, even to the shedding of their blood. The reason is that true believers are a threat to worldly religion or institutionalism.

☞ **Blasphemous names upon her** (17:3). God is reproached by lifeless religion. His name is effaced, and His cause obscured by a form of godliness that denies the power thereof.

☞ **In a wilderness** (17:3). While reigning in the midst of multitudes, spiritual Babylon is actually in a desert, isolated from streams of living water, and the refreshing truth of God. Too, one must become isolated from the

world to see her as she is.

☞ **Ruling over the kings of the earth** (17:18). She manipulates earthy government for her own temporal advantage—and, for a while, the world consents to it. In such cases, religion is thought to sanctify government.

☞ **Hated by the powers over which she ruled** (17:16). The world cannot forever tolerate religion, even in a corrupt form. It agrees to work with Babylon, only because God puts it in hearts to do so.

☞ **Brought down by the ones with which she aligned herself, after the purpose of God has been fulfilled** (17:18). How different from the fellowship we experience with the Father and the Son. Those who are joined with the Lord are never repudiated by Him. But it is not so with the world. It is fickle, and will soon turn against those who imagine that joining in affinity with it will bring them advantage.

Beyond question, this is one of the most arresting passages in all of Scripture. My own life has been dramatically altered by a more clear perception of its message. The worst of all sin is religious sin—sin that takes place in a religious environment, and with the sanction of the institution. When our religion makes us comfortable in this world, we are being influenced by Babylon the great—the “*great harlot*.” When men are content to remain at a distance from the Lord, while still wearing His name, the “*great harlot*” has made them drink her cup. When this world eclipses the world to come, and men still think they are *Christians*, they have been seduced by corrupt religion. The condition of such people is infinitely more serious than men dare to imagine. “*Great Babylon*” is to be taken seriously. She is to be shunned with consistency and zeal. God will not allow us to turn from His Son to anything else—even a seemingly successful religious institution.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 32

## THE FALL OF BABYLON

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “ “ Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury .” And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “ Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘ I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow. ’ Therefore her plagues will come in one day; death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her .” (Rev 18:1-8, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The section of Revelation with which we are dealing is an extensive one. It is a view of the end of the world, but it is from a focused point of view. This is a delineation of the collapse of the corrupt church, or worldly religion. The point of the passage is that religion that aligns itself with this world, will perish with it. Lifeless religion can no more survive the coming of the Lord than the present heavens and earth. A religious system that borrows from the world will perish

with it.

Admittedly, there are difficulties associated with the message we are reviewing. Those challenges, however, have more to do with the incompatibility of the book of Revelation with the current religious culture, than with the message itself. That circumstance is a most serious one. Any approach to *Christianity* that encourages or approves of the neglect of God's Word, cannot be right.

**FIRST** , *there is a conspicuous absence of this kind of teaching in the contemporary church.* Yet, this is a message God gave to Jesus, to be given to the churches. It is a message God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have directed to the people of God (1:1,2; 2:7,18). There is no acceptable excuse for the people of God remaining ignorant concerning this message.

**SECOND** , *the message is not considered relevant.* Others matters, such as soul winning, missions, and church planting, are considered to be preeminent. But is this really the case? If this is, in fact, the final word of Jesus to His people, should it not be taken with the utmost seriousness, and an understanding of it be sought with great fervency? *God the Father* is presenting it! *The Lamb of God* is imparting it! *The Holy Spirit* is communicating it! *Holy angels* are employed in the giving of it! It is *Apostolic doctrine* , coming through the pen of one of the foundation stones of the glorified church (21:14)! What could possibly make this message more relevant? In fact, how is it possible for anything to be more applicable than a message given by God, through Jesus, through an angel, through an Apostle, to the churches?

As the certainty of our salvation is affirmed, faith  
revives and survives, making us equal to the  
challenges of life. If, however, the well of promise is

closed, faith soon begins to deteriorate, the heart becomes heavy, and discouragement revives.

**THIRD** , *the symbolic, of apocalyptic, language of the book tempts men to believe it is not important—that it is an optional book.* In this view, the message is not perceived as important because of the metaphorical language it employs. This is not, however, a perceptive view at all. The symbols, types, and figures used in Revelation have all been taken from Moses and the Prophets. It is not new language, subject to some new kind of interpretation. This circumstance (the language of Moses and the Prophets) indicates the Lord was actually preparing men for the message of Revelation. Through the ancients, He provided a sort of template through which the general message of the Revelation could be comprehended.

**FOURTH** , *the existence of numerous novel interpretations of the Revelation has constrained many to stay away from the book.* The varying views of the book, however, only confirm there is a valid message to receive—else, Satan would not be so aggressive to corrupt it.

**FIFTH** , *the popular notion that the church is no longer in the world from the fourth chapter on, has produced a sort of indifference concerning the entire book.* This aberrant view of Revelation ignores the continuous references to those aligned with Jesus from chapters 4 through 20 (5:8; 8:3; 7:14; 11:18; 12:17; 13:7,10; 14:4,12; 16:6; 18:4, etc.).

## **A HIGH VIEW**

The Revelation is a high view of the working of God and the reign of the exalted Christ. It reveals the utter futility of Satan's effort to overturn God's purpose, remove His people from the earth, or nullify the salvation being administered by Jesus. It also proclaims the unquestionable triumph of all who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus—i.e., those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Believers need to have these things

reaffirmed to them. The experiences of life appear to contradict these realities, but we must not be deceived by such appearances.

As the certainty of our salvation is affirmed, faith revives and survives, making us equal to the challenges of life. If, however, the well of promise is closed, faith soon begins to deteriorate, the heart becomes heavy, and discouragement revives. That is why it is so important to get this message into our spirits.

## WHY SO MUCH ON BABYLON?

Because this line of spiritual reasoning is so rare in today's religious culture, men question why the Spirit is saying so much about Babylon. Some purported expositors have said "*Babylon*" is Rome, while others have said it is Jerusalem. Both of these views are out of harmony with the thrust of Apostolic doctrine—the message Jesus gives to the churches. Because of the length of Christ's message, we need to see it right.

### *Not Rome*

Neither Jesus nor the Apostles spoke extensively about Rome, even though the Jews were under its dominion during the time of Jesus and the apostles. Since Jesus ascended into heaven, earthly empires are **not** the focus of divine commentary. Daniel spoke of world empires, but only because they provided a context in which the eternal Kingdom would be revealed. Apart from that enduring Kingdom, those ancient empires have little, if any, significance. To devote such a large section of Scripture to the demise of the Roman empire simply does not blend with the nature or thrust of the heavenly Kingdom. It has no bearing whatsoever on the "*eternal salvation*" with which Christ's dominion is concerned.

### *Not Jerusalem*

While Jerusalem was the city where God had placed His name (1 Kgs 14:21),

it did not have the global impact of “*Babylon the great*” of the book of Revelation. Its corruption was more localized than that of “*the great harlot*.” Jerusalem was severely judged by the Lord for defiling the name of the Lord. That judgment, however, did not have the universal impact portrayed by the “*great city*” of Revelation. Too, its judgment had already occurred at the writing of John.

### *A Global Satanic Initiative*

What we are given to see is a remarkable Satanic initiative. It is marked more by subtlety than brutality—although brutality is often employed. It is more a corruption of truth than an open renunciation of it. This is the bulk of the “*flood*” spewed out of the mouth of the dragon to carry away the people of God (Rev 12:15-16). He could not cause them to renounce the name of the Lord through bloody persecution, so he has redirected his drive. He now proposes a merger between the church and the world. In such a merger, the world will be the most prominent. It is not possible to blend the cursed with the blessed, and end up with a blessing!

By joining the religious and the worldly, Satan causes men to feel comfortable, even though they are at a distance from God. He also causes them to think there is no real need to press closer to the Lord, or engage in a hearty effort to apprehend that for which they have been apprehended in Christ. When men attempt to join the religious and the worldly, the world always takes the preeminence.

By adopting this view, men forfeit the approval of God, fellowship with Christ, and their reward in heaven. The preference of this world makes one the enemy of God (James 4:4). This is particularly true when the form of godliness is retained while rejecting its power. The fact that men are reluctant to address these things confirms the effectiveness of Satan’s tactic.

## A GLORIOUS ANGEL

*“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.”*

The holy angels play a key role in our salvation. The book of Revelation confirms this with remarkable consistency. You will observe these exalted beings never have any difficulty with the inhabitants of the earth. They are never stymied by their wisdom, or thwarted by their power. The best of the world’s system is vastly inferior to the holy angels. How blessed to be in Christ and have this sacred assemblage as our ministers (Heb 1:13-14).

### **Great Authority**

Angels never have any difficulty with the inhabitants of the earth. They are never stymied by their wisdom, or thwarted by their power. The best of the world’s system is vastly inferior to the holy angels. How blessed to be in Christ and have this sacred assemblage as our ministers

Descending from heaven, this angel is said to have *“great authority.”* This is not token authority, but is effective superiority. In the earth, men have a form of authority, but often cannot implement their preferences, or subdue their enemies. Jesus spoke of the *“kings of the Gentiles”* who lord it over people, doing their own will, and reducing the people to *“benefactors”* (Lk 22:25). Some have viewed the Lord and those executing His will from this perspective. They see authority as the ability to carry out ones own good pleasure, while lording it over the people. This is a worldly view, and is unacceptable before God.

This angel had *“great authority”* to carry out the will of God. His authority was circumscribed by Divine purpose. That, of course, is the manner of the Kingdom. Even the Lord Jesus, when coming into the world, confined Himself

to doing the will of God (Heb 10:7-9).

What we are here beholding is the execution of God's will. This is a very detailed examination of God's view of Babylon—corrupt religion. He will not allow it to continue. Unlike the Kingdom of His son, this monstrous intrusion into the affairs of men will be brought down. The Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the holy angels are aligned against corrupt religion. It has no blessing from God—not so much as a small blessing, if there be such a thing. If it appears to be successful, it is only the longsuffering of God that is enduring its insolence. It is accruing wrath, not blessing, by its appearance.

By saying “*great authority*,” the Lord means this mighty angel cannot be resisted. His mission cannot be thwarted. His words cannot be contested. He comes to carry out the will of God, and he will not fail in his commission. Men have become so accustomed to powerless people, ineffective words, and aborted missions, that this is a most difficult thing to see. There is, however, a Divine purpose in place that cannot be overturned. In his Sovereignty, God has employed mighty angels who cannot be successfully resisted.

God's people need to know that this purpose, and power, is devoted to the demise of spiritual Babylon—the “*great harlot*.” Unfaithfulness to Christ—whatever form it takes—will be judged by the Lord, and cast from His view. It is rare to hear such a proclamation in our day, but this is the kind of message to which we are exposed in this text. To suffering saints, it is particularly significant.

### **His Glory Illuminated the Earth**

Angels do have glory. Jesus Himself spoke of the glory “*of the holy angels*,” affirming it would be unveiled when He returns (Lk 9:26). That glory is even associated with the “*glory of the Lord*,” as declared in Luke 2:9. Their glory is unlike the glory of man, which is “*as the flower of the grass*” that “*falls away*” (1 Pet 1:24).

The earth being illuminated with the glory of the angel is a symbolic way of saying the will of the Lord is being executed. The time of its fulfillment has come to pass. This is a manner of speaking that is found throughout Scripture: i.e., when the Lord entered into the affairs of men, His glory illuminates the earth. This was the case at Sinai, when the law was given (Ex 24:16).

In particular, this passage is a *DECLARATION* of the fulfillment of God's will. That is, it is an affirmation that what has been determined will surely come to pass. This is a prophetic way of speaking that confirms the certainty of Divine counsel. The same type of language was employed when the Lord revealed to Ezekiel that He would overthrow the spiritual harlotry that existed among His people. The forty-third chapter of Ezekiel tells of this overthrow. It was a time when Israel would "*defile*" the house of God "*no more*" (verse 7). There would be a restoration of purity, and a removal of spiritual contamination (verses 8-27). In all of this, the "*glory*" of God was most prominent (verses 2,4,5). That is to say, what is declared would surely come to pass.

Now, this is precisely the type of language used in our text. The Lord is declaring before hand what He is going to do to corrupt religion. A mighty angel that cannot be restrained by men declares it. The glory of this angel, which is less than the glory of the Lord, illuminates the earth, pushing the darkness from it, and drawing attention to the working of the Lord.

This is something that will occur. The people of God are to ready themselves for it, and shape their lives in anticipation of it. If they are suffering at the hands of false religion, they are to take heart that the harlot will be judged. If they are tempted to join hands with powerless religion, they are to adjust their thinking, remembering that such alliances will be destroyed when God's judgment falls on Babylon.

**BABYLON THE GREAT IS FALLEN!**

Thus, when the angel *cries* “*mightily with a loud voice,*” he is revealing what has been determined. He is announcing what cannot be averted. Here is a declaration faith must grasp! It is to have an impact upon our wills, and shape the way we think. It is a statement of Divine certitude!

“And he cried mightily with a loud voice . . .” This is not the shout of an unfulfilled desire, but the announcement of what will happen! There are cries, or shouts, that express the desire of God; i.e., “*Repent,*” “*Look unto me,*” “*Choose life,*”

and “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*” (Matt 4:17; Isa 45:22; Deut 30:19; Matt 11:15). These are all appeals to humanity to do something. But this is not the case with the shout of this mighty angel. He is not appealing to men, but announcing something that has been determined in heaven.

### **Daniel’s Similar Experience**

This is much like what was experienced by Daniel. He too was shown things that had been determined in heaven—things that were certain, and could not be changed. The angel of the Lord told Daniel, “*But I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth . . .*” (Dan 10:21). The phrase “*scripture of truth*” does not refer to the “*book of the Law,*” or Scriptures, as ordinarily understood. Other translations capture the sense of the text by using the phrase “*Book of truth*” (NRSV, NIV). *This is another way of saying, I will now reveal to you what has already been determined in heaven.* The term “*Book of truth*” is another way of saying Divine purpose—what God has determined to do.

Thus, when the angel *cries* “*mightily with a loud voice,*” he is revealing what has been determined. He is announcing what cannot be averted. Here is a

declaration faith must grasp! It is to have an impact upon our wills, and shape the way we think. It is a statement of Divine certitude!

## BABYLON IS FALLEN

“ . . . saying, *Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen . . .* ” The language is taken from Isaiah, who foretold the fall of glorious Babylon of old. “*And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, **Babylon is fallen, is fallen** ; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground*” (Isa 21:9).

## Not Yet Risen

Keep in mind, this monstrous fabrication of Satan had not yet arisen when John received the Revelation. Yet, its demise is proclaimed, even before it has a beginning! How appropriate are the words of Isaiah here. “*Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, **Declaring the end from the beginning** , And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ' **My counsel shall stand** , And **I will do all My pleasure** , ' Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; **I will also bring it to pass** . I have purposed it; **I will also do it** ” (Isa 46:9-11).*

Among all the uncertainties of life, we must devote ourselves to believing the Word of the Lord. *What the Lord has determined cannot fail of fulfillment!* If the faith of the people of God is to grow, there must be more said about what God has determined! Faith cannot flourish on the declaration of duty or relating of routine. Much of the preaching of our time is nothing less than fleshly counsel wrapped in a religious shroud. It has no message or power, and actually stifles faith.

God's people cannot be satisfied until corruption is overthrown. Their ultimate joy will be realized when they are "*ever with the Lord*" (1 Thess 4:17). That satisfaction, however, does not exclude the desire for Christ's enemies to be put down.

But John writes to those who are in tribulation. He himself is a "*companion*" in their tribulation and in their perseverance (1:9). Through him, Jesus gives a message that will spawn hope and strengthen faith. It is a message of certainty and finality something faith can grasp.

### **Ultimate Satisfaction**

God's people cannot be satisfied until corruption is overthrown. Their ultimate joy will be realized when they are "*ever with the Lord*" (1 Thess 4:17). That satisfaction, however, does not exclude the desire for Christ's enemies to be put down. Even Jesus, although at the very right hand of God, is expecting "*until His enemies be made His footstool*" (Heb 10:13). He will not be satisfied until He "*puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet*" (1 Cor 15:24-25).

### *The Souls Under the Altar*

The saints of God participate in this expectation. Even the martyrs, now safe from their oppressors beneath the heavenly altar, are awaiting the vindication of their blood (Rev 6:9-11). When they cried "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*," they were not rebuked for being insolent, but consoled for being righteous. They were told to patiently wait, assured that such vengeance would, indeed, take place.

### **Imprecations**

There is a sort of spiritual naivety in the church world that leads people to

believe it is not right to look forward to the overthrow of what is false. Such thinking is inspired by the devil, and maintained by the religion he perpetrates. While men have labored to explain the imprecatory Psalms, and to veritably explain them away, they are still a part of God's Word. These are Psalms where men of God prayed for the punishment of God's enemies and the vindication of saints whom they persecuted (Psa 5:10; 6:10; 9:20; 10:2,15; 25:3; 28:4; 31:17-18, etc.).

Other holy men have prayed such prayers—prayers for the judgment of the wicked. These include Moses (Num 16:15), Nehemiah (Neh 4:4-5), Job (Job 27:7), Jeremiah (Jer 11:20), and Paul (Gal 1:8-9; 2 Tim 4:14-15). All of them knew the ultimate outcome of God's enemies.

None of these men took matters into their own hands. Their prayers were not the eruptions of flesh, but the expressions of godly and tender hearts. David, for example, did good to Saul, who was his avowed enemy, even seeking to kill David (1 Sam 24:16-19). When oppressed by the Jews, the early church asked God to "*behold their threatenings,*" granting the believers boldness to speak the Word in spite of opposition (Acts 4:29). God would not assure His people of the ultimate overthrow of Satan's substitutions if the matter were inconsequential. I fear that our time has cause the love of many to "*wax cold,*" as Jesus said (Matt 24:12). They do not love the truth with such zeal that they are offended by religious corruption.

Jesus taught us to pray, "*Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:10). The fulfillment of that petition not only involves the establishment of the truth, it also includes the overthrow of the lie. Truth and falsehood cannot dominate simultaneously. Lifeless religion and the power of godliness cannot be enthroned at the same time. With unspeakable clarity, the Lord Jesus affirmed, "*Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*" (Matt 15:8). A review of that text will confirm He was speaking of religious corruption—something that professed Divine origin, but was from the earth.

### *The Faithful Know*

The sorrow that has been inflicted upon the saints by spiritual Babylon is staggering. From “*newborn babes*” to seasoned veterans of the faith, the hearts of God’s people have been crushed by lifeless institutionalism. Many a godly soul has been oppressed by a supposedly *Christian* environment that was stifling to the soul. Hungry and thirsty souls are regularly deprived of spiritual nutrition, while the institutional wheels continue to run smoothly. Scriptural illiteracy continues to proliferate at an astounding rate, while the religious institutions grow and flourish.

**Many a servant of God has dropped through the religious cracks simply because the Word of God was not preferred, and would not be received. Countless multitudes of believers long for freshness and power from the Lord, only to have the cold waters of institutionalism suffocate their desires.**

Many a servant of God has dropped through the religious cracks simply because the Word of God was not preferred, and would not be received. Countless multitudes of believers long for freshness and power from the Lord, only to have the cold waters of institutionalism suffocate their desires. Such people are viewed as peculiar, and out of synch with reality. Personally, my greatest sorrows have come from my associations with lifeless religion. How I long for the demise of spiritual Babylon—the overthrow of powerless religion—the uprooting of lifeless forms. This section of Revelation confirms such desires will be answered, praise the Lord!

Babylon is scheduled for a fall from which she will never recover. That means the Lord will judge her. It also means her influence will dissipate and dry up. Those with whom she has aligned herself will turn against her. Her role in the Divine economy will come to a close, and she will be removed.

## WHAT BABYLON IS NOT

At this point, we need to spend some time further defining spiritual Babylon—the “*great city*” and the “*great harlot*.” With zeal, we must avoid a view of Babylon that makes us sectarian, or that provokes us to repudiate some of God’s people.

- *Babylon is NOT a particular church, or a specific denomination.* Men are tempted to equate this Satanic substitute with a specific religious group, i.e., Roman Catholicism, etc. While it is true that the Roman church introduced this form of corruption, it by no means thoroughly defines Babylon the great.
- *Babylon is NOT every church but our own.* I come from a religious heritage where this view was insinuated, though not openly espoused. We imagined we had restored the New Testament pattern, and were deceived into thinking we were the New Testament church. Thus, we viewed the rest of the religious world as denominational and sectarian, conveniently excluding ourselves from that classification. The condition of our group, however, belied our empty profession.
- *Babylon is NOT a description of a physical institution or organization.* This is not an entity that can be defined through observation, academic processes, or mere human logic. It is a spiritual entity, motivated by spiritual powers. We must look beneath the surface to see it.
- *Babylon is NOT a particular form of organized religion, i.e., a diocese, synod, etc.* Babylon is identified by its character, not its form. It is possible to have proper religious form and approaches, yet be an aggravation to the Lord Jesus. The church at Ephesus is a case in point (Rev 2:1-4).
- *Babylon is NOT anyone and everyone that does not embrace the whole scope of truth.* It is never right to embrace only a portion of the truth. However, this

shortcoming is not always due to rebellion and unbelief. Some, like Apollos, have limited knowledge, but good hearts, ready to embrace the truth when it is heard and perceived (Acts 18:25). Do not suppose for a moment that everyone who does not see what you see are a part of Babylon. They may only lack exposure to the truth.

- *Babylon is NOT everyone that holds to questionable teachings.* There are numerous popularized teachings that are seriously flawed. We are not, however, to conclude that everyone receiving them are part of spiritual Babylon. While they are lingering on the porch of that “*great city*,” their hearts may be tuned to a higher frequency with which they are not yet familiar.

### WHAT BABYLON IS

What, then, is spiritual Babylon, that “*great city*,” “*Babylon the great*,” and the “*great harlot*?” What is this that the mighty angel proclaims is fallen? What is it that cannot be reformed, and for which there is no hope? Allow me to make some attempt to further define this monstrosity.

- *This is the false church, organized religion, and the church patterned after the world.* It is the professed church following the principles of the governments of this world.
- *Babylon IS the absence of the stranger-pilgrim posture of faith.* Those who possess real faith are not at home in this world. With David they confess, “*Your statutes have been my songs In the house of my pilgrimage*” (Psa 119:54). With the patriarchs and saints of old, real believers confess they are “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 11:13). With joy and intense interest they receive the admonition, “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (1 Pet 2:11). Saints recoil at the world’s thought patterns. They are offended by its manners, and repulsed by its logic. They draw back at the world’s insistence that it be served.

Saints see this world as a temporary residence—one in which they, by grace, are being prepared for “*the world to come*.”

Even though the world order is fallen and cursed, Babylon continues to draw from its polluted well. It patterns its government after the world's manner. It structures its presentations according to worldly concepts. It adopts its view of music, rhetoric, economics, and exercising influence.

But Babylon knows nothing of this posture. It is a system of religion that borrows its methods, techniques, and values from the world. It is a form of religion that causes one to feel at home in this world, and deprives the soul of the enmity that exists between the carnal mind and the Lord. It provokes the individual to plan as though this present life were the only life.

- *Spiritual Babylon IS worldliness covered with a religious mantel.* It is a religious system, developed and maintained by the devil, that causes one to suppose he can be at home in this world, and yet expect an inheritance in the one to come.
- *Babylon IS more a system of thought than an external appearance.* It views things from the temporal point of view, yet talks about Jesus, God, and the Spirit. It is not driven by hope, but what is possessed by the senses.

## WORLDLINESS

Worldliness is the predominate trait of "*Babylon*." It is of this world, and has willingly adopted the ways of the world. It is, in a word, "*worldly*." What does that mean? Often it involves deep immorality, as ordinarily conceived. But it is not confined to decadent conduct.

The word "*worldly*" is used several times in Scripture. The KJV uses it two times. First, it describes desires, or passions, that are of this world (Tit 2:12)., Second, the word is used to describe the tabernacle, or sanctuary, that was

given under the Law—an external, or visible, one (Heb 9:1).

The NASB employs “*worldly*” 5 times. First, it is used to identify *fables* that detract from the truth and unite men to the cursed order (1 Tim 4:7). Second, it describes empty and *pointless chatter* that brings no eternal advantage (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16). Third, it denotes desires that are of this world (Tit 2:12). Fourth, it is a description of the type of mind possessed by those devoid of the Spirit— *worldly-minded* (Jude 19).

The NIV uses the word “*worldly*” ten times. Here are some examples of how the NIV uses the word “*worldly*.” It speaks of “*worldly wealth*” (Lk 16:9,11). It also describes the infantile state of believers that have not grown (1 Cor 3:1,3). The wisdom totally and summarily rejected by God is called “*worldly wisdom*” (2 Cor 1:12). In distinguishing himself from those living apart from the Lord, Paul said he did not make plans in a “*worldly manner*” (2 Cor 1:17). The new creation, or those in Christ Jesus, no longer regard people from “*a worldly point of view*” (2 Cor 5:16). It is also affirmed that “*worldly grief brings death*” (2 Cor 7:10).

### *Babylon is Predominately Worldly*

This is the Scriptural perspective of Babylon— **worldly** ! She is immersed in the lusts, or desires, of this world. She thinks according to the patterns of this world, and considers everything from a worldly point of view. Were it not for the worldly teachers, she would not learn. If the world did not give her ministers their credentials, they would never have any. If the world did not receive her, she would not become famous or be popular among men—any men.

This type of mind-set is meant when Scripture employs the words “*pleasure*” and “*folly*” (Prov 15:21; 21:17; 1 Tim 5:6). The height of enjoyment is reached when the world’s resources are obtained. Even though the world order is fallen and cursed, Babylon continues to draw from its polluted well. It patterns its government after the world’s manner. It structures its presentations according to worldly concepts. It adopts its view of music, rhetoric, economics, and

exercising influence. It is “*worldly*.” As such, Babylon is not offensive to the world.

*Much Required, but Little Given*

Being worldly is listening to the lower realm—the world—and investing in it. Such investments require much, but yield little. This is a consistent trait of the world. It requires much, but gives little. Scripture describes this condition. “*You shall eat, but not be satisfied*” (Micah 6:14). The prophet Haggai identifies this circumstance with remarkable clarity. “*You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes*” (Hag 1:6).

This is the character of the world, and Babylon participates in it. Mind you, this is NOT the Divine Nature! God never requires much without giving much. Those who give themselves to the Lord will find “*riches*” (Rom 2:4; 11:33; Eph 1:7; 2:7; 3:8; Col 2:2), “*treasures*” (Col 2:3), and “*abundance*” (Rom 5:17; Eph 3:20; Tit 3:6). If they “*sow bountifully*,” they will “*reap bountifully*” (2 Cor 9:6). Babylon is where spiritual growth is difficult to achieve, and little is received from God.

This type of religion is so reprehensible to the Lord that He is devoting several chapters of this book to its demise—the fall of Babylon. It is perceived as the object Divine judgment. The end of the world is not contemplated without an extensive Divine commentary on the cessation of lifeless and powerless religion.

Having joined with the world, Babylon esteems the praises of men greater than the praises of God (John 5:44; 12:43). It courts the world because it longs for its approval. It will change its manner of preaching to please it. Babylon will even change the structure of its meetings so they will be approved by the world. It makes its music appealing to the world, and alters its message so it will not be offensive to those who are themselves offensive to God.

### *This Is Common Knowledge*

These things are well known to the saints of God, even though they rarely hear them expressed in this manner. Many a hungry and thirsty soul has known the debilitating effects of powerless preaching, meaningless singing, and lifeless assemblies. Righteous people without number have had to go outside the confines of their “church” to be edified, or to learn what the Word said, or to find comfort for their soul. Others have experienced rejection and spurning by the very people and organizations for whom they spent themselves. God does not treat His people this way, but Babylon does—it is of the world. It has no regard for Christ or His people, being driven by its own objectives.

In a word, Babylon the great is the world with a religious name. It has no wisdom from God, but gathers its wisdom from the world. It feels at home in the world, and does not like to think of leaving it. Its messengers speak of being “so heavenly minded they are no earthly good,” while the Lord warns us of being so worldly minded, we are of no heavenly good (Rom 12:1-2).

This type of religion is so reprehensible to the Lord that He is devoting several chapters of this book to its demise—the fall of Babylon. It is perceived as the object Divine judgment. The end of the world is not contemplated without an extensive Divine commentary on the cessation of lifeless and powerless religion. This message is to be taken seriously. When our text says, “*Babylon the great is fallen, IS FALLEN,*” it means the fall is determined, and is sure. Nothing can avert it—no prayer, no deed, no work! It has wed itself to the cursed order, and there is no way to recover it.

### *A Suitable Dwelling Place for Demons*

“ . . . **and has become** a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!” Because Babylon is the work of the devil, his cohorts feel at home there. Its doctrines were “*the doctrines of demons*” (1 Tim 4:1). It drank from “*the cup of demons*,” and ate from their “*table*” (1 Cor 10:21). Now we find Babylon falling, and only the realm of darkness is any longer associated with her.

The language is again borrowed from the prophets, and denotes the curse of the Almighty. Isaiah spoke of the fall of ancient Babylon, employing this very language. “*But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged*” (Isa 13:21-22). Again, Isaiah spoke in the same manner of the Lord’s controversy with, and judgment against, the nations (Isa 34:11-15). Jeremiah also used this language in declaring the coming demise of ancient Babylon. “*Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation . . . And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant*” (Jer 50:39 ; 51:37). Zephaniah used precisely the same language in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh. “*And He will stretch out His hand against the north, Destroy Assyria, And make Nineveh a desolation, As dry as the wilderness. The herds shall lie down in her midst, Every beast of the nation. Both the pelican and the bittern Shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; Their voice shall sing in the windows; Desolation shall be at the threshold; For He will lay bare the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city That dwelt securely, That said in her heart, "I am it, and there is none besides me." How has she become a desolation, A place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her Shall hiss and shake his fist*” (Zeph 2:13-15). This is the language of **DESOLATION** .

Babylon is the realm of lesser spirits—demons, foul spirits, and unclean and hateful birds. Satan is at home there, and the powers of darkness and world of demonic spirits are not intimidated by “*the great city*.”

How different from the household of faith—the place to which those in Christ are come. The holy society to which the Lord brings us is described within great detail. “*You are come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel*” (Heb 12:22-24). How marvelous is the place to which faith brings us!

How significantly this differs from “*a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!*” The devil is at home in Babylon—God is not. Demons dwell in Babylon, the Holy Spirit does not. Babylon is a snare for the soul. In the end, those who are trapped there will find themselves in company with every foul thing and spirit. Babylon is where Christ’s name is espoused, but His Person is absent. How dangerous is such a place!

## NATIONS, KINGS, AND MERCHANTS

Ordinarily, you would think of corrupt religion as committing fornication with the world. But our text says the world committed fornication with it. The nations drank the harlot’s wine, and “*committed fornication with her.*” She was not made rich by the earth’s tradesmen, but “*the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.*”

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” Here again, the depravity of spiritual Babylon is declared. Ordinarily, you would think of corrupt religion as committing fornication with the world. But our text says the world committed fornication with it. The nations drank the harlot’s wine, and “*committed fornication with her.*” She was not made rich by the earth’s tradesmen, but “*the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.*”

Again, the language is taken from the prophets. Ezekiel employs similar language when he speaks of the “merchants” profiting from corrupt Jewry. For this reason, and others, judgment was brought upon the ancient people (Ezek chapters 26-27).

This description should not surprise us. Remember, spiritual Babylon is the fabrication of the devil himself. Although it is religious, it maintains the devil’s view, and still is at home in the world. Its opulence is not of heaven, but from earth. What it offers did not come “*down from above,*” but is “*earthly, sensual, demonic*” (James 5:15-17). It is not strange, therefore, that the world is attracted to this spiritual monstrosity.

The world imagines itself to have become better because of Babylon, the “*great harlot.*” It sees the corrupt “*church*” as a valuable addition to the world order, and thus welcomes it with open arms. The “*kings of the earth,*” who had set themselves against the Lord’s Christ (Psa 2:2; Rev 16:14), see advantage in joining with “*Babylon the great.*” The “*merchants of the earth*” who traffic in temporal things, eagerly join in affinity with this “*great harlot.*” Neither the kings nor merchants of the earth were threatened by “*Babylon the great.*” With them, the “*harlot*” was a lovely and dignified woman, and the corrupt city beautified the earth.

### **It Had Already Started**

This very condition had begun to creep into the church as John wrote the Revelation. Remember how Jesus indicted some of the churches. “*You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead . . . Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*” (Rev 3:1,17). While it was the exception then, it would soon spread into all the world, becoming the prevailing form of *Christianity* .

Babylon has actually made the world worse , all the while claiming to make it better! She is the “*mother of harlots AND the abominations of the earth*” (17:5). The joining of church and state is highly revered by Babylon. With God, it is “*fornication.*” An alliance with the kings and merchants of the earth is considered an advantage by Babylon. It is the accrual of wrath with God. God is taking a people “*out of*” the world, not merging His people with it (Acts 15;14). Believers are the “*light of the world,*” not compatriots with it. They are “*the salt of the earth,*” not a projection of its thoughts and manners. They are, in the true sense of the word, “*not of this world*” (John 8:23; 17:14,16; 18:36).

Believers are the “*light of the world,*” not compatriots with it. They are “*the salt of the earth,*” not a projection of its thoughts and manners. They are, in the true sense of the word, “*not of this world*”

The kings of the earth committed fornication with Babylon, and the merchants of the earth became richer through her. In saying this, the Lord is declaring the world would have been better off without this religious monster. Like the Pharisees of old, Babylon shuts up the kingdom of God against men, and refuses to allow men to enter it (Matt 23:13). Its evangelistic crusades are much like those of the scribes and Pharisees, yielding sons of hell (Matt 23:15). Like the lawyers of Jesus’ day, Babylon has taken away “*the key of knowledge,*” robbing men of the insights required to enter into glory (Lk 11:52). Its presence in the world is an obstacle to honest and good hearts, and a refuge for those lacking faith. Its chief work is to provide solace for the carnal. It draws a curtain over the riches of glory.

## SUMMARY

When those who are the greatest in this world (kings of the earth) are comfortable with *Christianity* , **Babylon** is the name of the Christian representation. When those who profit from this world (the merchants of the earth) benefit from an alliance with religion, **Babylon** is the name of the religion.

Religion that maintains affinity with the world order is **Babylon** . A form of godliness that cannot be successful with aligning itself with, and borrowing from, the world, is **Babylon** .

There is such a remarkable consistency on this subject in Scripture that it is astounding it is not more readily seen. Think of these observations.

- No church was ever commended for having a politician.
- No church was ever rebuked for not being involved in politics.
- No congregation was ever commended for being wealthy.
- No congregation was ever rebuked for being poor.
- No believers were ever commended for being successful in business,
- No believers were ever rebuked for lacking possessions of business acumen.
- We have no record of any person of faith being commended for their worldly achievements.
- We do not know of a single person in Christ who was lauded for having worldly credentials—educationally, politically, or economically.
- There is not a solitary reference in all of the Bible to someone having spiritual advantage because of worldly attainment.

Any place, and every place, people of earthly acclaim are identified with Christ, it is in spite of their worldly status, and never because of it. Men and women of God are always presented as having the advantage because of their faith—never because of their fleshly accomplishments. It was their separation from the worldly order that made them great, not their association with it. But this is not the case with Babylon. *The world has made it great, and it has made the world worse.*

**COME OUT OF HER!**

*“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”* We now come to an admonition that is extremely strong. It must be understood in the Spirit. This is not the summons of a man, but is a *“voice from heaven.”* It is a Divine requirement—a call to be more completely associated with God, and less identified with the world.

### **God’s People in Babylon**

Some of God’s people are in spiritual Babylon! They have been caught in its snare, and have still remained His people. This is not owing to any advantages given to them by Babylon. They have survived in spite of Babylon, and have kept the faith even though in an environment that militated against it. They have had to overcome lifeless religion.

As with Israel, so it is with those in Christ Jesus, *“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Rom 11:5). That blessed remnant is scattered, and cannot be found in a single cluster. All through the defiled religious realm, God’s people are scattered as the Jews were scattered among the nations (Deut 4:27). Babylon, in this regard, is much like the church in Sardis. *“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy”* (Rev 3:4). Do not suppose for one moment that everyone associated with lifeless religion is of one spirit with it. The Lord still has a people, and He is still calling to them.

**There are sensitive hearts and tender spirits that are being oppressed by Babylon. Many of them are not**

fully aware of their circumstances. But if they will listen, above the noise of Babylon, they will hear a voice from heaven, calling for them to come out of her. **“COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE.”**

There are sensitive hearts and tender spirits that are being oppressed by Babylon. Many of them are not fully aware of their circumstances. But if they will listen, above the noise of Babylon, they will hear a voice from heaven, calling for them to come out of her. **“COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE.”** Babylon is the place of cursing, not of blessing. It will be overthrown, while the church of the Firstborn will stand. The judgment of God will fall upon Babylon. The blessing of God is reserved for *“the holy city.”*

### **“COME OUT”**

This is a call to separate from the course of this world—particularly when it has a religious flavor. It is NOT a call to monasticism, or physical isolation—even though many have so interpreted it. God does not call us to be hermits in body, but *“strangers and pilgrims”* in heart and spirit. This is a call to not permit the world to corrupt our faith. It is a summons to keep our minds free from the contamination of this present evil world—particularly when it wears the clothing of religion. It is quite possible for this to require some form of outward movement, but it is really a matter of the heart.

### *“Turn Away”*

The Spirit is not tolerant of godless associations, especially when they are *Christian* ones. When speaking of *“perilous times”* that would arise in the latter times, the Spirit speaks with unusual clarity. First, He identifies such times with corrupt religion, not drunkenness, immorality, drugs, etc. In summary He says the times will be characterized by those *“having a form of godliness but denying its power”* (2 Tim 3:5a).

Note carefully, the Spirit is very specific about what type of defection this is.

He does not refer to false doctrine—although that is surely involved. The doctrine may appear to be sound. It may even be supported by a haberdashery of Scriptures. Such teachings as keeping the Sabbath day, eternal security, and justification by works, are presented with an assortment of Bible texts. Other teachings focus on family values, economic stability, and political involvements. They too are supported with sundry verses from the Bible.

As unsound as these teachings may be—and they are—they are not the focus of the Spirit’s warning. It is a “*form*” without accompanying “*power*” that is the sign of unusual spiritual degeneracy. When a person has the shell of the truth without its content, he is in a more dangerous position than having no form of the truth at all. In such a case, his religion puts him to sleep. A religion that puts you to sleep, and leaves you comfortable in this world is NOT from God—it is the devil’s own concoction! Historicity without Divine power is nothing more than a fable. God has no “*sound doctrine*” that is not immediately related to Divine power!

### **What Are We To Do?**

And what is to be our attitude toward such a phenomenon? Again, it is not possible to miss the Spirit’s intent unless our hearts are calloused. “*FROM SUCH TURN AWAY*” (2 Tim 3:5b). There are no other alternatives offered. It makes no difference how extensively men may reason on this, or how convincing their arguments, these words will stand the test of eternity. They will remain after heaven and earth have passed away. In the end, all who have contradicted them will be found liars, and God will be found true.

Others versions confirm the emphatic nature of these words. “*Avoid them!*” (NRSV). “*Avoid such men as these*” (NASB). “*Have nothing to do with them*” (NIV). “*Avoid such people*” (RSV). More literally, the words mean *turn yourself away from them* ! Do not allow them to influence you! Do not submit to their persuasive words! With an exertion of your will, separate yourself from the influence of powerless religion! This is done primarily in your heart. You may wonder about external involvements with such people. If your heart is repulsed by

powerless religion, you will not spend much time around it. Further, that is an area of your responsibility—to react correctly to the overtures of both Christ and Satan.

*“Touch Not the Unclean Thing”*

There is a sense in which the Lord’s reception of us is directly related to our separation from defiling things. It is written, *“As God has said: I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people. Therefore, Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty”* (2 Cor 6:16b-18).

This text focuses on idolatry—which is religious corruption. It does not deal directly with Babylon, as our text, but does deal with the principle of it. God calls upon His people to *“Come out”* from influences that defile and corrupt. Things that are *“unclean,”* or contaminate our spirits, are not to be *“touched.”* If it is something we have been saved *“from,”* we are to maintain our distance from it.

Like Israel was captivated by ancient Babylon, so the people of God have been captured by spiritual Babylon. That captivity, is not intended to be uninterrupted. There comes a time when the people of God must vacate the confines of lifeless religion.

The promise is unequivocal: *“And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters.”* Is there anyone foolish enough to believe God will maintain that identity if the individual refuses to *“Come out from among them?”* God NEVER pledges His fellowship with those refusing to cut the chord to the cursed order! Babylon, however, does not believe this. They allow worldly affiliations, while God does not! They do not call out for people to *“touch not the*

*unclean thing,*” but God does! Babylon teaches people they remain “*sons and daughters,*” even though their hearts are divided, and their affection neutralized by a love for the world and the things that are in it. But this is not true!

### **How Do We Come Out?**

And how does a person “*Come out from among them and be separate?*” This is a personal decision, and must be made in accordance with our faith and sensitivity—but it must be done. It means that we will not lend our influence to the perpetration of something God has condemned. The question Jehu put to king Jehosaphat is appropriate for our time. “*Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?*” Whatever you may choose to think about that question, here is what Jehu said to the king, who had done precisely what was posed in the question. “*Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you*” (2 Chron 19:2).

This does not exclude feeding our enemy or doing good unto all men (Rom 12:20; Gal 6:10). It DOES mean, however, that such ministrations are done at a distance, without becoming a part of the thing God has cursed. Our quest is to bring men higher, not to come lower.

God’s call has consistently been “*COME OUT.*” Abraham was called out (Gen 12:1-3). Lot was required to separate (Gen 19:22). Israel was admonished to separate, and not touch the unclean thing (Isa 52:11). When foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus told the people to get out of the city before it came down (Matt 24:16). The call to “*Come out!*” is a perfectly reasonable one. To refuse to hear it, is to refuse to hear Jesus, which makes grace inaccessible.

Israel was called to go forth from Babylon, and separate from the Chaldeans (Isa 48:20; Jer 51:6,45). The text in Revelation is couched in this language and circumstance. Like Israel was captivated by ancient Babylon, so the people of God have been captured by spiritual Babylon. That captivity, is not intended to be uninterrupted. There comes a time when the people of God must vacate the

confines of lifeless religion.

In our separation, we must “*Remember Lot’s wife*” (Lk 17:32). She came out of Sodom physically, but her heart remained in it. For that reason, she did not get to the place of safety. From the heavenly view, she really did not come out. The same was true of Israel, when they came out of Egypt. The hearts of many of them remained in Egypt, even though they had exited it bodily. Stephen said of them, “*And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt*” (Acts 7:39).

### **Not To Be Done Perfunctorily**

The Spirit is not calling people to a perfunctory separation from Babylon, but one of the heart. The call of the Lord to “*COME*” to Him, presumes we are leaving something (Matt 11:28; 22:4; Mk 8:34; 10:21; John 7:37). It infers a preoccupation with the Lord’s Christ, and a hindering influence in Babylon. This is not a call to mere formality.

Thus our text does not say “*LEAVE Babylon,*” but “*COME out of her.*” The idea is that Jesus is NOT in Babylon. It is therefore unreasonable for His people to be there. As with the church at Laodicea, He is on the outside of this the “*great city*” (Rev 3:20). His people are to leave Babylon in order to obtain His fellowship and direction. The only reason to leave a lifeless realm is to obtain life. The only reason to leave a powerless domain is that we might obtain power. **It is not possible to remain where Jesus is excluded, and still enjoy the benefits of His fellowship and blessing.**

### **Reformation Not Possible**

Throughout history, there have been noble efforts expended to reform a dead church. The intention was commendable, but the objective was impossible. Wherever a valley of dry bones is found, resuscitation is not the need, but resurrection—and there is a difference. New life must be given, not the restoration of the old life. You will recall that the Spirit of God breathed upon the valley of dry bones, bringing them to newness of life (Ezek 37). God did

not issue a revision of the Old Covenant, but brought in a new one, making the first “old” (Heb 8:13).

### **Not Just A Technical Point**

This may appear to be a technical point, but it is not. **The life of God does not die, and thus cannot be resuscitated.** There is a vast difference between “*transformation*” and “*reformation*.” Transformation presumes the need for new life. Reformation is a mere modification of something that exists.

When our Lord says , “*Come out of her My people,*” it is assumed that Babylon cannot be changed. That is why the summons is given to leave it. Babylon has been so corrupted by the world that it is no longer salvageable. God’s people must leave it, quite thinking like it, and cease from efforts to redirect it or reshape it.

The judgment of God against lifeless and powerless religion is determined. Like the fall of ancient Babylon, the fall of spiritual Babylon cannot be averted. As Jerusalem was judged for its rejection of Christ, so will the “*great city*” be judged for its refusal to walk in His life and power. Babylon cannot do anything to change this judgment—it has already gone to far.

Remember, we are speaking of a WAY of thinking more than an external organization or affiliation. It will not do simply to leave one church, so to speak, in favor of another, or to abandon one theological emphasis for another. The Lord is calling His people to abandon any worldly manner—to repudiate a religion that allows the world to remain in the central position.

**Sharing Her Sins and**

**Receiving Her Plagues**

What a solemn warning! “Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” The Lord has rejected Babylon, and determined its curse—but He does not desire to bring His people down with it. Unless they separate from the cursed thing, however, they will share in its fate! If Lot had not come out of Sodom, he would have died in the fiery judgment of it.

Not only do “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33), they make one subject to Divine judgment. If the “spot” of the world is found upon us, we will suffer the judgment leveled against it. No wonder James affirmed, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

It is for our protection that we come away from worldly principles, earthy thinking, and a life that is motivated by sight. Our senses must not be the directors of our religion, for God will not abide it. Nor, indeed, can human logic be accepted as the engine of thought. Appearance cannot become the essence of our religion. All of this is “Babylon the great.”

### **The Judgment Is Determined**

The judgment of God against lifeless and powerless religion is determined. Like the fall of ancient Babylon, the fall of spiritual Babylon cannot be averted. As Jerusalem was judged for its rejection of Christ, so will the “great city” be judged for its refusal to walk in His life and power. Babylon cannot do anything to change this judgment—it has already gone too far. The only hope is for God’s people to leave “the great city” in preference for Christ Jesus. He will strengthen them to make the move, undergirding them every step of the way.

## **HER SINS REACHED INTO HEAVEN**

*“For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her*

*iniquities.*” Again, the language is taken from Moses and the Prophets. This is a way of saying the time of judgment has come. It is also a way of saying the offenders have become so repulsive to God, He can no longer bear them. This is an aspect of the Lord that is unfamiliar to religious multitudes. They have been led to believe the longsuffering of God is endless. But they are wrong.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because their sins had become “*very grievous,*” coming up “*unto*” the Lord (Gen 18:20-21). Ezra fervently prayed for mercy from the Lord because he knew the “*trespass*” of Israel *had “grown up into the heavens”* (Ezra 9:6). The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh because “*their wickedness*” had “*come up before*” Him (Jonah 1:2). This is another way of saying the cup of iniquity has become full (Gen 15:16). There came a time when the people in a plain in the land of Shinar went too far. They aspired to build a tower that reached into heaven, making a name for themselves. They thus pushed God’s longsuffering to its limit, and He abruptly terminated their effort (Gen 11:1-8).

### **There Comes A Time**

There does come a time when the longsuffering of an infinite God comes to an end. **God is eternal, but His longsuffering is not!** The Divine tolerance of sin and sinners by no means suggests they are acceptable.

There does come a time when the longsuffering of an infinite God comes to an end. **God is eternal, but His longsuffering is not!** The Divine tolerance of sin and sinners by no means suggests they are acceptable. One aspect of the Lord’s longsuffering is seen in His desire that all come to repentance. As it is written, “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pet 3:9). But this is NOT case with spiritual Babylon.

A word most appropriate for this situation is found in Romans 9:22-23. *“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering **the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction** , and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory.”* The vessels of reference were not salvageable, yet were endured for the sake of *“the vessels of mercy.”* It is the same principle revealed in the parable of the tares of the field. The tares, if removed prematurely, would cause the destruction of some wheat. At some point, the wheat and the tares were indistinguishable. So it is with *“Babylon the great.”* There is a time when the people of God are scattered throughout the wicked city. But when the sin of Babylon reaches its fullness, and can no longer be endured by the Lord, her destruction will take place.

What, therefore, appears to be Divine toleration, is actually the filling of a cup of wrath by the unfaithful. The Lord is not kindly disposed toward Babylon at all, but only enduring her until her wicked ways reach their apex. This is precisely the circumstance Jesus described when He spoke of individuals who did not believe on Him. *“He who does not believe is condemned already . . . He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:18,36). By saying the wrath of God *“abides on him,”* the Lord means it hovers over the unbeliever like a storm cloud, ready to erupt at any moment. Some choose to identify that circumstance as God’s love for the individual. Scripture rather represents it as the Divine toleration of the person. It is a subduing of the Divine nature which is offended and grieved by the very person endured. This is the circumstance with Babylon.

### **The Language of Jeremiah**

The language of our text is couched in the language of the prophets. The prophesy of the fall of political Babylon is attended with language remarkably like that of our text. *“We would have healed Babylon, But she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies”* (Jer 51:9). The children of Israel were held captives in Babylon, yet their circumstances remained somewhat tolerable. That captivity was not like the one they experienced in Egypt. Here, they were told to pray

for the peace of the city in which they were held (Jer 29:7). The great prophet Daniel exercised remarkable influence during that captivity. Yet, with all of the prayers and influence, Babylon was not healed. It kept its gods, and maintained its godless ways.

Let it be clear, the failure of spiritual Babylon to be pleasing to God is not owing to a lack of exposure to truth. It is not because efforts have not been expended to change her, and infuse her with life. Countless multitudes of God's people cry out, "*We would have healed Babylon!*" The great Reformers would have healed her! Myriads within her institutional walls have sought her spiritual health. I doubt there has ever been a dead and lifeless church that has lacked a person burdened because of its condition. Both young and old, learned and unlearned, gifted and ungifted, have sought to heal Babylon. Yet it is as true with corrupt religion as it was with the corrupt government of Babylon of old: "*SHE IS NOT HEALED!*"

Now, after all of the effort spent on her healing, her judgment "*reaches to heaven, and is lifted up to the skies.*" Her wickedness is confirmed by her failure to respond to those who would have healed her. The concerned were serious and fervent in their efforts. Their labors were extensive and prolonged, yet yielded no essential change in the institution for which they were concerned. Now God calls His people out of her. Judgment time has come! It cannot be circumvented, and no further labors will be allowed within Babylon. The time of Divine forbearance has come to a close!

### **An Unknown Kingdom Trait**

This aspect of the Kingdom was affirmed by Jesus when He was among us. When He sent out the twelve he said, "*And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!*" (Matt 10:14). The same direction was given to the seventy. "*But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against*

*you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you. But I say to you that it will be more*” (Lk 10:10-12). I do not believe there is any word of Scripture that suggests this is now inappropriate.

Paul also followed this procedure. In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul reasoned extensively with the Jews of a local synagogue concerning Christ. When they rejected his words, Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly. *“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46). Later, when adversarial Jews stirred up devote women and the chief men

of the city against Paul and Barnabas, they were expelled from the city. They did not seek to return. Rather, it is written, *“they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium”* (Acts 13:51).

Satan has persuaded some that modifying their message, reducing its power, will somehow produce conversion among sinners. Thus we hear of *seeker-friendly* churches and services. Some are audacious enough to remove any obvious reference to Christ and salvation in order to avoid offending the ungodly—those who are themselves an offense to God. In so doing, they have only identified themselves with Babylon the great. No such procedure has ever been followed by those sent by God. Moses, the holy Prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the Apostles, are NEVER said to have adopted such a strategy. It is a human innovation.

Satan has persuaded some that modifying their message, reducing its power, will somehow produce conversion among sinners. Thus we hear of *seeker-friendly* churches and services. Some are audacious enough to remove any obvious reference to Christ and salvation in order to avoid offending the ungodly—those who are themselves an offense to God. In so doing, they have only identified themselves with Babylon the great.

It may be countered that Paul “*became all things to all men*” (1 Cor 9:22). In every case of record, however, this was done where the people already had a commitment to Christ, but were limited in their understanding. Paul shaved his head and took a temple vow to reach men who were already committed to the Lord, but lacked understanding (Acts 21:20-24). Neither Jesus nor Paul ever accommodated themselves to Pilate, Herod, or the Pharisees—even though they doubtless longed for their salvation.

### **Some Things Must Not Be Tolerated**

Where religious corruption and a lack of devotion exist, no accommodation is allowed. Moses did not do it. The prophets did not do it. John the Baptist did not do it. Jesus did not do it. The Apostles did not do it. And, we must not do it. Our hearts long for the enlightenment and healing of Babylon. We are not content with its lifeless institutionalism and spiritual pretension. Yet it remains true, and we must acknowledge it, “*she is not healed!*” She has not changed, and has not improved. She remains unfaithful and corrupt.

## **REPAY HER DOUBLE!**

*“Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.”* Were it not for the extended word of the Lord on this subject, it would be difficult, indeed, to remain on this theme. However, we are being exposed to the heart of the Lord, and we do well to seek grace to take hold of His message. Just as He has strong attractions to His people, He is repulsed by Babylon.

In keeping with the law of sowing and reaping, Babylon will reap a harvest that exceeds what she has sown. It will be in the precise measure of her corruption. Jesus spoke of this principle in Matthew 7:1. “*and with the measure you use, it will*

*be measured back to you.*” The allusion is to a device used to measure grain, or some other commodity—something like a scoop. Our text affirms what the Lord gives to Babylon will be *“as she herself has rendered”* (RSV). She was aggressive in her rejection of the truth—God will be aggressive in His rejection of her. She was assertive in her opposition of the saints, her enemies will be assertive in their opposition to her.

In her wickedness, Babylon actually determined her own judgment. She decided the measure and extent of her condemnation, and did so willingly and heartily. Precisely the same means of measure she used against the Lord’s people, He will use against her.

### **The Prophet’s Use of “Double”**

The use of the word *“double”* is taken from the prophets. It denotes an adequate and final measure. Isaiah used it in this manner. (Isa 40:2). *“For she has received from the Lord's hand **Double** for all her sins”* In this case, Israel had suffered enough, and was going to be reclaimed. In our text, the suffering is to come, and Babylon will not recover. In particular, Jeremiah employed this language in his prophecies of the overthrow of Babylon of old. *“And first I will repay **double** for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable idols”* (Jer 16:18). Taking hold of the reality of these words, Jeremiah prayed against Babylon, using the same language. *“Bring on them the day of doom, And destroy them with **double** destruction!”* (Jer 17:18).

This, then, is not a mathematical measure, but one of **justice** —Divine justice. Let it be clear, the mercy of God does not obliterate His justice. The fact that Jesus Christ has inducted an era of grace does not remove the *“day of wrath”* (Job 21:30; Rom 2:5). It is not pleasant to contemplate such things, but it is necessary to do so. God’s wrath will be poured out upon corrupt religion and the adulterous church. It will be in copious measures, and without mercy. That is why God’s people are called to *“Come out of her.”* It is for their own protection that they are summoned away from the cursed thing.

## SHE HAS GLORIFIED HERSELF

*“In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.”*

### Started at Laodicea

History confirms the professed church did not learn from the Laodicean situation. It did not *“hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Spiritual Babylon is nothing less than an extension of the devilish spirit that surfaced in the church at Laodicea.

The beginning of this prideful attitude was seen in the church in Laodicea. Thinking itself to be thoroughly adequate, that church said, *“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”* (Rev 3:17). It is not that this was the official statement of the Laodiceans—it is their perspective. Jesus was reading their hearts. This was apparently an opulent church, recognized as being large and flourishing—much like many mega-churches of our day. The glory she possessed, however, was from herself, not the Lord. Hers was not the glory of the day of Pentecost when 3,000 gladly received the Word, and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

Christ’s assessment of this church differed from its own evaluation. He said it was it was *“wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”* Thinking it had no need, this church actually had nothing, and needed everything. They were bereft of Divine benefits, and were surviving without heaven’s resources. Jesus gave them very pointed direction. *“Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep*

*the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see” (Rev 3:18).*

History confirms the professed church did not learn from the Laodicean situation. It did not *“hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Spiritual Babylon is nothing less than an extension of the devilish spirit that surfaced in the church at Laodicea.

### **The Spirit of the Evil One**

The spirit that characterizes Babylon is the very spirit of Satan. He is the first who sought to glorify himself. Of him, the Lord said, *“I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High”* (Isa 14:13-14). Although he was once *“the anointed cherub,”* the Lord said of the devil, *“Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor”* (Ezek 28:17).

This is the spirit that pervades spiritual Babylon. It exalts self at the expense of Christ’s glory. Its glory is in what it has done, not what the Lord has done. That is a sin of enormous magnitude, and will not long be tolerated by the Living God.

When the Gospel was first preached, the essential message was *“the wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11). The good news, or Gospel, is embodied in *“Jesus Christ, the Son of God”* (Mark 1:1). When it comes to accomplishments, the real church glories in the achievements of the Son of God.

But it is not so with Babylon. She *“glorified herself,”* in flagrant contradiction of the Divine mandate that *“no flesh should glory in His Presence”* (1 Cor 1:29). She spoke of herself, not her Lord, and sought her own glory instead that of the

One to Whom all glory is due. It is for this reason that judgment will come upon her.

**Babylon does not have a message that makes people conscious of eternity. That is not where its life is anchored, and therefore little is said about it. All of this is inspired by the devil.**

There is a cunning lure to this type of religion. Which of us has not felt its tug upon our hearts? It is a religion that *“takes pride in appearance, and not in heart”* (2 Cor 5:12). Those who live by faith *“look not at the things which are seen”* (2 Cor 4:18). It is not that they should not, but that they DO NOT! But it is NOT so with *“Babylon the great.”* Its strength is its appearance. Take that away, and she is unimpressive. In this, she differs radically from the Lord Jesus. Of Him it is written, *“He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him”* (Isa 53:2-3). This is how the world saw Jesus. He did not fit into its mold, or reflect its values.

But it is not so with Babylon. She fits into the world. Her glorying, or boasting, is after the worldly manner. Her ministers are recognized by the world. Her music is popular with the world. Her institutional approach to things is perceived as good, and her boastful manners are not at all offensive to *“the enemies of the cross of Christ”* (Phil 3:18).

### **Godless Confidence**

Flesh can produce a confidence that causes both individual and institution to imagine they are invincible. Babylon says, *“A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see.”* Like Nineveh of old, Babylon reasons, *“I am and there is none else”*

(Zeph 2:15). Like Jericho, it trusts in its walls—the work of its own hand. Its own achievements are the source of its confidence. The Divine observation is arresting, “*she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously.*” Now, her destruction will be in the same measure—she gave herself a lot of glory, now God will pour a lot of judgment upon her.

## THE INCARNATION OF PRIDE

Babylon is nothing less than the incarnation of pride. It is pride brought to its fulness: flesh glorying in religious garb.

God has pledged He will break all pride (Lev 26:19; Jer 23:9). Because of pride, men will NOT seek after God, excluding Him even from their thoughts (Psa 10:4). The fear of the Lord will now allow for pride. It even constrains the individual to hate it (Prov 8:13). With pride comes shame and disgrace (Prov 11:2), as well as contention and strife (Prov 13:10).

There is a deception in pride that is lethal, setting the Almighty against those possessing it. The Prophet Obadiah spoke with great clarity on this matter. “*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the LORD*” (Obad 3-4).

This is precisely what we are seeing in the Revelation—the casting down of a religious institution driven and fed by pride. Such deceiving religion leads people to ignore realities like the day of judgment, accountability to God, and the coming of the Lord. That is why those subjects are rarely mentioned within Babylon’s walls. It is not that men have merely forgotten about those facts. They simply have no place in their scheme of religion, and that is why they do not speak of them. They really have no relevance to the institutional program, and are therefore placed on the shelf for theological relics—something from a bygone day. Babylon does not have a message that makes people conscious of

eternity. That is not where its life is anchored, and therefore little is said about it. All of this is inspired by the devil.

### **The Lure of Canaan**

When the Lord delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, He held out more than simply being free from enslavement. They left Egypt to inhabit Canaan, “*a land flowing with milk and honey*”. Repeatedly, this land was held out as an incentive to the ancient people (Ex 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:15; 27:3; 31:20; Josh 5:6). Godly Joseph, in anticipation of a deliverance that would come long after he had died said, “*God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence*” (Gen 50:25).

### **Godly People Wait Expectantly**

Godly men like Joshua and Caleb patiently waited for the promised land, even if their unbelieving brethren die in the wilderness (Num 14:30,38; 26:65; 32:11-12; Josh 14:6,13). The contemplation of the promised land sustained those saints, enabling them to keep believing, and continue going while others failed. Their expectation enabled them to survive.

Spiritual Babylon has no such incentives. It does not hold “*the world to come*” before the people, because it is at home in “*this present evil world.*” This world is where it feels at home, and this world is where it belongs. That is what makes it “*Babylon.*”

Wherever an overestimation of the flesh exists and is fostered in the name of Christ, there you have “*Babylon the great.*” When men glory in their own achievements, and are made confident by their own religious accomplishments, Babylon is in control. When men insist on being identified as “*Christian,*” yet entertain no prevailing interest in eternal things, the “*great harlot*” is dominating. Where a reigning active Christ is irrelevant, yet the shell of religion remains, you have “*the great city.*” It is preeminently a way of thinking, but does reveal

itself through institutionalism. It allows the individual to remain a part of the world order, while at the same time wearing the name of Jesus. This is iniquity in its worst and most subtle form. It lulls men into “*the sleep of death*” (Psa 13:3), and deceives like Delilah did Samson.

## BABYLON FALLS QUICKLY

This is language that depicts a sudden and overwhelming reversal. One day the adversary dominates, the next day he is gone. One day the saints are oppressed, the next day their oppressor is gone.

“Therefore her plagues will come *in one day*; *death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.*” It will not take Babylon long to fall. Once the judgment of God is leveled against something, its demise is immediate. The entire population of the world, saving Noah and his family, was obliterated in less than 150 days (Gen 7:17-24). The remarkable unity of the people devoted to building the tower of Babel was instantly destroyed, and the building project abandoned (Gen 11:8). Sodom and Gomorrah, and the productive cities of the plain were utterly destroyed in a single day (Gen 19:25,28-29). Egypt’s entire army was eradicated in the brief time it took the waters of the Red Sea to return to their normal course (Ex 14:28). Sennacherib’s army of 185,000 was annihilated in a single night (2 Kgs 19:35). The Lord can, indeed, bring an abrupt conclusion to evil that has dominated for centuries!

### Scriptural Language

Again, this type of language was introduced by the prophets. It speaks of Divine judgment that is certain, and will be thoroughly effective. Isaiah said,

*“But these two things shall come to you In a moment, **in one day** : The loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness Because of the multitude of your sorceries, For the great abundance of your enchantments” (Isa 47:9). In one judgment against Judah, “Pekah the son of Remaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah **in one day** , all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers” (2 Chron 28:6).*

This is the manner in which God spoke of the fall of Babylon of old. *“Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is **suddenly fallen** and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed” (Jer 51:7-8).*

This is language that depicts a sudden and overwhelming reversal. One day the adversary dominates, the next day he is gone. One day the saints are oppressed, the next day their oppressor is gone.

### **Appropriate Judgment**

The language is vivid, and no doubt offensive to the flesh. Those who insist on maintaining an accommodating view of God that makes no allowance for wrath, will be repulsed by these words. They are not intended to be crude, but reflective of the seriousness of offending God Almighty. *“Therefore her plagues will come in one day; death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire.”* Four judgments are mentioned, each of them appropriate for the situation.

DEATH, because she scorned the very idea of being a widow: *“I sit as queen, and am no widow.”* MOURNING, because she reveled in her spiritual decadence and affirmed she would *“not see sorrow.”* FAMINE, because *“glorified herself and lived luxuriously.”* She will also be UTTERLY BURNED WITH FIRE because of her fornication. This was the judgment against the daughter of any priest who played the harlot. As it is written, *“The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself*

*by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire” (Lev 21:9).*

### **There Is A Reason**

In my judgment, the reason for this graphic language is to confirm the wickedness of a religion of form without power. It also verifies that such has NOT gone unnoticed by the Lord of glory. Even though such lifelessness flourishes in the religious world, and men tend to overlook it, Divine judgment has been pronounced against it. The judgment is not casual or ordinary.

## **CONCLUSION**

**The best way for the saints to avoid the influence and ensnarement of Babylon is to develop an aversion for this present evil world. It is to press close to the Savior, cultivate a love and appetite for the truth, and set their affection on things above.**

Only those who have in some way been oppressed by “*Babylon the great*” will derive comfort from this message. To others, swept up in the current or popular religion, the whole message is confusing and uninteresting. But for believers that are “*companions in tribulation,*” there is a comforting note in this communication. It is a sweet sound to the souls under the altar, and to those who have been rejected by religion because of their faith in and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Their joy is not in their personal vindication, but in the triumph of Christ and His truth.

When we read “*Babylon is fallen, is fallen,*” we are not reading of something momentary. It is not a fall like that of the devil and his angels, who continue to

harass the saints. Nor, indeed, is it a fall like the reprobate, who leave the faith, yet corrupt the earth with their presence. This is a fall like that which the whole cursed order will experience. Isaiah referred to this type of fall in his book. *“The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, And shall totter like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, And it will fall, and not rise again”* (Isa 24:20).

This is the type of all that has been heralded—a final demise and absolute removal from any kind of fleshly prominence. It will be removed from the religious arena like the heathen nations were removed from Canaan. It will be judged before the sight of others like the cities of the plain were removed in the *“vengeance of eternal life”* (Jude 7).

The reason for this judgment ought to be clear. Babylon the great—corrupt and powerless religion—has defied the Living God. With purpose and consistency, it has rejected the Person and agenda of the reigning Christ. Not content with that rejection, it has concocted dogmas that appear to justify its lifelessness. It has also adopted a program that does not require Divine power. It can run on human energy and ingenuity alone.

Spiritual Babylon is to the real church like Korah was to Moses. This rebel, joining with other rebellious spirits, *“rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’”* (Num 16:2-3). They were an impressive assembly, indeed. While appearing to be influential for a brief period, the Lord ultimately judged Korah and those with him. The earth, as though itself siding against these insurrectionists, *“opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly”* (Num 16:32-33).

Thus Babylon the great, the great harlot, has risen to contest the reign of Jesus. It is driven by the devil, and is more a frame of mind than an identifiable institution. There is no town too small for its influence, and no city too large for it to dominate.

No person is excluded from its influence. It pervades both government and business, and has a carnal beauty about it. It can operate in the country and in the city. It can compel an individual or an institution. It is a dreadful attempt to combine both curse and blessing, and temporal and eternal. It is lifeless, and therefore powerless to effect any change for good. It cannot bring a single person to God, or produce a solitary spiritual thought. It is utterly impotent spiritually.

The best way for the saints to avoid the influence and ensnarement of Babylon is to develop an aversion for this present evil world. It is to press close to the Savior, cultivate a love and appetite for the truth, and set their affection on things above. In doing this, they will rob Babylon of its power against them. The Lord Jesus will side with such, empowering them to stand against the most subtle approaches of the adversary. Thus, they will be oriented for glory, and prepared for the fall of all that is false. When Satan's fabrication falls, they will lose nothing.

### **The Lord Has Much to Offer**

All of this is presented against the backdrop of a "*great salvation*." That salvation has been purchased at great cost, and hammered out in the crucible of unspeakable suffering. It is offered without any Divine reluctance to "*whosoever will*." No individual or congregation is powerless because of a deficiency in Christ's work. Spiritual lifelessness in any degree, whether in a person or an institution, cannot be explained satisfactorily. Only unbelief and delusion can produce an unacceptable state.

Babylon has arisen because of an unfocused and unfaithful church. It is a strong

delusion, sent by God, because of obstinance—a refusal to receive the love of the truth. As in other curses, countless innocent people have suffered in the wake of this delusion. Many of the saints have been opposed, and even killed, by false religion. Countless others have walked through life with heavy hearts, watering their beds with their tears, because of the corruption of *the church* . This is not something to be taken lightly, or treated as though it has little or no relevance.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem that was only briefly exposed to His presence. What must be His reaction toward a decadent church that is living in the midst of the day of salvation? How must holy angels view the development of spiritual corruption in a “day” when the grace of God has been poured out copiously, and the Holy Spirit lavished upon the people of God. How can men explain a commitment to spiritual deadness when the well of the water of life is so readily accessible? With remission, empowerment, Divine fellowship, and continual access to God available, why do religious men court the world? In a day when “*all are taught by God,*” what would provoke those so sorely needing such instruction to seek wisdom from the world?

“*Babylon the great*” is responsible for the promotion of form without power, and having a name that one is alive, but actually being dead. It moves men to settle down in the very realm that has been cursed. It advances a form of religion that ignores the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of Christ, and the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Do not marvel at such an extensive commentary on the fall of Babylon the great! It is a monstrosity on the landscape of life that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. It is a system of pretension that makes a profession, but has no possession. It can only flourish where faith is suppressed and the love of the truth refused.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 33

## THE WORLD LAMENTATIONS

"The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! 'For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.' Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her! Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth." (Rev 18:9-24, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The pulse of Divine life is found throughout this marvelous book. It comes from God, and contains the purpose of God. It was given through Christ, and reflects "*the mind of Christ.*" It was given through an angel, and contains remarkable angelic activities and perceptions. The Holy Spirit speaks through its message, and it contains "*the mind of the Spirit.*" **This is a heavenly perspective of things occurring in this world.** They are things that appear chaotic and out of control, yet are strictly managed by the King of kings and Lord of lords. The church judged successful by worldly standards is pronounced "*dead*" by Jesus. The highly structured governments so highly revered by men are called a "*beast*" by

the Lord of glory. The church that navigates will within the world order, and is approved by it, is called "*the great harlot*" by the One Who purchased the church, and gave Himself for it. Saints who were killed because of their testimony, and left the world in seeming shame, are seen alive and well, awaiting the vindication of their blood.

This is a book that leaves no question about the destiny of the devil, worldly government, or the false church. There is no doubt about what will happen to those who reject Christ, deny His Gospel, and oppose His people. On the other hand, the outcome of Christ's glorious reign is declared with certainty. He will triumph over all of His enemies, and those who align themselves with Him will share in that triumph. Those who wear the name of Jesus will be viewed with the strictest attention—not to see if they have flaws, but to see if their hearts are involved in their profession.

The world order has been summarily rejected. Not a single fragment of it will ultimately survive. Its wisdom will fail, together with its purpose and treasures. All who have refused to come away from it will perish, and those who have, in faith, separated from it, will be forever with the Lord. The church that has joined itself to this world will share in its determined fate. It is not possible for those in love with this world to avoid this judgment. That is the resounding message of this segment of Revelation.

It is a source of great sorrow to me that this perception is so uncommon in our time. The Western church, where affluence and peace currently are prospering, is particularly at fault here. Its ministers are often too worldly in their thinking to be blessed by the Lord. The programs that are offered are too close to the cursed order, and deal too little with eternal matters. With everything from weight-loss clinics to senior citizen outings, and entertainment to sporting events, the modern church appears to have little to prepare people for the end of the world and the judgment of God.

While this is a subject that is not palatable, it is the prevalent theme throughout the book of Revelation. It is a word that is essential to believers maintaining an aggressive faith. Many a soul has nearly despaired because of the stultifying affects of spiritual Babylon. Were it not for corrupt Christendom, there would have been far less tears shed by the righteous. The bulk of their opposition has

come from those wearing the name of Christ.

Many a soul has nearly despaired because of the stultifying affects of spiritual Babylon. Were it not for corrupt Christendom, there would have been far less tears shed by the righteous. The bulk of their opposition has come from those wearing the name of Christ.

However, Jesus assures us this is only a temporary situation. Our Lord will put all enemies under His feet. The truth will triumph gloriously. The saints will be publically exonerated and vindicated.

### **The Evil Conglomerate**

The attempt to merge religion and the world is the devil's brain child. It is wicked beyond imagination, and cannot survive the judgment of the Lord. "*True religion*" is heavenly life embraced by mortals. It is "*the mind of Christ*" shared by those who have been plucked from the burning. Rather than allowing for unity with the world order, it involves extrication from it.

Those who are in Christ Jesus are called to be "*partakers of the Divine Nature*" through God's exceeding "*great and precious promises*" (2 Pet 1:4). The "*fashion of this world,*" because it is passing away, (1 Cor 7:31) is in sharp conflict with both the promises of God and the Divine Nature in which we participate. The mind at home in, and nurtured by, the world is the "*fleshly mind*" (Col 2:18), or "*carnal mind*" (Rom 8:7). It is "*hostile*" to God, and is not subject to His Law (Rom 8:7). To attempt to merge these two minds is not only an exercise in futility, it is war against God.

Yet this is precisely what spiritual Babylon has done—attempted to mingle the

flesh and the Spirit. It is aggressive in its attempt to bring harmony between the mind of the flesh and “*the mind of the Spirit.*” It thinks nothing of trying to combine the world’s concept of man with God’s revelation of him. It undertakes to fuse the world’s view of organization with the “*unity of the Spirit.*” In doing this, Babylon has judged itself unworthy of eternal life. It has revealed its discontent with the Divine way of doing things. The extraordinary prevalence of this kind of thinking in *church* is mind boggling. One can scarcely find a place where these things are not accepted without reservation. In fact, the seeming success of the modern church is largely owing to its alliance with the world.

Now, the Spirit will unveil the response of the world to the Lord’s judgment of Babylon. It weeps and laments as the survivor of an unholy marriage. Sorrow grips the heart of the unregenerate when false religion crumbles to the ground. It has made the world feel comfortable in its sin, and has been the occasion of ungodly gain. It did not weep when the life of Jesus was taken, but how it will weep when Satan’s fabrication of the church—that great harlot—is taken!

## THE KINGS OF THE EARTH WEEP AND LAMENT

***“The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her . . .”*** We must remember, “*the kings of the earth*” are friends to neither Jesus nor His people. Nine times they are mentioned in this book. Jesus is said to be Prince over them (1:5). They cannot abide the coming of the Lord, and will seek to hide from Him (6:15). They are gathered together by demons, to attempt to do battle against God Almighty (16:14; 19:19). They commit fornication with the false church, giving to her what belongs to God alone (17:1-2; 18:3,9). False religion has unduly influenced them (17:18). In the end, they will have to lay all of the glory at the feet of Jesus (21:23-24).

These “*kings*” had no identity with the Lamb of God. They did not bow their knees to Him, nor call upon His Name. They were His enemies. When Jesus was enfleshed amongst us, these kings “*set themselves against*” Him (Psa 2:2; Acts 4:26). The Lord is determined to “*cut off*” their spirit, rendering them powerless and without influence (Psa 76:12). They will be “*punished*” by the Lord for their refusal to honor Him (Isa 24:21).

The world did NOT lament when Jesus died. Neither Herod nor Pilate led a lamentation for the Son of God.

The “*kings of the earth*” were not sorrowful when Peter and John were imprisoned, when Stephen was martyred, or when John was exiled on Patmos. All who were joined to the world order “*hated*” Jesus because He testified that “*its works were evil*”

These very kings, however, had no difficulty embracing the false church–corrupt religion. They would have none of God, but committed fornication with the “*great harlot*.” It was not a passing association they had with Satan’s fabrication. Our text says they “*lived luxuriously with her*.” They poured their affection out on her, and “*shared her luxury*” (NIV). Nothing about her was too abrasive to discourage such affection. Her message did not grate against their hearts, or chaff against their conscience. Thus, the most influential of the world feels perfectly at ease with the worst of religion. Keep in mind, the real people of God are the dwelling place for God (1 Cor 3:16-17). Spiritual Babylon, or the corrupt church, is the dwelling place of demons and foul spirits (Rev 18:2).

There are at least three conditions that allows “*the kings of the earth*” to commit fornication with the “*great harlot*.” They are a recurring theme throughout this book, and are worthy of notation.

- **A spirit of alienation from God, and comfortable accord with the world order is found throughout Babylon.**
- **The exaltation of flesh and self over the Son of God is prevalent in the corrupt church.**
- **Things that God cannot abide are tolerated within false religion. These range from unacceptable thinking to indulgence in pride and gross immorality.**

Were it not for these conditions, “*the kings of the earth*” could not cohabit with

religion. A church that seeks affinity with the world must move away from the Lord, reject His power, and be ruled by the temporal order. It is not possible to be received by the world without doing these things.

### **Weeping At A Distance**

*“ . . . will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment . . . ”* When the two witnesses were slain, the world *“rejoiced,” “made merry,”* and *“sent gifts to one another”* (11:10). When the *“chief priests”* heard Judas would betray the Lord Jesus, *“they were glad, and promised to give him money”* (Mk 14:11). When the Gentiles were given an opportunity to do what they wanted to Jesus, they *“mocked,” “scourged,”* and *“crucified”* Him (Matt 20:19).

The world did NOT lament when Jesus died. Neither Herod nor Pilate led a lamentation for the Son of God. The *“kings of the earth”* were not sorrowful when Peter and John were imprisoned, when Stephen was martyred, or when John was exiled on Patmos. All who were joined to the world order *“hated”* Jesus because He testified that *“its works were evil”* (John 7:7). When the *“Spirit of truth”* came into then world, the world could not receive Him. It did not see Him, know Him, or countenance His indispensable influence (John 14:17).

How different the world’s reaction to Babylon the great! When she falls, the kings of the earth *“will weep and lament for her.”* They imagined themselves advantaged by her, although they hated the Lord’s Christ. They were glad to see Jesus go, but they were sad when Babylon was brought down.

Mark it well, Babylon had seduced men from faithfulness to God. It had provided a religion that allowed people to remain a part of the cursed order, thereby making them comfortable in their sin. That is why Christ’s enemies *“weep and lament for her.”*

They seem to sense Babylon cannot recover. They see her overthrow is thorough and irreversible –*“they see the smoke of her burning.”* Indeed, there is coming a time when Babylon, like Sodom, will be gone forever!

Our text indicates the “*kings of the earth*” will see this demise before the end of time. **Babylon is the chief kingdom that will be ground to powder by the Kingdom of God** (Dan 2:44). Ancient Babylon was great. The Medio-Persian empire was impressive. The Grecian domain was significant. The Roman empire was glorious and lengthy But they were all footmen next to Babylon the great! More souls will be cast into the lake of fire because of delusion, than because of the pressure of persecution, or the legislation of threatening laws.

“ . . . saying, '*Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come!*'” Keep in mind, from the heavenly perspective, Babylon was neither “*great*” nor “*mighty*.” That is an earthly perspective of this monstrosity. We know this is the case because it fell “*in one hour*.” Neither its seeming greatness nor might could avert Divine judgment!

What a sense of loss there will be among Christ’s enemies: “*Alas, alas!*” Three times in this chapter this lament is heard. **The kings of the earth cry out**, “*Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city ! For in one hour your judgment has come*” (v 10). **The merchants of the earth shout**, “*Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing*” (v 16). **Every shipmaster, sailor, and sea-trader lamented** , “*Alas, alas, that great city , in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate*” (v 19). See how grief stricken is the world!

The world, that very rarely sees anything the same, all behold the fall of Babylon the same. The kings saw her as a “*mighty city*” whose “*judgment*” came in “*one hour*.” The earth’s merchants saw her as a “*great city*” which “*came to nothing*.” Those who used the sea saw her as a “*great city*” who “*is made desolate*.” They all knew she would never rise again, and how they missed her.

The kings beheld the smoke of her ruin from “*afar off*” because they knew nothing could be done for her. They did not come to her aid, for her overthrow was so apparent they knew any such effort would be futile. They look on from a distance like Lot watched Sodom go up in flame. How powerless the world becomes when the hand of Divine judgment falls! Who is able to resist the Lod?

## THE MERCHANTS OF THE EARTH WILL AND MOURN

It is as though the demise of spiritual Babylon devastates earthly traffic like her rise brought a sudden surge to it. These merchants had profited from religion—false religion. Their coffers had become fat because of the merger of religion with the world.

“And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys *their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men* .” Here is a most telling remark. The “*merchants of the earth*” do not lament because they can no longer buy from Babylon, but because no one any longer buys from them. It is as though the demise of spiritual Babylon devastates earthly traffic like her rise brought a sudden surge to it. These merchants had profited from religion—false religion. Their coffers had become fat because of the merger of religion with the world.

The listing of merchandise is a telling one. With one exception, everything is temporal. With that single deviation, everything has to do with this world. You must be able to see the ungodly merger yielded no advantage for souls in quest of eternity. The world dominated this alliance. That is the consistent result of attempts to placate and accommodate the world. It never yields godly results. The world contaminates everything and anything it touches.

There are no benefits for the soul listed here. Rather, souls are exploited, sold, and merchandised. The closer the church gets to the world, the fewer benefits there are for the soul. The words of Micah are appropriate here. “*Arise and depart, For this is not your rest; Because it is defiled, it shall destroy, Yes, with utter destruction*” (Mic 2:10). Those professing the Lord must take seriously any effort of religion to appease the world, appeal to its desires, or merge with it.

There is a full representation of commerce here. Every conceivable area of merchandising is mentioned.

- **VEGETABLE:** wood, cinnamon, fine flour, wheat.
- **MINERAL:** Gold, silver, precious stones, brass, iron, marble.
- **ANIMAL:** beasts, sheep, horses, ivory.
- **PERSONAL ADORNMENT:** Pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet.
- **FURNITURE:** Vessels of wood, brass, iron, marble.
- **SENSUAL GRATIFICATION:** odors, ointments, frankincense.
- **FOOD:** wine, oil, fine flour, wheat.
- **SOCIAL INFLUENCES:** slaves, souls of men.
- **THINGS IN THEIR RAW AND UNREFINED STATE:** Gold, silver, beasts, sheep, pearls.
- **THINGS IN A REFINED STATE:** precious stones, fine flour, linen, purple, silk, scarlet, vessels, chariots.

### **WHY SUCH A DESCRIPTION?**

Why is such a description given? This is a symbolic way of saying Babylon is firmly rooted in “*this present evil world.*” What she has to offer pertains to THIS world, and NOT the “*world to come.*” This is where she dwells, and this is where she promotes commerce. Her influence has permeated into every facet of this world, and every aspect of this world has contaminated her.

*Of the world's order.* Babylon's wares are of the same order as herself. They are merely outward, external, temporal, and even gaudy. Note her ostentatious appearance: “*And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations*” (Rev 17:4).

**External Worth.** She majors in external values, and thus the merchants of the earth can, through her, traffic in gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, and materials.

**Notable Appearance.** As described, Babylon makes a notable appearance, and thus the merchants of the earth, as they profit from her, deal in vessels of wood, brass, iron, and marble.

**Pleasant and Attractive.** To the world, there is something pleasant and attractive about her. How appropriate that she is said to profit the earth's merchants through handling cinnamon, odors, ointments, and frankincense.

**The Best of Earth.** As the refined diet of Babylon of old, spiritual Babylon offers the best of this world's victuals. Thus, the world's retailers are said to deal with wine, oil, fine flour, and wheat.

**Extensive Influence.** The influence wrought by false religion is remarkable. This is evidenced by reference to the merchants dealing with beasts, sheep, horses, and chariots. Every avenue of life has been infected by false religion.

### THE MOST HEINOUS THING

There is something in this text that is more heinous than everything thus mentioned. It is spiritually barbaric and coarse. Not only did Babylon and the merchants of the earth deal with things, they also dealt with "*the souls of men.*" That is the final thing mentioned in the extensive list ". . . *and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men*" (18:13).

Babylon USES men for her advantage, rather than seeking to benefit them. Like the false prophets of old, her leaders "*fed themselves, and fed not my flock*" (Ezek 34:8). In this, Babylon stands in stark contrast to the Lord of glory! Jesus came to "*seek and save that which was lost*" (Lk 19:10). He spoke of harvesting people—reaping them for God—not selling them (Matt 9:37; Lk 10:2). Babylon, however, uses people to advance her own cause, and barter with them for the furtherance of her own objectives. She has joined with the "*merchants of the earth*" in the

promotion of “*merchandise of gold, silver, and precious stones . . . and slaves and souls of men.*”

Whereas those who serve the Lord Jesus are “*kings and priests*” (Rev 1:5-6), those who serve Babylon are “*slaves.*” They either serve Babylon’s purpose, or are placed on the selling block, to be dispensed as mere chattel. Many a tender and sensitive soul has been dashed upon the rocks of lifeless Christian institutionalism. Others have felt they were being used without ever receiving anything from the organization that could transfer to “*the world to come.*”

God sends shepherd to make His people great. He provides for them to be equipped to do every good work, and to have utility in His glorious Kingdom (Eph 4:11-16). Such shepherds have no odors to sell. They do not offer silver or gold or flashy appearances. They cannot stock your barn with sheep and horses. They can, however, assist you in laying up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt. How the true church differs from Babylon the great—Satan’s great delusion!

Let us have done with lifeless religion and powerless profession! It is too much like the world, and the world is comfortable with it. With one mind and soul, let us seek the things that are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-3). We will find that very quest will put a distance between ourselves and Babylon. The merchants of the earth cannot capitalize on real spiritual life. Wherever the truth of the Gospel is found, wicked men are deprived.

## UTTER FRUSTRATION

***“The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.”*** Here is a vivid portrayal of the utter futility of “*a form of godliness that denies the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:5). Here is a picture of a system that cultured lust—ungodly lust. It developed and catered to an appetite for things that will pass away. And a voracious appetite it is! The things desired are not what is offered to fallen humanity through the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not eternal—not “*the things of the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:14). They are not “*the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*” (Col 3:1). Rather, they

are things that are tied to the temporal order, and are destined to pass away with it.

There is a staggering amount of religion that is of this order. Power, fame, wealth, success, security, recognition—they are all part of Satan’s arsenal. He wraps them with religion and leads men to want them. Their soul “*longs for*” these temporal things, and their religion cultures the longing.

The phrase “*your soul longed for,*” or “*thy soul lusted after,*” describes a consuming, not a fleeting, desire. Appetites are cultured and geared for things that will pass away—and all in the name of religion. **Babylon appeals to the unregenerate heart.** It is the religion of the flesh, and caters to its appetites. In a veiled form, it offers things the fallen nature craves, while rubbing a religious salve upon the conscience to remove any sense of impropriety. Its offerings range from close human relationships, to a stable and profitable career. Babylon will give you the kind of scholarship and music that is unoffensive to the flesh, yet robs the soul of spiritual sensitivity. Such accommodations are an indication of its wickedness.

But no matter how strongly the soul craves the things Babylon offers, and regardless of the abundance of those things, they WILL pass away. They are not suited for the spirit of man. They cannot transfer to the world to come. They cannot remain when the glory of the Lord is revealed. How dreadful the words: “*And the fruits of the desire of thy soul did go away from thee, and all things--the dainty and the bright--did go away from thee, and no more at all mayest thou find them*” (Young’s Literal Translation).

### A Consistent Representation

The “*new man*” finds no satisfaction in the its meager offerings. Every honest heart knows this to be the case. If it is not known cognitively, or through the reasoning processes, it is known intuitively or

instinctively. Believers may not always be able to put their finger on the fatal flaw of Babylon, but they sense it is there. They know their souls are not being fed, and their hearts are not satisfied.

While it is not common to hear or think of such things, we must discipline ourselves to do so. Ponder the tragedy of culturing your soul to crave things that cannot last—of devoting your life to a quest for things that are transitory. Remember, man is made in the image of God. The “*great salvation*” of God is calculated to prepare men for eternity. Everything about that salvation accentuates things that are forever. The salvation itself is “*eternal*,” bringing “*eternal life*” (Heb 5:9; 1 John 2:25). We are promised an “*eternal weight of glory*,” and are admonished to look intently upon unseen things that are “*eternal*” (2 Cor 4:17-18). We are told of an “*eternal purpose*,” “*eternal glory*,” “*eternal redemption*,” and an “*eternal inheritance*” (Eph 3:11; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 9:12,15). With unwavering consistency, we are exhorted to seek things that “*are above*” (Col 1:1-3). The promise of ultimate satisfaction is given ONLY to those who “*hunger and thirst after righteousness*” (Matt 5:6). Our first and foremost quest is to be “*the Kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matt 6:33). There is absolutely no ambiguity or lack of clarity in God’s Word about this—none at all.

With great solemnity believers are cautioned, “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is NOT in him*” (1 John 2:15). It can be said of Babylon, “*They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them*” (1 John 4:5). Instead of assisting people to overcome the world, which is the assignment and work of faith, 1 John 5:4), Babylon knits its constituents to the world. It deliberately ignores the fact that Jesus chooses us “*out of the world*” (John 15:19).

Yet, in spite of this deluge of Divine direction, Satan has deceived multitudes into seeking what can be seen, and will ultimately be destroyed. Were you to remove what is fleshly and of this world from the average mega-church, you would have very little, if anything, remaining. Its strength is its carnality (if that can be called strength).

What Babylon offers cannot even be desired by the “*new heart*.” The “*new man*”

finds no satisfaction in the its meager offerings. Every honest heart knows this to be the case. If it is not known cognitively, or through the reasoning processes, it is known intuitively or instinctively. Believers may not always be able to put their finger on the fatal flaw of Babylon, but they sense it is there. They know their souls are not being fed, and their hearts are not satisfied.

### **Found No More at All**

Sometimes what we long for is taken from us, only to be restored later. That is the way it is with joy and strength: sometimes they leave us for a season. How precious it is when they return. The “*joy of salvation*” can be restored (Psa 51:12), and the “*health*” of our countenance can return (Psa 42:11).

But this is not the case with the situation before us. Not only are the things longed for removed, they will never again be enjoyed. That is a picture of utter frustration! To contemplate spending ones life nurturing a desire that will be kept but never satisfied is staggering! Yet, that is precisely the case with the adherents of Babylon. “*And the fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will **no longer find them***” (NASB). The merger of the church with the world will yield an empty cupboard!

The removal of what was desired did NOT take away the desire also! The hunger remained, but the source of gratification passed away. Ultimately, this will be realized by those who are cast into hell. “*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where **their worm dieth not**, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:44-48).

The phrase “*their worm dieth not*” is taken from the prophet Isaiah (Isa 66:24). It depicts an aspect of punishment that is most dreadful. This is not a reference to a literal worm or maggot that feeds upon the dead. Rather, it portrays a gnawing or goading conscience that remains without consuming. Even the English definition of the word includes, “something that torments or devours within” (**Miriam-Webster Dictionary**) . The torment is generated because what is desired cannot be appropriated. Notwithstanding the inability to meet the desire, it continues to intensify and grow. What a dreadful circumstance!

Thus Babylon has promoted desires that cannot ultimately be satisfied. At the very best, they yield only “*pleasures . . . for a season*” (Heb 11:25). The “*fashion of this world passes away*” (1 Cor 7:31), and therefore can yield nothing permanent or eternal. Its well eventually runs dry, and its pleasures finally cease to exist. Yet the heart that is set upon appropriating these fleeting things will continue to long for them, even after they are gone.

### **In the End**

In the end, the desires of the heart will be locked in place, with no possibility of reversal. Those who fill their hearts with the things of this world, religious or not, will find themselves in the most grievous of circumstances. James put it this way: “*You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter*” (James 5:5). But for those who have developed a hunger and thirst for righteousness, the time of satisfaction will come. In the glory, we will occupy a realm replete and brimming with all of the things we desire. What blessedness will belong to those who have prepared for the absence of temporal things! Eternity will yield a large harvest to those who have prepared for it. Take seriously the admonition to seek the things that are above!

Prepare, child of God, Prepare! Do not allow yourself to be joined to something that is passing away! Stand aloof from what is temporal, particularly if it is religious. A religion that is of this world will eventually lead to absolute and utter frustration. Such woes will begin here, and culminate there.

## **THEY STAND AT A DISTANCE**

### **Merchants of These things**

*“The merchants of these things . . .”*

The first reference is to “*the merchants of the earth*” (v. 11). Although referring to the same general class, there is a slight variation here. They are referred to as “*the merchants OF THESE THINGS.*” These are specialists in the supply of temporal things—things that will be taken away. These are “*things*” promoted by Babylon, the false church. They are not eternal things, and will not be able to survive the judgment of God or the end of the world.

Jesus revealed He would bring disruption and a lack of harmony in the world. His words are in sharp conflict with the effect of Babylon the great. *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household”*

I hesitate to make any attempt to list some of these things, yet feel compelled to do so. The world has profited much from Babylon the great. False religion has fattened the coffers of fundamentally ungodly people. Some of the areas of abuse include education, entertainment, music, economics, motivation, leadership training, religious artifacts, jewelry, architecture, art, clothing, literature, electronics, etc. It cannot be denied that some helpfulness has come from all of these areas. However, when they become the focus of attention, and an appetite is developed for them, Babylon is present.

### **Made Rich By her**

*“ . . . who became rich by her . . . ”* It is never good when worldly men profit from religion. It has never been God’s purpose to cause the ungodly to flourish. He has allowed such to occur, to be sure, but it is not for blessing. The world, together with all of its merchants, hated Jesus and His Apostles (John 15:19). On one occasion, a revival in Ephesus resulted in the demise of the silversmiths business (Acts 19:24-27). Had the tactic of Babylon been employed, the merchants would have stopped making *“silver shrines of Diana,”* and started making something *Christian* .

What an anomaly we have here. The *“merchants”* of the world *“made rich”* by religion! Of course, this should not surprise us. We still hear of those who are looking for this world to be a *“better place to live.”* They tell us this is what Jesus could do for us, even though this is never held out as a Divine objective—never! Rather than targeting making the world *“a better place,”* the Lord is preparing us to leave it. It is not our home, we are strangers in it, and our basic citizenship is not here. Worldly merchants cannot look to become rich from us, for our soul does not covet what they have to sell!

This is too hard for some to receive, even though the Word of God is quite clear on the point. Jesus revealed He would bring disruption and a lack of harmony in the world. His words are in sharp conflict with the effect of Babylon the great. *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household”* ( Matt 10:34-36, NKJV). Again he said, *“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! . . . Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division”* (Lk 12:49-51). Does that sound like the type of circumstance in which the *“merchants of these things”* can become rich? Indeed not!

### **Like The Kings, They Stand at a Distance**

*“ . . . will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing . . . ”* Remember, the *“kings of the earth”* also beheld the demise of the great harlot from a distance (18:10). The *“merchants of the earth”* do the same thing for the same reason, i.e., *“for fear of her torment.”* They stand at a distance because they are impotent to help their fallen colleague. They also stand at a distance because they are afraid of being swept up in her dissolution. They had formed a coalition with her, but can do nothing for her. God Almighty has judged the *“great city,”* and there is not a person or group of persons that can help her. The *“kings of the earth”* are impotent, as well as the *“merchants of the earth.”* Their expertise and ingenuity utterly fails them. They can only *“weep and wail”* in despair.

*“ . . . and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!’”* Babylon looked impressive and invincible to the world—but she was not! She trafficked in things precious and valuable, but was no better because of it. Her finery could not sustain her for a single hour when once the judgment of God fell upon her. The *“merchants of the earth”* who had prospered by this religious monstrosity lament, *“For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.”* Like the silversmiths in Ephesus, their prosperity was affected. They lamented it, but could do nothing about it. Like Lot watching the destruction of Sodom, they stood at a distance!

Suffice it to say, it is better to stand at a distance from the unholy city BEFORE it

is taken down by the King of kings and Lord of lords!

### **The Shipmasters**

This wretched trio (kings, merchants, and shipmasters) did not weep and lament when Jesus died! They did not raise the voice of lamentation when Stephen, Paul, Peter, or Antipas died! You did not hear a wail or see a tear from them when the early church was “*scattered abroad*,” or was hounded and persecuted by its enemies!

*“Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?'"* See how extensively Babylon had infected the world, and how thoroughly was its merger with it! The Kings of the earth loved her. The merchants of the earth loved her. Now “*every shipmaster*” also laments her fall. Those who “*trade on the sea*,” purveying their goods across continents, had profited from the “*great harlot*.”

Again, the language is taken from the prophets, and reveals the total destruction that has been appointed to spiritual Babylon. When ancient Babylon fell, the prophet challenged, “*Wail, O ships of Tarshish, For your stronghold is destroyed*” (Isa 23:14, NASB).

Ezekiel used precisely the same language in foretelling the fall of Tyre in Ezekiel 27. The language is remarkably like that of our text. The “*kings of the earth*” are mentioned (verses 33,35). “*Merchants*” are mentioned (verses 13,15,17,21-24,36). All manner of cloth, spices, and metals are mentioned (verses 15-24). Those who did business on the sea were also mentioned (verses 25-32).

*“They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'”* Again, this is the

same reaction those who traveled in ships had when ancient Tyre fell. The language is almost precisely that of the prophet Ezekiel. “*And all who handle the oar, the sailors, and all the pilots of the sea will come down from their ships; they will stand on the land, and they will make their voice heard over you and will cry bitterly. They will cast dust on their heads, they will wallow in ashes. Also they will make themselves bald for you and gird themselves with sackcloth; and they will weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning*” (Ezek 27:29-32).

There is a message given in this type of language. The overthrow of Babylon is sure. It is thorough. And it cannot be reversed. Babylon the great is headed for oblivion. It cannot be recovered by the most formidable of this world— “*the kings of the earth.*” It will not be brought back to life by those expert in economy and business— “*the merchants of the earth.*” Nor, indeed, will it be rejuvenated by those who do business in the remote parts of the earth— “*the shipmasters.*”

### **Behold the Nature of the Trio**

This wretched trio (kings, merchants, and shipmasters) did not weep and lament when Jesus died! They did not raise the voice of lamentation when Stephen, Paul, Peter, or Antipas died! You did not hear a wail or see a tear from them when the early church was “*scattered abroad,*” or was hounded and persecuted by its enemies! They raised no voice of protest or lamentation when millions of believers were martyred for their faith, or when the Word of God was wrested from the hands of the common man. But they weep and lament over the fall of Babylon. And why so? Because the world “*loves its own*” (John 15:19), and Babylon is its kind. It thinks like the world because it is of the world, and has the spirit of this world.

### **DOCTRINALLY SPEAKING**

There are at least two things taught in this passage. Both are foundational teachings, and are repeatedly stated in God’s Word. A heart that does not consider these things is a defective and deceived one.

### **The World Order Will be Destroyed**

Here is an aspect of truth that can easily escape us. Satan makes every effort to

make us believe the world is permanent, and that we should conduct our lives as though it will never end. In an accelerated effort to convince the saints of this lie, he has penetrated the church. The religion he has created knows nothing of a heavenly emphasis. Rarely, if ever, does it make reference to the world to come. How differently the Spirit speaks!

*“Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish . . . The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage . . . Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment . . . heaven and earth shall pass away . . . the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up . . . “* (Psa 102:25-27; Isa 24:19-20; 51:5; Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:10). Any approach to religion, however conservative it may appear, that obscures or minimizes these declarations is NOT of God. It belongs to the order of Babylon the great. Both the heavens and the earth will “flee” from before the presence of the glorified Christ, and no place will be found for them (Rev 20:11).

### **What The World Offers Cannot Last**

A temporal world can offer no eternal benefits. What the world—even the religious world—offers, eventually fades. In fact, it is destined for destruction with the rest of the cursed order. Its fruits, for which men lust, will depart from those who want them.

Ultimately, anything proceeding from the natural order cannot satisfy the soul. Its pleasure is only “*for a season.*” Think of the affirmations of the Spirit concerning this matter.

*“Though evil is sweet in his mouth, and he hides it under his tongue, though he desires it and will not let it go, but holds it in his mouth, yet his food in his stomach is changed to the venom of cobras within him.*

*He swallows riches, but will vomit them up; God will expel them from his belly . . . He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance*

*with its income. This too is vanity. When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? . . . As a partridge that hatches eggs which it has not laid, so is he who makes a fortune, but unjustly; in the midst of his days it will forsake him, and in the end he will be a fool . . . Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself . . . You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes . . . You lust and do not have . . .” (Job 20:12-15; Eccl 5:10-11; Jer 17:11; Hos 10:1; Hag 1:6; James 4:2).*

By way of comparison, what the Lord offers is eternal. In fact, salvation, in a very real sense, involves deliverance from the temporal. Any religion, therefore, that accentuates the temporal and minimizes the eternal is to be aggressively shunned. It is lethal because dominated by Satan.

## REJOICE OVER HER!

Now the scene is changed. We have seen the reaction of the kings, merchants, and shipmasters of the earth to the fall of Babylon. They all felt a keen loss in her removal. They wept. They wailed. They threw dust upon their heads. They felt something great and prosperous has fallen, and considered themselves poorer because of it. But this is not at all the heavenly response. The heavenly realms consider it no deprivation when powerless and lifeless religion falls to the ground. You will hear no weeping in heaven when a church is closed that had no Divine power within it. Jesus wept over Jerusalem when it rejected Him, but we have no record of Him weeping when it fell.

When it comes to lamentation, there is sorrow in heaven when “*truth is fallen in the street*” (Isa 59:14), or “*because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land*” (Hos 4:1). When there is none to “*stand in the gap*” (Ezek 22:30), or “*truth is perished*” (Jer 7:28), that is when the heavenly minded are concerned. Sorrow is found among the godly when shepherds “*feed themselves,*” and do not “*feed the flocks*” (Ezek 34:2). God, Christ, the Spirit, and all who are joined to them by faith express deep concern when a church leaves its “*first love*” (Rev 2:4), tolerates erroneous and damaging doctrines to be taught (Rev 2:20), or

thrusts Jesus outside its confines by their lukewarmness (Rev 3:14-20). Wherever a form of godliness is embraced while rejecting “*the power thereof*” sighing and crying always erupt among the saints. But no tear is shed among the spiritual when what is false crumbles to the ground!

### A Call From Heaven

Do not think for one moment that because believers prayed for their enemies they were indifferent to their wicked deeds. God will not let us forget what the world has done to His people until He has set things right. Behold the candor with which the heavenly voice speaks. ***“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”***

The summons to “*rejoice over her*” is a call to exult and celebrate her fall. Here is an aspect of Divine life that is unfamiliar to our generation. There are some expressions in Scripture that indicate God is delighted over the fall of corruption even as He is over the establishment of righteousness. Israel was exposed to this aspect of the Divine nature in Deuteronomy 28:63. “*And it shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you ; and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.*” Such language is not to be taken lightly.

When the enemies of God’s people were overthrown, rejoicing took place. “. . . *the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies . . . my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies . . .*” (2 Chron 20:27; 1 Sam 2:1). There is such a thing as holy rejoicing at the demise of the wicked. “*He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury . . . The Lord laughs at him; For He sees his day is coming . . . And the righteous will see and fear, And will laugh at him, saying, Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, But trusted in the abundance of his riches, And was strong in his evil desire . . . But Thou, O LORD, dost laugh at them; Thou dost scoff at all the nations . . . I will even laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes . . .*” (Psa 2:4; 37:13; 52:6; 59:8).

How vividly this is shown when Satan was cast out of heaven—thrown down to the earth, together with his angels. The shout is then heard, “*For this reason,*

*rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them” (Rev 12:12). Now Satan’s false church is cast down, and the heavens are told to rejoice again. That means the presence of Babylon was not a source of joy in heaven, even among those no longer upon earth. Now, while the world laments, the heavens rejoice. Few texts confirm the sharp conflict between heaven and earth as much as this one.*

### **Apostles and prophets**

Faithfully, Apostles and Prophets pointed men away from the world and its curse to God and His blessing. Consistently, they witnessed to the temporality of this world, and the everlasting nature of God and His salvation. At the jeopardy of their own lives, they stood against the world, exhorting men to abandon worldly patterns of thought and life.

Apostles and Prophets are especially admonished to rejoice at the fall of Babylon. This fabrication was particularly an affront to them. In order for Babylon to flourish, the message of the Apostles and Prophets must be either repudiated or ignored. The church simply cannot stay on course unless it gives heed to the Apostles and Prophets. Thus it is written, *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:19-20). “ . . . the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph 3:4-5).*

Faithfully, Apostles and Prophets pointed men away from the world and its curse to God and His blessing. Consistently, they witnessed to the temporality of this world, and the everlasting nature of God and His salvation. At the jeopardy of their own lives, they stood against the world, exhorting men to abandon worldly patterns of thought and life.

But Babylon rose with her deceptive ways. She seduced men—even kings and merchants—to drink from the world’s well. In order to do this, the Apostles and Prophets had to be placed into the background. Now men of the world became prominent in the professed church. Its motivators, administrators, and philosophers supplanted the Apostles and Prophets. The economists and educators of the world suddenly obtained great worth in the professed church. But when all of this happened, the Apostles and Prophets, to whom God Almighty had revealed His purpose, were thrust into the background. Their words became strange, and their message was soon forgotten. Little wonder they are to rejoice when the corrupt church is brought down.

Hear the testimony of the Lord. The early church “*continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine*” (Acts 2:42). The holy Prophets are said to have given testimony of Jesus (something the world never does ), Acts 10:43. The “*righteousness of God,*” now imputed to those who believe on Jesus, was witnessed by the Prophets (Rom 3:21). The purpose of God, kept secret from the foundation of the world, is now made known through the “*Scriptures of the Prophets*” (Rom 16:26). The Lord has placed “*Apostles*” and “*Prophets*” in the preeminent positions in Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:28). The plan kept secret from prior ages was “*revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*” (Eph 3:5). We are told to remain mindful of “*the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior*” (2 Pet 3:2). Jude, the brother of our Lord, exhorted us to “*remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jude 17).

The Lord will NOT honor a person, church, or movement that does not take these words seriously. When people substitute the words of mere men for those of the Apostles and Prophets, they have been deceived by Satan, and are embarking on a course of doom. Their neglect of the Apostles and Prophets will not be overlooked by the Lord.

Thus the Apostles and Prophets are seen as being vindicated by the fall of Babylon. These godly men, out of the body, yet conscious and able to respond, are told, “*God has avenged you on her!*” Like the souls under the altar (Rev 6:9-10), they have an acute awareness of their cause. They have left the body and the earth, yet they are alive.

How vital was their message—so much so that God almighty avenged them by overthrowing Babylon the great. The prophets before Christ foretold the Messiah, the New Covenant, and the remission of sins. Apostles and Prophets after Christ declared the Gospel, the imputation of righteousness, and the coming of the Lord. They expounded justification and the glories to come. But their message has been nearly erased from the minds of men by spiritual Babylon.

Men teach everything from dietary habits to the keeping of Old Covenant feast days from the Prophets. They probe in them for insight into political activity in the latter days, and forget they primarily spoke of “*the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (1 Pet 1:11). The message of the Apostles is thrust into the background in favor of church patterns, evangelistic secrets, and family values. The indispensable doctrine of the Apostles is thus distorted so it will supposedly fit into an earthly agenda.

The percentage of *church members* possessing any commendable understanding of the Apostles and Prophets is extremely small. A level of doctrinal ignorance exists that cannot, under any circumstances, be justified. And why so? It is the contemptible aftermath of Babylon the great. She has robbed the world of the only living message it ever received. When she is overthrown, there will be no sadness among those holy Apostles and Prophets. They will rejoice over her demise.

## VIOLENTLY THROWN DOWN

The intent of this language is to affirm that only the Lord could overthrow Babylon. No amount of human effort could rid the world of it. The existence of corrupt religion is to men what a giant millstone is to a child. It cannot be reformed. It cannot be organized

## away. No rebellion, human reaction, or coordinated human effort can get rid of spiritual Babylon.

For some, such an extended text is most unpleasant. They had rather not hear about the overthrow of something deemed wicked by God. And, indeed, under normal circumstances, this is not an altogether wrong reaction. Ordinarily, it is better to hear the Gospel and the exceeding great and precious promises made to those who embrace the Son. However, because of the significance and extent of spiritual Babylon, considerable time is devoted to its fall. It represents Satan's most aggressive effort to drown the church. It has also extended over the longest period of time, and had the most far-reaching influence. There is scarcely a place in the world or a time in history when Babylon has not dominated the *Christian* world. Though largely unrecognized among men, all of heaven is acutely aware of the circumstance. Departed Apostles and Prophets, together with millions of martyred saints, know of the corruption extant in the religious world. Also, believers everywhere sense the presence of doctrinal corruption, erroneous emphasis, and lifeless religion. All of them will profit when this message is perceived. The fall of an unusually influential system demands extensive Divine commentary—and that is what we have.

***“Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.”*** Again, we are confronted with a *“mighty angel.”* The last time we read of a *“mighty angel,”* he put one foot on the sea, and another on the land. With his hand raised to heaven, he swore by the Lord that *“time should be no longer”* (10:1-6). This meant time would no longer be delayed, and what was determined would come to pass. This is the nature of the event before us. The fall of Babylon, determined by God, is now taking place. There is no way for it to be averted. A *“mighty angel”* is employed to emphasize the surety of the appointment. Angels never fail. Their announcements are never wrong. They are effective in what they do, and precise in what they say.

The action of the angel is significant. Picking up a boulder the size of a millstone, the angel cast it into the sea. The stone was large and formidable, signifying its seeming immovability. Linguists tell us this was a millstone that could only be turned by a beast of burden. It is the kind of *“millstone”* Jesus mentioned in Mark 9:42. *“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”*

The intent of this language is to affirm that only the Lord could overthrow Babylon. No amount of human effort could rid the world of it. The existence of corrupt religion is to men what a giant millstone is to a child. It cannot be reformed. It cannot be organized away. No rebellion, human reaction, or coordinated human effort can get rid of spiritual Babylon. Illuminated souls despise its pretension, deplore its influence, and reject its message. Yet it remains with us. But it will not always be this way. In the wings of Divine purpose a “*mighty angel*” waits. At the word of the Lord, he will hurl the “*great city*” out of existence.

### The Language of Scripture

With care, we must avoid getting tangled up in this language. The Lord is using expressions introduced by Moses and the Prophets. This is a phrase denoting violent, complete, and irreversible overthrow. Thus the mighty Egyptian army was overthrown, sinking to the bottom of the sea “*as a stone*” (Ex 15:5). In the words of Nehemiah, the formidable Egyptian military forces were thrown “*into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters*” (Neh 9:11).

Of particular note is the prophecy of Jeremiah against ancient Babylon. This is doubtless the figure employed in our text. “*Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. Then you shall say, ‘Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from **the catastrophe that I will bring upon her**. And they shall be weary’*” (Jer 51:63-64). The words, “*And they shall be weary,*” signify the depletion of all of Babylon’s resources. It is like saying, *she will wear out*. The NASB reads, “*they will become exhausted.*”

It is as though Babylon will muster all of her resources to remain, but be unable to do so. “*Violence,*” in this case, means against the will of Babylon—in spite of her resistance and will to remain. It is another way of affirming a Divine overthrow. It is how the building of the tower of Babel was disrupted. It is how Sodom and Gomorrah were “*overthrown.*” Egypt was overthrown in this manner, as well as Syria and Tyre.

Such overthrows do not produce a truce, but the extinction of the foe. God will not allow Babylon to remain. She cannot be reformed, nor will she be allowed to peacefully coexist with the bride of Christ. She is, in every sense, the enemy of God.

### Found No More At All

Suffering saints need to hear about the demise of the wicked. Those oppressed by powerless and lifeless religion must hear of the time it will no longer exist. There is coming a time when the name of the Lord will no longer be defiled—when His blessed name will no more be affiliated with a form of godliness that denies the power thereof.

Here again, the language of the prophets is employed. Of the wicked, it is written, “*He shall fly away as a dream, and **shall not be found**: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall **see him no more** ; neither shall his place any more behold him*” (Job 20:8-9). The Psalmist said of the troubling wicked, “*I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, **he was no more** ; Indeed I sought him, but **he could not be found** ”* (Psa 37:35-36). To the wicked city of Tyre, the Lord said, “*I will make you a terror, and you **shall be no more** ; though you are sought for, you will **never be found again** , says the Lord GOD*” (Ezek 26:21). Daniel prophesied of a wicked ruler that would be brought down by God. In describing the fall, he used the same language as that of our text. “*Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and **not be found** ”* (Dan 11:19).

The Psalmist spoke precisely when he foretold the demise of the wicked and the exaltation of the righteous. “*For evildoers **shall be cut off** : but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, **thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be**. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace*” (Psa 37:9-11). Notice, the fall of the wicked occasions the rise of the righteous.

## The Godly Need to Know

Suffering saints need to hear about the demise of the wicked. Those oppressed by powerless and lifeless religion must hear of the time it will no longer exist. There is coming a time when the name of the Lord will no longer be defiled—when His blessed name will no more be affiliated with a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. While religious bigots boast of their organizations and spread themselves like a green bay tree, the righteous anticipate their demise.

If your heart is weighed down with the condition of the church, lift up your head. The condition is bad, but God is going to resolve it! A time is coming when the powerless church will be “*found no more!*” Like the devil who produced it, its time is running out. The Divine calendar has made no provision for it to continue indefinitely.

It makes little difference how committed Babylon is to remaining, it will be overthrown with violence. It will be pulled up by the roots, so to speak. As Jesus has said, “*Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*” (Matt 15:13). Child of God, you can count on that. Let your faith take hold of it, and ask the Lord to help your unbelief. Babylon is NOT invincible! Organized religion does NOT hold the keys to your future! You are scheduled to inherit the earth and reign with Jesus. Babylon is scheduled to fall. It will not recover from its fall, and you will not fall from your exaltation.

Speak of the inheritance of the saints, and of the fall of their enemies. Tell about the triumph of the church, and the demise of those who oppose it. Extol the Lord who sustains you, and resist the devil who opposes you. Announce that the saints will judge the world, and that Babylon the great will fall. Resist the temptation to despair, and “*hope until the end*” (Heb 6:11). The warfare will soon be over!

## THOROUGHLY THROWN DOWN

The Spirit will not let this matter rest. It is too critical to the survival of the saints. Babylon has been noted for such longevity believers are tempted to think it will always be here. But that is not the case. “*The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any*

*craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.”*

Again, this is the language of the prophets. It denotes the total absence of joy or a sense of safety. Isaiah spoke of overthrow in similar words. *“The mirth of the tambourine ceases, The noise of the jubilant ends, The joy of the harp ceases”* (Isa 24:8). In his denunciation of wayward Israel, the prophet Jeremiah, foretold of its overthrow. He used the same kind of language. *“Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate”* (Jer 7:34). Again he said, *“Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride”* (Jer 16:9). And again, *“Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jer 25:10-11).

Ezekiel spoke in the same way of the demise of Tyre. His language sets the tone for this section. *“I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more”* (Ezek 26:13).

At this present time, there is joy and mirth in the false church. It boasts of its success. Its motivations and entertainers are well known and appear to be doing well. Careers have been crafted in the powerless church that have brought advantage to carnal people. Form without power has been seemingly shaped into a powerful force. But it is only temporary.

Spiritual Babylon has lulled people into sleep, so they cannot imagine God capable of such a thing. But she has deceived the people. Just as surely as God will wipe away all

tears from the faces of His saints, so He will obliterate joy and celebration among those who have corrupted His church. With great clarity and power, the Spirit affirms, *“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”* (1 Cor 3:17). This is no idle word! Those who have dared to inject the wisdom of the world into the body of Christ are destined to be destroyed! If any person promotes a worldly frame of mind among God’s people, his doom is sure.

At this present time, there is joy and mirth in the false church. It boasts of its success. Its motivations and entertainers are well known and appear to be doing well. Careers have been crafted in the powerless church that have brought advantage to carnal people. Form without power has been seemingly shaped into a powerful force. But it is only temporary.

There is coming a time when not a single song or note of joy will rise from those who have embraced a form of godliness but denied its power. Such a monstrosity will no longer support the efforts of craftsmen and opportunists. The religious charlatan will disappear with the evil organization that supported him. No more joy! No more human ingenuity that supports and perpetuates what God hates! No more *“sound of the millstone,”* where men are engaged in lifeless religious work.

***“The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore.”*** No more occupancy in Babylon! No one will choose to live there. It will be seen for what it is, will fall, and become repulsive to men. No more marriage between religion and the world. No more rejoicing over coalitions that did not require God, Christ, the Spirit, or the Word. No more progeny or offspring. No more perpetuation of powerless religion. No more! The contemplation of such freedom is glorious.

O, how the godly need to hear this. Satan will tempt the best of people to become tolerant of what God hates. Religious marketers will point to some speck of goodness they imagine is in Babylon, and call upon us to rejoice over it and embrace it. But we must not allow ourselves that indulgence. We do rejoice in the truth, and in any genuine advance of God’s cause in the earth. But all of that is in spite of Babylon, and not because of it.

Have you seen the picture? It is most graphic. False religion will fall. It will not

be able to carry on its relationship with the world any more. Kings will feel deprived of her presence, but be unable to bring it back. Merchants will sense great loss because of her demise, but will not be able to revive her. Even those who trade upon the open sea will lament her fall, yet be impotent to recover her. No one will buy her polluted goods any more. No longer will any one want what she offers. Not a single soul will gain an advantage from her. No joy will be found in her. No one will make their habitation there any longer.

God will surely judge any and every system of religion that rejected His sustaining power. It will fall and not rise again. Believers must tune their hearts to heaven, setting their affection there, and seeking the things that are there for them. There is no acceptable alternative to this. The Lord is leading His people out of this world and into the next.

## BABYLON AND SORCERY

***“For your merchants were the great men of the earth . . .”*** Here the character of spiritual Babylon is again unfolded. Prior to this, we read of the *“merchants of the earth.”* But now the Lord says they were really Babylon’s merchants. These are the men that promote false religion. They are also the ones who profit from it. Were it not for Babylon the great, many a religious professional would be out of a job. Their careers are actually sustained by a system of thinking and living that God hates. They have embraced what is repulsive to Christ, and have marketed it throughout the world. Such are enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18).

Note what is said of these *“merchants,”* or dealers of spiritual corruption. They are *“the great men of the earth.”* Their names are not *“written in heaven”* (Lk 10:20), and they are NOT *“great in the sight of the Lord”* (Lk 1:15). They are NOT men *“after God’s own heart”* like David (1 Sam 13:14). They are nor friends of God like Abraham (James 2:23). They did not have power with God and men like Jacob (Gen 32:28). They had no message like the prophets, nor were they sent like the Apostles. Unlike David, their greatness was not of God (2 Sam 22:36).

*“Great men of the earth”* are confined to the earth. They do not dwell in heavenly places. The ONLY place where they are of note is where God is neither

known nor served. The world loves them because they are of its order. It recognizes their wisdom as valid, and applauds their ways as productive. Isaiah also referred to such despots. Doubtless, this language is taken from his prophecy against Tyre. “*Whose merchants are princes, Whose traders are the honorable of the earth?*” (Isa 23:8).

Remember, Babylon is an attempted merger of religion and the world. In such an effort, the world ALWAYS dominates. As soon as you attempt to join flesh and Spirit, the flesh assumes the throne. Thus corrupt religion has opened a door for worldly men to enter—and enter they did.

### **The Citadel of Corruption**

“*. . . or by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.*” The Lord has painted a most vivid picture of the worldly success of spiritual Babylon. Kings and merchants, individuals and nations, have been corrupted by her. It was supported by rulers and promoted by merchants.

How is it that Babylon has been so effective. Why has she been so influential and prosperous? Is it because of the gifted within her precincts? Can her success be traced to talented and insightful leaders among her constituency? Is her influence due to the development of expert methods and techniques? Ah, her merchants, great men of the earth, would have us believe so. Babylon parades her church planters, missions experts, financial gurus, and motivators before us as though they were some great discovery. They are invited to speak at their conferences, and their books and films are always before us. The “*great harlot*” points to her institutions and organizations to explain her phenomenal success. Babylon has marketed itself well.

The Lord, however, provides a different explanation. The influence of Babylon—false religion—is traced to **SORCERY**. It is not simply sorcery in general, but “***YOUR sorcery.***” It differs from the witchcraft of the world of darkness, and the enchantment of the necromancer. This is sorcery that wears a Christian hat, and calls itself after the name of Jesus.

It is “*sorcery*” because it is produced by Satanic power. It is authored by the “*rulers of the darkness of this world*,” against which believers “*wrestle*” (Eph 6:12). The teachings perpetrated by this sorcery are nothing less than “*the doctrines of demons*” (1 Tim 4:1). While some teach that demons no longer exist or exercise influence, John is told of a latter day when they would pervade the nominal church and invade the *Christian* community. Paul spoke of a great delusion that would appear in the latter times. It would involve a despot “*whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders*” (2 Thess 2:9).

How is it that Babylon has been so effective. Why has she been so influential and prosperous? Is it because of the gifted within her precincts? Can her success be traced to talented and insightful leaders among her constituency? Is her influence due to the development of expert methods and techniques?

I have often marveled at the success of false religion, but there is no need to do so. It is supported by supernatural power—wicked power, to be sure, yet supernatural. Sorcery is NOT a natural power, even though it operates through the flesh (Gal 5:20). We must not miss the gravity of this text. The powerful influence of spiritual Babylon is expressly said to be owing to its “*sorcery*.” When, therefore, we willingly subject ourselves to its “*merchants*,” we come under the influence of the devil.

There is an important aspect of truth to be seen here. **The more closely we are in harmony with this world, the more extensively Satan will influence us.** If we form an alliance with the world, we come into harmony with the devil, for he is the “*god of this world*.” Do not flirt with the world! Avoid religious alliances that court the world’s favor, and borrow from its wisdom!

### **Deception**

This captivating influence is employed to deceive “*all the nations*.” The deception moved people to embrace a false Christ and an erroneous gospel. It made sin appear attractive, and righteousness seem impossible. This deception so

blurs the vision that the world is approached as though it were permanent, and heaven is avoided as though it were a myth.

Myriads of religious people have been seduced by the sorcery of Babylon. They speak of heaven as though it were temporary, and plan as though this world were permanent. They approach the Word of God as though it were irrelevant, and come to the wisdom of the world as though it were vital. They make no plans for eternity, yet plan extensively as though they were guaranteed a tomorrow. Church services are structured around the flesh, providing brief exposure to the things of God, and a message that is comfortable to the flesh.

And why do these conditions exist? The book of Revelation goes behind the scenes and tells us why. It is because of the existence of Babylon the great – the great harlot. It is owing to a system of religion that has been raised up of the devil, and it supported by a world of evil spirits. It is because men have been seduced into such foolish thinking.

These are the very reasons that have summoned the judgment of God against Babylon. It is simply inexcusable to treat the existence of powerless religion as though it were inevitable. Its fall is inevitable, not its existence! The people of God cannot become attached to something God has cursed. They dare not build on a foundation God is going to destroy. They cannot afford to forge a relationship with something supported by the devil and promoted by sorcery!

I realize all of this seems quite strong. That is because it IS quite strong! It deals with a very vital issue: godless religion, and that is reprehensible to God!

## RESPONSIBLE FOR BLOODSHED

This is what brings out the real nature of Babylon the

great—its maltreatment of the saints of God. Many of us have suffered from such treatment. Some, in despair, have compromised their convictions in order to gain the approval of powerless and lifeless religion.

“And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.” Again, the Lord lays the responsibility for the slaughter of prophets and saints at door of false religion. We have read of this butchery before. In the pouring out of the bowls of judgment, God judged men *“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due”* (16:6). Our first introduction to the false church as a harlot included these words, *“I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”* (17:6). Later, in the nineteenth chapter, exultation continues over the judgement of Babylon. *“For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.”* (19:2).

I have said it before, but must say it again. When men side with the Lord’s enemies, they become responsible for everything His enemies have done. Thus did Jesus say to His enemies, *“Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar”* (Matt 23:34-35).

Cain, who committed the first religion sin, thought nothing of killing his own brother because his works were righteous (1 John 3:12). The Sanhedrin felt no restraint in stoning Stephen to death because he preached Jesus and refused to embrace their corrupt teaching (Acts 7:54-58). Throughout history, believers have acknowledged, *“Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”* (Psa 44:22; Rom 8:36). Knowing it was a threat to its own existence, corrupt religion has never hesitated to do whatever was required to stifle spiritual life.

Jesus warned His disciples of religious opposition. “*They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service*” (John 16:2). Such people are like smoke in God’s nose—people destined to be judged most harshly by Him. This, of course, is precisely what the Lord said through Isaiah. “*Who say, 'Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!' These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me : I will not keep silence, but will repay; Even repay into their bosom*” (Isa 54:5-6).

And why did Babylon shed the blood of God’s “*prophets and saints?*” Of all people, they were the most meek and helpful. They did no harm to their brethren or even their enemies. They obeyed the laws of the land for conscience sake, i.e., wherever their conscience would allow it. Their only offense was their UNworldly frame of mind. They simply were not of this world, and therefore the worldly church opposed them.

The *church world* is strewn with the victims of institutionalism. Precious souls have been cast upon the garbage dump of humanity for no other reason that they did not worship and serve the institution. It is no different with them than the three Hebrew children who would not bow down to the image they confronted. Whether by disenfranchisement or violent death, Babylon rids itself of those who will not bow to it. It makes little difference whether or not such people have faith, spiritual abilities, or deep devotion to the Lord. They are still seen as excess and needless baggage.

This is what brings out the real nature of Babylon the great—its maltreatment of the saints of God. Many of us have suffered from such treatment. Some, in despair, have compromised their convictions in order to gain the approval of powerless and lifeless religion. This is a serious error. If God will not overlook the sins of Babylon, He will not ignore those who court her approval!

### **And All that are Upon the Earth**

The extent of the guilt of Babylon challenges our thinking. It underscores the magnitude of embracing lifeless religion. Not only is the “great city” guilty of the blood of the Prophets and saints, but “*all who have been killed on the earth*” (NIV). Similar words were addressed to wayward Israel by the prophet Jeremiah.

*“Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents”* (Jer 2:34).

This is an awesome consideration! Those who side with the wicked will share in their responsibility. Those who take the side of the devil will share in his destiny. Those who partake of Babylon will partake of its curse.

The pervasiveness of Babylon’s influence confirms the righteousness of its judgment. Aligned against the Lord and His Christ, she sided with the world, and joined with it. She corrupted the truth, exploited the saints, and opposed all who did not approve of her. God be praised she is destined to fall! Believers are anxious to bid her farewell!

## CONCLUSION

Truth is not always palatable. Remember, when John *“ate”* the book of Divine destiny, he testified, *“it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter”* (Rev 10:9-10). Because the church left its first love, and lost the love of the truth, Babylon arose. That was bitter. Saints were opposed, maligned, and killed because of Babylon. That was bitter. John did not take great delight in relating these things to us. It was necessary, however, that it be done.

We must not be naive about the devil’s assault upon the people of God. It is not always apparent, and it does not always come from the irreligious. Our greatest foes are those who are wolves in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt 7:15). Satan is no more dangerous than when he comes disguised as an angel of light, and his ministers are no more effective than when they come garbed as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14-15). Those who expect wickedness to be obvious and apparent will fall prey to delusion.

Let every one naming the name of Christ *“depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim 2:19). As in the days of Isaiah, *“he who departs from evil makes himself a prey”* (Isa 59:15). But the condition is only temporary. Jesus cannot lose, and Satan cannot win! The

truth shall ultimately triumph, and the lie shall eventually be cast down. Corruption will be consumed, and the pure of heart will be established. **You can count on it!**

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 34

## THE RESPONSE OF HEAVEN

"After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her. Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever! And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, Amen! Alleluia! Then a voice came from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great! And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Rev 19:1-6, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The fall of Babylon has been announced by heaven. ***"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication"*** (14:8). The fall is a most significant one, and has produced a variety of responses. All those who are alienated from God, and are of the world, react harmoniously. Standing at a distance from her smoking embers, the kings of the earth lament, ***"Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come"*** (Rev 18:10). The ***"merchants of the earth"*** also stand aloof from the burning city, lamenting because no one bought their merchandise any more. Pouring out their anguish they cry, ***"Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing"*** (V 16-17). Even ***"the shipmasters,"*** who plied their trade on the high seas, stand back from the fallen city, grieving over the impact of its demise upon their trade. ***"What is like this great city? . . . Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate"*** (V 18-19).

## **A Rare Occurrence**

Rarely does earth join so harmoniously in any effort—particularly that of lamentation. Those who are of this world conspired together AGAINST the Lord's Christ. Now they join together in grief at the removal of His enemy, Babylon! If we had no other information about "*men of the world, which have their portion in this life*" (Psa 17:14), this should be sufficient to cause us to shun their influence upon us. Solemnly, Jesus affirms He has taken us "*out of the world,*" and that we are no longer of that order (John 15:19).

## **The Way of the World**

While Babylon the great chose to embrace the reasoning patterns and manners of this world, God has chosen quite differently. "*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence*" (1 Cor 1:27-29).

## **Another Order**

The advantages given to the believer are from another realm—another order. "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God*" (1 Cor 2:12). From the viewpoint of the world, believers are the garbage of the world. They think nothing of defaming and discarding the saints of God. As it is written, "*We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now*" (1 Cor 4:13).

## **The Basics of This World**

The "*basic principles of the world,*" or the foundations upon which its reasoning and philosophies are based, are in sharp conflict with those of the Lord. They are categorically said to be "*NOT of Christ*" (Col 2:8). Its most lofty ideals and perceptions cannot effectively deal with sin and transgression (Col 2:20-22). Whoever is a "*friend of the world,*" by that very association, has become "*the*

*enemy of God*” (James 4:4). Scarcely can we find a more solemn declaration.

### **Good to Men, Contemptible to God**

When, therefore, we read of great lamentation from those who are of the world, we are confronting the fall of something opprobrious and contemptible before the Lord. As our blessed Lord said, “*For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God*” (Lk 16:15). This is precisely what spiritual Babylon is: an attempt to merge religion with “*this present evil world.*” It is an effort to please men, and to develop something highly regarded by them. The attempt was not an effort to please God, but to please men. The Spirit informs us that at the point we seek to please men, we abruptly cease to be a servant of Christ (Gal 1:10). There are no exceptions to this. The ramifications of this are arresting!

### **The Shifting of the Scene**

Now the scene shifts to the heavenly realms. We hear no lamentation there at the fall of Babylon! There is no sympathy or tolerance for corrupt religion in the higher precincts. Many who presently occupy that realm tasted of the world’s oppression, paying for their faith with their very lives. We have already heard a heavenly shout, summoning both holy Apostles and Prophets to rejoice at the collapse of Babylon. Her wealth is gone, together with her whorish influence. No longer can she give advantages to men, cause them to be great, or reward them for aligning themselves with her. Her influence crumbles, her objectives fail, and she is brought to nothing by the God with Whom she contended. Heaven will be glad about the very thing causing sorrow on earth.

## **A MULTITUDE IN HEAVEN**

*“After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven . . .”*

### **Salvation Is Not Insignificant**

It is good for believers to remember they are part of something exceedingly large. Too, often we are tempted to think of God’s “*great salvation*” with a view limited

to our place and time—as though it were something temporal. But this is not a fair evaluation of the case, and does not bring honor to the Lord. Rest assured, the Almighty God did NOT invest of Himself, send His Son, lay the iniquities of the world upon Him, and make Him to be sin, to save a handful of people! He did not raise the Son from the dead, set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, and deliver all authority in heaven and earth for the sake of a meager few. An infinitely wise and powerful God did not marshal an enumerable company of angels, send forth the Holy Spirit, and appoint Apostles and Prophets to garner a smattering of souls. He did not spend 1,500 years teaching and preparing humanity through the Law so that only a representative number of our race might be saved.

### **What About References to Few?**

This is not to minimize the words of our Lord. *“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matt 7:14). *“For many are called, but few chosen”* (Matt 20:16; 22:14). We must not skim the surface of these words! Rather, we must strive to understand them.

Too, often we are tempted to think of God’s *“great salvation”* with a view limited to our place and time—as though it were something temporal. But this is not a fair evaluation of the case, and does not bring honor to the Lord.

On one occasion, Peter pointedly asked, *“Lord, are there few who are saved?”* (Lk 13:23). Jesus did not answer in the affirmative. Instead, He gave a solemn warning. *“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out”* (Lk 13:24-28).

Jesus was saying that “few” of that generation would be saved. As grievous as it was to ponder, the majority of the generation to whom Jesus and the Apostles ministered rejected their words. But Jesus did not let the matter drop there. That was not the only generation. Hear His comforting words, for they include your own response to the Gospel. “*They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last*” Verses 29-30). Matthew records, “*And I say to you that **many** will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt 8:11).

Bear with me while I develop this further. It is food for the soul, and will bring strength to the heart. In our consideration of whom will be saved, we must recall these words. “*I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' To a nation that was not called by My name*” (Isa 65:1). Paul confirmed this marvelous prophecy in Romans 10:20. “*But Isaiah is very bold and says: I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.*” Paul also says of the mass of humanity—the Gentiles— “*Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith*” (Rom9:30). We should not be surprised at this! Nineveh did not send for Jonah! The Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were not seeking a visitation from God! The people in Samaria were not asking for salvation to come to their city!

Abraham was found by God when he was not seeking Him. God also appeared to Moses in an abrupt manner, intruding into the normalcy of life. We should not allow ourselves to think such things are impossible in our day! The conversions of Cornelius and his house, the household of Lydia, and the Philippian jailor all occurred without human planning.

All of these, and more, represent Divine initiatives. They do not obviate the necessity of human response, but they do make it more likely. Here and there, men have arisen who

were aggressive to seek the Lord, even when it was not fashionable. They include Enoch, Noah, Job, and others. But they were few and far between. Abraham was found by God when he was not seeking Him. God also appeared to Moses in an abrupt manner, intruding into the normalcy of life. We should not allow ourselves to think such things are impossible in our day! The conversions of Cornelius and his house, the household of Lydia, and the Philippian jailor all occurred without human planning. They involved the Living God, the Spirit of God, the preaching of the Gospel, and the response of those who heard it. But there was an element of Divine orchestration in them all that must be seen.

I have taken the time to declare this because we are now faced with “*a great multitude in heaven.*” I want you to see that we should not be staggered by the sight. We should not be astonished that a “*great salvation*” does, in the end, display great results! We dare not judge the effectiveness of the Gospel by our generation, anymore than the Apostles could judge it by their generation. It DOES appear that we have lived in a perverse generation that, for the most part, has rejected the Lord. But God has not concluded His purpose yet. In the end, there will be “*a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*” (Rev 7:9-10). Today, men can count how many profess the Lord. They can tally up how many were martyred, and present their counts without challenging the ability of men to compute or calculate. But when God’s “*eternal purpose*” has been fulfilled, and the enemies of the Lord have been made His footstool, we will see the **great** results of a **great** God, Who worked a **great** salvation! Nothing about salvation is small, insignificant, or unimpressive.

## WHO IS THIS GREAT MULTITUDE?

The KJV reads, “*much people,*” while other versions read “*great multitude.*” Is there a difference? Indeed, there is! The word used here is **ὄχλου (oxlou)**, which is consistently used to refer to a large number of people. It is so used **25 times in the New Testament—always referring to people, and never to angels or demons (Matt 27:24; Mk 7:17,33; 8:1; 9:17; 10:46; Lk 8:4; 9:38; 11:27; 12:1,13; 18:36; 19:3,39; 22:6; John 5:13; 7:31,32,40; Acts 19:33; 21:35; 24:12,18; rev 19:1,6).** I do not believe Robertson is correct in saying “**this is probably the voice of the angelic hosts.**” While there is a vast number of angels, they are specifically identified when their activities are considered—whether they are holy angels or those under Satan (Rev 1:20; 3:5; 5:11; 7:1,2,11; 8:2,6,13;

9:14,15; 12:7,9; 14:10; 15:1,6,7,8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9,12).

### **An Important Consideration**

While this may appear to be a theological bypath, it is anything but that. The vastness of the foes against which we are aligned is NEVER accentuated. Consistently, the NATURE of the foe is emphasized, not the number of them (Eph 6:12; 1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 11:15). In the words of Elisha to his fearful servant, “*Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them*” (2 Kgs 6:16). Do not think for a single moment that our enemies outnumber those who are for us. They do not!

The vastness of the redeemed that are on the other side, so to speak, is intended to bring comfort to our hearts. We “*are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses*” (Heb 12:1, NIV). An awareness of them will contribute to our strength and stamina. We are part of something exceedingly large, and it strengthens the heart to think upon it.

This multitude, then, is nothing less than “*the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Heb 12:23). Many of them had suffered at the hands of spiritual Babylon, and some had even been beheaded by her. When Babylon falls, there is an instant response among them. No silent meditation now! They burst forth together with a “*great,*” or “*loud voice.*” They join together in one accord at the triumph of the Lord. The picture is that of these rejoicing spirits drowning out the laments of the kings, merchants, and shipmasters of the earth.

John heard the heavenly multitude because joy overcomes sorrow. The triumphant shout of the redeemed overshadows the sorrow of this world which “*works death*” (2 Cor 7:10). It is our business to tune our hearts NOW to heaven’s melody. Here, in this world, we must learn to respond correctly, and in harmony with the heavenly multitude. God is honored by such responses.

## **THE ASCRIPTION OF SALVATION**

We now hear insightful spirits, who are no longer subjected to the philosophical ranting of men in the flesh. There is no question among them concerning the salvation they have experienced. With power and glory they ascribe salvation itself to the Lord.

*“ . . . saying, Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!”* Men have long debated what makes salvation effective. The devil has driven a giant wedge in the Christian community over this issue. Some feel the burden of salvation is placed upon men. These emphasize the “free will” of man, and affirm that he casts the deciding vote. One, representing this emphasis, has said: “The Lord casts a vote for you, and the devil casts a vote against you. You cast the deciding vote.” With all of the revelation about the human will and the responsibility of men to believe the Gospel and embrace the Lord, it is never stated in that manner in God’s Word. Men take too much upon themselves when they say they cast the deciding vote—or anything similar to it. Such reasoning has the sound of the world in it, and is abrasive to the sensitive spirit.

### Alleluia

Four times in this passage (19:1-6), we hear the shout “*ALLELUIA*” from the heavenly realms (Verses 1,3,4,6). These are the only uses of the word in the New Testament Scriptures.

This is a universal word meaning “*praise ye the Lord.*” That particular phrase is used 25 times in Genesis through Malachi: once in Judges (5:2), once in Jeremiah (Jer 20:13), and 23 times in the Psalms (104:35; 105:45; 106:1,48; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1,9; 116:19; 117:2; 135:1,21; 146:1,10; 147:1,20; 148:1,14; 149:1,9; 150:1,6). It is an admonition , prompted by insight into the working of the Lord.

The great multitude associate the fall of Babylon with the execution of God’s will. They also perceive the Lord has done this, and that the work brings glory to Him. They are calling upon all intelligent beings to see in the fall of Babylon something for which God is to be praised. His purpose has been fulfilled in its fall! His people

have been advantaged by its fall! Satan has been overthrown in its fall!

### **Salvation to God!**

We now hear insightful spirits, who are no longer subjected to the philosophical ranting of men in the flesh. There is no question among them concerning the salvation they have experienced. With power and glory they ascribe salvation itself to the Lord. It is “*His salvation*” (1 Chron 16:23; Psa 35:9; 85:9; Isa 25:9). It is called “*the salvation of God,*” NOT the salvation of God AND man (Psa 50:23; Lk 3:6; Acts 28:28). Jesus is declared to be the “*Author*” of this salvation (Heb 5:9). With a power that shakes the wisdom of men God is said to have “*appointed*” us to “*obtain salvation by our lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess 5:9). There is no theological position or persuasion that can erase these words from Scripture or nullify their power to the believing heart.

When considering your own salvation, trace it back to God! This is what Paul did (Acts 26:13-18). This may appear to be a technical point, but it is not. Paul did not trace his conversion back to when he made a decision, but to when the Lord appeared to him. There is a remarkable consistency in Scripture concerning this matter. On the day of Pentecost, men changed when they were “*pricked in their hearts*” (Acts 2:37). The Ethiopian eunuch was born again following a Divine initiative (Acts 8:29). The conversion of Cornelius was traced back to a Divine initiative (Acts 10; 14:27). Lydia’s conversion followed the opening of her heart by the Lord (Acts 16:14). The “*word of salvation*” was “*sent*” by God to the people (Acts 13:26).

Jesus spoke on this subject, leaving no doubt about the Source of salvation. “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:44). “*Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*” (John 6:65). Admittedly, this is a high view, but it is a true and precise one. Only people in the flesh have questions about why men are saved, and why their salvation was effective. Those who have departed the body have no question about it at all. They know all too well what Jonah learned by hard experience, “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9).

When we come to Christ as He asks us to do (Matt 11:28), we are to

acknowledge we have been drawn there—that is what He said. Coming to Him is like entering a door that has the words “*WHOSOEVER WILL*” over its top. Those words are surely true (Rev 22:17). No one will ever receive salvation who does not want it. Once we are in Christ, however, if we look back at the very entrance that emphasized our willingness, we will see another sign: “*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4). If you cannot fit the two together in this world, rest assured, you will be able to do it in the world to come.

Salvation in its entirety is traced back to God. While in this world, we were brought to salvation through the message of the Apostles and Prophets—but salvation does not belong to them. It belongs to God! Holy men of God, ministers He has given to every man, were involved in us believing (1 Cor 3:5)—but salvation does not belong to them. It belongs to God! The body of Christ, “*Jerusalem which is above*” is “*the mother of us all*” (Gal 4:26)—but salvation does not belong to it. Salvation belongs to God!

Salvation in its entirety is traced back to God. While in this world, we were brought to salvation through the message of the Apostles and Prophets—but salvation does not belong to them. It belongs to God! Holy men of God, ministers He has given to every man, were involved in us believing (1 Cor 3:5)—but salvation does not belong to them. It belongs to God! The body of Christ, “*Jerusalem which is above*” is “*the mother of us all*” (Gal 4:26)—but salvation does not belong to it. Salvation belongs to God! It is our business to become acquainted with this and confess it BEFORE we join the heavenly throng. Salvation belongs to the Lord our God!

Elaborating on this pivotal aspect of our salvation, the Spirit says, “*For of Him and through Him and to Him are ALL THINGS , to whom be glory forever. Amen*” (Rom 11:36). And again, “*Now ALL THINGS are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 5:18). And again, “*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of His will*” (Eph 1:11). And again, “*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are ALL THINGS , in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*” (Heb 2:10).

The glorifying affirmation of heaven, therefore, that salvation “*belongs to our God*” is in keeping with everything that has been revealed about it. This vast multitude gathers everything related to salvation from the beginning to the end, and in a loud voice traces it all back to God!

## **What Has Just Occurred**

### **Relates to Salvation**

The fall of Babylon the great, therefore, does not refer to political matters, but to those relating to salvation! Those who view this sacred volume as a commentary on an antichrist and the formation of a world power do greatly err. Worse still are those who foolishly view this section as having nothing whatsoever to do with the church, the body and bride of Christ Jesus.

The church is the object of God’s great salvation. Jesus loved “*the church*” and gave Himself “*for it*” (Eph 5:25). This is the appointed “*pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15), and the exclusive recipient of His “*fulness*” (Eph 1:23). The exceeding greatness of God’s “*manifold wisdom*” is now being made known to heavenly principalities and powers “*by the church*” (Eph 3:10). Salvation is never dissociated from the church! The ascription of salvation to God, therefore, assumes that the overthrow of Babylon directly related to the church, and the salvation conferred upon it.

Babylon represents Satan’s primary assault upon the body of Christ. It is his corruption of the truth, and was designed to subtly lure people away from the Savior. Deliverance from its delusion and power, whether in coming out of her or in her final overthrow, is an aspect of God’s great salvation. The heavenly realms immediately make that association. There is no reason why we cannot do the same.

## **Glory and Honor and Power**

As with salvation, these attributes “*belong unto the Lord.*” They belong to Him because they are the expressions of His nature. They owe their existence to Him, and belong preeminently to Him.

GLORY has to do with the manifestation or revealing of God's Person. The fall of Babylon is seen as the Lord's doing, and therefore the multitude immediately think of Him when they hear "*Babylon is fallen.*"

HONOR AND POWER refer to dignified and a holy manner in which evil was overcome. God always acts in a manner that reveals Who He really is. Unlike we mortals, His words and deeds are never contrary to His Person. His "*power*" includes not only His ability, but His authority or right to use it. Some men have power, but use it wrongly.

Five times in this book, these three qualities are ascribed to the Lord.

- The 24 elders declare they belong to Him because He has created all things for His please (4:11).
- The vast multitude of holy angels affirm they belong to the Lamb, Who wrought salvation (5:12).
- In response to the angels "*every creature*" in heaven, the earth, under the earth, and in the sea join in ascribing these qualities to God and the Lamb (5:13).
- At the sign of the vast body of the redeemed, the holy angels again affirm these all belong to God forever and ever (7:12).
- And now, "*much people in heaven*" take up the refrain (19:1).

This is a book that expounds salvation. From beginning to end it affirms it is all of God. He authored salvation, He is now working it out in the earth, and He will bring it to a glorious completion. The fall of Babylon the great is involved in that working. The people of God will be delivered from its harassing presence, and are to live in hope of that deliverance. Take hold of the message and rejoice!

## TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS

By saying His judgments are “*true*,” the Spirit is emphasizing they are genuine, real, and dependable. They are in perfect harmony with God’s nature. They also are inevitable, and cannot be overthrown. They are also correct and not to be questioned.

*“For true and righteous are His judgments . . .”* Judgment, or the carrying out of a decree, is one thing. Righteous judgment is something else. As foolish as it may appear, there are people who do not believe what God does it right. They not only question His authority to do what He wills, they also doubt its correctness. Thus, some become angry with God (which is a despicable sin, and not to be tolerated among the people of God). Such foolish thoughts are “*imagination*s” that are to be “*cast down*,” not entertained (2 Cor 10:5-6). Babylon has produced an environment that encourages rebellion and an incorrect assessment of God and His work.

God is righteous in all that He does, and is NEVER to be questioned or interrogated. As it is written, “*If He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’*” (Job 9:12). And again, “*All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’*” (Dan 4:35). There is no mortal that can “*instruct*” the Lord, or suggest to Him a better way of doing things (1 Cor 2:16).

Some become complacent, thinking there is no need to resist evil or make an effort to do good. They imagine that God has made them one way or another, and they actually find fault with Him for what He has done. To such this word of the Lord is given. “*You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’*” (Rom 9:19-20).

Settle it in your mind now, WHAT GOD DOES IS RIGHT! The fall of Babylon will be right! Even though the kings of the earth lament her demise, it will be right. Although the merchants of the earth considered her presence essential, yet her fall

as right. In spite of the shipmasters assessment of her worth, it will be right when she falls. The heavenly multitude confess, *“For true and righteous are His judgments!”*

By saying His judgments are *“true,”* the Spirit is emphasizing they are genuine, real, and dependable. They are in perfect harmony with God’s nature. They also are inevitable, and cannot be overthrown. They are also correct and not to be questioned.

The heavenly multitude sees the fall of Babylon as something God would do; i.e., it is His character to overthrow such a monstrosity. They also see it as correct, without fault, and deserving. In seeing the fall of Babylon, therefore, there is no question about the cause. It is obviously something God has done, and He is therefore given glory. Beholding His working is a prelude to praising Him!

This very truth is stated repeatedly in the Word. *“The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”* (Psa 19:9). *“Righteous are You, O LORD, And upright are Your judgments”* (Psa 119:137). *“The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever”* (Psa 119:160). *“Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments”* (Rev 16:7).

### **High and Lofty Ways**

The working of the Lord cannot be deciphered by the flesh. His ways are too high for unregenerate people to perceive them. As it is written, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa 55:8-9). This condition causes carnal men to question the validity of Divine judgments. It also provokes them to lament over what He does as though no good has come from it. All such responses evidence an aloofness from the Lord and a unity with the condemned order. This is always a serious condition.

### **A Classic Example**

In another place, the Spirit deals with the ways and judgments of God. He proclaims they are lofty, and yet they are right. They are to be received without question. In particular, God's dealings with the Jews and Gentiles are expounded. He gave the Jews the law, and then rejected them because of their unbelief. He did not give the Gentiles the Law, and yet received them even though they did not seek Him. He concluded both Jews and Gentiles in unbelief that He might have mercy on them all. He provoked the Gentiles to jealousy through the Jews, and then provoked the Jews to jealousy through the Gentiles (Rom 11:26-32). All of this seems out of order to the flesh. Yet, faith rises to the occasion and joyfully acknowledges God's dealings were RIGHT. *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen"* (Rom 11:33-36).

### **The Judgment of Babylon**

The judgment of Babylon is much the same. It arose because of Divine judgment. The professed church lost is love for the truth, and thus God sent them *"strong delusion, that they should believe a lie"* (2 Thess 2:11-12). Then Babylon is judged because it exploited those having a love for the truth, opposing them and doing them harm. The whole matter, from beginning to end is absolutely right. Those in the heavenly realms recognize this and glorify God by declaring it. We are told of the matter in order that we might enter into the joyful recognition of the Lord's doing. It is also intended to alert us to the necessity of avoiding ensnarement by Babylon.

### **Summary Thoughts**

All of this means it would be wrong for Babylon to remain. Such a condition would contradict the truth and be at variance with the Divine nature. For this religious corruption to continue to flourish and remain unjudged, would reflect upon the integrity of God.

It is also apparent that Babylon cannot be reformed or made good. It has already been judged in the Divine counsels. It is only a matter of time until it is brought down, bringing honor and glory to God. We must zealously avoid attachment to it, lest we suffer when it falls. Just as surely as its fall is determined, the salvation of

those refusing its dominance is also determined.

## THE GREAT HARLOT

The Lord knows that men encounter great difficulty in thinking of these things. They tend to have a sympathy for lifeless religious organization, even though it is never lauded, but always condemned, in God's word.

*“ . . . because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.”* Our text is not needless repetition, although it appears to be so to the flesh. The fall of Babylon the great is now viewed as the *“judgment of the great harlot.”* Even though this has been said before, it is again emphasized by the Spirit, as He speaks to the churches. The Lord knows that men encounter great difficulty in thinking of these things. They tend to have a sympathy for lifeless religious organization, even though it is never lauded, but always condemned, in God's word.

Solemnly, the Spirit warned early believers of a time when men would *“not endure sound doctrine”* (2 Tim 4:3). Men, *“according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers,”* turning away *“their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables”* (2 Tim 4:3-5). He told them of perilous times in which men would embrace a *“form of godliness,”* but reject *“the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5). Ruthless teachers, referred to as *“grievous wolves,”* would *“enter”* among God's people, *“not sparing the flock”* (Acts 20:29). With remarkable precision (the Spirit speaking *“expressly”* ) men were told of circumstances in the *“latter times.”* Some (praise God, not all!) would *“depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,”* all the while maintaining a *Christian* appearance (1 Tim 4:1).

## **Being a Good Minister**

Paul told young Timothy that if he continued to “*instruct the brethren in these things,*” he would be a “*good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed*” (1 Tim 4:6).

The general absence of this type of instruction indicates a seriously deficient spiritual condition. Remember, we are hearing the Lord’s assessment of false religion. During Apostolic times it was difficult to believe such corruption could dominate the *Christian* world. Even John, when beholding this “*harlot,*” confessed, “*And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement*” (17:6). Her presence defied carnal explanation.

In our time, the situation is quite different. What the Lord said would “*come to pass*” in the latter times has occurred. What is more, the presence of religious corruption is not as abrasive to the hearts of professed believers as it was to John the Beloved. The very presence of evil tends to dull the sensitivity of men, and lull them into spiritual sleep. Without exerting ourselves to remain spiritually awake and alert, we will soon get used to the presence of what God hates. Men are tempted to offer too many explanations for the presence of religious systems they sense are less than acceptable. However, unbelief and complacency cannot be justified. They are always wrong, and are consistently rejected by both God and Christ. They are a seed-bed in which Satan works without restraint. In a spiritually dead environment, the truth cannot work, the Spirit is quenched, and condemned flesh is therefore accepted. God simply will not receive these conditions.

These conditions demand that the Spirit elaborate on the fall of Babylon, lest we be put to sleep by the wicked one. A lack of sensitivity among professed believers enables Satan to work freely among them. Knowing the truth, on the other hand, will make men “*free*” (John 8:32).

## **The GREAT Harlot**

**Babylon is the GREATEST harlot. It is the worse**

corruption, and most serious departure from the Lord. He is more angry with her than with the heathen nations! If one doubts this, consider the manner in which our Lord spoke to the corrupted Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Lawyers. He was completely intolerant of them, and offered not a shred of hope to them.

“ . . . *because He has judged the great harlot . . .*” Babylon is not merely a harlot, but “*THE great harlot.*” The expression is taken from the Greek words τὴν πόρνην τὴν μέγαν, which literally are translated, “the harlot the greatest .” The Amplified Bible translates the phrase, “*the great and notorious harlot [idolatrous].*”

Here is the GREATEST form of unfaithfulness—the most grievous kind of fornication. It is worse than the fleshly fornication, which itself excludes people from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:20-22; 1 Tim 1:10). Those who commit fornication will be judged by God (Heb 13:4). In this text, however, we are seeing fornication of even a worse order. If those who, by fornication, sin against their own body (1 Cor 6:18), and are condemned to the lake of fire (Rev 21:8), what of those guilty of an even worse form of fornication?

“*The great harlot*” has been unfaithful to God! She has worn His name, yet courted and become involved with the world. Her intimacy was not with the Lord Who purchased her, but with the world and the devil, who have been summarily and totally rejected and condemned by the Lord.

Long before the dominance of this great harlot, James wrote, “*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4). With great solemnity David wrote, “*For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee*” (Psa 73:27). To wayward Israel the Lord cried out, “*But come here, You sons of the sorceress, You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!*” (Isa 57:3).

Do you wonder how God feels about those who do not walk with Him—who refuse involvement with Him, and walk in the flesh? There is so much in the Word of God on this, one wonders how it can be missed. Hear His lament over recalcitrant Israel. *“Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for travelers; That I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men”* (Jer 9:2). Jesus identified the very generation to whom He appeared and ministered as *“a wicked and adulterous generation”* (Matt 12:39; 16:4).

Babylon is the GREATEST harlot. It is the worse corruption, and most serious departure from the Lord. He is more angry with her than with the heathen nations! If one doubts this, consider the manner in which our Lord spoke to the corrupted Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Lawyers. He was completely intolerant of them, and offered not a shred of hope to them. Have you forgotten His words? *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . how can ye escape the damnation of hell? . . . Therefore you will receive greater condemnation . . . you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves . . .”* (Matt 23:13,14,15,33).

For those who wear the name of Jesus to embrace the world, they must forsake the Lord. To become a friend of the world, whether an individual or a group, Christ must be rejected. If the wisdom of the world is adopted, the wisdom of God is refused. If men seek to please men, they abruptly stop serving God. It is not possible to serve two masters! Our allegiance cannot be given to the Lord and to the world at the same time. We cannot court the world and fellowship with Christ simultaneously. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other”* (Matt 6:24). It makes no difference how much effort is spent attempting to serve the world AND God, it simply CANNOT be done. A choice is made to serve one or the other. That choice is known by God.

What makes this *“harlot”* the worst one is that she still retains the name of the Lord. She is like an adulterous wife who keeps her husband’s name, yet is intimate with others. In the earth, harlotry, or whoredom, can be committed with a friend of the husband/wife. But this is not the case in spiritual matters. What compounds this problem is that the spiritual harlotry is with God’s ENEMY.

The false church wears Jesus' name, but actually has no identity with Him. He is not involved with her, and she is not involved with Him. She says she is religious, but she is idolatrous. She makes claim to being Christ's church, but is actually His enemy. All of her religion is vain, and is actually offensive to God. Of her best and most impressive rituals God says what He said to disobedient Israel, "*When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them*" (Isa 1:12-14, NASB).

This is no mere conjecture, for God is declaring the overthrow of Babylon, the greatest form of harlotry, in the Revelation. O, that men would take this matter more seriously, and come away from lifeless forms of religion. Let men cease their feeble attempts to justify what God cannot stand!

### **She Corrupted the Earth**

When those wearing the name of Jesus live in the flesh, they open the door for the devil. They loose the powers of darkness, and cause men to feel comfortable in their sin. They cause any sense of discontent with sin to be removed, and lead men deeper into alienation from God.

“ . . . who corrupted the earth with her fornication . . . ” The Amplified Bible translates it, “*who corrupted and demoralized and poisoned the earth with her lewdness and adultery [idolary].*” Here we again see the extent of Babylon's influence. She is a bearer of poison and corruption. Wherever she is, everything is made worse, and nothing is made better. For some, this is too difficult to receive—yet it remains the truth. With the narcotic of her religion, she has lulled men off to sleep. They think less of the Lord because of her. They do not hate sin, because of her. They involve themselves with things that are an abomination to the Lord,

doing so without a twinge of conscience—and all because of her! The wicked are not ashamed to wear the name of Jesus, because of her. Those whose hearts are far from the Lord, and who have no interest in Him and His great salvation, feel at liberty to become, what men call, *Christians*. There is not a syllable in all of God's Word that encourages them to think in this manner. It is because of Babylon, the great harlot, that they do so.

Babylon has "*corrupted the earth.*" It has brought a curse upon the earth just as surely as Adam did (Rom 5:12-19). It is even a worse curse, because it comes in the name of Christ, offering help, answers, and guidance in spiritual matters.

When those wearing the name of Jesus live in the flesh, they open the door for the devil. They loose the powers of darkness, and cause men to feel comfortable in their sin. They cause any sense of discontent with sin to be removed, and lead men deeper into alienation from God. Spiritual Babylon is the greatest harlot, the foremost example of unfaithfulness, and the most significant form of spiritual death.

### **The Blood of God's Servants Avenged**

*" . . . and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."* The Amplified Bible reads, "*And He has avenged—visited on her the penalty for—the blood of His servants.*" For years—often centuries—it seemed as though God had forgotten the blood of His servants. That assumption constrained Babylon to more readily oppose the saints, and engage in a suppression of the truth.

God's nature is to avenge the blood of His servants. "*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people*" (Deut 32:43). Wherever His people are oppressed, the oppression will not be forgotten. You may remember Jesus told His disciples of religious oppression. In their case, it came from the Jews. "*They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service*" (John 16:2). This circumstance is also true of "*the great harlot,*" Babylon "*the great city.*"

But God will not forget the shedding of the blood of His people—he will not! This promise is made in the Revelation. *“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due”* (16:6). If the blood of Abel cried out from the ground (Gen 4:10), you can imagine what the blood of those who were slain *“for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held”* is crying (Rev 6:9).

Many of God’s people have been viciously opposed by assumed brothers and sisters in Christ. Although their blood has been shed, God is not unmindful of their situation. Diotrophes, who *“loved to have the preeminence”* among the brethren, opposed the Apostle John and those with him, forbidding the church to receive them (3 John). Alexander the coppersmith opposed Paul, doing him much evil (2 Tim 4:14). Through John the Apostle, the Spirit informed us of the seriousness of hating the children of God. *“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now . . . But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness , and does not know where he is going , because the darkness has blinded his eyes . . . Whoever hates his brother is a murderer , and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him . . . If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar ; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”* (1 John 2:9,11; 3:15; 4:20).

A disdain for the people of God is one of the chief attributes of Babylon, the *“great harlot.”* It cannot abide those who are in quest of heaven, love the Lord with all of their heart, and have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts. From this viewpoint, Babylon is a system that does not allow for being alive to God. It depends upon an alliance with the world. That is why it rejects those who *“preach the Word.”* That is why it hates an emphasis upon eternal things, and those who have set their affection on things above, and not on things on the earth.

Before the Lord, their hatred and rejection of the people of God classes them as murderers—that is what the Spirit declares. It also confirms they are walking in darkness, and that their eyes have been blinded by it. Any profession of life toward God by such people is a lie, and is no truth at all. Whether they were guilty of shedding the blood of the saints in martyrdom, or rejecting them and their influence, God will avenge the saints upon her. She has made life more difficult for believers. Many a preacher has become fatigued dealing with lifeless assemblies. Numerous teachers have become casualties on the battlefield of Babylon. Countless believers have become weak and faint because of this monster.

# GONE FOREVER!

*“Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!”* For the second time the cry comes from the heavenly chambers, *“ALLELUIA!”* Praise ye the Lord! Give Him the glory for what has occurred! See His hand at work, and magnify His name! Babylon now appears like ancient Sodom, with *“her smoke”* rising up as *“the smoke of a furnace”* (Gen 19:28). This is the language of utter destruction!

It is also the language of the utter helplessness and frustration that attends being cursed by God. The situation is much like that of Joshua’s destruction of Ai. *“And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers. Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai”* (Josh 8:20-21).

This is a fulfillment of the promise of the Psalmist concerning the wicked. *“But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away”* (Psa 37:20). And again, *“As smoke is driven away, So drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish at the presence of God”* (Psa 68:2).

There is coming a time when a diligent search for Babylon will yield no results at all. It will be gone forever: i.e., it will be taken away, never to rise again. No remnant of it will be left. No residue will survive her destruction. Finally the word will be fulfilled in every sense, *“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more”* (Psa 37:10). No more jeopardy! No more conflict! No more opposition! No more grief! The day of Babylon’s fall is surely coming.

## THE FINAL AMEN

***“And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, Amen! Alleluia!”*** For the first time since the fourteenth chapter, the twenty-four elders are mentioned (14:3). They are mentioned twelve times in this vision (4:4,10; 5:5,6,8,11,14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). Always, their introduction comes in the wake of a great revelation, or unfolding of the Person and work of Christ. They have an intense interest in the salvation of God, and everything associated with it.

1. We first see them when exposed to the heavenly throne (4:4).
2. They immediately give glory to God when His Person is lauded by the four living creatures (4:10).
3. One of them spoke to John about the Lion of the Tribe of Judah prevailing (5:5).
4. The Lamb stood in the midst of the elders (5:6).
5. The elders fell down before the Lamb, having the prayers of the saints in their possession (5:8).
6. They join with the heavenly host in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb Who was slain (5:11).
7. They fall down and worship Him who lives forever (5:14).
8. All of the angels fall down and worship the Lord while in the presence of the elders (7:11).
9. One of the elders identifies the redeemed as those who have come out of great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:13).
10. When it was announced that the kingdoms of this world had become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, the elders fell down and worshiped God (11:16).
11. The 144,000 are pictured as singing a new song in the presence of the elders—a song only the redeemed could learn (14:3).
12. Joining the four living creatures, the elders fall down and worship God at the news that Babylon has fallen (19:4).

What is to be learned from all of this? First, these elders are mentioned in exclusive association with the salvation of God. It is a salvation wrought out and governed by the Lamb. It is a salvation that involves the prayers of the saints. They behold the salvation of God as the result of the Lamb’s work, both past and present. They rejoice at the sight of a cleansed multitude, and delight to hear them sing praise to God. Now, they praise God for the demise of the great imposter, Babylon the great, or the great harlot.

All of this confirms that this book is about salvation, not the jostling of earthly empires. It is an account of the triumph of the Lamb, not a reign of terror by His enemy. These elders do not marvel at the rising of the beast, but rejoice at his demise. They do not wonder at the rise of Babylon, but glory in its dissolution. If we miss this truth, we will not profit from the book of Revelation. The vision John had will not be perceived as relevant unless it is seen in direct relation with the salvation we have in Christ Jesus.

### AMEN!

While falling down and worshipping “*God who sat upon the throne,*” they cry out “*AMEN!*” They have correctly perceived the fall of Babylon as directed from the heavenly Throne. “*AMEN,*” they cry. Here, indeed, is a word not often heard within the precincts of Babylon. It is because they do not perceive a connection between what is seen and heard with the God of heaven. But the elders and the four living creatures perceive the association and cry out “*AMEN!*”

Here, indeed, is a word not often heard within the precincts of Babylon. It is because they do not perceive a connection between what is seen and heard with the God of heaven. But the elders and the four living creatures perceive the association and cry out “*AMEN!*”

Ten times this word is used in the Revelation. It is even one of the names ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ (3:14). Twice the word erupts from John in his opening remarks to the churches. “*And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen . Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen ” (1:5-6).*

Jesus Himself uses the term when proclaiming His triumph over death and hell.

*“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death” (1:15). The four living creatures are noted for saying “ Amen ” (5:14). All the holy angels join in its use (7:12). John also shouts it out. “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen . Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen ” (22:20-21). Thirty-six times the word is used in Romans through Jude, and five times in the Gospels. In the giving of the Law, those to whom it was spoken were required to say “AMEN” (Num 5:22; Deut 27:15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26). At the return of the ark, all of the people shouted “AMEN,” and praised the Lord (1 Chron 16:36). When Nehemiah and the people set themselves to rebuild the walls of the holy city, “all the assembly said AMEN and praised the Lord” (Neh 5:13). When Ezra opened the book of the Lord before the people, all the people stood up. After he had blessed the Lord, “all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands” (Neh 8:6). Three times the phrase “Amen and Amen” is used in the Psalms (41:13; 72:19; 89:52). It should be not be a strange word to us.*

This should not be a strange word to us. It has been sanctified in its use by Jesus, the prophets, Israel, the apostles, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the redeemed in heaven.

The word “AMEN” is a response of insight and agreement. It confirms the one saying it has seen what the Lord has done and concurs with it. It takes all of the glory and honor and sends it back to God. The word also means “so be it,” or let it stand just that way. It is an acknowledgment that the speaker would have it no other way. Literally, the word means “let it be so,” “truly,” “this is indeed true,” and “that is the way it should be” (Thayers).

Thus, the heavenly responders have seen that what has occurred (the fall of Babylon) has come from God Himself. They see it as being just and right. They also acknowledge it should be no other way, fulfilling all of the requirements of a holy God. They are also willing to let it stand the way it is. They do not plead for Babylon. They do not ask for it to be given another chance. By saying “AMEN,” they have acquiesced with Divine judgment, thereby glorying God.

**ALLELUIA!**

By saying “*Alleluia*,” the elders are urging that the work of God be recognized, and that praise be given to Him.

### REJOICE IN THE WORKING OF THE LORD!

This is the heavenly environment. We do well to seek to emulate it upon earth. As we see the working of the Lord, whether in the overthrow of wickedness or the establishment of righteousness, we should agree by saying “AMEN!” It is also in order to summon our colleagues to the recognition of the work of God by saying “Alleluia!” Join us in praising Him! Praise, remember, is “*comely*” (Psa 33:1).

## EVERYONE PRAISE HIM!

*“Then a voice came from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!”* When it comes to the praise of God, everything that “*hath breath*” is to be involved (Psa 150:6). Already those in immediate proximity to the throne are praising the Lord. But that is not enough! A great thing has occurred – something enhancing our perception of God. A work has been done that clarifies His intent and purpose, and opens up His nature more fully to us. Not only has God been seen in the redemption of humanity, He is also seen in the overthrow of those corrupting the truth and maligning His people.

Among men, great efforts are expended to bring honor to their peers. Those captured by the spirit of the world create special gatherings for the bestowing of honor upon those they consider worthy of the same. They give awards to those who can act well on the stage. They lift up those who can play well at sports. They even give prizes to those who are able to give the people what they want, satisfying their corrupt appetites in literature and other means. Praise is not something strange among men. When it ends with anyone other than God and Christ, however, it is never right!

### The Source of the Voice

If you are serving God, you must do so with an alert mind and sensitive heart. When the Lord works, both heaven and earth are to be filled with praise. This is a frame of spirit that Law cannot produce. Those who seek to serve the Lord out of a sense of slavish obligation will not be able to see what He is doing. Such service closes the eyes of the heart, confining awareness to the flesh.

*“Then a voice came from the throne.”* This voice does not come from Patmos. It comes from the Throne of the universe: the Source of all power, and the Originator of all things. In the world, great lamentation is heard at the fall of Babylon. But amidst the hopeless wailing of the kings, merchants, and shipmasters of this world, another voice is heard. It is a high and demanding voice. It beholds the same thing that has caused those of the world to lament. It speaks with authority.

The book Revelation is the opening of the reign of God and the Lamb. It is, in a very true sense, a *“throne book.”* With remarkable consistency, it draws our attention away from the world and to the Throne. It expounds the One sitting there, and opens His purpose to us. It reveals the manner in which the government of this throne is conducted, and what will be the outcome of that government.

No less than forty-one times we read of this throne in Revelation—and it is ALWAYS a central consideration. Both blessing and judgment proceed from this throne. The purpose of God is executed from it, and all praise is uttered before it. Those who serve the Lord receive direction from this throne.

- *God the Father* is declared to be on this throne (3:21; 4:2-3,9,10; 5:1,7,13; 6:16; 7:11,15; 12:5; 14:5; 19:4; 21:5; 22:1).
- *The Son of God, the Lamb*, is in it (3:21; 5:6,13; 6:16; 7:9,10; 7:17; 20:11; 21:5; 22:1,3).
- *The Holy Spirit* is related to this throne (1:4; 4:5).
- *The living creatures* are around this throne (4:6,9; 5:6,11; 7:11; 14:3).
- *The twenty-four elders* surround this throne (4:4,10; 5:6,11; 7:11;14:3; 19:4).

- *The voice of direction* proceeds from this throne (16:17; 19:5).
- *Prayers* are presented before the throne. (8:3).
- The *river of the water of life* flows from this throne (22:1).
- This is the place from which *judgment* proceeds (6:16; 16:7).
- *Worship* occurs before this throne (4:10; 7:11; 19:4).

Now a voice comes from this throne. It is more than just a voice, it is like the voice of the Lord, coming “*out from the throne.*” It is “*powerful*” and “*full of majesty*” (Psa 29:4). It breaks despotic powers, strikes as flashing lightning, and shakes the wilderness (Psa 29:5-8). This voice, while it was probably that of an angel, perfectly reflects the “*mind of the Lord.*” It is in strict accord with His purpose, and is authoritative in its demands. Let us listen to it carefully.

### *His Servants*

“*Praise our God, all ye His servants.*” Those who serve the Lord are to be first and foremost in the expression of praise. They are not only to engage themselves in His will, but be swift to recognize His work. Sensitivity to God’s work is essential.

Holy angels are among these “*servants*” (Psa 104:4), and you see in Revelation how quick they are to praise their God (7:11-12). They are admonished to praise the Lord also. “*Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure*” (Psa 103:20-21).

Now the call comes for “*ALL*” His servants to praise Him. It is another way of saying, Behold what I have done ! It is a call to those who are ministering in behalf of the Lord. As the Psalmist would say, “*Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD! You who stand in the house of the LORD, In the courts of the house of our God*” (Psa 135:1-2).

This is not “*praise*” as conceived by the contemporary church. Many boast of singing praise who are prompted more by a supposed leader than by spiritual insight. In this praise, there is no leader. Nor, indeed, are they asked to sing a series of songs or choruses. While there is certainly nothing wrong with that when

done truthfully, that is not the point of the text. The praise that is called for will come from insight—from beholding the working of the Lord. In particular, it is prompted by an understanding that the Lord has brought Babylon, the great harlot, down in judgment. God is to be praised for that work!

If you are serving God, you must do so with an alert mind and sensitive heart. When the Lord works, both heaven and earth are to be filled with praise. This is a frame of spirit that Law cannot produce. Those who seek to serve the Lord out of a sense of slavish obligation will not be able to see what He is doing. Such service closes the eyes of the heart, confining awareness to the flesh.

This summons is like an awakening call. It bids us turn away from earthly responses and evaluations, that we might see things as they really are.

#### *Those Who Fear Him*

“ . . . ***and those who fear Him, both small and great!***” There is a society in the earth that “*fear*” the Lord. They stand in awe of Him, and will intentionally do nothing to displease Him. They are aggressive to do His will, and seek to be used by Him as extensively as possible.

All men are not in this category. Even in the midst of the plagues, the Egyptians were told, “*I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God*” (Ex 9:2). It is said of the wicked, “*There is no fear of God before his eyes*” (Psa 36:1). Again, the Lord said of the entire human race apart from Christ, “*There is no fear of God before their eyes*” (Rom 3:18). Such people are never admonished to praise the Lord. Nor, indeed, are they capable of doing so.

Those who are God’s “*servants*” are those who truly “*fear*” Him. They do his bidding and seek His will. They vigorously shun things perceived as offensive to God, and look for His working among men. They are perceptive of His presence and have preference for His Word and work.

“*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psa 111:10). The fear of the

Lord is the threshold of all true wisdom. This is the entrance point for all proper reasoning and conclusion.

When the voice summons those who fear the Lord to praise Him, insightful and hearty praise is called for. There are no mere mechanics here!

The fall of Babylon is an occasion for glory to be brought to the Lord. This is so because of its significance. Here was Satan's chief and most productive work. As a beautiful and luring harlot, she had seduced the entire world, including kings, merchants, and those who traffic on the sea. She had wrested the truth from the grasp of the multitudes, taking away the "*key of knowledge*" as the Lawyers of Jesus' day (Lk 11:52). With wicked shrewdness, she had led the world into a false view of God, a corrupt understanding of the Scriptures, and a distorted view of salvation. In the name of Christ, she had allowed the world and its manners into the church. Those who were the closest to God were the furthest from her, and she knew it. Therefore she opposed the saints, even unto death when allowed to do so. She reigned virtually uncontested for centuries. She molded the way people thought about God, Christ, salvation, and the Scriptures as a whole. She crafted religious music, and created the professional clergy. She mastered the form and rejected Divine power. What a phenomenon she was!

But God overthrew her—decisively and forever. He did not allow her to continue one second beyond her appointed time. As soon as His purpose was served, the Lord removes Babylon. Therefore great praise is due His holy name.

## THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNS!

Whatever a person may think of the Sovereignty of God, and His power to do His will, it is good to remember what this text says. A lot of people have missed the blessing because they simply have been too slow to respond. Others have been spared of judgment because they were "*quick to understand*" (Dan 1:4). There are

some people who will not see the real issues until they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. They will have no advantage at that time—none at all.

*“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”*”

### **An Instant Response**

There is an instant response to the voice from the throne. In the heavenly realms there is a glaring absence of the slowness and retardation that too often are found in the world. Slowness of heart is a serious condition, and is always rebuked, and never excused. Jesus upbraided the two on the road to Emmaus for being in this condition. *“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”* (Lk 24:25). To be *“slow in heart”* is to be dull, slow to comprehend, and slow to act. This is the result of living and reasoning in the flesh. The closer one is to the Lord, the less this condition exists. There is a place where the soul can reside where response is instant or immediate. It is also insightful and brings great glory to God.

Such is the response we are witnessing. The great multitude respond in the same manner as the aged prophetess Anna. Upon realizing she was in the presence of the promised Savior, *“in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord”* (Lk 2:38). They are alert to the heavenly frequency. O, that this trait were more prominent among those professing the name of Christ.

There are times when our very existence depends upon an instant response. There is a brief dialog in Jeremiah that confirms this to be the case. *“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it”* (Jer 18:7-10).

The heavenly multitude do not require a lengthy exhortation, or an insightful leader to expound the reasonableness of giving praise to God. Immediately, they respond to God's glory by affirming His greatness as seen in the fall of Babylon.

Whatever a person may think of the Sovereignty of God, and His power to do His will, it is good to remember what this text says. A lot of people have missed the blessing because they simply have been too slow to respond. Others have been spared of judgment because they were "*quick to understand*" (Dan 1:4). There are some people who will not see the real issues until they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. They will have no advantage at that time—none at all.

The heavenly multitude do not require a lengthy exhortation, or an insightful leader to expound the reasonableness of giving praise to God. Immediately, they respond to God's glory by affirming His greatness as seen in the fall of Babylon.

It goes without saying, the love of the truth and a disdain for error are required for such a response to be given. Those who possess these qualities will be glad when truth is openly established and the lie is obviously overthrown.

### **A Unified Response**

We do not hear VOICES, but "*the VOICE of a great multitude.*" The word "*voice*" is used three times in this verse. "*voice of a great multitude . . . the voice of many waters . . . the voice of mighty thunderings.*" All three of these expressions refer to the utterance of the multitude. The sound is like the roar of a mighty cataract, or waterfall. It also bears resemblance to the arresting sound of a loud rolling clap of thunder. In all three cases, unmistakable UNITY is emphasized. The multitude shout with harmonious voice. The sound was like a single mighty waterfall, comprised of much water, but joined together in one mighty cascade of water. The sound was like thunder--like a rolling peal thunder, unmixed with confusing sounds.

Multitudes are not always noted for harmony—especially in this world. The building of the tower of Babel was disrupted when, due to Divine judgment, the people were not longer united in their speech (Gen 11:7-8). You may also remember when the city of Ephesus became involved in turmoil because of Paul’s preaching. Of that occasion it is written, “*Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together*” (Acts 19:32). A multitude is more often an occasion for friction and disagreement rather than unity. In this world, the larger the gathering, the more possibility there is for contradiction and disruption.

But it is not so in the heavenly places! Here is a most glorious aspect of dwelling near the throne—or walking in the light. Near the Throne, the more there are, the greater the unity. Personalities are pulled together as they are focused upon the Lord. They become so entwined with one another that they can speak with a single voice. That is what we have in our text, a multitude with ONE voice! Praise the Lord.

### *Such Unity Can Be Enjoyed Now*

This type of unity can be enjoined now—in this world. It will be in measure, to be sure, but it will be glorious. It is possible to be “*of one heart and one soul*” (Acts 4:32). We are even admonished to “*all speak the same thing,*” and be “*be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (1 Cor 1:10). It is possible for believers to “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*” (Phil 1:27).

But we must dwell in “*heavenly places*” for this to occur. If men insist on remaining “*in the flesh,*” this cannot be accomplished. Such unity is a heavenly trait, not a worldly one. Only to the degree that we join around the throne will we be able speak with one voice and have the same message.

### **A Commanding Response**

This response is not happening in an undetected corner—a sort of private answer to the Divine summons. No secrecy here. The praise of this multitude reverberates

throughout the heavenly domain like the sound of a gigantic waterfall and rolling thunder. God has spoken to man in a “*still small voice*” because of his present frailty (1 Kgs 19:12). But that is not the case when created beings speak in praise to God! Heavenly communications are consistently represented as “*loud*.” Nineteen times this kind of voice is mentioned in this book. They are worth of noting.

1. On the Lord’s day, John heard a “*LOUD VOICE*” (1:10).
2. A strong angel asked in a “*LOUD VOICE*” who was worthy to open the book of Divine destiny (5:2).
3. A vast host of angels praised the Lamb with a “*LOUD VOICE*” (5:12).
4. The souls of the martyrs under the altar cried with a “*LOUD VOICE*” for their blood to be avenged (6:10).
5. An authoritative angel cried with a “*LOUD VOICE*,” to angels empowered to hurt those on the earth, to wait until God’s servants were sealed (7:2).
6. The redeemed of all ages were beheld ascribing salvation to God in a “*LOUD VOICE*” (7:10).
7. A mighty angel cries with a “*LOUD VOICE*” “*Woe, Woe, Woe to inhabitants of the earth*” (8:13).
8. A mighty angel announces with a “*LOUD VOICE*” that time has run out (10:3).
9. God’s witnesses are called into heaven with a “*LOUD VOICE*” (11:12).
10. When Satan was cast out of heaven, a “*LOUD VOICE*” came from heaven announcing the arrival of salvation (12:10).

So it is with the commanding response that we hear.

It is not an orchestrated response, like those fabricated by men. This is the response of insight—of those who have comprehended something. It comes from those upon whom the glory of God has dawned, who have beheld and delighted in His work.

11. An angel cried with a “*LOUD VOICE*” for all men to fear God and give Him glory (14:7).
12. Another angel announces in a “*LOUD VOICE*” that torment is reserved for those giving in to the beast (14:9).
13. The Lord is summoned by an angel with a “*LOUD VOICE*” to reap the

- earth (14:15).
14. The angels with seven bowls of Divine wrath hear a “*LOUD VOICE*” from the temple telling them to pour out their bowls upon the earth (16:1).
  15. The announcement “*It is done*” is made from the temple of heaven in a “*LOUD VOICE*” (16:17).
  16. The fall of Babylon is announced by a mighty angel in a “*LOUD VOICE*” (18:2).
  17. A great multitude in heaven ascribe praise to God with a “*LOUD VOICE*” (19:1).
  18. An angel standing in the sun calls in a “*LOUD VOICE*” for the birds of prey to gather for the supper of God (19:17).
  19. A “*LOUD VOICE*” from heaven announces that the tabernacle of God is with men (21:3).

This is perfectly consistent with the remainder of Scripture. God gave the law in a “*loud voice*” (Deut 5:22). The Levites gave Divine directives to the people with a “*loud voice*” (Deut 27:14). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon spoke before the people with a “*loud voice*” (1 Kings 8:55). Jesus’ cry to God from the cross, concerning being forsaken, was in a “*loud voice*” (Matt 27:46). When He yielded up His spirit on the cross He did so with a “*loud voice*” (Matt 27:50). He summoned Lazarus from the grave with a “*loud voice*” (John 11:43). When Paul healed a man lame from birth, with a “*loud voice*” he commanded him to stand up (Acts 14:10). On the day of Pentecost, Peter “*lifted up his voice*” and spoke (Acts 2:14).

This is certainly not intended to bind laws upon the people of God, demanding that they speak with certain tones. However, there is an idea conveyed here that must be seen. When speaking with an acute awareness of God, the whole person is thrown into the activity. As the heart becomes exhilarated, even our speech is affected.

So it is with the commanding response that we hear. It is not an orchestrated response, like those fabricated by men. This is the response of insight—of those who have comprehended something. It comes from those upon whom the glory of God has dawned, who have beheld and delighted in His work.

**The Lord God Omnipotent**

Here is a most telling description of the Lord: “*the Lord God Omnipotent.*” Other versions use the expression “*the Almighty.*” This is the only place in any standard English Bible where the word “*Omnipotent*” is used. I like the word because it is arresting, provoking us to ponder the nature of our God.

From the standpoint of language definition, the word means “*He who holds sway over all things; the ruler of all; almighty*” (Thayers) . There is nothing that is not subject to Him. There is no realm over which He does not preside. There is no enemy that does not answer directly to Him or is not subject to Him. His will is the dominant will.

Our Lord is “*the Almighty God*” (Gen 17:1). Nothing—absolutely nothing—is “*too hard for the Lord*” (Gen 18:24). Well did Job confess, “*I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You*” (Job 42:2). His strength is “*everlasting strength*” that cannot deteriorate or be overcome by another (Isa 26:4). It is still true, as Jesus said, “*with God all things are possible*” (Matt 19:26).

Spiritual Babylon has robbed people of the awareness of this truth. I fear that man’s “free will” and imagined abilities has pushed this perspective of God into the background. Myriads of professed believers actually doubt that all things are possible with God. They do not pray as though He is Almighty. Neither do they live as though all things were possible with Him. Unwittingly (or perhaps wittingly) they have magnified man and reduced God.

With seeming innocence (that is really ignorance), men speak of “making Christ your Lord.” It all may sound good, but it is not. That phrase is NEVER used in Scripture—in any version. There is not the slightest hint in all of Scripture that ANYONE exists over whom Christ is not Lord—particularly in the church! No less than seventy-five times believers are told of “*our Lord*” —not a potential Lord! Rather than receiving Him as Lord, we are told to CONFESS Him as Lord (Rom 10:9). Moreover, we are told that eventually every tongue will confess that He “*IS Lord*” (Rom 14:10; Phil 2:11).

There is no reason why we cannot begin now—in this world—to enjoy this perspective. It is the truth, and no imagination. It will strengthen our hands for the battle, and cause us to cast our anchor upward instead of settling down in this world.

Whether willingly or unwilling, Christ IS “*Lord of ALL*” (Acts 10:36). God has already “*made*” Him both “*LORD and Christ*” (Acts 2:36). There is no place in all of Scripture where it says God or Christ WILL be Lord. The Holy Spirit never moved a single person to say God or Christ OUGHT to be Lord. Any place and every place the Omnipotence, power, authority, or ability of God and Christ is mentioned, it is ALWAYS in the present—something already in possession and active. If God is Omnipotent (and he emphatically IS), it can be no other way.

Doubt and unbelief hide this reality from the human heart and mind. Those who say they are “*angry with God*” have denied His Omnipotence and authority. When weakness of heart comes upon us, it is because we have lost sight of this truth. Babylon is noted for its neglect of declaring the greatness of God. It has taught men to speak on a lower plain, as though everything depended upon men. As a result, the powers of hell have been loosed, and “*strong delusion*” has come upon men.

But those in heavenly realms know the truth! They affirm God IS “*Omnipotent.*” They confess that power has been seen in the overthrow of Babylon, who thought it was invincible. In this great section, the rise and fall of Babylon are declared to have been under Sovereign control. Not a single soul in the Son was lost, and not a solitary personality in the power of the devil will be saved. Although the most subtle and powerful of all enemies aligned himself against the seemingly frail people of God, his purpose was not fulfilled. It is the purpose of God that realized fulfillment, for THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNS!

There is no reason why we cannot begin now—in this world—to enjoy this perspective. It is the truth, and no imagination. It will strengthen our hands for the battle, and cause us to cast our anchor upward instead of settling down in this world.

## He Reigns!

What a glorious confession! It is the shout of understanding! The power of God is not only possessed, it is employed. Our Lord's Omnipotence has been in place from the beginning. Even when our blessed Savior sheathed His Deity to walk among men (Phil 2:6-7), the Father remained in control. Never has the Father sheathed His power—NEVER! Paul elaborates on this in First Corinthians 15:27. *"For God has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is plain that this does not include the One who put all things in subjection under Him"* (NRSV).

Correctly seen, the reign of Almighty God has been exhibited throughout history. Anywhere and everywhere there was a confrontation with opposition, the Lord overcame. Whether we are speaking of the devil and his angels, the world of Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, or the Egyptian oppressors, God has ALWAYS triumphed. If God commanded a soul to be sustained, it was sustained, even if birds of the air and an impoverished widow had to do it. 450 prophets of Baal were no match for the person upon whom the favor of the Lord rested. A thousand Philistines were no match for a man endowed with power from God, even though he had only a jawbone in his hand. A seasoned warrior over nine feet tall could not stand before a young lad with nothing but a sling and five smooth stones. Although a nation of unbelieving Jews sought to stifle the preaching of a former Pharisee, they were impotent to do so. THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNS!

For centuries a seemingly invincible foe appeared to rule the world. Kings, merchants, and traders joined with this oppressor in a unity that appeared unbreakable. But at the very moment God's purpose is served, and without delay, the wicked conglomerate will come tumbling down. THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNS!

Determine in your heart not to wait until the close of time to acknowledge the Omnipotence of our God! Join the heavenly multitude now in confessing *"Christ is Lord to the glory of God."* It will honor God and bring strength to you. If God is for you, who CAN be against you?

THE REIGN OF THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this series, I have labored to show nothing totally new is taught in the Revelation of Christ. The salvation of God is consistently the preeminent matter. The purpose of God is at the heart of the book. The devil is presented as our most formidable foe, and corrupt religion is declared to be his chief weapon. The saints are seen as misfits in, and opposed by, this world. Their work, life, and death are declared to be under Divine supervision. Nothing they have done for Him has been in vain, and He will avenge all who have aligned themselves against His people. The Word of God is declared to be pivotal in the affairs of the Lord. Those who have that Word and declare it are affirmed to be the premier people in this world. The closer people are to the world, whether kings or slaves, the further they are from God. The more aware personalities are of the Lord, the quicker and more insightful is their praise. Ultimately the Lord Jesus will be seen and confessed to have been Lord. Finally, the devil and all of his hosts will be seen as intruders, and will be cast into the lake of fire.

Who is the soul who is unable to see the perfect harmony of this with the rest of Scripture? Who would dare to say this message is not relevant to the saints of God, or that it does not bring comfort and solace to those who are oppressed for righteousness sake?

Let every soul take heart! Corruptions of the truth will not always exist. They are only present for a relatively brief moment to draw out from among the saints those with no appetite for the truth. False churches, reprehensible though they be, are necessary *“that those who are approved may have become evident”* (1 Cor 11:19, NASB).

When, therefore, grief comes upon you because of apparent corruption around you, do not weep as one who has no hope! It is not over yet. *“Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning”* (Psa 30:5). As you sow and water the eternal seed remember, *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves*

*with him*” (Psa 126:6).

As you embrace the message of this glorious book, take hold of this truth, and do not let it go. “*For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry*” (Heb 10:37). Until then, “*with purpose of heart,*” cling unto the Lord (Acts 11:23). It will soon be over.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 35

## THE BRIDE'S READINESS

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.' And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' " (Rev 19:7-10, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Every believer will ultimately triumph, and every unbeliever will eventually be thrust from the presence of the Lord. Whether we are speaking of individuals or groups of individuals, faith will be rewarded and unbelief will be condemned. That is the overriding message of the Revelation!

This chapter opens with the joyful response of a great multitude in heaven. The ploy of Satan [spiritual Babylon] has been brought down by the King of kings. Although it appeared invincible, and enjoyed dominance for an unusual period of time, it could not stand. From its inception, the curse of God was upon it. Now that its purpose has been served, it falls, "*broken without hand,*" as it were (Dan 8:25). But this is not the

conclusion of our God's purpose. The objective of the Lord is not merely to overthrow evil, or to remove the devil and his hosts from the realm of influence.

Isaiah prophesied the coming Savior would be a King. He affirmed the Lord would "*order*" and "*establish*" His kingdom—not merely decimate opposing kingdoms (Isa 9:7). The "*increase*" of His kingdom would be everlasting, having no end. Daniel described this "*increase*" as a stone growing in size, crushing all other kingdoms, and finally filling the whole earth (Dan 2:35,44).

The Revelation is an elaboration of this very theme—the increase and dominion of the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. Daniel accentuated the political kingdoms of the world, and mentioned spiritual dominions. The Revelation emphasizes spiritual kingdoms and alludes to political kingdoms. It reveals that all opposition has been instigated by the devil within the Sovereign government of the Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of God will be fulfilled, and the purpose of the devil will be utterly frustrated.

Every believer will ultimately triumph, and every unbeliever will eventually be thrust from the presence of the Lord. Whether we are speaking of individuals or groups of individuals, faith will be rewarded and unbelief will be condemned. That is the overriding message of the Revelation! Jesus cannot lose, and Satan cannot win! Those following the Lamb wherever He goes will at last be joined to Him. Those who follow the delusions of the wicked one will be cast with him into the lake of fire.

As elementary as that may appear, Satan

The present reign of the Lord Jesus is being carried out in such a manner as to provoke constant praise in the heavenly places. In that reign, the acceptance of the saints and the rejection of their enemies are being unveiled.

is tireless in his efforts to obscure the truth. He seeks to attach men to a condemned world,

and drown the saints in blood and delusion. However, all of his efforts are futile. Natural assaults like famine, pestilence, and flood fail to move the saints from their place in Christ. Fierce and relentless persecution, and the passing of opposing laws, are powerless to pluck the weakest saint from the hands of an omnipotent Christ. Our adversaries' most sustained effort, religious delusion, also proves to be impotent against the "*faith of God's elect*" (Tit 1:2). All of this is owing to the reign of Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The safety of God's people is evidence of a reigning Christ. The frustration of the devices of the devil confirms that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

### **A Bride Without an Adversary**

In this text we are given to behold the bride without an adversary. The enemy has been cast down, and the bride of Christ is ready to be joined forever to her Husband. This is nothing less than the beginning of an eternal marriage. In this passage we are standing on the threshold of eternity, beholding a relationship that will project throughout the ages to come. It is the beginning of a reign that will never cease. Here is an occasion of inexplicable joy that brings great honor to God.

Here we learn God's people will not be fully joined to the Lord until all enemies have been publically and finally overthrown. Prophetically, David said, "*The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'*" (Psa 110:3). Jesus confirmed this referred to the Father speaking to the Son (Matt 22:42-44). Hebrews 1:13 declares it to be a unique statement, never made to an angel (Heb 1:13). Finally, the Spirit declares the subjugation of all Christ's enemies to be one of the things occurring during His mediatorial reign. "*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*" (Heb 10:11-14).

### **A Point of Doctrine**

There are two key perspectives that are declared in Scripture. The law foreshadowed these views, and the Prophets foretold them. The Apostles affirmed and expounded them, and the Revelation unveils them in a vision.

- **That sin has been expiated and those believing in the Son have been accepted. This is in strict accord with the predetermined purpose of God, and is thoroughly righteous.**
- **That all enemies of God are destined to destruction. Their cause will not flourish, but will be abruptly terminated to the glory of God.**

The present reign of the Lord Jesus is being carried out in such a manner as to provoke constant praise in the heavenly places. In that reign, the acceptance of the saints and the rejection of their enemies are being unveiled. While the enemies of God rage, the saints of God remain nestled in the bosom of their Savior. Although assaulted by men and demons, their acceptance cannot be negated as they cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Too, no matter how successful their enemies appear, or how long they seem to dominate, their fall is certain and their demise is sure. They are only here for a while!

From the standpoint of our text, the time of our sanctification is also the time of our enemies subjugation. O, the saints must see this truth. You, dear believer, must see life through the window of the Revelation. In your most fierce and disappointing trials at least two things are taking place. ( **1) You are being perfected. (2) Your adversary is being frustrated and disappointed.** You must not lose sight of these realities. They are the working of God! Your faith can take hold of them, making you victorious over the world. Faith IS the victory (1 John 5:4-5)

Jesus is enthroned in glory. Prior to His enthronement, He terminated the Law as a means to righteousness, destroyed the devil, and spoiled principalities and powers (Col 2:12-15; Heb 2:14; Rom 10:4). This allowed God to confer His own righteousness upon those who believe. Therefore, God is demonstrating “*at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). Now Jesus is reigning righteously. That is, He is guiding, feeding, and sustaining believers in a way that cannot be condemned or found with flaw. His ministry toward the saints is right.

By the same token, His reign over His enemies is right. He uses their wicked devices for His own glory, and brings them down when He is finished with them. Of this aspect of Divine rule Isaiah wrote, “*Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes*

*their knowledge foolishness” (Isa 44:25).*

Even though there have been periods of history during which this did not seem to be the truth, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by appearance. Revelation has told us of righteous people being “*slain*” (6:9-10; 11:7; 12:11; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). We have read of the saints being “*overcome*” (13:7). A vision of unrequited martyrs has been provided (6:9-11). Yet, in all of this, the saints were protected from eternal ruin. Although their enemies will be cast into the lake of fire, they will not! **Nothing was able to keep them from arriving at their appointed destiny!**

The path to glory does not lead through quiet meadows and soothing and tranquil terrain. There are times of blessed quietness, to be sure. But there are also tumultuous times, when the rattling of the spear and the shout of the enemy can be heard. The mighty Apostle Paul must write from prison as well as when preaching as a free man. Although John lived to be an aged Apostle, his brother James was beheaded at the very beginning of their ministry. Saints enjoyed favor with all the people, yet those very believers were also scattered abroad by aggressive persecution.

When saints experience hardship and difficulties, it does not mean they have been forsaken. When their enemies tread upon them and oppress them, it does not mean they are invincible. In both instances, the Lord is ruling “*until His enemies become His footstool.*” His purpose is being served, and He alone will receive the glory.

Our text now confirms all of this to be the case. The smoke of battle has cleared, the enemies have been cast down, and the warfare as been completed. What we will see is nothing less than the fulfillment of Divine purpose. This is what the Lord intended all along. It is why Jesus reigned. What we read is currently in process. The saints are being kept and the enemy is being cast down. The grand conclusion is sure! The King is reigning over both the saints and their enemies. There is not the slightest chance that reign will be interrupted.

## A CAUSE FOR REJOICING

***“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come . . . ”*** All of heaven has been waiting for this marriage! The Lord purposed it, creating and governing the world with it in mind. The Son came into the world, died, rose from the dead, returning to heaven to effect this purpose by His reign. The Holy Spirit was sent into the world to work toward the accomplishment of this purpose: convicting, leading, empowering, and enlightening. The holy angels consistently and faithfully ministered to the *“heirs of salvation”* to assist in the fulfillment of this purpose. The Holy Scriptures were given to aid the saints in their preparation for this marriage. Without this marriage, everything else would have been futile. Those who imagine the *Christian life* is an end of itself, and that it is commendable to so live even if there were no heaven, betray a level of spiritual ignorance that is inexcusable!

### **LET US BE GLAD AND REJOICE**

In this world, gladness and rejoicing are often considered an end of themselves. Thus men speak of “being happy” and “having fun.” It has even become fashionable for people to associate worshiping God and being a Christian with “having fun.” These spiritual hedonists imagine that pleasure is the best thing. They gauge everything by the thermometer of enjoyment. But they are wrong—seriously wrong! Pleasure is good and pain is bad. However, pleasure is not the best thing, and pain is not the worst thing!

The supreme pleasure belongs to God, not to us. This is a teaching of Scripture that is consistent. It is why the Lord Jesus confined Himself to God’s will (Matt 26:42). It is why He taught us to pray, *“Thy will be done on earth . . . ”* (Matt 6:10). The term *“good pleasure”* refers exclusively to matters pleasing to God (Psa 51:18; Lk 12:32; Eph 1:5,9; Phil 2:13; 2 Thess 1:11). Everything Jesus did and does is to please the Father (John 8:29). The Holy Spirit devotes Himself exclusively to doing the will of God (Rom 8:27). All of the holy angels *“do His pleasure”* (Psa 103:21).

This is not a theological bypath! We are told of a great falling away where human pleasure would become a primary objective. Religious men would become *“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”* (2 Tim 3:4). Wicked men attempt to sanctify such wayward quests by associating them with religion. Their efforts are in vain.

I am going to wax bold and say that a quest for pleasure—or the desire to please men—is of the devil. I know this to be the case. Paul, whose appointed occupation was to reach the Gentile world, refused to be caught up in pleasing men. “*For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*” (Gal 1:10). One might object that Paul likewise said, “*I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*” (1 Cor 10:33). In this expression, the salvation of men is the primary objective, not their pleasure. This is another way of saying, “*giving none offence,*” or not laying a stumbling block before the people (1 Cor 10:32). The appeal was not to the desires and preferences of natural men, but to the deep hunger of fallen spirits.

### **MEN MAY REJOICE WHEN GOD REJOICES!**

The summons to “*be glad and rejoice*” is occasioned by the gladness of the Lamb and all the host of heaven. The pleasure of created beings is wrapped up in the pleasure of Him who “*created all things.*” This is part of having “*the mind of Christ.*” While He “*expects,*” so do we (Heb 10:13). When He is glad, so are we! Rejoicing that is not entwined with Divine joy is out of order! “*Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep*” (Lk 6:25). There is a joy that is out of harmony with Divine pleasure, and will therefore be turned into mourning.

Our text, however, speaks of a genuine joy—genuine because it reflects the joy of the Savior. The spirit now speaks of a time when gladness and joy will be brought to their fullest measure. They will never again be interrupted, or compete with conflicting emotions. “*Let us be glad and rejoice.*” What God has purposed has come to pass! What the Son has longed for has now arrived!

In this world, we have “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Pet 1:8). This joy, however, is “*unspeakable,*” or inexpressible (NASB, NIV). It transcends our abilities of locution. But our present condition will not always be the case! There is coming a time when that joy WILL be expressible. Our text speaks of that time. Peter also referred to it in his First Epistle, associating it with the revelation of Christ’s glory. “*But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy*” (1 Pet 4:13). The exhortation to “*be glad and rejoice*” refers to that time. It will be the time of Christ’s unveiling, when the Father will “*show*” Him before an assembled universe (1 Tim 6:15). Then we will have the ability to rejoice fully, with no

distraction or encumbrance.

## AND GIVE HIM GLORY!

There will be no question about WHY the redeemed are there. There will be no doubt about the effectiveness of the reign of Christ. Every soul will clearly see the righteousness of the salvation of God's elect, and the uprightness of the condemnation of the wicked!

This is not a mere release of pent-up joy. It is an appointed means through which the heavenly multitude will give God "*glory.*" In their joy, the working of God will be acknowledged. Through it, attention will be drawn to the righteous and effective execution of His good will. Everything will be perceived as having been worked "*together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*" (Rom 8:28). There will be no question about WHY the redeemed are there. There will be no doubt about the effectiveness of the reign of Christ. Every soul will clearly see the righteousness of the salvation of God's elect, and the uprightness of the condemnation of the wicked! There will be no inquiry about the legality of the path through which the saints came to glory.

All of the gladness and all of the joy will be shouted with our faces toward the Throne! What has made the redeemed glad has been wrought by God. Holy angels will see the effectiveness and superiority of the grace of God. The seraphim and cherubim will behold the completion of a Divine purpose that spanned generations and millennia. With insight, fervor, and expressible joy, all will exclaim, "*This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes*" (Psa 118:23).

## IT IS THE LAMB'S MARRIAGE!

Here is a glorious truth! This is not the marriage of the church, but of the Lamb! "*For the marriage of the Lamb is come.*" The Lord Jesus is the dominant one in this scene. The church is being presented to Him. As it is written, "*that He might*

*present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). This is the presentation to which Paul referred in Second Corinthians: “knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will PRESENT us with you” (4:14). And again, declaring His own involvement in the presentation, Paul wrote, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may PRESENT you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2). Again, this presentation is mentioned in Colossians 1:21-22. “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to PRESENT you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” And again, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may PRESENT every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col 1:28). And again, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to PRESENT you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).*

This marriage was central in the thinking of Christ when He “*dwelt among us.*” He referred to Himself as “*the Bridegroom,*” and His return to heaven as a time of absence from the bride (Matt 9:15). The gathering of the church to Himself is depicted as wise virgins going in to the “*Bridegroom*” (Matt 25:1-10). In language most precise, Jesus said, “*He who has the bride is the Bridegroom*” (John 3:29).

Now, in our text, the consummation of the marriage comes to pass. This is the objective behind the Word becoming flesh. This is the reason for His vicarious death and glorious resurrection. This is why He was enthroned in glory, being given all power in heaven and earth. Here is the reason for the subjugation of His enemies, and the casting down of all opposing power. It was that, in the end, we might “*always be with the Lord*” (1 Thess 4:17). This is the ultimate reason for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the objective that caused holy angels to be ministers to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). There is not a single aspect of salvation that does not relate directly to “*the marriage of the Lamb.*”

## IN SHARP CONFLICT

At this point we come into sharp conflict with the thrust of most *Christianity*. The startling effect of Babylon upon the thinking of men can be seen while contemplating this truth. Satan has fabricated a religion that is “*this worldly.*”

Those who embrace it do not think about the “*marriage of the Lamb.*” Their religion lulls them to sleep as they live and move and have their being with this world in mind. The surety of participating in “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*” is the one area where doubt reigns supreme in the professed church. Mind you, this is what salvation is all about. It is why Jesus came, and why He reigns. All of heaven is supporting this revealed agenda. Yet, myriads of professed believers stand in doubt about their eternal destiny.

Speaking as though they were learned, men refer to what they conceive as the “main thing.” They speak of rescuing men from sin as being fundamental. Others consider “the great commission” as the greatest and most extensive undertaking of all time. All of this sounds very good, and fits in with the institutional agenda very well. But how does it fit into the revealed agenda of God? The deliverance of men “*from the power of darkness*” is only one side of the heavenly coin! The other side is being “*translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son*” (Col 1:13). Men are not only turned “*from darkness,*” they are turned “*to light*.” They not only are turned away “*from the power of Satan,*” but “*to God*.” They not only receive “*forgiveness of sins,*” but “*an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith*” (Acts 26:18).

In each of these affirmations the latter expression is the objective, while the former is the means to its accomplishment! The PURPOSE is to be placed into Christ’s Kingdom, be in the light, be toward God, and possess an inheritance. The appointed means to bring us to that condition is deliverance from the power of darkness, being turned from darkness and the power of Satan, and having our sins remitted. If you remove the PURPOSE, there is no reason for the means!

Those who erroneously spotlight the means, by that very emphasis, obscure the purpose for it all. That is why they do not speak of heaven, glory, the coming of the Lord, and the inheritance that is reserved for those who are sanctified by faith. That is why those following their teachings do not have confidence and full assurance. The multitudes of anemic souls that fill the churches of our land are the direct result of a distorted theological emphasis.

Unless our teaching leads those who embrace it to anticipate “*the marriage of the Lamb,*” it misses the mark. It makes little difference how scholarly the approach, or how effective the methods employed. If those adhering to the teaching in

question are not left “*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:13), they have been led astray. Questioning and unsure hearts are bad fruit that come from a corrupt tree! The lack of full assurance loudly declares that the fundamental work has not yet been accomplished, and the primary message has not yet been believed.

When our text says, “*Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*” the grand purpose of our salvation is being confirmed. Right here we can examine the validity of our emphasis, and the correctness of our doctrine. Lay the reason for living along side this text. See if what you say and how you live is pointed in the direction of “*the marriage of the Lamb.*” Right here you can determine whether or not you are in harmony with what God is doing. There is no reason why you cannot be in accord with this purpose! The “*great salvation*” which the Gospel announces is designed to prepare you for that day. Heavenly resources have been supplied to ensure you arrive safely at the goal.

## HIS WIFE

Remember, it is the Lamb’s marriage, not the church’s! The church is “*His wife,*” he is not her husband. The marriage occasions glory and honor to the Lord. He is the focus of it all. The glory of the bride is her Bridegroom. Her joy flows from His gladness. He is the reason for her blessedness and acceptance. Never must we allow the church to become primary, or overshadow its Savior. We will be glorified in His glory, and be honored in His honor. At the marriage, He will be the center of attention. The bride will be glorified IN Him.

## THE WORK OF PREPARATION

“*. . . and His wife has made herself ready.*” Until now, the church has been called “*the bride*” (John 3:29; Rev 22:17). The “*bride*” is the prospective “*wife*” – the “*wife*” in preparation. To the bride, the marriage is everything. If that is missed, there is no point to anything else. All of life is lived in anticipation of “*the marriage of the Lamb.*” Obedience is yielded with that in mind. Persecutions are endured in consideration of the coming marriage. Death moves us closer to the marriage! The resurrection further prepares us for the marriage! The day of

judgment is a prelude to the marriage! “*The marriage of the Lamb*” is everything! It is what the Father planned. It is why the Holy Spirit is given to those in Christ Jesus. It is what Jesus is anticipating.

Now we are given to see the life and manners of the church from the standpoint of the consummation of all things. The people of God were making themselves “*ready*” for the marriage. This is why they looked to the things that are not seen (1 Cor 4:17-18). This is why they perfected “*holiness in the fear of the Lord*” (2 Cor 7:1). It was to this end they worked out their own “*salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:13). This is why they kept “*the commandments of God*” (1 Cor 7:19). For this purpose they were “*called into the fellowship*” of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9). This is why they ran the race set before them and kept the faith. They were preparing themselves for the “*marriage of the Lamb.*”

The saved are representatives of the Lord, and workers together with Him—but they are more. They are “*His wife!*” Like Rebekah was chosen to be the wife of Isaac (Gen 24), so the church has been chosen to be Christ’s wife (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 17:14). The realization of her blessed state compels her to prepare for the marriage.

### A Chaste Virgin

Part of the preparation of the bride involves the maintenance of purity. When we are moved from darkness to light, “*being born again*” of “*incorruptible seed*” (1 Pet 1:23), we begin pure and clean. We are “*forgiven all trespasses*” (Col 2:13), and “*washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:22). We begin life in Christ without a single stain or blemish, our hearts being “*purified by faith*” (Acts 15:9). The very circumstance of our beginning in Christ Jesus should confirm our ultimate destiny to our hearts. We do not have to limit ourselves to our own conclusions, however valid they may be. The objective for the church is clearly stated. “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless*” (Eph 5:15-17, NASB).

### *Unspotted from the World*

A significant part of our preparation is remaining unspotted. James put it this way,

*“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:27). This is purity from every angle: thought, word, deed, and motives. An admonition given to Timothy, but not confined to him, was *“keep yourself pure”* (1 Tim 5:22). This requires considerable effort on our part, and cannot be accomplished casually.

Separation from contaminating influences is essential.

The reason for the separation is specified—it is an unequal yoke. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot mingle. Light and darkness cannot commune. Christ and the devil cannot be in accord. A believer and an unbeliever have nothing in common

The incentive for maintaining moral and spiritual purity is provided in the promises. Of particular note is a promise made in the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians. *“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty”* (6:17-18). Separation from contaminating influences is essential. The reason for the separation is specified—it is an unequal yoke. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot mingle. Light and darkness cannot commune. Christ and the devil cannot be in accord. A believer and an unbeliever have nothing in common (2 Cor 6:14-15). **Relationships that cannot transfer to the next world, must not be nurtured in this one!**

We are not to touch the *“unclean thing”* – the thing that defiles and contaminates the soul. We are to make no attempt to handle what soils our souls, whether it is a thought, an association, or some sensible object brought into our lives.

To assist us in the holy work of preparation, the Lord makes certain commitments. They are based on our response to the specified requirement.

**(1) I will receive you.**

**(2) I will be a Father to you.**

**(3) You shall be my sons and daughters.**

We must carefully guard ourselves from accepting any theological view that neutralizes this text, rendering it powerless to us. The notion that God receives people unconditionally is not only absurd, it is a thought originated by demons, and designed to make us misfits in glory. Any view of salvation that allows God to receive you while you are willingly defiled is false. Too, remove from your mind the notion that God is a “*Father*” to everyone. He is not. Although every person had his beginning with God, God conducts Himself as a Father only to those who keep themselves unspotted from the world. For some, this is too hard to receive. They had rather imagine their prayers are heard even when their lives are soiled. But it is not so.

### *Dealing with Sin*

The maintenance of purity is possible because of the provision of an Advocate. “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 John 2:1). His advocacy is conditioned upon our acknowledgment of sin. As it is written, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). Perhaps you have been discouraged by considering you may have sinned without really knowing it—a sin of ignorance, so to speak (Lev 4:2). Gracious provision has even been made for this. “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). There is no reason for the child of God to carry the guilt of sin from one day to another! Full provision has been made for continual cleansing and perfection! This is part of our preparation for the marriage!

### *The Assistance of the Holy Spirit*

In the holy work of preparation for the marriage, we are not limited to our own efforts. Our preparation will take everything we have-- all of our strength, but will not be accomplished by our strength alone. The work we are called to do is an

arduous one. Were it not for Divine assistance, it would be a hopeless endeavor. The Lord Jesus, however, is intent in His determination to “*bring many sons to glory*” (Heb 2:10). The Holy Spirit is given to us to assist in the strenuous work of subduing the flesh. That is the meaning of Romans 8:13-14. “*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*” Those who do not engage in this activity are grieving the Spirit of God, by Whom they were “*sealed for the day of redemption*” (Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit, given to believers to assist them in preparing for the marriage, is thus distressed and virtually thwarted in the work, because of the obstinance of those He was sent to help.

The very fact that we require the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to “*put to death the deeds of the body*” (NKJV) confirms the difficulty of the task. Unless there is a commitment to the work by the individual, it is actually a hopeless endeavor. Remember, “*His wife has MADE HERSELF ready*” (Rev 19:7). She availed herself of Divine enablements, but she did MAKE HERSELF ready. She “*perfected holiness in the fear of the Lord*” (2 Cor 7:1).

### The WISE Virgins

In preparing for the “*marriage of the Lamb,*” the bride must employ wisdom. Her preparation is made in a strange country, surrounded by hostile and aggressive foes, and while housed in a tabernacle of clay. Her foes are crafty, so she must be wise. She cannot afford to be thoughtless or foolish.

The faithful do whatever is required for them to be ready to meet the Lord. Those who are haphazard in their preparations are dominated by unbelief. Unless they recover from their indolence, they will be “*punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*”

Our Lord referred to those who prepared themselves for the coming Groom as “*wise virgins.*” The 25 th chapter of Matthew declares a primary trait of this indispensable wisdom. The summons to prepare for the marriage is likened to “*ten*

*virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” They were not all of equal character. “Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” They all had lamps with them. However, “Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.” Those who were wise, however, made plans for a long wait. It is written, “but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” They did not assume a brief sojourn, making preparations for a long vigil.*

The Bridegroom did not come as soon as expected. He “tarried,” or “delayed” His appearance. During that interval of time, all of the virgins fell asleep, and all of their lamps went out. At an unexpected time—MIDNIGHT—the cry went out, “Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!” All of the virgins awoke. All of them arose. All of them trimmed their lamps, preparing to light them during the peak of darkness. But that is where the likeness stopped. The five wise virgins were PREPARED—they had extra oil. The five foolish virgins were UNPREPARED—they had NO oil.

You will remember the outcome of the parable. The foolish virgins made an effort to procure oil from the wise virgins, but could not. There was not enough oil for ten virgins—only for five. The arrival of the Bridegroom was NOT a time to share oil. It is written, “those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.” Later, the foolish virgins, who had once intended to be at the supper, pounded on the door, seeking admittance to the supper. From within came the heart-wrenching words, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.”

Our Savior’s application of this parable reveals the essentiality of making preparation for His return. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matt 25:1-13).

When, therefore, we read, “His wife has made herself ready,” there is a perfect harmony with the remainder of Scripture. The faithful do whatever is required for them to be ready to meet the Lord. Those who are haphazard in their preparations are dominated by unbelief. Unless they recover from their indolence, they will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:9).

Whatever hinders our preparation for the “*marriage of the Lamb*” is to be avoided. There is no cost too great to pay in this matter. If habits or associations make our preparation too difficult, they should be terminated, abruptly and completely. This is what Jesus means in these arresting words, “*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell*” (Matt 5:29-30, NIV). Mark adds the telling words, “*It is better for you to ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mk 9:46-48). In this case, entering the Kingdom of God is equivalent to being ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

I want to emphasize that NO PROVISION whatsoever is made for those who are NOT ready for the marriage. Now–today– “*is the day of salvation.*” This is the time to avail ourselves of the grace and power of God, preparing for the “*marriage of the Lamb.*” When the marriage arrives, there will be no time for ANY preparation. All will either be ready or forever unprepared. Simply put, salvation provides no inheritance for those unprepared to receive it. It is evident this is not generally received.

## THE HEAVENLY GRANT

***“And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”*** Here the grace of God shines brightly. Remember, the bride is going to be joined to her Lord. She is “*His wife,*” and He is spotless and pure. In Revelation, we have seen this bride as a “*woman,*” hounded by the enemy, and chased into a wilderness area. We also beheld another “*woman*” –a harlot. She “*was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls*” (17:4). Her apparel was gaudy, and not comely. Her clothing was not given to her by God, but was self-made, and an abomination to the Lord. But it is not so with “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*”

The clothing she has was “*given*” to her. She did not make her apparel as Adam and Eve did at first. Her clothing itself was a “*grant,*” or provision, from her Lord.

Like the individual saints of all ages who comprise her, she has nothing she has not “*received*” (1 Cor 4:7). It goes without saying, the bride received her garments from the Lord. As it is written, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*” (James 1:17).

The apparel to which our text refers is nothing less than the garments of salvation. With a shout of joy, the bride can say, “*My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness*” (Isa 61:10). By that I mean the garments are an aspect of salvation, and are supplied with it.

Although the righteousness is given to us, it must be appropriated by faith. This is nothing less than putting on the new man (Eph 4:24). It is walking in the Spirit and participating in the Divine nature (Gal 5:16; 2 Pet 1:4). Thus the Divine nature is evidenced in our personal expressions.

As to its nature, the covering of the bride is precise and costly—“*fine linen.*” Her apparel was supplied at great cost, and produced with meticulous labor. The clothing is “*clean and white,*” unsoiled with the spot of the world. It is “*clean and white*” in God’s sight, and is so perceived by all the hosts of heaven.

Yet, this text goes deeper than that. By saying “*it was given unto her to be arrayed . . . ,*” the PRIVILEGE of wearing the clothing is emphasized as well as the clothing itself. This accent can be seen in several different versions. “*And to her was granted that she SHOULD BE arrayed . . .*” (KJV). “. . . TO HER it has been granted to be clothed . . .” (NRSV).

### **The Righteousness of Saints**

The “*fine linen*” is defined as “*the righteousness of saints.*” There is a sense in which righteousness is imputed, or credited, to believers. While it is given to them, it really is not theirs. It is “*the righteousness of God*” Himself, and is imputed “*without,*” or separate from, “*the Law*” (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22). This is NOT, however, the point of our text. The declaration is that “*His wife has MADE HERSELF ready.*” She has entered into the process personally, working out her own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:13). The “*fine linen*” is pointedly said to be “*the righteousness of saints,*” NOT the righteousness of God. Some other versions make an even stronger statement of the case. “The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”(NKJV, NASB, NIV). “*The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*” (RSV). “*For the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints*” (BBE).

While righteousness is, indeed, imputed to the saints, it must be “*put on*” by them. This is expressed in the most wonderful language by the prophet Isaiah. “*Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; PUT ON YOUR BEAUTIFUL GARMENTS, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean Shall no longer come to you. Shake yourself from the dust, arise; Sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!*” (Isa 52:1-2).

Although the righteousness is given to us, it must be appropriated by faith. This is nothing less than putting on the new man (Eph 4:24). It is walking in the Spirit and participating in the Divine nature (Gal 5:16; 2 Pet 1:4). Thus the Divine nature is evidenced in our personal expressions. This is the “*fruit of the Spirit.*” The fruit comes from the Spirit, yet is expressed through our hearts, minds, words, and deeds. Men put on these garments when they do not quench or grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 4:20; 1 Thess 5:19).

Our preparation for the “*marriage of the Lamb*” involves the Divine nature being expressed through our persons. It is something we do, but not something we do alone. It is our involvement that makes it “*the RIGHTEOUSNESS of saints.*” It is the work of God that makes it “*the righteousness of SAINTS.*”

Let it be clear, unrighteousness disqualifies a person from participation in “*the marriage of the Lamb.*” Any theology that states to the contrary is to be scrapped, because it is refuse and dung. The Spirit speaks expressly on this matter. “*Do you*

*not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor 6:9). “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). It is said of those who allow the flesh to express itself, “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21).*

John adds a word to this subject. He affirms this is common knowledge among those who know the Lord. *“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). The “righteousness of saints” describes the activities of those who practice righteousness. Thus John again says, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7).*

Unrighteous people have no part with the bride, because they are not making themselves ready for *“the marriage of the Lamb.”* But those who engage themselves in the doing of righteousness are, by that very activity, making themselves ready for the appointed marriage. It is the business of those speaking in the behalf of the Lord to continually apprise His people of this. They must be ready for the marriage!

## THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

### VINCENT, ON THE WORD “BLESSED”

Thus the word passed up into the higher region of Christian thought, and was stamped with the gospel signet, and laden with all the rich significance of gospel blessedness. It now takes on a group of ideas strange to the best pagan morality, and contradictory of its fundamental positions. Shaking itself loose from all thoughts of outward good, it becomes the express symbol of a happiness identified with pure character. Behind it lies the clear cognition of sin as the fountain-head of all misery, and of holiness as the final and effectual cure for every woe. For knowledge as the basis of virtue, and therefore of happiness, it substitutes faith and love. For the aristocracy of the learned virtuous, it introduces the truth of the Fatherhood of God and the corollary of the family of believers. While the pagan word carries the isolation of the virtuous and the contraction of human sympathy,

the Gospel pushes these out with an ideal of a world-wide sympathy and of a happiness realized in ministry. The vague outlines of an abstract good vanish from it, and give place to the pure heart's vision of God, and its personal communion with the Father in heaven. Where it told of the Stoic's self-sufficiency, it now tells of the Christian's poverty of spirit and meekness. Where it hinted at the Stoic's self-repression and strangling of emotion, it now throbs with a holy sensitiveness, and with a monition to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep. From the pagan word the flavor of immortality is absent. No vision of abiding rest imparts patience and courage amid the bitterness and struggle of life; no menace of the destiny of evil imposes a check on human lusts. The Christian word *blessed* is full of the light of heaven. It sternly throws away from itself every hint of the Stoic's asserted right of suicide as a refuge from human ills, and emphasizes something which thrives on trial and persecution, which glories in tribulation, which not only endures but conquers the world, and expects its crown in heaven.—Vincent's Word Studies

***“Then he said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”*** Here is a message Jesus especially wants His people to hear. Remember, this is a message to “*the churches*” –something the Spirit is saying “*to the churches*” (2:7,11,17,23,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16). ***Something that is “written” is intended for the saints of all ages.*** That is one of the principles of the Kingdom. Those who spend an inordinate amount of time determining context, purpose for writing, and other such things, do not always consider this principle. The word “*Scripture*” means writing, coming from the word **γραφή** (grafe). The Word apprizes us, “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Thus Scripture is identified as writings inspired and commanded by God. They were written to assist “*the man of God*” in being prepared for Divine use.

Another example of this principle is found in 1 Corinthians 10:11. “*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they WERE WRITTEN for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*” John also concluded his Gospel by saying, “*But these HAVE BEEN WRITTEN that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:31).

While this may appear a trite point, it is not. The thing that makes the Word relevant is that it has been “*written.*” It is not WHO it is written to that makes it pertinent. And, indeed, it is not WHEN it was written that makes it germane to the

saint. The writing itself (Scripture) means it contains things conducive to teaching, reproof, correction, training, and learning. There are different uses of Scripture, to be sure, but all of Scripture is useful, and none of it irrelevant.

Thus, when John is told “*Write*,” he is being directed to provide the people of God with something essential to their understanding and profit.

### ANOTHER BEATITUDE

Here is another beatitude: “*Blessed are . . .*” To confirm this is a book of blessing, it contains seven beatitudes.

1 *BLESSED* is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (1:3)

2 *BLESSED* are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’ (14:13)

3 *BLESSED* is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments , lest he walk about naked and men see his shame. (16:15)

4 *BLESSED* are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb . (19:9)

5 *BLESSED* and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection ; over these the second death has no power. (20:6)

6 *BLESSED* is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book . (22:7)

7 *BLESSED* are those who wash their robes , that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (22:14)

This should confirm to your heart that the book of Revelation deals with salvation. It contains no different message, but is perfectly harmonious with the remainder of God’s word. It has been given to bring a blessing to us, not merely information. It is written to give us an advantage by further preparing us for the marriage of the Lamb.

### What does it mean to be “*blessed*?”

First, blessing comes from God, and is not induced by the creature. That is why “*blessing*” is ascribed to the Lamb—the Administrator of the Kingdom (Rev 5:12,13; 7:12). The Word appropriately refers to “*the blessing of the Lord*” (Gen 39:5; Deut 12:15; 16:17; 33:23; Psa 129:8; Prov 10:22).

Second, blessing is a human experience. It is transcendent happiness or joy—a sense of well being because of the favor of God. Vincent says the word “*blessed*” involves “a sense of God’s approval founded in righteousness which rests ultimately on love to God.” Because of the unusual richness of his remarks on this word, I have included some of his words in the box titled “*Vincent’s Comments.*”

The person who is “*blessed*” realizes this to a measurable degree while still in the body. He is thus able to tap into the rich treasury of blessing that is in Christ Jesus. In the powerful effects of that blessing he can resist the devil, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life.

Blessedness is a frame of spirit that comes from understanding— “*spiritual understanding*” (Col 1:9). Under the Old Covenant, “*blessing*” was nearly always associated with outward prosperity and benefit (Lev 25:21; Deut 7:14; 28:3,6). In Christ Jesus, the idea of blessing has been enlarged. It now projects into eternity—beyond the temporal order. It refers to the favor, or loving approval of God, that makes the individual suitable to dwell forever with the Lord. The person who is “*blessed*” realizes this to a measurable degree while still in the body. He is thus able to tap into the rich treasury of blessing that is in Christ Jesus. In the powerful effects of that blessing he can resist the devil, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life. Peter reminds in Christ we are “*called, that ye should inherit a blessing*” (1 Pet 3:9).

## AND WHAT IS THE BLESSING?

What is the “*blessing*” that is to be written? It is one addressed to faith. It is a blessing that cannot be confirmed to anyone living in the flesh. Only those so blessed know of its reality. “***Blessed are they which are called*** (invited, NKJV, NASB, NIV) ***unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.***” Notice, the blessing is for NOW – “*Blessed are they which are CALLED.*” He does not “*write*” of a future blessedness—although that is surely coming. Rather, John is charged to “*write*” for the benefit of those fighting the good fight of faith.

Believers are referred to as “*the called of Jesus Christ,*” and “*who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom 1:6; 8:28). Their calling came from heaven, and is therefore called a “*heavenly calling*” (Heb 3:1). It is also a call to come higher, and is therefore called a “*high calling*” (KJV), or “*upward call*” (NASB), Phil 3:14. Because this call comes from a holy God, and demands separation from this world, it is also called a “*holy calling*” (2 Tim 1:9). The chief means employed in this call is the Gospel of Christ, through which we become aware of the “*call*” (2 Thess 2:14). We must never forget that the Lord is the one who “*calls.*” The “*call*” is His invitation or summons, and it is personal. Salvation is intimate in all of its facets, and is never impersonal.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter related salvation to the call of God. “*And Peter said to them, Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself*” (Acts 2:38-39). Years later, Paul related salvation to the choice of God, writing, “*whom He predestined, these He also called*” (Rom 8:30).

The “*call*” of God occurs when the human spirit is made aware of His provision of salvation. Through the influence of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel, the “*heavenly calling*” becomes known to us. This is a fundamental part of Apostolic doctrine that cannot be successfully contradicted.

It is the OBJECTIVE of that call that is the subject of John’s commissioned writing. How frequently the purpose of our calling is mentioned. Here are a few of the references. They all indicate the largeness of the salvation that is in Christ

Jesus.

- To His kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12)
- To the obtaining of glory (2 Thess 2:14).
- Into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6).
- Out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).
- To be saints (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2).
- Into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor 1:9)
- Into liberty (Gal 5:13).

And how is all of this accomplished? How are we brought to Christ's Kingdom and glory? How are we caused to obtain glory? What means are employed to get us into the grace of Christ? How is it that we are brought out of darkness into His marvelous light? How do we become saints? How are we brought into Christ's fellowship? What method does the Lord use to bring us into this marvelous liberty in Christ Jesus?

All of these blessings are facilitated by a Divine call—by a heavenly summons—by an invitation from the Lord. This presumes sensitivity to the call, and the ability to respond to it. It also infers the call is personal, known by the individual. The grace of God so permeates His calling that those who heed it are guaranteed of the blessing it promises.

### **CALLED TO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB**

*“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”* What was previously called *“the marriage”* is now called *“the marriage supper.”* This is the same occasion, viewed from two different perspectives. As a formality, it is the *“marriage of the Lamb.”* From the viewpoint of joyful participation, it is *“the marriage supper of the Lamb”* – a festive occasion!

Even now, we experience a foretaste of this grand *“supper.”* Jesus promised to *“sup,”* or *“dine”* with the individual who hears His voice and opens to Him (Rev 3:20). Isaiah prophesied of the feast of salvation. *“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined”* (Isa 25:6). The

picture is of the joyful satisfaction realized now in heavenly places (Eph 1:3; 2:6). But this is only the beginning! The best is yet to come. From the ultimate viewpoint, the call is a summons to “*the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

The picture is of the joyful satisfaction realized now in heavenly places (Eph 1:3; 2:6). But this is only the beginning! The best is yet to come. From the ultimate viewpoint, the call is a summons to “*the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

The Word of God affirms we are called “*in one hope of your calling*” (Eph 4:4). There is a single ultimate aim, and it has remained the same throughout the centuries. That single objective is the point of our text– “*called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*” It is a call to forever be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). Take this from the saints, and there is no satisfactory motive for purity, endurance, or assurance. The absence of an emphasis on our coming union with the Lord has occasioned the rise of false doctrines, as well as a lack of confidence and a flood of erroneous expectations.

### **We Need Help to See It**

The objective of our calling is so grand that it cannot be deciphered with natural resources. However astute the mind may be, and however disciplined the individual, this hope is simply too large to be grasped without help. What is more, the magnitude of it **MUST** be apprehended, or else the possibility of arriving safely at the “*supper*” is decidedly reduced. Doubting, stumbling *Christians* are not apt to make it to the feast!

### **A Prayer for Enlightenment**

In recognition of these things, and under the constraint of the Holy Spirit, Paul prayed and wrote concerning believers seeing the magnitude of this hope. He prayed “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the*

*eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might” (Eph 1:17-20).*

The Ephesians had joyfully received the Gospel of their salvation, and had been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:13-14). They had both “*faith in the Lord Jesus*” and “*love for all saints*” (1:15). As all believers, they had been blessed “*with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*” (1:3). They had been raised from death in trespasses and sins (2:1-2), and made to “*sit together with Christ in heavenly places*” (Eph 2:6). Their condition, however, was bigger than their apprehension of it. The room into which they had been brought by grace was larger than what they saw. The Spirit wanted them to see the greatness of what they possessed, so they could say with David, “*Thou hast set my feet in a large place*” (Psa 31:8).

The very first matter mentioned in the required illumination is “*the hope of His calling.*” By this, he means the objective, or end to which, the calling was issued. We might say, “*WHY the Lord called us.*” And why did the call come to us? What was the purpose the Lord was implementing? To many, the intention is to remove us from our past. To others, the call is into Divine service and the winning of souls. Still others see the purpose as solidifying domestic life. While all of these things are involved, they are not the ultimate purpose of God’s calling. Those are matters relating to life in this world – but there is more to the call than that!

We have been invited to “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*” – called to participate in an eternal festive gathering. It is a “*supper,*” or feast, that God has prepared for His Son, and we are invited to participate in it. It is the point at which we will fully become “*joint heirs with Christ,*” “*inherit all things,*” and begin our “*reign*” with Him (Rom 8:17; Rev 21:7; 2 Tim 2:12).

This is the time when the bride will be presented to Christ. She will be “*holy and without blame before Him in love*” (Eph 1:4). This “*bride*” will be “*the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless*” (Eph 5:27, NASB). That is God’s revealed objective, and it must be perceived to some measurable degree for us to participate in it.

This is why Paul prayed for the eyes of our understanding to be opened to see the grandness of the hope of His calling. Churches that have left their first love, have either not seen this hope, or have forgotten what they did see. Those who entertain false doctrine as though it were inconsequential have also failed to grasp the hope. Congregations that seek greatness in this world have been blinded to “*the hope of His calling,*” as well as those who have grown lukewarm.

When “*the hope of His calling*” is not seen, the heart grows hard and calloused. The Word of God ceases to grow and produce fruit in the individual. There is no valid *Christianity* where this hope is not apprehended—only a feeble attempt to simulate the life of Christ!

The blessing is to “*called*” to such a glorious “*supper!*” When the world grieves our hearts, we take joy in the supper to which we have been called. When the condition of the professing church weighs heavy upon our hearts, we contemplate the supper to which we have been invited. The very best is yet to come! It will be according to Divine appointment, and there is no chance it will not take place.

An abundance of heavenly resources have been made available to us to enable our preparation. Let us throw ourselves into a fervent preparation for the supper! Declare war on all that hinders your preparation, and make friends with those who assist it. If you are not ready for the marriage of the Lamb, your life shall have been wasted. If you ARE ready, you will enter into the joy of the Lord—a joy never to be interrupted!

## SAYINGS THAT ARE TRUE

God’s people must learn to trace the Word back to God. Whether it is a record of what was done, a commandment, or a promise, the Word must be viewed as “*the true sayings of God.*”

“And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God.” Why is such a statement necessary? Should it not be obvious that what God has revealed is true? From a lower perspective, this is true – but it does not take the whole scope of life into consideration. In the heat of the vision, the truth of Divine utterance was obvious. Truth is not spoken, however, with only the present time in view—even when it is a time of spiritual exhilaration.

Just as there came a time when the very message that was sweet in the mouth was bitter in the belly (10:9-10), so there would come a time when the blessedness of the invitation would not be so apparent. The people of God, whether John the Apostle or you, receive the promises of God in a war-zone. They have an adversary that attempts to cloud the Word with the entrance of “*other things*” (Mark 4:19).

The mind of the believer is an area of great conflict! It is assaulted with “*fiery darts*” from the wicked one (Eph 6:16)—temptations that are hurled relentlessly by the wicked one. Only the “*peace of God*” can effectively keep our hearts and minds stable in this warfare (Phil 4:6-7). Human resources are not enough.

While memory is a wonderful thing, and not to be neglected in the apprehension of the truth, Divine affirmation is what makes the memory spiritually productive.

Now the heavenly voice reminds John that what has been said ( “ *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.* ” ) are “*the true sayings of God.*” John writes them, but they are “*the sayings of God.*” They came to him through the instrumentality of an angel (1:1), but they were “*the true sayings of God.*” These are words that convey the intentions and will of God Almighty. They are NOT merely history written in advance, but a revelation of an eternal purpose that cannot be thwarted.

God’s people must learn to trace the Word back to God. Whether it is a record of what was done, a commandment, or a promise, the Word must be viewed as “*the true sayings of God.*”

## TRUE SAYINGS

Faith needs “*true sayings*,” and, bless God, they have been given! Faith cannot take hold of an opinion. It cannot build upon an assumption, or navigate on the sea of doubt. It is a unspeakable tragedy that so much contemporary religion is speculative. It is shrouded with human opinion, and genders doubt and confusion in the hears.

The voice does not relate what John has been shown and told to linguistic accuracy. He does not specify the most precise human language in which the words are to be written. It is enough to know they are “*the true sayings of God*.” Believers of all ages will be able to derive comfort from this. When living by faith does NOT yield the best of earthly circumstances, they can remember “*the true sayings of God*.” They have not been called to comfort and ease, but to “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*.” When, like prophets, Apostles, and sages of old, their words are not received, and they even suffer for speaking them, they can remember “*the true sayings of God*.” They have NOT been called to be accepted and lauded by men, but to “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*.”

The Lord uses this method of affirmation elsewhere in Scriptures. “*This is a faithful saying , and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*” (1 Tim 1:15). “*For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance*” (1 Tim 4:9). “*It is a faithful saying : For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself*” (2 Tim 2:11-13). “*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement ; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men*” (Tit 3:5-8, NASB).

Faith lays hold on the Word of a God who “*cannot lie*” (Tit 1:2). Those who receive the Word of God, by that very reception, certify that God is true. Thus

Jesus said, “*The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful*” (John 3:31-33, NIV). By this, Jesus meant the person receiving what He says will personally benefit from the truth of God. Faith will bring the blessing! Those who reject or doubt what He says CANNOT receive benefit from His words.

Again, John is told to write what he has been told because they are “*the true sayings of God.*” Jesus does not want men to trust the words because John gave them, but because God said them! Then, and only then, will they produce hope within the heart, and enable the believer to endure. Faith must have a word from God!

## AN IMPROPER REACTION

“*And I fell at his feet to worship him.*” The reaction of John to the angelic messenger reveals the greatness of the revelation more than the weakness of John. Those unduly critical of the aged Apostle easily forget the magnitude of what was given to him. He has not only heard from heaven, but has been vouchsafed the privilege of writing a Divine commitment for all generations. John was no ordinary man, the messenger sent to him was not a common messenger, and the commission given to him was no typical commission.

The truth so gripped John that he “*fell*” at the feet of the angel “*to worship him.*” John does the same thing at the conclusion of the book (22:8). These responses indicate the exceeding greatness of the Revelation given to John.

Some suppose John thought this to be Christ Himself, and therefore fell down to worship. There is no indication this is the case. It rather appears that the

## character of the revelation is what constrained the action.

Some suppose John thought this to be Christ Himself, and therefore fell down to worship. There is no indication this is the case. It rather appears that the character of the revelation is what constrained the action.

***“ But he said to me, See that you do not do that!”*** The holy angel will not receive worship from John. He knows the Lord alone receives such adoration. Though *“a little”* higher than men in the flesh, yet the angels will not receive worship from them. With heavenly abruptness the angel says, *“You must not do that!”* (NRSV). The heavenly hierarchy does not allow for such worship! Would to God men were as aware of these things as angels!

***“ I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus.”*** The Scriptures reveal we have come into the fellowship of *“an innumerable company of angels”* (Heb 12:22). They are part of the heavenly companionship into which we have been called. They are employed in the very same purpose we have embraced. They work under the same King we worship and serve.

Is this not a most blessed description: *“your fellow servant.”* Working for the same Master on the same project! Jesus taught his people are *“fellow servants”* (Matt 18:28; 24:49). Paul referred to co-laborers as *“fellow servants”* (Col 1:7; 4:7). Those beheaded for their testimony, residing under altar, were told they must wait until their *“fellow servants and their brethren”* who were to be killed joined them (Rev 6:11).

There was an occasion revealed in the book of Acts where men sought to worship the Lord’s messengers. The response of the messengers was strong, like that of the angel John confronted. Barnabas and Paul had powerfully preached the Gospel in Lystra. Paul, in a loud voice, had commanded a man crippled from his mother’s womb to stand up on his feet—and the man *“leaped up and began to walk.”* When the people *“saw what Paul had done,”* they lifted up their voices and shouted, *“The gods have become like men and have come down to us.”* They then referred to Barnabas as Zeus, and Paul as Hermes *“because he was the chief*

*speaker.*” The priest of Zeus, whose temple was close by “*brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.*” As soon as Barnabas and Paul heard of this, “*they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM . . . ’*” (Acts 14:8-15).

Holy angels and holy men refuse the attention that is due the Lord alone. Part of serving God is drawing attention to Him, and away from ourselves. With joy we join John the Baptist in his insightful confession. “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30). For us, all glory goes to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us!

Here is a strong factor in the unity we enjoy. We give honor to the same Lord, and labor in the same purpose! We even serve with the holy angels! Each of us must strive to be conscious of this privilege. May we also seek to yield acceptable responses when we receive insights into the heavenly agenda.

## THE PROPER OBJECT OF WORSHIP

While the word “*worship*” includes the idea of posture, that does not at all exhaust the word. More than the activity, the point of worship is the One to whom it is directed. No mere procedure will satisfy the demands of the admonition, “*Worship God!*”

“*Worship God!*” What a word is this! And it was spoken to an Apostle. Not just your average Apostle, but the “*disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 20:2; 21:7,20). Among other things, this confirms the highly tenuous nature of human experience. If an Apostle in the very midst of receiving a message from the

glorified Christ must be admonished to “*Worship God,*” what of those who occupy lesser positions and lower ground? I realize there is a sense in which “*we are the circumcision which [do] worship God*” (Phil 3:3). Still, because of the infirmity of the flesh, high and lofty experiences can be the occasion of unacceptable responses. Should such times occur, may the Lord grant the presence of one swift to exhort, “*WORSHIP GOD!*”

This is more than an exhortation to assume a certain physical posture—although that is involved. While not fashionable in the Western world, those in the Eastern part of the world are accustomed to such conduct. To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “*But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you*” (1 Cor 14:24-25). There is no question but that exposure to Divine influences is like a searchlight to the soul. Profound revelation not only uncovers the intentions God, they also reveal the deficiency and weakness of human nature.

Precisely what is meant by the admonition “*Worship God!*” ? For those given to word studies, the word “*worship*” comes from προσκυνῆαι (pros-ku-ne-ai). The word is lexically defined as “(1) a basic sense bow down to kiss someone's feet, garment hem, or the ground in front of him; (2) in the NT of worship or veneration of a divine or supposedly divine object, expressed, falling face down in front of someone worship, venerate, do obeisance to; (a) toward God (Matt 4:10); (b) toward Jesus (Matt 2:2); (c) toward the devil and demons (Matt 4:9; Rev 9:20); (d) toward idols (Acts 7:43); (e) toward human beings as given or claiming to have divine power or authority (Rev 3:9; 13:4b).” Candidly, such definitions approximate spiritual impotency.

The Worship of God calls the entire person into activity—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). No part of the human constitution is omitted. Such activity is seen in the wise men who came to “*worship*” Jesus (Matt 2:2). When confronting the holy child, they “*fell down and worshiped Him.*” They also “*opened their treasures*” and presented gifts to Him (Matt 2:11). All of this was done out of a lively sense of the Person of the “*King.*” While the word “*worship*” includes the idea of posture, that does not at all exhaust the word. More than the activity, the point of worship is the One to whom it is directed. No mere procedure will satisfy the demands of the admonition, “*Worship God!*”

If we are going to bow, let it be to our God! If we are going to give homage, let it be to our God! Let our service be directed to Him! Let us present our bodies a living sacrifice to Him! Let us present the sacrifice of our lips to Him! WORSHIP GOD! Perceive all blessing as coming from Him! Understand your salvation as being sent from Him! See the Lord Jesus as His Lamb and His Christ. See the purpose for the world as conceived by Him. WORSHIP GOD! See your salvation as His work and WORSHIP GOD!

## THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

“*FOR the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*” Here is another profound utterance. In it is found the pulse of Divine life, the reason for Scripture, and the focus of Divine commentary. Every major translation reads exactly the same way: “*for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, YLT) .

This is sited as the REASON to “*worship God.*” The angel assumes this to be explanation enough for his admonition to John. It reveals at least two things.

- **First, the worship of God is bound to the Person of Jesus.** Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, valid worship is neither possible nor accepted. This is involved in our Lord’s telling remark, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). Worshiping God “*in spirit and in truth*” results from identity with a Person, not a procedure. Those who spend their time trying to find and codify a procedure of worship are in serious error. When the role of Jesus as Savior, Mediator, and King is perceived, men will “*Worship God.*”

That reign is revealed through bringing many sons to glory, and subjugating every foe that opposes that

work. All of this is a revelation of a purpose designed by God before the foundation of the world. When this is seen, and the vision is maintained, men well  
*“Worship God.”*

✎ **Second, the message John has received relates primarily to the Lord Jesus Christ.** It is a revelation of His reign, which is in strict accord with the revealed purpose of God. That reign is revealed through bringing many sons to glory, and subjugating every foe that opposes that work. All of this is a revelation of a purpose designed by God before the foundation of the world. When this is seen, and the vision is maintained, men well *“Worship God.”*

## TESTIMONY

The “*TESTIMONY of Jesus*” is the declaration of Him. It is the evidence, report, or record of Jesus. This is what occurred at our Savior’s baptism, when “*the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:21-22). God testified of Jesus, affirming His identity as the Son of God.

## JESUS

“*The testimony of JESUS*” is the report of His Person and accomplishments. It is the overriding subject of the prophecy, the theme and thread of the message. “*Jesus*” is our Lord from the redemptive perspective. The testimony is primarily a declaration of “*the MAN Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5), and the things He did and is doing in that capacity.

## SPIRIT

The “*SPIRIT of prophecy*” is the breath, or life, of prophecy. It is what makes it pertinent and powerful. Jesus is to “*prophecy*” what the spirit is to the body – He is what gives it life and relevance. Prophecy has a pulse to it—something that makes it alive, causing to yield affects in the hearers. Miss the life, and you miss the prophecy.

## PROPHECY

The “*spirit of PROPHECY*” is the life of the utterance or declaration. Prophecy takes place when one understands and declares the purpose and work of God—even in the face of opposition. The Spirit defines “*prophecy*” in a poignant statement concerning the one who prophesies—the prophet. “*But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men*” (1 Cor 14:3). Prophecy, therefore, builds up and strengthens men. It exhorts or moves men to spiritual activity. It also consoles and cheers, causing hope to rise within the heart.

### WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?

What, then, is said in this remarkable statement?

- The Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of all inspired utterances. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- Prophecy is validated by its relationship to the Savior of the world. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- The centrality of Jesus in the prophecy is what gives it effectiveness. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- God gives no word to humanity that has no direct relationship to His Son. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- There is NO edification, or building up, apart from a proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- There is no effective exhortation or admonition that does not center in the Lord Jesus Christ. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”
- There is no comfort or consolation in any message that does not bring Jesus nearer to the heart and conscience. “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”

**The “testimony of Jesus” is what gives the book of Revelation vitality.** It is what makes it relevant, yea needful, to the believer. This is *NOT* a record of the rise and fall of governments, but of the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world by Jesus! Revelation is *NOT* a declaration of the rise of an antichrist, harlot, city, or beast, but of their eradication by the Lord’s Christ. The vision given to John is *NOT* the record of the oppression of God’s people, but of their triumph over oppression. It is *NOT* a report of the rule and reign of Satan and his animated cohorts, but of the reign of our Lord and His Christ!

Those who take this book and strike fear into the heart of the people of God have added their opinions to it, and taken the breath out of it. By so doing, they have incurred the curse of God upon themselves. The Lord Jesus does not close this book until He has sounded the solemn warning. *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book”* (Rev 22:18-19). It is the business of every preacher and teacher who handles this book to make Jesus known. If the Savior cannot be seen in the book, let men lay their hand upon their mouth, and cease to speak concerning it. *“The testimony of Jesus”* is the spirit of THIS prophecy, as well as all others!

### IN KEEPING WITH THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

Because of the centrality of this truth, it is necessary to show its consistent declaration throughout Scripture. *“The testimony of Jesus IS the spirit of prophecy.”* It is NOT the “spirit,” or heart and life, of A prophecy, but of prophecy itself—ALL prophecy.

The prophets sensed they were prophesying of something larger than themselves—something beyond their time. That is why they diligently sought to understand what the Spirit was pointing to through their words.

#### The Gospel

The message of salvation, which is the most precise declaration of eternal purpose, centers in the Lord Jesus. That is why it is called *“Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God,” “the Gospel of Christ,” “the Gospel of His son,” “the glorious gospel of Christ,”* and *“the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Mark 1:1; Rom 1:9,16; 2 Cor 4:6; 2 Thess 1:8). ***“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”***

When the Scriptures speak of “*the Gospel of the Kingdom*,” they are speaking of the reign of Jesus (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mk 1:14). That reign is evidenced in the reconciliation of sinners, their guidance to glory, and the overthrow of their adversaries. **“*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”**

When we read of “*the Gospel of the grace of God*,” the good news of Divine favor upon men because of Jesus, is the emphasis (Acts 20:24). The Lord removed the obstacle between God and man, thereby opening the door of grace to humanity. **“*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”**

“*The gospel of peace*” emphasizes the benefit received because of the effective work of Jesus (Rom 10:15). It is because of Him that believers have peace with God, and can be at peace with one another. **“*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”**

“*The gospel of your salvation*” again affirms the effectiveness of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice (Eph 1:13). God is pleased with what He has done, and therefore joyfully saves those receiving His Son. In doing this, He is declared to be both “*just and the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). **“*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”**

“*The gospel of the blessed God*” and “*the Gospel of God*” underscore the impact of Christ’s work upon the Father Himself (1 Tim 1:11; 1 Pet 4:17). He is “*blessed*,” happy and jubilant because Christ put away sin, took the condemning law out of the way, destroyed the devil, and spoiled principalities and powers. **“*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”**

### ***The Whole of Scripture***

Here is a truth that is scarcely known in the professed church. It is rarely preached because it is hidden to many who represent themselves as preachers and teachers. Like those who “*want to be teachers of the law*,” these “*do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm*” (1 Tim 1:7, NIV).

Jesus is the Subject of ALL of Scripture. Remove Him from the Word, and nothing is left—no life, no vitality, no hope, and no power. There is a resounding testimony to this truth by both Jesus and the Apostles.

### *The Scriptures Testify of Him*

To His enemies, Jesus once said, “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39, NKJV). This means that those who read the Scriptures, yet rejected Christ, had missed their message! “*The Scriptures,*” in this case, were Moses and the Prophets. From Genesis through Malachi, the overriding testimony is of Jesus! He was their theme. The sacrifices pointed to Him. The promises were about Him. “***The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.***”

### *His Sufferings and Glory*

Peter takes all of the prophets prior to Jesus, and summarizes their message. “*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*” (1 Pet 1:10-11). His “*sufferings*” related to the atonement. His “*glory*” relates to the result of that atonement, the salvation, justification, and glorification of men. Though shrouded with hard-to-understand words, that was the theme of the prophets. They sensed they were prophesying of something larger than themselves—something beyond their time. That is why they diligently sought to understand what the Spirit was pointing to through their words. Those in Christ now behold the Savior in those ancient prophecies. They see Him in the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices. They behold Him in the poignant prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi. “***The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.***”

### *Preaching Christ*

When Philip was directed to the Ethiopian eunuch, he found him reading from the prophet Isaiah. The eunuch, though a man of great authority under the Queen of Candace, did not understand what he was reading. Because he saw Jesus in the Book, Philip “*began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus*” (Acts

8:35). Philip had proclaimed in the same manner earlier, when he “*preached Christ*” in Samaria (Acts 8:5). As soon as he was converted, Saul of Tarsus did the same thing “*in the synagogues,*” where he “*preached Christ*” (Acts 9:20).

Think of the inordinate amount of time expended by professed teachers of the Word on contextual considerations, historical backgrounds, etymological (language) concerns, hermeneutics (laws of interpretation), the original language, and Biblical customs.

Later, Paul acknowledged, “*But we preach Christ crucified*” (1 Cor 1:23). He also confessed the Gospel in power was nothing less than “*the preaching of Jesus Christ*” (Rom 16:25). From the standpoint of the MEANS of salvation, Paul referred to “*the preaching of the cross*” (1 Cor 1:18). Everything that the New Covenant messengers preached centered in Christ Jesus. He was their dominant theme. If it did not relate directly to Jesus, they did not proclaim it. It is ever true, “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”

#### *Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets*

When Jesus confronted Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, He made Himself known to them. How did He do so? He did not show them a sign, work a miracle, or ask them to study His appearance. The Author of all Scripture took the Scripture and showed those disciples that He was its Theme. “*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Lk 24:27). Later, sitting at their table, He said, “*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me*” (Lk 24:44).

He then opened the understanding of these two disciples. With telling words, He summarized the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. “*Thus it is written,*

*and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Lk 24:45-46). Who cannot behold the grandeur of the statement, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy!”*

#### *Peter on Pentecost*

Peter saw it on the day of Pentecost, as he preached Jesus from Joel (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21; Psa 110:1; Acts 2:34), the Psalms (Psa 16:8-11 Acts 2:25-28), and Second Samuel (2 Sam 7:11-16; Acts 2:30-33). What a marvelous correlation of Scripture! *“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy!”*

#### *Too Numerous to Mention*

Time would fail us to expound the many references on this subject. Jesus first revealed Himself by unveiling His Person and ministry from the book of Isaiah (Lk 4:17-22).

In preaching the Lord Jesus, Paul said he spoke *“no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come; that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).*

James perceived the extensive ministry of Jesus to the Gentiles when he understood the writings of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea--seeing Jesus in them (Acts 15:14-18; Amos 9:11-12; Isa 2:2-3; Jer 16:19; Hos 2:23).

The Gospel itself is said to be *“according”* to the Scriptures of Moses and the Prophets. *“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).*

Referring to the whole of Scripture (at the time referring to Moses and the Prophets, Paul said, *“which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through*

*faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).*

### *Christ and the Church*

On one occasion, Paul gave what appeared to be an extensive teaching concerning marriage. In it, he spoke of the responsibilities of both husbands and wives. At the conclusion of the teaching, he adjusted the focus of every believer. *“This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church . However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph 5:32-33, NIV).* Although husbands and wives are to conduct themselves in strict accord with this text, they are not what it is all about.

The comparison of Christ and the church with marriage is not readily apparent—it is a “*great*” or “*profound mystery.*” It is NOT that Christ and the church are understood by studying marriage. That is not the point of the text. The point is that marriage is comprehended by perceiving the relationship of Christ and the church. The focus is the Lord Jesus. ***“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”***

### **WHY SO MUCH TIME ON THIS?**

Why give so much time to this matter? Simply because it is generally unknown. Working through Babylon, the great harlot, Satan has drawn a veil over the Scriptures. Even though the heart and life of Scripture is Jesus, that is not apparent to the religious masses. Think of the inordinate amount of time expended by professed teachers of the Word on contextual considerations, historical backgrounds, etymological (language) concerns, hermeneutics (laws of interpretation), the original language, and Biblical customs. All of this appears wise, and has launched countless careers and fame for many men and women. But this is not really comprehended: ***“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”***? Has the individual that perceives Jesus in the text missed the point? None but a fool would affirm this to be the case! Those perceiving this to be the situation will find the door of revelation opening, and the cloud of mystery dissipating.

What of those who approach the Bible as a handbook of human conduct? They imagine that the EMPHASIS of Scripture is how men ought to live. That this is

present in the word cannot be denied. That it must be believed and incorporated into our lives is equally true. But directives concerning how we ought to live are NOT the “*spirit of prophecy*.” They are not what gives it life and power. The “testimony” of Jesus is what makes the Word “*living and powerful*” (Heb 4:12). As soon as you magnify human responsibility, you have diminished the Person and work of Christ. However, when you enhance Jesus, you at once open up the nature of human responsibility. You also bring the power to live within the reach of we weak mortals.

Others, even lower on the theological totem pole, see dietary and economical considerations as the fundamental thrust of Scripture. They see the Bible as a handbook of health and wealth. Indeed, they resurrect texts that appear to justify their emphasis. However, as soon as they major on “diet” and “economics,” Jesus goes into hiding, and is no longer seen. These people are oblivious to the declared destruction of this world and all that is within it (2 Pet 3:10-12). They do not speak of the day of judgment or of being joined to the Lord, for that has little bearing on what they are doing.

Still others emphasize the pattern of the church and religious procedures. They nearly always speak of elders, deacons, church government, and imagined patterns of worship. They love to speak of the role of woman, the name of the church, and how to orchestrate the work and service of God. Such people speak little of the Lord Jesus, for He has no immediate relevance to their program.

But enough of this. It should be apparent that “*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*.” He is what gives the Scripture importance. He is the theme of everything God has revealed. The very first prophecy of Scripture related to Jesus. “*And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel*” (Gen 3:15, NASB). The remainder of Scripture also relates to Him.

Lord has never quit talking about Jesus! He was in mind when He gave the Law, which “*was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal 3:24). The prophets spoke of “*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*” (1 Pet 1:11). The Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus. All Apostolic doctrine, or teaching, centers in the son of God. On the day of His baptism, God shined the spotlight of Divine attention on the Son. He has never

removed the attention from Him. O, that men could see it more clearly—that they had a better grasp on this verity! “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*”

## CONCLUSION

This text (19:7-10) is one that further opens the message of the Revelation. It assists us in not being moved off-center, or being deceived by our adversary the devil. The Revelation has the same emphasis as the rest of Scripture—the Lord Jesus and His salvation. Its message is “*to the churches,*” and not to the world. It does not major on history, but on the ages to come—eternity. The ruler of emphasis is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of significance is the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. The throne of preeminence is “*the throne of God and of the Lamb.*” The predominate purpose belongs to the Lord. The most prominent people are the saints of God. The triumphant One is the Lord Jesus. The defeated one is Satan, together with the beast and the false prophet.

These are the things that make Revelation comforting to the saints. Its message confirms that those with Jesus cannot lose, and those against them cannot win! Its message deals with certainties, not possibilities. It announces Divine appointments and the certainty of their fulfillment.

These are realities the church must know. The hardships endured by the saints are lessened in the knowledge of these things, and its burdens are lightened. The word sent by God through Jesus to the churches is not intended to strike fear into the heart of the saints, but good hope and everlasting consolation.

The professed church has spent too much time theorizing and speculating on the message of this book. Their time is to be spent reading, hearing, and keeping the words of this book (Rev 1:3). They are not to occupy their time with considerations of a coming beast, world government, economic disaster, or the mark of the beast. They are rather to prepare for the marriage of the Lamb. If they are prepared for that, they will be able to pass through any tribulation, regardless of its greatness.

If, in the end, we have made ourselves “*ready*,” all will be well. Further, we must be encouraged in the work of preparation. Everything we need to be prepared for the marriage has been supplied. A living Christ now intercedes to ensure we receive those resources. The Holy Spirit has been dispatched to assist the preparing bride. The holy angels have been sent to be her ministers, working behind the scenes to guarantee no ultimate harm comes to her. The salvation of God has removed the part of the bride that separated her from God, and brought to her the things that unite her to Him. Only time stands between her and the marriage. What good news this is! What good reasons this gives to prepare for the marriage to which grace has called us!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 36

## THE ENEMIES OVERTHROWN

" Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. " (Rev 19:11-21, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is more a book of perspective than of details. It is written to assure the hearts of believers of the reign of Jesus, not the reign of the antichrist. It is a pictorial record of the triumph of the saints and the Gospel, not of a Satanic initiative. Just as surely as those in Christ Jesus have an inheritance in heaven, so those who align themselves with this world “*shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*” (Rev 21:8). When history appears to justify the conclusion that the saints are weak and defenseless, these things are still true. When truth “*is fallen in the street*” (Isa 59:14), is corrupted in the mouths of men, and aggressively opposed by the enemies of God, these remain true—fixed in the eternal purpose of Almighty God.

When God’s witnesses are slain, they rise again (Rev 11:7-11). When saints are “*beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God*” (Rev 6:10), they live on in heavenly places, awaiting the sure vindication of their blood. If Satan launches an aggressive attack against the church, she will be given wings to fly to a place of safety and be nourished. Even “*the earth*” will “*help the woman,*” absorbing the shock of the devil’s assault (Rev 12:13-16). If it looks as though the Lord Jesus has withdrawn, and is no longer accessible to His people, He is seen in heaven—on the throne and reigning in the behalf of His people (Rev 5:1-13).

With sorrow we read of “*beast*” ascending out of “*bottomless pit,*” to make “*war*” against the saints, “*overcome,*” and

The message of this book makes unbelief, apostasy, worldliness, godless toleration of error, and lukewarmness unacceptable. It makes giving up and denying the faith inexcusable.

“kill them” (Rev 11:7). We see the devil as an enraged dragon going forth to “*make war*” with the holy “*remnant*” —those “*who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (Rev 12:17). We read of another beast, empowered by the devil himself. To this beast “*It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them*” (Rev 13:7). Even ten united kings make “*war*” with the Lamb (17:14). But this is not the only militant action recorded in this book. Nor, indeed, is it the primary activity. We are not going to read about Another—the conquering Lamb. Of Him it is written, “*and in righteousness He*

*doth judge and make war”* (Rev 19:11). Satan’s war was prolonged, that of the Lord’s Christ will not be prolonged. Satan did not realize the objectives of his war. The Lamb will fully realize His. After Satan’s most penetrating assault, a remnant of the faithful remained. After Christ’s war, not a single enemy will remain to oppose the people of God. Though we look diligently for their place, it will not be found!

Suffering saints **MUST** hear this message! In this world, they will endure the opposition of nature, caused by their adversary the devil. Famine, pestilence, and other forms of trial will occur in this world. At times, a bloody sword will be raised against them. Apostasy may even be found within their ranks, as many depart from the faith. But those who put their trust in God will be fully vindicated by the reigning Lamb! The faithful who maintain their garments will not be forgotten, but will be sustained and rewarded as those “*few*” in Sardis (Rev 3:4).

Satan is incapable of forging an initiative that can overthrow the Son of God. That is why he cannot ultimately conquer those who put their faith in Christ. Oppression, contradiction, and error are not invincible—even though they may appear to dominate for centuries.

The message of this book makes unbelief, apostasy, worldliness, godless toleration of error, and lukewarmness unacceptable. It makes giving up and denying the faith inexcusable. Too, when believed, its message spawns hope within the heart of the faithful. It sparks anticipation in those are looking for “*the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:13). This is not a message for the world, but for the church! The Spirit is saying it “*to the churches!*” Those with “*an ear to hear*” –the saints of God—are exhorted to “*hear*” the message. It is a good and comforting word.

## THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE ONE MAKES WAR

***“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.”***

## HEAVEN IS OPENED

The phrase “*heaven opened*” denotes the revelation of the heavenly rule: the execution of God’s “*eternal purpose*.” This book is appropriately called “*the Revelation*” –an opening of the rule and reign of Jesus. In chapter four, we saw a “*door opened in heaven*” (4:1). In chapter six, a sealed book was *opened* . In chapter eleven, the temple of God was “*opened*” (11:19). In chapter fifteen, “the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was *opened* ” (15:5). In chapter twenty “*the books*” of human deeds and “*the book of life*” were *opened* (20:12).

This is heaven’s perspective of the world’s history. It is the opening of the reign of Jesus. It is a revelation of the nature of the Kingdom of God. Here we see the reason for, strategy, and overthrow of the devil. When heaven is “*opened*” we behold the superiority of the heavenly hosts. We see the invincibility of the Lord’s Christ. Our hearts and minds are impressed with the impotence of the devil when the arm of the Lord is bared. If ever the church needed this view, it is our day!

The opening of heaven, or one’s entrance into it, is the key to all understanding. This is the occasion when the Lord dominates our vision. Isaiah saw things plainly when he saw the Lord “*high and lifted up*” (Isa 6:1-6). Ezekiel received insight into the purpose of the the Lord when he had “*visions of God*” (Ezek 1:1). The understanding of Zechariah was traced to his “*visions of God*” (2 Chron 26:5). Paul’s unusual insight found its basis in “*visions and revelations of the Lord*” (2 Cor 12:1). Before the John was exposed to the Lord’s purpose, he was first exposed to the Lord Himself (1:12-16). Throughout history, this has been the Lord’s manner. In order to see the affairs of earth properly, they must be seen from a heavenly perspective. By that I mean our primary focus must be the Lord. He must fill our vision before any degree of clarity will occur concerning things occurring on the earth. Thus it is written, “*For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light*” (Psa 36:9).

We are being shown things that have been determined, things that are sure, and things that are strictly governed from the heavenly throne. If we read this sacred volume with a despotic earthly government as our primary focus, we will be dashed upon the rocks of confusion and despair. This is not a book about the world, but of the Lamb of God and His inevitable conquest!

Regarding Scripture, the greatest measure of understanding is not realized by passing the Word through an historical filter. By this, I mean the understanding of historical circumstances does not shed the greatest illumination on the text of Scripture. Too, the attempt to process the written Word through an etymological colander does not result in the greatest understanding either. By this, I mean expertise in the language in which Scripture was originally written, by no means makes one an expert in its meaning. I understand this position is not a popular one among those prone to such approaches. However, they have no Scriptural support for their approach, either in doctrine or example.

It is in the light of God—the illuminating awareness of His Person—that all other matters come to light. Therefore, the Lord Jesus is giving us a glimpse of these things through His own eyes. When it comes to the churches, He tells us what **He** thinks of them. When it comes to the book of human destiny, **He** informs us it is in **His** hand. When it comes to the martyrs, **He** apprizes us of heaven’s reaction to them. He does not depict political government as men do, but rather declares it to be a “*beast*,” animated by the devil. He shows us the devil as a devouring dragon whose focus is the body of Christ. He does not paint a glowing picture of the popular church, citing its many contributions to society. He rather portrays it as a captivating city and despicable harlot.

When He shows us the church under attack, He does not comment at length about the tragedies through which she passes. Rather, He informs us of Divine provisions prepared for her, and her ability, through grace, to fly there for sustenance. When opening the terrible affects of Satan’s assault upon the world in general, the Lord says “*the earth helped the woman.*” This disruption of the ungodly and the discomfiting of a dead church are both affirmed to be the

judgment of the Almighty.

What is the point of all of this? We are seeing light in God's light! He is illuminating the circumstances faced by men by shining His own person upon them. Think of Divine qualities that have been expounded in this book! Faithful Witness (1:5), the Beginning and the End (1: 8), the First and the Last (1:11), the Prince of the kings of the earth (1:5), and the one possessing the keys to death hell and death (1:18). He is the One who searches men's hearts (2:23), He alone can open the sealed book of Divine intent (5:5,9). All blessing, honor, glory, and power belong to Him (4:11; 5:12-13). His wrath is the indignation to be feared (6:16-17). Salvation belongs to God (7:10). He is Almighty (1:8). His works are the ones that are great, and His ways are just and true (15:3). He is holy (3:7). And will give to everyone according to their works (2:23). That is "*HIS LIGHT!*"

As the things recorded in this book pass through His light, they are made more plain. As they are read with the purpose and power of Christ in mind, the pale of confusion disappears from them. This is involved in the heavens being opened. We are being shown things that have been determined, things that are sure, and things that are strictly governed from the heavenly throne. If we read this sacred volume with a despotic earthly government as our primary focus, we will be dashed upon the rocks of confusion and despair. This is not a book about the world, but of the Lamb of God and His inevitable conquest! It is not about a ruthless antichrist, but about the people he could not remove from the earth or from the favor of their Savior. No wonder John writes, "*Now I saw HEAVEN opened.*" Here comes the answer! Here comes the key to understanding!

### **BEHOLD! A WHITE HORSE**

Here is a vivid depiction of the righteous judgment of God being executed by the Son of God. We first saw a white horse in the opening of the first seal of Divine destiny. A conqueror was on that horse also. A crown was given to Him, and He went forth conquering and to conquer (6:2). There, the Son of God was seen expanding the Kingdom, causing it to increase. In our text, He comes forth to deal with His enemies. In both cases, the cause was thoroughly righteous.

### **FAITHFUL AND TRUE**

In this text, no doubt is left concerning the identity of the One upon the horse. He “*was called Faithful and True.*” These names define His character. In Him no variableness or shadow of turning was found. He was “*called Faithful.*” He is faithful to the commission of the Father, faithful to His promises, and faithful to his character. He is faithful in the mission upon which He now embarks. He has promised those who trusted in Him will not be ashamed, and they will not (Rom 10:11). The righteous were promised He would reign until His foes were made His footstool, and He will (Heb 1:13; 10:13). How frequently our Savior is called “*Faithful*” in this book (1:5; 3:14; 19:11). In our redemption, He was “*faithful*” to save. Now He will be seen as faithful in judging and making war.

His name is also “*True.*” By this the Spirit means the Lord Jesus is correct and dependable. He, His salvation, and His war are all genuine and correct. Anything and everything aligned against Him and what He is doing is, by that very circumstance, wrong. The conquering Lamb is characterized by total integrity, honor, and impeccable dignity. The war He makes is not wicked like that of Sennacherib. It is not a mere reaction, or an explosion of Divine temper, so to speak. In making war, He is carrying out the Divine agenda, and doing so as One invested with all power in heaven and earth.

### WAR WAGED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

This is a depiction of the coming of the Lord from the standpoint of His enemies. It would be wrong to approach this text using a timetable, and attempting to figure out a precise sequence of events. **This is not a revelation of sequence, but of purpose.** Just as our Lord’s return will be the beginning of glory for His saints, so will it be the end of glory for His enemies.

Everything initiated by heaven is righteous. Yet, the Spirit does not leave that to be concluded by us. He is going to show us the merciless destruction of Christ’s enemies. Not a spark of grace will be found in the destruction. Lest we be tempted to be sympathetic about the extermination of Christ’s enemies, we are told it is an act of righteousness.

Until this time, the “*longsuffering of God*” waited, as in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:20). His enemies, though vessels made to be taken and destroyed, had been endured with “*much longsuffering*” (Rom 9:22). As Peter well stated, “*the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*” (2 Pet 3:15). It is what causes the door of salvation to remain open to humanity. But, when the Lord comes forth to “*judge and make war,*” that is the end of “*the day of salvation*” for humanity. The “*accepted time*” (2 Cor 6:2) will close when Jesus comes to reckon with His enemies.

Make no mistake about this, the war our Lord initiates will not be a long one. There will be no extended resistance. No military strategy will be required. As it is written, “*For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth*” (Rom 9:28). Isaiah had heard about this time, and prophesied of it. “*Now therefore, do not be mockers, Lest your bonds be made strong; For I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts, A destruction determined even upon the whole earth*” (Isa 28:22). This will be a thorough destruction, executed in righteousness, and from which no enemy will recover. Isaiah put it this way. “*A bulge in a high wall, Whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant. And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel, Which is broken in pieces; He shall not spare. So there shall not be found among its fragments A shard to take fire from the hearth, Or to take water from the cistern*” (Isa 30:13,14).

## THE COMING OF CHRIST

This is a depiction of the coming of the Lord from the standpoint of His enemies. It would be wrong to approach this text using a timetable, and attempting to figure out a precise sequence of events. **This is not a revelation of sequence, but of purpose.** Just as our Lord's return will be the beginning of glory for His saints, so will it be the end of glory for His enemies. It will all occur at the same time—the coming of the Lord.

This should not sound strange to us. It is pointedly declared in both the Lord's parables and the doctrine of the Apostles. The destruction of the tares took place at the same time the wheat was harvested. The harvest is identified as “*the end of the world,*” in which the tares are gathered out, and the wheat are gathered in (Matt

13:39-43). Again, the kingdom of God is like a great net that gathered both good and bad fish. In the end, the two were separated. The good were gathered into vessels, and the bad were cast away—at the same time. In His exposition of this parable Jesus said, “*So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just*” (Matt 13:47-49). The very event that occasioned the reception of the five wise virgins also occasioned the exclusion of the five foolish ones (Matt 25:1-12).

Paul declared the same truth to the Thessalonians with remarkable power and clarity. He speaks of the time “*when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*” And when shall all of this occur? When will the wicked be punished, or, as Revelation puts it, when will the Lord come forth to judge and make war? The answer is too clear to be denied. “*WHEN He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe , because our testimony among you was believed*” (2 Thess 2:7-10).

The same “*coming*” that brings salvation to the saints will bring damnation to the ungodly. The same glory that will be the undoing of the wicked will be the glorification of the righteous. Our text underscores the *cessation* of their rebellion rather than their eternal consequences. This is when the Lord Jesus “*makes His enemies His footstool*” —a time expected by Him, and eagerly anticipated by all who live by faith (Matt 22:44; Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13; 10:13). Let every child of God live for that days! Its coming and outcome are sure.

## HIS MATCHLESS CHARACTER

“*His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*” Now we are given to behold the character of the Lord. These are more than external characteristics. They are the expression of His person. Already we have been told He is “*faithful and true.*” When He judges and makes war, He does so “*in righteousness.*” Now we see His character from another high and lofty

perspective

The name of the Lord speaks of His Person or character. There are names of our Lord that have been revealed to us, that revelation has not been in its fulness. No one has yet “*seen Him as He is*”. That disclosure will not occur until He comes again

***His eyes.*** Twice before, the Lord Jesus is described as having eyes “*as a flame of fire*” (1:14; 2:18). They are penetrating and powerful eyes, missing nothing. “*All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him*” (Heb 4:13). He beholds everything exactly as it is, and is never deceived. He sees the saints as they really are. He beholds the beast as it really is. Our Lord observes spiritual Babylon, the great harlot, for what she really is. When He judges and makes war in righteousness, He does so in strict comportment with reality. His eyes are “*as a flame of fire.*” Too, His very look is powerful, changing the circumstance. If, when He was among men, looking at Peter could drive him to lament and weep, what will be done when He beholds His enemies in all of His glory?

***His head.*** Prior to this, we saw the Lord with a single golden crown upon His head (14:14). This signified His exaltation by the Father over all things. But here we see Him with “*many crowns*” upon His head. This answers to the “*ten crowns*” that were upon the head of the beast. The enemy of the saints had extensive power, but nothing to compare with that of their Lord and Savior. He has crowns in every area, every aspect of life. There is no part of any realm that is not under Him. He is “*the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim 6:15). Too, this is a pictorial way of saying “*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*” (Rev 11:15).

***His full name.*** We have been told of a rider whose name was “*Death,*” and our adversary whose name is “*Apollyon*” (6:8; 9:11). Jesus promised overcomers He would write upon them His “*new name*” (3:12). Three times in this chapter, the name of our Lord is mentioned, and three times it is different. Here is a name no

one knows but Himself. Later it will be identified as “*the Word of God.*” Toward the end of the chapter His name will be known as “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (19:16).

The name of the Lord speaks of His Person or character. There are names of our Lord that have been revealed to us, that revelation has not been in its fulness. No one has yet “*seen Him as He is*”. That disclosure will not occur until He comes again (1 John 3:1-2). It is ever true that “*No one knows the Son, but the Father*” (Matt 11:27).

There are aspects of His Person that have not yet been unveiled. One of them relates to His wrath. No one has yet beheld “*the wrath of the Lamb*” in its fulness. But the time is coming when more of this aspect of His Person will be revealed. The first time “*God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (John 3:17). The second time, the world will see aspects of His Person never before seen.

***His clothing.*** John’s first exposure to the glorified Christ found Him clothed “*with a garment down to the foot*” (1:13). That was His High Priestly attire, emphasizing His intercession and bringing many sons to glory. But now He is seen as the heavenly Warrior, dashing His enemies to the ground, and having His garment saturated with their blood, as well as that of Himself. The basis for this representation was introduced in Isaiah 63:3-4. It is the language of triumph over His enemies. “*I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come.*”

Here the enemies of the Lord are pictured as a vineyard destined for the crushing winepress of the wrath of God. A similar picture is presented in chapter fourteen. “*So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs*” (19-20). The “*wrath of the Lamb*” is strong, unyielding, and irresistible. When the reigning Lamb comes to execute that wrath there will be no retaliation on the part of His enemies, and no effective resistance. It will be apparent from His garments, so to speak, that

the Lord is the only triumphant One.

***His revealed name.*** Here is a revealed name: “*The Word of God.*” To my knowledge, this is the only place in Scripture where our Lord is referred to as “*the word of God.*” One other place, He is called “*the Word,*” which was in the beginning, was with God, and was God (John 1:1). But here, His name is identified as “*the Word of God.*” That is, He is the precise expression of God. The relationship of reality to the expression of that reality is unusually close. The association of a word to the matter it discloses is most precise.

So is the relationship between the Lamb of God and God Himself. The Lamb is the precise expression of God. There is where the Person of God is expounded, for the “*fulness of the Godhead*” dwelt in Him “*bodily*” (Col 1:19; 2:9). In our text, the Lord Jesus comes to execute the will and judgment of God, and to reveal His purpose and nature. In Christ, particularly in His second appearance, the mind and purpose of the Almighty God will be revealed in full measure. His view and purpose for both the saints and His enemies will be made known, and none will be able to resist it. He is not only the Expositor of God, but the Executor of His “*eternal purpose.*” He will carry all things to their appointed conclusion.

## THE ARMIES OF HEAVEN

All of heaven supports the Son! He has been granted “*all power,*” not only in earth, but also “*in heaven*” (Matt 28:18). The holy angels announced His birth, supported Him in His ministry, strengthened Him in His trials, and announced His resurrection.

“And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.” There is a Divine cause with which a multitude of personalities have been aligned. All of them are associated with the Lord of glory, the incarnate Word of God. Because of the militant nature of this section of Revelation, these

personalities are called “*the armies of heaven.*” They have owned the cause of the Lord as their own, and therefore they “*followed Him.*” Who are these “*armies,*” coming from the heavenly realm?

Here is the glorified multitude to which the saved are now being gathered. They consist of both angels and men. The “*Word of God*” and the armies that follow Him are compared to “*the kings of the earth and their armies*” who set themselves to do battle. How futile are their efforts!

## HOLY ANGELS

We know from the Scriptures that in Christ we “*are come to an enumerable company of angels*” (Heb 12:22). These will play a prominent role in the return of our Lord. When He comes to remove the wicked, they will be involved. They are “*His angels.*” As it is written, “*For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works*” (Matt 16:27). Like that of the Son, their involvement will be impeccably holy. “*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the **holy** angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory*” (Matt 25:31). They will then appear in all of their splendor and glory, which is presently hidden from men. “*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own **glory**, and in His Father's, and **of the holy angels***” (Lk 9:26). Although exceeded in glory by their Leader, this is a glorious host, indeed!

All of heaven supports the Son! He has been granted “*all power,*” not only in earth, but also “*in heaven*” (Matt 28:18). The holy angels announced His birth, supported Him in His ministry, strengthened Him in His trials, and announced His resurrection. They accompanied Him to glory, and serve Him in a reign of righteousness now. Together, they will accompany Him when He returns. None of their glory will be hidden, and none of their number will be missing.

They will discharge their duties with swiftness and precision. They will “*gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*” -- “*from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven*” (Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27). They are the appointed “*reapers*” of the harvest. They will “*gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and*

*gnashing of teeth*” Matt 13:41). Who is foolish enough to think an army of this magnitude could be withstood—to say nothing of their Sovereign Leader!

## THE REDEEMED

The redeemed of the ages are also among these armies. We know from the Word of God that when Jesus comes again, “*God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Thess 4:14). Until that appearing, they are not called “*armies,*” but “*the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Heb 12:23). Being “*absent from the body,*” they are presently “*with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). But in that day, when He comes with clouds, and “*every eye shall see Him,*” this vast multitude of the redeemed will be among “*the armies of heaven.*” They will not be the docile people they were when upon the earth. Rather, they will follow Jesus, who comes to “*judge and make war.*” They will be an army. They will be aggressive, and will share in the victory of Jesus.

The saints will be involved when their Lord comes to “*judge and make war*” in righteousness. They are being groomed now for that participation.

Jesus alluded to the events of this passage, and the saints participation in it, in His message the church at Thyatira. “*And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels; as I also have received from My Father*” (Rev 2:26-27). Here, then, is the beginning of the fulfillment of the saints involvement in the judgment of the world. “*Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?*” (1 Cor 6:2-3).

The saints will be involved when their Lord comes to “*judge and make war*” in

righteousness. They are being groomed now for that participation.

### THEIR CLOTHING

“ . . . *clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*” Three times in revelation we read of linen clothing. **The seven angels** having the seven last plagues were clothed in “*pure and white linen*” (15:6). **The Lamb’s wife** was “*granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white*” (19:8). **Babylon the great**, that magnificent harlot, was also “*clothed in fine linen*” – but it was NOT “*clean and white*” (18:16). That “*linen*” was Satan’s fabrication of righteousness.

This is a depiction of the church “*not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*” (Eph 5:27). While it was in the world, the church was forbidden to retaliate (Matt 5:39; Rom 12:17,19; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9). For the time, that is because we are “*in the body.*” While here, we are warned “*For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*” (James 1:20). However, when we are divested of the “*body of this death*” (Rom 7:24), and freed from the influences of the “*old man*” and “*the flesh*” (Eph 4:22; Rom 7:25), we will no longer be capable of improper judgment. Then, we will follow the conquering King of kings, dashing our enemies in pieces through righteous judgment. This will be the beginning of our eternal reign with Jesus.

The armies of heaven followed Jesus riding on “*white horse.*” This denotes the uprightness of the war they wage, and their participation in it. Our reign with Jesus will be right, and none will be able to speak against it. The wicked will not be able to resist the Lord or the armies with Him.

### Not A Prolonged Battle

It is important to again emphasize this is not a prolonged battle. The words “*make war*” do not require a brilliant stratagem or lengthy military campaign. A Leader upon a white horse with vast armies following Him are not intended to leave us thinking of a sort of fourth world war. By calling the triumphant rider “*The Word of God,*” we know this is a matter of fulfilling the purpose of God. The accent is upon His eyes, not a weapon of war as normally conceived. He is not fighting to gain a crown, He already wears “*many crowns.*” He is not fighting to extend His kingdom, but to conclude all competing ones. His robe has already

been dipped in blood, revealing a predetermined outcome. The armies that follow Him are clothed in fine linen, clean and white, yet they have no weapons. This is the kind of war fought with Egypt, Sodom, and Sennacherib's army. "War" does not mean battle, crusade, or campaign. He comes to "*JUDGE and make war,*" NOT *fight* and make war! If we entertain doubts about this matter, the weapon used to strike the enemies will confirm what I have said. We must not allow ourselves to think in a fleshly manner about the message of this book. If we do, we will not profit from it.

## THE WEAPON OF TRIUMPH

*"Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations."* Early in this book, we are introduced to this sword. John saw the glorified Christ, "*and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword*" (1:16). The church at Pergamos was reminded, "*These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges*" (2:12). What is more, they were warned if they did not repent of their tolerance and embrace of damnable doctrine, "*I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth*" (2:16). Speaking of the same weaponry, Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah, "*He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked*" (Isa 11:4). Paul, speaking of the destruction of the lawless one, wrote, "*whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming*" (2 Thess 2:8). The sword proceeding from the King's mouth is the "*rod of iron*" with which he shall "*dash in pieces*" those who are against Him (Psa 2:9; Rev 12:5).

Presently, the messengers of God bring the sweet message of the Gospel. They announce "*the acceptable year*" and the "*day*

In spite of the resounding testimony of the strength and effectiveness of the Word of God, religious men continue to resort to other means to accomplish what they imagine is the work of the Lord. There is a reliance on the wisdom of men in all of its varied and ineffectual forms.

of salvation” (Lk 4:19; 2 Cor 6:2). But this is NOT the theme of this portion of Scripture. Just as surely as the grace of God “*brings salvation*” (Tit 2:11), the day of “*the wrath of the Lamb*” will bring the sure destruction of His enemies.

Those who are alive unto God “*live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord*” (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). His enemies will be judged and overcome by the same word. As it is written, “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48). Speaking of this powerful word, Jeremiah wrote, “*Is not My word like a fire?*” says the LORD, *And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*” (Jer 23:29). It is ever true, “*The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon*” (Psa 29:5).

A decadent church has lost a sense of the power of the Word—the sword proceeding out of the mouth of the conquering King. It has forgotten it was “*begotten*” by that very Word (James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23). It was once cleansed “*with the washing of water by the Word*” (Eph 5:26). In fact, everything is presently being sustained by “*the Word of His power*” (Heb 1:3). By His “*Word*” the Lord “*framed*” the worlds (Heb 12:3). By His Word the flood destroyed the world of Noah’s day (2 Pet 3:5), and by His Word the world now being preserved will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet 3:7).

In spite of the resounding testimony of the strength and effectiveness of the Word of God, religious men continue to resort to other means to accomplish what they imagine is the work of the Lord. There is a reliance on the wisdom of men in all of its varied and ineffectual forms. Whether it is principles of hermeneutics to understand Scripture, psychiatry to discern men, or methods and techniques to expand their numbers, the modern church continues to rely on inferior words. The Bible is no longer chained in monasteries, thereby kept from the multitude. Now is it covered with the shroud of religious tradition. We are told that only experts in the original language and Bible interpretation can bring the true meaning of Scripture to us. Thus the ignorance of the Word of God continues to grow—in the churches. People are becoming increasingly unfamiliar with what has proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord. The danger attending this condition is serious.

But now the Lord Jesus takes us to the end of time. He shows us the final confrontation of His competitors. He declares they will be overcome decisively. The victory will not come by unearthing a principle of interpretation, but by the

sword that proceeds out of His mouth. The wisdom of men –even religious wisdom–was not able to stop the rise of the beast. It could not stop the slaughter of the saints. Traditional and historical expertise and empty rhetoric could not stop the rise of spiritual Babylon. It could not neutralize its power, or pluck the souls of men from her grasp. The expert methods of which men boast could neither impede religious corruption nor moral decay. The word of man in all of its forms is impotent!

But this is not the case with the Lord. His open and unquestioned triumph will be accomplished by His Word–the sword that proceeds out of His mouth. He will speak to the mountain, and it will disappear. He will command every plant that He has not planted to be uprooted, and it will be so (Matt 15:8). *“The Word of the Lord is living and powerful”* (Heb 4:12)! We have an opportunity for this to be to our advantage now. That same Word will feed, direct, and console us. But if men choose to ignore the Word of the King now, they will be dashed to pieces by it in the end. This is a message that has nearly disappeared in the Western church. But it is true, and we all do well to *“hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Back to the Word!

## HE HIMSELF TRIUMPHS

*“And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”*

## JESUS HAS ALREADY TRIUMPHED

Technically , the Lord has already triumphed over His enemies. Although this may be apparent to us, our hearts do well to hear of it again. When it comes to His enemies, the Lord Jesus triumphed gloriously over them in His death.

## Satan Is Destroyed

Of His arch foe, Satan, it is written, *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and*

*release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Heb 2:14-15). Note, the destruction of Satan is associated with the DEATH of the Lord Jesus. The reason in which he was destroyed is also given. It was to *“release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime*

Our adversary has not been annihilated, but he has been *“destroyed,”* or rendered ineffective in his working. When we are *“baptized”* into Christ’s *“death,”* we come into the area where Satan has been destroyed. By faith, therefore, we are able to triumph over him.

subject to bondage.” In this *“destruction,”* Satan was rendered powerless to keep hungry and thirsty souls from coming to Jesus. He cannot stop those desiring to *“call upon the name of the Lord”* from doing so. Whoever wants free from his dominion will be given repentance to simply walk out of the prison that had held them captive. In addition, the devil cannot now contend with the *“NO”* of believers to ungodliness and worldly lusts. Those who resist him in the faith will find him fleeing.

The devil has been *“destroyed”* through the death of Christ. In that death, both sin and the strength of sin, the law, were effectively removed. Now, there is no basis for accusation in those who *“receive the atonement,”* or reconciliation (Rom 5:11).

Our adversary has not been annihilated, but he has been *“destroyed,”* or rendered ineffective in his working. When we are *“baptized”* into Christ’s *“death”* (Rom 6:3-4), we come into the area where Satan has been destroyed. By faith, therefore, we are able to triumph over him.

### **Principalities and Powers Spoiled**

Principalities and powers, through which Satan dominates the world, have been plundered by Jesus. This despoiling occurred in our Lord’s death. It is written, *“ . . . His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of*

*them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (His cross, Col 2:15). The triumph was so thorough, and the plundering so effective, that whole bodies of people responded to the Gospel simultaneously. 3,000 gladly received the Word on the day of Pentecost, and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Even though the captain of the temple and the Sadducees removed the Apostles from preaching, putting them in custody for a day, 5,000 men believed their preaching (Acts 4:4). The entire city of Samaria believed the preaching of Philip. With “*one accord*” they “*received the Word of God*” (Acts 8:5-14). Principalities and powers had been spoiled!

Yet, Satan and his powers continued to exercise influence. They had not been exterminated, but rendered powerless in the heavenly places, and wherever faith was found. There are still places dominated by Satan—places where his throne is placed (Rev 2:13). He still blinds men’s minds, lest they should believe (2 Cor 4:4). There are still individuals who are “*taken captive by him at his will*” (2 Tim 2:26). Indeed, there remain wicked men, persecutors, and blasphemers. But none of them are with Jesus. None of them have the Holy Spirit.

These enemies also have a determined destiny. They will be made Jesus’ “*footstool.*”

It will be public, before an assembled universe. They will be brought before the saints like Joshua brought the defeated kings before Israel. Of that occasion it is written, “*So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of the men of war who went with him, ‘Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.’ And they drew near and put their feet on their necks*” (Josh 10:24). So will it be with the saints in the day of the Lamb’s wrath. Their foes will be powerless before them as the Lord Jesus openly displays their impotency before Him.

The Lord will “*make His enemies His footstool*” when He comes again. It is something that will be direct and public. His first subjugation of the hosts of darkness was NOT apparent. It was behind the scenes, so to speak. Only those with faith know of His triumph—and some of them do not yet see it clearly. Those who “*love darkness rather than light*” certainly do not see the destruction of the devil and the spoiling of principalities and powers. But they will! It will not be for their benefit, but they will behold the enemies of Jesus—all of them—bowing down at His feet in ignominy and shame. That is why it is written, “*But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,*

*from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool” (Heb 10:12-13). Again, it is written, “For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor 14:25).*

This is the time with which we are confronted in our text. Jesus dashing His enemies in pieces with the sword of His mouth is nothing less than His enemies becoming His footstool. The last of those enemies, we are told, is “*death*” (1 Cor 15:26). That, of course, will be destroyed when our Lord raises the dead with the words of His mouth. Jesus Himself said, “*the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*” (John 5:28-29).

Remember, the final and complete overthrow of our Lord’s enemies will be accomplished with the sword that comes out of His mouth. This perfectly coincides with the Apostolic representation of the case. “*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming*” (2 Thess 2:8). As God said through Hosea the prophet, “*Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth*” (Hos 6:5).

If men wonder WHEN this will occur, we are told the enemies will be destroyed “*with the brightness of His coming*” (2 Thess 2:8b). Pointedly, we are reminded this will not be a special coming during which the Lord will deal only with the wicked. This is the same coming during which He will be glorified in and admired by His people. As it is written, “*When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed*” (2 Thess 1:7-10).

Part of the Lord being “*glorified in His saints*” will be realized when the armies of heaven follow Him when He comes to “*judge and make war.*” He will speak His enemies into oblivion, terminating their rebellion abruptly and “*without hand*” (Job 23:24; Dan 8:25). He spoke the worlds into existence, and He shall speak the

termination of His foes. He upholds all things by the Word of His power, and He will conclude all things with His word. Make no mistake about this His sword comes from His mouth! That sword will subjugate all His foes! None can stand before the Word of the Lord! It is, without question, “*living and powerful.*”

## KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

The government, or reign, has not been given to “*the Man Christ Jesus.*” Nothing has been excluded from Christ’s dominion but the Father Himself, Who placed all things under Him (1 Cor 15:27). The authority has already been given to Him: it is not something that is to come.

“And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Here, the Lord is identified by yet another name. This is not a name as ordinarily conceived. Rather, it is an unveiling of His character. The “*name*” of someone, from this perspective, defines WHAT they are as well as who they are. This is a consistent approach to identifying the personalities in this book. The rider on the pale horse was NAMED “*Death*” because that is what he brought (6:8). A great star falling from heaven upon the waters was NAMED “*Wormwood*” because it produced great bitterness (8:11). He devil himself is identified by several names: “*Abaddon,*” because he is a destroying angel, “*Apollyon*” because he is a destroyer (9:11). A bitter foe of the people of God, called a “*beast*” that had “*the name of blasphemy upon his head*” because of its blasphemous manner. The pretending church is pictured as a harlot NAMED “*MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH*” (17:5). All of these “*names*” reveal the *character* of the ones being described. In a very real way, their names are them!

The name “*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*” precisely defines who the Lord IS. This is affirmed in chapter seventeen. “*He is Lord of lords and King of kings*” (verse 14). All rulers—all who have authority—whether in heaven or earth,

are under the Lord Jesus Christ. He is their Lord and King. He reigns over them, determining the duration and manner of their rule. He will also cause their rule to abruptly end when it has served His purpose. No lord or king can rise without His approval, and none can remain without it. His Word determines the beginning and end of their rule.

Right now, our Lord is King of kings. Thus it is written, “*He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim 6:15). As David sang in his song of thanksgiving, “*And let them say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns’*” (1 Chron 16:31). Even in the midst of what appears social and political chaos, “*God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne*” (Psa 47:8). Four times the phrase “*the Lord reigns*” is mentioned in the Psalms (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). Isaiah said it was “*good news*” when those in Zion were told, “*Your God reigns!*” (Isa 52:7).

The government, or reign, has not been given to “*the Man Christ Jesus.*” Nothing has been excluded from Christ’s dominion but the Father Himself, Who placed all things under Him (1 Cor 15:27). The authority has already been given to Him: it is not something that is to come.

Over and over the present dominion of Jesus is affirmed in Scripture. Isaiah prophesied the reign of the Messiah in connection with Him becoming a man. “*For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this*” (Isa 9:6-7). Peter affirmed Jesus is NOW on “*the throne of David*”— His reign has begun! (Acts 2:30-36).

Both Jesus and the Apostles took up the prophetic refrain, affirming that all power presently belongs to Jesus, and that all powers are presently under Him. “*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father . . .*”

**NEVER** is Jesus introduced as **NOT** presently

reigning– NEVER! When, therefore, we read of the name “*King of kings and Lord of lord*” being on His robe and on His thigh, we are reading of Who **IS**, not what He will be! His character cannot be changed, and being King is part of His character!v

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth . . . The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand . . . The Father has given Him authority to execute judgment also . . . Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands . . . You have given Him authority over all flesh . . . He put all things under His feet . . . who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (Matt 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 5:27; 13:3; 17:2; Eph 1:22; 1 Pet 3:22).

Those, therefore, who speak of the coming reign of Christ, or a time when His reign will begin, have not spoken correctly. The words “*shall reign*” are used by the prophets in reference to the coming Messiah (Isa 32:1; Jer 23:5; Mic 4:7). Mary used them in her response to the news she would bear the “*Holy Child*” (Lk 1:33). **But no Apostle ever spoke of a time in the future when Christ’s reign would commence!** The notion that Jesus will begin a reign in the future is a concoction of blind theologians. Such a thing is never stated in Scripture. In fact, it contradicts what is revealed in the wORD.

NEVER is Jesus introduced as NOT presently reigning– NEVER! When, therefore, we read of the name “*King of kings and Lord of lord*” being on His robe and on His thigh, we are reading of Who **IS**, not what He will be! His character cannot be changed, and being King is part of His character! If, when He entered into the world, He was “*born King*” (Matt 2:2), what must be said of Him now that He is exalted above every name that is named?

At this time, we see the reign of Jesus by faith. When we “*believe God,*” and “*the record*” He has “*given of His Son,*” we embrace a ruling reigning Savior. We are trusting that King to “*bring us to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). The point of our text is that God has appointed a grand conclusion when what we now see by faith will be revealed openly. That is nothing less than Christ’s second appearance (Heb 9:28). It is when He will come in all of His glory, the Father’s glory, and the glory of the

Holy angels (Lk 9:26). That is when the Father will “*show*” the assembled universe what He has shown His children in their spirits (1 Tim 6:15).

At that appearance, His enemies will be destroyed. It will only take a word from the King—the sword comes from His mouth! Like the mountains of old, His foes—all of them—will “*melt away*” (Ex 15:15; Psa 58:7; 112:10). Such a thing could not occur if the Lord Jesus Christ was NOT “*King of kings and Lord of lords.*” The ascended Christ is now on the throne which belongs to Him. He is reigning, and it is for your sake.

## THE INVITATION

***“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.”*** Up to this time, the people of God have been the ones oppressed and persecuted. The governments of the world appeared to have their way in their treatment of the saints of God. The false church oppressed and persecuted them. John identified himself as a “*companion in tribulation*” (1:9). Some saints were tried, and had “*tribulation for ten days*” (2:10). Antipas was a faithful martyr of Jesus (2:13). Souls that were beheaded for the Word of God have been seen (6:9). Those very souls were told there were others “*who would be killed as they were*” (6:11). Victorious saints are described as “*the ones who come out of the great tribulation*” (7:14). The devil aggressively persecuted the people of God (12:13-17). We have been given to see a corrupt church, pictured as a woman “*drunken with the blood of saints*” (17:6). The oppression of the saints has been most evident throughout the Revelation. But now the tables are turned, and the overthrow of their enemies becomes the emphasis. Just as Satan led the opposing of the saints, so the King of kings will lead their triumph!

An angel is pictured as “*standing in the sun,*” something impossible from the natural point of view. In our little world, the sun is the most significant thing. It outshines everything in our universe, and all revolves around it. But in our text, when the angel stands in the sun, he reduces it to insignificance. We are not

impressed with the light of the sun, but with the message of the angel. Nature recedes into the background as the purpose of God is proclaimed with a loud voice to the universe. The greatest thing in nature is but a place for angels to stand and make proclamation. Men must learn this world is inferior to the one to come. It's glory is inferior. It's kings are inferior! Its benefits are inferior!

### THE CRY TO ALL THE BIRDS

These birds, or "*fowls*," are birds of prey. They are the birds that feed upon dead carcasses—scavengers. Notice the words that are addressed to "*ALL the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven.*" This is an arresting word, and worthy of our consideration. **In this world, scavengers must compete for the prey. There is not enough for them all.** Often they will fight over what is found, because it is not found in abundance. Under normal circumstances, life outweighs death, and there is never enough for "*all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven.*" Often beasts of prey devour one another, preying on the sick and weakly, because there is not enough food for all.

But this is not the case in our text. "*All the birds*" are summoned to this feast, because of its abundance. There is enough for them all! The point, of course, is not vultures and mortal flesh. Rather, it is the destruction of the wicked.

The destruction of the wicked will be  
as thorough as the salvation of the  
righteous. **ALL** of the wicked will be  
destroyed, and **ALL** of the righteous  
will be delivered.

Throughout history, with a single exception (the flood), the wicked have been removed in small groups. Even though wickedness was found throughout the world, God would judge only "*the cities of the plain*" (Sodom and Gomorrah). Even though all nations were corrupt, He would judge Egypt, or Syria, or the Philistines, etc.

Although the “*kings of the earth*” were wholly wicked, He would selectively judge Pharaoh, Sihon, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, etc. Even if sin dominated the entire human race, the Lord would particularly judge Achan, Korah, or Ananias and Sapphira. These were judgments to which “*all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven*” could NOT be summoned. They were partial judgments, and did not deal with ALL of the wicked.

In our text, however, the judgment is not partial. It is not one of many wicked nations that is being overthrown. It is not a representative city that is being judged. Some of God’s enemies are not being brought down. This is nothing less than the total destruction of the wicked. ALL of the leaders of the wicked, and ALL of the wicked themselves will be brought down.

The language is taken from the prophet Ezekiel, who also spoke of the overthrow of wicked people. The language is abrasive, but it is necessary to impress upon the hearts of men how serious the Lord is about overthrowing the wicked. “*Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field : Assemble yourselves and come; Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal Which I am sacrificing for you, A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, That you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, Drink the blood of the princes of the earth, Of rams and lambs, Of goats and bulls, All of them fatlings of Bashan. You shall eat fat till you are full, And drink blood till you are drunk, At My sacrificial meal Which I am sacrificing for you. You shall be filled at My table With horses and riders, With mighty men And with all the men of war, says the Lord GOD*” (Ezek 39:17-20). The vivid language breaks through the mists created by stilted theology and indifference of heart. The same God who saves, also destroys. As it is written, “*There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy*” (James 4:12).

The destruction of the wicked will be as thorough as the salvation of the righteous. ALL of the wicked will be destroyed, and ALL of the righteous will be delivered. Think of these affirmations of the complete overthrow of the wicked, for that is what we are beholding in our text. “*The face of the LORD is against those who do evil , To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth . . . For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain and drink down . . . For behold, Your enemies, O LORD, For behold, Your enemies shall perish . . . You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross . . . Him, But all the*

*wicked He will destroy . . . His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire . . . Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*” (Psa 34:16; 75:8; 92:9; 119:119; 145:20; Matt 3:12; 15:18).

### **The Supper of the Great God**

The destruction of the wicked is pictured as a great supper— *“the supper of the Great God.”* In this case, *what* is being consumed takes the precedence over the ones consuming it. The supper itself is the point. Previously, we heard of *“the marriage SUPPER of the Lamb”* (19:9). That is the supper to which men are presently being invited—the time when the Bridegroom and the bride will be brought together in fulness. But that is not the only supper. Now we read of God’s *“supper,”* a feast to which dreadful birds of prey are invited.

Although this may well involve the hosts of darkness devouring those who followed them, I do not believe that is the point of the text. Rather, the language declares that in every place, throughout the world, wherever one wicked person is found—wherever there is a rebel, one who has not bowed the knee to Jesus, one who has not obeyed the Gospel—they will be thrown down, cast down, and cut off. No enemy will escape. The brightness of the glory of the Lord will pervade every citadel of darkness, discovering every cavern of ungodliness and every shrine of wickedness. Little wonder the wicked are pictured as crying *“to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* (Rev 6:16).

What we have read is a Divine appointment. There is no possibility of it being averted, or of God changing His mind. Just as surely as the *“marriage supper of the Lamb”* has been determined, so has the *“supper of the great God.”*

Behold how thorough the fall. It involves **leaders of renown** : *“the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men.”* Those who have been **aggressive against the truth** are included: *“the flesh of horses and of those who sit on*

*them.” All levels of society are embraced: “the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.”*

It is necessary for us to recognize this is how Jesus had chosen to be revealed. This is His revelation, and it is the revelation of Him. Orthodox churches like Ephesus, who have left their “*first love*” need to hear this. They have been gravitating to the enemy’s side! Churches like Pergamos, who have teachers who lead people to sin, need to hear this message. They are drifting to the enemy’s side. Churches like Thyatira, who allow false teachers to continue in their midst, need to hear this message. They are retreating to the enemy’s side. Churches like Sardius, who have more people that are dead toward God than those alive to Him, need to hear this message. They are already in the grip of the wicked one. Churches like Laodicea, who are lukewarm and indifferent, need to hear this message. They have already become repulsive to Jesus.

It is the condition of the churches that requires such a vivid portrayal of the destruction of the wicked. They have been lulled to sleep by their religion. It has made them comfortable in sin, which will be the means of their undoing. What we have read is a Divine appointment. There is no possibility of it being averted, or of God changing His mind. Just as surely as the “*marriage supper of the Lamb*” has been determined, so has the “*supper of the great God.*” Two suppers, and every person who has ever lived will participate in one of them. Now is the time of preparation. Now is the time to resist the devil. Now is the time to follow the Lamb! Now is the time to align yourself against the devil and his hosts.

## ENMITY PERSONIFIED

***“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.”***

A great deal of religious folklore has arisen regarding this text. Some imagine an extensive military conflict between the glorified Christ and the kings of the earth. Those who imagine such nonsense do not realize how glorious Jesus is, or how weak His enemies are. If the heavens and the earth will flee from the face of the appearing Lord (20:11), how do men imagine His enemies will survive? If Jericho trembled at the word of the approaching Israelites, their hearts melting, and their courage departing (Josh 2:10-11), what will Christ’s enemies do when He returns?

Away with theology so insipid it imagines mortal flesh can contend with revealed Deity. Such foolishness is spawned in pools of inexcusable ignorance. It betrays small thinking, blinded eyes, and insensitive hearts. Aside from this, such things are not taught in Scripture. They represent the conclusions of men who equate what they THINK Scripture means with Scripture itself. By so doing, they have opened themselves to the curse of Jesus, as expressed in this very book. *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”* (22:18-19).

### **THE ENEMIES REPRESENTED**

In this text, a high view of Christ’s enemies is presented. Rather than viewing them as individuals, the leaders are accentuated. The word of God often presents the wicked at the detailed level: *“them which do iniquity . . . them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . the unrighteous,”* etc. (Matt 13:41; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Cor 6:9). But here we are provided a different view.

**“THE BEAST”** is the devil’s first level of human influence. It represents the gathering of people under a common cause that is other than that of Christ. More precisely, it is earthly government as animated by Satan himself. Concerning its ultimate origin, this entity, created by Satan, comes from the bottomless pit (11:7). Regarding its appearance among men, it rose from social agitation (13:1-2). Its nature is fundamentally ruthless and devouring (13:2). Ultimately, it comes out against the people of God, opposing, persecuting, and even killing them. This is the highest form of human opposition to the saints of God.

**“THE KINGS OF THE EARTH”** are the next level of leaders, operating within a political environment, and for the beast, who is empowered by Satan. These are the immediate leaders—the ones who initiated opposition, and persecuted the saints. They are the ones who passed laws against the people of God, the Word of God, and the life of God. They are *“of the earth,”* not heaven.

ALL earthly power sides against the Lord. That includes political power and philosophical power. Whether it is the aggression of the world, or the wisdom of the world, it all eventually opposes God! Finally, everything that did not come from God will seek to join forces against Him.

“**THEIR ARMIES**” are all who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. In their denial of the Son of God, they were left with only one alternative: enlist in the army of Christ’s opponents. In them is fulfilled the Lord’s saying, “*He who is not with Me is against Me*” (Matt 12:30).

### **THEY GATHER TOGETHER**

This wicked confederation are gathered together by Satan to make war against the Son of God. Their gathering is foolish, and will be met with not a single speck of success. The picture here is not that Christ’s enemies gather together at His appearing, but that His appearing INTERRUPTS their gathering together. This “gathering” actually started at is first revelation, when kings, the Gentiles, and even Israel “*were gathered together*” against the Lord Jesus (Psa 2:1-5; Acts 4:27). Throughout history, there have been repeated attempts to “gather” the ungodly under a common banner.

It appears as though Satan will muster them once again as the time of the end draws near. However, “*Though they join forces, none will go unpunished*” (Prov 16:5). The point here is that eventually, ALL earthly power sides against the Lord. That includes political power and philosophical power. Whether it is the aggression of the world, or the wisdom of the world, it all eventually opposes God! Finally, everything that did not come from God will seek to join forces against Him.

This gathering is said to be “*against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.*” Actually, it took the immediate form of opposing the saints. However, their opposition is considered by Jesus to be against Himself. Remember, He said to Saul of Tarsus, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*” (Acts 9:5). He also

said of those who neglected His people, *“Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me”* (Matt 25:45). Peter, when comforting those suffering because of their faith, wrote, *“On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified”* (1 Pet 4:14).

What a diabolical gathering this is! It will be interesting to see how it concludes. Will there be a lengthy battle? Do the saints have anything to fear from this confrontation? The Lord does not leave these matters to human conjecture. The confrontation of the wicked is sure, and the outcome of the confrontation is sure.

## A QUICK CONCLUSION

***“Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.”***

You will notice there is NO battle! No fight! No extended conflict takes place. We do not read of the clash of swords, or of struggles for victory. Christ has interrupted the futile gathering of His enemies. Their opposition is terminated abruptly and with finality. The opponents were simply *“captured.”* No struggle is depicted—none at all. What is more, the totality of the inimical forces are *“captured.”* Both the forceful power ( *“the beast”*) and the deluding power (*“false prophet who worked signs”*) are *“captured.”* This should not surprise us. If God can destroy the entire human race, except for eight souls, with a flood, why should the capturing of the beast and false prophet appear difficult. If He could remove Sodom and Gomorrah without so much as a shred of resistance from them, why should the disposal of governments and false religion seem too hard? Remember how quickly he destroyed the armies of Egypt in the Red Sea? Recall the death of Sennacherib’s vast army of 185,000, during the night, while men slept. All of these things occurred WITHOUT the revelation of the full glory of God. In our text, we are reading of something that occurs WITH the full revelation of God’s glory, Christ’s glory, and the glory of the holy angels. And that is accompanied by the glorified saints, part of the *“armies of heaven.”*

Both of these arch foes are “*cast alive into the lake of fire.*” This indicates they were captured and cast into the lake of fire when they were at the height of the power. They were at their best when they were “*thrown into*” eternal oblivion. The Lord did not first weaken them, like He did the Egyptians, when their chariot wheels fell off. He allowed them to “*gather together,*” to pool their resources, taking full advantage of one another. The world crucified the Lord in His “*weakness*” (2 Cor 13:4). He will dispose of them in their strength—at the peak of their potency.

And what of those who followed this wicked pair? What will happen to them. They are called “*armies,*” but they do not fight. Indeed, they are all struck down with a mere word from the King. “***And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.***” When among us, Jesus cast out demons with His word (Matt 8:16). He raised the dead with a word (John 11:43). He “*rebuked*” a fever (Lk 4:39). A fig tree withered and died when cursed by Jesus (Matt 21:19). A fish brought a coin to Peter at the word of Jesus (Matt 17:27). And all of that was BEFORE He had been glorified. If a detachment of soldiers and some officials went backward and “*fell to the ground*” when a straightened Jesus said “*I am HE*” (John 18:6), what will happen when He speaks to those inferior armies in all of His glory?

Thus the demise of the wicked is concluded, swiftly and decisively. The phrase “*all the birds were filled with their flesh*” portrays the total removal of the wicked from all influence. Never again will the devil tempt anyone. Never again will the “*beast*” lift its hand against the saints. Never again will the “*false prophet*” spout lies in the name of Jesus. Never again will the wicked be joined together in any sense, or for any cause. That is what will occur at the coming of the Lord. Set your hope there, and live by it. The day of the saints is coming!

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 37

## THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

" 1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. " (Rev 20:1-6, KJV)

## INTRODUCTION

In this text we have one of the most controversial passages in all of the Bible. Whole bodies of theology have been founded on this text, then placed as a template upon the rest of the Scriptures. These doctrines affect the way people read the Bible. They have an impact on what they expect to happen, and how they live their lives. They do not represent harmless positions. When it comes to the study of last things, called *Eschatology* , we are on especially sensitive ground. This is no place for error.

## VIEWING THE CONCLUSION

Our view of the conclusion of all things will penetrate everything we do and say. At no point are we allowed the luxury of considering last things apart from the revealed purpose of God. This objective is called an “*eternal purpose*” (Eph 3:11), and relates to everything God has done, is doing, and will do. It is declared from several different perspectives. Considering **the outcome** of His great salvation, that purpose will be realized in the conformity of the saved “*to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29). Viewed from the perspective of **undoing everything** infected by sin, God has purposed that in “*the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him*” (Eph 1:10). Peering into **the eternal realm**, that purpose is declared in this manner: “*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:7). In respect to the **exalted Son** receiving due recognition, that purpose will be realized when “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil 2:10-11). Other declarations of our Lord’s predetermined purpose include (1) The ultimate and final frustration of the devil (Gen 3:15; Rev 20:10), (2) Everything being made new (Rev 21:5), and (3) The exaltation of the church to reign with Jesus, world without end (2 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 6:1-2; Rom 8:17).

Any view of last things that drives these things into the background is a delusion. Such views have not come from God, regardless of their seeming wisdom and employment of Scripture. If it does not have to do with salvation, then it cannot have to do with Christ! He is primarily “*the Savior of the world*” (1 John 4:14). Apart from that, there is no reason for “*the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5).

## **OUR PERSON AND OUR VIEW MUST BE APPROVED BY GOD**

As we approach this passage, we must do so with a disciplined heart, soul, mind, and spirit. It is imperative that we bear in mind the solemn injunction of the Spirit: “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*” (2 Tim 2:15, NASB). Steer clear of novel approaches to the Word of the Living God! This is the Word that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). We do well to exercise ourselves not to be at variance with the Author of Scripture—particularly in our understanding of it.

Let none imagine that the Lord Jesus departs from His revealed agenda in this

book, and especially in this chapter. The emphasis of His Word has not suddenly shifted from salvation in Christ and the eternal purpose of God, to world history. Nor, indeed, is a new doctrine of the appearance of Christ, His reign, and the resurrection of the dead, unveiled in this passage. Novel doctrines are a curse to the church, drawing it into profitless bypaths and vain speculations. Add to this the austere warning of our Lord concerning adding to or taking from the word of this prophecy, and you have sufficient incentive to realize we are standing on holy ground. The shoes of human speculation and creative theology must be removed as we stand before this text!

### **PERSPECTIVE, NOT CHRONOLOGY**

The book of revelation provides spiritual perspective, not detailed chronology. It views the “*day of salvation*” from several different perspectives. These allow us to address life in confidence that everything is being governed by the reigning Christ. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Think of the perspectives we have seen already.

1 **History from the standpoint of the churches.** The recap of the seven churches reveals the impact of life in this world upon those wearing the name of Christ. There are jeopardies that attend their sojourn in this world. As an assembly, God’s people can leave their “*first love*.” They can get caught up in the world’s approval, and even allow destructive teaching to take place among them. Their hearts can grow lukewarm. They can also hold to the faith, being faithful to the end (Chapters 2-3).

2 Considered from a heavenly point of view, earth’s history is nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ ruling and reigning—bringing the saints to glory. He is in absolute control, holding the book of eternal destiny in His hand (Chapters 4-5).

3 In the seven seals, we have the world’s general disdain for the churches revealed. Although the Lamb rides triumphantly through the world, conquering and to conquer, the realm itself is aligned against the saints. The world and its inhabitants are challenges to be overcome. In all of this, the saints are protected (Chapters 6-7).

The Scriptures, especially the New Covenant writings, alert us to the conflict believers face. In this world,

we are in a war zone, with intense activity. We are involved in this warfare, depicted as “*wrestling*” against a staggering array of enemies

4 The seven trumpets introduce history from the standpoint of Divine judgment. God judges the world for its treatment of His people. He has done so historically, and will conclude earth’s history with eternal judgment upon those who oppose His Son and those who follow Him. Even the judgment of Satan himself is declared. In all of this, the saints are protected (Chapters 8-11).

5 Another view of history reveals the consistent difficulty the church has had with worldly government. It is a ruthless beast, rising out of social turmoil, to eventually oppose the people of God. It is also animated by the devil himself, who seeks to destroy the Lord’s inheritance. In all of this, the saints are protected (Chapter 13).

6 A lengthy section of the book is devoted to showing the conflict between the saints and worldly religion—spiritual Babylon. Here is an approach to religion that borrows from the world’s concept of government and rule. The worldly church is the embodiment of unfaithfulness— spiritual harlotry. This represents the devil’s most extensive assault on the body of Christ. In all of this, the saints are protected (Chapters 14-19).

In all of these representations, nothing totally new is taught. Everything is fully supported by the teachings of the prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles. The very language and images employed are found in the holy Prophets. This confirms to our heart the Divine agenda has never changed. It also buttresses our faith by unveiling the superiority of the Lamb of God in all of these circumstances. The struggle is NOT in heaven, but upon the earth.

### **OUR FOES PAINTED VIVIDLY**

The Scriptures, especially the New Covenant writings, alert us to the conflict believers face. In this world, we are in a war zone, with intense activity. We are involved in this warfare, depicted as “*wrestling*” against a staggering array of enemies (Eph 6:12). The book of Revelation confirms this to our hearts in picturesque language. At least five great foes are mentioned.

1 **THE DEVIL** himself is the arch-foe, animating all other foes. He is depicted as “*Satan*,” “*the angel of the bottomless pit*,” “*Abaddon*,” “*Apollyon*,” “*the great dragon*,” “*the great red dragon*,” “*the old serpent*,” and “*the devil*” (2:9; 9:11; 12:3,9; 20:2).

2 **THE BEAST** that rose from the sea. This is understood to be political government: the organization of men for self-exaltation. This beast comes from the “*bottomless pit*,” and is given life by Satan (11:7; 13:1-10).

3 **ANOTHER BEAST** that came from the land. This beast had the appearance of a lamb, but spoke as a dragon. It is the false church considered as a ruthless opponent of God’s people. He has all of the power of the first beast, even working miracles in an effort to seduce the elect (13:11-18; 14:11; 15:2).

4 **BABYLON THE GREAT** . This is an additional view of the false church. It represents some refinement over the condition depicted in the second beast. Power and domination still exist, but are now draped with the robe of success and religious beauty. This is religious institutionalism as we know it. Appearing attractive to men, it is really a harlot, unfaithful to God, and responsible for shedding the blood of His people (14:8; 16:19; 17:1-18:21).

5 **THOSE HAVING THE MARK OF THE BEAST** . These are the individuals who subscribe to false religion. They embrace a form of godliness that rejects the power of God. Those who triumph by faith are said to have gained victory, not only over the beast, but over “*his mark*” (15:2). Those identified with lifeless religion are enemies of God’s people. They attempt to make attractive what God has cursed.

The message of the Spirit to the churches offers consolation to the saints of God. All of their foes will be totally vanquished.

1 The devil is presently controlled by Jesus. The key to the bottomless pit, which is the devil’s resource, is held in heaven. The devil will be thrown into the lake of fire (9:1; 20:1,10).

2 The first beast was “*wounded to death*,” portraying the casting down of worldly empires who opposed the church (13:3).

3 The second beast will be “*cast alive into the lake of fire*,” forever removed from the presence of the Lord and His people (19:20; 20:10).

4 Spiritual Babylon will be brought down, decimated by the reigning Lamb. All false religion will be powerfully overthrown (14:8; 16:19; 18:2-21; 19:20; 20:10).

5 Those who have the “*mark of the beast*” –who embrace lifeless religion–will also be “*cast alive into the lake of fire*” (19:20).

### **KEEP IT IN REMEMBRANCE**

Do not allow a curious mind to rob you of these basic realities. If you are ever tempted to think this world is your friend, remember the enemies that are affirmed in the Revelation. They are all in “*this present evil world.*” If you are ever tempted to despair because of this wicked conglomerate, remember their end is declared in this book! Such holy recollections will assist you in fighting the “*good fight of faith,*” and laying “*hold on eternal life.*” Your labor in the Lord is NOT vain (1 Cor 15:58).

## **SOME NEW PHRASEOLOGY**

In this brief passage, we are introduced to some new scriptural expressions. They are not found anywhere else in Scripture.

Thus, in our study of Scripture, what is mysterious or difficult to understand, is to be comprehended in view of what is more plainly declared. If, in our understanding, what we read in the Revelation, does not fit into the greater context of Scripture, and things plainly declared, we must make no attempt to wrest the text from the rest of the Bible. Better to ask God for understanding, and wait until greater clarity is experienced.

### **THE FIRST RESURRECTION**

Of especial interest is the term “*the first resurrection*” (20:5-6). This is the only place in all of the Bible where this phrase is mentioned. The word “*resurrection<sub>s</sub>*” does not appear a single time in all of Scripture–in any version! Resurrection is always in the singular, never in the plural. Jesus declared the singularity of the

resurrection when He said, “*for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*” (John 5:28-29). Paul affirmed, “*there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*” (Acts 24:15). Isaiah heralded a solitary event when he said, “*the earth shall cast out the dead*” (Isa 26:19). No less than twenty times the phrase “*THE resurrection*” is used by the Holy Spirit. In all of them, the definite article “*the*” is used, denoting the singularity of the resurrection (Matt 22:28,30,31; Mk 12:23; Lk 14:14; Lk 20:33,35,36; John 5:29; John 11:24,25; Acts 4:2; 17:18,32; 1 Cor 15:21,42; Phil 3:11; 2 Tim 2:18).

While it may seem trite, it is not on the part of wisdom to construct an entire theological framework from this text, then read the rest of the Bible with that framework in mind. Such an approach contradicts every form of sound reason—to say nothing of the reasoning of faith, which is far superior to any other form of reasoning. One old aphorism says, “**It is through the known, and only through the known, that we come to learn of things unknown.**”

Thus, in our study of Scripture, what is mysterious or difficult to understand, is to be comprehended in view of what is more plainly declared. If, in our understanding, what we read in the Revelation, does not fit into the greater context of Scripture, and things plainly declared, we must make no attempt to wrest the text from the rest of the Bible. Better to ask God for understanding, and wait until greater clarity is experienced.

I will, therefore, view the “*first resurrection*” within the context of the resurrection of the dead. That consideration constrains me to view it as a spiritual resurrection, and not a bodily one. Just as “the second death” is different from the general death experienced by all men, so the “*first resurrection*” is different from the general resurrection which will be experienced by all men.

## A THOUSAND YEARS

The vision given to John assumes familiarity with

what had already been revealed. It would not be possible to gain any degree of understanding from Revelation were it not for the rest of the Word of God. The Scriptures themselves are what throw light upon this book.

Also, as a specific measure of time, this is the only place in Scripture where “*a thousand years*” is mentioned (20:2,3,4,5,6,7). Other places where this expression is employed do not identify a particular segment of time. Rather, it is used in a metaphorical sense. “*For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night*” (Psa 90:4). “*Moreover he (a father with many children) hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?*” (Eccl 6:5-6). “*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Pet 3:8). In any version of Scripture these nine verses represent every single time the phrase “*thousand years*” is mentioned.

You have no doubt heard the word “*millennium.*” It is a single word that means “*a thousand years.*” A new millennium, such as we are now approaching, is a new thousand year period. The word “*millennium*” is not found in any standard version of Scripture. In spite of this remarkable circumstance, there is an astounding amount of teaching in the Christian community concerning “*the millennium.*” Three of the primary teachings concerning the end of the world center in this phrase. They are “*Pre millennialism,*” “*Post millennialism,*” and “*A millennialism.*” The first teaches Jesus will come again BEFORE the millennial reign of Jesus. The second teaches He will come AFTER the millennium. The third teaches we are presently IN the millennium. There is a single thing that each of these positions have in common. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is NOT the central point in any of them. One additional observation: neither the return of Christ nor His Kingdom are ever approached in this manner in Apostolic doctrine. Interestingly enough, this section of Revelation holds a prominent position in these humanly developed teachings.

### **THE REST OF THE DEAD**

Verse five reads, “*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand*

*years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*” Some are persuaded this means there will be a one thousand year interval between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. The only expression in all of Scripture that can be wrested to mean this is in the text before us. Candidly, a doctrine that depends upon such handling of Scripture bears the thumb print of man upon it. It also reveals a grossly carnal way of handling the Word of God that is wholly without precedent. Such a view does not blend with any word concerning the resurrection uttered by the prophets, Jesus, or the Apostles.

Because this Book is the testimony of a vision, and because it is apocalyptic, or symbolic, in nature, I will view this passage in harmony with the rest of Scripture. This passage will not be viewed as a detailed outline of the end times. Rather, it will be approached as a high and lofty summation of the the outcome of salvation. This summation will be seen as perfectly harmonious with the remainder of scripture.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT**

When we look closely at this text, we behold marvelous things. It is best to first view them in principle.

- 1 The bottomless pit that was once opened by an angel, is now closed.
- 2 The same Satan that deceived the whole world is now restrained.
- 3 The devil is restrained for a significant period of time.
- 4 Satan is not able to deceive the nations during this period of time.
- 5 Following this period, Satan will be loosed for a brief time.
- 6 Occupied thrones are beheld, and judgment was given to them.
- 7 The souls of martyrs are beheld—individuals who did not yield to the foe empowered by the Devil.
- 8 These souls lived and reigned with Christ during the specified time period.
- 9 The rest of the dead, or those not included in the souls of the martyrs, do not live again until the designated time is completed.

10 The living and reigning of these souls with Christ is called “*the first resurrection.*”

11 A blessing is pronounced upon those participating in the “*first resurrection.*”

12 The “*second death*” has no power over those taking part in the “*first resurrection.*”

13 The living and reigning ones are called “*priests of God and of Christ.*”

14 These reign with Christ for the designated period of time.

### **PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

It should be evident that this passage cannot be the basis for the *formation* of doctrine concerning the last times. Visions **support** sound doctrine, but are not to be the basis for its formation. The reason for this condition is that visions are not marked with the clarity required for doctrinal presentation. That is why the visions of the prophets were always explained—else they would have obtained no value.

The vision given to John assumes familiarity with what had already been revealed. It would not be possible to gain any degree of understanding from Revelation were it not for the rest of the Word of God. The Scriptures themselves are what throw light upon this book.

### **Satan Is A Controlled Adversary**

It is also apparent this passage does not declare the end of Satan. There is a resounding message that comes to us through its words. **SATAN IS STRICTLY CONTROLLED FROM HEAVEN!** He is bound and loosed at the behest of the reigning Christ. He simply cannot work when He is bound by heaven. Conversely, when he is loosed, there are immediate ramifications upon the earth.

### **The Righteous Cannot Ultimately Lose**

Even if they are slain for the word of their testimony, the righteous cannot ultimately lose. Their “*souls*” will yet impact the world, and their message will live on! Believers need to hear such affirmations! There is such a thing as being

dead, yet speaking (Heb 11:4). It is possible for your works to “*follow*” you, even after you have “*rested*” from your “*labors*” (Rev 14:13).

There is a realm and a condition in which the saints become impervious to “*the second death.*” While men may argue about when this condition occurs, and where this realm is located, our faith must grasp the truth of them both. There are living personalities over which the second death has “*no power.*” Such individuals are with Jesus, and follow Him wherever He goes. They are identified exclusively with God and Christ, and they are reigning with Jesus! They are neither sad nor idle, but are truly blessed.

## CHRIST’S RETURN NOT THE POINT OF THIS TEXT

There is a note of finality in all of these representations. None of them are associated with temporality. Nor, indeed, do any of them portray Satan as remaining active, enemies as still present, or things displeasing to God continuing on the earth. All of these things are seen as occurring at the conclusion of time

The return of Jesus is mentioned several times in Revelation, and from varied perspectives. APPARENCY OF HIS COMING- - “*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him . . .*” INCENTIVE TO FAITHFULNESS – “*Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown . . .*” WARNING TO BE WATCHFUL– “*Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame . . .*” A TIME OF REWARD– “*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work . . .*” THE SURETY OF HIS COMING– “*Surely I am coming quickly*” (1:7; 3:11; 16:15; 22:12; 22:20).

For His enemies, His return is said to be “*the great day of His wrath*” (6:16). For His saints, His coming will be a time when “*the harvest of the earth is ripe,*” and

the earth is “reaped” (14:15). It is a time when His church will be gathered to Himself in a great “marriage supper” – a supper for which the bride is making “herself ready” (19:7,9).

There is a note of finality in all of these representations. None of them are associated with temporality. Nor, indeed, do any of them portray Satan as remaining active, enemies as still present, or things displeasing to God continuing on the earth. All of these things are seen as occurring at the conclusion of time, not during a brief period in the midst of time.

Yet, in this text, there is no reference to the second coming of Jesus. Men have chosen to wedge that idea into the text, making it fit into their preconceived systems of theology. Satan is bound, then Satan is loosed. That cannot refer to the coming of Christ, for Satan will not be loosed after that! Rather, he will be removed from all influence, never again to lead, dominate, deceive, or oppress the saints. Saints are said to reign with Jesus, but it is limited in duration. This cannot be the eternal reign, when they “inherit all things,” for that will never end. Further, our presence with the Lord in the world to come is never presented in terms of limitation. Rather, its duration is described as “throughout all ages, world without end,” “forever and ever,” “ever be with the Lord,” and “the ages to come” ( Eph 1:7 ; 3:21; 1 Thess 4:17).

But no such references are found in this passage! No mention of Jesus returning. No indication He is gathering His people from all of heaven and throughout the earth. Not a hint that He is coming to reap the earth, destroy the wicked, or judge the world. In fact, the Lord Jesus Himself is not the heart of the text, but those who are aligned with Him—those who have died because of their witness of Him.

Yet, men have taken upon themselves to take this text of Scripture and create a religious vocabulary that has actually become a standard among man. Think of expressions like “millennial reign,” “millennium,” “millennial kingdom,” and “set up His Kingdom upon earth.” These are common expressions among devoutly religious people, yet not a single one of them is found in Scripture. All of them are founded on an **interpretation** of this text: Revelation 20:1-6. Mind you, they are NOT established on the text itself, but on an analysis, or commentary, of the text—an uninspired one! To say that such an approach to teaching is dangerous seems rather elementary. Particularly since the Spirit summarily curses “any man”

adding to or taking from “*the words of the prophecy of this book*” (22:18-19).

I make no apologies for approaching this book with reverence, and the doctrines of men with contempt. Myriads of believers have been adversely influenced by “*the doctrines of men*” (Col 2:22). Such teachings are subtle because they employ the words of Scripture. The strength of their teaching, however, is not in the Scripture itself, but the interpretations men assign to it.

I understand such an approach is not popular in many circles. Tests of fellowship have actually been made over humanly conceived teachings. Others, unwilling to disfellowship those not holding such views, consider the people embracing them to be superior in understanding. But all of this is a sort of spiritual fog that tends to obscure the Word of God. I will, therefore, make a concerted effort to ignore religious traditions that have surrounded this passage. At the same time, I hold in high regard all those who respect the passage, earnestly laboring to keep it pure.

I have taken the time to give this lengthy introduction to the text because of its gross corruption in the Christian community. I see such corruption as a sin of unspeakable enormity and inestimable danger. It is sad that so many approach this subject with unbecoming casualness. It betrays a fundamentally flawed heart.

## THE ANGEL WITH THE KEY

***" I And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand."*** Here again, an angel is employed by the King. Remember, angels are at the Lord's disposal, performing His will instantly and effectively (Psa 104:4; Heb 1:7). We understand their ministry to be devoted to “*them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Heb 1:14). They answer, however, to the risen Savior, doing His bidding (Heb 1:6; 1 Pet 3:22). When, therefore, we read of the activity of a holy angel, we may conclude at least two things. First, the angel has been dispatched by the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, he has been sent for the benefit of the saints.

## “DOWN FROM HEAVEN”

While this may appear redundant, we must be reminded “*the heavens do rule*” (Dan 4:26). Affirming this to be the case, the Kingdom is frequently called “*the Kingdom of heaven*” (Ex, Matt 3:2; 4:17; 5:3). When this kingdom moves, nothing can restrain it. Thus, when both John the Baptist and Jesus announced “*The Kingdom of heaven is at hand,*” they were announcing a heavenly **initiative** against which Satan was impotent. Satan may cause trouble on earth, but since the exaltation of the Son of God, he causes none in heaven, and is never depicted as doing so!

The phrase “*come down from heaven*” denotes an appointed objective—a determined purpose against which there can be no effective opposition. Whenever this phrase is employed by the Holy Spirit, what God determined came to pass, and foes were vanquished (2 Kgs 1:10-14; 2 Chron 7:1; Dan 4:13,23; John 3:13; 6:33,38,50,51,58; 1 Pet 1:12; Rev 10:1; 18:1).

The point to be seen is that the “*key*” to this dreadful place is in heaven, not in hell. It is held by the King of kings, not the prince of demons! Satan cannot use the key, nor can any of his wicked hosts. Whatever power he possesses is derived from God.

The people of God need to hear of the Sovereign government of heaven! They must learn this rule is for the benefit of those in Christ Jesus, and that nothing—absolutely nothing—is not controlled by heaven. In this very passage, this will be confirmed with strength to our hearts.

## THE KEY TO THE PIT

The “*bottomless pit*” is only mentioned in the Revelation. It is referred to no less than seven times—two times in this very passage (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). This is no doubt the place to which the demons in “*the country of the Gadarenes*” asked not to be consigned. They besought Jesus that “*He would not command*

*them to go out into the deep,*” or “*the Abyss*” –NASB, NIV (Lk 9:31). Coincidentally, this is precisely the same Greek word translated “*bottomless pit*” in Revelation ( ἄβυσσος , a-bus-son-a). We do not have an extensive description or commentary of this dreadful place. If even demons fear being cast there, what should be our attitude?

Here is a place with no “*bottom*” –a source of unimaginable evil and torment. Just as heaven is the source of inconceivable benefit, so the bottomless pit is a source of incredible wickedness. The idea of it being opened should strike fear into every person capable of serious thought.

This is not the first time we have heard about this “*key*.” Nor, indeed, is it the first time it is said to have been used. Our first exposure to this key was in the ninth chapter. There, as a judgment from God, it was used to “*OPEN*” the “*bottomless pit*” (9:1-11). From it emitted darkness and destructive forces. Heaven restricted the activity of the wicked forces, not permitting anyone identified with the Lord to be harmed. However, for all others, the forces from the “*bottomless pit*” worked with such power and effectiveness that men actually sought to die rather than to live (9:6). These forces were led by Satan himself, who was their “*king*” (9:11). Praise the Lord, their influence was limited to “*five months*,” an expression denoting Divine control. When that period was over, the work of the hellish horde was brought to a grinding halt.

The point to be seen is that the “*key*” to this dreadful place is in heaven, not in hell. It is held by the King of kings, not the prince of demons! Satan cannot use the key, nor can any of his wicked hosts. Whatever power he possesses is derived from God. He simply cannot work at will, doing whatever he wants whenever he wants. The key to his arsenal is maintained in heaven. It may only be used at the discretion of the One who is “*bringing many sons to glory*” (Heb 2:10).

### **A GREAT CHAIN IN HIS HAND**

In the hand of this angel is not only “*the key to the bottomless pit*,” but “*a great chain*.” Not only, therefore, does the angel have the authority and ability to open and close the “*bottomless pit*,” he also has dominion over everything that is in it. He can not only release dark powers from it (9:1-2), but can remove such powers from the realm of influence, and consign them to prison of darkness. I gather this

is the same kind of chain with which the wicked angels are bound. As it is written, *“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”* (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6).

This vividly pictures for us the extent of Christ’s government. I am chagrined by the alarming absence of this kind of preaching from the pulpits of the land. In many circles a great fear of Satan and his powers exists simply because the people have not been told of the greatness of the King of kings. Satan is NOT to be feared! Fear is a response belonging to God alone. Satan is to be *“resisted”* (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9). With the boldness of faith, the people of God are admonished, *“do not give the devil a foothold”* (Eph 4:27, NIV). The saints can *“stand firm against the schemes of the devil,”* struggling victoriously against the highest expression of his power (Eph 6:11-13).

But such triumph is not likely to occur if the people of God consider Satan to be more powerful than he actually is. If they do not know the truth of the KEY and the CHAIN, they will tend to overestimate Satan’s power and underestimate *“the exceeding greatness of the power that is toward”* them (Eph 1:20). While the world speaks of a “ball and chain,” the saints can confidently speak of the *“key and the chain”* held by heaven!

Notice, there is no battle with Satan in this text—not an ounce of resistance from him! The only battle with Satan occurred in the twelve chapter of this book—and that was not with Jesus, but with Michael and his angels. That *“war in heaven”* depicted the overthrow of Satan through the redemptive work of Christ. That is why his expulsion from heaven occasioned the heavenly response, *“Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him . . . ”* (12:10-11). But there is NO fight in Revelation 20:1-6). Satan is simply taken, bound, cast into the pit, and the pit locked. No resistance, no fight, and no struggle! That is how effective the triumph of Jesus is! Satan is a foe, but he is a controlled one. Praise the Lord!

## THE BINDING OF SATAN

***“ 2a And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled.”***

I cannot get over the glory of this text. The bottomless pit has been the source of political, social, and religious opposition to the saints. From it has proceeded both delusion and bloody aggression. Its assault against the church is highly organized, led by a king who orchestrates the activities of spiritually destructive forces (9:11). It is good to hear this resource for evil is controlled by heaven! Praise the Lord!

Notice what occurs here. It is most significant. First, Satan is *“bound,”* or placed in restraint. The nature of the restraint is specified, *“that he should deceive the nations no more.”* Setting a *“seal upon”* Satan refers to confining him to the Abyss, much like Pilate set a *“seal”* upon the tomb of Jesus (Matt 27:66). In the case of our Lord, the seal was broken. However, that is emphatically NOT the case with the devil.

The time of his restraint is, however, limited. It is only *“until the thousand years should be fulfilled.”* This is not, then, the permanent removal of Satan, when he will be cast into the lake of fire (20:10). From this we see several key principles.

- 1 That Satan is subject to heavenly powers.
- 2 As long as the world stands, the binding and loosing of Satan are temporary.
- 3 The failure of Satan to any longer deceive the nations is traceable to his binding, not the evangelistic activity of the church.
- 4 We will not be totally done with deception until the heavens and earth passes away. Until then, we must contend with the lie.

## **LOOKING AT THE CIRCUMSTANCE**

It is not on the part of wisdom to read this text with only our culture in mind. Behold it from the view of those who first received this revelation. Look at it from the perspective of John, who received the Word from heaven.

Look all about that world! In every direction, spiritual darkness and desolation dominated. While the Gospel had been “*preached to every creature under heaven*” (Col 1:23), it had by no means been believed by every person. Nor, indeed, had it toppled any empires, widespread revival had not taken place, and the saints were being oppressed. Were you to make an attempt to count the idols and abominations that were in every city, you would not be able to do so. Heathen temples dominated the social landscape. Abominations, filth, and corruption attended the cultures of the world. Licentious festivals, prostitution, immorality, bloodletting, and all forms of indulgence dominated the most advanced cultures. There were superstitions and vice extant that stagger the imagination. Temples and shrines to false gods were filled with ignorant worshipers, cluttering the landscape of the world. Truly, darkness covered “*the earth, and gross darkness the people*” (Isa 60:2).

Here and there, a few scattered churches existed—i.e., “*the seven churches which are in Asia*” (Rev 1:4). Everywhere, heathendom, idolatry, and spiritual ignorance dominate! Jesus had died and risen again, yet sin reigned! He had been received up into heaven, and was given all power in heaven and earth, yet the truth had not yet filled the earth, nor did the knowledge of the Lord cover it as the waters cover the sea. It was nearly the end of the first century. The church had been established, and the message had been preached by faithful witnesses. Yet the world “*sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons*” (Psa 107:10).

Without a solitary exception, every single nation on the face of the earth was dominated by Satan and in the grip of delusion! Even the Jewish nation, to whom the Savior came, remained blind and unable to see the truth. Even in that nation, the saved were but a “*remnant.*” Come now, you who would go back to the first century! This is the condition that prevailed at the conclusion of that century!

There, in the grip of this vision which confronted the saints of old, we sigh in grief and ask some questions. Is this condition ever going to change? Will the devil maintain his rule over the peoples of the world? Will the glorious light of the Gospel ever penetrate the cultures of the world? Will spiritual darkness continue

forever? “*Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?*” (Psa 77:9). Arresting questions, indeed!

### **A VITAL LESSON TO BE LEARNED**

Cursed by an academic environment, the Western church needs to seriously consider this text! It has placed too much significance on its own wisdom—its methods and techniques. It imagines that by rallying its forces, it can bring the world to bow before King Jesus. Is this really the case?

Unless Satan is restrained by heaven, he cannot be bridled on earth! He is strictly governed by the Lord, to be sure. However, his activities, or the suppression of them, do not happen automatically. Nor, indeed, can they be regulated by mankind—even redeemed mankind.

Remember, we are speaking of an era during which the likes of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, and Paul the Apostle filled the earth with their anointed message. The world killed all of them, save John the beloved—and they made an attempt to slay him. In their day, the Apostles were the “*the offscouring of all things*” (1 Cor 4:13).

### **Heaven Alone Can Restrain Satan**

Unless Satan is restrained by heaven, he cannot be bridled on earth! He is strictly governed by the Lord, to be sure. However, his activities, or the suppression of them, do not happen automatically. Nor, indeed, can they be regulated by mankind—even redeemed mankind. Jesus gave “*the keys of the kingdom*” to His Apostles (Matt 16:19). They were told, “*whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*” (Matt 16:19). However, Jesus did not give them the “*key to the bottomless pit.*”

Nowhere are believers said to “bind” Satan, even though some are known for attempting such things. We can resist him, but are warned not to make a place for him. When told our adversary like a roaring stalks about seeking whom he may devour, we are not admonished to rebuke him or bind him, but to “*resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world*” (1 Pet 5:8-9). Neither the key nor the chain have been placed in our hands, and we had best conduct ourselves with an acute awareness of that circumstance. Once perceived, it will assist us in drawing close to the real King, allowing no distance to form between us and Him through our unbelief.

These things should be evident enough to us without providing extensive commentary. The killing of James (Acts 12:2), scattering of the early church (Acts 8:1-4), killing of Stephen (Acts 7), imprisonment of the Apostles (Acts 5:40), imprisonment of Paul (2 Tim 1:16), exile of John (Rev 1:9), and countless other revealed circumstances should make the matter clear enough. It is the Lord, and only the Lord, Who can “*deliver us from the evil one*” (Matt 6:13, NIV). If Paul determined to go to Thessalonica “*time and again; but Satan hindered*” him (1 Thess 2:18), what shall we say of those who boast of being able to bind the devil? If a mortal man, regardless of spiritual attainments, makes a claim to having the “key and the chain,” he has simply not told the truth!

It seems to be that a perception of this truth will have a significant impact on our prayers. Armed with this insight, “*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven . . . And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one . . .*” (Matt 6:10-13) makes a lot of sense!

## REVIVAL

Revival, whether global, regional, or personal, has much to do with Satan being restrained. Perhaps this is one of the things involved in us wrestling “*against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Eph 6:12). Revivals occur more indirectly than directly.

This passage portrays a universal awakening: a time when the nations will not be in the grip of the wicked one. It is the time prophesied by the prophets and

announced by the Apostles. The prophets affirmed “*the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa 11:9). Isaiah revealed the Father said to the Son, “*It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth*” (Isa 49:6). David declared, “*All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, And **He rules over the nations***” (Psa 22:27-28).

### IN A SENSE, HE IS BOUND NOW

There is a sense in which the “*old serpent*” is bound now. From this view, Satan being “*bound*” would be something like a chained up dog. He is not totally removed, but is significantly restrained. The word “*bound*” ( ἔδησενῆ , ed-a-se-ne) can carry the meaning of restriction. This is the word used when telling us Herod laid hold on John the Baptist and “*bound him*” (Matt 14:3; Mark 6:17). It is also used to describe the woman with a bowed back, whom Satan “*bound*” for eighteen years (Lk 13:16). While I do not place a lot of value on this approach to understanding Scripture, in both instances the individuals, we assume, had some movement, although it was not total.

Thus, many understand the binding of Satan to be such restraint as enables all men everywhere to come to Christ as they desire. He is thus depicted as having a chain attached to him that greatly restricts his movement—like a dangerous dog on a leash. Only those wandering within the circumference of his influence can therefore be deceived by him. There certainly is a lot of truth to that view. This perspective accounts for the present circumstance of believers throughout the world. They have received Christ while in nations that were formerly dominated and deluded by Satan.

This would be a “binding” much like that which was experienced when the Lord Jesus Himself “*cast out demons*” in a forceful display of the power of God (Matt 12:28,29). It also was seen when He sent out the seventy, giving them power over “*all the power of the enemy.*” Even the demons were subject to them at that time, a circumstance that even surprised them (Lk 10:17-19).

There has never existed more than a mere remnant of God's people from Pentecost until this time. Great awakenings have not been global, or even national in scope. They have been provincial and regional. But men do greatly err if they imagine nothing better will occur.

In this sense, the Spirit affirms that in His death Jesus "*spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them*" in His cross (Col 2:15). In this arena of defeat, Jesus draws men to Himself, out of the darkness into the light (John 12:32). Such marvelous results are largely due to the weakening of Satan. Now, the empire of Satan is being invaded, with the veil being lifted from many eyes. Whosoever will may "*come*," a circumstance not always available to men.

### **THERE IS MORE TO COME!**

With all of this marvelous activity, Satan is still deceiving the nations! Our text speaks of a time when "*he should deceive the nations no more.*" Too, the text does not say Satan had a chain placed on him, yet continued to traffic among the nations. It states, he was "*cast into the bottomless pit,*" which was "*locked and sealed . . . over him*" (20:3, NIV). I find it difficult to believe that has been fulfilled in the era from Pentecost to now. There has never existed more than a mere remnant of God's people from Pentecost until this time. Great awakenings have not been global, or even national in scope. They have been provincial and regional. But men do greatly err if they imagine nothing better will occur.

The Spirit compares the impact of Israel being cut off to them being grafted in again. Once again, hear His marvelous words. "*Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how **much more** will their fulfillment be! For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*" (Rom 11:15, NASB). If we are tempted to imagine they have utterly fallen, never to rise again, the Spirit reminds us. "*I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous*" (Rom 11:11).

Do not for one moment imagine that God cannot raised up a valley of dry bones, whose hope is lost (Ezek 37:1-14). Though scattered among the nations and sorely divided, God has promised, *“and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever”* (Ezek 37:21-28).

It is still possible for a cleansing river of life to flow from the Divine altar into all the world, healing all but the *“swamps and marshes”* (Ezek 47:1-12). The knowledge of the Lord can still cover the earth as the waters cover the sea! It is still possible for *“the nations”* to flow into the Lord’s house, coming of their own volition because they have beheld the working of the Lord (Isa 2:2). Do you imagine these words cannot be fulfilled by the mighty God of heaven? *“He will also lift up a standard to the distant nation, And will whistle for it from the ends of the earth; And behold, it will come with speed swiftly”* (Isa 5:26, NASB). Again he said, *“All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name”* (Psa 66:4).

There is simply too much of this in the Word of God for it to be ignored. The Abrahamic covenant was, *“In you all families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, NASB). The Psalmist declared, *“All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; And they shall glorify Thy name”* (Psa 86:9, NASB).

Who among us is capable of imagining the affects of Satan being bound? An angel not only CAN do this, he has been assigned to do so at the proper time. Let your mind contemplate what would happen if Satan COULD NOT deceive the nations anymore—if he were removed from the battle field for a season, and locked in the “*bottomless pit.*” And who would dare to question that this could, in fact, be done? Particularly since it is categorically stated that it will be done. Let your own conversion confirm the possibility of such a thing to you. Let your awareness of great awakenings settle it in your heart. Satan can be bound from heaven! He can be chained, cast into the bottomless pit, and the pit locked upon him.

What we have in this text is an explanation for the sudden breaking forth of the truth of the Gospel. It is not so much owing to the awakening of the church concerning its responsibility, as it is to the binding and removal of Satan. The time will come when the Divine shout will again be heard, “*Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left.*” (Isa 54:2-3, NASB).

This will be a time of unparalleled spiritual calm and renewal—one that will surpass all that the world has ever known. In a very true sense “*The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former*” (Hag 2:9). The great God will yet show how great His salvation really is! If this appears too difficult for the faint-hearted, remember this. God’s Kingdom has been progressive from the very first. It has never retrogressed. With each succeeding revelation, things expanded. Noah had more than Adam. Abraham was given more than Noah. Moses was granted more than Abraham. The prophets experienced greater revelation than Moses. John the Baptist exceeded all who were before him. The Lord Jesus outshone all of His predecessors. When He left, He told His disciples they would do even “*greater works,*” because He was going to the Father (John 14:12). Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that Satan could be bound and the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth in the latter times?

## A LITTLE SEASON

“*2b . . . and after that he must be loosed a little season.*” Following the binding of Satan, he “*MUST be loosed for a little season.*” Thank God, it is a “*little*”

season! This is something that **“MUST”** be done. Remembering this is a book of perspective, it is important to see the comparison between the binding and loosing of Satan. He is bound for *“a thousand years,”* and loosed for a *“little season,”* or short while. Thus the blessing is infinitely larger than the curse. The effects of Christ’s atoning death will prove to be much larger than the devastating impact of Satan’s delusion. *“For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman, says the LORD”* (Isa 54:1).

As Ezekiel indicated in the vision of the healing waters, universal blessing by no means indicates the blessing of every single person. There will remain spiritual *“swamps marshes,”* even after the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Now, throughout the whole world, clusters of saints may be found. They provide a haven for weary travelers, as Elim was to the journeying Israelites (Ex 15:27). Such places are no more in abundance than were oasis to Israel in their wilderness journeying. But that situation will be reversed in due time. The restricting influence of Satan will cause the waters to break forth like a mighty cleansing and healing flood.

Satan does not work himself loose, but is *“loosed.”* The same power that confined him released him. And why *“must”* he be loosed? Because there will yet remain those *“swamps and marshy places”* that were unaffected by the advantages of his binding. He will go to deceive and gather those who *“received not the love of the truth that they might be saved”* 2 Thess 2:10). He will disrupt the calm, which he could not do while locked in the *“bottomless pit.”*

Satan is capable of doing much in a *“little season.”* The brevity of the time does not indicate a brief and ineffective work. Remember what he did to Job in a single day (Job 1:12-19)? Do you recall what he did to David in a moment of time, while he lingered on a housetop (2 Sam 11:2)? Neither revival nor a sudden plummet into sin require a lengthy period of time.

By saying *“little season,”* the Spirit accents that Satan will do much, but not what he really wants to do. His effort will be short-lived in that it will come short of his objectives. Nor, indeed, will it undo what has been done while he was bound. God will use this *“little season”* to reveal His glory.

## A REMARKABLE PARALLEL

We have in this passage a remarkable parallel to a previous section of Revelation. While not precisely the same, the Divine agenda for this world can be seen in principle. The passage to which I refer is Revelation, chapters twelve through fourteen. Briefly stated, four elements can be seen.

- 1 Satan defeated: 12:5-12/20:1-3
- 2 A period of nourishment: 12:14/20:4-6
- 3 Brief period of persecution: 13:7/20:7ff
- 4 The coming of the Lord: 14:14ff/20:11ff

Throughout history, these cycles can be seen. (1) Divine restraint. (2) Divine renewal. (3) Persecution. (4) Consummation. The cycle can be seen in Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It is again seen in Samson's life, and in David's life. The early church experienced a miniature, as it were, of this very cycle. (1) The restraint of the wicked one is seen in the outbreak of spiritual renewal that occurred on Pentecost. (2) The church quickly flourished, enjoying a period of peace. (3) Then persecution was unleashed against it. (4) Finally, it enjoyed once again "*the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied*" (Acts 9:31).

We will see this very cycle of events in the Revelation. (1) Satan is initially restrained as the Warrior from heaven rides triumphantly throughout the world, conquering and to conquer. (2) During every cycle, the church is marvelously sustained by the Lord. There will yet come a time when truth will gloriously and apparently triumph as Satan is placed under Divine restraint. (3) Still, before the consummation, he will once again be loosed to make an attempt to destroy the church. (4) When He appears, the Lord will bring Satan's efforts to an abrupt end, however, to the praise of the glory of His grace. His demise will not be attended by any degree of difficulty.

These very things are even experienced on a personal level. There are times when Satan appears to be impotent—when his power over us is so neutralized that we make significant progress. As a result sudden and effective growth takes place, as we are more rapidly conformed to the image of God’s Son. But alas, lest we become complacent, the enemy is again loosed upon us in driving fury. He even looks as though he will do us in, as we are tempted right to the brink of our ability. Then, praise the Lord, deliverance comes as the Lord raises a standard against the devil, thwarting his efforts, and ending the trial.

We should not be surprised that what occurs on a personal level will also occur on a global level. We are, after all, a microcosm of the universe—a sort of little world. Both good and evil are resident in us. We experience the influence of both Satan and the Holy Spirit. There are times when we flourish and times when we languish. We are two persons in one body, two worlds in a state of moral collision. Our own cyclical experience should confirm the truth of the message contained in this passage.

(1) If , on a personal, regional, or global level, the Gospel is triumphing gloriously, we must rejoice. Our rejoicing, however must not presume this will always be the case, or that renewal will never wane. The end is not yet.

(2) When spiritual nourishment, enlightenment, and growth occur at unprecedented levels, it is an occasion for great rejoicing and thanksgiving. However, such times must not cause us to imagine they will continue forever. Believers dare not think Satan has been permanently removed, or rendered utterly powerless. The pit can be opened again! The end is not yet.

(3) Should we be in the throes of an attack from the bottomless pit, and Satan appears to be having his way, saints must not faint. We can be nourished during such times in the secret place, prepared by our God. Neither, indeed, can they assume such trials cannot be brought to a conclusion, and the fires of renewal flame again. The end is not yet!

(4) Beyond all human experience, whether good or evil, there is a day appointed when unrighteousness shall be peremptorily terminated, and the godly venerated. At the appearance of Christ Jesus, Satan and his hosts will be cast into the lake of fire, never to rise again. The saints will also be exalted, never again to fall or be subjected to the ferocious attacks of the wicked one.

In these cycles, we also see a very fundamental truth. It is not enough for the agents of evil (principalities, powers, etc.) to be overthrown. Both the beast and Babylon can suffer defeat, but it is the devil that must finally be cast forever into the lake of fire. Until that is done, evil will break out in this world, and the wicked will be marshaled together to assault the saints. There will be times when such outbreaks are prominent and devastating. But the end is coming!

In my perception, this is the overriding perspective developed in the Revelation. When this view is perceived and embraced, it genders great confidence in the heart of the believer. In that confidence, the individual is made strong—able to stand against the devil. Faith is, indeed, the victory!

## THRONES AND THOSE UPON THEM

*“4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”*

### INTRODUCTION

In this enigmatic and mysterious section of Scripture, we must not allow the flesh to dominate our approach. Many highly and respected theologians have fastened their attention on the “*thousand years*” here mentioned—i.e., the millennium. But this is not the focus of the passage at all! Were that the case, the Spirit would have first mentioned “*a thousand years*,” then what occurred within that period. But that is NOT what He does. Instead, the Spirit first reveals places of dominion (thrones). Within that setting he mentioned the ones sitting upon them (rulers).

Then he identifies the nature of their reign (judgment). He further identifies a special group of personalities participating in this reign, who had given their life for Christ in martyrdom (souls). Magnifying this group of “souls,” their particular triumph over the beast and his image is mentioned (political power and false religion). Then, the duration of their reign is identified as “*a thousand years.*” It is not possible to read that passage without human theology in mind, and come up with an emphasis on a “millennium.”

### **NOT A DEPICTION OF ALL SAINTS**

Those persuaded this is a picture of Gospel age, see this as a depiction of all saints. The chief thing that is ignored in this view is that the thrones in question are “*in heaven*” and that they are occupied. The saints of God are going to reign with Jesus, to be sure. That condition, however, is held out as a coming reality, and not a present experience. Thus it is written, “*If we endure, We shall also reign with Him*” (2 Tim 2:12). Again, Jesus promised, “*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*” (Rev 3:21). We are no more enthroned in this world than was the Lord Jesus. He had to leave this world to be enthroned, and so must we!

Some will object that saints are said to reign right now. “*For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:17). That is a very real reign, to be sure. However, as the succeeding chapters confirm, it is a reign over our own fallen nature—a “*reign in life*” –and not a reign over the wicked. Too, it is a reign “*THROUGH Christ,*” not “*with Christ.*” The words “*reign with,*” when applied to reigning with Jesus, are ALWAYS preceded by the word “*shall*” (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10; 20:6; 22:5).

We are much like David before his  
enthronement. He was anointed king a  
considerable while before he assumed the  
throne.

Others will refer to saints presently being “*kings*” – and that is also the truth. That blessed condition is associated with being washed from our sins (Rev 1:6). It is in this sense that we are called “*a royal priesthood*” (1 Pet 2:9). While we are, indeed, kings, we have not yet occupied our throne or been given our “*crown*.” We are much like David before his enthronement. He was anointed king a considerable while before he assumed the throne. While king Saul was still alive and ruling, God sent Samuel to anoint David as king, while he was yet a youth. The Scriptures tell us of that occasion, “*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward*” (1 Sam 16:13). It was not until five years later that he actually began to reign. That is similar to our situation. We have been anointed kings, but have not yet begun to reign. Like David, we enjoy occasional exploits in the interim. However, they are but as faint glimmer of what is to come.

## A THOUSAND YEARS

Realizing I am dealing with a highly controversial passage, I must draw your attention to the precise way in which the Spirit speaks. (Remember, this is what “*the Spirit is saying to the churches*.” ) **He does not say “*THE thousand years!*”** That particular expression is used in this passage (20:1-7) three times—but not here! Incidentally, those three times are the ONLY place in all of Scripture that the phrase is used (including the following versions: KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, NCV, NLT, Darby’s, LB). The only translation I could find using “the thousand years” was Young’s Literal Translation. In this verse, however, he departed from translation literalness.

While this may appear to be a mere technicality, I must devote a short space to the matter. The reason for this approach is that a very fundamental and pervading doctrine concerning “the thousand years” is prevalent in the church. It has caused many to miss the intent of this passage. It has also occasioned the development of a theological wedge that has been forced into Scripture. This wedge has shaped the way people read the entire Bible. The development of this intrusive theology represents a sin of the greatest magnitude. It has been the mother of countless theological by-paths that have hurt Christ’s body.

The article “THE” is not found in this reference to “thousand years”—that is why the vast majority of translations read “*A thousand years*.” That means the point is not the duration of the “*years*” but the NATURE of that time. Even when

the expression “*THE thousand years*” is employed (20:3,5,7), precise length is NOT the point. Those verses read, “*And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled . . . But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished . . . And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.*” In Each of these expressions, the length of the period was not the point, but what occurred during it. In fact, the clear reference is verse two, where the none-specific form is first used. “*He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for **a thousand years** .*” That is “*the thousand years*” to which verses 3,5, and 7 refer. It is the time of Satan’s binding.

This is the Spirit’s way of identifying a time segment, with an emphasis on WHAT is occurring, rather than WHEN it is occurring.

There are other times in Scripture when the Spirit emphasizes time differently—showing WHEN something took place. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point. “*From the morning until the evening*” (Ex 18:13-14) , “*from the year that he was sold until the year of Jubilee*” (Lev 25:50) , “*From Abraham to David,*” “*from David until the carrying away into Babylon,*” “*from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ*” (Matt 1:17), “*From Adam to Moses*” (Rom 5:14). In each of these TIME was the point. I give them to show the Spirit speaks differently when time is NOT the point.

Apart from this passage, the only other places in all of Scripture where “*A thousand years*” is mentioned are as follows. “*For **a thousand years** in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past . . . Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man even if he lives **a thousand years** twice . . . with the Lord one day is as **a thousand years** ” (Psa 90:4; Eccl 6:6; 2 Pet 3:8). In each of these passages, it is apparent the expression in question is one that *avoids* specificity rather than articulating it.*

Here, then, is the significance of “*a thousand years.*” It is a Divinely appointed and governed time when Satan will be restrained in an unprecedented way. Because of that condition, it is also a time when significant spiritual renewal will take place. In this renewal, those who are with Christ Jesus will play a prominent role, living and reigning with Him.

## VINCENT'S WORD STUDIES

I was interested to read Vincent's remark about this word. It reflects a scholastic honesty that is refreshing. "Here we confront the same problem found in the 1260 days. In this book of symbols how long is a thousand years? All sorts of theories are proposed, none of which fully satisfy one. Perhaps Peter has given us the only solution open to us in 2 Peter 3:8 when he argues that 'one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.' It will help us all to remember that God's clock does not run by ours and that times and seasons and programs are with him. This wonderful book was written to comfort the saints in a time of great trial, not to create strife among them."

### THRONES OF JUDGMENT

In the vision, John beheld thrones and those seated upon them, who were given authority to judge. The wording of the passage is peculiar. "*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them*" (KJV). But who are the "*they*?" Other versions make the matter a little clearer. "*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed*" (RSV). "*I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge*" (NIV). In my judgment, these are the "*they*" mentioned previously in this book—the redeemed. From one perspective, "*These are they which came out of great tribulation*" (7:14). From another view, "*These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*" (14:4). From yet another angle, these "*are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*" (19:9). When it comes to personalities other than Jesus, these are the emphasis of the book of Revelation.

The government of Jesus is again emphasized in the words, "*and judgment was GIVEN unto them.*" It was given at an appointed time, and for an appointed duration. Lest believers be tempted to be "*wise in their own eyes*" (Isa 5:21), the authority to judge did not begin until Satan was bound. Even in Christ, men are not free to rule, reign, or judge, at will.

Too, notice we are not talking about a military conflict but of judgment—a discretionary rule. Jesus meant precisely what He said when He affirmed to Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants*

would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). Some are quick to point out Jesus said His kingdom was not NOW of this world. They assume it WOULD be of this world at a later time, and that His servants WOULD fight at that time. But that view is only an imagination. The Kingdom of Christ is always singular, never plural. Too, it is NEVER represented as changing in either substance or focus. In fact it is written, “Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:7). If one posits that Christ’s Kingdom will “increase” from NOT being of this world to a state of BEING of this world, a remarkable confession of ignorance has been made. It is not possible for Christ’s kingdom to advance from Spirit to flesh, non-fleshly aggression to fleshly aggression, and non-worldliness to worldliness. Such imaginations should be aggressively “cast down,” not embraced!

In this reign, the erroneous notions perpetrated and fostered by the powers of darkness, will be overthrown. Delusion will become apparent, and the truth will be more clearly seen. This is another way of describing a global awakening. It will be of the same order that occurred regionally on Pentecost in Jerusalem, and later in Samaria.

### **SOULS WHO HAD BEEN BEHEADED**

With the keenness of sight obtained in revelation, John says, “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” This is now the second time he has seen these souls. When first he beheld them, they were not upon thrones, but were “under the altar,” awaiting the vindication of their blood (6:9-10). These had been slain because of “the Word of God” and “their testimony.” It was their message—what they said—that brought the wrath of sinful humanity upon them.

### **The Proper Emphasis**

While it is not fashionable to say so, the thing for which the church is to be most noted is “the Word of God” and its “testimony” to involvement with Christ. Its morality, while absolutely essential, is not its brightest light. Even the love for one another that exists within its confines, though a bright and shining light, is not its refulgence. Fundamentally, the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1

Tim 3:15). It is the appointed means through which the Lord keeps His word before men. The church is to apprise men of what the Lord has said. That is to be done with a proper focus. Its role is not simply to share SOME things God has said, randomly cavorting through His Word as in a play-field.

After nearly fifty years of preaching, and extensive exposure to the churches, I can tell you the professed church has failed miserably in this responsibility. There is a level of Scriptural illiteracy that exists in the churches that is unparalleled and wholly without justification. It is no wonder that spiritual sterility is found throughout the Western church! This was NOT the case with *“the souls that were beheaded for the Word of God, and for the word of their testimony!”*

### **Beheaded, But Not Destroyed**

From the world’s viewpoint, it looked as though it was ridden of the godly influence of these souls. Both their persons and their message appeared to have been removed from prominence. But we will find that was not the end of the matter. **What is started by God cannot be finished or terminated by man!**

Beheading is the ultimate insult. It is what God did to the Philistine god Dagon (1 Sam 5:4). It is what David did to Goliath (1 Sam 17:51). It is also what the Philistines did to king Saul (1 Sam 31:9). Herod *“beheaded John”* the Baptist (Matt 14:10). James the Apostle was also beheaded (Acts 12:2). As we will see, whom the world beheads is NOT ultimately removed!

### **WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?**

What is John beholding? What is the point of seeing *“souls”* who were once removed from the arena of battle through beheading? The point is, they were removed, but their cause remained! The shedding of their blood was not only personal, it was an insult to the Living God! It revealed not only the rejection of His messengers, but of His message! Their removal by wicked men was not merely an attempt to frustrate their cause, but subvert the cause of the Almighty.

### **Further Identity**

They did not simply claim allegiance to Christ, they affirmed it by laying down their lives. Because of this, heaven received them while earth killed them. The devil made every effort to dissuade them, but was not able to do so. Their identity with Jesus kept them safe from the destroyer.

These “*souls*” are further identified as having gained the victory over the forces of darkness. They “*had not worshiped the beast*” allowing political power to turn them from the Lord. They had not worshiped “*his image*,” which was the representation lifeless religion, employed by Satan to bring men under his power. These “*souls*” had not “*received his mark upon their foreheads*,” thinking after the pattern of worldly religion. Neither, indeed, had they received his mark “*in their hands*,” serving the other master of human institutions and the devil’s delusion.

They did not simply claim allegiance to Christ, they affirmed it by laying down their lives. Because of this, heaven received them while earth killed them. The devil made every effort to dissuade them, but was not able to do so. Their identity with Jesus kept them safe from the destroyer.

### **The Cause Will Again Flourish**

Thus, this passage portrays the resurfacing and dominance of the CAUSE for which the martyrs were beheaded. Two things are thus introduced to us. (1) The cessation of the dominance of evil. (2) The flourishing of the Gospel of Christ. No person should think this to be impossible, or consider it too incredible to believe.

The message for which the martyrs laid down their lives will rise again, like the two witnesses of Revelation 11:11. Although centuries may have passed between the death of these souls and the resurfacing of their message, not one whit of power will be missing from it. If it shone brightly in a world DOMINATED by Satan, what will happen during a time when he is bound? If the Gospel made

inroads when the bottomless pit was opened, what will it do when it is “*shut up.*” If wicked Agrippa said “*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*” when darkness covered the world (Acts 26:28), what will be done when the prince of darkness is locked up?

### **Their Spirit Alive In Others**

The spirit of the martyrs will live in other saints. This is not some form of channeling, as practiced by the occult. Rather, it is a kingdom phenomenon involving one individual having the traits of another. Thus John the Baptist came “*in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Lk 1:17). In fact, Jesus said of John, “*he is Elijah who is to come*” (Matt 11:14). The Lord Jesus, referring to Malachi’s prophecy of the return of Elijah (Mal 4:5-6), did not limit the fulfillment to John the Baptist. In answer to the disciples question concerning the coming of Elijah, and considerably AFTER John the Baptist had been beheaded, Jesus said: “*Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands*” (Matt 17:11-12). Rather, Jesus points out, than John restoring “*all things,*” the people to whom he ministered “*did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished.*” He did not, therefore, exhaust Malachi’s prophecy. Jesus left the door open for its fulfillment, and so must we.

Without being unduly diverted from our passage, the point is that the traits of departed souls can in some sense, be seen in succeeding generations. Those in the first century had no difficulty thinking in this manner. Herod, for example, thought Jesus was John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded (Mark 6:16). When asked by Jesus what the people were saying about Him, the disciples replied, “*Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets*” Matt 16:14). The language before us, therefore, should not be strange to us.

### **Reigning From Heaven**

Without carrying the matter too far, I suggest departed saints, in some sense, are presently reigning. Too, that reign can be accentuated within the provinces of the Divine will. We are told of “*the spirits of just men made perfect,*” into whose fellowship we have now come (Heb 12:23). In an account of activity beyond the veil, Jesus spoke of Abraham comforting departed Lazarus. He also informed an occupant in hell of activities on the earth, even announcing with authority what

was and was not possible. He also gave a description of circumstances in the unseen world (Lk 16:22-31). The Spirit also informs us that although Abel was killed, “*through his faith he is still speaking*” (Heb 11:4, RSV). The extent of Abel’s involvement in the testimony is not the point. Rather, it is that a cause lives on, even though the one embracing it passes on.

### **Spearheaded By the Jews**

Although I have mentioned this before, I deem it necessary to again affirm it. This global awakening will be spearheaded by the Jews. They will flame with the spiritual energy of the martyrs. The lifeless institutionalism that has gripped the Gentile church reveals Satan’s activity, not that of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an appointed time when “*the full number of the Gentiles has come in*” (Rom 11:25, NIV). It is the time to which Jesus referred when He said of the destruction of Jerusalem, “*And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Lk 21:24).

In a powerful exposition of Divine purpose, Paul argues that Israel has NOT been summarily rejected—that there is a glorious future determined for them (Rom 11:11-31). His argument is so convincing, it is difficult to believe it has been rejected by great bodies of the Christian community. These few points will confirm the solidity of the message.

### **The Possibility of It All**

- 1 They have not stumbled so as to fall, or not rise again (v 11a).
- 2 Through their fall salvation has gone out to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy (v 11b).
- 3 If riches were brought by their fall, “*much greater*” riches will come through their “*fulness*” (v 12).
- 4 Paul’s Apostleship to the Gentiles was to provoke the Jews to emulation (v 12-14).
- 5 If their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, their acceptance will bring life from the dead (v 15).

6 If the “*firstfruits*” of believers coming from Israel were holy, so is the whole “*batch*” –root and branches (v 16).

7 The Jewish branches were NOT broken off so the Gentiles could be grafted in (v 17-22).

8 God is able to graft them in again (v 23).

9 If wild olive branches (the Gentiles) could be grafted into the appointed tree, it is more reasonable to suppose the natural branches can be re-grafted into their own tree (v 24).

10 “*Blindness in part has happened to Israel*” until the full number of the Gentiles are come in (v 25).

11 “*All Israel will be saved,*” as the Deliverer comes to “*turn away ungodliness from Jacob*” (v 26).

12 God’s covenant with them is to “*take away their sins*” (v 27).

13 Although “*concerning the Gospel,*” they are enemies for the sake of the Gentiles, they are still “*beloved for the fathers*” [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] *sake*” (v 28).

14 The “*gifts and calling of God are WITHOUT repentance*” (v 29).

15 Just as “*in times past*” we Gentiles have obtained mercy “*through their unbelief,*” those Jews who have “*now not believed,*” through the mercy given to the Gentiles “*also may obtain mercy*” (v 30).

16 God has shut up “*all men*” to disobedience that He might have “*mercy*” on all—not just the Gentiles (v 32).

Let none, therefore, question the possibility of the conversion of the Jews—or the lifting of the veil from their eyes, and their turning to Christ.

### **ALL NATIONS WILL BE INVOLVED**

God has gone on record concerning this matter. “*And he will destroy in this mountain* [the mountain from which Gospel blessing flows, v 6] *the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations*” (Isa 25:7). These marvelous words parallel the words of our text, “*that he should*

*deceive the nations no more” (20:2). It refers to the removal of hindering influences, as well as the provision of the Word of salvation. Through Isaiah the Lord gave a word to the ancient people. “Arise, shine, for **your light** has come, and the glory of the LORD rises **upon you** . See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises **upon you** and His glory appears **over you** . Nations will come to **your light** , and kings to the brightness of **your dawn** ” (Isa 60:1-3, NIV).*

Sandwiched in his book, Zechariah, moved along by the Holy Spirit, said, “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’*” (8:23). Zechariah prophesied around 520 BC. Beginning around 120 years later, the fountain of revelation ceased to flow for a period over 400 years. Nothing during that period could be said to have fulfilled Zechariah’s word. Certainly the laying of the foundation and building of the walls that took place under Ezra and Nehemiah provides no fulfillment of the word. Nothing of this magnitude occurred from the Apostles until this day. Even during Christ’s earthly ministry this did not take place. Gentile acceptance was unusual during His earthly ministry, not common.

Until this day, the involvement of “*all nations*” has been representative. Even relatively small nations have not been relieved of the overwhelmingly deceptive power of Satan. But this will not always be the case! A Divinely scheduled time has been appointed wherein an unprecedented display of the potency of truth will be shown among the nations—when Satan will no longer be able to keep them captive.

Was their righteous cause thrown to the ground when they died? Were their lives lived in vain? God forbid! Their influence extends beyond their generation, just as that of Peter, Paul, and John. The Apostles are, to some extent, reigning with Jesus wherever a soul turns from darkness to light, and from the power of

## Satan unto God.

Numerous passages of Scripture confirm that “*all nations,*” or “*all the earth,*” will be blessed. The listing of a few of them will suffice. Genesis 12:3; Psalm 2:8; 22:27-28; 65:2; 66:4; 72:8,11,19; 86:9; 138:4; Isaiah 2:2; 24:16; 25:6ff; 40:5; 45:8; 66:12; Jeremiah 3:17; 16:19; Daniel 2:44-45; Habakkuk 2:14; Zephaniah 2:11; 3:9; Malachi 1:11.

Additionally, this is not the first time this perspective has been declared in Revelation. It is also found in 5:9; 11:15; 14:6; and 15:4.

### **Final Thought On This Matter**

The martyrs left this world with a burning heart, flaming with the power of the Gospel. Like David, they “*served*” their generation (Acts 13:36). They preached the Gospel, declaring the testimony of Jesus in the presence of threatening opponents. They lost their lives because of their word. Their preaching cost them their lives.

Was their righteous cause thrown to the ground when they died? Were their lives lived in vain? God forbid! Their influence extends beyond their generation, just as that of Peter, Paul, and John. The Apostles are, to some extent, reigning with Jesus wherever a soul turns from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The reign of God’s servants is not limited to the geographical areas in which they labored. Nor, indeed, does the taking of their lives by their enemies terminate their influence.

Every person who died for Jesus will realize the extension of their cause when Satan is bound and shut up for an extended period in the bottomless pit.

Those who consider the present “*day of salvation*” to be the period in reference in our text are many, but they are not right. They have not successfully dealt with the binding AND shutting up of Satan. Nor, indeed, have they offered a reasonable explanation for the inability of Satan to deceive the nations any longer. The flourishing of the cause for which righteous men died is not duly addressed by them either. In fact, there is a certain impotence among such people that is staggering. They have not yet been able to awaken slumbering churches—to say

nothing of “*the nations.*” Their evangelistic and missionary efforts have not yielded anything approximating what God has declared will take place.

These failures are not owing to them, but to the influence of Satan. That influence cannot be successfully countered on a large scale until the old serpent is restrained. How thankful we must be for the light this passage sheds on the history of the world. What often appears to be chaotic is being orchestrated by heaven to a grand conclusion. That conclusion will be for the ultimate good and glory of all who follow Jesus.

## THE REST OF THE DEAD

***“5a But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”*** Capitalizing on the Scriptural ignorance that pervades our world, a widespread acceptance of erroneous views of this passage prevails. With a remarkable level of acceptance, it is taught this refers to a second bodily resurrection. The godly, it is affirmed, are raised prior to the millennium, and the ungodly are raised after it—one thousand years later. Thus we have a temporal world inhabited by resurrected souls, without the presence of the wicked. It does require a prodigious imagination to embrace such a view.

First, it assumes the compatibility of glorified personalities with an unglorified heavens and earth. Second, it presupposes God is honored by the presence of glorified people in the realm from which they were once delivered. Third, it contradicts every single word of Scripture regarding the resurrection of the dead. Here, in this highly symbolic passage, certain teachers have found a basis for generating a doctrine no Prophet ever foretold, and no Apostle ever expounded. It is a view Jesus never affirmed, and John the Baptist never mentioned. It is most difficult for me to conceive of a more flimsy foundation for teaching than that. Add to this the fact that we are dealing with a book that, without any qualification whatsoever, curses anyone and everyone who tampers with its contents.

Who are “*the rest of the dead?*” I gather these are the opposite of the “*souls of those who were beheaded for the Word of God.*” They are the ungodly dead, but not merely the ungodly dead. It appears “*the rest of the dead*” are those who exercised unusual influence in the world, but not for righteousness. Just as the

Lord has unusual people who turn men from darkness to light, so the devil has “*ministers*” who turn men from light to darkness. Simon the sorcerer, you may recall, for a “*long time*” bewitched the entire city of Samaria with his sorceries (Acts 8:11). “*Hymenaeus and Philetus,*” through their doctrine “*overthrew the faith of some*” (2 Tim 2:17). Peter foretold the coming of a class of false prophets who would “*bring in damnable heresies,*” even denying the Lord who bought them. With great sobriety he wrote, “*And many shall follow their pernicious ways*” (2 Pet 2:22). Paul also wrote of “*that man of sin,*” who would rise with great power, “*showing himself that he is god*” (2 Thess 2:3-4).

There are people who are influential for evil. Often, even after they die, their cause is taken up by someone else, and their heresies and contemptible lies resurface. Some pioneers of iniquity are unsuccessful in their generation, but their cause is resurrected in succeeding generations. History is cluttered with the revivals of iniquity as well as those of righteousness. In our own day, there has been a remarkable renewal of idolatry, witchcraft, Satan worship, and devilish philosophies, such as hedonism, gluttony, and the justification of immorality.

But these influences will not dominate when the cause of the martyrs flames into prominence. “*The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.*” When Satan is bound and shut up in the bottomless pit, his ministers become impotent, and his cause falls to the ground! Throughout history, we have seen this on a small scale. It will yet happen on a large one. This should not be difficult to believe.

## THE FIRST RESURRECTION

***“5b This is the first resurrection. 6a Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.”*** There is a principle that is found in the Kingdom: ***death first, life last*** ! Ultimately, the grandest display of this is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. In His own words, “*I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen*” (Rev 1:18; 2:8). Thus, whenever we read of “*resurrection,*” we are reading of a key factor in the working of God’s eternal purpose.

Referring to the ones who “*lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years,*” the Spirit says, “**THIS IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION.**” Again, it is unfortunate that strange doctrines have been developed from this text. The wisdom of men, though counted “*foolishness*” by God (1 Cor 3:19), allows men to tamper with the very Word of God, and feel comfortable doing so. Thus, “*the first resurrection*” is said to be the first phase of the general resurrection. This particular teaching affirms the righteous will be raised first, one thousand years before the wicked are resurrected.

### **The Dead in Christ Will Rise First**

Those embracing this view fasten upon a phrase in First Thessalonians which seems to support their view. “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first***” (1 Thess 4:16). However, the Holy Spirit is not comparing the resurrection of “*the dead in Christ*” with the resurrection of the wicked. Rather, He is comparing the resurrection of “*the dead in Christ*” with the believers who are “*alive and remain*” until the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:17).

The changing of those living, and their joining to the  
Lord, will not precede, or occur before, the  
resurrection of those who have gone to be with the  
Lord

The subject under consideration in the Thessalonian text is the appearing of Christ. Some of the believers in Thessalonica thought those who died would not participate in the Lord’s coming. They imagined that only those who were “*alive*” at that time would enjoy being gathered to the Lord. Thus the Spirit sets about to correct their thinking on the matter. Believers who have died have not “*perished,*” and we are not to sorrow as though they have (4:13). Even now, their spirits live on. In fact, when our Lord comes again, “*even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him*” (4:14). At that time, they will be united with their resurrection bodies, and those who are alive at that time will be “*changed*” in the twinkling of an eye. The changing of those living, and their joining to the Lord, will not precede, or occur before, the resurrection of those who have gone to be with the Lord (4:15). “*The dead in Christ will rise first, THEN we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the*

air” (4:16-17).

Speaking of the coming of Christ from the very same perspective, the Spirit says “*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (1 Cor 15:51-52).

The wresting of the Thessalonian passage to make it fit into a contrived theology is contemptible. While innocent people have embraced it, innocent people did NOT create it. Further, to base this corrupt doctrine upon one of the most veiled texts in all of Scripture reveals a heart that is utterly contaminated.

### “FIRST” AND “SECOND”

The words “*first*” and “*second*” are not always chronological words, like 1,2,3. Frequently, as in this passage, they denote a different order or kind. This perception is fundamental to good understanding.

### The Covenants

The Old Covenant is called the “*First Covenant*” (Heb 8:7,13; 9:1,15,18), and the New Covenant is referred to as “*the Second*” (Heb 10:9). Actually, there were other covenants before “*the First Covenant*” (Gen 9:12,13,16,17; 17:11). But the promise to never again send a flood, and the covenant of circumcision, were of a different order than the covenant of the Law. The Law was “*the FIRST*” of a particular kind of covenant that dealt with men being approved by God. The “*Second*” Covenant was a second kind, or order, of covenant. It was not the same kind as the former covenant. Thus it is written, “*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt*” (Heb 8:8-9).

Two kinds of covenants one by works, and one through promise. One by law, the other by grace. One through doing, the other through believing.

## **Adam and Jesus**

Adam is called “*the FIRST man*,” and Jesus “*the SECOND Man*” (1 Cor 15:45,47). Jesus was not the “*Second man*” chronologically. He was a different order of man, and generated a new kind of race.

Two kinds of men. One from the earth, the other from heaven. One disobedient, the other obedient. One made a living soul, the other a life-giving Spirit.

## **The Second Death**

Again, being cast into “*the lake of fire*” is called “*the SECOND death*” (Rev 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8). This does not mean that men die the same death twice. Rather, the second is a different kind of death—a SPIRITUAL death. Death, a sentence passed upon “*all men*” (Rom 5:12) is obvious. Therefore spiritual death is distinguished from it by the use of the word “*second.*”

Two kinds of death. One is a separation of the spirit from the body. The other an eternal separation of the person from God. The second is not apparent, and is therefore distinguished from the other by the word “*second.*”

## **The Resurrection**

There is also another KIND of resurrection—one that differs from the general resurrection of the dead. A “*first resurrection*” by no means implies another of the same order. We nowhere read of a “*second resurrection,*” or one that is of the same order, only involving different personalities. The general resurrection, in which all will participate (John 5:28-29) is obvious. Therefore this resurrection is distinguished by the word “*first.*” It is also called “*first*” because it occurs after death, but before the general resurrection. This is a SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION.

Two kinds of men. One from the earth, the other from heaven. One disobedient, the other obedient. One made a living soul, the other a life-giving Spirit.

The “*first resurrection*” and “*the second death*” are spiritual. Both occur AFTER the experience of death, which passed upon “*all men.*” Everyone will participate in the general resurrection (John 5:29), but all will not have part in the “*first resurrection.*” It has been appointed unto men “*to die ONCE*” (Heb 9:27), but not all will experience the “*second death.*”

Participation in the “*first resurrection*” excludes one from “*the second death.*” One birth is granted to all living, and one death is appointed. If a person, however, is born only once, he will die twice. If a person is born twice, or “born again,” he will only die once. In this, the Scripture is fulfilled, “*death unto death . . . life unto life*” (1 Cor 2:16).

#### A LARGER VIEW

Some have supposed “*the first resurrection*” is the new birth. That is, of course, a spiritual resurrection. Those in Christ have been “*quickened,*” or “*made alive*” in Christ. They have also been “*raised up together,*” and “*made*” to “*sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:6). Still, however, they have “*this treasure in earthen vessels*” (2 Cor 4:7). They are, indeed, “*kept by the power of God,*” but it is “*through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet 1:5). Their condition, blessed as it is, does not qualify for the statement, “*Over such the second death has no power.*”

While they are in the world, safety is afforded to believers upon the basis of their faith (John 3:16,18,36). There yet remains a part of them over which the “*second death*” indeed has power. It is believers that are told, “*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*” (Rom 8:13). Widows who were believers, yet lapsed into the flesh, are described in awesome words: “*But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives*” (1 Tim 5:6).

As though all of this were not enough, the Lord Jesus speaks to the churches specifically about the second death. With unusual clarity, He declares that only those who finally overcome will pass beyond the danger zone. *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”* (Rev 2:11).

For these reasons, I cannot accept the notion that *“the first resurrection”* is the new birth.

### THE MARTYRS LIVE ON

When beholding the thrones and those sitting upon them, John saw *“the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands”* (20:4). These were, in fact, OVERCOMERS, to whom the promise of Jesus (2:11) applied. If they were not the only personalities on those thrones, the others were also overcomers, even though they were not martyred.

These souls had imbibed the truth of God, and spoken it to a sinful generation. Even though they were killed, their works followed them, as they rested from their labors (14:13). **Their influence remained among men, even though they had been removed by martyrdom.**

The *“first resurrection,”* then, refers to the lives of those who have passed on, once again exercising godly influence in the world. It takes place when their cause flourishes, and the very thing that brought about their death becomes the occasion for an awakening in the world. These are lives that can be duplicated again. It is like the *“spirit and power of Elijah”* surfacing in mighty John the Baptist.

In a general sense, this confirms that those who *“die in the Lord”* do not pass into extinction in their departure from this world. In a very real sense they move up higher. While they are not yet in the fulness of the inheritance reserved for them, they are much closer to it than they were when in the world. On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah returned from the unseen world. They

*“appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”* (Lk 9:31). They were, in a very real sense, reigning with Jesus. While we are not told the particulars of that conversation, it must have resulted in the strengthening of our Lord for being made sin and a curse for us. The formidable weight of His commissioned death was, no doubt, lightened by the appearance of these two departed saints.

Who knows the extent of involvement of those who have overcome the world, and are now on the other side? Perhaps James, killed at the very beginning of the *“day of salvation”* played a key role from heaven when *“the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (Acts 6:7).

## REIGNING WITH JESUS

*“6b . . . but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”* These enthroned overcomers will rule with Jesus during the period Satan is bound. In some significant way, they will participate when the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

When we first saw these martyrs, they were crying out for their blood to be avenged. They were told to *“rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed”* (6:11). We have seen their request answered in the overthrow of the beast and Babylon—of the tyranny of earthly government and the peril of the false church.

But now, John sees them as resting no longer. They are not under the altar, but seated upon thrones. They are not crying for vengeance, but reigning with Jesus as *“the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.”* What a blessed vision this is, and what great consolation it brings to those who are fighting the good fight of faith. It is especially comforting to those who are speaking the Word. Candidly, those who labor in the Lord’s vineyard need a good word like this! They need to know their lives are continually progressing.

## WHY WAS THIS PASSAGE WRITTEN?

We must never forget, John was commissioned, “*What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea*” (1:11). It is possible to be distracted from this by the theological jargon that has filled the earth. Under such delusion, one might consider that only the first three chapters were written to the “*seven churches,*” with the rest of the book bearing little relevance to them. But this is not at all the case.

This book was written during a time of persecution, when the church was under attack from “*the beast.*” That is why John wrote, “*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*” (1:9). The Roman Empire had become the great antagonist of the church. Even Antipas’, Christ’s faithful martyr, had been slain (2:13). Too, trial was imminent for some believers (2:10).

The book is written to comfort believers experiencing the opposition of the world. God sees their tears (7:17; 21:4). Their prayers are instrumental in the rule of the world (8:3,4). Their death, cruel though it may be, is precious in His sight (14:13; 20:4). Their final victory is assured, as they keep the faith and refuse identity with Satan’s fabrication (15:2). Injustices done to them will be fully avenged by their Lord (6:9; 8:3).

The Revelation confirms to us that things are NOT what they appear to be. The mighty God and His Christ are ruling behind the scenes. They are orchestrating the affairs of this world for the ultimate glory of God and the benefit of His saints. Nothing is really out of control. The final conclusion will confirm this to be the case.

Christ is not unmindful of His grievously afflicted people. He gives them a view of conquering souls—not merely departed souls, but CONQUERING souls. God’s people must have more than a finely spun systematic theology! It is not enough simply to challenge them to run harder, reach higher, and fight more diligently. They must have a view of the grand conclusion. They must also see something of

what awaits them between passing from this world and the “*end of all things.*” That is WHY this book was written. Throughout the years, its message has buoyed up believers in troublesome waters.

Here, in this world, a few short years of suffering. There, in the world to come, we live and reign with Christ! This is not a cold and calculating doctrine, but a comforting message of contrast between here and there, and now and then.

Prophetically, Revelation speaks of the triumph of the truth—the revealed and spoken truth. The martyrs were beheaded “*for the witness of Jesus.*” The earth extended itself to cut their restricting bands from itself, like it did with Jesus (Psa 2:8). It looked like the world won, but it did not!

A few more martyrs. A few more sacrifices for the cause of Jesus. A little more blood. A short season where the enemy seems to triumph. Then, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. The kingdoms of this world WILL become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ!

I expect the truth to triumph and evil to fall, and exhort you to do the same. Evil will have his day. The dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and those who have “*the mark,*” will all have their day. They will oppose the saints, and at times will appear to absolutely triumph over them. However, the eye of faith can see beyond all of this! Praise the Lord for the book of Revelation! It provides insights that strengthen and cheer the heart. It makes fighting the good fight of faith sensible.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 38

## SATAN'S LAST STAND

" Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. " (Rev 20:7-15, KJV)

## INTRODUCTION

The passage with which we are dealing is highly controversial. Because of this, many have chosen to ignore the passage, supposing that diverse views indicate the text is extremely difficult. Should we choose to follow this line of thinking, we will be deprived of a significant degree of comfort and encouragement.

There are texts in which God speaks with principle in mind rather than specific

details. The perspective reflected in such texts is a high perspective—from the vantage of “*heavenly places.*” To impose upon such texts highly controversial detailed views will not enhance faith or stabilize hope. Too, such a procedure thrusts us into the realm of human opinion and controversy. For example, if a body of people were all walking down fifth avenue in Manhattan, New York, they could come to some agreement on the height of the buildings, names and location of the street, and focus of specialty shops. Unless, however, they had personal knowledge of the infrastructure of the city, they would not be able to agree on the general layout of the city, whether or not it was on an island, and other general perspectives. Should that same group, however, view the city from an airplane, about 20,000 feet in the air, the whole city would look differently. From that higher perspective, they could see the general layout of the city. They might be able to identify some unusual structures, like the Empire State Building and the the Twin Towers. However, if they tried to identify the number of stories in each building, and the various streets and shops of the city, they would not be able to agree among themselves. Such details were not plain from that high perspective. It would be unwise to define all of the details from that higher view.

The book of Revelation is, in my understanding, a high view of the working of the Lord. It is intended to give us the layout, so to speak, of God’s “*eternal purpose,*” and not all of the historical details. That is why both Jesus and His enemies are pictured according to their character, and not according to appearance. They are viewed from a higher and more general perspective—one that is required to properly understand the details revealed elsewhere. Think, for example, of the many references to the Lord Jesus . “*Him which was, and is, and is to come*” (1:4). The “*first Begotten from the dead, and prince of the kings of the earth*” (1:5). The “*Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending*” (1:8). “*The Lion of the tribe of Judah*” (5:5). “*A Lamb as it had been slain*” (5:6). “*The Word of God*” with eyes “*as a flame of fire,*” and a sword proceeding “*out of His mouth*” (19:13-15). The devil is depicted as “*A great red dragon*” (12:3), “*Abaddon and Apollyon*” (9:11), and “*the angel of the bottomless pit*” (9:11). Those who oppose the saints are portrayed as “*The beast*” (11:7; 13:2), “*another beast*” (13:11), “*great Babylon*” (16:19), “*the great whore*” (17:1), “*the mother of harlots*” (17:5), and “*the false prophet*” (16:13; 19:20). All of these are lofty views—perspectives dealing with principle, not details.

This is not the end of the matter. Things that are specifically detailed elsewhere in Scripture are portrayed symbolically in the Revelation. Take, for example, the nourishment of the people of God. That is a subject of much Apostolic doctrine. They provide the details of the procedure. Often, it comes through the body of

Christ (1 Cor 14:3). Other times, it is traced to the direct involvement of God Himself (2 Cor 1:3-4). Again, it is associated with the working of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). But when we come to this book, the very same nourishment is seen from yet higher perspective. “*Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days . . . But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent*” (12:6,14).

### FAITH GRASPS THE HIGHER VIEW

Because of the nature of faith, it must have the higher view. That does not obviate the necessity or value of the detailed views. However, the details can only be correctly seen within the context of the higher view.

In the world, learning takes place at the lowest, or detailed, level. Thus we first learn about words, then use sentences, then express thoughts, etc. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom. Learning takes place at the highest level. The Gospel, for example, is the proclamation of what the Lord has done in Christ Jesus—the higher view. Once faith lays hold of that, the details of obedience, following the Lamb, etc., are provided, and can be comprehended. It is “*in light*” that we are able to “*see light*” (Psa 36:9): i.e., within the higher view, or Divine summation, the details of doctrine come into sharper focus. If you can see that Christ has “*destroyed*” the devil (Heb 2:14), it makes sense that you can “*resist*” him (James 4:17).

Those who major on the details of *Christian living* ,  
even though they mean well, have greatly  
handicapped the saints. Men dispatched by the Lord  
“*preach Christ,*” not obligations

Those who major on the details of *Christian living* , even though they mean well, have greatly handicapped the saints. Men dispatched by the Lord “*preach Christ,*” not obligations (Acts 8:5; 17:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:28). This does NOT mean they never declared the responsibilities of men, or warned against the neglect of those

responsibilities. It DOES mean the focus of their preaching was the Lord Jesus Himself. The heart of their proclamation was the Lord and what He had done. They consistently spoke of the duty of men WITHIN the context of Christ Jesus and His great salvation. Their exposition was NOT of duty, but of Christ and salvation.

### **COME UP HIGHER!**

Even though John was “*in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,*” the heavenly summons was “*Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this*” (4:1). The Lord, in a sense, did not bring the Revelation down to John, but brought John UP to it. He was being given a higher view of the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. The higher view would allow for a glorious summation that would actually clarify what was occurring on the earth.

In these lofty spiritual realms, the development of theological positions is not at all the point. The definition of historical events is not the focus. That does not mean theological positions are wrong, or that historical events cannot be, to some degree, identified—even in this book. However, such things are not the intention of the Book. Should we pursue that approach, we will not gain the benefit the Revelation was intended to bring. Too, we will set ourselves against one another over matters of opinion.

We must be challenged to come up higher—to enter the realms where the consummation looms larger than the means through which it is accomplished. Every believer, regardless of their level of spiritual attainment, can grasp the conclusions affirmed in this book. We are told of the destiny of the saints, the devil, political opposition, and religious corruption. We are told of a lake of fire as well as a place where God and His people will be joined together—and we are told who will occupy both places.

Do not take for granted that these things are known by everyone. The best of saints can easily forget them in the wake of persecution, frustration, and protracted warfare. They must be reminded of them—having their “*pure minds*” stirred up with the recollection of them. Persecution and hardship will be easier to endure if we can see “*the end of all things.*” Faithfulness and obedience will be more cheerfully and consistently rendered if we are convinced our labor is not vain in

the Lord.

So, come up higher! Do your best not to impose upon this text a personal persuasion. Your persuasion may be true—altogether true. But it is not to be imposed where it does not belong, and it cannot be forced upon your brethren, or made a point of contention—particularly in the study of Revelation. Our objective is to perceive the point the Lord Jesus is making.

## THE LOOSING OF SATAN

***“ 7 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison [loosed out of his prison, KJV] , 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.”*** The very idea of Satan being “*released from his prison*” should produce great sobriety among the people of God. When speaking our “*adversary the devil,*” the Spirit admonishes us “*Be sober, be vigilant*” (1 Pet 5:8). No believer is ever told to be casual about the devil. Rather, they are solemnly told, “*do not give the devil an opportunity*” (Eph 4:27, NASB). Whenever and wherever he is given a place or opportunity to work, he will do so! To be sure, he is under the government of God, but that does not mean God never gives him leave to work. The single account of Job, the “*perfect man*” from Uz, is enough to dispel such an imagination (Job 1-2).

Our text affirms, “*Satan will be released.*” He will be released AFTER he has been “*bound*” for “*a thousand years*” (v 2). After a lengthy period of seeming success, the devil is said to have been “*bound.*” Again, after a period during which “*he should deceive the nations no more,*” he is said to be “*released for a little while*” (v 3). Both the binding and the releasing were dictated and facilitated by heaven.

With this principal mind, texts tending to be mysterious become more clear. “*I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things*” (Isa 45:7, NKJV). “*. . . If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?*” (Amos 3:6). It is no wonder the Spirit says, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31).

## The Thousand Years

Only “*when the thousand years are expired*” will the devil be “*loosed.*” In my understanding, this does not necessarily speak of a precise period of time. However, neither does the language exclude such a season. Believing this is speaking in terms of principle (which does not eliminate the possibility of precise duration), several things may be seen.

- This is a period of sufficient length to vindicate the martyrs.
- It is a season that will bring the world into rest from the dominancy of evil.
- This is a time of Divine determination, both initiated and terminated by the Lord of glory.
- If it is not a period of 1,000 literal years, it will be one in which a thousand years (as ordinarily conceived) of accomplishment will be realized.
- There are times when Satan is powerless to deceive the nations.
- There are times when the saints are powerless to restrain the devil.

Whenever and wherever he is given a place or opportunity to work, he will do so! To be sure, he is under the government of God, but that does not mean God never gives him leave to work.

▀ Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot dominate simultaneously. One must give way to the other.

There are also several other observations concerning this period of blessedness.

- With Satan bound, the Word spreads rapidly.
- The thousand years is not a period of unmixed good. Evil will be restrained, and Satan’s delusional power bound, yet sinners will still remain.
- Evil can be subdued without disappearing.
- Death will still be in the world.
- There will still be reason for the people of God to be prepared for war—to arm themselves.

These observations are prompted by the fact that when Satan is loosed, he does gather the wicked together (verse 8). They have remained in the background, even though they could not prevail as they did formerly.

### **One More Thing**

One more thing should be observed. Satan cannot and will not be loosed until Divine objectives have been realized: i.e., “*until the thousand are expired.*” Jesus expressed this succinctly in His words to those arresting Him in the Gethsemane. “*When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Lk 22:53, NKJV). Just as the “*power of darkness*” could not work until Christ’s ministry was completed, so Satan will not be loosed “*until the thousand years are expired.*”

For this reason, we must, in our own measure, say with Jesus, “*I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work*” (John 9:4). While we have the light, we are to walk in the light, aggressively throwing off the shackles of slothfulness. As it is written, “*Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth*” (John 12:35) .

### **THE DIVINE MANNER**

It is the Divine manner to subject His people to hardship after they have been delivered—to allow evil to surface after it has been subdued. Thus Sarah remained barren **after** she had received the promise. Joseph went into prison **after** he had been made “*overseer*” over Potiphar’s house (Gen 39:4-5,20). Israel faced the Red Sea **after** they came out of Egypt (Ex 12:34-37; Ex 14:18). Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den **after** he had been made “*the third ruler*” of the kingdom (Dan 5:29; 6:16). The early church was grievously persecuted **after** it had “*favor with all of the people*” (Acts 2:47; 8:1-4). Every believer experiences opposition to some measure after they have been delivered. As it is written, “*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*” (Heb 10:32).

When, therefore, we read of Satan being “*loosed*” AFTER he has been bound, it should not sound strange to our ears.

### **HIS PRISON**

While “*the bottomless pit*” is a source of iniquity, it is also Satan’s prison—the place where HE is kept. It is not simply that Satan’s plans failed, being overpowered, as it were, by the Gospel of Christ. He is not simply restrained, he is imprisoned—and there is a vast difference.

While he is in “*prison,*” the saints will enjoy reigning with Jesus. Understanding there are a variety of teachings on this matter, it should suffice to show such a thought should not be difficult for us. The Lord is the “*King of kings,*” ruling “*in the kingdom of men.*” Thrice it is affirmed of the kingdoms of this world, He “*Gives it to whomever He*” (Dan 4:17,25,32). It is even declared that God “*setteth up over it the basest of men*” (Dan 4:17b). Why, then, should it be thought incredible that it could be given to the saints of the Most High God? Such is the result when Satan is “*bound.*”

### **THAT WE MAY KNOW**

It is possible, because of a lengthy period of dominance, for men to overestimate their strength and ability. Perhaps this is another reason why Satan will be “*loosed for a little season.*” Here again, it will be confirmed that the “*excellency of the power*” is of God, and not of us (2 Cor 4:7). A theological view that leads one to suppose all danger has been removed, and that Satan is impotent, is a delusion. There is a vast difference between Satan being “*bound*” and him being impotent or powerless. His destruction by Jesus (Heb 2:14) was not his annihilation, but his removal from the heavenly realms. He is ONLY powerless in the heavenly places.

### **DECEIVE THE NATIONS**

The very thought of Satan deceiving the nations should awaken the greatest degree of sobriety within the saints! Thank God He is to be “*released*” for only “*a little while.*” However, what havoc he can wreck in but a brief period!

Whenever and wherever he is given a place or opportunity to work, he will do so! To be sure, he is under the government of God, but that does not mean God never gives him leave to work.

Upon his release, Satan “*will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth.*” Those who are persuaded Satan was “bound” at the beginning of the Gospel age, or the “*day of salvation,*” must account for the universal delusion of the nations existing in our day. As pervasive as the Gospel has been, I do not believe the truth of God has ever been dominant in this world—at least not to date. The knowledge of the Lord has not yet “*covered the earth as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). Neither, indeed, has the “*whole*” of society yet been affected by the Kingdom of God. Speaking of the nature of the Kingdom, Jesus said, “*To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened*” (Lk 13:20-21).

### THE DANGER OF DELUSION

This text points up the most dangerous aspect of Satan’s activity. It is delusion! Satan once attacked Job, causing all of his goods to be confiscated and his body to be covered with boils (Job 1-2). **Deception is worse than that!** He once bound a woman with a spirit of infirmity, so that she was “*bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up*” (Lk 13:11-16). **Deception is worse than that!**

Men often do not regard deception as a great danger, because they overestimate their own intellectual abilities. But they are foolish to do so. Satan has deceived, and even blinded, the wisest men the world has ever produced. The Spirit said this of Satan’s universal impact: “*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19, NIV). ONLY in Christ are individuals freed from Satan’s control. The Gospel is “*hidden,*” or veiled, to those deceived by Satan. As it is written, “*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

While Satan was “*bound*,” iniquity was subdued, but did not disappear. The knowledge of the Lord covered the earth, and yet there remained marshy places throughout the world that were not healed. People did not get smarter, thus enabling them to avoid the snares of the devil. No one was so wise in themselves that they could no longer be deceived. The loosing of Satan would again bring deception throughout the nations. We can learn much from this.

- That truth is not dependent upon people to be successful.
- That Satan can appear to be dominant.
- That Satan’s deceptions are stronger than man’s power of analysis and intellectual prowess.
- That God can start revivals of righteousness or loose surges of iniquity at will.
- That Satan is only as powerful as the will of the Lord.
- That wicked men can be subdued. However, without a change of heart, they remain subject to Satan’s delusion.

The phrase “*four quarters of the earth*” denotes from every part of the world. The emphasis in this expression is not quantity, but area. The idea is that every part of the world will have people who have not embraced the truth, even though Satan was bound.

## **HUMAN DEFILEMENT**

There is an important aspect of the situation that should be mentioned here. Men do not naturally gravitate toward the Lord. When Adam sinned, the human nature was defiled, falling away from any Divine inclination. Even if Satan is bound or severely restrained, men must hear the Gospel of Christ and choose to believe it. Their hearts are corrupt by nature. In the words of the Spirit, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9).

## **GOG AND MAGOG**

This is the only place in all of Scripture where the exact expression “*Gog and Magog*” is used. Once Ezekiel referred to “*Gog, of the land of Magog*” (Ezek 38:1). Nine times Ezekiel refers to “*Gog*” (38:2,3,14,16,18; 39:1,11). Expressions used include, “*Gog, of the land of Magog*” and “*Gog, the chief prince of Meshech*”

*and Tubal*” (38:3; 39:1).

Nothing good is said about “Gog.” Ezekiel was told to set his face “*against Gog*” (38:2). God affirmed He Himself was “*against*” Gog (38:3). The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to Gog, “*In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes*” (38:14-16). When, the Lord said, Gog came against the “*land of Israel,*” “*My fury shall come up in My face. For in My jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken*” (38:18-19). Ezekiel also declared God would come against Gog, leaving only a small remnant of them. They would fall upon “*the mountains of Israel,*” never to rise again. They would then be buried in Israel in a place that would be called “*the valley of Hamon Gog*” (39:1-11).

This is the sum total of everything the Almighty has said about Gog in any language and at any time. While a significant amount of teaching has been developed upon the foundation of these few verses, I do not feel comfortable with much of it. It seems unnecessary to say students of Scripture must take special care NOT to explain the Word of God within the context of humanly-conceived theologies. Yet, it must be affirmed again and again, as men continue to have this propensity.

The meaning of “Gog” is “covering.” Apart from this lexical definition, little is known of it. The progeny of Reuben included one of the sons of Joel who was named “Gog” (1 Chron 5:4). Nothing more is said of this person—he is simply listed as one of Reuben’s descendants. He is not related to the “Gog” of Ezekiel, who wrote around 500 years later.

**It seems unnecessary to say students of  
Scripture must take special care NOT to**

## explain the Word of God within the context of humanly-conceived theologies.

The only association we have with this name is that of an enemy of the people of God. Ezekiel's prophecy is a particularly difficult, because the person and land to which he refers are not specifically defined. Neither, indeed, are there meanings assigned to the words by lexicons, as ordinarily given to names. The whole matter has been shrouded with a degree of mystery, like Melchisedec, king of Salem. While something specific is no doubt encased in this passage, it appears as though the Lord has shut men up to thinking in terms of principle concerning Gog and Magog. That is the manner in which I will approach this passage, not feeling comfortable with many of the popular interpretations created by men—even honest and good men.

According to Ezekiel, "*Gog, the chief prince of Meschech and Tubal,*" would be joined by Persia, Ethiopia, Libya (African continent, excluding Egypt), Gomer (Aryans, from Southern Russia), and Togarmah (Armenia is considered most probable)—Ezek 38:5-6. Ezekiel's prophecy foretold a massive invasion against Israel. After Israel had been gathered from all nations and brought to dwell safely in their land, Gog and his horde would come over them "*like a storm,*" and "*like a cloud to cover the land.*" This, Ezekiel said, would take place "*in the latter years*" (38:8-9). These enemies would think that because Israel dwelt in "*unwalled villages*", "*all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,*" they could override Israel easily.

In a remarkable parallel with our very text, the Lord informs this evil multitude He would be "*sanctified*" in Gog before the eyes of all nations (38:17). At that very time, when Gog comes up against God's people, His "*fury*" will come up in His face, and the fire of His "*jealously*" will burn in fiery wrath. Surely, the Lord affirms, "*there will be a great shaking in the land of Israel*" (38:19). The destruction of the enemies would be so great, "*seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land*" (39:12). The grand conclusion, according to the Prophet, is staggering. "*So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword*" (39:23).

It is not clear if Ezekiel and the Revelation are referring to precisely the same event. However, they are referring to exactly the same principle. The focus of Ezekiel was Israel. Some, taking a historical view of the Ezekiel text, say the prophecy was fulfilled when the Scythians came up against Israel early in the seventh century BC. That was, indeed, a devastating time for Israel. However, the Lord's wrath did not burn against those Scythians at that time, nor was He sanctified before the eyes of all nations according to Ezekiel's prophecy. The historical view that text, in my judgment, is only a surface view, lacking much.

Compared to Ezekiel's prophecy, the Revelation refers to "*the camp of the saints*" and "*the beloved city*" (20:9), both of which are much larger in scope than the nation of Israel. Further, suddenly turning our attention to a consideration of the nation of Israel alone does not blend when the tenor of the passage. We have been speaking of the binding of Satan and "*the nations*" being deceived no more. Now Satan is to be loosed to "*deceive the nations.*" He will gather opponents, going "*upon the breadth of the earth*" (20:9). Further, this book is written to "*the churches,*" not to the Jews. Its value is found in its relevancy to the reign of Jesus, not a detailed disclosure of Israel's future. The ancient people of Israel ARE included in the Revelation, but they are not its focus.

The Spirit is borrowing the language from Ezekiel to describe the futility of Satan's effort to remove the saints. The impression being made is not that of meticulous details, i.e., times and places. Rather, the Spirit is confirming to our hearts the absolute control exercised by the heavenly realms. The nature of our adversary is also declared. The devil himself is unchangeable. His purpose remains the same, together with his intent to fulfill it—even though he is shut up for a thousand years! Too, those who do not receive the love of the truth remain debased in their nature. As soon as Satan is given leave to work, they will at once side with him in open opposition to the saints of God. The absolute fallenness of men is not to be denied.

## THE FRUSTRATED ATTEMPT

Even though Satan was bound, and his cause could

not flourish, and although the knowledge of the Lord covered the earth as the waters covered the sea, yet they remained “*strangers and pilgrims in the earth*”

“*9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.*” The language is awesome! You get the picture of a multitude of inimical hosts covering the earth and surrounding the saints of God. They are rallied by the devil himself. Those who are not in Christ ARE aligned against the people of God. If they do not break forth against them, it is only because they are restrained by the King of kings. However, given leave by God, they will be mustered against believers.

### **THE CAMP OF THE SAINTS**

Notice, the saints are encamped, thereby depicting their temporal residence in this world. Even though Satan was bound, and his cause could not flourish, and although the knowledge of the Lord covered the earth as the waters covered the sea, yet they remained “*strangers and pilgrims in the earth*” (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13). A professed church that courts the friendship of the world will be destroyed by it. Further, a religion that allows for close identity with the world is more from Satan than from God. Believers do move in and out among the godly, but they do not “*camp*” with them. They are “*in the world,*” but they are not “*of the world*” (John 17:14). Any comfort they enjoy in this world is but temporary. If their enemies are subdued, it is only for a season. Until the heavens and the earth pass away, we live by faith and maintain separateness from the course and fashion of this world, which is passing away (1 Cor 7:31).

The message of the Revelation assumes the pilgrimage of believers in this world. They have been chosen “*out of the world*” (John 15:19), and are being oriented for “*the world to come,*” over which they will preside (Heb 2:6; 6:5). If these realities are ever forgotten, we will not be able to “*hear what the spirit is saying unto the churches.*”

### **THE BELOVED CITY**

Here the people of God are declared to be the objects of Divine affection. While

it is true that God “*so loved the world,*” this is never said of Jesus. When His love is declared, it is pointedly said to be upon the church—his body. “. . . *having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end . . . we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us . . . the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me . . . Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us . . . Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her . . . To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood*” (John 13:1; Rom 8:35-38; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; Rev 1:5). There is such a remarkable consistency on this matter one wonders how it could possibly be missed. The love of God is only realized in Jesus Christ.

### **THE LOVE OF GOD**

When the love of God the Father is declared, it also is said to be focused upon those in Christ Jesus. “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) . . . Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace . . . In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins . . . We love Him because He first loved us*” (Eph 2:4; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 John 4:10-11,19).

The ONLY place in all of the Bible that God is said to have loved the world is John 3:16. It is a marvelous expression, and is not to be in any way despised or minimized. Neither, indeed, is it to be distorted. Notice, the expression is in the past tense: “*loved.*” The MANNER of the love is also highlighted: “*SO loved.*” The love was provisionary, and not an expression of preference or delight. That love was exhibited in the sending of the Son into the world to provide a means through which God could be “*just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). That is a marvelous love, furnishing a means to personally experience Divine love.

However, when it comes to those who are “*beloved*” of God—or who are BEING loved by God—the privilege belongs only to those in the Son. They are a city that is loved by God and Christ—a body of people residing in Divine favor. They are preferred by God, honored by Him, and the focus of His

# No person is commended in Scripture for having a love for sinners. However, believers are consistently applauded for having love for the saints

attention. Presently, they are a city in encampment—on the move. But the day is coming when they will “*go no more out*” (Rev 3:12). Individual believers are looking for that “*city*” with great anticipation (Heb 11:10; 13:14).

The people of God are also called a “*city*” because they gravitate toward each other. The means through which they become apparent to the world is not their love for the world, but their love “*for one another*” (John 13:35). No person is commended in Scripture for having a love for sinners. However, believers are consistently applauded for having love for the saints (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; Phile 5,7; Heb 6:10). The love of the brethren is our personal evidence we *have “passed from death unto life”* (1 John 3:14). While this view conflicts sharply with contemporary representations of Divine love and Christian love, it is the viewpoint of Scripture. There is not a single deviation from it throughout God’s word.

## **SURROUNDED!**

Once loosed, Satan wastes no time rallying the unregenerate. They have a single focus, having embraced the cause of the devil. It is NOT to corrupt the government! It is NOT to defile the educational system! It is NOT to contaminate the family structure. When Satan is given leave to gather his hosts together, he does not set out to bring a nation down. His is more focused than that! A destroying flood proceeds from him that is calculated to carry away “*the woman*” —the saints of God (Rev 12:15). A fallen nation is bad. A fallen church is worse! The deterioration of the family structure is alarming. Disintegration within the church is worse! When the education system becomes corrupted by distorted philosophies, it is contemptible. When the church is contaminated by false teaching, it is worse!

## **SAINTS AT A DISADVANTAGE**

This vivid picture shows the church at an apparent disadvantage. From all human

perspectives, the situation appears hopeless. Frequently Scripture uses the word “*compassed*” to depict the apparent advantage of the godless. The wicked men of Sodom “*compassed*” the house of Lot (Gen 19:4). The wicked Syrians “*compassed*” the house in which Elisha resided (2 Kgs 6:1). The 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm presents the coming Redeemer as being “*compassed*” with strong opposing forces (Psa 22:12,16).

The 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm presents the need to trust the Lord, even when surrounded by seemingly insurmountable odds. In language much like that of our text, the Psalmist cries out, “*All nations compassed me . . . they compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about . . . They compassed me about like bees*” (118:10-12). That is the situation described in our text. It is a condition that has existed throughout history, but will particularly come to pass at the close of time.

This tactic of the devil is mentioned elsewhere in the Revelation. “*For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*” (16:14). That evil gathering was thwarted by the coming of the Lord (16:15-16). Again it is written, “*And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army*” (19:19). The utter frustration of their intent is again declared: “*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone*” (19:20).

The wicked will be taken at the height of their power. Satan will be brought down violently and decisively when he appears to be invincible. That is the Lord’s manner, for in so doing He gains honor and glory for Himself. When our adversary seems to have the upper hand, we must believe that he does not really have it!

### **AND FIRE CAME DOWN**

Suddenly, under these seemingly impossible circumstances, “*fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.*” With an abruptness of which God alone is capable, the intent of the devil is thwarted. The saints are not harmed. The

*“beloved city”* is not destroyed. The devil only gathered his forces together so they could be openly and finally destroyed by the Lord God Almighty.

When the people of God are tempted to imagine they are at a disadvantage, they must bolster their hearts by a recollection that the disadvantages all belong to Satan and his camp. His time is *“short”* and his purpose destined to fail! It is not the possibility of his removal that is affirmed, but the surety of it!

Like Pharaoh AND his armies were destroyed in the Red Sea (Ex 14:17; 15:19), so the wrath of God will fall upon Satan and all those allied with him. This is not a matter of conjecture. Hear the Word of the Lord. *“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”* (2 Thess 1:7-9).

It makes no difference how aggressive evil is, how numerous those who perpetrate it are, or how successful their efforts appear—all wicked initiatives will be brought to an abrupt end. It will be a God-glorifying, devil-debasing conclusion!

Some are persuaded this passage is dealing with Northern nations flooding down against Israel, only to be destroyed by Divine fire. I do not for one moment rule out the possibility of such a thing happening. We must not allow godless academia to rob us of a sense of God’s mighty power. However, neither must we allow a cramped view of Scripture to rob us of the comfort it is designed to bring. Your faith requires the rich consolation that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus IS the King of kings—even of Satan. Your heart needs the confidence that comes from being persuaded ALL of Satan’s efforts will be frustrated by the lord—whether they are against an individual, Israel, or the body of Christ in particular. Anything and everything he purposes is temporal.

Notice the finality of the Divine act, and let it strengthen your heart. The devil was loosed. He quickly marshaled together enemies of the saints. Like an unconquerable horde, they went upon the breadth of the whole earth. With

malicious intent and seeming invincibility they surround the saints. All appears hopeless. But do not let your vision end here. Scan the horizon of eternal purpose! Lift up your eyes and see the baring of the Lord's arm. "*And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them!*" A sudden end to an impossible circumstance! O, the glory of the sight! How often the saints need to hear that evil can come to an abrupt end!

## THE DEMISE OF THE DEVIL

The lake of fire, however, will also house all who have been "*deceived*" by the devil. Just as all those who have embraced Jesus will be with Him, so those who have espoused the cause of Satan will dwell with him.

***" 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."*** O, how we need to hear of the end of the devil! In the very beginning, before the transgressing pair was expelled from the Garden, God told the devil of his end. We must never tire of hearing of it. "*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel*" (Gen 3:15). To give us hope in the good fight of faith, we are told the bruise has already been delivered to the devil. It was administered in Christ's death, during which the "*heel*" of the Messiah was bruised. How glorious the words. "*That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*" (Heb 2:14). Now our adversary is powerless in the heavenly places. He will yet be powerless in every place.

By the time of this text, two of Satan's wicked initiatives have already been absolutely thwarted. The "*beast and the false prophet*" have already been removed, and their dominancy brought to a grinding halt. Political tyranny against the saints, and religious corruption will both be absent when the "*knowledge of the*

*Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.*” Unregenerate hearts will still exist, but they will not be able to form coalitions or launch a drive against the saints.

This perspective is seen in the words, “ ***The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are.***” There is no battle here, no resistance by the devil, and no retaliation by his forces. The devil is simply removed from the scene, and cast into the place “*prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt 25:41). The lake of fire, however, will also house all who have been “*deceived*” by the devil. Just as all those who have embraced Jesus will be with Him, so those who have espoused the cause of Satan will dwell with him.

The “*lake of fire and brimstone*” does not denote annihilation but Divine cursing and removal from the arena of influence. It is also a place of unutterable suffering. The devil and his confederation “*will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*” Earlier, the future of those who were deceived by the devil is described in similar terms. One additional perspective, however, is added. Such “*shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb*” (14:10). The lake of fire will afford those consigned to it the vision of the holy angels and the Lamb of God, Whom they rejected. The emphasis is on the condemned beholding the angels and Jesus, not on the angels and Jesus beholding them. It is not that the sight will provoke a desire to be with the Lord—that will be an impossible thing for the damned. The devil hated the sight of Jesus when He was upon the earth. He will hate it even more from the lake of fire. His torment will be accentuated by his inability to do anything about his foaming hatred. The same will be true of “*the beast and the false prophet.*” Their utter frustration, as well as their surrounding, will contribute to unspeakable suffering and torment.

Those imagining God is incapable of consigning people to such a state must consider the destiny of the devil. It is exactly the same destiny to be shared by everyone who made a place for the devil, embracing his delusion and ignoring the Lord’s Christ. There is altogether too little thought about these matters in the contemporary church. Enough must be said about this to make the slothful ill at ease with their manners. Truly, “*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31).

## THE TIME OF DIVINE VINDICATION

***“ 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”***

When referring to the place of Divine rule, “throne” is never used in the plural. The use of the word “*thrones*” consistently refers to under-rulers, and never the Lord. The places occupied by earthly rulers are “thrones” destined to be cast down (Dan 7:9). Jesus said the twelve Apostles would sit upon “*twelve thrones*” (Matt 19:28). All forms of authority, seen and unseen, are included in the “*thrones*” created by our Lord and for Him (Col 1:16). Earlier in this chapter, John saw those living and reigning with Christ seated upon “*thrones*.”

Worship and praise are directed toward this throne. The destiny and duration of men are determined at this throne. Here is where the extent and length of Satan’s influence have been set. From this throne saints are nourished and protected.

But when it comes to the residence of Divine authority, we never read of “*thrones*,” only of “*throne*.” No less than forty-one times, the Revelation refers to God’s “*throne*” (1:4; 3:21; 4:2,3,4,5,6,9,10; 5:1,6,7,11,13; 6:16; 7:9,10,11,15,17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3,5; 16:17; 19:4,5; 20:11; 21:5; 22:1,2,3). It is the place of determination and accountability. Here is where both blessings and judgment are dispensed. Worship and praise are directed toward this throne. The destiny and duration of men are determined at this throne. Here is where the extent and length of Satan’s influence have been set. From this throne saints are nourished and protected. This is, in every sense of the word, “*THE throne*.”

In every instance where “*throne*” is used in the Revelation, it comes from the same word: “*thronos*” ( **θρόνος** ). It will now be seen as the place where every person will give an account, and from which their destiny will be announced.

This throne is seen from various perspectives in the Word of God. It is “*the throne of holiness*” from which righteous decrees are executed (Psa 47:8). Because the reigning Christ is made known from this throne, it is called “*the throne of His glory*” (Matt 19:28; 25:31). The dispensing of needful grace comes from this throne. Therefore it is called “*the throne of grace*” (Heb 4:16). But, it is a single throne—a solitary place from which Divine determinations are executed, and before which every created being shall stand.

#### A “Great Throne”

This is a “*GREAT*” throne. It is “*great*” by nature, not only in appearance. It excels all other thrones, dominating in judicial authority. It is “*great*” in sight, compelling the attention of everyone. When this throne is seen, no one will be looking elsewhere. It is also “*great*” because of the judgment emitting from it.

#### A “White” throne

Here purity, righteousness, and justice are enforced. There will be no fault charged against the Lord at His throne. Men find fault with God in this world, but it is only because they are not aware of His presence. When all stand before the “*white*” throne, every mouth will be “*stopped*.” It will become clear that the Judge of all the earth does “*right*,” and only “*right*” (Gen 18:25).

#### The “Throne”

This is the place where absolute Sovereignty is expressed. God is truly “*above all*” (Eph 4:6). The Lord Jesus, to whom all judgment has been committed (John 5:22), is “*Head over all things*” (Eph 1:22). This is not a place of delegated authority, like that of earthly dignitaries.

Crystallized views of the last time have been developed that employ the words “*the great white throne judgment*,” making it a unique judgment. As cherished as it may be, such phraseology is not found in Scripture. In my judgment, this leaves us with no alternative but to view both the throne and the judgment within the context of what the Spirit has elsewhere said of them.

## **The Fleeing Earth and Heaven**

We are beholding a glorious throne and a glorified Lord. It is precisely the same throne that has governed all affairs from the beginning. It is also the same Lord that was exalted above all things, and given a name that is above every name. God has promised to unveil the exalted Son. As it is written, “*He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim 6:15). This is the point to which we have come in the Revelation—the showing of the Son.

As it is written, “*the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus*” (Acts 3:13). That glory transcends the natural order—so much so that it cannot be unveiled and the natural order remain. The Lord repeatedly reminds us of the transitory nature of “*the heavens and the earth which are now*” (2 Pet 3:7). They are “*reserved for fire,*” and will “*pass away*” (Matt 24:35). That passing is specifically associated with the coming of the Lord. As it is written, “*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*” (2 Pet 3:10).

Some has suggested the fiery destruction of the heavens and the earth will be the result

of nuclear warfare. This is an imagination. Not only the earth will be affected by the declared end, but the heavens, or universe, as well. Man is not capable of removing what God has put into place. The heavens and the earth came into existence “*by the word of the Lord*” (2 Pet 3:5). Their destruction, we are told, will be accomplished “*by the same word*” (2 Pe 3:7). Novel views of Scripture often betray a lack of familiarity with the truth.

## **GLORY WILL BE THE MEANS**

Our text provided an expanded view of Peter’s prophecy. It is the “*face*” of the glorified Lord that will be the means of appointed destruction. Nothing that is natural can survive exposure to the face of the Lord. What has been infected by sin cannot abide the fulness of Divine glory. This is what the Lord meant when He apprized Moses, “*You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live*” (Ex

33:20). Indeed, when ONLY a portion of His glory was revealed, the earth itself convulsed as though it was coming to an end (Ex 19:18; 20:18; Deut 4:11-12; 5:22; Judges 5:5; Psa 68:7-8; 104:32).

The shroud of mortality has been draped over the entirety of creation. Because of that circumstance, the glory of the Lord will bring an end to the era of defilement for nature.

The nature of the Lord is in sharp conflict with everything that is made. Thus it is written, *“A fire goes before Him, And burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; The earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth”* (Psa 97:3-5). In very vivid language, the Psalmist spoke of the revelation of God. *“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him, And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him”* (Psa 50:3, NKJV). Daniel alluded to the same thing when he wrote, *“A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him”* (Dan 7:10, NKJV). Nahum spoke of the same thing. *“The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein”* (Nah 1:5). Malachi adds his word to this matter of the effect of the Lord’s glorified presence. *“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch”* (Mal 4:1). Finally, the Spirit adds a confirming word in the book of Hebrews. *“For our God is a consuming fire”* (Heb 12:29).

Thus, when the King of glory appears, nature will not be able to abide His presence—to say nothing of His enemies! The heavens and earth themselves will flee from the face of their Maker. Thus will come to an abrupt conclusion everything that is transient.

No place will be found for anything that defiles or has been defiled! As the result of man’s sin, *“the heavens are not clean in His sight”* (Job 15:15). The shroud of

mortality has been draped over the entirety of creation. Because of that circumstance, the glory of the Lord will bring an end to the era of defilement for nature. Unlike unredeemed humanity, *“the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,”* longing for deliverance *“from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Rom 8:22). That deliverance will come when the face of the Lord is seen.

The Lord’s appearance (when we see *“His face”* ) will conclude the time when good and evil are mingled. The stewardship of evil will be finished. Because the drama redemption shall be complete, the stage upon which it was enacted (the earth) will be destroyed. The age of resistance will be over. Temptation will no longer exist. God’s people will no longer be strangers and pilgrims in any sense. The fleeing of the heaven and the earth involves all of this. There will be no evidence of temporality in any form. When the glory of the Lord is unveiled, all of nature will flee away! The very notion of a glorified Christ reigning upon a temporal stage is absurd. Glory and flesh cannot mix—that is why the glorified Christ returned to heaven. As long as the world remained, He could not remain there in a glorified state. Even so, when He returns, the earth will not be able to remain.

I cannot leave this section without exulting in the marvelous effects our Lord’s coming will have upon the saved. The revelation of the Lord will bring great joy to the redeemed. As Isaiah wrote, *“And it will be said in that day: Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation”* (Isa 25:9).

The same coming that destroys the devil and his hosts will liberate the saints of God. The same coming that will consume all of His adversaries will change all of His people. The heavens and the earth will flee from before His face, but we will rejoice and be exceedingly glad. As it is written, *“but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:2, NKJV). The very same appearance shall affect all of these thing

## **THE BOOK AND THE BOOKS**

***“ 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”*** What an awesome sight is before us! From one perspective, we are seeing “*the end of all things*” (1 Pet 4:7; 1 Cor 15:24). From another view, however, the coming of the Lord will be the beginning of things. For the enemies of God, it will be the beginning of accountability, punishment, and retribution. For the saints, it will be the beginning of an eternal reign, complete conformity to the likeness of their Lord, and a life without hostility or disruption. For creation, it will be the beginning of the freedom from the curse and mortality. In fact, life is to be viewed with this verse in mind.

This is not the first time John has been shown “*the dead.*” At the very beginning of the book, the churches are alerted to the return of Jesus and the inevitable confrontation that will take place as “*every eye*” sees Him (1:7). In the eleventh chapter John was exposed to “*the time of the dead,*” when saints will be rewarded and sinners will be destroyed (11:18).

John sees “*the dead, small and great, stand before God*” –the ultimate confrontation. The word “*dead*” can be seen from two perspectives. First, it is all who were slain in the fall of mankind–those “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13)–in other words, the entire human race. Second, and more specifically here, it is all who were subject to the Divine appointment of death (Heb 9:27). By saying “*small and great,*” the Spirit is again emphasizing that all men will be there. “*Small and great*” is a Divine synonym for everyone (Gen 19:11; 1 Sam 5:9; 2 Kgs 23:2; Acts 26:22; Psa 115:13; Rev 11:18).

**The day of judgment (and it is always in the singular) is a time of Divine vindication. Here the reasonableness of both condemnation and salvation will be openly displayed.**

This will take place after every word of God has been fulfilled. With great power Peter spoke of Jesus being retained, or remaining, in heaven until everything the prophets declared has come to pass. “*And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was*

*preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:20-21). Now, in a gigantic assembly, “*the dead*” stand before God. He does not say “*the rest of the dead,*” but “*the dead.*” He does not say “*the dead in Christ,*” but “*the dead.*” This is “*the time of the dead,*” and is precisely described in the eleventh chapter. “*Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth*” (11:18). All of them, will know why they are there. The saved of the nations will be rejoicing and the lost lamenting—but they will all be there. Judgmental believers are reminded of this occasion. “*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*” (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).

Some have concluded this is a different judgment because of the term “*judgment seat.*” This expression is taken from a different word than “*throne.*” The word translated “*judgment seat*” is *bh,mati* (ba-ma-ti). Fastening upon this expression, the doctrine of the “*bema-seat*” judgment has been developed. This teaches that sinners will be judged at a different judgment and time. The saints are said to be rewarded rather than judged, at a previous time. This simply does not blend with the rest of Scripture. Believers are told what will occur at the “*judgment seat of Christ.*” “*For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Rom 14:11-12).

Jesus spoke of the separation of the sheep from the goats as taking place when the nations are gathered before Him (Matt 25:32). At THAT time, the “*sheep*” will enter into their inheritance, and the “*goats*” will be thrust from the presence of the Lord into “*everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt 25:3-41).

“*The books*” that will be opened are the works of men. With remarkable consistency, judgment is always said to be “*according to*” our works (Rom 2:6; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 11:15; Gal 6:7-8; 2 Tim 4:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 10:12-13). Our Lord went so far as to say, “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment*” (Matt 12:36). On the positive side, Malachi speaks of the heavenly recording of gatherings of those

fearing the Lord. *“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name”* (Mal 3:16).

Daniel also spoke of these books, looking forward to the time when judgment would be take place. *“A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened”* (Dan 7:10). What far reaching vision was given to this holy prophet!

A day of accountability is coming! O, that more professed believers were convinced of this! Those having rule over the house of God, who speak to them the Word of the Lord, will also give an account for the flock. *“They watch out for your souls, as those who must give account”* (Heb 13:17). Due consideration of this accounting will have a favorable effect on our labors for the Lord. A failure to recall the time when we stand before the Lord will contribute to slothfulness and spiritual sleep.

### **WHY ARE THE BOOKS OPENED?**

The *“books”* are not opened to determine who is saved and who is lost. That is determined while men live in the world. Jesus once said, *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already”* (John 3:18). He does not say the believer WILL not be condemned, but that such *“IS not condemned.”* Nor, indeed, does our Lord say the unbeliever WILL be condemned, but that he is *“condemned already.”*

### **A TIME OF DIVINE VINDICATION**

The day of judgment (and it is always in the singular) is a time of Divine vindication. Here the reasonableness of both condemnation and salvation will be openly displayed. The worthiness of the redeemed will be displayed, as well as the unworthiness of the wicked. For some, this is too difficult to receive, for they imagine the saints possess no worthiness. But this is not the case. Their worthiness is not owing to their own goodness, to be sure, but nevertheless, it is very real. Of the faithful few in dead Sardius, the Lord said, *“they shall walk with Me in white,*

*for they are worthy* ” (Rev 3:4). Christ has “ *made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*” (Col 1:12). The spirit says of those who refused to thrust the Word of the Lord from themselves, “*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city*” (Rev 22:14). The day of judgment will declare the rightness of believing in Christ, abandoning the world, and resisting the devil. The worth of denying oneself, crucifying the flesh, and being a stranger in this world will be shown.

Too, the uprightness of the condemnation of the wicked will be apparent. God will be found absolutely true in all of His sayings. As it is written, “*let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged*” (Rom 3:4). Every person refusing to yield to the Lord has judged the Lord unworthy of their obedience. They have pitted themselves against the Lord, choosing their own way over that of their Creator.

The Lord has told us our thoughts, words, and deeds will some day confront us. (Matt 12:36; 16:27; Mk 4:22; Lk 12:2-3; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:13; 4:5). The books WILL be opened!

While men are upon the earth, the books are not opened. There are secret things that are written in the books that are known now by no one but God. But that will not always be the case.

The greatness of salvation will be seen, as well as the absurdity of sin and transgression. While men are upon the earth, the books are not opened. There are secret things that are written in the books that are known now by no one but God. But that will not always be the case. God will “*judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ*” (Rom 2:5). Things that were “*hidden*” in this world, will be “*revealed*” in the day of judgment. Our Lord declared, “*For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad*” (Mark 4:22). Some who appeared good and upright will be seen as corrupt and depraved. Others, appearing to men to be naive and foolish will be seen as God’s

kings and priests.

## ANOTHER BOOK

The “books,” we will find, are perfectly coordinated with “another book.” This is “*the Book of Life*,” or the record of those who are “*alive unto God*” (Rom 6:11). This book is mentioned by name eight times in Scripture. Paul spoke of fellow workers “*whose names are in the Book of Life*” (Phil 4:3). Jesus promised the overcomer, “*I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life*” (Rev 3:5). In a description of those who were ultimately deceived by Satan and his evil confederacy, the Spirit identifies them by where their names were NOT recorded. “*All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8). Those enamored of Satan’s representative are also described as those “*whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 17:8). Later, those dwelling forever with the Lord are portrayed as “*those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life*” (Rev 21:27).

The relevancy of this “book” is made known in a telling remark about those who dare to tamper with the words of Revelation. Those taking away from these words are told “*God shall take away his part from the Book of Life*” (Rev 22:19). A solemn warning, indeed.

Particularly for those who do not believe such a thing is possible! This was spoken by the Lord of glory Himself. Further, the removal of the names of offenders will be accomplished by God Himself. Men do well to abandon doctrines that cause them to deny the affirmations of scripture.

## Another Way of Saying “Eternal Life”

The term “*Book of Life*” is another way of saying eternal life. Not only do the saved know God, God also knows them! Thus, when speaking of our identity with God, the Spirit says, “*But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God . . .*” (Gal 4:9). This kind of knowledge was prefigured in faithful Moses. Of him the Lord said, “*for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name*” (Ex 33:17). Jesus also said, “*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep*” (John 10:14). And again, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them*” (John 10:27). The Spirit declares in First Corinthians, “*But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him*” (1 Cor 8:3). We are told the day is coming when we will “*know*”

even as also we are “*known*” (1 Cor 13:12). And who can forget the marvelous affirmation of Second Timothy 2:19: “*Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: The Lord knows those who are His.*”

These are all references to “*the Book of Life*” –the recognition of those in Christ Jesus by both the Father and the Son. In this world, not even the most godly of all people have been shown this book. Each person does well to know whether they are written in it. But in the day of judgment, the full contents of the book will be disclosed.

### **Names Written in Heaven**

Another way the Scriptures speak of this book is found in Hebrews 12:23. There the saints are referred to as “*the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.*” As citizens of heaven, their names are recorded in the appropriate register. To have your name written in this book is a cause for great rejoicing. When confronting a rejoicing number of disciples, returning from remarkable victories over the powers of darkness, Jesus spoke of a greater cause for rejoicing. “*Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20).

O, for the day when “*the Book of Life*” will be opened–the register of every one who is alive and sensitive to God. This is the roll of those “*acceptable to God*” (Rom 14:18) and “*approved in Christ*” (Rom 16:10). It is the listing of those whom “*Christ has received to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:7).

All people are not alike! There is a group of individuals who are loved and honored by God. He knows them by name, and His Son intercedes for them. His Holy Spirit helps their weaknesses, and strengthens them within. His holy angels are dispatched to serve them, assisting them in their journey to glory. Their names are in the Book of Life.

The day is coming when these people will be disclosed to the assembled universe. The angels know who they are now, and will know who they are when they gather them from every quarter of heaven and earth. But some day everyone will know!

The Son of God will step forward, as it were, and acknowledge them before the Father and the angels. As it is written, *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matt 10:32). *“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God”* (Lk 12:8). That is another way of saying the Book of Life will be opened. Make every effort to be sure your name is written there. The day of judgment is coming, and you have an appointment to be there (Heb 9:27). You have nothing to fear if your name is in *“the Book of Life,”* and everything to fear if it is not. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure (2 Pet 1:10), so that when the Book of opened, you will be glad.

## EVERYONE IS THERE

*“ 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”*

There is coming a day when we will mock the grave.  
Even now, we do it by faith, looking forward to the resurrection. *“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”*

The Spirit now underscores the thoroughness of the day of judgment. Everyone will be there! Everyone affected by sin will be affected by Divine judgment. A large percentage of graves are in *“the sea.”* For the most part, these are lost from both view and mind. Think of mass of people who died in the flood. Who can estimate the vastness of the number? They will ALL stand before the *“great white throne.”* Since the flood, there have been localized floods, and sea disasters in which untold millions have died. They will all be brought back to stand before *“the great white throne.”*

*“Death and Hades”* will yield the dead that are in them. *“Death,”* in this case, is the grave, or abode of the body. *“Hades”* (“Hell” in the KJV), is the abode of spirits. Upon death, the spirit and the body are separated. That is what death means,

separation. Each part of man, the seen body and the unseen spirit, are consigned to separate places until the time of resurrection.

## **“DEATH”**

The Scriptures have much to say about the grave, i.e., “*death*,” or the place where the body is interred. Presently, it has swallowed up humanity, appearing to be victorious. Through Hosea, God has spoken to the grave, “*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes*” (Hosea 13:14). The word “death” refers to the general residence of dead bodies—the earth—and not to particular graves, like “*the grave of Abner*” (2 Sam 3:32), the “*grave of Lazarus*” (John 12:17), etc.

“*Death*” is a prison house for the bodies of the deceased. Jesus, however, has the “*keys of death*,” and will open this prison when He returns in all of His glory.

There is coming a day when we will mock the grave. Even now, we do it by faith, looking forward to the resurrection. “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*” (1 Cor 15:55). In obedience to God, the time is coming when death will deliver up the dead who are in it. The earth will “*cast out her dead*” (Isa 26:19). And when will that occur? When the Lord is revealed. When He face is seen. Even the grave will not be able to survive the coming of the Lord!

## **“HADES”**

“*Hades*” is mentioned eleven times in Scripture (Matt 11:23; 16:18; Lk 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; 1 Cor 15:55; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14). In all of these texts, the KJV translates the word “*hell*.” The word “*hades*” is a general word denoting an unseen place for departed spirits.

Those who have departed from this life are not unconscious. Their bodies “*sleep*,” but they do not. They are, however, confined to an unseen realm. There is such a sparse amount of information revealed about this abode that we do not well to develop a rigid view of it. We do know that Jesus was not able to be confined

there, as Peter affirmed. *“For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption . . . he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption”* (Acts 2:27,31). There you have both realms, death and Hades, visited by the Lord Himself. Neither realm could contain Him. As Peter declared, *“whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it”* (Acts 2:24).

Jesus also referred to *“The gates of Hades”* (Hell, KJV). He was not referring to the realm of the damned, but the realm of the dead. Of His Deity He said, *“on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”* (Matt 16:18). The thing against which the gates would not prevail was preeminently His person, and secondarily His church. What He was saying is both Himself and His church could not be confined by death. He would come back from the region of the dead, and so will His church.

### **COMPLETE PERSONS**

Each person will stand before the Lord in a complete state—spirit, soul, and body. Consider the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Both of their bodies will be raised, and both of their spirits will come from the realm where they were consigned. Spirit and body will be rejoined in the resurrection to stand before the *“great white throne.”*

### **THE EXTENT OF THE SITUATION**

The extent of the judgment is challenging to consider. Not Only will all men confront the Lord Himself, they will also confront one another. Those whose records have been provided in Scripture, and from whom we should have learned, will be at the judgment. We will be acutely aware of them, and they of us.

**Not Only will all men confront the Lord Himself, they will also confront one another. Those whose records have been provided in Scripture, and from**

## whom we should have learned, will be at the judgment.

Jesus spoke of this matter. For those who refuse to repent, even when they are confronted with the truth of their condition and the glory of the Gospel, Jesus gave this word. *“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here”* (Matt 12:41). And what will an impenitent generation have to say when they *“rise up?”* How will people, for example, in Joplin, Missouri explain their obstinance before the likes of Nineveh. Nineveh heard no Gospel, yet did repent.

For those who do not extend themselves to appropriate available truth, Jesus said these words. *“The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here”* (Matt 12:42). Knowing that Solomon had greater wisdom than she did, the queen of Sheba *“came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue”* (1 Kgs 10:1-13). She asked him hard questions—questions no one else could answer. What will those who have not inquired of Jesus—who have not sought His mind—say when she rises up in the day of judgment. She will not remain seated when she beholds people who had access to the *“treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* in Christ Jesus, yet did not take advantage of them. People who have remained fundamentally ignorant of the Scriptures, God, Christ, and salvation, will surely confront the Queen of Sheba, as well as the Lord of glory. How will they account for their spiritual obtuseness before her?

Jesus also spoke of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and how they will appear on the day of judgment. *“And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”* (Matt 10:14-15). As wicked as those cities were, they did not have the advantage of Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, the ministry of Jesus, the Apostles, or the Scriptures. Their sin, as wicked as it was, is not as bad as that of those rejecting the Lord’s Christ and His great salvation. The righteous judgment of God will find it *“more tolerable”* for Sodom and Gomorrah than for such people. Adding to this, Jesus said to Capernaum, *“for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day”* (Matt 11:23-24).

To Chorazin and Bethsaida, where Jesus did “*most of His mighty works*” (Matt 11:20), the Lord spoke of confronting Tyre and Sidon. “*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you*” (Lk 10:13-14). The curse of the Lord against Tyre is recorded in Isaiah 23:1-18. It is mild when compared to those who have been exposed to the working and word of Christ, yet have remained in unbelief!

### **THE SAINTS WILL JUDGE**

The saints will not only stand before the throne themselves, they will participate in the judgment. “*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*” (1 Cor 6:2-3). It is in this sense that we will be given “*power over the nations*” (Rev 2:26-27). The tables will be reversed! Those who judged the saints in this world will be judged by them on the day of judgment. This is involved in the promise of our Lord to those in Philadelphia. “*Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet , and to know that I have loved thee*” (Rev 3:9).

The day of judgment will not be a simplistic occasion. The gathering of every created personality together before the holy God is certainly not to be taken lightly. The affair will not be for merely making announcements. It is a time of Divine vindication and justification. Every single word the Lord said will be shown to be true. Every single person who contradicted His word will be shown to be foolish. Every individual who embraced the Lord and His word will be shown to be right. To fail to prepare for this inevitable day is foolish, indeed! We have not only been apprized this day will surely come, but have been given everything necessary to prepare for it.

### **JUDGED ACCORDING TO WORKS**

Many have stumbled over the statement that men are judged “*according to their works,*” even though this is the ONLY way judgment is presented in Scripture. How is it possible to be “*saved by grace,*” yet be “*judged according to our works.*” First, the question is really out of order. God has affirmed both to be true, which

should be an end of all controversy. “*By grace*” we are “*saved*” (Eph 2:5,8). Too, we will be judged “*according to*” our “*works*” (Rev 20:12,13).

Salvation is not something theoretical or psychological. It is very real and effectual. A new heart is really granted, together with a purged conscience and a clean moral slate. The person in Christ is “*a new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17). That salvation, duly heeded, results in “*good works.*” Even though we are NOT justified by works (Rom 4:2; Gal 2:16; Tit 3:4,5), salvation does not exclude them. The Word of the Lord is very clear on this matter. “*By grace you have been saved . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Eph 2:5-10).

Those who are not characterized by “*good works*” are outside of the realm of salvation. Their life is a contradiction of salvation, and not evidence of it. Christians must stop explaining the absence of “*goods works.*” These “*good works*” are not defined by men, but appointed by God. It is another way of saying living by faith, walking in the Spirit, or living unto God (Heb 10:38; Gal 5:17; Gal 2:19).

There is a perfect coordination between the works of believers and their salvation. New life in Christ does not erupt in devilish activity. The absence of good works indicates the absence of spiritual life. Thus, when they are judged according to their works, the effect of salvation will be publically displayed to the glory of God and the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is gloriously effective, as the judgment will confirm.

## TEMPORAL RESIDENCES DESTROYED

The “*lake of fire*” is a place of absolute separation from God. Divine wrath will not be mingled with mercy, as it is now. Not a shred of goodness, consideration, relief, or hope will be

found in “*the lake of fire.*”

**“14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** The extent of “*the end of all things*” challenges our souls. We have already been told the “*beast and the false prophet*” were “*cast into the lake of fire*” (19:20). The devil will also be cast there (20:10). Whoever was not found written in the Book of life will be thrown there (20:15). Here, however, we read of something impersonal that will be cast into the lake of fire. “*Death and Hades*” (Hell, KJV).

These are both temporary residences. They depict the place where bodies are held and spirits reserved until the resurrection. The final destiny of the damned will, in fact, be the “*lake of fire*” –not the grave, and not Hades, or Hell. The final destiny of the saved is to “*ever be with the Lord.*” There will be no release of the condemned from their final destination. Nor, indeed, will the saved ever again leave their final abode.

The earth will no longer be in a temporal state, condemned to the “*bondage of corruption*” by the curse. Flesh and blood will no longer exist as we know it. There will be no more births, initial or spiritual. No one will ever again die. Thus, there will be no need for death, or the grave. There will also be no further requirement for Hades, or the place of departed spirits. Having no further utility, both “*death and Hades*” will be cast into the “*lake of fire.*”

There will be no more comfort in Abraham’s bosom, for the saved will be “*with the Lord.*” There will be no more souls “*under the altar,*” crying out for the avenging of their blood. They will ever be with the Lord. There will be no more souls in hell, like the rich man of Luke 16. He will be in the lake of fire. Thus, both “*death and Hades*” will be “*cast into the lake of fire,*” together with the damned. I do not know all of the ramifications of “*death and Hades*” being where the condemned are. Perhaps the fear and dread of these places will be part of the reward of the wicked.

### **The Lake of Fire**

The “*lake of fire*” is a place of absolute separation from God. Divine wrath will

not be mingled with mercy, as it is now. Not a shred of goodness, consideration, relief, or hope will be found in *“the lake of fire.”* The eternal lament will rise from this awful realm, *“The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!”* (Jer 8:20).

This condition is described in the words of Second Thessalonians 1:9. *“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power”* (NIV). This is a very real situation about which speculation is completely out of order.

### **ANYONE NOT FOUND WRITTEN**

The very thought of not being found written in the Book of Life should awaken a resolute spirit in every person. Remember, *“there is no respect of persons with God”* (Rom 2:11). There is no hope for anyone whose name is not found in *“the Book of Life.”*

The ramifications of this are significant. The *“Book of Life”* is the Divine record of those *“alive unto God”* –who are *“known”* by Him. It is the record of those in fellowship with God’s Son, whose lives are *“hid with Christ in God”* (Col 3:3). Here are the names of those who KNOW the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom He has sent (John 17:3).

Anyone and everyone that are not in this category do not have their names in the Book of Life! The outcome of that circumstance is succinctly stated. *“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”* They will be eternally consigned to the same place as the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. They will occupy the same realm as everyone who was deceived by the devil. The villains and despots of the world will be their associates—and yet they will not be able to join hand in hand.

Those bold enough to give due thought to this matter will find it influencing the way they live. They will be provoked to view the Lord Jesus more intently, and expose themselves to the Word of God more consistently. This message is written *“to the churches.”* They are to give heed to it, working out their own salvation

with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-12). Their efforts will be undergirded by Omnipotence, and cannot be in vain.

## CONCLUSION

We have dealt with an unusually controversial passage of Scripture. The controversy, however, has not been caused by the passage itself, but by what men have said about the passage. If we will rise high enough, great benefit can be derived from this text. If we remain on a lower and more fleshly plain, the text will generate more questions than answers, and we will find ourselves in conflict with other believers. A proper view of the text will promote unity, not disunity. It will also tend to strengthen and enlighten believers, emphasizing the glory of redemption and the danger of rejecting or neglecting it.

A brief recollection of the broad perspective of this text will serve to confirm these things.

- ▀ Satan will be contained for a significant period of time, during which he will not be able to deceive the nations.
- After a time of binding Satan will be loosed to deceive the nations throughout the world.
- He will gather those deceived by him in a confederacy to do battle against the people of God.
- The camp of the saints will be surrounded by this wicked host.
- Those who are surrounded are loved by God.
- The aggression is abruptly terminated when fire comes down from heaven and devours them all.
- The devil is summarily cast into the lake of fire, where he and his cohorts will be tormented day and night forever.
- There is a great white throne, and One upon it, before whom the heaven and earth cannot remain.
- Once removed from the Lord's face, there will be no place for the fleeing heaven and earth.
- All of the dead will stand before God.
- The books of human deeds will all be opened.

- The Book of Life will also be opened.
- Men will be judged out of the books, in strict accordance with their works.
- The sea will give up all of it's dead.
- Death, or the abode of interred bodies, will give of the dead in it.
- Hades, or the abode of departed spirits, will yield up the dead in it.
- Everyone will be judged according to their works.
- Death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
- Whoever is not found written in the Book of Life, will be cast into the lake of fire.

Faith CAN take hold of those affirmations. They must be taken into the heart as they are stated. If done so, the Spirit will expand them to us, showing their relevancy to the life of faith.

Some general conclusions are in order. These are supported by all of Scripture, and have no affect upon the text itself.

- Only heaven can bind Satan.
- Only heaven can release Satan.
- Men gravitate to sin by nature.
- Satan's chief work is deception.
- Wicked men can be rallied against the church.
- It is not possible to side with Satan, or yield to his deception, and yet be saved.
- It is not possible to identify with Jesus and cleave to Him, and be lost.
- Those who do not live unto God cannot be saved.
- Those who live to the Lord cannot be lost.
- Nature cannot survive the confrontation of the full glory of Christ.
- All men will eventually confront God. Better to come to know Him now, in preparation for that confrontation.

As you can see, there is good reason to *"receive"* Christ, and walk in Him. As it is written, *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him"* (Col 2:6). Be encouraged to do precisely that.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 39

# GOD WITH MEN

" 1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God: 4 and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. 5 And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true. 6 And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part *shall be* in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death. " (Rev 21:1-8, KJV)

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Revelation an exposition of both temporality and

eternality has been given. An understanding of both is essential to being an overcomer. All trial and affliction is temporary. Struggle and oppression are transitory. The devil is our foe, but only for a while. The forces he rallies are a threat, but not for long. The bottomless pit, when opened, brings great testing to the inhabitants of the earth, but it is limited. The most fierce of all opponents, the first and second beast, Babylon the great, the false prophet, and the great harlot—they are all temporary. For those in Christ Jesus, life is eternal, and every competitive influence temporary. This world is transitory, the world to come is a “*world without end*” (Eph 3:21). That world is our focus!

How much this perspective is needed among us! Hardship, opposition, and deficiency are all temporary! Temptation, warfare, and disappointment are momentary! A defensive posture, debilitating weakness, and captivity in every form are passing. None of these things, grievous though they be, can be approached as though they will never end.

All spiritual retrogression, however minute or momentous, takes place because this perspective is lost. Those who are drawn into sin have forgotten its pleasures are only “*for a season*” (Heb 11:25). It is imperative that the church be the “*pillar and ground of the truth,*” majoring on things that make for clarity of vision and maturity in understanding.

Much, if not the majority, of what represents itself as being *Christian* majors on the things that are passing away. Vast religious enterprises are given over to “ministries” that are limited to this world and will quickly pass away when time is no more. Let none imagine that assisting the fatherless and widows in the affliction, doing good to all men, and assisting the needy are unworthy activities. They are most assuredly a part of the ministry of the saved. But they are all hands and feet, not the heart of our work. At no point are such ministries an end of themselves. They are the result of a proper focus, and not the focus itself.

### **A DIFFERENT EMPHASIS**

The only way to overcome the world is to rise into realms

where it is no longer the prominent thing. As long as this world dominates our thinking, it will control our conduct and distort our perspective.

You may have observed a total absence of contemporary religious emphases in the book of Revelation. The home, marriage, government, social corruption, and the hardships of earthly life are rarely, if ever, mentioned. The reason for this absence is NOT owing to our Lord's indifference toward such things. His earthly ministry confirms His compassion toward those who are suffering under the burden of life. In this book, however, we are given a loftier view of things. The only way to overcome the world is to rise into realms where it is no longer the prominent thing. As long as this world dominates our thinking, it will control our conduct and distort our perspective. Our affection must be on "*things above*" (Col 3:1).

### SOVEREIGN CONTROL

Thus the Revelation confirms the absolute control and government of Christ. The destiny of all things is in His hand, and cannot successfully be opposed or contravened. In a moment Satan can be either bound or loosed, without any resistance whatsoever. Even the duration of our trials are determined in heaven. How vividly this has been affirmed in this book. “. . . *ye shall have tribulation **ten days** . . . And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for **a little season** . . . And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies **three days and an half** . . . And after **three days and an half** the Spirit of life from God entered into them . . . And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there **a thousand two hundred and threescore days** . . . Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but **a short time** . . . And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue **a short space** . . . and bound him **a thousand years** . . . and after that he must be loosed **a little season** . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him **a thousand years**” (2:10; 6:11; 11:9,11; 12:6,11; 20:2,3,6).*

In my judgment, it is a serious error to fasten upon the measures of time that are mentioned. While there can be no doubt that specific durations are involved, it is the control of the Lord that is the point. Whether it is 3 1/2 days or a thousand years, it is the King who determines the duration. Furthermore, all of those periods are associated with temporality, whether for weal or for woe.

## ENTERING THE ETERNAL REALM

Now we enter into the eternal realm. Because all opponents have been removed, the battlefield itself is also withdrawn. Undistracted by the warfare, we will be better able to behold the glories of the world to come. This is nothing less than the fulfillment of God's "*eternal purpose.*" we now will confront the objective for which we have been called and nurtured.

## A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

***"1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more"*** (ASV). What a sight to behold! Later, He who sits upon the throne will confirm, "*Behold, I make all things new*" (21:5). We are now confronting the Divine appointment, the objective for which salvation prepared us.

## THE REASON FOR SALVATION

Here we come to grips with the reason for salvation, the purpose for redemption, and the goal of regeneration. I perceive this to be one of the most obscured realities in all of Christendom. In pulpit and pew, one can scarcely be found who is conversant with the WHY of God's great salvation. The nominal church is so institutionalized it cannot see beyond this world. It is anchored in time instead of "*within the veil,*" and thus is tossed upon the ephemeral waves of "*this present evil world.*" Somehow, men must be persuaded that a "*new heaven and a new earth*" are looming on the horizon—a realm in which a worldly emphasis has no place.

Salvation orients us for "*the world to come,*" with which our text is concerned. No person unprepared to enter into that realm shall have been advantaged by Jesus. That IS the world over which we will rule. As it is written, "*For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Heb 2:5-6).

## **This World Is Not Our Domain**

It is currently being taught in many circles that Christ restored to man the dominion Adam lost. This is not the case at all, and is a serious misrepresentation of the result of Christ's atoning death. The world order has been written off, "*made subject to vanity*" (Rom 8:20). As such, it is not our inheritance. The solemn injunction is not to rule this world, but to overcome it. Because "*the fashion of this world is passing away*" (1 Cor 7:31), it cannot be the primary realm in which our abilities are exercised. Rather, we have been "*raised . . . up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 2:6).

Christ's kingdom "*is not of this world*" (John 18:36). If it was, not only would His people rule over the elements, they would "*fight*" their enemies in the flesh. If it is true that Jesus restored the dominion Adam lost, Paul would NOT have perils in the "*waters*" and the "*wilderness.*" He would NOT have experienced "*weariness and painfulness,*" "*hunger and thirst,*" and "*cold and nakedness*" (2 Cor 11:26-27). What purpose would there have been for "*learning*" how to "*suffer need*" (Phil 4:12), if the most prominent Apostle had dominion over the elements? Or is there one who would dare to say Paul lived beneath his privileges? Why did he have to labor with his own hands (1 Cor 4:12)? Why didn't he command the elements to come to his aid? How is it that he "*suffered shipwreck*" three times? Is it that he did not know he had power over the elements, or that Jesus had restored the dominion Adam lost? I tell you emphatically, this doctrine is false to the core, revealing an abysmal ignorance of the nature and intent of salvation!

## **A New Creation for a New Realm**

Becoming a "*new creation*" in Christ Jesus readies us for the new heaven and the new earth (2 Cor 5:17). It prepares us by uprooting our hearts from the transitory world, and giving us an appetite and affection for "*the world to come.*" Whatever you may think of this world, as long as we are "*in the body,*" we are "*absent from the Lord*" (2 Cor 5:6). Who is there among us that is content with that circumstance? If David yearned for the external "*courts of the Lord*" (Psa 84:2), how much more do those in Christ yearn to be "*forever with the Lord?*"

Through Peter, the Holy Spirit stated the case succinctly. "*Nevertheless we,*

according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13). Are not the hearts of such people lifted when they read these words? “I saw a new heaven and a new earth!” **The expression presumes a longing for such an environment**, “the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest” (Job 3:17). Salvation begins a process that will culminate in our total adaptation to that realm in “spirit, soul, and body” (1 Thess 5:23). That is our ultimate destiny.

### **The Longing of the Patriarchs**

Even before the Law, holy people longed for “a better country, that is a heavenly one” (Heb 11:16 RSV ). Father Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, Whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb

Hidden beneath the realm of the seen is an invisible Kingdom. By faith, we have already received this Kingdom (Heb 12:28). It remains for it to be revealed—to be seen with clarity and joy.

11:10). He was promised a fruitful part of this world, “all the land of Canaan” (Gen 17:8). The promised possession was extensive, and fertile in the extreme. “Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18).

Abraham did arrive in the land promised to him. Yet he remained a stranger while in it, never really settling there. As it is written, “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9). Scripture goes on to tell us, God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on” (Acts 7:5). Abraham did not remonstrate at this circumstance, but looked beyond Canaan to a “better country.” His faith produced this godly reaction.

Can it be that those in Christ would possess less of a longing for a “better country,” and more of an at-homeness in this world than was found in Abraham?

The very thought offends those living by faith.

### **PROMISED BY THE PROPHETS**

What we are reading is the confirmation of promises made through the prophets. With remarkable clarity Isaiah said, “*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind*” (Isa 65:17). In confirmation of the covenant made with Abraham, God spoke to Israel about a new heavens and earth. “*For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain*” (Isa 66:22).

Thus the Lord promised an environment in which His purpose could be executed without contradiction. It would be such a glorious realm, “*the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.*” The glory of the world to come will not only remove the present heavens and earth, it will also dissolve all memories of the defiled realm! In the very fullest sense of the word, “*old things*” will pass away—even from our memory. Everything corrupted by and associated with the old order will give place to the new order!

### **THEY ALREADY EXIST**

The new heaven and earth are not in a state of construction. They already exist. The creation of which He speaks is more from our perspective than that of the Lord. In another place the Spirit says, “*And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may **remain***” (Heb 12:27).

Hidden beneath the realm of the seen is an invisible Kingdom. By faith, we have already received this Kingdom (Heb 12:28). It remains for it to be revealed—to be seen with clarity and joy. Right now, hidden from the eye of the flesh, a realm exists in which nothing defiled can be found. Salvation is designed to prepare us for THAT realm. Faith, which procures salvation, also “*looks*” for the revelation of the new heaven and the new earth (2 Pet 3:13).

## THE FIRST ORDER PASSES AWAY

When the *“first heaven and the first earth”* are removed, it will strip many a soul of everything it counted precious. Life in Christ Jesus is designed to prepare us for this inevitability. Hundreds of years before Jesus came into the world, the Psalmist wrote, *“Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed”* (Psa 102:25-26).

Isaiah wrote of the earth being *“broken up,” “split open,” “shaken exceedingly,”*

The sea is also a depiction of trial, as seen in the Israelites’ confrontation of the Red Sea (Ex 13:18). It also reminds us of the agitating presence of false teachers who are described as *“Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame”*

reeling *“to and fro like a drunkard,”* tottering *“like a hut,”* and falling never to *“rise again”* (Isa 24:19-20). Again, the world is challenged, *“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment”* (Isa 51:6). Our Lord Himself said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away”* (Matt 24:35). Peter affirms that when our Lord returns *“the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”* (2 Pet 3:10 NKJV ). Those counting on this world being permanent are on the precipice of eternal ruin!

Now John is given to see the time when *“the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.”* That means the purpose for them has been concluded. The temporal realm was the stage upon which the drama of redemption was unfolded. Salvation has prepared the people of God for this inevitability. Thus, for them, its passing is not accompanied by trauma or disappointment. Their affection has been uprooted from the passing and anchored in the eternal.

## No More Sea

How precious the vision must have been to John. He had been exiled on Patmos, an Isle jutting out into the Aegean Sea. Of course, the sea is a Divinely appointed

representation of turmoil and agitation. Thus it is written, “*But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*” (Isa 57:20). The sea is also a depiction of trial, as seen in the Israelites’ confrontation of the Red Sea (Ex 13:18). It also reminds us of the agitating presence of false teachers who are described as “*Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame*” (Jude 12-13). No more agitation, turmoil, or unrest in the world to come!

The sea now covers the predominate percentage of our earth. 71% of the earth’s surface is covered by the oceans of the world. Including lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water, nearly 87% of the earth’s surface is covered by water, hiding much of the splendor and resources on the earth.

This is a picture of the curse of sin that has enveloped our world, obscuring Divine benefits from human consideration. Even after we come into Christ, this obscurity remains to a significant degree. The vast majority of what we have in Christ has “*not yet appeared.*”

Thus, when the word is spoken, “*And there was no more sea,*” we are to understand that all forms of restriction, as well as agitation, have been removed.

### **The Total Creation**

The total creation is referred to as “*heaven, earth, and sea*” (Ex 20:11; Psa 146:6; Acts 4:24; 24:15). All of these were infected by sin, and all will pass away!

Before, therefore, we are given a view of the glories of the world to come, it is first confirmed that all that has been cursed will be removed. In this case, as well as all other aspects of the Kingdom, “*the last shall be first.*” Also, as at the wedding feast in Cana, the Lord has kept the best for last (John 2:10). Our hearts must be convinced of the passing of the natural order before we will be able to let it go. Faith, however, can accomplish that task. It is imperative, therefore, that we hear the truth of the matter.

### **The Regenerated Realm**

The “*new heaven*” and the “*new earth*” are the regenerated realm—the new environment for which we have been prepared. Here is “*the creation itself,*” “*delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*” (Rom 8:21). This is the “*world to come*” over which the redeemed will preside (Heb 2:5-6), the “*earth*” the meek will “*inherit*” (Matt 5:5). The “*children of God*” have been prepared for this glorious realm. This is one of the reasons we “*must be born again.*”

## THE HOLY CITY

***“2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband ”*** (ASV). We have been introduced to the new realm, now we will be exposed to the occupants of that realm. Let there be no mistake here, we are beholding the glorified church, “*made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*” A city as a dwelling place is never so described. This is not a place where saints will dwell, but is a depiction of the saints themselves. It is **WHAT** they are that is the point.

### **A Vital Perspective**

Herein is a marvelous commentary on Divine emphasis! With the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the appearance of the new heaven and new earth, what are we given to see? Does the Spirit launch into a description of the new heaven, telling us of celestial bodies and the renewed atmosphere? Is the renewed earth the objective of consideration, with a description of the terrain, the renewed brute creation, and a description of our resurrection bodies? Indeed not!

Immediately, the Spirit speaks of the redeemed—the glorified saints of God. He sees the church aggregate, with every vestige of the curse removed. With perfect preparation, it is ready to dwell forever with the Lord and reign with Him, world without end. The appeal of this passage is not to our carnal curiosity, but to our faith. Those who take this passage and attempt to lead us into a vivid description of **WHERE** we will be are in serious error. The point of the passage is not where **WE** will be, but where **GOD** will be— “*with us.*”

## **We Have Been Introduced to the City**

The Scriptures have introduced us to this city, with which we already have fellowship. “*But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all*” (Gal 4:26). This is the body of the redeemed of all ages. They are termed “*Jerusalem*” because God dwells among them. They are identified as “*above*” because they have been “*raised up together*” and made to “*sit together in heavenly places in Christ jess*” (Eph 2:6).

Jerusalem which is above is also “*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*” to which we have come in salvation (Heb 12:22). Earlier in the Revelation, Jesus referred to it as “*The city of My God*” (Rev 3:12). This is the “*city*” that Abraham sought: “*he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:10). Prophetically, the Psalmist spoke of this city when he said, “*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King*” (Psa 48:2).

The first person to build a city was Cain (Gen 4:17). The last one to build one is God (Heb 11:16). A united people in the land of Shinar conspired to build “*a city and a tower, whose top may reach into heaven*” (Gen 11:4). The “*city of God*” will come down from heaven to a renewed earth.

## **People, Not Structures**

It is necessary to emphasize that we are now beholding people, not inanimate structures. When we think of cities in Scripture, the predominate thought is the people dwelling in them: i.e., Sodom and Gomorrah, Nineveh, Jerusalem, Tyre, Nazareth, Antioch, etc. When Jesus “*beheld the city*” of Jerusalem, He wept over it, saying “*If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes . . .*” (Luke 19:41ff). He was not weeping over the structures, but over the people dwelling there! When Jesus upbraided Chorazin and Bethsaida, likening them to Tyre and Sidon (Matt 11:21), He was not speaking of buildings, but of people.

We must not allow ourselves to become fleshly in our consideration of this passage.

How different the glorified church. It is holy by nature, having partaken of the very holiness of God. No vestige of iniquity is found in it. The inhabitants have no corruptible bodies or souls bent toward the earth.

We are beholding the glorified church, the people of God brought to perfection according to the appointment of God.

### COMPARED WITH BABYLON

One of the chief opponents of the people of God is presented under the figure of a city— *“Babylon the great.”* What a different city! Its end was to become *“the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird”* ( Rev 18:2). Instead of being a *“holy city,”* it is said of Babylon, *“her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities”* (18:5).

Babylon was no mere city of brick and mortar. It was an aggregation of people who conspired against the people of God. What she did can only be credited to people. *“She made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”* (14:8). The *“fierceness”* of God’s wrath was focused against Babylon (16:19). She was *“the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth”* (17:5). Babylon the great was not an architectural wonder, like Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon (Dan 4:30). It was a spiritual wonder—a composite of people who were governed by the devil himself.

Likewise, the *“holy city”* is not a group of impersonal and lifeless structures. This is not an environment for saints, but a place for God Himself to dwell. The glorified saints themselves are the city.

### THE HOLY CITY

The saints of God are precisely that— *“saints,”* or holy ones. In this world, righteousness is imputed, or credited, to them. When they are glorified, they will

be thoroughly holy, spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). God is holy (1 Cor 3:17). The Lord Jesus is holy (Acts 4:27). The Spirit is holy (1 Thess 4:8). The angels are holy (Matt 25:31). The Scriptures are holy (Rom 1:2). **How could an unholy people fit into an environment like that!**

Of old time, the city of Jerusalem was called “*the holy city*” (Neh 11:1,18; Isa 52:1; Matt 4:5; 27:53). But it was not inherently holy. Sin and iniquity were found in it—so much so that God judged it with a grievous judgment. That city was “holy” because of its association with God, not because of its character. That city was holy because God chose to put His name there (1 Kgs 11:36). It was a place of Divine association, where His law, worship, and blessing was found. All of that was in spite of the people comprising its citizenry.

How different the glorified church. It is holy by nature, having partaken of the very holiness of God. No vestige of iniquity is found in it. The inhabitants have no corruptible bodies or souls bent toward the earth. Every remnant of the curse has been removed from them. They are, in every sense of the world, “*the holy city.*”

## THE NEW JERUSALEM

This is the “*Jerusalem*” of a new and eternal order—a different kind of city. Comprised of a perfected people, this Jerusalem will fulfill all of the statements made of her. “*At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD . . . Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness . . . and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth*” (Jer 3:17; 33:16; Zech 8:3).

While it is true that Jerusalem is associated with coming spiritual renewal and blessing, that is but a prelude to the “*new Jerusalem*” which will leave nothing to be corrected.

When earthly Jerusalem is at its best, the nations will “*flow*” into it (Isa 2:2). But that is not the picture being portrayed in this section of Revelation. Rather, this is a Jerusalem into which the Lord Himself comes (21:3). The point is not how the nations respond to Jerusalem, but how God responds to it!

## COMING DOWN

John beholds the city “*coming down from God out of heaven.*” It has been associated with God all along, and in a very real sense has been joined to Him. Yet now it will come into its inheritance.

Here, therefore, the people of God are beheld together, glorified, and coming into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world

In redemption, we become identified with God Himself. We are “*reconciled to God*” (Rom 5:10), become “*servants to God*” (Rom 6:22), and “*bring forth fruit unto God*” (Rom 7:4). We are made “*acceptable to God*” (Rom 14:18), have “*turned to God*” (1 Thess 1:9), and “*draw nigh*” to God (James 4:8). The church is referred to as “*sons of God*” (1 John 3:1), the “*temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:16), and “*the house of God*” (1 Tim 3:15). It is a “*habitation of God*” (Eph 2:22), “*heirs of God*” (Rom 8:17), and “*the elect of God*” (Col 3:12). Here is an association that is too often left out of preaching and teaching. Once seen, however, it brightens the text we are now considering.

From every viewpoint, the glorified church will come down “*from God.*” While they lived on the earth, their lives were “*hid with Christ IN GOD*” (Col 3:3). Those who died were “*absent from the body, but present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). When the Lord Jesus returns, He will “*gather*” the saints together (Matt 24:31). Together they will be “*caught up*” to “*meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thess 4:17).

Here, therefore, the people of God are beheld together, glorified, and coming into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34).

## PREPARED AS A BRIDE

Earlier the people of God are referred to as the Lamb's wife, that "*made herself ready*" (19:7). That description emphasized her personal involvement in the preparation. Now we see her from an even high vantage point. Having been glorified, she is, in the fullest sense, "*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*" The redeemed no longer dwell in tabernacles of clay. Their souls are no longer cast down, nor can they be. They have been glorified and made suitable for eternal and expanded involvement with the Son of God, and with God Himself.

This is why God called them. This is why they were born again, with sins forgiven and their names written in heaven. Remove this glorious event and there is no reason for a Savior, Gospel, or godliness. It is imperative that the people of God be regularly exposed to the "*end,*" or objective, "*of their faith*" (1 Pet 1:9). If we are not given to contemplate our state AFTER the passing of the first heaven and the first earth, we will be confined to futility. If our thoughts are not focused on our involvement with the new heaven and the new earth, we will be unable to please the Lord. This is His appointed objective for us, and it must capture our minds. A religion that emphasizes this world finds no profit in a passage like this. It rather chooses to actually dwell on the things that cannot, by their very nature, remain. This is nothing less than a Satanic snare.

## GOD HIMSELF SHALL BE WITH THEM

***“ 3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God ”*** (ASV). Again, we hear "*a great voice.*" The Revelation began with John hearing "*a great voice, as a trumpet*" (1:10). Later, he was summoned up higher by "*a great voice from heaven*" (11:12), coming from "*the throne.*" Twice he heard "*a great voice out of heaven*" (16:1,17). All of these announced Divine appointments—things that could by no means be averted or effectively contradicted. Now, a "*great voice*" comes "*out of the throne.*" It is the second time such a voice has been heard. The first time it was not a "*great voice,*" as it is here, but was a voice of exhortation. "*And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great*" (19:5). But this "*great voice*" is giving no exhortation. Rather a proclamation is made. What God has determined has come to pass, and the announcement of it reverberates throughout the new heaven and the new earth.

## THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

While there is a sense in which God now dwells in us (2 Cor 6:16; 1 John 4:13), it is in a preliminary sense. God inhabits His people “*through the Spirit*” (Eph 2:22). He does so only in the part of us that has been regenerated—our spirit. We do not yet have the fulness of His dwelling, because there are parts of us that are incompatible with Him, and would be destroyed by his glory. Our bodies most evidently fit into that category.

The dwelling of God among His people is mentioned often in Scripture. We have read of this dwelling before. “*He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them*” (Rev 7:15). This is an immediate dwelling, and is the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy. “*My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Ezek 37:27). There is a marvelous play on words here. In this world, we come to God. In this text, God comes to the redeemed. He comes to dwell with them forever.

## HE SHALL DWELL WITH THEM

In this world, God is a God who “*hides*” Himself (Isa 45:15). There are times when His presence is not apparent, and we must navigate through faith alone.

In the Spirit, God now takes up His abode with those who love Jesus and keep His words (John 14:23). **That aiding presence, however, is conditional.** It must be preceded by loving Jesus in an environment that discourages such love, and keeping Christ’s words in a realm where we must grapple with forgetfulness. Further, Deity now dwells within our hearts “*by faith*” (Eph 3:17).

But this proclamation declares a time when faith will no longer be the means, and contrary influences will no longer be experienced. There will be no more Mediator as we now have. We will never again be unaware of His presence, and the element of mystery, or veiling, will have been removed.

How glorious are the words: “*God HIMSELF shall be with them, and be their God.*” From an experiential viewpoint, it will be just as though the individual and God were the only ones present. There will be an acute and unfading awareness of His presence, His favor, and His purpose. There will be no need for chastisement, correction, or forgiveness. We will no longer “*seek*” the Lord, strive to “*find Him,*” or be unable to see Him with crystal clarity!

### **A LONGING IS PRESUMED**

All of this presumes an intense longing within the saints for the immediate and unveiled presence of the Lord. This is not the passing along of mere information. It is language for the oppressed, good news for the persecuted, and a promise to the longing ones. It all means nothing to people firmly entrenched in this world. Salvation will, if heeded, create deep longings for these very things in the heart of the believer. Where such longings are absent, the Spirit has been grieved and quenched, and the soul is in serious jeopardy.

This message **MUST** be delivered to the people of God! A message that majors on the affairs of this world and fleshly experiences is not from God. Such a word does not have Christ at the heart of it, or heaven at the end of it. It is spurious in every sense of the word, and is to be rejected by the saints. Our religion must not allow us to focus on this world to the neglect of the one to come.

### **THINGS THAT HAVE PASSED AWAY**

Regardless of their volume or frequency, in the world to come God will “*wipe away every tear from their eyes!*” In this world, we wipe tears. In the one to come, they are wiped “**AWAY.**” By this, the Spirit means the things that occasioned the tears will no longer be remembered.

*“4 . . . and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the*

*first things are passed away*” (ASV). I cannot overemphasize the necessity of nourishing the saints with this blessed vision. The things with which we presently contend are only temporary. We dare not approach them as though they are to have no end. The best way to do this is not by philosophizing, or even pretending they are not present with us. Rather, we must heed the voice that comes from the throne. It speaks of the end of things that grieve us!

## THE END OF TEARS

“ . . . and *He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes* .” What child of God does not rejoice to read these words! Tears will not simply cease to flow, God will “*wipe away every tear*.” Until this is accomplished, the tears of the righteous are carefully stored in God’s own “*bottle*” (Psa 56:8). None of them have been shed in vain!

Jesus once promised, “*Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh*” (Lk 6:21). That day is surely coming! Often, like David, we “*drench*” our “*couch*” with our “*tears*” (Psa 6:6). They are an expression of the futility that characterizes our flesh. Were we able to control everything about us, as some liars claim, we would have no tears at all. Our tears are the proof we are not now in control. Sometimes tears are our food “*night and day*,” as we are not able to get away from them (Psa 42:3). Even in the service of the King, Paul sometimes wrote to believers “*with many tears*” (2 Cor 2:4). In Ephesus, the Apostle “*ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:31). He was even thoughtful about the “*tears*” of Timothy (2 Tim 1:4).

Regardless of their volume or frequency, in the world to come God will “*wipe away every tear from their eyes!*” In this world, we wipe tears. In the one to come, they are wiped “*AWAY*.” By this, the Spirit means the things that occasioned the tears will no longer be remembered. Too, the total affect of those occasions will be moved from us. Because this is such an essential matter, it is repeated two times in this book. “*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes . . . God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*” (7:17; 21:4). Isaiah spoke of this blessed time also. “*He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces*” (Isa 25:8). This circumstance is much desired by those living by faith.

This, then, speaks of the affect of life in this world upon us. All such affects will

be removed. Hear it again, and rejoice in the truth of it. *“The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces.”*

## THE END OF DEATH

*“ . . . and death shall be no more .”* With the advent of sin, death entered into the world. As it is written, *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin”* (Rom 5:12). Ruthlessly, death has reigned over the entire human race. The landscape of this world is cluttered with the graves of those *“swallowed”* up by death. There is no time or culture where death has not ruled the race. No one has been able to elude its rule but Enoch and Elijah—and their translation was the result of Divine action, not personal accomplishment. It is even said of the patriarchs who lived by faith, *“these all DIED”* (Heb 11:13). Presently, we face *“the power of the grave”* and its *“sting”* (1 Cor 15:55). We stand at the graves of the godly as well as the ungodly, and mourn the loss of those with whom we have been united, and with whom we have labored.

No matter how long we live in this world, we do not grow accustomed to death. It is *“the last enemy”* to be destroyed—and it surely will be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26).

When Sarah died, the Scriptures tell us *“Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her”* (Gen 23:2). When mighty Jacob died, a gigantic entourage came with Joseph and *“they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days”* (Gen 50:10). When Aaron, the saint of the Lord, died, Israel mourned for him for thirty days (Num 20:29). They did the same for Moses (Deut 34:8). All Israel lamented the death of Samuel (1 Sam 28:3). Those whose lives have proved an advantage for the faithful are sorely missed when they die. Although they go to be with the Lord, the wake of their death leaves tears and sorrow behind them, as well as thankfulness and joy..

When Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, died at the hands of God’s enemies, *“devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him”* (Acts 8:2). It was apparent to them that they had sustained a great loss in the death of Stephen. I have known a few such people in my lifetime—people whose death created a sort of void that caused sorrow.

But the appointed time is coming when there will be “*no more death.*” God Himself will be the plague of death (Hos 13:14), and its “*sting*” will be forever removed (1 Cor 15:55). The curse enforced in Eden will finally be dissipated, praise the Lord (Gen 2:17; 3:19).

There is much involved in the removal of death. There will be no more vanity, futility, or hopelessness in any form. The tendency to fear will be removed, as it is a sister to death. There will be no more fading glory, deterioration in any form, or any kind of separation. How glorious the announcement! “*And death shall be NO MORE!*” Not only will there be no more death, all of the things that accompany it will also forever pass from us.

### THE END OF MOURNING

“ . . . *neither shall there be mourning* [sorrow, KJV ]. ” Mourning, or sorrow, is an offspring of faith. It is a sister to repentance, and is characterized by grief. In this world, those who mourn because of a regret over sin, are promised a blessing. “*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted*” (Matt 5:4). Among other things, that means mourning creates a condition that requires comfort and bolstering. It depletes our resources, and weakens our soul.

There will be no need for the confession of sin, for sin will have been forever banished. No more debilitating weaknesses. No personal unwilling thoughts entertained.

Speaking of sorrow—even “*godly sorrow*”—the Spirit says, “*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation*” (2 Cor 7:10). This, I gather, is the type of sorrow or mourning meant. By saying there will be “*no more sorrow,*” or “*mourning,*” the voice means there will be no more occasion for it. There will be no need for the confession of sin, for sin will have been forever banished. No more debilitating weaknesses. No personal unwilling thoughts entertained. None will ever again be taken captive by Satan, nor will there ever be frustrated desires and ambitions. As Isaiah said, “*they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*” (Isa 35:10). The sorrow produced by the awareness that

we “*come short of the glory of God*” will forever be removed from us (Rom 3:23). Never again will we find “*another law*” in our members, “*warring against the law of our mind*” (Rom 7:23). There will be no more mourning, or sorrow!

## THE END OF CRYING

“ . . . *neither shall there be . . . crying .*” Since the transgression of Adam, there has never been a day when the voice of crying was not rising from the earth. The word “*cry*” does not mean shedding tears, although tears accompany such cries. This is strong longing that erupts from the mouth—i.e., a cry for help, or crying out.

When Jesus approached His death, He cried out to God. Of that occasion it is written, “*Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with **strong crying** and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared*” (Heb 5:7). Who can forget his words from the cross, “*Jesus **cried with a loud voice** , saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46). “*Crying*” is no small word.

Often the Psalmist would say, “*I cried unto the Lord*” (Psa 3:4; 120:1; 142:1), or “*I cried unto Thee*” (30:2; 31:22; 119:146; 130:1; 142:5). One time, when he was surrounded by his enemies, Jehoshaphat “*cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him*” (2 Chron 18:31). Crying speaks of times of helplessness, when fervent calls are sent up to God for strength and protection.

By saying there is “*no more crying,*” therefore, the Spirit means there will never again be a time of crisis! Trouble will never again be confronted. No one will sink in stormy waters, encounter fearful adversaries, or be faced with an end of their own strength. Who is not able to see the blessedness of this marvelous promise. We must hear it often.

## THE END OF PAIN

“ . . . *neither shall there be . . . pain.*” There are at least two kinds of pain, and neither of them is easy to bear. Pain can be in the body or the soul. When Job was

afflicted, he had both kinds of “*pain.*” Because of sin, the woman experiences pain in giving birth (Gen 3:16; Psa 48:6). When Joseph was bound with fetters of iron, he was in pain and hurt (Psa 105:18). Paul confessed that in his labors for the Lord, he experienced “*weariness and painfulness*” (2 Cor 11:27).

Speaking of inward pain, David once said, “*My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me*” (Psa 55:4-5). When pondering the coming judgment of his people, Jeremiah said “*I am pained at my very heart*” (Jer 4:19). How blessed it is to contemplate the time when there will be “*no more pain.*”

I have been with kindred and brethren when they experienced great pain. I have witnessed them gather strength to call upon the name of the Lord as the devil sought to restrain them. I have joined them in their prayers for relief. I also know the distracting influence of pain. Pain of any kind, inward or outward, is diverting and hard to bear.

Let no man or woman of God hide from us the glories of what is to come! When our tears flow, tell us of the time when God will wipe them all away! When we confront death face to face, and even walk into the valley of its shadow, tell us of the time when death will be no more! When we sorrow and mourn, and comfort is difficult to appropriate, tell us of the time when there will be no more sorrow! When we sense the futility of our own strength, and circumstances drive us to cry out to God, tell us of the time when all crying will cease, and we will never again come to the end of our strength. And when pain strikes us down in body or soul, and we are tempted to despair, tell us of the time when there will be no more pain! How we need to hear these things. Faith, which “*comes by hearing,*” requires that they be heard!

## **THE FORMER THINGS**

The magnitude of this expression is remarkable. The Spirit gathers all of the entire temporal order--nature, trials, and disheartening experience--and wraps it in a single phrase: “*former things.*” None of them exist any more. They served their purpose, and thus “*passed away.*” They could not remain a single second after their purpose was fulfilled.

Isaiah adds something significant to the phrase. “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former **shall not be remembered or come to mind***” (Isa 65:17 NKJV ). It is good to know that the memory of difficulties in this world will not haunt us in the one to come. There will be no recollection of injustices, persecution, or even personal setbacks. Not only will the “*former things*” pass away, they will not be remembered.

The yoke of trouble we are called to bear is only for a little while. As for those who trouble us, ponder this blessed Psalm. “*For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more*” (Psa 37:10 NKJV ). When the light of the glory of God floods all things, all adversity, with its memory, will be ended, and never again come to mind! Purity of heart and mind will be total.

## A WORD FROM THE THRONE

**“ 5 And He that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new . . .** (ASV) . With great power, the Spirit has directed our attention away from the warfare. The burdens of both life and death are not now addressed. We are not warned about the devil, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, or the great harlot. At this point, churches are not upbraided because they have left their first love, tolerated false teachers, or for being dead. No congregation is rebuked for defiling their garments or being lukewarm.

The net of the Kingdom has been drawn in, and the fish have been separated. There is no more prayer, no more faith, and no more hope. The objective of all those things has been realized, and we are forever with the Lord. Tears have been wiped away, sorrows drowned in a flood of joy, and death swallowed up of life. Our bottled tears have been exchanged for shouts of joy. What heart is there that is not touched by the scene!

**FROM THE THRONE**

Now “*He that sitteth on the throne*” speaks. He will not speak of the past conflict, but of the blessedness of what is ahead. He will speak to faith providing spiritual substance for us to grasp. This is the throne that is presently ruling the universe. Your spiritual life was commanded from this throne. It is the source of your sustenance and the reason your adversaries have not prevailed over you. The place where our Lord sits is not an easy chair, or a footstool. It is a throne. It is not a place of service, but a position of rule.

Throughout this book, we have heard of and from this throne. Holy associations have been made with it. A brief recollection of some of them will underscore the power of what we are about to hear.

- Victory (3:21)
- Awesome sight (4:2-6)
- Honor and glory (4:9)
- Worship (7:11)
- Providence and control (5:1,6,7)
- Fear and dread (6:16)
- Salvation (7:9-10)
- Service (7:15)
- Care (7:17)
- Prayer and attention to it (8:3)
- Singing (14:3)
- Faultlessness (14:5)
- Finality and fulfillment (16:17)
- Praise (19:5)
- The passing of heaven and earth (20:11).

Now this throne is a “*throne of grace*,” dispensing what is needed to safely navigate through the difficult straits of this world. It is a throne with which we are familiar by both experience and Scripture. We have learned to trust what comes from this throne, neither doubting nor questioning it.

### **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW ”**

Here is a word the saints need to hear—and it comes from the enthroned Lord of glory. It is spoken to those in tribulation (1:9), and is designed to bring a blessing (1:3). The Lord calls for our attention: “**BEHOLD!**” This not word addressed to

those IN glory, but those who are fighting the good fight of faith.

Through Isaiah, God foretold a new creation. *“Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them”* (Isa 42:9). *“Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert”* (Isa 43:19).

Much of what Isaiah prophesied has been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Our God has made a *“way in the wilderness,”* raising up a highway upon which we can travel to glory (Isa 35:8). After making us a *“NEW creation in Christ Jesus”* (2 Cor 5:17), He surrounded us with newness—glorious newness. We have been given a *“NEW song”* (Psa 33:3), a *“NEW name”* (Isa 62:2), and a *“NEW spirit”* (Ezek 11:19). By His grace we have a *“NEW heart”* (Ezek 18:31), a *“NEW man”* (Eph Col 3:10), and a *“NEW commandment”* (John 13:34).

Let this truth warm your heart and buoy up your spirit! Allow it to strengthen hands that hang down and the feeble knees! Better days are coming. **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”**

As great as these things are, they are only a pledge of what is to come. They are to our ultimate destiny what the grapes of Eschol were to Canaan.

Whatever needs to be made new WILL be made new. Whatever sin has infected, God will restore to wholeness. Whatever tends to grow old will be made new. When our bodies are fatigued and grow inadequate, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When our affections are sluggish and must be prodded with exhortations, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When you experience persecution and opposition, and your enemies seem to prevail, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When we experience inner warfare, finding a recalcitrant law within our members, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When we find ourselves doing what we do not want to do, contending

with unwanted thoughts, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** If any one experiences members of his own house becoming his foes, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** If you are called to endure the loss of loved ones, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When tears of sorrow and repentance fill your eyes, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** When our hearts are slow to understand these precious things of God, remember: **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”**

There is NOTHING that will not be made new. **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** There is not an unpleasantness of life or a frustration of effort that will not be changed. **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”** Let this truth warm your heart and buoy up your spirit! Allow it to strengthen hands that hang down and the feeble knees! Better days are coming. **“I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”**

### **WRITE IT DOWN!**

*“And He saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true ”* (ASV) . This is the twelfth time John has been told to **“WRITE.”** For me, this underscores the importance of the Revelation.

- “What you see, **WRITE** in a book and send it to the seven churches” (1:11).
- “ **WRITE** the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (1:19).
- “To the angel of the church of Ephesus **WRITE** ” (2:1).
- “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna **WRITE** ” (2:8).
- “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos **WRITE** ” (2:12).
- “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira **WRITE** ” (2:18).
- “And to the angel of the church in Sardis **WRITE** ” (3:1).
- “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia **WRITE** ” (3:7).
- “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans **WRITE** ” (3:14).
- “ **WRITE** : Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” (14:13).
- “ **WRITE** : Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (19:9).
- “Behold, I make all things new. And He said to me, **WRITE** , for these words are true and faithful” (21:5).

If you are ever tempted to question the outcome of your faith, remember *“these words are faithful and true!”* It is not possible for you to believe them and be

disappointed.

## THE WATER OF LIFE

**“6 And He said unto me . . . ”** (ASV) . The worth of being addressed by the One sitting upon the throne cannot be overstated. It tells us something about the Holy One. Surely this passage confirms the statement of Isaiah. *“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones”* (Isa 57:15). Not only was John’s spirit revived by the words given to him, but all those who read and believe them are revived. These words are pregnant with spirit and life. We must not come to them with an academic magnifying glass, language expertise, and theological precision. Whatever part those things play in the good fight of faith, there comes a time when they must be laid aside. Only faith can grasp the words of Him who sits upon the throne!

### THEY ARE COME TO PASS

**“It is done!”** What a word is this! Only the Lord can speak in this manner, declaring things are *“done”* even before they have come to pass. Faith needs this kind of affirmation. It needs to hear the surety of the things upon which hope is founded. We *“do not know what a day will bring forth”* (Prov 27:1), but we do know the outcome of all things! We do not know if we will live or die by tomorrow (James 4:15), but we do know how everything will turn out! All of our foes will be vanquished, and all things will be made new! The Lord has declared it!

There is not the slightest chance this will not come to pass. The Lord of glory says, **“IT IS DONE!”** He has revealed what He has determined, and nothing can change that! Hear the word of the Lord. *“For I am God, and there is no other ; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning , and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand , And I will do all My pleasure . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass . I have purposed it; I will also do it ”* (Isa 46:9-11 NKJV ).

It is as though the Lord hurls the word in the devil's face, challenging him to overturn it, or cause one jot or tittle of it to fail. At the very beginning, the Lord told the devil what He was going to do (Gen 3:15) –and **He did it !** He announced to Abraham that He was going to bless “*all families of the earth*” (Gen 12:3) –and **He did it !** He revealed He would cause a virgin to conceive and bring forth a Son, and that the government would be placed upon His shoulder (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7)--and **He did it !**

Now the Lord has taken us to the end of time, the conclusion of all things. He has declared the cessation of all trouble, the consignment of the devil and all of his hosts to the lake of fire, and the glorious triumph of the saints. He calls upon believers to peruse everything that has been contaminated by sin, then tells them: “*I make all things new!*” Then, to secure the matter to our heart, He affirms, “***IT IS DONE!***” Speaking from the same perspective the Lord says elsewhere, “*the works were finished from the foundation of the world*” (Heb 4:3).

Why does the Lord speak in this manner? It is because faith requires this kind of word. Faith cannot take hold of ambiguity or things uncertain. Possibilities cannot sustain faith. It needs a sure word from God. We do need to know what to do—what the Lord “*requires*” of us (Mic 6:8). However, we do not live by the commandments, as much as we love them, and as necessary as they are. Faith thrives on Divine affirmation. “*Your sins **ARE** forgiven you for his name's sake . . . you **ARE** not in the flesh but in the Spirit . . . you **ARE** the temple of God . . . but ye **ARE** washed, but ye **ARE** sanctified, but ye **ARE** justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God . . . you **ARE** no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*” etc. (1 John 2:12; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:11; Eph 2:19).

Now faith hears the word, “***IT IS DONE,***” and rests confidently upon it. It reasons that it is just a little while, and we will ever be with the Lord.

## **ALPHA AND OMEGA**

If, in this world, an appetite and thirst for the Lord is

not awakened, there is no hope of being forever with Him. When one contemplates the condition of the contemporary church, this is a most disturbing thought.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Jesus has said this before (1:8,11), and will yet say it again (22:13). This is a word that needs to be riveted in our spirits. It speaks of our Lord’s total control of things. The “*Alpha*” is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the “*Omega*” is the last. In this case, the alphabet stands for all that God has determined to do. It is what brings rationality and order to everything.

In the highest sense of the word, nothing has occurred, or can occur, outside the perimeter of God’s will. The worst atrocity ever perpetrated by mankind was the death of God’s Son. In that single deed, the wickedness of man was unveiled and confirmed. Yet, when assessing that great evil, the Spirit constrained Peter to say to the guilty parties, “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*” (Acts 2:23). Later, the church, joined together in one mind, said of that event, “*For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*” (Acts 4:27-28).

But all of this is pointless if we make no connection with the good fight of faith. We must believe the Lord is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, concerning the destiny of His people also.

In this affirmation, the Lord is assuring our hearts that everything is in His control, and that He is ruling in our favor. When He is finished with the devil, He will cast him into the lake of fire. When the purpose for the present heaven and earth has been completed, they will pass away, and the new heaven and earth will appear. When our warfare is finished, it will pass away, never again to be remembered. Tears will be wiped away, and death, sorrow, crying, and pain will come to an end. Everything will be made new--totally and refreshingly new. IT IS DONE!

## THE WATER OF LIFE

***“I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely .”***

Now our attention is turned to the individual whose soul has been nurtured by grace. It is with great sadness that I must acknowledge the rarity of this type of person within the average church. Notwithstanding that condition, this is the ONLY kind of person that has any promise whatsoever of glory.

The word “*athirst*,” or “*thirsty*,” is not a casual word. The word means **to suffer from thirst, long for earnestly, and have a strong desire for** . Jesus used this very word when pronouncing a blessing upon His people. “*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled*” (Matt 5:6). It is certain that these are the ONLY ones who will realize eternal satisfaction. If, in this world, an appetite and thirst for the Lord is not awakened, there is no hope of being forever with Him. When one contemplates the condition of the contemporary church, this is a most disturbing thought.

David thrice expressed this type of strong thirst. “*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God . . . My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water . . . My soul longs for You like a thirsty land*” (Psa 42:2; 63:1; 143:6). If David could express such strong longings BEFORE grace brought salvation and the Spirit was given to men, what type of longings should be expected today? The truth is that David so far excels the average churchman that is it mind-boggling.

One of the strongest affirmations of this type of thirst is expressed by Paul. It is a standard in the New Covenant. “*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*” (Phil 3:7-11 NKJV ). That properly depicts “*him that is athirst.*”

This promise cannot be overstated. At once you should be able to see it is largely irrelevant in the nominal church. Furthermore, where it is found, it is rarely nourished and encouraged. The individual with a thirst like this is such a misfit in the average congregation that he is looked upon as strange and fanatical.

But the Lord Jesus sees such souls, and speaks to them with power. He knows their hearts, and how they long for His presence and blessing. These people confess, *“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness”* (Psa 84:10). Whatever the world offers them is paltry next to the promises of God. They will forfeit all of the world for but a moment in the courts of the Lord. That is what it means to be *“thirsty.”*

Jesus was attracted to such people when He walked amongst us. On one occasion, during a great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:37-38). Here is a unique aspect of the Kingdom. The thirsty person, after drinking, becomes a secondary resource. *“OUT of his belly,”* or inmost being, will *“flow rivers of living water.”* The drinking begins now, but will be brought to the level of thorough satisfaction in the world to come.

### **Direct Knowledge**

Notice the glorious expression. *“I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely.”* This is a promise of drinking from the Source, without receiving second hand. Now, in this world, the water comes to us through appointed means. The Scriptures, ministers, and edifying assemblies serve up the water. It is true, we draw from the well within, but what we have is nothing to be compared with the *“fountain of the water of life.”* There is more abundance for us.

This is an expression denoting thorough satisfaction—what is longed for is experienced in abundance. In this world, things for which a strong appetite exists may only be enjoyed in small measures. Often there is not an abundant supply of such things. Too, sometimes our appetites are not adequate to ingest large quantities of the desired thing.

But it is not so in the world to come! There, we will have a capacity to receive an abundance. The Lord will never say, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”* (John 16:12). Nor, indeed, will the words ever again be heard, *“Melchizedek, of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing”* (Heb 5:10-11).

The word *“freely”* means gratuitously. That is, He gives it because He wants to give it, and there is no charge. Here is the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”* (Isa 55:1).

Suffice it to say, a religion that does not develop and sustain a voracious appetite for the things of God is a dangerous one. It will, unless overcome, keep a person out of heaven. Rest assured, there will be no one with the Lord who has not fervently desired to be with Him. Those with small appetites are tottering on the edge of a Christless eternity. They are not to be envied!

You will observe that the promise assumes the existence of spiritual thirst—a strong desire for what the Lord has to give. That thirst begins in this world, but will not be fully satisfied until we are divested of our carnal nature and bodies, and the present heaven and earth pass away. Then we will be able to drink freely and enjoy complete satisfaction. Too, that condition will never end! A copious and unending supply for thirsty souls. What a blessed prospect for those who have developed a hearty appetite for eternal things!

## INHERITING ALL THINGS

***“7 He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*** The promises here expressed are not exaggerations. If anything, they are understated because of the infirmity of our flesh. Yet, it is rare that one hears reference to these *“exceeding great and precious promises.”* It is as though the Lord piles blessing upon blessing in His commitments to His people. Twelve

glorious commitments have been made to this point.

1. No more separation from God: *The tabernacle of God with men.*
2. The unhindered and obvious presence of the Lord: *God dwelling with men.*
3. The revelation of our relationship to God: *The saints will be His people.*
4. No more Mediator required: *God Himself with them, being their God .*
5. The impact of all sorrow, trouble, and sin removed: *God will wipe away all tears.*
6. No more separation in any sense. *The cessation of death.*
7. Grief, heartache, and all forms of lamentation ended: *The end of sorrow.*
8. The call for help, deliverance, or rescue, will never again be heard: *No more crying.*
9. Agony, grief and affliction will never again be experienced: *The termination of pain.*

From a practical viewpoint, it will be just as though we were the only ones there. There will be personal access to, and fellowship with, the Lord that has never before been experienced

(10) All things associated with and contaminated by sin will be removed from sight and memory: *The former things passed away.*

11. All things contaminated by sin will be recreated: *Everything made new.*
12. Limited understanding and secondary knowledge never again experienced: *Free access for the thirsty to the fountain of living water.*

Yet, the end is not yet! There will be a personal reward that will confirm the blessedness of the good fight of faith. The child of God will not simply receive some things. There will be no representative inheritance, like we experienced while living by faith. Now we enjoy the “*firstfruits of the Spirit*” (Rom 8:23). Then we will “*inherit all things.*”

This promise is exceedingly large! It includes the new earth (Psa 37:11), God Himself (Rom 8:17), and the Kingdom of God (Matt 25:34). Of old time, Hannah caught a glimpse of the magnitude of the saints’ inheritance. In her prayer of thanksgiving for the birth of Samuel, she said the following. “*He raises the poor*

*from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory* ” (1 Sam 2:8). Isaiah spoke of those inheriting God’s “mountains” (Isa 65:9). Paul reminded us “*things to come*” belong to the saints (1 Cor 3:22).

Also, “*all things*” include everything just mentioned. It will ALL be given to the INDIVIDUAL who overcomes by faith. Not one whit shall be withheld from those who kept the faith and finished their course. Who, knowing this, is not willing to spend and be spent for the Lord?

## **I WILL BE HIS GOD, AND**

## **HE WILL BE MY SON**

The personal aspect of glory needs to be seen. All of the saints will be there, to be sure. There will be aspects of glory that will be accentuated by the togetherness of the people of God. There are other facets of it, however, that are intensely personal. From a practical viewpoint, it will be just as though we were the only ones there. There will be personal access to, and fellowship with, the Lord that has never before been experienced. In this world, we are only introduced to Divine fellowship. We have been “*called into*” it by grace (1 Cor 1:9). However, our present situation limits that fellowship to a significant degree. We are in a body incapable of being close to God. We are in a world that is at war with God. And we are in time, that eventually will be no more. But this will not be the case in the world to come!

Earlier, with an accent on the people of God, it was said, “*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people*” (v 3). Now the promise becomes more personal: “*and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.*”

It is not that God will **begin** to be our God, or that we will **begin** to be His sons. We have already received “*the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father*” (Rom 8:14-17). “*NOW we are the sons of God*” (1 John 3:1). Jesus is “*bringing many sons*” to glory—individuals who have already been adopted (Heb 2:10). But, as wonderful as this is, it is only introductory.

## A Conditional Sonship

In this world, our sonship is conditional. This is because we have not yet been fully redeemed. We are “*waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Rom 8:23). Until that occurs, we must be on guard, vigilant, and faithful.

There is a remarkable consistency in this representation.

- Jesus associated being “*children of the highest*” with loving our enemies, doing good, lending, and hoping for nothing again– **conditions** (Lk 6:35).
- Again, he said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*” – **a condition** (Matt 5:9).
- Those receiving Christ are given power to “*become the sons of God*” – **a condition** (John 1:12).
- Being “*sons*” and “*daughters*” of God is, in a sense, contingent upon separation from defiling influences– **conditions** (2 Cor 6:16-18).
- Now, we are “*all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” – **a condition** (Gal 3:26).
- Being the “*sons of God without rebuke*” is also related to us doing all things without murmuring and disputing– **a condition** (Phil 2:15).

These things do not suggest we are NOT really sons of God. Nor, indeed, do they imply that we fall in and out of this relationship, never able to be confident of our status. What they do suggest is that our sonship cannot be taken for granted. It is something that must be demonstrated, or shown to be true. Our status of “*sons of God*” is held by faith. It is a real condition, but is conditioned upon faith, which overcomes all opposing influences (1 John 5:4-5).

In this world, Adam and Eve can be expelled from the very Garden in which God placed them. Israel can be thrown out of Canaan, after God placed them there. Judas can “*fall by transgression*” after he was made an Apostle. Some can “*depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.*” We are in a war zone, and anyone that imagines there is no danger or jeopardy here has been lulled to sleep by unbelief.

But in the world to come, none of these conditions will exist. There will be no need for shield or armour. Vigilance and alertness, as we know it now, will not be required. No part of us will be unregenerated or require subordination. There will be no jeopardy, danger, or hostility in any form.

Thus, Divine fellowship will obtain a consistency and thoroughness that could not be experienced this side of the veil. That is the condition to which God refers when He says, *“I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”* Then, there will be no *“IF’s.”* Until then, they are very present (Matt 6:14; 17:20; 8:31; 15:7,10,14; Rom 4:24; 6:5,8; 8:13; 1 Cor 11:31; 15:2; Gal 5:18; 6:9; Col 1:23; 1 Thess 4:14; 2 Tim 2:11,12; Heb 2:3; 3:6,7,14,15; 4:7; 10:26; 12:25; 1 Pet 1:17; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 1:6,7,8,9,10; 2:10; 4:12; 5:9,14,15).

Again, this by no means suggests believers live in uncertainty and fear. Faith produces an assurance and confidence that stabilizes the soul, enabling it to live triumphantly in *“this present evil world.”* There is such a thing as the *“full assurance of faith”* (Heb 10:22), and blessed is the person possessing it. But faith is the solitary means by which this is accomplished, and faith is not automatic.

Thus when the Lord says, *“I will be his God, and he shall be my son,”* He means not a solitary influence will diminish or threaten that status. There will be no conditions attached to His presence, because there will be no liabilities or enemies with which to contend. There will be a personal identity with Him that can scarcely be imagined in this world, and it will be glorious! This, dear reader, is what God has called you to!

## A FINAL WORD ABOUT THE UNGODLY

***“8 But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death ”*** (ASV). This book began with the assessment of Christ’s churches. Faults and deficiencies were found in them that jeopardized their relationship to Him. Some were close to being vomited up by Jesus, cast away from His presence. These conditions existed because we are in the realm of danger—an evil world. Now, lest His church become

complacent, the Lord reminds us of the destiny of those who do not fit into the world to come. His words are stern and to the point. If believed, they will assist us in separating ourselves from contaminating influences.

None of the promises just recounted are for those now reviewed. Rather, there is a “*part*” reserved for them in the “*lake of fire.*” That very circumstance reveals the abomination of these individuals.

### THE FEARFUL

These are not those who fear the Lord, but those with the “*spirit of bondage unto fear*” (Rom 8:15). Having the “*spirit of fear,*” they hide themselves from God. They do not draw near to God because His is contrary to them. They are dominated by “*the fear of death,*” and thus devote themselves to things that cause them to ignore that reality. Their dread of facing the Lord does not compel them to seek Him, but to ignore Him. They run from Him in fear, rather than running to Him in reverence and godly fear.

Now, lest His church become complacent, the Lord reminds us of the destiny of those who do not fit into the world to come. His words are stern and to the point.

Their fearfulness “*surprises*” them. As it is written, “*The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*” (Isa 33:14). The idea is that such people do not think of God, live for Him, or plan to meet Him. When suddenly they are confronted with Him, or made aware of His Person, fearfulness rushed into them, thrusting them from Him.

Those who are repulsed by the Lord will certainly have no place in His presence!

## THE UNBELIEVING

What a dreadful description: *unbelieving* ! This is the individual who has not believed “*the record God gave of His Son*” (1 John 5:10-11). The “*unbelieving*” are those without faith, who possess neither the substance of things hoped for nor the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). They stagger at the promises of God, and are not persuaded that God is able to do what He has promised (Rom 4:20-21).

Because of their unbelief, everything they do is defiled. As it is written, “*but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work*” (Tit 1:15).

Being “*unbelieving*” particularly applies to refusing the Gospel. Removing all doubt about the matter, Jesus said, “*he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mk 16:16). In another place He said, “*if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24). Unbelief caused some of the Israelites to be broken off (Rom 11:20). It makes the heart “*evil,*” causing the individual to “*depart from the living God*” (Heb 3:12). Of old time, Israel “*could not enter*” into Canaan “*because of unbelief*” (Heb 3:19). It will also exclude people from glory, and be the cause of them being cast into the lake of fire.

This is not the absence of intellectual assent, but a refusal to trust in and rely upon the Christ declared in the Gospel.

## THE ABOMINABLE

There are people who are themselves “*abominable.*” The Spirit refers to those who profess they know God, but deny Him in their works, as “*abominable*” or “*detestable*” (Tit 1:16). This is the opposite of being “*beloved*” or “*precious*” in the sight of the Lord (Deut 33:12; Isa 43:4). Those who imagine that God has an attraction to everyone are sorely mistaken!

There are some people who are personally reprehensible to God. “*All who behave unrighteously, are **an abomination** to the LORD your God . . . For the*

*perverse person is **an abomination** to the LORD . . . These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are **an abomination** to Him: . . . A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Deut 25:16; Prov 3:32; 6:16-19). At one point the Lord’s own inheritance, Israel, became obnoxious to Him. “Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance” (Psa 106:40).*

It is no wonder such individuals will not enter the Kingdom, but rather be cast into the lake of fire. I find it a matter of great concern that some believe such people do not even exist. They are convinced God “loves everybody,” and is incapable of hating any one. It is written, “*But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates,*” and “*You hate all workers of iniquity*” (Psa 11:5; 5:5). Again, it is written, “*My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; It cries out against Me; Therefore I have hated it*” (Jer 12:8). Men do well to avoid falling into this category!

## **MURDERERS**

Because man is made in the image of God, murder is a particularly serious sin. For man to take life that God has given is an attack against the Almighty. The first murderer was Cain. The Spirit says of him, “*who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother*” (1 John 3:12). Jesus said of the devil, “*He was a murderer from the beginning*” (John 8:44), thereby confirming he is the influence behind all murder.

Murder is taking the life of another. The Spirit expands this sin to include hating ones brother. “*Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*” (1 John 3:15). There is no hope of a person in this condition entering heaven. At some point, such must be separated from this category of persons, or they will have their part in the lake of fire.

## **WHOREMONGERS**

Other versions use the word “*sexually immoral*” (NKJV), “*fornicators*” (RSV), “*immoral persons*” (NASB). The Greek word used here is *pornois*, (porn-ois). It is a man who practices immorality, and particularly refers to sodomites or homosexuals (Thayers Lexicon) .

Here is a sin that has become tolerable in our age. Palatable terms like “live-in” and “single mothers” have been sanctified by the world, to say nothing of “same-sex marriages.” It is not at all surprising to find fornication, and even sodomy, in the average church. Often it is treated with sympathy, and viewed as a simple weakness. But this is not the case at all. There will be no exception to this proclamation. This is a truth that is evident to the faithful. “*For this ye know, that no whoremonger . . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God* (Eph 5:5).

## SORCERERS

The sin of sorcery has been popularized in our day through witchcraft (Wicca), astrology, fortune telling, and psychic phenomenon.

Sorcery is frequently condemned in scripture. Pharaoh had sorcerers who opposed Moses (Ex 7:11). Israel allowed sorcerers to creep into their presence and determine what they did (Jer 27:9). Nebuchadnezzar also had sorcerers (Dan 2:2). Malachi prophesied against sorcerers that had gained prominence among the people (Mal 3:5). Paul confronted a sorcerer in Paphos (Acts 13:6,8), and Peter encountered one in Samaria (Acts 8:9). What sorcery, and why is it condemned.

Because the word “*sorcery*” comes from *mageu,wn* (mag-eu-ov), and means to *practice magic* (Thayer) , some have concluded it was mere slight of hand, or an appearance of something supernatural. That, however, is a modern definition of magic. The “*magicians*” of the Bible were not at all like the entertaining magicians of our day (Gen 41:8; Ex 7:11; Dan 1:20).

**Definition.--** In its modern accepted sense magic may be described as the art of bringing about results *beyond man's own power by superhuman agencies* . In the wide sense of this definition divination is only a species of magic, i.e. magic used as a means of securing secret knowledge, especially a knowledge of the future. Divination and magic bear a similar relation to prophecy and miracle respectively, the first and third implying special knowledge, the second and fourth special

power. But divination has to do generally with omens, and it is better for this and other reasons to notice the two subjects-- magic and divination-- apart as is done in the present work. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

Sorcery has to do with unlawful knowledge--knowledge attained from unlawful sources. An example of this type of knowledge is found in a woman from Ephesus who possessed a spirit of divination. This woman followed Paul for many days crying out, "*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation*" (Acts 16:1-17). Technically, she could not have been more correct. Yet, the knowledge was not obtained lawfully. Therefore, "*Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her*" (17:18).

A similar example is found when Jesus confronted a man with an unclean spirit in a Capernaum synagogue. The spirit cried out to Jesus, "*Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are; the Holy One of God!*" (Mark 1:24). The statements concerning Jesus were precisely true, but they were not lawful when coming from an unclean spirit. Therefore Jesus rebuked the spirit saying, "*Hold thy peace, and come out of him*" (1:25).

The sin of sorcery has been popularized in our day through witchcraft (Wicca), astrology, fortune telling, and psychic phenomenon. The first lady of our land has even sought knowledge from such sources. Law enforcement agencies frequently hire psychics to track down criminals or obtain detailed information about mysterious crimes. Millions of people regulate their lives according to astrological charts, placing great stock in the "sign" under which they were born. These are condemned practices.

In Christ, the meaning of idolatry is expanded to include covetousness: "*. . . covetousness, which is idolatry*" (Col 3:5). In this case, idolatry is serving ones own appetites and desires, something quite

## common in our day.

For some, this is all a lot of delusion. However, the Scriptures do not represent sorcery as a harmless bit of manipulation. Moses warned the people about contact with such people. *“Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God”* (Lev 19:31). He does not say to avoid those who SAY they have *“familiar spirits,”* but with those who HAVE them! Manasseh is said to have *“dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards”* (2 Chron 33:6).

Isaiah also warned the people of God not to seek knowledge from such sources. *“And when they say to you, Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”* (Isa 8:19-20). Seeking consultation from the realm of the dead is condemned by God.

I have provided this somewhat extended explanation because a prevalent view among the people with whom I have been identified. They do not see sorcery as real, but consider it as delusion and mere phantasy. If that is the case, this is the only instance in the Bible where a sin that is unreal is condemned.

## **IDOLATERS**

Here is a sin that ranks unusually high. It was specifically condemned in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:4). It involves the ascription of Divine qualities to something other than God. The Spirit informs us that those serving idols are really worshipping demons (Lev 17:7; 1 Cor 10:20).

In Christ, the meaning of idolatry is expanded to include covetousness: *“ . . . covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Col 3:5). In this case, idolatry is serving ones own appetites and desires, something quite common in our day.

## **ALL LIARS**

This involves more than simple misrepresentations of the facts, although that is certainly not excluded. “*All liars*” are those under the powerful sway of Satan, who cannot speak the truth. Jesus said of the devil, “*When he [the devil] speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is **a liar** and the father of it*” (John 8:44).

Moved by the Spirit, John further defines the liar. “*Who is **a liar** but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son*” (1 John 2:22). In particular, this is the person who misrepresents Christ Jesus, luring people away from Him and His great salvation. John also referred to a “*liar*” as one who claimed to know Christ, yet does not keep His commandments. “*He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is **a liar**, and the truth is not in him*” (1 John 2:4). He also identified the person saying he loved God, yet hating his brother, as a liar. “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is **a liar***” (1 John 4:20).

Paul described the liar as one whose words contradict the word of the Lord. “*God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man **a liar**; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged*” (Rom 3:4).

All such people will be cast into the lake of fire. By their words, they have confirmed they are not possessors of the Divine nature.

There is no chance that people so characterized will enter heaven. Either they become separate from these things in this world, or they will be excluded from the one to come.

All of these traits are contradictory of the Divine nature. Those dominated by them, by that very circumstance, have excluded themselves from the presence of the Lord. These sins remove an appetite for, and appreciation of, the living God.

## **THEIR PART**

Not only do such people NOT fit into glory, they DO fit into hell. There is no place for them in the Lord's presence, but there IS a place for them in the lake of fire. These "*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*"

Eternity will confirm where the individual belongs! In this world, every person is becoming acclimated to an eternal environment. Those who have nurtured godless appetites and lived apart from the Lord will find they simply do not fit into the "*world to come.*" It will be even more offensive to them then than it was when they rejected it in this world.

But those who have "*their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*" will not find it pleasant. They will fit in there, or be suitable for that horrible place, but not experientially. Being incongruous with the realm of glory, their natures will only blend with the order of pain and rejection. Heaven will be distasteful to them, but they will find no relief in the lake of fire. From one point of view, there will be no place where they will be comfortable. All ability to enjoy, be comforted, and be satisfied will be withdrawn from them. They chose to reject the Divinely appointed remedy. It is, to be sure, a most dreadful consideration. They will be miserable in their eternal dwelling. It is a fearful thing to fall into then hands of the living God!

## CONCLUSION

Salvation is designed to develop and nurture an appetite for the glory to come. If the individual does not have an yearning for glory, he will not participate in it. It is most disconcerting to consider the smallness of spiritual yearning that dominates the professed church. It is a condition that is most serious, yet is almost universally ignored. Professional religion caters to the small spiritual appetite. Brevity is the epitaph over most religious gatherings. The people are not there long enough to really get anything from God. What is more, they love to have it so. While the entertainment and athletic media lengthens their programs, the church is shortening its program, even curtailing the number of times they meet together.

And why does this condition exist? Because there is an absence of enjoyment of

the things of the Spirit of God! Some are even bold enough to join the evil Israelites in their petition to the prophets. “*Who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' And to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits'*” (Isa 30:10). Woe to the person who succumbs to such demands!

**Faith cultures an appetite for what God has promised!** It constrains the believer to move toward the fulfilment of those promises by pondering them and preparing for their realization.

This is one of the primary ways we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19-20). There has been a lot of frothy things said about such treasures, and how they are to be “*laid up.*” It is accomplished by setting “*your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:1). If that does not occur, there is no chance of obtaining those things.

In the end, everyone will get what they want. Those who earnestly desired the Lord will inherit Him. Those who did not want Him will go into a Godless eternity. Now is the time to nurture the proper appetites and longings. Now is the time to develop a yearning for what God has promised.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 40

# THE GLORIFIED CHURCH

" Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. " (Rev 21:9-27)

## INTRODUCTION

We are entering into a section of Revelation that is designed to especially comfort and encourage the saints of God. This is a picture of the glorification of the church—something to which she has been predestinated (Rom 8:29-30). Individual believers are frequently told of this coming glory. It is a strong incentive to faithfulness, alertness, and productivity. *“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Rom 5:2). *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor 4:17). *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”* (Phil 3:19-20). *“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory”* (Col 3:4). *“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thess 4:17).

If the people of God are not regularly and powerfully reminded of their coming liberation, life will become too burdensome, and discouragement will find way into their hearts. Too, when such holy reminders are absent, the world becomes stronger in its attraction, and Satan will be more effective in his aggression against the believer. To deprive the saints of hope is to make them vulnerable to the enemy, and weak in the fight of faith.

If there is a single circumstance to which the deplorable state of the

The absence of purity, or holiness, then, is directly related to the absence of hope. Wayward minds, a failure to grasp the significance of Scripture, and the inability to discern good and evil, are all brought about because *“the hope of salvation”* is not worn as a protecting *“helmet”*

contemporary church may be traced, it is the absence of a vivifying and dominating hope. Of this hope, the Spirit says, *“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:3). The absence of purity, or holiness, then,

is directly related to the absence of hope. Wayward minds, a failure to grasp the significance of Scripture, and the inability to discern good and evil, are all brought about because “*the hope of salvation*” is not worn as a protecting “*helmet*” (1 Thess 5:8). When believers are not illuminated concerning the “*hope of His calling*” (Eph 1:18), they cannot be equal to the challenges of Kingdom labor or spiritual conflicts.

## TO THIS POINT

Until this point, the Patmos vision portrayed the church while upon the earth. The contrast between that portrayal and what we will now see is worthy of special notation.

- The church was under the critical assessment of her Lord (2-3).
- The future hidden, only able to be known as unveiled by the Lamb (5).
- A time when Jesus conquers (6:2).
- The removal of peace from the earth (6:3-4).
- Subjected to famine, scarcity, and measured supplies (6:5-6).
- A reign of death by sword, hunger, pestilence, and beasts of the earth (6:7-8).
- Martyred souls whose blood had not been avenged (6:9-11).
- The collapse and removal of the natural order are depicted (6:16).
- The day of the Lamb’s wrath is declared (6:17).
- The servants of God are sealed amidst the threat of impending judgment (7:1-17).
- Divine judgment is portrayed under the figure of seven final trumpets (8:2-11:19).
- The bottomless pit is opened, bringing delusion and destruction upon the earth (9:1-21).
- The Word of God causes bitterness in the belly of the one speaking it (10:9-10).
- The Temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers are subjected to Divine judgment (11:2).
- God’s witnesses are slain (11:3-13).
- Satan is depicted as leveling a fierce assault the church (12:1-17).
- Worldly government, shown as a beast, rises from social turmoil to oppress the church (13:1-10).
- Corrupt religion rises, having the same principles as corrupt government, to deceive and persecute the church. It is pictured as a “*second beast*,” “*the false prophet*,” “*Babylon the Great*,” and “*the great harlot*” (13:11-18-24).
- Only the Lord Jesus, the reigning Lamb, can address the dilemma in which the

saints are found in this world. The enemies must be judged from heaven, else they will not be overthrown (6:15-17; 11:18; 19:1-21).

## A GRIEVOUS ERROR

Those who teach believers have been promised prosperity and success in this world, while they are yet in the flesh, have seriously misrepresented the Lord. They have willingly ignored the forthright declarations of Jesus and the clear teaching of the Apostles. They are also in sharp conflict with the general message of the book of Revelation. For the believer, life in this world is one in which intense warfare and opposition are realized. The warfare not only is all around them, but rages within as well. Apostolic doctrine emphasizes the warfare **within** the believer, accentuating the need for faith, the armor of God, and vigilance (Rom 7; Gal 5:17; Eph 6:12-18; Col 3:1-5).

The book of Revelation emphasizes the conflict coming from **without** the believer, showing it is fierce and unrelenting. That conflict will not totally cease until the devil, beast, and false prophet, together with all who followed them, are cast into the lake of fire. Even though there will be a season when the wicked will not be able to assert themselves, and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas, unholy people will remain unholy. It will only take the release of Satan for a little season to rally those wicked people together and surround the saints (Rev 20:3).

Now we will behold the condition of things WITHOUT the presence of the devil, the beast and the false prophet. The Spirit will now set before our eyes how things will be when the temporal order is no more. The saints will no longer have a treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7). There will be no more struggles within, temptation, or downward pull upon our souls. No part of us will be in bondage, and there will be no form of opposition, resistance, or weakness. It is the time of glory, when we will come into the inheritance that has been reserved for us.

The Spirit will not simply comment on the environment in which the redeemed will be found. He will expound upon the redeemed themselves: "*the bride, the Lamb's wife.*" He will emphasize WHAT we will be even more than WHERE we will be. This is our destiny, and it is the truth. One seen, it exercises a powerful influence on the soul. If this is not seen, the soul becomes weak and debilitated,

unable to cope with life. It is a grievous thing to withhold these things.

## THE BRIDE, THE LAMB'S WIFE

*“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.’”* Behold how versatile the holy angels are. Here is one of the seven angels employed in pouring out grievous Divine judgments upon the enemies of our Lord. Yet, he is not merely a specialist in judgment. He also has keen insight into the glorified people of God. It is my persuasion that the heavenly places remove the tendency to be lopsided. The soul becomes more versatile when dwelling in high and holy places. It can navigate freely in seemingly contradictory realms. This trait is seen in this mighty angel.

The description given of *“the Lamb's wife”* is similar to the description of lovers in the book of Solomon. The language is more lofty than that of Solomon's Song, and it is more appropriate for public articulation.

Again, there is a forward stance in the Revelation. The sight is not brought to John, but John is brought to it: *“Come . . .”* Twelve times this summons is used in Revelation (4:1; 6:1,3,5,7; 11:12; 18:4; 19:17; 21:9; 22:17). It denotes the character of the heavenly Kingdom and of spiritual life. Several times our Lord Jesus used this summons with His disciples, calling them forward to better and deeper things (Matt 11:28; 14:29; Mk 1:17; 6:31; John 1:39; 21:12). The very word presumes intense interest on the part of the one summoned. It also assumes the worthiness of the things to which they are called. While this may appear but a small point, it is not. There is a prevailing circumstance in Revelation that must not be missed. Forward progress is always being made. An upward look is consistently encouraged. The movement is always toward perfection, beauty, and thorough satisfaction. If this is missed, we will soon be distracted by the language, missing the things it contains.

## AN OBSERVATION

There is an additional thing to be seen here. It is something to which we have been introduced in other sections of Scripture. This holy angel, mighty and in glory, “*talked with*” John. You might say John had been brought into a realm where angels were comfortable talking with him. There was a fellowship between this glorious being and the Apostle who was exiled on Patmos. “*He talked with me!*” Scripture teaches us we “*are come*” into the fellowship of “*an innumerable company of angels*” (Heb 12:22). You can see from this text that this is more than simply being in their presence. I certainly do not advocate making attempts to communicate with angels—you have access to the Lord of the angels. However, it is important to see how comfortable they are in the presence of the redeemed. That is proof that a mighty work, indeed, has been done in believers!

## I WILL SHOW YOU THE BRIDE

There is no question about what we are going to behold. The is “*the Lamb’s wife,*” the saved of the Lord, or the body of Christ. Concerning her own activity, she has “*made herself ready*” (19:7). Concerning Divine activity, she is “*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (21:2). This is not a city, as ordinarily conceived, but a people!

### The Bride

John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom*” (John 3:29). These are the people Jesus loved, and for whom Jesus gave Himself. As it is written, “*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Eph 5:25). These are the people who, in this world, were “*espoused,*” or betrothed, to “*one husband,*” the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 11:2). Their marriage is determined to be “*even to Him who is raised from the dead,*” that they should “*bring forth fruit unto God*” (Rom 7:4). In their spirits, they were “*joined to the Lord*” in salvation (1 Cor 6:17). Now, we will behold this vast body, divested of everything inherited from Adam, and clothed with everything procured for them by Christ Jesus. They are ready for Jesus, and Jesus is ready for them.

These people, the redeemed, were not taken from the world and gathered

together for men to manage. They were brought together to be “*presented*” to Christ Jesus (Eph 5:27). They are not people for elders to manage, and self-appointed leaders to direct! They were called out to be a bride for the Son! They are not **primarily** a disciplined and holy people, but the “*Lamb’s wife!*” They are not **primarily** soul winners, but the “*Lamb’s wife!*” They are not primarily good people, but the “*Lamb’s wife!*” They are not **primarily** a rescued people, but the “*Lamb’s wife!*”

Do not imagine this gives license to be unholy, uninvolved in fishing for men, or remain captive to sin. It is being “*the Lamb’s wife*” that brings meaning to these other matters. Remove that from the scenario, and there is no reason for being holy, aggressive to preach the Gospel, or being liberated from the guilt and power of sin. The absence of this perspective accounts for the presence of unrighteousness, slothfulness, and enslavement to sin among those professing to know God. This understanding is all but absent in the contemporary church.

From this view, **the entire economy of salvation** is captured in these words. “*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for His Son*” (Matt 22:2). There you have it! That is what it is all about: God the Father making a marriage for His Son! That is why He is taking out a people for His great Name (Acts 15:14). If you will ponder this truth, at least two things will grip your heart and mind. First, this truth is obvious throughout Scripture when once it is seen with the heart. Second, you will be hard pressed to find anyone at any time emphasizing this central, or pivotal, point of revelation. There are people, devout people, who have never heard any emphasis on heaven, glory, or the Lamb’s wife. They have never made a conscious association between their faith and being a chosen bride for Jesus. It is a tragic circumstance, indeed. Let every one who sees these things devote themselves to appraising kindred spirits of their reality.

## WHAT WE WILL SEE

The description given of “*the Lamb’s wife*” is similar to the description of lovers in the book of Solomon. The language is more lofty than that of Solomon’s Song, and it is more appropriate for public articulation. Metaphorical language is used to accentuate the **character** or nature of the individual. Allow me to give you a few examples.

- “*I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots*” (1:10).
- “*Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold*” (1:11).
- “*Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.*”
- “*Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing.*”
- “*Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet.*”
- “*Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.*”
- “*Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armory*” (4:1-4).

While in this world, the church was also presented under several different figures.

- “*The body of Christ*” (1 Cor 12:27).
- “*Family in heaven and earth*” (Eph 3:15).
- “*The flock of God*” (1 Pet 5:2).
- “*God's building*” (1 Cor 3:9).
- “*God's husbandry,*” or field (1 Cor 3:9).
- “*Jerusalem which is above*” (Gal 4:26).
- “*The temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:16-17).

Now, in even more lofty language, and with more exalted figures of speech, the glorified church will be described. The angel is specific in identifying what will be exhibited: “*the bride, the Lamb's wife.*”

I want to again emphasize that we are not beholding the dwelling place of believers, but **the dwelling place of God and the Lamb**. The glorified saints themselves are the city, and they are where God and the Lamb will make Their permanent abode. There is no reason for any reader to think otherwise. This manner of explanation is found throughout the Word, as I have indicated above. The objective of God is to bring Himself and His people together. The glory of that accomplishment is the subject of this text, and must not be missed. The people of God will now be told what they will become—their appointed destiny. The intent of the message is to bring more rationality to living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

## DESCENDING WITH GLORY

*“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain . . .”*

The vision is so lofty, it cannot be perceived on lower plains. Neither, indeed, can John ascend to the place of showing in his own strength. He must be “*carried*” there in and by the Holy Spirit. Those who imagine the human spirit to be capable of perceiving the things of God by natural means only betray their ignorance of the truth. If John, in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and twice brought up higher, had to be “*carried away in the Spirit*” (4:2; 17:3) to behold the glorified church, how can we be adequate to behold such things in ourselves?

Not only was John himself “*carried away in the spirit,*” he was brought to “*a great and high mountain.*” There are heavenly realities so lofty and transcendent, they can only be revealed in mountainous terrain, far above the plains of this world. Thus the Law was given from a mountain (Exodus 19-20). The glory of Jesus was unveiled in His transfiguration while on “*an high mountain apart*” (Matt 17:1-8). The secret of comprehending the things of God is not bringing them down to the people, but bringing the people up to them. Those who seek to make the mysteries of God more discernible to men by diluting them with the wisdom of this world, carnal illustrations,

Those who imagine the human spirit to be capable of perceiving the things of God by natural means only betray their ignorance of the truth.

and humorous anecdotes, will find themselves hard pressed to justify their approach with Scripture. At some point, the people must be consciously brought into the heavenly realms. That is where both blessings and insight are to be found. The lower you bring the truth, the more diluted and obscure it becomes.

Holy prophets are often described as being “*carried*” away in the Spirit. Ezekiel had this experience (Ezek 3:14; 8:3; 11:1,24; 40:1-3). Philip the evangelist also experienced this (Acts 8:39). Paul spoke of one occasion when he too was brought into exceedingly high places, of which he could not speak (2 Cor 12:2-4). Such

occasions were not frequent, indicating the unusual loftiness of the truths made known in them.

To be carried away in the Spirit is to be dislocated from the natural order. This is necessary in order for spiritual vision to be clear. The closer you are to the world order, the more obscure the things of God become. What we are about to see is NOT the church from an earthly perspective.

There is a certain obscurity to this passage that is required. It cannot be grasped by the carnally minded. It is so phrased that it will not make sense to those with no hunger or thirst for righteousness, and do not seek first the Kingdom of God.

## The Great City

“ . . . and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem.” There can be no doubt about what we are going to behold. It is “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*” It is the ONLY aggregation of humanity God has ever recognized: “ ***THE*** great city.” This is no small group of people—not a remnant as they were upon the earth. They are too vast to number, and too numerous to count. This is “*the GREAT city.*” Here are a people who are orderly, focused, and perfectly joined. It is “*the great CITY .*”

This is the ONLY true dwelling place God acknowledges: “ ***THE*** holy Jerusalem.” It is a “city” because its people are perfectly united, happily dwelling together in the same place and at the same time. It is “*righteous,*” not by imputation, as it was upon the earth, but in reality. There is absolutely nothing about the people, individually or collectively, that is defiled, weak, or unacceptable. It is “*the HOLY Jerusalem.*” This is the real “Jerusalem,” which means tranquil possession,” or “city of peace.” It is the society of ultimate calm and serenity. No form of agitation or disruption is found among these glorified people. There is not a single agitating or wayward thought among them. No hasty or uninformed word proceeds from any of them. No objections or recalcitrance is found among them, neither murmuring nor discontent. It is the “*holy JERUSALEM .*”

Remember! This is “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*” It is the redeemed of all ages, all those who have been brought safely from earth to glory, and time to eternity.

## **OUT OF HEAVEN FROM GOD**

There will be no question about the association of the redeemed with God. Here, they bore His name. There, they will bear His glory! The similarity will be obvious and beyond all question.

“ . . . descending out of heaven from God.” This is the second time this has been emphasized. The 21 st chapter began with these words. “*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (21:2). Now John will get a closer look at the glorified church, to which he has already been introduced. He saw her while in the world, oppressed and persecuted. Now he will see her in glory.

The phrase “*coming out of heaven from God*” must be seen within the context of salvation. The objective of salvation is to bring us into harmony with the Living God. Thus, in redemption, we have been “*raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:6). By means of regeneration and our faith, Jesus has brought us “*to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). Right now, our lives are “*hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3). Our fellowship, right now, is with the Father and the Son, who dwell within us by faith (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3). Those who are “*absent from the body*” are “*present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8).

Upon the removal of the first heaven and the first earth, all temporary conditions and relationships will be brought to a conclusion. This includes the grave and hades, as well as time and trying circumstances. All believers, the body of Christ, who were caught up to be forever with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17), will descend out of heaven to occupy the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34). The time of God’s people has come.

The church is preeminently associated with God the Father. That association has been accomplished through the Son, through Whom we come to the Father. That is why the glorified church is said to descend “*from God.*” His purpose brought her into existence, and His Son brought her to God.

## THE GLORY OF THE REDEEMED

“ . . . *having the glory of God.*” The glory of the church is what she has from God! When we see her in all of her glory, we will not see what she has done, but to Whom she has been conformed. Her achievements will not be the focus. Rather, she herself will be seen to be the achievement of the Almighty. She will have “*the glory of God.*”

In this world, while persecuted and opposed, “*the Spirit of glory and of God*” rested upon her (1 Pet 4:14). However, it was not recognized, and therefore her enemies were not afraid to oppose and attack her. But now we see her revealed, unveiled in all of her majestic splendor. In this world she became a “*partaker of the Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). That participation, however, was only introductory. Now we will see the work brought to its culmination.

There will be no question about the association of the redeemed with God. Here, they bore His name. There, they will bear His glory! The similarity will be obvious and beyond all question. Indeed, “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory*” (Col 3:4).

Earlier in Revelation, the heavenly temple was “*filled with smoke from the glory of God*” (15:8). Now, the people of God themselves have the glory of God, and not as a smoke, obscured by a battlefield and difficult to perceive. It is all apparent—very apparent, with not a jot or tittle to hide it. If an angel could illuminate the earth with his glory (18:1), what will happen when the assembled saved of all ages are seen coming down out of heaven possessing the very glory of God!

When this truth is seen, bringing glory to God in this world makes sense. In fact, it becomes a most joyous activity. Even in this world, the glory of God emanates

from the saints. It is not, however, detected as God's glory by all who see it. Of this circumstance the Scriptures say, "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified*" (1 Pet 4:14).

But this will not be the case when the glorified church is seen coming down out of heaven from God. The glory of God that characterizes her will be unanimously perceived as being that of God. It will be said of them in glory, even as it was said of Israel in Egypt, "*But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue*" (Ex 11:7).

Let us learn from this that the pinnacle of Christian character is not found in human accomplishments, or even in the keeping of the commandments of God with external precision. Rather, it is found in the glory of God being seen in the people who have embraced His Son. A religion that settles for anything less than this, regardless of its seeming success in this world, will have no part in the world to come. That "*form of godliness,*" together with all embracing it, will be thrust from the presence of the Lord.

It is in this sense that Jesus will be "*glorified in His saints*" and be "*admired among all those who believe*" (2 Thess 1:10). Individually and collectively, the saints will bear the Divine image, without flaw.

## **ONE MORE WORD**

Even in this world, the Lord has acquainted us with men having a resemblance to the Living God. The law-giving qualities of God were seen in Moses. The leadership qualities of the Lord were made known in Joshua the captain. Boldness and valor were revealed in Elijah the Prophet. Sensitivity was manifested in David. In Christ, each believer receives a special measure, or facet, of the Divine nature. That measure, activated and sustained by faith, allows the individual to become a "*worker together with God*" (1 Cor 3:9). This is the point that is made in Romans 12:3 and 1 Peter 4:11. "*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith . . . If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus*

*Christ.”*

It all starts here--in this world--and will be culminated in the world to come. This world is not our home, our emphasis, or the object of our affection. Rather, it is the place where we are being oriented for glory, and prepared for the world to come. We are to be regularly apprized of these things.

## THE LIGHT SHE POSSESSES

Remember, this is a vision of the glorified church. Glory is not simply upon the redeemed, but is part of them. They themselves have been glorified! It is not light shining upon the city that brings out its glory, but the light of the city itself.

“Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” The last reference to a “*jasper stone*” was in the fourth chapter. Do you recall it? “*And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald*” (4:3). That reference is to the glory of the Lord himself. Here, it refers to the glory of the people of God! The wall of “*the great city,*” and its foundations, also include “*jasper*” (21:18-19). Remember, this is a vision of the glorified church. Glory is not simply upon the redeemed, but is part of them. They themselves have been glorified! It is not light shining upon the city that brings out its glory, but the light of the city itself. It is “*HER light.*” No longer, therefore, is the glory of the people of God hidden beneath the veil of flesh. The day of her glory has come, and she is bursting with the Divine nature! Then the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled IN the people of God, “*Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee*” (Isa 60:1).

## A PRECIOUS STONE

Throughout the Scriptures, the people of God are represented as precious to Him. To ransomed Israel He said, *“For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life”* (Isa 43:3-4). Jeremiah spoke of *“The precious sons of Zion, valuable as fine gold”* (Lam 4:2). Those genuine and fruitful converts that are built upon the Sure Foundation, Jesus Christ, are referred to as *“gold, silver, precious stones”* (1 Cor 3:12).

In the days of Malachi the prophet, when there had been a remarkable deterioration within Israel, there remained a holy remnant of people. Even though it was not fashionable to meet together for holy and honorable purposes, these people spoke often with one another. Their words did not go unnoticed. *“The LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”* (Mal 3:16-17).

But our text affirms the glorified church had the traits of a stone *“MOST precious.”* That is, even among precious stones, it stood out, excelling, as it were, in glory. It is not the inherent worth of the redeemed themselves that gives them such glory. Rather, the Divine nature, in which they have been granted by grace to participate, has produced the glory now beheld.

## **A JASPER STONE**

The jasper stone was sanctified in the tabernacle, which was an image of the glorified church. It was one of the stones in the High Priest’s breastplate (Ex 28:15-20; 39:8-13). In his denunciation of Satan, Ezekiel mentions the jasper stone in association with Eden (Ezek 28:13). Thus, the jasper stone speaks to us of the glory of God Himself, the worship and service of the Lord God by selected and ordained personalities, and the perfection and goodness reflected in the creation.

## **CLEAR AS CRYSTAL**

Ordinarily, a jasper stone has a greenish color to it—a picture of freshness and life.

But this stone has no shade or shadow whatsoever. It is a picture of perfection and purity– “*clear as crystal.*” Everything is apparent, and nothing is hidden–yet it is saturated with the glory of God.

This should confirm to our hearts the magnitude of our salvation. Although He started with defiled and guilty humanity, the Lord will display the beauty of perfection within these very people. He began by washing us from our sins, cleansing our conscience, and justifying us in His sight. Even though the vestiges of contamination remain in us in this world, it will not always be this way. When we enter into our inheritance, the most precise scrutiny will confirm that not so much as one speck of evil will remain when we are glorified. From a negative point of view, the fulness of glory is nothing less than the absence of every form of defilement, incompleteness, ignorance, and inability. In the world to come there will be nothing distracting or distasteful.

What a glorious prospect is before us. Every child of God has good reason to be strong in faith and hope, giving glory to God. The best is up ahead, and it is all in abundance and truth! Joy and unspeakable satisfaction awaits you.

## THE WALL AND ITS GATES

### A GREAT AND HIGH WALL

*“Also she had a great and high wall.”*

Because the church has known only warfare in this world, time is given to persuade her of coming rest and safety. Keep in mind, the description is not of the place the saved are residing, but of the saved themselves.

More than seven hundred years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the walls we now behold. “*We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks*” (Isa 26:1). Again he wrote, “*but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation*” (Isa 60:18). Prophetically, David spoke of the city of God: “*Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following*”

(Psa 48:12-13). Zechariah also used this figure: “*For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her*” (Zech 2:5).

The passage does not suggest there are dangers lurking around the city. Rather, this vision is intended to comfort the saints with the prospect of uninterrupted safety and fellowship. While we are in this world, we need to hear such affirmations, for we are continually subjected to hostility and danger. What we are reading is not a technical explanation, but words addressed to the hearts of those subjected to the trials of life. Because we are presently incapable of fully discerning the nature of our future state, it is described in words suitable to our situation.

A “*great wall*” is one that is impressive and impregnable. A “*high wall*” is one that cannot be scaled. Thus, we have a picture of absolute safety and security. No more vigilance or armor will be required. What a blessed contemplation.

Satan Gained access to Eden. He will not gain access to the holy city. He penetrated the people of Israel. He will not penetrate there! He found a receptive person among Christ’s twelve apostles, he will find none in the holy city!

## THE GATES OF THE CITY

The passage does not suggest there are dangers lurking around the city. Rather, this vision is intended to comfort the saints with the prospect of uninterrupted safety and fellowship.

We will now behold the glorified church as something that was entered—a body of people with whom affiliation began while yet upon the earth. Remember, “*Jerusalem which is above is . . . the mother of us all*” (Gal 4:26). That depicts entrance into salvation by means of the new birth. Now we will see that same entrance from the viewpoint of the **place** of entrance.

The wall is too high to be scaled, so entrance must be gained through an appointed means— *gates* . Jesus spoke of the same view when He said, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber*” (John 10:1). The idea here is that abundant and complete provision has been made for entering into favor with God. No stone has been left unturned in providing salvation for humanity.

## **Their Number and Guardians**

“ . . . *with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates . . .* ” This imagery is taken from the 48 th chapter of Ezekiel. There each gate is associated with one of the tribes of Israel. The three Northward gates bore the names of Reuben, Judah, and Levi (48:31). The Eastward gates had on them the names of Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan (48:32). The Westward gates were named Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun (48:33). The Southward gates bore the names of Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. Ezekiel’s vision declared a full provision for all of the tribes of Israel.

Twelve is the number of perfection or completeness. It is used twenty-two times in the Revelation (7:5,6,7,8; 12:1; 21:12,14,16,21; 22:2). In every case, a description is given of either Divine activity or Divine provision. The vision of Revelation will confirm to us that an “*abundant entrance*” has been provided for all men.

Each gate is attended by an angel, a guardian, as it were, of the point of entrance. Elsewhere we are taught that angels are specifically “*sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Heb 1:14). Not only are they instrumental in protecting and delivering the saints (Acts 5:19; 12:7-11; 27:23), they are also involved in bringing people to a point of entering into the Kingdom of God. Thus an angel directed Philip to go down to the road of Gaza, in order to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26). An angel directed Peter to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:3-7). An angel also directed Cornelius to call for Peter (Acts 10:22). How extensively the holy angels are involved in our entrance into the Kingdom is not known. However, it is clear they play a vital role. Each gate had an angel. That is, at every point of entrance into salvation, angelic hosts are

involved.

## The Names on the gates

How much we owe to the ancient people! Never should the people of God be encouraged to think less of the tree into which they have been grafted. Israel prepared the way for the Messiah to come, and for the world to benefit from Him.

*“ . . . and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel . . . ”* We now come to another section of Revelation that is highly disruptive of much theology. The Lord does not let us proceed very far in this book without mentioning the ancient people—Israel, or the Jews (Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-3). Now, we find them mentioned again.

Their names are upon the gates of the city. Entrance into salvation is directly related to the Jews, even though this is very difficult for some to receive. It was our Lord Jesus Himself who said, *“Salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:22). They are the ones who received all the promises (Rom 9:4-5). The power unto salvation is *“to the Jew first”* (Rom 1:16).

Elaborating on this facet of salvation, the Spirit argues, *“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if **the root be holy** , so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and **with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree ; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, **thou bearest not the root, but the root thee** ”*** (Rom 11:16-18).

How much we owe to the ancient people! Never should the people of God be encouraged to think less of the tree into which they have been grafted. Israel prepared the way for the Messiah to come, and for the world to benefit from Him.

In the world to come, there will be a high regard for Israel, and we do well to begin now to prepare for that. The names found upon the twelve gates are NOT those of worldly philosophers or politicians, but of the twelve tribes of Israel. Our entrance into Christ cannot be disassociated from the Jews. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received the initial promises in which we now participate. The Law that was given to Israel proved to be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It is their Prophets that still minister to us concerning the magnitude of this salvation. John the Baptist, who introduced the Savior, came from that nation. The twelve Apostles were chosen from this tree. And Jesus Himself sprang out of this nation. Truly, salvation is of the Jews! Eternity will not let us forget these things.

### The Location of the Gates

***“ . . . three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.”*** There are entry points on every side: North, East, South, and West. When the redeemed are seen in the aggregate, we will behold how they came from *“the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south”* to *“sit down in the kingdom of God”* (Lk 13:29). Israel was provincial, but the church is not. Together they shall lift their voices in mighty chorus, *“Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Rev 5:9).

In the end, the holy angels will gather together the elect *“from the uttermost part of the earth”* (Mk 13:27). No part of this world shall be without representatives. We will see that a gate was made available for all peoples to enter into glory, and participate in the marriage supper of the Lord. The knowledge of this is most refreshing to the soul. What a large salvation has been made available to every quadrant of humanity.

## THE WALL HAS TWELVES FOUNDATIONS

***“Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”*** Remember, we are seeing the glorified church— *“the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”* We must discipline ourselves to think of the people of God themselves, not a place where they will reside. It is not that they will have no place to abide. We are beholding the glorified church *“coming down*

*out of heaven from God.”* She will surely inhabit a place—a realm characterized by unspeakable benefits. But first we must see the church itself in the glorified state. It is primarily a place for God to reside, and thus we speak of its glory.

Entrance into salvation is related to the Jews. Now we will see that **stability and illumination** are associated with the Apostles of the Lamb. No individual can claim to have personally discovered salvation: everyone entered through a gate with a Jewish name upon it. Too, no person can boast of having made himself firm in the Lord. The salvation which they experienced had foundations named after the Apostles.

The Word of God associates the foundation of the church with the Apostles. *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”* (Eph 2:19-20). It is through the Apostles that we came to know more precisely of God’s great salvation. Both Peter and Jude exhort us to be mindful of what was said by the Apostles (2 Pet 3:2; Jude 17). They are the *“first”* in order or priority within the church (1 Cor 12:28). Things relevant to salvation have been *“revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit”* (Eph 3:5).

There is a vital truth to be seen here. We are beholding the glorified church. We are not seeing the church in its inception or preparation for glory. The salvation that surrounds her is seen from an eternal perspective. The chief ministry of the Apostles was not their directives concerning moral and spiritual responsibilities, as important as those things are in this world. Their foundational work related to the clarifying of salvation in which we participate. They revealed its basis, effectiveness, and conclusion. They gave our faith something in which to anchor.

The world to come will not find us contemplating or speaking of moral and social responsibilities. There are, indeed, occasions when such matters must be addressed in this world. But we do well to deal with them from a foundational viewpoint, much like Paul dealt with moral purity in First Corinthians 6:18-20. *“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

Foundational perspectives are not common in the average church. That condition, however, is not due to any deficiency of revelation on the matter. The names of the “*twelve Apostles of the Lamb*” are on the twelve foundations of the glorified city because of their message. They clarified redemption in Christ Jesus. They were given Divine expositions of justification, and faithfully communicated them. They elaborated upon the truth introduced by the Prophets and our blessed Lord. They also interpreted the nature of the Kingdom of God, acquainting us with its manners.

## A CITY FOURSQUARE

***“And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.”*** The imagery is again taken from the books of Ezekiel and Zechariah (Ezek 41:1-5; Zech 2:1). Also, John had earlier been exposed to Divine measurement (11:1-2). All of these precious measurements portrayed the assessment of God’s people in time—in this world. The measurements of Ezekiel and Zechariah were anticipatory, in which the true worship of God in Christ Jesus was foretold. Although there are some difficulties related with their visions, they seem to ultimately point to the worship of God in Spirit and in truth. The measurement that occurred earlier in Revelation was one of judgment, in which the church was found faulty.

All three measurements related to time, when flaw and imperfection were present. The comparative smallness of the measurements confirms this to be the case. Ezekiel mentions 2,3,5,6,10,20,70, and 100 cubit measurements, all confined to the temple itself. Zechariah’s measurement was of Jerusalem (2:2), yet, as with the measuring in Revelation 11, no actual measurements are given.

In this world, the church is scattered, being dispersed in both time and circumstance. But that will not be the case in glory. There, God brings together “*the*

## *whole family in heaven and earth”*

But notice the measurements given in this twenty-first chapter. The city is a perfect cube. Each side measure 12,000 furlongs, or 1,500 miles. A furlong is equal to 660 feet. We have, then, a perfect cube with sides of approximately 7,920,000 feet--1,500 miles. How does that compare with 100 cubits, which is 150 feet? That is an appropriate comparison between earth and heaven, conflict and rest, flesh and glory!

The glorified church is to the militant church what 150 feet is to 1,500 miles! There simply is no adequate comparison.

Remember, we are NOT beholding a city in which the people of God will reside, but the glorified church in which the Lord Himself will reside!

An absolute cube, with no varying measurements, signifies perfection in the purest sense of the word. There is no inequality, shortcomings, or disparity. Contradiction and variance will be totally absent in the glorified church. No matter how you look at the glorified saints, they will be perfect and without flaw. All of this was prefigured in the Holy of Holies, which was also a perfect cube (Ex 26). There, in the Holy of Holies, the Presence of the Lord was found. (Ex 25:22). That imagery teaches us the Lord dwells in the midst of perfection. Only when the church is glorified will the Lord Himself fully dwell in her.

In this world, the church is scattered, being dispersed in both time and circumstance. But that will not be the case in glory. There, God brings together *“the whole family in heaven and earth”* (Eph 3:15), gathering *“together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him”* (Eph 1:10). There will no longer be a *“greater part”* absent from the body, while a struggling remnant remains upon the earth. No longer will discontented souls be seen under the altar or suffering ones upon the earth. Individual believers will not find *“another law”* in their members, warring against the law of their minds. All imperfection will be dismissed, and *“we shall know even as we are known.”* We will be a city foursquare: no unequal parts or separated members, only total perfection. What a marvelous picture of coming glory!

## THE NATURE OF THE WALL

*“Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.*

At once we see a significant difference between the wall and the city itself. The redeemed are pictured as a city 1,500 miles high. The wall about it is 144 cubits, or a little over 1,200 feet tall, less than 1/5 of a mile. We will soon see that BEAUTY is the accent of the wall, and not protection. Once again, this emphasizes there will be no need for sanctuary for there will be no enemies. At last, we will be within the safety zone, where variance has no presence nor place.

## THE CITY

“ . . . *the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*” As we might expect, there is nothing on earth to parallel this vision. In this world, cities have some buildings that have some gold on some parts of some structures. Even the relatively small tabernacle was not of pure gold. Some of its furniture was overlaid with pure gold, but the tabernacle itself was anything but pure gold. Wood, stone, tapestry, and even badger skins were also found in the tabernacle. The temple as well had gold, but was not pure gold. There were bronze, granite stones and cedars of Lebanon in the temple also.

But behold, there are no inferior materials in “*the city!*” Nothing about it is not comely, subject to decay, or to be covered with something else. It is not just gold, but “*pure gold.*” But it is not gold as we have in this world. It is gold that is “*like clear glass.*”

No more refining fire is needed: the people of God will be “*pure gold*.” No more hidden counsels of the heart: the saints will be “*clear as glass*.” Is it not a pleasant thing to contemplate?

Remember, we are speaking about “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife*.” We are not beholding where she will dwell, but the bride herself, where God and Christ will dwell. She is pure and transparent. Ah, it was not so while she was upon the earth. There were ignoble vessels within her (2 Tim 2:20), foolish virgins (Matt 25:1-10), and fish to ultimately be cast away (Matt 13:47-48). Within her number were found Ananias, Saphirra, Demas and Diotrephes. There were dead churches like Sardis, tolerant ones like Thyatira, and lukewarm ones like Laodicea. In the world, churches like Corinth and Galatia had to be rebuked. Some professed believers had to be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. The church was anything but “*pure gold*” when in the world.

But it is another story after the first heaven and the first earth are passed away. No more refining fire is needed: the people of God will be “*pure gold*.” No more hidden counsels of the heart: the saints will be “*clear as glass*.” Is it not a pleasant thing to contemplate? And contemplate it we must, for that is our appointed destiny.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL

“*The construction of its wall was of jasper* .” Most walls were built of crude materials, because they were subject to attack. Nehemiah and his builders constructed a wall of stone (Neh 4:3). Solomon spoke of a “*stone wall*” (Prov 24:31). That is the manner of earth. But we are destined for a great change—a glorious change. The beauty and value of the people of God in the world to come will be as gems of jasper compared to roughly hewn stones.

The identity of a jasper stone is not altogether clear. We know it is precious. Some have suggested that the qualities ascribed to this stone of purity and clearness make it more like the diamond of our day. This stone was the last one in the breastplate of the High priest (Ex 28:17). The High Priest himself, however, did not have the glow of a jasper stone. It is also used to describe the glory of God

Himself seated upon the throne (4:3).

What is here depicted is the people of God possessing the glory of God. This is something for which Jesus prayed *“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”* (John 17:22-24).

The glory of which Jesus spoke was, in a sense, a borrowed glory. It was designed to confirm to the world that God sent Jesus to save it. But that is not the purpose for the glory we now behold. This glory is inherent, or part of the nature of the church. They have been brought through trials to the place of perfection, and now they themselves shine with the glory of God. They have been *“conformed”* to the Image of God’s Son. That glory will be as plain in them as a diamond wall surrounding a city of pure gold.

## **THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WALL**

*“ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst .”*

Everything about the glorified saints is beautiful and precious. Remember, the wall is a picture of salvation which surrounds the glorified saints. The foundations of that wall are decorated and embellished with all kinds of precious stones—set, as it were, within the diamond foundations. The stones mentioned are representative of multifaceted beauty. Each stone is characterized by a unique color and other characteristics. Jasper is clear. Sapphire was of a clear blue color, and very precious (Ex 24:10; Job 28:16). Chalcedony is thought to be a green carbonate of copper. The emerald is a precious green gem. The sardonyx was a kind of onyx,

noted for its value in engraving. The sardius was a precious stone, yellow in color. Chrysolitre was yellow in color, and identical with the modern jacinth or amber. The beryl was a variety of emerald. Topaz is thought to be a variety of the chrysolite, and was yellowish-green. The chrysoprasus was much like the beryle, or aqua-marine gems. The jacinth was a red variety of the zircon, and came in a variety of colors. The amethyst was a purple stone. **The point to be seen is the beauty and variety of these stones.** The glory of the redeemed is truly multifaceted, having many different sides.

But there is something else to be seen here. Set within salvation are various gems of truth—Divine nuggets that cause the wall of salvation to sparkle with glory. Think of the jewels of the love and righteousness of God. The gems of justification and sanctification, and the precious stones of eternal purpose and manifold wisdom. They all adorn the wall of salvation that encompasses the glorified saints. How they sparkle and glow in the bright light of Divine glory! When fully seen, salvation will provide a rich commentary and display of the Person and character God and Christ. All of this will cause the church to shine more brightly, bringing more glory to our Lord.

## EVERY GATE WAS ONE PEARL

Thus our entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is seen as exceeding precious. Whether we entered from the North, East, South, or West, the entrance itself is to be valued.

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl.” We are viewing the glorified church, *“the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”* With beauty, she is adorned as a wife prepared for her husband. This is the redeemed, standing before their Lord *“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing”* (Eph 5:27). They are *“faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24). Now, we focus upon the points of ENTRANCE into the city.

Our text does not say the gates were made of pearl, but that each gate was itself one pearl. In this world, a pearl is the result of a lot of activity. They are very valuable, and are so identified in Scripture. Jesus said the Kingdom was like a man seeking fine pearls. Finding “*one pearl*” of great price, or value, he sold all he had to possess it (Matt 13:46). Now, we behold the twelve points of entrance into the church as individual pearls—rare and valuable pearls.

Thus our entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is seen as exceeding precious. Whether we entered from the North, East, South, or West, the entrance itself is to be valued. Do not doubt the validity of this concept. Our entrance is precious because it speaks of Divine provision and activity.

Our entrance is described in various ways. It is seen as believing the Gospel and being baptized (Mk 16:16). It is also represented as repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). The Spirit refers to our entrance as receiving the Lord Jesus (John 1:12). It is also seen as being washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11). Ephesians 1:13 declares it to be trusting in the Lord Jesus after hearing the Gospel of our salvation, then being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Romans 6 refers to it as being buried by baptism into the death of Christ, then being raised by the Father to walk in the newness of life (6:4-6). John 3:3-5 records Jesus speaking of perceiving and entering the Kingdom of God by means of the new birth. Acts 3:19 refers to it as being “*converted.*” In a marvelous declaration of Divine involvements in our salvation, Acts 26:18 speaks of having our eyes opened, being turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, receiving the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith. Jesus spoke of it as being converted and becoming as little children (Matt 18:2). The entrance of the Thessalonian brethren was referred to as receiving the Word of God, not as the word of men, “*but as it is in truth, the Word of God*” (1 Thess 2:13).

From whatever perspective you approach our entrance into the New Jerusalem, it is precious—like an individual pearl. That is how it will be seen in the world to come. We will see the whole matter of our salvation was of the Lord. No one will have any difficulty singing with understanding, “*Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*” (Rev 7:10). And again, “*Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God*” (Rev 19:1). With joyful and insightful recollection, they will sing, “*For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people*

*and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God” (Rev 5:9-10).*

This is the reality of the case: our entrance into Divine acceptance was precious! It involved the planning of the Father and the sending of the Son. An atonement was made by Jesus and presented in heaven to a satisfied God. The Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel, convinced us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. We “*obtained like precious faith,*” believing “*through grace*” (2 Pet 1:1; Acts 18:27). We were drawn by the Father to Jesus, and brought by Jesus to God (John 6:44; 1 Pet 3:18).

What a blessed day it was when we entered into the Kingdom of God! Our names were written in heaven, and we are come unto a great heavenly host (Heb 12:22-24). Indeed, ever gate is made of one pearl. It is precious, and throughout all eternity will be so perceived. Nothing about our entrance was average or mediocre! May we see it that way now. The consideration will impart both strength and joy to our hearts. It will cause the saints to be closer together, or more sensitive of the Lord Who bought them.

## THE STREET OF THE CITY

***“And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”*** You have no doubt heard of “*streets of gold.*” No such reference is found in Scripture. Just as the glorified church has only one river, or source of life (Rev 22:1-2), so it has only one street, or means of communication. Again, we must remember we are seeing the glorified church— “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*” In the earth, the people of God often dwelt where there were deceit and guile in the streets (Psa 55:11). Often wisdom cried out in the streets, only to be spurned and rejected (Prov 1:20). The streets were often the place where the sick, halt, blind, and maimed were brought for mercy (Lk 14:21; Acts 5:15). Such streets were anything but pure gold!

Here is a marvelous picture of unity—of minding and speaking “*the same thing*” (1 Cor 1:10). No variant or defiled communication, no bypaths that take people away from the main thing, no distracting tributaries of thought or speech. The street is “*pure gold.*” It is not yellow gold, but gold “*transparent as glass.*” There

is no gold like this in the earth. It speaks of communication that is obvious, plain, and understood by all. The figure of speech declares there will be no more parabolic teaching, no more hidden sayings, no more occasions where “*hard sayings*” will be uttered. Every word, every movement, every bit of communication will be pure, uncontaminated, and of great value. There will be no more vain words, pointless words, or empty speeches. Because we ourselves will be pure, the means of communication will also be pure.

In this world, there is need to have our feet washed. That is one of the lessons learned during our Lord’s last evening with His disciples. As He washed His disciples feet He said, “*A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean*” (John 13:10). The part of us that touches the earth becomes defiled, and we need to have that part cleansed. Jesus was speaking of more than bodily hygiene. There is spiritual defilement that comes from commerce in this world. However minor it may be, we must attend to it. Our minds must be “*renewed*” (Rom 12:2). Our souls must be awakened and refurbished. There are moral streets upon which men must traffic that are contaminating. Our jobs and our business, our neighborhoods and our pleasures, all have contaminated streets between them. Our souls become soiled, and our thoughts diverted during movement between them. The sensitive soul is painfully aware of these things.

But in the world to come, there will be no such experience. “***And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.***” There will be no desert to traverse, no type of activity, and no means of communicating that is not perfect. Never again will we touch anything corrupt—at any time, or in any sense. What a refreshing consideration!

Our new bodies will clarify the truth rather than obscure it. Our speech will be precise, totally void of any clumsiness or other aspect of inadequacy. Motives will all be pure. All commerce, of whatever sort, will be noble, holy, and profitable. How glorious to contemplate the glorified church—the bride, the Lamb’s wife. How comely she will be in all of her attributes and expressions.

**NO TEMPLE IS THERE**

*“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”* In this world, there are times and places when we focus upon the Lord. When God gave the Law, He brought the people to Mount Sinai, isolating them from the rest of the world. When He revealed Himself to Moses, the Lord hid him a cleft of the rock, away from the mundane and ordinary. The Israelites had a tabernacle in the desert, and a temple in the holy city. For the ancient people, the Presence of the Lord was associated with a special place and special times.

Involvement with God generally required withdrawal to a special place. John the Baptist did not prepare for his short ministry on the streets of the city, but *“was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel”* (Lk 1:80). Often, Jesus would retire from the multitudes to a solitary place for communion with God (Matt 12:15; John 18:2). Early in the history of the church, believers gathered together in homes and in the temple, coming apart from the course of this world (Acts 2:46). Peter and John went up to the Temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1).

In fulfillment of our Lord’s promise, Deity makes its abode in us (John 14:23). Yet, there are vast segments of the church and our persons where God is not found.

Believers have always sensed a conflict between life in this world and fellowship with God. That is why they assemble together, forming an environment in which the Lord promised He would be present (Matt 18:20). Those who approach the gathering of saints as a law betray their own hearts. Even in old time, *“those who feared the LORD spoke to one another”* (Mal 3:16). Whether then or now, such gatherings are not informal get-togethers, where we exchange personal views and provide community updates. These are times when we become more acutely aware of the Lord—when collectively we become a temple of the Lord. Edification flows during such times, as the Head ministers *“nourishment”* to His body by its *“joints and bands”* (Col 2:19). It is possible for one unacquainted with the ways of the Lord to enter such an environment and be *“convicted by all.”* As words from the Lord are spoken, the secrets of such a person’s heart are revealed, and *“falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth”* (1 Cor 14:25). Like it or not, in this world, there are places and times when the Lord is more evident, and people are more alert in spirit.

While God does not dwell in temples made with hands, He does dwell in a temple. As long as we are in this world, it is ever true, “*But the LORD is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him*” (Hab 2:20). At some point, in our spirits, we must make our way to His abode, drawing near to Him with a true heart and in the full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22).

## NO TEMPLE IN IT

In the glorified church, there will be no central place where the Lord resides—no temple. There will be no outskirts of the camp, so to speak, where His presence is not known. There will be no Temple with special furniture and special utensils used only for Divine service—no place where we will leave other things behind.

There will be an acute consciousness of the Person and favor of God everywhere. No longer will saints assemble with a “*mixed multitude*” where some are spiritually obtuse. No more will people be among us whose minds wander from the things of God—whose hearts are dead and cold.

Lay hold on this picture that is before us. It is glorious! In this world, the church is the temple of God. As it is written, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are*” (1 Cor 3:16-17). In fulfillment of our Lord’s promise, Deity makes its abode in us (John 14:23). Yet, there are vast segments of the church and our persons where God is not found. His presence pervades neither body nor mind. Being “*filled with all the fulness of God*” is an objective from which we admit we fall short (Eph 3:19).

In the world to come, there will be “*NO temple.*” Notice the precision with which the Spirit speaks. “*For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*” Rather than men having a sanctuary for God, God Himself is now the sanctuary! By faith, our lives are now “*hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3). But that is only introductory to what is coming. O, the depths of the expression, “*heirs of God*” (Rom 8:17). Who is able to plumb the profoundness of God Himself being our “*exceeding great Reward*” (Gen 15:1).

By saying ***“the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple,”*** the Spirit is affirming the Presence of the Lord will pervade the people of God. It is another way of saying ALL temple. There will be no corners or peripheral areas where the Lord is not joyfully obvious! In this world, it is difficult to have a single hour of religious service without times when it is apparent the Lord is either at a distance, or not obvious to the heart. There are distractions in *church* , as well as in the world. Disinterest, controversy, and carnality often surface during gatherings of believers—things and attitudes the Lord does not inhabit.

But that will not be case with the glorified church! There will be no need to ward off incongruous thoughts, and focus on the Lord. ***“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”*** We will not have to sort through what we see and hear, discarding unprofitable things, and matters that do not make for edification. ***“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”*** In every sense, and in every way, we will be swallowed up of life. Every part of our persons will pulsate with Divine life. Never again will the Lord *“hide Himself”* from us, chasten us, or allow us to be tempted. ***“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”***

This is what the Lord desires! This is why He purposed to bring a people to Himself through His Son. He is not seeking to merely surround Himself with personalities who worship and adore Him—although that is certainly prominent both now and in the world to come. By saying ***“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple,”*** a marvelous condition is being heralded. The Lord and His people will be totally one—perfectly joined together. Jesus prayed for this. *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”* (John 17:10-21). There is a unity and consolidation of spirits so marvelous we are only able to touch the border of its truth.

In this world, the objective of that glorious merger is *“that the world may believe”* God sent Christ. But there is more to come. When ***“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple,”*** They will be able to perfectly express themselves through the redeemed. Reigning with Christ will not be a response of obedience, but the result of a thorough and effective blending of the redeemed with their Redeemer. There will be no place or time when we do not worship and serve our

God and the Lamb. Such expressions will be spontaneous and continuous, effective and glorious. Such thoughts both ravish and challenge the heart. The anticipation of these things will buoy up our spirits, and keep us running the race. How we need to hear of the coming glory! The news of the world to come makes life more tolerable.

## NO NEED FOR THE SUN OR MOON

Often, those in Christ begin reverting back to a state of darkness. They must then be exhorted, “*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*” With the Psalmist we often confess in anticipation, “*the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness*”

*“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.”* Do not tire of hearing me say this. We are NOT viewing the dwelling place of the righteous, but the glorified church being the dwelling place of God Almighty and the Lamb. **The real issue is not whether we dwell with God, but if He dwells with us.** The promise is “*I will dwell in them , and walk in them* ” (1 Cor 6:16). **In redemption, we come to God. In glorification, God comes to us!** Salvation is all about preparing us to be the habitation of God—a habitation without restriction or flaw. “*The city*” is the glorified church—the people of God completely divested of the curse.

## NO NEED OF SUN OR MOON

This is symbolic language—words that describe the glorification of the people of God. He uses terms of nature, but is speaking of more lofty things. **There will be no need for illumination!** From the very beginning of creation, illumination was required. It was required in nature, then in Law, and finally in grace. The darkness that covered the natural creation was dispersed by the creation of light. The spiritual darkness that covered humanity was lightened by the moonlight of the

Law. The prevailing ignorance of God that covers the earth is shattered by the *“light of the glory of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus”* (2 Cor 4:6).

Conversion itself is referred to as being *“enlightened”* and *“illuminated”* (Heb 6:4; 10:32). Even after we come into Christ, further enlightenment is needed. We sorely need *“the eyes of our understanding . . . enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe”* (Eph 1:18-19). What a great requirement this is!

Often, those in Christ begin reverting back to a state of darkness. They must then be exhorted, *“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light”* (Eph 5:14). With the Psalmist we often confess in anticipation, *“the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness”* (Psa 18:28). Now it requires effort to *“walk in the light”* – we must come to it and stay in it (John 3:20-21; 1 John 1:7). The hymn writer correctly said, *“Days of darkness still come o’er me.”* There are times when the path is not as clear as we desire, and mystery covers our minds like a shroud. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to effectively steer us through such times.

But in the world to come, no such occasions will occur. Darkness in any form will not exist. There will be no form of ignorance, and no presence of slowness or obtuseness. Everything will be clear, and we will *“know, even as we are known”* (1 Cor 13:12). There will be *“no need of the sun or of the moon to shine”* upon us. We will not *“see through a glass darkly,”* or *“know in part.”* No one will ever say, *“this is a hard saying”* (John 6:60), or *“Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not”* (Gen 28:16). Never again will a righteous man say, *“how little a portion is heard of Him”* (Job 26:14).

We will not have to wait for light, as we do in this world. Now, we must give earnest heed to the Word of prophecy *“as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”* (2 Pet 1:19). However, no such experience will take place in the world to come!

The reason for the removal of the need for light is vividly described: *“for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”* The Divine Presence will dispel all forms of ignorance. Even now, we taste the first fruits of this experience. As we become more aware of the Lord, and more knowledgeable of Him, other matters are more clearly understood. Thus it is written, *“in Thy light shall we see light”* (Psa 36:9).

When God Himself is with us, we will experience a sufficiency never before known. Nothing will be dark. Nothing will not be understood. There will be no mystery, nor will there be any fear that attends such mystery. God and the Lamb Themselves will illuminate everything else.

Among other things, salvation is designed to so acquaint us with the Lord that everything else is better comprehended. Living for the Lord demands a certain clarity of life—s state where things are seen more clearly. A religion that leaves the people ignorant of God is a most dangerous one. It neither equips people to live in this world, nor prepares them to live in the world to come. In such a condition, falls are inevitable. I find this to be a most arresting consideration.

## THE NATIONS AND THE KINGS

***“And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it . . . And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.”*** Do you not find this expression intriguing: *“the nations of those who are saved.”* Is it possible that while the people of God are gloriously one, yet there is some form of distinction among them? Indeed, it is so. The Father, Son, and Spirit are one, yet there are distinctions among Them. Why should it be thought incredible that distinctions will also be found among the people of God? They will not be differences that divide or distract from the Lord. The fact that we will be one does not indicate no one will stand out, as it were. We have already read of *“the twelve tribes of Israel”* having their names on the gates, the *“twelve Apostles of the Lamb”* being uniquely identified with the foundation stones. Jesus once said to recalcitrant Jews, *“ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God”* (Lk 13:28).

The phraseology used here is another way of saying the redeemed are “*out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (Rev 5:9). There will be generations who were faithful before the Law, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. There will be generations from the time of Law, like Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and those mighty souls who all died in the faith. There will be the wise men who came from afar to worship Jesus, and the queen of Sheba who traveled to hear the wisdom of Solomon—the city of Nineveh that repented at the preaching of Jonah, and Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth who believed. Those receiving Christ when the New Covenant was inaugurated at Pentecost, and Gentiles like Cornelius will be there. Generations during the Reformation, and other great awakenings will be present. Kings of the earth who used their position to honor God and relieve His people will be there.

All of them will bring their glory and honor into the glorified church. Not their persons, but their glory, or the effects of their influence, will be brought together. It is another way of saying they will cast “*their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*” (Rev 4:10). Any differences that existed will be confessed to be of God, and not of self. It will then be clearly seen that God alone made us to “*differ from one another,*” and we had nothing of value that we did not “*receive*” (1 Cor 4:7). The glory of the parts will contribute to the glory of the whole. The, in the fullest sense, we will be builded together for a habitation of God!

## HER GATES ARE ALWAYS OPEN

***“Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).”*** This is the language of permanence. How sorely we need to hear of the time when we will “*go no more out*” (Rev 3:12). Moses, after speaking with God face to face, had to come down the mountain, into the realm of conflict and sin (Ex 19:21; 34:29). After wrestling with a heavenly representative, Jacob had to return to the mundane, limping as he went (Gen 32:31). After witnessing the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, Peter, James, and John, had to come back down the mountain to face the trials of life (Matt 17:9ff). A season of unusual spiritual productivity at Ephesus was brought to an end as Paul left that area (Acts 20:38). The best of times come to an end in this world. The dearest of human ties are broken, and the seasons of greatest spiritual joy suspended for a time. This is a harsh reality of life in this world with which we must contend.

The world to come, however, will find a total absence of such experiences. The gates are never shut, and are always open. Remember, we are not talking about the dwelling place of the righteous, but of the righteous glorified and made suitable for the permanent presence of the Lord. Not only will the righteous never leave, God will never leave or recede into the background, hiding Himself for a season.

Our life will not be seasonal nor cyclical. Abundant access will be consistent and uninterrupted. Heavenly insights will not have an adverse effect upon us like they did upon Daniel (Dan 8:27). We will never respond to the light in an inappropriate manner, like John did on Patmos (Rev 19:10; 22:8). There will be no bitterness in the belly after there is sweetness in the mouth (Rev 10:9-10). Forever we will dwell in an enlightened and open realm, with no diminishment of our glory, and no exit from the Lord's presence in any sense.

Too, there will be no danger, so there will be no need to close the gates. When Nehemiah and his workers were building, there came a time when they had to "*shut the doors*" and appoint watchmen to be alert for enemies (Neh 7:3). So it is with the life of faith. We must ever be alert and vigilant in this world, for our adversary the devil is prowling about, seeking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8-9). Even when we pray, we must enter our closet and shut the door (Matt 6:6). But no such experience will ever be known either individually or collectively in glory! The body of Christ will never again knock on the door for entrance, as Peter did following his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:13).

God will always be at home among His people **–the gates shall not at all be shut**. Free access to the Lord will never be interrupted **–the gates shall not at all be shut**. It will always be in order to enter His courts with praise **–the gates shall not at all be shut**.

## NO NIGHT THERE

Our hearts can scarcely conceive such a condition: *no night!* No obscurity, vagueness, or lack of clarity. We will never again have to navigate through difficult and unclear waters by faith. Perfect clearness, clarity of understanding, and uncluttered awareness will characterize the saints.

“*Night*” and “*darkness*” are associated with evil (1 John 1:6), sorrow (Isa 21:11), ignorance (1 Thess 5:4-5), sin (Eph 5:8), death (John 9:4), and the influence of Satan (Col 1:13). All of these in all of their forms will be forever behind us in the world to come! No evil will be lurking around us. There will not be “*another law*” of wickedness in our members. Sorrow will never again be mingled in the cup of life. The darkness of ignorance and sin will be foreign to us, and will not even come into our minds. Death will have been swallowed up of life, and the devil cast into the lake of fire. How refreshing to think of these things.

There will be “*NO night*” in all of the glorified church! Even nature itself will be relieved of night, as it comes into the “*glorious liberty of the children of God*” (Rom 8:21). From the beginning of creation, there has always been night. But after the passing of the first heaven and the first earth, the only darkness will be where the devil and the damned reside. For the glorified church, in every way and in every place, there will be no night! No passing of the light. No diminishing of the glory. No fading of the refreshment of knowing as we are known! There shall be no night THERE! No wonder faith moves us to look forward.

## NOTHING DEFILING WILL ENTER

***“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”*** The Spirit is securing to our hearts the certainty of God’s promises. In this world, there is hardly a moment of time when we do not confront defiling influences. Whether it is a sight, a person, or a fleeting thought, we most assuredly are in a defiling realm. Thinking is defiled. Vision is defiled. Human associations are defiled. It is all around us. A Simon may be found among believers (Acts 8:9-24). A Demas may break the heart of an Apostle (2 Tim 4:10). An Ananias or Sapphira may surface among the faithful (Acts 5:1ff), or a fornicator be revealed in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 5:1). A false prophetess can be found in Thyatira (Rev 2:20), and those who embrace the damnable doctrine of the Nicolaitanes be found in Pergamos (Rev 2:15).

In the most devoted of believers, a defiling and corrupting law is found that must

be rejected and put off (Rom 7:23; Eph 4:22-24). Daily we must flee to the throne of all grace, confessing defilements, and appropriating forgiveness (1 John 1:7-9). We cannot go a single day without the intercession of Christ, which is saving us (Heb 7:25). Indeed, we are in the land of defilement.

But when the saints are glorified, such

Even though these things have been revealed with unusual clarity, there remains an astounding amount of wickedness within the professed church. The condition even existed in five of the seven churches to whom John was directed to write this book.

things will never again occur. There will not be a single wayward thought or imagination come into our minds. Never again will a tare be found among the wheat, or small and unsuitable fish in the Kingdom net. Do you not long for this?

The root of evil, or *“the vine of the earth”* (Rev 14:18-19) will have been removed. As it is written, *“anything that defiles, or CAUSES an abomination or a lie”* will never enter, or intrude into glory. What a refreshing thought! In this world, we can hardly go a single minute without confronting defiling influences. There, we will never again encounter such things.

There are people and things than cannot enter the eternal kingdom—the glorified church. The people of God must be reminded of this, else they may become complacent concerning this reality. Unbelief, for example, disqualifies for glory (Mark 16:16; Heb 3:19). Those who are not born again cannot enter (John 3:3-6). The unrighteous will not enter (1 Cor 6:9-10). Those indulging in the works of the flesh are ruled out (Gal 5:19-21). Those involved in immorality cannot participate (Eph 5:5-6). Flesh and blood are disqualified (1 Cor 15:50). Unless our righteousness goes beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way to enter (Matt 5:20). Those who here defile the temple of God will be destroyed by Him (1 Cor 3:17).

Even though these things have been revealed with unusual clarity, there remains an astounding amount of wickedness within the professed church. The condition even existed in five of the seven churches to whom John was directed to write this book. Thus, to make firm in our minds the certainty of these things, we are reminded that “*by no means*” will any corrupting influence enter the glorified church.

Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be admitted. Only those “*alive unto God,*” who have reckoned themselves to be “*dead indeed unto sin*” (Rom 6:11), will be there.

And what is the point of this verse? Simply this: if we are going to deal with defilement, it will have to be in this world, before we pass from it. Separation from sin and the possession of new life must take place, and be sustained, before the Lord comes. He has already told us there is not place for deficiency in any form in glory. Now, in this world, and by the grace of God, an appetite for these realities must be developed and nurtured. Salvation is the appointed means of accomplishing this requirement. As it is fueled by the Gospel and God’s precious promises, it will do so effectively, creating and long for, and anticipation of glory.

## CONCLUSION

The benefit of this section is apparent to faith. Believing the Gospel brings light into the heart that causes these things to make perfect sense. Even though we cannot see the whole of the vision, enough can be seen to whet our appetites for glory. That anticipation will cause the world to lose its attractiveness. Its baubles and novelties will be seen as cheap and tawdry, unworthy of our affection or quest. From this perspective, the purpose of salvation is to uproot us from the condemned order, and make a place for us in the redeemed order. It accomplishes this by effectively dealing with our past, and securing our future. The past is dealt with in the remission of our sins, the circumcision of the whole body of the sins of the flesh from us, and the procurement of the righteousness of God Himself. The future is secured to our hearts by means of the new birth and the precious promises of God. In Christ, life is lived in hope of the future, not in the recollection of the past.

I have said this before, but want to emphasize it again. The people of God must hear this message in order to overcome the world. They do not need a lot of theological speculation or religious philosophy. The delineation of duty will not suffice as an adequate preparation for the world to come. We must hear about where we are going and what we will be. We need to hear about the coming absence of difficulty and warfare. When these things are not spoken, this present evil world swells to a disproportionate size. Its difficulties are accentuated, and the wisdom of men suddenly appears to be something other than foolishness.

The average church is being deprived of these things by a professionalized clergy. Supposed leaders of local congregations spend more time speaking about difficulties and the mundane than about promises and the heavenlies. Some boast of being family-oriented, but few in being oriented for heaven. It is a most serious situation—just as serious as it was in the first century, when this book was written.

The book of Revelation is used properly when it develops within the believer a hearty appetite for glory, and a certain revulsion for the things of this world. Those two things confirm the book has been understood.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 41

## THE GLORIFIED STATE

" And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Then he said to me, These words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God. " (Revelation 22:1-9, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

As we near the conclusion of this book, the Holy Spirit sets the glory that awaits us before the eyes of our hearts. He does not provide an academic explanation of the glorified state, for the glory transcends human language. Thus, no descriptions are given such as those relating to Canaan, the promised land (Gen 15:18-21; Ex 23:31; Num 34:3-15; Deut 11:24). We do not read of borders and other external reference points. Rather, the Spirit addresses the heart, speaking of matters for which faith causes us to long. This is heart language, and if we work on believing the text instead of understanding it, a sense of its grandeur will burst upon us. It speaks more to our spiritual intuition than to our intellect.

The language that is used obtains its power to those engaged in the good fight of faith. Think of the words that will be accentuated: "*life,*" "*healing,*" "*no more curse,*" "*serve Him,*" "*see His face,*" "*no night there,*" and "*reign forever.*" All

of these expressions presume we are engaged in a fierce conflict in which liabilities in these areas exist. They also emphasize that our present experience does not allow the fulness of these things that we desire, for which we long. They are held out to us to ensure our hearts our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Through the Spirit, and by means of our faith, we are developing a hearty appetite for the very things now held before us. This is not a mere academic exercise—something to be outlined, placed in prioritized order, and codified. At least two things are accentuated by this text. *First* , what is ahead for the saints is an enlargement of the very experiences faith has brought to us now. *Second* , the Holy Spirit is culturing within our hearts a yearning for these very things.

It should be apparent to you that none of these things are of value to the institutional mind—the frame of spirit that associates every aspect of spiritual life with a religious institution or mind-set. Too, they deal with lofty experience—life in heavenly places. They lift us above mere human associations into spiritual ones. The common denominator that gives great value to them is not domestic life, institutional involvements, or other aspects of social life in this world. In fact, unless the individual is living by faith, all of these glorious affirmations appear irrelevant. They are more “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by,” having little to do with “where the rubber hits the road,” so to speak.

**God’s people must not allow their religion to take them where any affirmation of the Spirit becomes pointless!** Who is not aware that countless religious gatherings never assist those attending to come within the perimeter of Divine influence. They are more soulish than spiritual, and do not prepare the heart for deep involvements with Deity. Those so ensnared will find no lasting value in the text before us. They have been robbed by their religion--a tragic condition.

The things to which we will now be exposed cannot be concluded by logical thinking. Rather, they are matters that must be revealed: i.e., “*He showed me . . .*” The glorified state is so marvelous it exceeds all human abilities to imagine or think. Yet, they are altogether true and comforting. Yea, they are essential for the believer.

# THE PURE RIVER OF WATER OF LIFE

*“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”* (Verse 1) Notice the adjectives employed by the Holy Spirit: “*pure*” and “*clear.*” How marvelous to hear of such things while in a polluted realm, where matters are not as clear as we desire. For believers in Christ, the future holds out both purity and clarity. There will be no distractions or contamination of any kind: no imperfection or defilement in any form. Candidly, I find that to be a most pleasant consideration.

## A MATTER OF REVELATION

*“He showed me.”* It is no wonder this book is called “*the Revelation*” (1:1). It is not the result of human conclusion or contemplation, but of Divine disclosure. What follows could never have been deduced by mortals—regardless of the amount of revelation given to them. At the very outset of the book, John is told, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass*” (1:1). Following the exhortation to the churches, the aged Apostle was told, “*I will show thee things which must be hereafter*” (4:1). After John had been exposed to the alarming corruption of false religion, he was told, “*I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore . . .*” (17:1). Before closing this marvelous vision, John was again told, “*the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly be done*” (22:6).

John is twice shown something in this section of the Revelation. (1) “*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*” (21:10) . (2) “*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*” (22:1) .

Although considerable revelation had already been given to the sons of men, the Apostle John was still SHOWN aspects of glory. At least three things may be seen in

For believers in Christ, the future holds out both purity and clarity. There will be no distractions or contamination of any kind: no imperfection or defilement in any form.

this. *First*, there are things that cannot be concluded, even though extensive revelation has been given. *Second*, the greatness of glory requires extensive unveiling. *Third*, there is a need for believers to have their minds stretched, so to speak, regarding their future.

From an academic point of view, the word “*show*” comes from *e;deixe,n*, and means “show, point out, reveal, explain, or prove” (Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary). The word “*show*” underscores that it is hidden. The word “*point out*” means it is not apparent. “*Reveal*” means Divine initiative is required for it to be seen. “*Explain*” indicates that even the vision requires some Divine interpretation. “*Prove*” emphasizes how the Lord brings the matter to the attention of John, confirming the reality of the thing being made known.

Once again, the Spirit makes clear that “*no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation*” (2 Pet 1:20). What we have before us is NOT John’s commentary on what he saw, but what he saw—and there is a vast difference. When it comes to faith, God will allow no man, regardless of his appointed position in the Kingdom, to simply give us a private exposition of the truth to which he was exposed. Truth revealed is not a series of building blocks to be assembled by mere mortals. Nor indeed, can the soul be saved, strengthened, or comforted, by an interpretation originating by men. If the things of God are not “*shown*,” there is no way for them to be known.

## A PURE RIVER

“*A pure river of water of life.*” From the earthly perspective, the very expression “*pure river*” is a contradiction of terms. In this world, a river is a watercourse—a flow of water that passes through varied terrains. Because of their movement, rivers pick up all manner of contamination. Ordinarily, because of this condition, one does not drink directly from a river.

## Contending with Contamination

Often, in this world, the water of life is offered in contaminated cups of men's creation. Denominational containers present the truth of God in the setting of sectarian dogma, thereby neutralizing the influence of the truth upon the soul. Several examples will suffice to confirm this unfortunate circumstance.

*New Testament* church, *believer's* baptism, *unconditional* love, *unconditional* election, *limited* atonement, *irresistible* grace, *total* depravity, *plan of* salvation, *authority of the* elders . . . etc. I have highlighted the human addition to Scriptural terms. Those additions, however innocent or sound they may appear, represent bodies of theological dogma that have been developed by men. They present inspired terms from a human point of view instead of from a heavenly one.

In this world, we must contend with this form of contamination, testing everything we hear. As it is written, "*Prove (test) all things*" (1 Thess 5:21). This circumstance proves to be a thorn in our side. Those who live by faith look forward to the time when we will drink freely from a "*pure river.*"

Abundance! Abundance!

This expression— "*a pure river of water of life*" --denotes ABUNDANCE— the abundance of life. Jesus, you will remember, affirmed, "*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it **more abundantly***" (John 10:10). While that abundance begins now, in this world, it will not reach its apex until we are liberated from the bondage of corruption. Here, there are times when truth seems to rise to flood-stage in our hearts. However, that condition does not last. Soon, the desert times are upon us again and we cry out, "*my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is*" (Psa 63:1). But it will not be so in the world to come, praise the Lord!

The Water of LIFE

It is a source of joy and gladness, satisfaction and gratification. Life is not depicted as a boisterous ocean, but a smoothly flowing river, following a tranquil course without any commotion or turbulence.

The FIRST thing John beholds is preeminent—LIFE. He is not shown what we will do, but the source of sustenance and delight: *“a pure river of water of life.”* This is doubtless the river of which David sang. *“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High”* (Psa 46:4). It is a source of joy and gladness, satisfaction and gratification. Life is not depicted as a boisterous ocean, but a smoothly flowing river, following a tranquil course without any commotion or turbulence.

In ancient times, the flow of water into the city was critical. If the enemy could cut off the water supply, the city could be easily conquered. If the supply of water could be maintained, the city could stand during the fiercest assaults. Our text speaks of a joyful condition that will never be interrupted. The abundant supply of life will never be cut off, diminished, or run dry. How marvelous is the picture!

There will no more sense of distance between the individual and spiritual life. No more environment or circumstance in which spiritual life and response are reduced or placed under limitation. Our awareness of God will never wane, nor a sense of profound satisfaction ever diminish.

## **PERFECT CLARITY**

*“Clear as crystal.”* This is an aspect of glory that can scarcely be imagined while in this world. Alas, even in our best times, *“we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror”* (1 Cor 13:12 NIV ). Even after we are given profound glimpses of the truth, we must stand back and shout, *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”* (Rom 11:33). With David we acknowledge, *“Your thoughts are very deep”* (Psa 92:5 NKJV ). Even when the *“riches of Christ”* are brought within our grasp, where they can be enjoyed and contemplated, we acknowledge they are *“unsearchable”* (Eph 3:8). This circumstance provokes a lifetime of inquiry, seeking, and pressing toward the mark. As long as we are in the body, a profound

sense of mystery surrounds the truth of God. It is our “*earthen vessels,*” and not the truth itself, that produces this situation.

However, this will not be the case in the world to come. There, the flow of life-giving truth will be marked by perfect and undiminished clarity. The “*river of water of life*” is not only abundant and pure, it is also comprehensible. This is another way of saying, “*but then shall I know even as also I am known*” (1 Cor 13:12). The far-reaching implications of truth will be apparent to us. The significance of Divine utterance will be obvious to us as we no longer peer into a hazy mirror. The truth itself is pure (Psa 119:140; Prov 30:5). However, the “*vile body*” (Phil 3:20-21) in which we presently reside, emits a sort of spiritual fog that removes much of the apparency of the truth. This condition is a source of great grief to those living by faith. They are quite content to live without comprehending life in this world, but they are not content with the lack of perfect clarity in the things of God. How blessed, therefore, to read of a “*a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal.*”

## DIRECT ACCESS

“*Proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*” The flow of sustaining life will come directly from the Lord, without secondary means. In this world, revelation comes through appointed means. Even the book of Revelation was given by God through Jesus, through an angel, through John (1:1). Everyone brought to faith is given a “*minister,*” some individual through whom the knowledge of the truth came. As it is written, “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*” (1 Cor 3:5). Those who think they can ignore these ministers and still be ready to meet the Lord have been sorely deceived.

God has also appointed the Scriptures as a means to sustain spiritual life. As it is written, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matt 4:4). And again, “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Rom 15:4). Any notion that we can adequately prepare for glory independently of the Scriptures is nothing less than an imagination, to be cast down with our spiritual weaponry.

The saints themselves are a rich source of benefit to one another. It is through them that Jesus ministers, bringing life-sustaining supplies to His people. As it is written, “*the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow*” (Col 2:19 NIV ). The various members of the body are essential for spiritual growth. They have been placed in the body precisely where God wants them, and endued with a measure of faith that enables them to effectively minister to one another (1 Cor 12:18,22-27; Rom 12:3-6). If you are ever tempted to think you can make it to glory by ignoring kindred saints God has placed in your path, you have simply been seduced by the devil. Nothing God gives can be treated as unnecessary.

Thus, in this world, we are provided access to the truth through indirect means, as well as directly between our spirits and the Holy Spirit. The reason for this provision can be traced to the impact of sin upon our persons. Thus, ministers of truth, the Scriptures, and the body of Christ have been given to assist us in laying hold on the truth.

This will not be the case in glory. We will have direct access to the truth, with no need for it to pass through another before it comes to us. The abundant things of God will all be within our reach

Thus John’s first exposure to the blessed state of the redeemed finds them in a state of Divine abundance. What they have tasted in this world will be expanded in the world to come. The appetite created and sustained by grace through faith will be satisfied. It will all be accomplished in an intensely personal environment with no restrictions or limitation. Everything will be within reach.

### **Ezekiel’s Vision of the Waters**

This is the ultimate fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision of the healing waters. The language used in this text is that of Ezekiel (Ezek 47:1-23). As Ezekiel’s waters swelled, they are said to become “*a RIVER that could not be passed over*” (47:5). When the prophet stood on the brink of those waters, it is written he was caused to “*return to the brink of the river*” (47:6). There were also “*very many trees on the one side and on the other*” (47:7). The fruit of those marvelous trees is described in this manner. “*And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit*

*thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine” (47:12).*

The prophet Ezekiel, therefore, prepared us for this vision. It was through him that the Holy Spirit developed the vocabulary of our text. To put it another way, when John wrote, he did so in words “*which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*” (1 Cor 2:13 NKJV ). This is the manner in which the Lord delivers truth to His people. Those who couch the Word of God in the language of the street, or in words that man’s wisdom teaches, are in direct conflict with the manner of the Holy Spirit. With remarkable consistency, when the Holy Spirit reveals the things prepared for those who love the Lord, He does so in the language of the prophets.

## THE TREE OF LIFE, ITS FRUITS AND LEAVES

Thus, the Lord placed a cap, so to speak, on what men could know and experience. With sin, humanity entered into the realm of restriction—severe limitation. The primary stricture related to access to God, Divine knowledge, and spiritual growth. As long as we are in the flesh, these circumscriptions remain.

***“In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*** (Verse 2) Glory is a condition in which no separating divisions exist. There is a single “*street*,” and a solitary “*river*” —absolute focus and singularity. That is a depiction of perfect harmony and blessing. How different from our experience in this world! Here, “*the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh*” (Gal 5:17). False prophets are found as well as true ones (1 John 4:1). The lie is brought to us as well as the truth. In “*this present evil world*,” we are exposed to a multiplicity of streets and rivers. Glory will find us completely relieved of such grievous contradictions!

Now, the Spirit will emphasize the completeness of the glorified state. **There will be no appetite developed by grace that will not be gratified, and no thirst created by faith that is not assuaged.** Our text assumes a longing for the condition described. Grace is preparing those who live by faith for the fulfillment of these promises. Any approach to religion that does not make these texts inestimable is suspicious, to say the least, and should be avoided.

**Additionally, there will be no effects of sin that will not be thoroughly remedied.** Not a single vestige of the curse or its impact will remain. There will not be one longing that is not abundantly satisfied!

## THE TREE OF LIFE

Our first exposure to “*the tree of life*” is in Genesis 2:9. You may recall it was a single tree in an isolated place, “*the midst of the garden*” of Eden. It was not accessible from every place in the garden. It also competed with another tree, “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*”

With the entrance of sin, humanity was barred from “*the tree of life.*” After Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden by the God who placed there, the “*tree of life*” became totally inaccessible. As it is written, “*Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life*” (Gen 3:22-24).

Thus, the Lord placed a cap, so to speak, on what men could know and experience. With sin, humanity entered into the realm of restriction—severe limitation. The primary stricture related to access to God, Divine knowledge, and spiritual growth. As long as we are in the flesh, these circumscriptions remain. They are in much larger measure than we dare to imagine, even though grace allows us to touch the fringe of truth and handle what we do not fully comprehend.

Our limitations are so extensive the Spirit must speak to us in the language of our text. The “*tree of life*” is “*in the middle of the street.*” Any place and everyplace we can be found, “*the tree of life*” will be accessible, i.e., access to the life of God will be absolutely unhindered and free. As if that did not suffice, the tree of life, like a giant forest, is “*in the midst of the street and on either side of the river*” that flows like a mighty torrent from the throne. Absolutely no communication of any sort will move us beyond the source of life.

In this world we receive “*grace for grace,*” one blessing piled, as it were, upon another (John 1:16). The loving favor of God meets us in the pit as well as upon the mountain. We taste of it when we are suffering need or when we abound. It teaches us content in diverse conditions. Grace not only brings the things of God to us, it enables us to recover from the debilitating environment of this world, and the “*vile body*” in which we are temporarily housed.

But in the world to come, life itself will be exponential, as we leap from one degree of life to another. Our responses and expressions will swell and grow without restriction, together with our insights and delights. There will be nothing that makes for death, and everything that makes for joyful life. What a picture is given here!

## THE FRUITS OF THE TREE

“ . . . *which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.*” In sharp contrast with the cyclical nature of life in the flesh, a continual spiritual crop will be yielded. There will be no famine or reduction of benefits—ever, or in any sense.

The fruit is diverse. The KJV reads, “*twelve manner of fruits.*” The NKJV says, “*twelve fruits.*” The NASB and NRSV read, “*twelve kinds of fruits,*” and the NIV reads, “*twelve crops of fruit.*” Ezekiel’s vision spoke in precisely the same manner. “*Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river . . . Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them*” (Ezek 47:12). The words “*twelve manner*” is equivalent to “*all kinds*” of Ezekiel’s vision. It speaks of thoroughness, with nothing lacking at any time.

The bearing of fruit “*every month*” signifies the absence of seasons. As in nature, so it is in grace.

There are seasons–times when spiritual fruit flourishes, and times when it does not. God’s people must learn to “*abound AND to suffer need*”

The bearing of fruit “*every month*” signifies the absence of seasons. As in nature, so it is in grace. There are seasons–times when spiritual fruit flourishes, and times when it does not. God’s people must learn to “*abound AND to suffer need*” (Phil 4:12). That is the nature of spiritual life in this world. But it will not be so in the world to come. There will be no fall, when the leaf begins to wither, and life begins to wane. Nor, indeed, will there be winter, when deadness returns.

In glory, life will be experientially and discerningly sustained. In this world, our blessed Lord sustains our lives according to His promise: “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Heb 13:5). However, this is not always apparent. Sometimes the most spiritual of all live on the very border of despair (2 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:27). During such times, the sensitive soul cries out to God, “*Show Thyself!*” (Psa 94:1). But in the world to come, no such cry will ever be heard! There will be obvious and accessible provision, with no season of scarcity. Praise the Lord for such marvelous promises!

## **THE LEAVES OF THE TREE**

“ . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations 2b .” Ezekiel spoke similarly of the trees growing by the healing waters: “*and their leaves for medicine*” (47:12). Everything speaks of full recovery and abundant life.

The “*nations*” are “*the nations of those who are saved*” mentioned earlier (21:24). Throughout the world, the redeemed experienced varied effects of the transgression. Some were deprived of the normal amenities of life, living in poverty, sickness, and squalor. Others had little opportunity to culture their minds in the Lord. Still others lived in places and times characterized by fierce and bloody persecution. Make no mistake about it, sin has yielded great devastation to

our race!

How sorely healing is needed. When we read, “*and with his stripes we are healed*” (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24), we bring great reproach upon Jesus by confining that healing to temporary relief from bodily infirmities. Just as our sores went deeper than the flesh, so our healing extends infinitely further than our present bodies. There are effects of sin that must be remedied!

Will the impact sin has had upon our minds, memories, abilities, and desires ever be healed? “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” Will the lamentation and grief that we experience because of sin ever be remedied? “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” What about the sorrow for sins committed, personal failures, and wasted time? Will we ever be finished with those things? “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” How about the grief that attends separation, trials, and the hardships of life? Will the scars left upon us by these things ever be removed? “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” Will Peter have forever blotted from his mind that awful night when he denied Jesus three times? Will Paul ever forget consenting to the death of Stephen? Will your mind ever be freed from the recollection of foolish words and deeds you would to God you never said and did?

Indeed, all such things will be removed for those who overcome. “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” There will be full recovery for every effect of sin—every single one! The hurtful things that occurred to us during our sojourn in the flesh will “*not be remembered, nor come into mind*” (Isa 65:17). On eagles wing, we will soar high above debilitating and sorrowful memories. With agility of spirit, soul, and body, we will walk upon those high hills of eternal involvement without a twinge of conscience, or moroseness of thought. “*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*”

I ask you, is that not worth fighting the good fight of faith? Does not the recollection of these things bring strength to resist the devil, remaining steadfast in the faith? You have every reason to be faithful until death! Full provision has been made for you in your glorious inheritance! The Spirit does not exaggerate what is prepared for you. The inheritance is great in every sense of the word, and worthy of your best effort.

**NO MORE CURSE! NO MORE CURSE!**

***“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.”*** (Verse 3) Only those living by faith have the remotest idea of the magnitude of this promise. The curse of God was made known in Eden, and has continued without interruption until this very day. What a tragic day it was when the Almighty said, *“I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Gen 3:16-19). Anyone imagining sin to be inconsequential must acquaint themselves with what it has brought into the world.

After killing Abel, Cain was *“cursed from the earth”* by the Lord (Gen 4:11). Eleven hundred years after the fall, when Noah was born, Lamech remembered *“the ground which the LORD hath cursed”* (Gen 5:29). In the flood, God again cursed the ground *“for man’s sake”* (Gen 8:21). After the flood, Canaan was cursed because of the sin of his father, Ham (Gen 9:25). When the Law was read to Israel, its curses were sounded from Mount Ebal (Deut 27:13-26). With thunderous tones, even the Apostolic

Here we live with a mixture of curse and blessing.  
Our spirit is blessed and our flesh is cursed. We are  
seated in the blessed heavenlies, while living in a  
cursed realm below. But all of that will be behind us  
when we are *“ever with the Lord.”*

writings say, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them”* (Gal 3:10).

The curse of the Almighty is all about us. The ground is cursed. Flesh is cursed. Even the whole creation has been cursed for the sake of man, groaning under the weight of its own mortality. One of the functions of salvation is to make us aware of this situation, and cause us to long for the time when there will be “*no more curse.*”

Something that is “*cursed*” is delivered over to Divine wrath—a most dreadful consideration. While we are in this world, the Spirit reminds us that the people who are unresponsive to Divine overtures are like unprofitable ground that is “*nigh unto cursing*” (Heb 6:8). Jesus affirmed the unbeliever is walking about with the wrath of God abiding upon him (John 3:36). Peter spoke of persons who sat among the people of God who are “*cursed children*” (2 Pet 2:12). Indeed, the time has not yet come when there “*is no more curse.*”

However, there is coming a time when, for the saints of God, “*there is no more curse.*” Dare we to imagine what that means? It means there will be no more disobedience, temptation, hatred, or lack of response to God. There will be no more murder, crime, jealousy, or evil imaginations of the heart. There will be “*no more curse*” because there will be nothing to provoke Divine cursing. Never again will effort be met with resistance, as when the ground brings forth thorns and thistles to those who cultivate it. That “*other law*” that wages relentless war against us when we would do good, will no longer be present (Rom 7:23).

Here we live with a mixture of curse and blessing. Our spirit is blessed and our flesh is cursed. We are seated in the blessed heavenlies, while living in a cursed realm below. But all of that will be behind us when we are “*ever with the Lord.*” No more warnings will be required. There will be no need to exhort those who need to awake from spiritual slumber. There will be “*no more curse.*” Mortuaries, hospitals, and prisons are evidences of the curse. But none of them will be in glory. There will be “*no more curse.*”

Saint of God, the time of which we are reading is worthy of your investment. Preparations for eternity without cursing is time well spent. There will be “*no more curse.*” In the world to come, there will not be “*anything accursed*” (RSV). That means there will be no flesh, no sin, no wayward thought, no recalcitrant nature. For a while, we must live in a cursed body and a cursed realm. But we will yet be delivered from both, and brought into a state of glory where there “*is no*

*more curse.*” Only Divine approval and blessing will forever surround us. There will be nothing, absolutely nothing, that will evidence God’s disapproval. Having removed all things that offend, the love of God shall be lavished upon us in unprecedented ways. There is no way to now comprehend the effects “*no more curse.*” Our hearts, however, can long for that time, and in that longing, find strength for the day.

## AND HIS SERVANTS SHALL SERVE HIM

“ . . . *and His servants shall serve Him.*” Here is a term by which the people of God will known in the world to come as well as this one: “*His servants.*” The sons of God are ever about doing their Father’s business. They have been called into His work. It all begins now, during “*the day of salvation*” and “*the acceptable year of the Lord*” (2 Cor 6:2; Lk 4:19). We must thrust from us any notion that salvation is primarily God identifying with us. In no way is the Lord our servant—we are ever His. As trite as that observation may appear, there is an alarming tendency to present Christ as the resolution to personal difficulties and the means of achieving personal goals. I realize there is an element of truth to this, but it has been grossly exaggerated. Our redemption brings us into the Divine agenda, freeing us from enslavement to self.

In the world, the word “*servant*” does not designate exaltation or superiority in any sense. In a way, in this world, it is a demeaning term. But it is not so in the Kingdom of God. Think of the notable persons known for being the servants of God. “*My servant Moses . . . My servant Caleb . . . My servant David . . . My servant Job . . . Abraham His servant . . . My servant t Isaiah . . . My servants the prophets . . . His servant John . . . Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ . . . Epaphras , a servant of Christ . . . Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ*” (Num 12:7; 14:24; 2 Sam 3:18; Job 1:8; Psa 105:7; Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; Rev 1:1; Rom 1:1; Col 4:12; Jude 1). What a notable list! As if that were not enough, the Lord Jesus Himself is called a servant. Prophetically Isaiah said, “*Behold My Servant , whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles*” (Isa 42:1). For Him, this involved humbling Himself. Yet, it became

As trite as that observation may appear, there is an alarming tendency to present Christ as the resolution

to personal difficulties and the means of achieving personal goals. I realize there is an element of truth to this, but it has been grossly exaggerated.

the basis for His exaltation above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come. As it is written, “*But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a **servant** , and was made in the likeness of men*” (Phil 2:7).

### **An Exalted Position**

So far as we are concerned, this is the highest position in God’s Kingdom. As it is written, “*And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant . . . But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant*” (Matt 20:27; 23:11). Servanthood, in this case, involves the willing abandonment of self interests in order to minister to the Lord, doing His bidding and profiting His people.

Being a servant is the appointed prelude to reigning with Christ. As it is written, “*Well done, thou good and faithful **servant** : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*” (Matt 25:21). Those who will be condemned are described as “*wicked and slothful servants,*” and “*unprofitable servants*” (Matt 25:26,30).

There is no more elevated position than that of employment in Divine service. Our Lord’s work is the highest work, and those involved in it are the uppermost people. The greatest liberty is enjoyed in the Lord’s service, and the grandest rewards are offered there. It is here that our hearts are most fully satisfied, our peace is most extensive, and our joy brought to its zenith. What soul is there who is engaged in serving the Lord that has not found this to be so?

Thus, when we read “*His servants shall serve Him,*” we are reading of the consummate blessing.

## **HIS SERVANTS**

When we read “ *HIS servants shall serve Him,*” reference is made to the effectiveness of our Lord’s great salvation. Those who serve the Lord there, are the ones who served Him here. They became “*His servants*” while yet in this world. Their reception of Jesus (John 1:12) and reconciliation to God (Col 1:21) is what constituted them “*servants.*” Those who do not serve the Lord here, will surely not serve Him there! Let it be clear, being addicted to self interests in this world excludes one from being forever with the Lord. Knowing the condition of the contemporary church, this is an alarming consideration. Yet, it does need to be said. In a most solemn injunction, the Spirit admonishes, “*Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men*” (1 Cor 7:23). Again we are reminded, “*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*” (1 Cor 6:20, NKJV ).

But in the world to come, this will not be the case. We will happily serve the Lord without distraction. We will see nothing that competes with our service. No foreign thought will invade our minds. No enemy will be found in the land. We will not need to have a sword in our hand as well as a trowel, as those working with Nehemiah

However, this is not a matter to be bound upon men with the chords of Law. Rather, it is to be mentioned within the context of glory. The people of God must have this held before them: “*His servants shall serve Him!*” If there is joy in serving Him now, who can imagine the magnitude of the joy to be experienced then! If satisfaction is found in Divine service here, in the war zone, what will our involvement in that world bring!

## WITHOUT ENCUMBRANCE

It is to be understood that when “*His servants shall serve Him,*” it will be without the encumbrances of this life. In this world, Paul served the Lord in prison, and John on the Isle of Patmos (2 Tim 1:16; Rev 1:Rev 1:9). Stephen served the Lord while religious men hurled stones at him, and the early church served Him when they were “*scattered abroad*” (Acts 7:58; 8:4) Epaphroditus served the Lord when he was sick, and Paul did so with a “*thorn in the flesh*” (Phil 2:27; 2 Cor 12:7). Abraham served the Lord while a stranger in the very land he was promised (Heb 11:9). Isaiah, at one time, served the Lord “*naked and barefoot three years*” (Isa 20:2). Yet all of them were prepared by that very service for the time to come,

when “*His servants shall serve Him.*”

In this world, our service involves having a treasure in an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7). While we serve the Law, we experience “*another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind*” (Rom 7:23). Sometimes, we must confess with the ancients that we are “*pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired of life*” (2 Cor 1:8). Not only do we experience the wonderful response of heaven, we also endure the disheartening responses of earth. We serve the Lord in a dichotomy of experience. As it is written, “*As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*” (2 Cor 6:9-10).

But in the world to come, this will not be the case. We will happily serve the Lord without distraction. We will see nothing that competes with our service. No foreign thought will invade our minds. No enemy will be found in the land. We will not need to have a sword in our hand as well as a trowel, as those working with Nehemiah (Neh 4:18). I can scarcely imagine what it will be like to serve the Lord in this manner—without any distraction. But it is a most joyful contemplation. All glory to God for telling us of this blessing!

## THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE

“*They shall see His face . . .*” (Verse 4A) Who are “*they*”? These are the Lord’s “*servants*” – those who willingly embraced the Lord’s revealed purpose when they were “*in the body.*”

## THE TEST OF A SERVANT

The test of a servant is whether or not he will serve the Master when He is absent. The Kingdom of heaven is likened to “*a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods*” (Matt 25:14). Each servant was given something to do. The charge was in strict accord with each person’s abilities. There was no option about whether the work was to be done or not. Each servant received something from the master. They all knew the master

would return to bring them into account for their faithfulness. You will remember that even though all of the servants received something, not all of them were faithful. In particular, one servant did not serve his master's interest. He buried what was given to him, and straightway forgot about it. But the day of reckoning did come. Just as the unfaithfulness of that servant excluded him from the presence of the master, so the faithfulness of the other stewards became the occasion of blessing (Matt 25:15-30).

In this parable, the Lord accentuated His absence from the arena of service. *“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them”* (Matt 25:19). That delay is what revealed the hearts of the servants! Time is the great tester of discipleship. Those who serve the Lord by fits and starts, not being reliable or consistent, are walking among fiery serpents and scorpions. Unless their hearts are made stable, and their service made more consistent, they have little hope of being forever with the Lord.

## THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE

This is the same as seeing *“face to face”* (1 Cor 13:12). It involves the removal of both veil and mirror, or dark glass. It is seeing the Lord without obscurity, comprehending His presence without the necessity of faith, as we now know it. It is seeing Him *“as He is,”* in all of His resplendent glory and majesty (1 John 3:2).

### A Synonym for His Person

The *“face”* of the Lord is a synonym for His Person. When Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory, the Lord responded, *“You cannot see **My face** ; for no man shall see **Me** , and live”* (Ex 33:20). Notice the parallel between *“ My face”* and *“Me.”* When the Lord spoke of seeking His Person, He said, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek **My face** . . . ”* (2 Chron 7:14). Thus, when we read *“they shall see His face,”* the promise of seeing *“HIM,”* Whom we presently *“see not,”* is being given (1 Pet 1:8; 1 John 3:2).

Our text assumes the face of the Lord, or His Person, is now being sought by the saints. That is what gives weight to this promise.

Psalm 105:4 gives this admonition: “Seek *the LORD*, and His strength: seek *His face* evermore.” Hosea also spoke in this manner. “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek *My face*: in their affliction they will *seek Me* early” (Hos 5:15). **Again, note how the Lord’s Person and His face are used synonymously.**

### The Servants Longed for This

While in this world, the servants of God long to see the Lord—to behold His “face.” If this were not the case, the promise would mean little or nothing to us. It assumes a fervent longing for this very thing on the part of the saints. David spoke of a special generation of people who sought the face of the Lord (Psa 24:6). We know from Scripture that this is what the Lord desires—for His face to be sought. As it is written, “When You said, ‘*Seek My face*’ My heart said to You, ‘Your face, LORD, I will seek’” (Psa 27:8, NKJV ).

Two wonderful things are seen here. **First**, the Lord wants to be seen, and calls upon men to seek His face—His Person and blessing. **Second**, tender hearts can respond to the Lord’s request with joyful expectation.

Our text assumes the face of the Lord, or His Person, is now being sought by the saints. That is what gives weight to this promise.

### SEEN IN FULNESS

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall *see God*” (Matt 5:8). Our text is addressing the fulfillment of that glorious promise. It assumes that salvation has created a deep and profound longing to see the Lord “*as He is*.” Such longing can only be found in “*the pure of heart*,” who refuse to allow the defilements of this world to clutter their perception and affection.

This promise is also the fulfillment of Hebrews 11:6. “. . . *he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*” (Heb 11:6, NKJV ). **The reward for those seeking “Him” is the Lord Himself!** As the Lord said to our father Abraham, “*I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward*” (Gen 15:1). David confessed he too had embraced this longing. “*O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup*” (Psa 16:5).

Seeing His face involves more than simply looking at Him—although that is surely the heart of the vision. Even in this world, when men go to see celebrities, they do not simply want to look at them. They want to behold what they do—the thing that makes them worldly celebrities. Even so, beholding the grace of our Lord involves seeing His works in a clear and uncluttered way. Seeing His face involves discerning His judgments and ways, which are obscured in this world, and “*past finding out*” (Rom 11:33). But the saints are not content with this circumstance. Their faith has caused their hearts to long for a fuller vision, a more comprehensive look at their marvelous Lord.

Indeed, their longing will be satisfied. When they see “*His face*” it will no more be said, “*Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, And Your footsteps were not known*” (Psa 77:19). Everything God does is for a reason. As it is written, “*and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it, says the LORD GOD*” (Ezek 14:23). Those causes, however, are not apparent to us while we sojourn in this world. But then—when we see “*His face*” — there will be no yoke, no burden, no veiling, and no secrets. We will behold His Person, understand His ways, and comprehend His workings. Glory to God!

In the meantime, while we wait to see His face, let us culture an appetite for the coming vision. In all of its aspects, salvation contributes to the development of such an yearning. Conversely, all Satanic influence seeks to either dull or remove that anticipating longing. Understanding this will deliver us from many religious involvements that are not driven by the Holy Spirit. Any association or teaching that pushes our inheritance from us is most dangerous.

**HIS NAME SHALL BE ON THEIR FOREHEADS**

**“ . . . and His name shall be on their foreheads.”** Here is an aspect of glory that is most refreshing to the soul. Earlier in this vision, the judgment of God was withheld until His servants were *“sealed in their foreheads”* (7:3). When the bottomless pit was opened according to God’s purpose, the destructive hoard were allowed to hurt *“only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads”* (9:4). Later, when the whole house of Israel was seen standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, they had the *“Father’s name written in their foreheads”* (14:1). This is a symbolic way of saying the redeemed are obviously identified with God. That identity was not achieved by them, but accomplished by God. Their identity is the result of Divine work, not human ingenuity.

Jesus promised this very thing to the church in Philadelphia. They had not denied His name, but had heartily embraced Him in this world. They were opposed by the *“synagogue of Satan”* because they were unashamed to take hold on the Savior and His promises. To them Jesus said, *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him **the name of My God and the name of the city of My God** , the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him **My new name** ”* (3:12).

The things that qualify us for fellowship with God too often disqualify us for a place in the modern church. Familiarity with the good Word of God, which I so dearly treasure, is not a requirement for leadership or ministry in the nominal church. A strong desire for a fellowship based upon and around the Word of God is not a requisite either. In fact, such things are viewed as strange, actually making those possessing them peculiar to the average churchman.

Overcomers, whether from Philadelphia in the first century, or Joplin in the twentieth century, will enjoy the fulfillment of this promise. They will be conspicuously and thoroughly related to the Living God. They will have His nature, His disposition, and His character: the *“name of My God”* will be upon them. They will fit into the completed temple and city of God. They will belong where they are, and it will be evident to the redeemed of all ages, and the angelic hosts as well: the *“name of the city of My God”* will be upon them. And there, identity with the Lord Jesus will be noticeable and clear. They will be seen as His *“brethren,”* whom He has faithfully

brought to God (Heb 2:10-12). They will share the throne with Him (Rev 3:21), and be “*joint heirs*” together with Him (Rom 8:17). Indeed, Jesus will write upon them His own “*new name.*”

In this world, we must deal with not being accepted—with being out of place, so to speak. It is difficult enough to endure the status of “*outcast*” among the obviously unsaved: those with whom we live and work. But., alas, the status of “*stranger and foreigner*” is not limited to that alienated segment of humanity. Too often, we feel out of place in the professed church, and around those who wear the name of the Lord.

### **A Personal Testimony**

My greatest social grief is sensing I do not really belong among my religious peers. Perhaps sharing some of my own perceptions on this point will bring some encouragement to others who have shared this experience. For a long time now, I have sensed a gulf forming between myself and the institutional church. This is not what I desired to happen, and is not my preference.

This expanding chasm is largely owing to a quest for the things of God. I make no claim of being unique in this pursuit. In fact, it is an aspect of faith that all believers possess to some degree. I find that as the things of God become clearer to me, kindred spirits become correspondingly more precious. Conversely, those lacking an appetite for these things grow more distant, and can more easily do without my company.

The things that qualify us for fellowship with God too often disqualify us for a place in the modern church. Familiarity with the good Word of God, which I so dearly treasure, is not a requirement for leadership or ministry in the nominal church. A strong desire for a fellowship based upon and around the Word of God is not a requisite either. In fact, such things are viewed as strange, actually making those possessing them peculiar to the average churchman. The general church or religious institution has its own standards and credential requirements. Oblivious of the absurdity of their self-conceived requirements, they are blissfully unaware those very prerequisites exclude Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the Apostles, Luke, James, and Jude, from playing a role in their institutions. Thus, many of us who are at home in the presence of the Lord are actually ill-at-ease among them.

All of this should surprise no one. In all ages, those who were used of God experienced exactly the same thing. It was the Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, and Jewish Council that rejected John the Baptist, Jesus, Stephen, and Paul. Do not think for one moment that all of this had no affect upon those being rejected. Jesus wept over rejecting Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-43). Paul had heaviness of heart over Israel (Rom 9:2). Stephen prayed for the very ones who stoned him (Acts 7:60). Religious rejection is the bitter herbs at the Passover feast.

### A Place at Last

All of this highlights the glories of the world to come. No more will God's people be *"the filth of the world, and . . . the offscouring of all things"* (1 Cor 4:13). Indeed, the name of their God will be upon *"their forehead."* In this world, it was their hearts that were *"circumcised"* and made new. That operation was only apparent to those who had experienced the same thing. Then, we will be citizens of the city, and obviously so. No one will ask us if we are really citizens, or question our presence in the glory. It will be apparent we belong there. Our association with God will be evident. Our connection with Jesus will be noticeable and unquestionable. There will be nothing about us that will lead to any other conclusion: we belong in glory. *"His name shall be on their foreheads."* Hallelujah! How the hearts of believers long for that time!

## NO NIGHT THERE

*"There shall be **no night there** : They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light."* (Verse 5a) It is no wonder the Spirit says, *"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and **good hope** by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work"* (2 Thess 2:16-17, NKJV ). The *"hope"* that is held out to believers is *"good."* Our future is bright with the glow of *"good things to come"* (Heb 9:11). Those who

If the prospect of realizing all our hearts desire seems but a dream, let us dream on! The happy prospect of glory has given us power to live, the ability to think

more soundly, and the adeptness to drink from life's most bitter cup without despairing.

embrace the Lord with zeal, abandoning all competing pursuits, will surely be justified. If we seem foolishly radical now, it is only because our enemies are uncertain of their future. To such we acknowledge that, according to appearance, "*We are fools for Christ's sake*" (1 Cor 4:10). We have cast our eyes from the defilements of this world to the fair fields of glory. If the prospect of realizing all our hearts desire seems but a dream, let us dream on! The happy prospect of glory has given us power to live, the ability to think more soundly, and the adeptness to drink from life's most bitter cup without despairing. What a marvelous revelation is set before us in the twenty-second chapter of Revelation! Let us drink from it with joy!

## NO NIGHT THERE

Who is capable of comprehending the magnitude of this promise! "*There shall be NO night there!*" Among other things, life in this world is accompanied by night—both in nature and in spirit. In fact, our entire sojourn in this world is likened to time in the night. That is why we are told, "*The night is far spent, the day is at hand*" (Rom 13:12). We are not "*of the night,*" but we are presently occupying the realm of night.

When Jesus comes, He will interrupt the affairs of this world like a "*thief in the night*" (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10). Until that time, we live amidst uncertainties. We do not even know what a day will bring forth, to say nothing of next year. We have a perfect parallel in nature. The light that rules the night is called a "*lesser light*" (Gen 1:16). In eternity, we will find the glow of grace was greatly diminished in the realm where faith was perfected. However, while it cannot be said of this world in ANY sense, it is true in EVERY sense, in the world to come: "*There shall be NO night there.*"

## The Tragedy of the Night

The "*night*" does not speak of good things. It is a time of doubt and question, when watchmen must take their position on the walls of life (Isa 21:11). Jesus spoke of it the coming night "*when no one can work*" (John 9:4). Night, in this sense, is something with which the children of God cannot blend. As it is written, "*Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the*

*night, nor of darkness*” (1 Thess 5:5). It is true that we ourselves were “*once darkness,*” but in Jesus that is no longer the case (Eph 5:8). The ignorance and depravity belonging to darkness are now contrary to our natures, and we can blend no longer with them.

Glory consists of the ABSENCE of some things, as well as the presence of others. The “*night*” speaks of everything contrary to us, and against which our faith struggles. To accentuate this, allow me to remind you of common experiences associated with nighttime. Because there is “*no night there,*” none of these things will be there either.

■ **CRYING.** “*And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night . . .*” “*O my God, I cry . . . in the night season.*” “*She weeps bitterly in the night*” (1 Sam 15:11; Psa 22:2; Lam 1:2). What child of God does not know what this is about? Console your heart, child of God. “*There shall be no night there!*”

- **WEEPING THAT ENDURES.** “*Weeping may endure for a night , but joy cometh in the morning*” (Psa 30:5). There are times when our tears gush during the night, watering out bed (Psa 6:6). These are times when the helplessness of our flesh are emphasized, and our frailty looms large. What a blessed thing it is to read, “*There shall be no night there!*”
- **BITTER REMORSE.** No child of God desires remorse. Yet, in this world, we taste of it like Peter did. “*And Peter went out, and wept bitterly*” (Lk 22:62). What an exceedingly dark night that was! Those with tender hearts know something of that experience. How good to know, “*There shall be no night there.*” The mourning ones will be comforted!
- **TOILING FRUITLESSLY.** No child of God wants anything to do with fruitless labors. However, what believer is there that does not know what it is like to work hard, yet take in little. Remember when the disciples went fishing after Jesus’ death? It is written, “*immediately; and that night they caught nothing*” (John 21:3). It was reminiscent of an experience they had at the beginning. “*And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night , and have taken nothing*” (Lk 5:5). There are times when we cannot show much for our labors. But that will all end in the glory. “*There is no night there.*”

- **PRAYER VIGILS.** Our blessed Lord was noted for all night vigils in prayer. “*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and **continued all night** in prayer to God*” (Lk 6:12). Before Him, Jacob did the same (Gen 32:24). With the world shut out, and the lurking enemy of the soul near, nighttime has become a season for prayer. It is all part of being in this world. But it will not be so in the world to come. There will be no need for gathering strength in all-night seasons of prayer. “*There is no night there.*”
- **A TIME OF DEATH.** When those close to us leave this world, it is, so to speak, the nighttime. The brightness of the soul’s sun has often set as we see those with whom we have sojourned move up higher. It can be said of more than one, “*And this woman's child died in the night*” (1 Kgs 3:19). It is one of the harder experiences of life. But all of that will be behind us when we are ever with the Lord. “*There is no night there.*”

In a sense, believers can tell how close they are to God by what they are able to comprehend or understand. Where a fundamental ignorance of God and the things of the Spirit of God exist, there is a vast chasm between the individual and God.

Time does not allow extensive comments on this subject—the night. In bitterness of soul, the Psalmist’s sore ran in the night (Psa 77:2). Jacob spoke of being consumed by frost at night (Gen 31:40). Job spoke of “*wearisome nights*” (Job 7:3). There is a terror associated with the night (Psa 91:5), and strong spiritual desires that surface in the night (Isa 26:9). All of this is part and parcel of living in the body and in the world. But it is only a temporary situation. “*There is no night there.*”

Consider the difficulties associated with the darkness. Presently we wrestle against “*the rulers of the **darkness** of this world*” and the “*power of **darkness**”*” (Eph 6:12; Col 1:13). But all of that will soon be behind us forever. “*There is no night there.*”

NO LAMP AND NO LIGHT

*“They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.”* The “*lamp*” is for the night, and “*the sun*” is for the day. We need them both because of the temporal nature of life, and because of its cycles. They allow us to adapt to a changing environment.

To put it another way, the fulness of Divine glory is not presently with us. His Word is “*a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Psa 119:105). It allows us to navigate through difficult spiritual terrain.

But in the world to come, there will be no need for any adaptation as we presently know it. The “*Lord God*” Himself will shed light on everything. Nothing will be vague or mysterious. There will be no dark corners, so to speak, where we must navigate by faith. In this world, because we do not fully see the Lord, we cannot fully see life. In fact, both truth and life are only seen correctly to the degree we behold the Lord correctly. No wonder it is written, “*For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face: now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known*” (1 Cor 13:12).

Clarity of vision has more to do with WHERE we are than what we know. Being in the body and in the world produces a blurred condition. Further, while we are surrounded by the temporal order, God Himself cannot dwell fully with us. All of that, praise the Lord, will be fully corrected in the world to come. With the temporal removed, and our enemies in the lake of fire, the Lord Himself will be able to fully dwell with us. His Presence, or Person, will cause everything to become clear to us. There will be no further need for “*lesser lights,*” whether lamps or the moon.

In a sense, believers can tell how close they are to God by what they are able to comprehend or understand. Where a fundamental ignorance of God and the things of the Spirit of God exist, there is a vast chasm between the individual and God. Too, as the things of God become clearer to us, we are coming closer to the Lord, drawing near to Him in faith.

Conversely, the clarity of understanding we will have when we are in glory will confirm God Himself is with us. The illumination we possess will be given to us

by His Presence, not by secondary means, as it is now received. All of this assumes there is a longing for this illumination within the saints—and, indeed, there is. Salvation brings this longing to the soul. Wherever the Lord Jesus is received, there comes an increasing appetite and yearning for the truth of God. Where that is missing, death is prevalent. The pulse of spiritual life is directly proportionate to the dominance of hope. Where hope is nourished and maintained, strong yearnings for glory are found.

## THEY SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER

*“And they shall reign forever and ever.”* (Verse 5b) The magnitude of the glory set before us continues to grow. A river of water of life, trees yielding a variety of fruit, and leaves for the healing of the nations—all in abundance. There is no more curse, the throne of God and the Lamb is in our midst, and our service unhindered! But there is more! We will be God’s servants, but not mere servants. The saved will be reigning servants! Rather than being ruled, we will rule! Ours will not be an independent reign. Rather, we will reign with Christ. While ours will be a joint rule, it will be strictly in concert with our Lord Jesus Christ’s reign. We will be brought into His rule and operate within the Divine agenda. It will all be joyful and effective.

Herein is a marvelous thing. Earlier in Revelation it is said of Jesus, *“and He shall reign for ever and ever”* (11:15). Now, it is said of the saints, *“and THEY shall reign forever and ever.”* This will be a just reign for which no apology will be offered. Then the saying will be fulfilled, *“The LORD will make you the head, not the tail . . . you will always be at the top, never at the bottom”* (Deut 28:13, NIV ). In this world, that promise was conditional: *“If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them.”* There, it will be unconditional, for we will be delivered from every restraining and competing influence.

Here and there, the Lord has revealed this reign. One of the most extensive prophecies came through Daniel. He thrice referred to this very reign. *“But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come . . . and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the*

*kingdom . . . Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will **be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One** ; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:18,22,27).*

Is this not a staggering promise? And yet it is held out to every child of God. Jesus spoke of inheriting “*the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matt 25:34). Here we grapple with the enemy of our souls. There, we will not. What God has planned on the trestle board of eternity can scarcely be imagined—even after extensive revelation.

The thought of ALWAYS dominating is too large to be grasped at this present time. But we must allow our faith to stretch toward that goal, for that is where we are headed. The people of God do need to hear these things. It will strengthen the sinews of the faith, and brace up their feeble knees. We must hear about more than our weaknesses. We need a message that affirms that for which we have been apprehended!

## FAITHFUL AND TRUE WORDS

*“Then he said to me, These words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.”* (Verse 6) Some might wonder why such an expression is necessary. After all, this is the Word of God! It is God speaking through Jesus, through an angel, and now through the Holy Spirit. Is not that enough? Why add, “*These words are faithful and true?*” There is a reason!

An academic perspective is extremely limited. There are several things it does NOT take into account. **First**, we are in the flesh, which is everywhere declared to be a handicap. **Second**, we are in a cursed world which constitutes it a distraction to the soul. **Third**, we are opposed by a shrewd enemy who is aggressive against us. **Fourth**, we are living by faith and not by sight. The realities we have embraced are not evident, and vanish from our understanding like smoke unless they are believed. In view of these circumstances, placing confidence in scholastic and formalistic approaches is foolish and absurd. Expertise in language gives you

no advantage in the good fight of faith. Historical proficiency can not clear up eternal matters. An extremely logical mind can be as great a handicap as it can an advantage. Throughout the ages, the Spirit thunders, “*Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom*” (Jer 9:23, NIV ). This is not empty oratory, but a solemn reality!

When it comes to the apprehension of Himself and His salvation, God has discarded the whole of worldly wisdom. As it is written, “*Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*” (1 Cor 1:20). If you want to know the things of God, a worldly-wise man will do you no good. If you desire for the things of God to find residence in your soul, you do not call for a “*scholar,*” or scribe. The philosopher is impotent when it comes to “*the things of the Spirit of God.*” That is simply the way it is. The reluctance of many to acknowledge this truth has no bearing whatsoever upon it.

The biggest part of edification is **AFFIRMATION** , not explanation. The more men attempt to explain the truth of God, the more the power of the truth is neutralized. At some point the truthfulness of the promise must be affirmed.

It is because of this circumstance that Divine iteration is employed. “**These words are faithful and true.**” They are true because they have been said. They are not true because they are logical, but are spiritually logical because they are true. The **ONLY** reason to believe them is because the Lord has declared them—but that is reason enough for faith.

The biggest part of edification is **AFFIRMATION** , not explanation. The more men attempt to explain the truth of God, the more the power of the truth is neutralized. At some point the truthfulness of the promise must be affirmed. Again, its absolute faithfulness is to be declared. You can trust what the Lord has said, building your entire life upon it. It will hold you up during the battle, in the valley, and upon the mountain. With God, there “*is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:17). If you cannot prove the truth of His promises, they are still “*faithful and true.*” If they do not conform to historical patterns of through, they

remain “*faithful and true.*” If someone finds some Dead Sea scrolls that omit them, they are still “*faithful and true.*”

At once, the sophist will suspect us of speaking reproachfully of his cherished wisdom. Let such men acknowledge their thoughts are NOT the thoughts of God, neither are their ways His. And what is a person to do when such a circumstance is encountered? The answer is clear, “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts*” (Isa 55:7). See, all of that is involved in the words, “*These words are faithful and true!*” If you will embrace them by faith, you will find it to be so.

## GOD IS SHOWING HIS SERVANTS

“*The Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show unto His servants.*” See the Divine initiative. It is glorious! The “*holy prophets,*” rejected by those who heard them, were preparing the world for what we are reading. They wrote of “*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*” –and this is “*the glory*” of which we are reading (1 Pet 1:11). Now God stands behind the prophets and declares they belong to Him and spoke the truth.

Regardless of their professed worth and advancement in learning, God has never confirmed the message of a philosopher, linguist, economist, or politician. He has never been known as the Lord God of the philosophers, or the God of the politician.

God does not send an angel to confirm the words of Socrates or Plato! He does not buttress the words of Josephus. Regardless of their professed worth and advancement in learning, God has never confirmed the message of a philosopher, linguist, economist, or politician. He has never been known as the Lord God of the philosophers, or the God of the politician. Never has He represented Himself as the Sender of economists, or the Revealer of language expertise. While all valid knowledge is traceable to God alone, He has chosen to align Himself with the holy prophets. That means their message is superior to all of their peers and of all history.

There is such a vast gulf between the dwelling place of God and the abode of men, the message must be brought by an angel to John. No man could rise into heaven to obtain it and bring it down. The wisest and most gifted among men could not conclude it from the starry heavens or other facets of creation. The scientist, philosopher, and astronomer all stand before the mighty God of heaven with their hands over their mouths. It was a holy angel that brought the truth within the grasp of the man of God.

### **Shown to His Servants**

And who are the intended recipients of this truth? Is it a mass message for the multitudes? Indeed, it is not! It is for “*His servants*” –those employed by God in His work. If a person is NOT serving the Lord, this message is NOT for them! If a person IS serving the Lord, the message IS for them! It is really just that simple.

See how mindful the Lord is of those who live and have their being in Him! He wants them to know what is ahead–what has been determined for them. He will not leave them to walk in the darkness, but will shed some light on their path, making it more tolerable and enjoyable. Because “*we are saved by hope*” (Rom 8:24), our Lord will speak to hope, nurturing and strengthening it.

### **THINGS THAT MUST SHORTLY TAKE PLACE**

“*To show unto his servants the things which must shortly take place.*” This is the second time the Lord has made this point. The first verse of chapter one affirmed, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which **must shortly come to pass** . . .*” Again, note the use of the word “*servants.*” That is a term that is by no means confined to a specific area of the world or period of time.

At this point, men rush into the arena of thought, bringing their language expertise and lifeless theology. Fastening upon the expression “*shortly take place,*” they conclude God is speaking with the language of time. Thus they teach the destruction of Jerusalem is the point of time in reference, and that Jesus is speaking of things to occur during the latter part of the first century–in the lifetime of the first readers of the Revelation.

By so teaching, these people have robbed the saints of God, depriving them of food for hope and sustenance for the soul. If some imagine such people are sincere, we emphatically deny this to be the case. Their doctrine has betrayed the corruption that is in their hearts. They are neither honest nor good that teach the saints the glorious things we have just read have already taken place. Lest I appear to be speaking too strongly on this matter, allow me to refresh your mind about the magnitude of what has been revealed. Because of the sheer magnitude of the Revelation, I will limit myself to the section covered in 21:10-22:6.

- The devil, the beast, and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire (20:10).
- The earth and the heaven have fled away from the face of the One seated upon the throne, and no place is found for them (20:11).
- The dead, small and great, are brought to stand before God (20:12a).
- The book of life is opened (20:12b).
- The dead are judged out of those things written in the books, and in accordance with their works (20:12c).
- The sea gives up its dead, and they are all judged according to their works (20:13).
- Death and hades gives up the dead that are in them (20:14).
- Whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (20:15).
- The new heaven and the new earth appear (21:1a).
- The first heaven and the first earth are passed away (21:1b).
- The glorified saints are seen coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2).
- The tabernacle of God is with men, and He Himself dwells with them (21:3).
- God wipes away all tears from their eyes (21:4a).
- There is no more death (21:4b).
- There is no more sorrow (21:4c).
- There is no more crying (21:4d).
- There is no more pain (21:4e).
- The former things are passed away (21:4f).
- All things are made new (21:5).
- John is given a vision of the bride, the Lamb's wife (21:9-10).
- The glorified bride has the glory of God (21:11-21).
- The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple (21:22).
- There is no need of the sun or the moon, the the glory of God and the Lamb shed light everywhere (21:23).
- The nations of the saved and the earth bring all of their glory (21:24,26).

- The gates are never again shut (21:25a).
- There is no night (21:25b).
- Nothing defiling, works an abomination, or makes a lie, enters (21:27a).
- Everyone whose names are written in the book of life enter (21:27b).
- A pure river of water of life flows without hindrance or contamination (22:1).
- The tree of life flourishes with an abundance of consistent and continual fruit (22:2a).
- The nations are healed (22:2b).
- There is no more curse (22:3a).
- The throne of God and the Lamb are with the people (22:3b).
- God's servants serve Him (22:3c).
- God's servants see His face (22:4a).
- God's name is written upon the foreheads of His servants (22:4b).
- There shall be no night there (22:5a).
- There is no need of the sun or the moon (22:5b).
- The Lord God gives light to His servants (22:5c).
- God's servants reign forever and ever (22:5d).

There are **FORTY** marvelous things attributed to happening “*shortly.*” What soul is there foolish enough to try and wrest these from the hands of the people of God? Who is ignorant enough to say these all occurred in the first century? To attempt such things requires a prodigious imagination, a deceived mind, and a hard heart. We will not give such people the benefit of being honest, good, or sincere. If Hymaneus and Philetus overthrew the faith of some by saying the resurrection was past already (2 Tim 2:18), what can be said of those who teach these **FORTY** things have passed?

I have taken the time to briefly elucidate on this heretical view because of the gravity of our text. These words were sent by God through an angel to “*show His servants the things which must shortly be done.*” In all of those promises, nothing was held out that could possibly be limited by time or geography. They were all universal promises that spanned the ages. This is not provincial language, and must not be treated as such.

### **Not Confined to Time**

The word “*shortly*” is not confined to time, although it is used in that sense. However, in every Apostolic use where time is the obvious point, doctrine is NOT the point. Always, it was a matter of personal desire or preference (1 Cor

4:19; Phil 2:19,24; 1 Tim 3:14; 2 Tim 4:19; Heb 13:23; 3 John 14). Peter used the word “*shortly*” when referring to a special revelation concerning his death (2 Pet 1:14).

### The Language of Faith

Hope is not an intellectual thing, bounded by human logic. It is something that thrives upon Divine commitment, spanning time and looking at the end of all things.

The Spirit witnessed to us, “*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen*” (Rom 16:20). This bruising would have the same characteristics of our Lord’s bruising of the wicked one. Once bruised, the Lord was troubled no more by the devil. So it will be with the saints. When Satan is bruised under their feet, they will have done with him once and for all. The word “*shortly*” does not mean this was going to happen within the lifetime of the brethren in Rome. Rather, **it is the language of faith**. It is speaking of things that “*are not as though they were,*” or declaring the “*end from the beginning*” (Rom 4:17; Isa 46:10).

From this perspective, the coming of the Lord is set forth as about to occur. “*For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry*” (Heb 10:37). Not being burdened with the incidentals of life, the Lord leaps ahead to the next significant event, saying it will take place in a “*little while.*”

By using the phrase “*shortly come to pass,*” the Spirit is teaching us to live with the promised future in mind. We are not to become burdened down with the abrasiveness of life in the flesh. This is precisely the point being made in reference to our afflictions. “*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all*” (2 Cor 4:17, NIV). From the standpoint of time, our afflictions are neither light nor momentary. However, from the viewpoint of faith, they are—praise the Lord!

Because “*the just shall live by faith*” (Heb 10:38), the Spirit appeals to our faith, not our intellect. As you know, faith has to do primarily with the heart, the very citadel of our person. As it is written, “*shall not doubt in his **heart** , but shall believe . . . slow of **heart** to believe . . . Let not your **heart** be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me . . . If thou believest with all thine **heart** . . . believe in thine **heart** . . . For with the **heart** man believeth . . . a true **heart** in full assurance of faith*” (Mk 11:23; Lk 24:25; John 14:1; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:10; Heb 10:22).

Hope is not an intellectual thing, bounded by human logic. It is something that thrives upon Divine commitment, spanning time and looking at the end of all things. That is why the Spirit speaks as He does—He is speaking to faith. What consolation would be brought to suffering saints by saying, “these things will come to pass in one hundred years . . . five hundred years . . . a thousand years”?

Let your faith take hold on the message as it stands. Your battle will not be long! What you are yearning for will be here. Once, when referring to the seventy year long Babylonian captivity, the Lord said, “*For a **small moment** have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a **little wrath** I hid my face from thee **for a moment** ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer*” (Isa 54:7-8). From the standpoint of time, that forsaking certainly did not seem like a “*moment.*” The judgment poured out upon them did not appear as “*a little wrath,*” or “*for a moment.*” The expert in language and the meaning of original words could certainly not have brought much comfort to believers by an etymological analysis of the Divine utterance.

Nor, indeed, can those who traffic on the roads of language bring delight to our hearts by telling us what they imagine “*shortly*” to mean. So far as faith is concerned, the next meaningful thing on the Divine agenda is “*the end.*” Be strong in hope and fight the good fight of faith. It will soon be over! The Lord “*will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth*” (Rom 9:28). Your faith can take hold of that, and your hope can look forward to it.

## I AM COMING QUICKLY

***“Behold, I am coming quickly!”*** (Verse 6a) Here is the manner of the Kingdom—*“quickly.”* The word means suddenly and without delay. It is something that cannot be averted, or caused to happen after the appointed time. Jesus earlier told the churches, *“Behold, I come quickly”* (3:11). Later in this chapter He will say it again, *“And, behold I come quickly, and My reward is with Me”* (22:12). His last words to the church are, *“Surely I come quickly”* (22:20). The surety of His return is thus announced.

It is as though the Lord is saying, *Do not settle down in this world—I am coming quickly! Do not allow your thoughts to fasten on the transitory—I am coming quickly. Look toward heaven, lifting up your eyes—I am coming quickly.* How we need these blessed words!

## THE PRONOUNCED BLESSING

***“Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*** (Verse 6b) And what will we do with this marvelous book—the Revelation God gave to Jesus, to give to the angel, to give to John, to give to the churches? If we looked at the use the average church makes of this book, we would think it was a sort of optional book—only meant for a select few. We might also conclude it really had no pertinence for the life of faith. But that is not the way the Spirit treats the book. He challenges us to take hold of the words of this book, pronouncing a blessing upon those who keep it.

This is the second time this very blessing has been given. ***“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it ; for the time is near”*** (1:3).

What does *“keeps the words of the prophecy of this book”* mean? The word *“keep”* literally means *to guard (from loss or injury) . . . to maintain . . . hold fast.* Keeping these words involves hiding them in our hearts—keeping them close so we can ponder them. It is maintaining them within the range of our recollection, refusing to allow anything to wash them from our hearts and minds. To *“keep”* the words of the prophecy of this book is to recognize their value and relevance to the good fight of faith.

The fact that individuals retaining the words of this book are blessed, confirms its importance to the believer. This is not a novel book. Rather, it is rich with blessing.

The expression “*prophecy of this book*” places it in the profitable category. Elsewhere the Spirit affirms, “*But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation*” (1 Cor 14:3). This message, therefore, like all prophecy, is for us— “*men.*” It contains something we need, and will yield indispensable spiritual benefits. These benefits are all objective and intentional. They do not simply occur. “*Edification*” is the process whereby the child of God is built up, strengthened, and brought to maturity in Christ. “*Exhortation*” is a means whereby the soul is stirred, and the believer prompted to conduct his life in strict harmony with the truth. It moves the child of God to do something with the truth. “*Consolation*” or “*comfort*” is the process through which the heart is calmed and the abrasiveness of life dulled. In consolation hope is aroused and the will is strengthened for spiritual action.

The fact that individuals retaining the words of this book are blessed, confirms its importance to the believer. This is not a novel book. Rather, it is rich with blessing.

I want to underscore the importance that is ascribed to this book. It is called “*prophecy*” five times. “*The words of this prophecy*” (1:3). “*The prophecy of this book*” (22:7,10,18). “*The book of this prophecy*” (22:19). It differs from most prophecy because it is a vision. Thirty-five times in Revelation John says, “*I SAW*” (1:12,17; 4:4; 5:1,2; 6:1,2,9; 7:1,2; 8:2; 9:1,17; 10:1,5; 13:2,3; 14:6; 15:1,2; 16:13; 17:3,6; 18:1; 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11,12; 21:1,22). This book is a sort of animated prophecy in which the truth is painted in active colors. By doing this, the truth is more hidden to those possessing no appetite for it. It is an like a Kingdom parable, filled with life, yet obscure to those in the flesh.

The character of both good and evil are emphasized in Revelation. Satan, for example, is a “*serpent,*” “*a king,*” “*Abaddon,*” “*Apollyn,*” “*a great dragon,*” and “*the devil.*” In each of these depictions vivid pictures are painted of his activity, and the nature of his objectives. Triumphant believers are referred to as “*kings,*” “*priests,*” “*the servants of our God,*” “*the woman,*” “*the bride the Lamb’s wife,*”

and “*they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

### **A Particular Kind of Prophecy**

This book is “*prophecy*” like the visions of Daniel and Ezekiel. It portrays the truth in picture form. Remember, Daniel spoke of the triumph of the Kingdom of God as a small stone, hewn out of mountain without hands, crushing a gigantic statue, and eventually becoming a mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan 2:31-45). Ezekiel saw the awakening of Israel as a valley of very dry and scattered bones, brought together by a powerful word, and made a living army by the Spirit of God (Ezek 37). He also spoke of the healing virtues of the Gospel as a flow of life-giving water issuing from the heavenly altar, and eventually becoming a great river no man could cross (Ezek 47).

Other examples of this type of prophecy include Joseph’s dreams concerning his appointed superiority. In the first Joseph and his brothers as twelve sheaves of grain, with the brother’s sheaves bowing down to Joseph’s. The second pictured personalities as heavenly bodies, with the sun, moon, and eleven stars making obeisance to Joseph (Gen 37:7,9). Another prophecy of famine, and the means to sustain life during it, was given to Joseph. In it, seven years of plenty were portrayed as seven “*fatfleshed and well favored*” cows. Seven years of famine were seen as “*poor and very ill favored and leanfleshed*” cows that consumed the fat ones (Gen 41:2-27).

This, then, is not a strange type of message. These few examples confirm God uses this method to communicate vital and relevant truth—prophecy. When men spend time haranguing about whether the figures are literal or spiritual, they rob the book of its power. One might as well argue about the cows of Joseph’s dream or the waters of Ezekiel’s vision. Let every soul be encouraged to take hold on “*the prophecy of this book.*” If you keep it, the Lord will see to it that you are edified, exhorted, and comforted. You take care to retain the message, God will see to its effectiveness.

## **A HASTY RESPONSE TO AN OVERWHELMING VISION**

*“Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”* (Verses 8-9)

### **He Saw and Heard**

Such revelations bring men to the border of human capacity and ability. Were it not for the grace of God, they would cause men to be undone altogether. The message delivered to John was like a mighty tidal wave that swept over his soul.

Notice how John describes the message. It is what he *“saw and heard.”* Among other things, this confirms the message got through to John. He was not acting as a mere robot. He had eaten the book of Divine destiny that was in the hands of the Lamb (Rev 10:9-10). He ingested the message and saw its implications. While salvation brings great and marvelous benefits, it also initiates a fierce war. Those who embrace the truth will be opposed by the devil and his hosts. There will be suffering, hardship, and times when the truth appears nearly extinct. Satan will be *“loosed”* as well as *“bound,”* and God’s witnesses will be slain as well as come to life. There will be martyrs, whose blood is shed because they are God’s witnesses. Saints will be driven into isolation, yet be nourished from the face of the serpent. There is the sound of resounding hope even in trouble.

In all of this, the conquering Lamb will maintain strict control, governing His Kingdom with His people in mind. Believers will triumph, and all of their enemies will be thoroughly defeated. At last those who embraced the Savior will reign with Him, world without end. For them, conflict will be forever ended, and the effects and recollection of their warfare forgotten.

That is the resounding message of this book, and John *“saw and heard”* it. He was not only exposed to the message, he perceived it.

## **John Falls Down Before the Angel**

This is the second time John so reacted to a heavenly messenger. Both occasions are during the crescendo of the message. The first was when a blessing was pronounced upon those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:10). The second is when a blessing is pronounced upon those keeping “*the sayings of the prophecy of this book*” (22:8-9). Both times John “*fell to worship*” the messenger. Both times the heavenly messenger responded, “*See thou do it not,*” refusing to receive homage from the ages Apostle. How careful the holy angels are to keep the focus upon the Living God!

This is not a novice falling down before the angel of the Lord. Nor, indeed, is it some weak and thoughtless believer. John knew the worship of angels is strictly forbidden by the Lord (Col 2:18). Never are we allowed to worship the creation, whether it be heavenly bodies or heavenly personalities (Rom 1:25). How is it, then, that John attempts to worship at the feet of this angel?

It is more the greatness of the vision than the weakness of the Apostle that caused this reaction. There are revelations so grand and glorious that they cause unusual reactions. Upon hearing of the contamination of God’s people, Ezra tore his cloths, pulled hair out of his head and beard, and sat appalled (Ezra 9:3). On one occasion, Daniel received a revelation that caused him to “*faint,*” be “*sick for days,*” and be “*astonished*” (Dan 8:27). Upon seeing Peter, whom an angel, of the Lord had directed him to call, Cornelius “*fell down at his feet and worshiped him*” (Acts 10:25). Unlike the Pope and other imposters, Peter refused to allow such a response.

Such revelations bring men to the border of human capacity and ability. Were it not for the grace of God, they would cause men to be undone altogether. The message delivered to John was like a mighty tidal wave that swept over his soul. It put everything together, and provided a grand overview of eternal purpose. It held the future glory before John himself, who was being oppressed because of the Word of God. The glory of it all burst upon his soul, and his flesh fell at the feet of the angel. It was an overwhelming vision.

## **“Do It Not!”**

There is a gentleness in the voice of this holy angel that is worthy of note. He does not strike John down like Herod was stricken for improper conduct (Acts 12:22-23). He does not take away John’s speech, like the angel did to Zachariah, father of John the Baptist (Lk 1:19-20). Instead, he simply reminds him of the facts in the case.

**“I am thy fellowservant.”** What a word is this! He does not say John is his fellowservant, but that he is John’s fellowservant. In so doing, the angel acknowledged the supremacy of salvation. He confesses that angelic intrigue is caused by what men have been given in Christ Jesus (1 Pet 1:12). Holy angels are, indeed, serving God. They are also *“ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation”* (Heb 1:14). While uninformed men are intrigued with angels, holy angels are intrigued with the salvation wrought for men, desiring to look into the Gospel.

Angels are involved in the same program as the saints of God. They are *“fellowservants.”* From the standpoint of time, we have come into their fellowship (Heb 12:22). The angels know this, and we do well to also know it.

## **“Your Brethren, the Prophets”**

We have glimpses here and there of angelic activity in behalf of the holy prophets. Elijah was visited by an angel (2 Kgs 1:15). The mighty angel Gabriel unveiled things to Daniel (Dan 8:16-19). An angel *“talked”* with Zechariah (Zech 1:9,11). Such prophets were *“brethren”* with John in Divine purpose. Like John, they also labored in isolation and were persecuted. Their message drove a wedge between them and their peers.

The holy prophets are consistently lauded in Scripture. With great sternness the Lord warns, *“Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm”* (1 Chron 16:22; Psa 105:15, NKJV ). Since the *“world began,”* we are apprized, God has spoken *“by the mouth of His holy prophets”* (Lk 1:70; Acts 3:21). Peter admonishes us to *“be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets”* (2 Pet 3:2). If ever there was an unappreciated segment of humanity, it is the holy prophets! The holy angel remembered them, and we do well to do so

also.

The point to be seen here is this: the message given to John is in strict harmony with the message of the Prophets. It does not represent a new agenda, or a different Divine initiative. The book of the Revelation deals with the same Kingdom announced by the Prophets, demonstrated by Jesus, and expounded by the Apostles.

### **Them Which Keep the Sayings**

What a marvelous reality is here unveiled! Not only is the angel linked to the Prophets and to the Apostles, he also identifies himself with all who “*keep the sayings of this book.*” Think of it! The holy Prophets were given glimpses of the great salvation we enjoy, and foretold it. The truth was expanded and interpreted to the holy Apostles, and they declared it. Now those who receive that word are brought into the fellowship, being joined to angels, Prophets, and Apostles. Those who keep the sayings can certainly boast of no startling revelation like those given to Prophets and Apostles. They can, however, enjoy fellowship with them both, as well as the holy angels.

All of this, of course, is secondary. The angel charges John to “*worship God*” because it is His purpose, and both angels and men are His servants.

## **CONCLUSION**

The glory of the book of Revelation is realized in the impact it registers upon the believing heart. It awakens hope, strengthens faith, and soothes the troubled soul. It opens the mysteries of spiritual life, showing us our labor is not vain in the Lord. It is a

## disclosure that majors on outcomes or consequences.

The glory of the book of Revelation is realized in the impact it registers upon the believing heart. It awakens hope, strengthens faith, and soothes the troubled soul. It opens the mysteries of spiritual life, showing us our labor is not vain in the Lord. It is a disclosure that majors on outcomes or consequences. It is not a book of procedures or Divine direction, although some of those necessary things are included. Nor, indeed, is it simply a heartless unveiling of the future, as though it were unrelated to the good fight of faith. Myriads of professed believers ignore this book because they imagine it has nothing to do with *the Christian life*. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The book of Revelation confirms that Jesus is presently evaluating the churches. It boldly announces that He holds the destiny of all things in His hand. The devil and his wicked horde are under His control, as well as all of the saved. At his word Satan can be bound or loosed, saints can die or live, truth can flourish or be withdrawn. We do not live in an ungoverned world, nor are the events occurring in our time mere happenings of chance. Faith can take hold on this.

The Lamb is reigning, Satan is losing, and the saints are winning! That is the way it is, and we do well to keep those sayings in our hearts. The sound of this consistent message may appear to contradict both logic and appearance, but it is still true. Faith can see it, and hope can rejoice in it.

Remember, “*we are saved by hope*” (Rom 8:24-25). Where hope is weak, Christ’s yoke is difficult and the burden heavy. The commandments become grievous, and the world presses hard upon us. It is no wonder the average church member possesses so little confidence, appetite, or spiritual stamina. Hope is being starved by an emphasis on problem resolution and a focus on earthly involvements. Instead of a stream of living water issuing from many pulpits, there is a cloud of life-stifling, suffocating, dust. When the Holy Spirit holds before us the affairs of this world, He filters the vision through the purpose of God. Faithfully, He unveils the outcome of all things to us, also confirming everything is being thoughtfully governed by the very One who saved us. Satan is shown to be aggressive and powerful, but not invincible or omnipotent. His purpose will be frustrated, and his ministers cast into the lake of fire with him.

As these things are clarified to the soul, the ability to fight a good fight of faith

and finish the course set before us is granted. The clearer heaven is in our eye, the less dominant the world becomes. The more we hear about our inheritance, the less we want to hear about this present evil world. How glorious to have a book that feeds these longings, confirming to our hearts the blessedness of being in Christ Jesus. We can endure Satan's rage if given to behold the glories of the world to come. Tell us of the things close to the heart of our Lord, and we will renew our strength.

# The Revelation Of Christ

Lesson Number 42

## THE FINAL MESSAGE

" 10 And he said to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. 12 And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. 14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. 16 I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. 18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. 20 He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. " (Revelation 22:10-21, NKJV)

## INTRODUCTION

As we near the close of this marvelous book, we sense the fervent desire of our Lord for His people to know and comprehend His message to them. Often we think of the fervency required on our part to appropriate the truth of God. It is well to also consider the fervency with which the Lord has made that truth known to us. The inspiration of Scripture involves a Divine intrusion into the affairs of men. In the case of the book of Revelation, the Lord broke through political, religious, and social confusion to deliver a message to "*the churches.*" Even though Satan had spread a veil of spiritual ignorance over the world, the Word of God broke through

it all. The powers of darkness were not able to hold back the revelation. They could not stop Jesus from receiving from God. They were impotent to impede the conveyance of the revelation from Jesus to the angel. John received it from the angel without so much as jot or tittle being withheld by *“the enemy.”* And then, John delivers the message faithfully to the churches of all succeeding ages. The very existence of this book is a refreshing commentary on the Sovereignty of God. It confirms the Lord is fully capable of governing His kingdom effectively.

We will find that truth concealed brings no ultimate profit to the people. It is only as it is perceived that benefits are realized. Truth is not to be held as a mere relic, kept in a museum, and worshiped as though it were an end of itself. Spiritual freedom is the result of KNOWING the truth, not merely possessing it. This is the meaning of the an expression found in the 51 st Psalm. *“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts”* (v 6).

I say these things to assure your heart that efforts expended to profit from this book are not in vain. It contains a message Jesus wants the churches to know. A blessing is pronounced on all who *“read”* the words of this prophecy (1:3a). A blessing is conferred upon all who *“hear”* these words (1:3b). All who keep, or retain, these words are *“blessed”* (1:3c; 22:7). There is something here that will bring joyful profit to our hearts. We will be the better for taking hold of the message Jesus is delivering to the churches.

Those who insist on being practical must see this! There is nothing more practical, or matter-of-fact, than the blessing of God. That is an appointed process that brings Divine influence to bear upon the individual. It lifts true religion out of the realm of mere philosophy. It removes spiritual knowledge from the realm of mere theological position. *“Blessing”* removes monotony from religion, and opens the door for strong faith, abounding joy, and dominating hope. And, BLESSING is associated with our exposure to, and reception of, the words of the book of the Revelation. What a marvelous benefit is here offered to the saints of God.

## DO NOT SEAL THE WORDS

*“ 10 And he said to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for*

*the time is at hand.*” Those familiar with Scripture will at once see the difference between the revelation given to John and the one given to Daniel. After receiving a remarkable revelation concerning the future, Daniel was told: “*And the vision of the evenings and mornings which was told is true; Therefore **seal up the vision** , For it refers to many days in the future*” (Dan 8:26). The KJV reads, “*shut thou up the vision,*” and the NASB reads, “*keep the vision secret.*” Again, Daniel was told, “*But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*” (12:4). Again the Lord said, “*Go thy way, Daniel: for **the words are closed up and sealed** till the time of the end*” (12:9).

### A SPECIAL GENERATION

Does this phrase, “*Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book*” mean, EXPLAIN WHAT YOU SAW? Remember, once in this vision John was commanded to withhold what he saw: “*Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them*” (10:4). Throughout the remainder of the book, those thunders were never revealed. Nor, indeed, is everything explained in an academic manner, thereby satisfying our carnal curiosity. John is being told the vision he has received was not a private one. Nor, indeed, was it for another generation. This was a message to be told, believed, and embraced.

The book is not for a future generation, as with Daniel. We must not think of *future generation* from a fleshly point of view. Time is not the fundamental consideration in this matter. Solomon spoke of generations from the standpoint of character. “*11 **There is a generation** that curses its father, And does not bless its mother. 12 **There is a generation** that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. 13 **There is a generation** ; oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. 14 **There is a generation** whose teeth are like swords, And whose fangs are like knives, To devour the poor from off the earth, And the needy from among men*” (Prov 30:11-14). Jesus spoke of “*an evil and adulterous generation*” (Matt 12:39). The “*children of this world*” in their totality are also considered a “**generation**” (Lk 16:8). The Lord Jesus Himself has a “**generation**” –numerous offspring that span many ages (Isa 53:8,12; Acts 8:33).

The righteous themselves are called a generation:  
“*For God is with **the generation of the righteous**”*”

(Psa 14:5). David also spoke of “*the generation of those who seek Him*” (Psa 24:6). He also spoke of them specifically in his hallmark Messianic Psalm. “*A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation*” (Psa 22:30).

The righteous themselves are called a generation: “*For God is with the generation of the righteous*” (Psa 14:5). David also spoke of “*the generation of those who seek Him*” (Psa 24:6). He also spoke of them specifically in his hallmark Messianic Psalm. “*A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation*” (Psa 22:30). David also captured the sense of generations that is reflected in both Daniel and Revelation. “*This will be written for the generation to come, That a people yet to be created may praise the LORD*” (Psa 102:18, NKJV). In this case, the Spirit was referring to those in Christ Jesus: a generation that would be born again, created by the grace of God from Jew and Gentile—a “*new man*” (Eph 2:15). Peter referred to those in Christ as “*a chosen generation*” (1 Pet 2:9). There is a spiritual generation that is unique.

#### DANIEL’S VISION

Daniel’s vision was closed because that generation of people were yet to be created. What he was given to see pertained to the coming ages— “*the day of salvation*” and “*the acceptable year of the Lord*” (2 Cor 6:2; Lk 4:19). He spoke of the coming Messiah, His termination of iniquity, and the induction of “*everlasting righteousness*” (Dan 9:24). That message pertained to another time, and thus was sealed during Daniel’s time. In Daniel, that time is called “*the time of the end*” (8:17; 11:35,40; 12:4,9).

“*The time of the end*” is not to be limited to the closing years of time, and that is not the point of Daniel’s prophecy. Rather, that phrase means the closing era of the world itself—an era that would last for some time. Yet, there will no earthly era after “*the time of the end.*”

#### JOHN’S REVELATION

John’s revelation also pertained to those living in the closing era of time— “*the*

*day of salvation.*” Yet, his book was **not** closed because the prophesied “*generation*” was in place—the posterity of Jesus, “*the Everlasting Father.*” They needed this message to survive the assaults of the enemy and avail themselves of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of this book pertains to them. They are the ones for whom Jesus is now reigning.

These people are in the battles described in this book. The devil was attacking them, and has launched an organized initiative against them. They are the ones who are being “*nourished from the face of the serpent*” (Rev 12:14). They are the ones who will reign with Christ (5:10; 22:5). That is why the book must not be sealed. Remember, the book of Divine destiny was in the hands of the reigning Lamb. That book was sealed, just like Daniel’s vision. The Lamb, however, broke open the seals, unfolding the eternal purpose of God. Now John is told NOT to seal the book. It is a message “*to the churches.*” Christ had accomplished the reconciliation, destroyed the devil, plundered principalities and powers, and inaugurated the New Covenant. Now is the time when the message of this book is relevant.

## THE END OF TIME

Jesus did induct the end of time. He appeared “*once in the end of the world*” to “*put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Heb 9:26). The revelation of Jesus in His redemptive capacity is said to have been manifested, “*in these last times for you*” (1 Pet 1:20). On the day of Pentecost, Peter announced the beginning of “*the last days,*” as used in this sense (Acts 2:17).

Referring to the devil’s initiative against the church, John wrote, “*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour*” (1 John 2:18).

These expressions denote the last stage of human history, and not the finality of time itself. There are texts that do speak of the closing days of the last time. The Spirit spoke of scoffers that would come in “*the last time*” (2 Pet 3:3; Jude 18), and perilous times that would come “*in the last days*” –i.e., the closing days of time, or the last of the last days.

We must take care not to become snared by a carnal view of these things. Faith does not think in terms of time, but in terms of appointed events and eras. Thus, when John is told NOT to seal up the book, the Lord is confirming the message is for the period in which he lived. All of the things shown to him were germane for the churches, to whom he was writing.

By saying “*the time is at hand*,” the Spirit is calling for alertness and vigilance among the saints. The events at hand are not merely the ones relating to the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, or the judgment of humanity. They also include Jesus judging the churches, Satan launching an initiative against the saints, and the nourishment of God’s people. The government of Jesus and the overthrow of Satan’s work are also included, as well as the awakening of Israel, the persecution of God’s people, and the triumph of truth. The book of Revelation covers a wide range of events, from the death and exaltation of Jesus to the demise of the natural order at His return. God’s people are to become sensitive of these things, keeping their vision firmly fixed on their Lord, and not the passing things of this present evil world.

**This is one of the great failings of the modern church—its near-total lack of a sense of the swiftness of time. It makes it plans as though time was never going to end. This is a blight that dominates the nominal church, which simply is not living in hope.**

The Revelation is written to “*the churches*” in general, and the Gentile churches in particular. In my judgment, the Gentile church needs to be more aware of the brevity of time. This is one of the great failings of the modern church—its near-total lack of a sense of the swiftness of time. It makes it plans as though time was never going to end. This is a blight that dominates the nominal church, which simply is not living in hope.

The “*times of the Gentiles*” are chronicled as having a termination point (Lk

21:24; Rom 11:25). This is all the more highlighted by the pivotal reference to the “*the tribes of the children of Israel*” in the book of the Revelation (7:4; 21:12). Both references have to do with Kingdom prominence. These circumstances demand alertness from which no church in any time is excluded.

### THE TIME IS AT HAND!

This is not an expression about which men are to speculate. Something that is “*at hand*” is to be considered, pondered, and the motivation for appropriate preparation. We must rid ourselves of a lifeless academic approach to the Word of God. Jesus is not speaking to us as a Schoolteacher, but as a Lord and Savior. His message is primarily to our hearts, not our minds.

### Heart Language

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*” (Matt 22:37). Mark includes the words, “*and with all thy strength*” (Mk 12:30). In both cases, the heart is mentioned first. Our Lord’s reference was to the words of Moses, who used this expression three times. All three statements are found in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 6:5; 10:12; 30:6). Here is how those passages read. “*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all **thine heart** , and with all **thy soul** , and with all **thy might** . . . And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all **thy heart** and with all **thy soul** . . . And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all **thine heart** , and with all **thy soul** , that thou mayest live.*”

Notice that Moses does not mention the mind, but rather the “soul” (nephesh). That is a general word referring to the unseen part of man. Jesus, however, delineates that unseen part as “soul” ( yuch/l psuche) and “mind” ( dianoi,a dianoia)—distinguishing them both from the “heart” ( kardi,a kardia). Further confirming the distinction of “the heart” from “the mind,” the New Covenant involves putting God’s laws “into their hearts” and writing them “in their minds” (Heb 10:16). Hebrews 8:10 reverses the order, saying God’s laws are “put into their minds” and written “in their hearts.” The point is that a sharp distinction is made between the heart and the mind, with the heart given the priority. We believe “with the heart” (Rom 10:10). It is “out of the abundance of the heart ” that the

mouth speaks (Matt 12:34). A good man brings forth good things out of the “*abundance of the heart*” (Matt 12:35). Evil thoughts proceed from “*the heart*” (Matt 15:19). This is where spiritual circumcision occurs (Rom 2:29). True obedience is rendered “*from the heart*” (Rom 6:17). The heart has intentions and thoughts that can only be deciphered by the living Word of God (Heb 4:12). Grace can also establish the heart (Heb 13:9).

The heart is where character is found. It is where motives reside. It is the throne room of the individual. Whatever rules the heart rules the person.

The heart functions more by intuition than mere intellect, which can be void of emotion and spiritual understanding. The heart can believe the promises of God even when they are not fully comprehended, refusing to stagger at commitments of God—even though they are unreasonable to the flesh

The heart functions more by intuition than mere intellect, which can be void of emotion and spiritual understanding. The heart can believe the promises of God even when they are not fully comprehended, refusing to stagger at commitments of God—even though they are unreasonable to the flesh (Rom 4:18-20).

**The book of Revelation is addressed more to the heart than to the mind.** It does not exclude the mind—God forbid! The mind, however, is subordinated to the heart when the message of this book is embraced. Those who hear or read it with dates and historical events in mind will not grasp the intended message. The Lord is not providing data for the compilation and writing of a thesis. Rather, He is providing nourishment for the heart—giving His people a reason to hold on their way.

**The Time Is At Hand**

This is the manner in which the Holy Spirit frequently speaks to us—addressing our hearts. “*The night is far spent, the day **IS AT HAND** . Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light*” (Rom 13:12). “*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord **IS AT HAND** ” (Phil 4:5). “*You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord **IS AT HAND** ” (James 5:8). “*But the end of all things **IS AT HAND** ; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers*” (1 Pet 4:7). Viewing these texts as though they focused upon dates diffuses them of their power. When we read the words “*AT HAND*” we are to look expectantly and with joyful anticipation.**

The heart leaps beyond the boundaries of time, obtaining benefit from facts positioned in other times. It can reach backward to Abraham, the law, the Prophets, and the death and resurrection of Christ, obtaining benefits even though they occurred in another time. By the same token, the heart can bound forward, gathering immediate and effectual encouragement from things that have not yet occurred; i.e., the coming of the Lord, entrance into glory, the obtaining of our inheritance, etc.

This is the posture of faith: looking and longing for the end of all things. Faith takes hold of the promises and lives in view of them. It enables the believer to be uprooted from this world and anchored “*within the veil.*” Such language can be strange, indeed, to the intellect—but not to the heart that believes. It speaks of Divine commitment and eternal advantage. It means the Heavenly agenda is being fulfilled most precisely, and to our eternal advantage.

Thus, John is told NOT to seal the book, for these things are pertinent to faith. They are food for hope, and encouragement for the persecuted and struggling. If John was told NOT to seal the book, men had better be sure they do not hide it with their stilted theologies and doctrines! Any teaching that hides the determined outcome of all things brings unspeakable handicap to believers! It also brings a curse upon its originator and perpetrator. God makes no provision to experiment with the faith of His people. There is no place in the Kingdom of God for lifeless philosophizing and personal opinion, or “*private interpretation,*” none of which are permitted in the Kingdom of God.

## WHEN CHARACTER IS FIXED

***“ 11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.”*** Here is a verse worthy of much consideration. It is sandwiched between a declaration that *“the time is at hand”* and *“I come quickly.”* The NASB reads, *“Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”* The Living Bible seems to capture the sense of the text. *“And **when that time comes** , all doing wrong will do it more and more; the vile will become more vile; good men will be better; those who are holy will continue on in greater holiness.”* *“That time”* is the fulfillment of God’s purpose in Christ and the coming of the Lord.

Observe how mankind is classified: **Unjust and righteous, filthy and holy** . The *“unjust”* are those whose lives are out of synch with eternity. Their thoughts, words, and deeds are at variance with those of the Lord. The *“filthy”* are those who are defiled, contaminated, and unfit to dwell in the presence of the Lord. The *“righteous”* are those whose manners have been changed by personal transformation and the imputation of righteousness. The *“holy”* are those who are undefiled, who have been washed from their sins and made clean through the blood of Christ. What a contrast there is between the two categories—and they are the only categories there are!

There IS coming a day when character will become unalterable! The Spirit apprizes us of that time in order to stir us to make required changes now, while *“the day of salvation”* is still here. Time is something we are not promised! Changes are not to be put off! As the Spirit says elsewhere, *“knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light”* (Rom 13:11-12).

Many contemporary theologies would be forthrightly abandoned if a consciousness of the coming conclusion of all things were prominent. Somehow I sense people—Christian people—are living as though time will be provided for a change sometime in the future.

I do not find much of this type of awareness in our time. Many contemporary theologies would be forthrightly abandoned if a consciousness of the coming conclusion of all things were prominent. Somehow I sense people—Christian people—are living as though time will be provided for a change sometime in the future. Both young and old often wait for a more “*convenient season*,” as did Felix (Acts 24:25). But a day of crisis will dawn upon all men when change will no longer be possible! For those who have lived by faith, that will be a time of inexplicable joy. Their warfare will end abruptly, and they will no longer struggle within. But for all others, it will be a time of unimaginable lamentation. Throughout the universe the mournful words will be heard, “*The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!*” (Jer 8:20). It is the time when these words will be ultimately and finally fulfilled in every sense: “*My spirit shall not always strive with man*” (Gen 6:3).

#### WHAT IS THE SPIRIT SAYING?

This expression is more than a mere supply of factual information. It is a form of spiritual irony. It is a Divine demand for immediate response, instant receptivity, and on-the-spot change. This, of course, is one of our Lord’s manners, and is frequently expressed in Scripture. “*Choose you **this day** whom ye will serve*” (Josh 24:15). “*How long **halt ye between two opinions** ? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him*” (1 Kgs 18:21). “*Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me*” (Ezra 20:39).

Listen to the Lord speak with His people Israel. He speaks with precisely the same tone as that of our text. “*But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD. **He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse** ; for they are a rebellious house*” (Ezek 3:27). “*As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: **Go, serve every one of you his idols; and hereafter; if you will not obey me** ; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols*” (Ezek 20:39).

There is an urgency in salvation that is scarcely detected today. Evangelism and missions are too often approached as though the words of Revelation were not “*at hand*,” and the coming of the Lord was not drawing near. But this is not the manner in which God reasons with men. **He plainly tells them that if they are not going to serve Him NOW, let them give themselves wholly to what will**

**condemn them in the end!** Remember, Jesus said to a lethargic church, “*I wish that you were either cold or hot*” (Rev 3:15, NRSV ). One time, beholding the stubbornness of His people, the Lord said, “*Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone*” (Hos 4:17). Such a day is coming—when the state of all individuals will be fixed, or made permanent, with no possibility of change.

Now, in “*the day of salvation*” and “*the acceptable time,*” change can be made. But this day is not an eternal one! Even in this life, it is possible for a person’s character to become unalterable! The conscience can become “*seared with a hot iron*” (1 Tim 4:2), and men can become “*twice dead, plucked up by the roots*” (Jude 12). There is a state—in this life—when it would have been better not to have been born (Matt 26:24).

How much more is this true when time is no more, and the purpose of God has been fulfilled. When the Lord comes again, bringing a grand conclusion to all things, not a solitary person will experience a change of character. If they are unrighteous, they will be forever unrighteous. If they are filthy, they will forever be locked into the filthy state. If they are righteous, they will forever be righteous, shining forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matt 13:43). If they are holy, they will forever be pure and uncontaminated, with no possibility of ever again being subjected to defiling influences in any form.

But men must prepare NOW for the inevitability. There is no time for distraction, or for involvement in the tawdry baubles set before us by the wicked one. There is no time for entertaining levity, or distracting commitments. If we are going to be righteous, we must be so now! If we are going to be holy, we must be holy now! There is no time to wait! The church must apprise people of these things.

## A JOYFUL REMINDER

*“ 12 And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”* Throughout the Revelation, Jesus apprizes His church that He is returning. “*Behold, **He cometh** with clouds; and every eye shall see him . . . But that which ye have already hold fast till **I***

*come . . . Behold, I come quickly : hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown . . . Behold, I come as a thief . Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame . . . Behold, I come quickly : blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book . . . And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. . . He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly ” (1:7; 2:25; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7,12,20).*

Behold the weight of each of those statements, and the profound realities with which they are associated! Every eye will see Him! Until then, we are to see to that no man takes our crown from us. The fact of His coming is to induce a state of preparation and readiness. A blessing is pronounced on those who keep their garments clean in anticipation of His return. His reward will be brought with Him, to give to every man in strict accordance with his work. His coming is surely going to occur. It is difficult to conceive of anything being more weighty than the return of the Lord.

The Gospels contain at least 187 references to the coming of our Lord. Significant teaching concerning His return is found in First Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, second Thessalonians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, First Peter, Second Peter, First John, and Jude. This is a prominent teaching in the Word of God—a pole star, if you please, held out to those living by faith. It is not strange that Jesus mentions His return in the Vision of the ages, and does so multiple times.

Four times in this book, Jesus says He is coming “*quickly*.” Our text is one of the times. Some of the versions read, “I am coming soon” (RSV, NRSV, and NIV). I do not care for that rendering of the word. Coming from **tacu**, (ta-chu), the word means *without delay, by surprise, and without hesitation* . It is not a word of time, but of manner. His coming will be sudden, and at an unexpected time for those who are not watching. As Jesus said elsewhere, “*Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (Matt 24:44, NKJV ). That is surely a word the church needs to hear! I fear it has been lulled to sleep by her preachers and teachers. It is conducting itself just as though the Lord Jesus was not scheduled to return at all, or that she will not be held strictly accountable for her stewardship. Any one attending the average American church-gathering would never suspect that Jesus was going to come suddenly, possibly even interrupting that very gathering.

## “MY REWARD”

Some have suggested it is inappropriate to seek for or anticipate a reward from Jesus. They imagine that duty or obligation is sufficient to propel us into the work of the Lord. But this is very foolish, and conflicts sharply with the clear teaching of our Lord.

Some have suggested it is inappropriate to seek for or anticipate a reward from Jesus. They imagine that duty or obligation is sufficient to propel us into the work of the Lord. But this is very foolish, and conflicts sharply with the clear teaching of our Lord. Earlier in this book, it is said to the Lord Himself, “*You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great*” (11:18). Jesus promised, “*I will give to each one of you according to your works*” (2:23).

Now the Lord Jesus announces *when* this will take **place—when He comes** ! How refreshing to hear these words! Many believers never associate the coming of the Lord with being rewarded. The very thought strikes fear into their hearts. Others, confused by the doctrines of men, think of a rapture, a tribulation, the mark of the beast, or other kindred matters. While God has spoken on these subjects, the real comfort ministered by Christ’s coming is what it will mean for the believers. Of paramount importance is their reward.

Jesus spoke frequently of rewards to His disciples. Do you remember some of those words? “ . . . *great is your **REWARD** in heaven . . . thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall **REWARD** thee openly . . . He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's **REWARD** ; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's **REWARD** . . . He shall **REWARD** every man according to his works . . . But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your **REWARD** will be great*” (Matt 5:12; 4,6, 18; 10:41; 16:27; Lk 6:35). And how about the Apostles’ doctrine? “*If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a **REWARD** . . . Let no man beguile you of your **REWARD** . . . knowing that from the Lord you will receive the **REWARD** of the*

*inheritance . . . Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great **REWARD** .”* (1 Cor 3:14; Col 2:18; 3:24; Heb 10:35).

For that matter, how is it that faith views the Lord Himself? It comes to God believing “*He is, and that He is a **REWARDER** of them that diligently seek Him*” (Heb 11:6). In fact, God **MUST** be approached in this manner. “*He that cometh to God **MUST** believe*” this! In the case before us, the reward is **CHRIST’S** reward. It is not that it differs from what the Father gives, but that the Father gives His reward through the Lord Jesus Christ, Who purchased the church with His own blood.

Thus Christ’s words appeal to faith, which has come to God convinced He **DOES** reward those who diligently seek Him. The world despises the people of God because of their affiliation with Christ. For this reason, the expectation of His reward is especially needful. The saints are not to be deprived of this expectation by stilted theology. The prize must ever be set before them, accurately and with diligence.

#### ACCORDING TO HIS WORK

The reward of Christ will not be given indiscriminatingly, or in an impersonal way. There is a direct correlation between the work of the individual and the reward he receives. It will not be granted on the basis of appearance, but according to each person’s work. Some very gifted people put little of themselves into the work of the Lord. They will not receive a significant reward, if, indeed, they receive any at all. There are also people who do not possess a lot of natural ability, yet give themselves wholly to the Lord. They will receive a great reward.

It should be apparent that a lack of involvement with the Lord contradicts the entire thrust of salvation. We have not only been called out of darkness, we have been called into light (1 Pet 2:9). Not only were our sins forgiven, righteousness was imputed to us (Rom 4:6-7). From a state of alienation, we were called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9). All of this presumes activity on the part of the saved—Kingdom work.

The “*work*” to which our text refers is not mere activity. Rather, it is participation in what the Lord Jesus Himself is doing. His reward will be based upon the degree to which we became involved with Him through faith. That involvement is being “*laborers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9).

## RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE

“ *14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*” Here is another Revelation beatitude. Some very wonderful Kingdom perspectives can be seen in this expression. Observe, the blessing is upon those who “ *DO His commandments.*” If you have a more modern version of Scripture, it reads quite differently: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes*” (NASB, NRSV, NIV). There are academic explanations for the variant translations. I will give you one provided by William Barclay.

“In Greek the two phrases would be very like each other. *Those who have washed their robes* is **hoi plunontes tas stolas** , and *those who do His commandments* is **hoi poiountes tas entolas** . In the early Greek manuscripts all the words are written in capital letters and there is no space left between them. If we set down these two phrases in English capital letters, we would see how closely they resemble each other.

HOIPLUNONTESTASSTOLAS

HOIPOIOUNTESTASENTOLAS

It is easy to see how a scribe could make a mistake in copying and substitute the more unusual phrase.”

I must confess I cannot place a lot of stock on this type of exegesis, if, indeed, it can even be called that. Below, the two different texts are shown in Greek, first in lower, and then in upper case letters. There are some similarities, as you can see.

οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς

οὐ ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς

**ΟΙ ΠΛΑΥΝΟΝΤΕΣ ΤΑΣ ΣΤΟΛΑΣ**

**ΟΙ ΠΟΩΥΝΤΕΣ ΤΑΣ ΕΝΤΟΛΑΣ**

I choose to offer another explanation for the difference. First, the different translations do not change the meaning of the text, as most Bible scholars agree. The phrase “*do His commandments*” emphasizes the cause, and “*washed their robes*” emphasizes the effect. It is the same truth taught in Romans 6:17-18: “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.*”

The blessing is pronounced on those who responded by faith to the message of the Gospel. “*His commandments,*” in this case, were those associated with obeying the Gospel (2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17). In their obedience they obtained cleansing from sin, and were inducted into heavenly realms. Thus Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). This obedience is also referred to as “*the washing of regeneration*” (Tit 3:5). The commandments, therefore, are not the Ten Commandments, or a humanly-devised catalog of commandments, compiled from perceived critical texts.

Before I leave this subject, I want to confirm to you that this is the manner in which obedience is addressed. Just as the ten Commandments were summarized in two statements (Matt 22:37-40), so the commandments in Christ are summarized in two requirements. “*And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment*” (1 John 3:23, NKJV ). Obedience to these commandments is what results in the washing of our robes, or cleansing from all unrighteousness. John stated it this way, “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7).

DOING His commandments involves faith and the heart. They cannot be done perfunctorily, or without the involvement of the whole person.

One additional thing is seen in this text. Read it once again: “*Blessed are those who do His commandments, **THAT** [in order that] they may have the right to the tree of life.*” In other words, they DID His commandments in order that they might be given right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates of the city. While myriads of professed believers do not appear aware of this, disobedience disqualifies from the blessing.

This view delivers us from any notion that we are justified by works, or by, as some call it, *perfect obedience* . Nor, indeed, should anyone consider this a contrived and faulty explanation. The privilege vouchsafed to the obedient and washed ones confirms the emphasis was NOT on what they did, but on what they appropriated in their obedience.

#### Why Must We Be Washed?

With the exaltation of psychology, a “*science falsely so called*” (1 Tim 6:20), the defiling nature of sin has been obscured. Sin is now called maladjustment, addiction, chemical dependence, sickness . . . etc. All of these explanation consider only the social affects of sin. However, sin contaminates the person like leprosy defiles the body. It corrupts the mind, and the affection. Man’s intelligence, imagination, and very spirit is infected by sin. A thorough washing must take place before eternal life can be experienced, either initially or eternally.

In this world, the presence of the “*flesh*” often provokes us to express our unworthiness of the “*great salvation*” in which we participate by grace. But in the world to come, there will be an acute awareness of worthiness, and having a right to the tree of life.

We are not restricted to this text on the matter of garments being washed. In chapter seven, the saved were viewed in this manner. “*These are they which came out of great*

*tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Verse 14). “*Robes,*” or “*garments,*” refer to all of our varied capacities. The heart, mind, soul, and strength are “*washed.*” The part of our persons that remains in touch with this present evil world must continue to be washed, else sin will again overtake us.

## RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE

The absolute righteousness of our God is seen in this promise. God will not be unrighteous in conferring salvation (Rom 3:26). Neither, indeed, will He allow “*the unrighteous*” to enter the heavenly Kingdom (1 Cor 6:9). Salvation is a gift, to be sure (Eph 5:8), but it also must be received and acted upon. That is why our text reads the way it does. The Lord Jesus sees no difficulty in speaking about the saved having “*right to the tree of life,*” and neither should be.

An obvious comparison is being made with the Adamic transgression. In the beginning, humanity lost their right to the tree of life. “*So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life*” (Gen 3:24). Not having right to the tree of life is the same as being delivered over to death. Unless God intervened, all men were shut up to death, with no hope of recovery.

By the same token, having “*right to the tree of life*” is another way of saying “*eternal life.*” In Eden God ensured the people would **NOT** “*take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever*” (Gen 3:3:22). But now, with Sovereign wisdom and power, the redeemed have the right to “*take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.*” In this world, the presence of the “*flesh*” often provokes us to express our unworthiness of the “*great salvation*” in which we participate by grace. But in the world to come, there will be an acute awareness of worthiness, and having a right to the tree of life. It was our Lord Who said of the faithful in Sardis, “*they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy*” (3:4). The extent of this worthiness, and of our “*right*” to the tree of life cannot be measured while we remain in this world. However, this is something very real, and is to be joyfully anticipated by the saints of God.

## ENTERING THROUGH THE GATES OF THE CITY

This is another aspect of the righteousness of the saved being in glory. The idea is of a triumphal procession, as when victors return from the battle. Then the 100 th Psalm will be fulfilled in the redeemed, *“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name”* (v 4). Isaiah’s word will also be fully realized, *“Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in”* (Isa 26:2).

The glory of that entrance can scarcely be imagined, yet we do well to make every attempt to picture it. The anticipation of this entrance will produce an incentive to *“DO”* His commandments, and to keep your garments washed. This is nothing less than the *“abundant entrance”* mentioned by the Holy spirit. *“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:10-11).

This speaks of a glorious entrance, a public entrance, and a joyful one. The saints lived in anticipation of it, maintaining an acute sensitivity to their Lord and His will. They will be rewarded for their diligence.

## THE EXCLUDED ONES

*“ 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. ”* The Revelation makes quite clear who is excluded from the glory to come. *“So then because thou art lukewarm , and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth . . . If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation . . . But the fearful , and unbelieving , and the abominable , and murderers , and whoremongers , and sorcerers , and idolaters , and all liars , shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death . . . And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth , neither whatsoever worketh abomination , or maketh a lie ”* (3:16; 14:10; 21:8; 21:27).

But what is the purpose of these expressions? We must not miss the point being made by the Holy Spirit. It is more than a harsh denunciation of ungodly manners, although it surely includes that. The point is that the wicked, by their very nature, are excluded from *“the world to come.”* It is not that they want to enter into glory, but cannot. Rather, they have cultured their souls to live without the Lord, without His blessing, and without His favor. They were content to conduct their affairs just as though there were no God. In them was fulfilled the word, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”* (Psa 14:1). This is what prompted the church at Ephesus to leave its *“first love”* (Rev 2:4). This is why those at Pergamos endured some in their number who held to the licentious doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes (Rev 2:14). Because they were not mindful of the Lord, the church at Thyatira allowed a false prophetess among them to seduce Christ’s servants (Rev 2:20). This is why the church at Sardis died (3:1-2). It is also why the Laodicean church became lukewarm (2:16).

The refusal to live with an keen consciousness of God prompted the opposition of and persecution of the saints of God (Rev 1:9; 2:13; 6:9; 17:6; 20:4). It is why people refused to repent, even when great judgments were poured out upon them from God (Rev 9:20; 16:9,11).

The exclusion of *“dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie,”* is owing to their nature. What they DID was the direct result of WHO they were. If people refuse the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, they shut themselves up corruption. That corruption takes many forms, from religious to moral defilement. That is why the *“unbelieving”* are classed with *“murderers”* and *“idolators”* (21:8). In our text, *“whosoever makes a lie”* is grouped with *“sorcerers”* and *“whoremongers.”* The thing all of these individuals have in common is their refusal to live by faith and walk in the light. All sin is not the same, but it all driven by the same nature—a life lived without God..

**“DOGS”** are defiled people with the nature of dogs. They are spiritual scavengers, doing great damage and causing fear and harm wherever they are. Too, these are people who return to the folly they once abandoned (Prov 26:11; 2 Pet 2:22). We are told to *“beware”* of such people (Phil 3:2).

**“SORCERERS”** are those who practice magic or witchcraft, dealing in the occult. Having a penchant for the supernatural, they do not seek the Lord, or avail themselves of access to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Rather, they traffic in the realm of fallen spirits.

**“WHOREMONGERS”** are men who practice immorality. Such sins include fornication, adultery, sodomy, and other forms of sensual indulgence.

**“MURDERERS”** conduct themselves in stark contrast to the Lord of glory. He came that men *“might have life.”* These take life, despising those who are made in the image of God. Their expressions range from hatred to the shedding of blood.

**“IDOLATORS”** are those who choose to serve *“other gods”* (Ex 20:3). They have enough presence of mind to know they must render obeisance to someone or something. Refusing to render it to Almighty God, they give their allegiance to false gods, and thus to demons (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20; Rev 9:20).

**“WHOSOEVER LOVETH AND MAKETH A LIE”** stand in stark contrast to those who love the truth (2 Thess 2:10) and speak the truth (Eph 4:15). Although God is *“abundant in truth”* (Ex 34:6), and has revealed truth in the Person of Christ (John 14:6), these people prefer the lie—what contradicts God and Christ. Not content to NOT embrace the truth, they aggressively embrace the lie, preferring what is false, and speaking what opposes the truth.

Care must be taken not to view these transgressions simply as things that are not lawful. To be sure, they are unlawful. However, it is their **NATURE** that is being emphasized in this text. Those in whom these sins are found do not have the Divine nature, even though it was offered to them (2 Pet 1:4; Heb 3:14; 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). They remained in, or returned to, the spiritual condition from which deliverance is provided in Christ Jesus.

All such are excluded because they do not fit into glory. They have no appetite for the presence of the Lord, and thus there is no place in glory for them.

I cannot leave this solemn reminder without observing the serious deficiency in the contemporary church concerning these matters. Altogether too many *church members* are conducting their lives just as though there were no God, no Savior, and no glory. They are riveted to the earth, and think and speak of that realm alone. That very condition will exclude them from heaven.

## THE ROOT AND OFFSPRING

***“16 I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”*** Here the Lord again confirms the source of the message. This is a word from the King! It is not the impression of the Apostle John or the tradition of the elders. Jesus has personally sent the message: *“I Jesus.”* To spurn the message is to spurn Jesus., To neglect it is to neglect Him. He has sent the message by His own angel: *“My angel.”* Holy angels, as you know, never act on their own accord. They are Divine messengers, bringing needful and pertinent communications. To reject the word of an angel is tantamount to rejecting the Lord Himself (Josh 5:14; Num 22:22-35).

### IN THE CHURCHES

Again, the recipients of the message are identified: *“the churches.”* This is not a message for the sinners, but for the churches. It is to be testified *“in the churches,”* apprizing them of the purpose of their Lord. Note, the Lord does not say *“the seven churches of Asia”* here, but *“the churches.”* The churches of Asia were the immediate recipients of the message, but not the only ones. What the Spirit says in this book is *“unto the churches”* (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). After being apprized of what the Lord had against them, the church at Thyatira was told, *“and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”* (2:23).

I am going to wax bold here and say that the condition of the modern church is partially owing to the failure of preachers and teachers to proclaim this book. It contains a message that is intended *“for the churches.”* No church, therefore, can be adequately equipped for the good fight of faith while remaining in basic ignorance concerning this message.

The glorious and extensive reign of David was a Divinely ordered introduction to the reign of the Lord Jesus. History is ordered by the Lord! The Lord does not simply intervene in history and make things turn out for His good. He actually orchestrated it, bringing key individuals into the world to prepare the way for the coming Seed.

#### ROOT AND OFFSPRING OF DAVID

Elsewhere in Revelation our Lord is called "*the Root of David*" (5:5). Now He is also identified as "*the Offspring*" of David. He is "*the Root*" from which David Himself came. That is, the coming Messiah was the reason for the birth and life of David. He is the reason David came into being. The significance of this man of God is traceable to the Person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious and extensive reign of David was a Divinely ordered introduction to the reign of the Lord Jesus. History is ordered by the Lord! The Lord does not simply intervene in history and make things turn out for His good. He actually orchestrated it, bringing key individuals into the world to prepare the way for the coming Seed. This is particularly true of David.

Jesus is the promised Seed, or "*Offspring,*" that would sit upon David's throne (2 Sam 7:16; Isa 9:7). He is "*the sure mercies of David*" through Whom The world is being blessed (Isa 55:3; Acts 13:34). His throne is "*the throne of David,*" as affirmed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:30).

The knowledge of this circumstance will neutralize any temptation to stand in criticism of David. It will also provoke us to consider more deeply his words and manners.

This is the very truth accentuated by our Lord's answer to His critics. "*How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he His son?*" (Matt 22:43-44). He is both Cause and Effect, Reason

and Consequence, Foundation and Building.

## BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR

Among all the luminaries that have appeared before both angels and men, Jesus is the brightest. His glory is greater than the combined glory of both cherubim and seraphim. The amalgamated glory of all the holy angels is but a mere spark when compared with His glory. And when it comes to men, there is no one as prominent as the Lord Jesus Christ. Were all of the great men of the ages to stand together, their glory would fade away in the light of our Lord's glory. He is the "*Bright and Morning Star.*"

Overcomers are promised, "*And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star*" (Rev 2:28). Thus, our blessed Lord is not simply a source of illumination for the church in general. He will be God's gift even to the individual overcomer.

In the world to come a personal affiliation with Jesus will be enjoyed that surpasses the grandest thought of which redeemed man is capable. In the heavens, and Divine purpose, there is a single Person Who shines more brightly than all others. He possesses a greater glory because He is a greater Person. When men are tempted to place inordinate emphasis upon their peers, let them remember the words of our Lord. "*I am . . . the Bright and Morning Star.*"

The book of revelation must be read as a message to the churches, and with the Lord Jesus Christ in mind! If it is read with any other emphasis, its message will be missed. Blessed is the person understanding this, who refuses to be distracted by men. Who, when he reads, sees heaven and Jesus.

## THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

*" 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of*

*life freely.”*

This book does not close without a summons to mankind. It is a message to the churches, and yet it calls out to the extremities of humanity. The Holy Spirit is speaking through this book—through its message. If a person has “*ears to hear,*” this is not a mere history lesson. Nor, indeed, is it the lifeless proclamation of future events!

The book of Revelation is a message through which the Holy Spirit speaks. But notice, the “*bride*” speaks in concert with Him. “*The Spirit AND the bride . . .*” The Holy spirit has been sent by God into each member of the church, thereby constituting them sons of God. The presence of the Spirit brings a harmony between the individual and the Lord. They can sing a Divine duet, and in perfect harmony. The Spirit does not say one thing and the church another. Rather, they speak in concert with one another. This is an aspect of “*the communion of the Holy Spirit*” (2 Cor 13:14). This also casts light upon the expression, “*laborers together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9).

In certain religious circles, there is a great emphasis on reaching the lost, making disciples of all nations, and winning souls. These are all noble ambitions, and not to be despised. I have rarely heard references to such things, however, as the harmonious working of the “*Spirit and the bride.*” Too many times, I fear, the church is operating by its own agenda, and not that of the Holy Spirit. You will notice that the Spirit is mentioned first. The “*bride*” is joining in His effort, and not vice versa.

COME!

And what is it that “*the Spirit and the bride*” say? What is their harmonious and compelling word? It is “**COME!**” Already a blessing has been pronounced on those who are “*called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*” (Rev 19:9). The call comes from God, but it comes through “*the Spirit and the bride.*” Whenever an individual hears what the Spirit is saying, he will have strong inclinations to “**COME,**” appropriating what the Spirit is offering. Whenever a person comes into proximity of “*the bride,*” the same call will be sensed—a call to avail oneself of the blessings declared in the Gospel of Christ. I must confess I have been in many assemblies where this call has not been sensed—in fact, where it was completely out of harmony with the self-conceived agenda being served. This is a tragic circumstance.

Jesus declared the Kingdom of God was like a “*A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready*” (Lk 14:16-17). The “*great supper*” is the feast of salvation—a table lavishly spread with remission of sin, justification, the communion of the Holy Spirit, and an eternal inheritance. Everything has been prepared, and is ready to be enjoyed. That is why the call is, “*COME!*” Come now, without hesitation.

The very summons indicates that “*all things are now ready.*” The benefits can be appropriated now. The individual can begin to feast now. No further preparation is

All of this indicates a profound desire on the part of both God and Christ to give us what they have prepared. No person should doubt the sincerity of the invitation, or imagine they will be rejected if they come

required on the part of the Provider of the feast. The feast will not be catered, or brought to the person. The person must “*come*” to the feast. If the wise men had to “*come to worship*” Jesus, we ought not think it strange that we must “*come*” to the abundant feast of salvation.

When among us, Jesus also gave this invitation. “*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). Again, he cried out, “*If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink*” (John 7:37). All of this indicates a profound desire on the part of both God and Christ to give us what they have prepared. No person should doubt the sincerity of the invitation, or imagine they will be rejected if they come. Jesus plainly said, “*him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37). Now, “*the Spirit and the bride*” join in the summons.

### **He That Is Athirst**

“*Him that is athirst*” is also urged to come. This is the person who has found no

satisfaction in the empty wells of this world. They are hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matt 5:6). They have an insatiable hunger for the Living God (Psa 63:1). Such have a profound dissatisfaction with all the world has to offer. And what shall such a soul do? Let him **“COME!”** Let no such soul imagine they do not have sufficient to enjoy the richness of Divine grace. The person who *“hath no money”* is told, *“come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”* (Isa 55:1). See, there is hope for every longing soul—every single one!

In my judgment., there should be a stronger appeal to thirsty souls. The *“bride”* is to join with the Spirit in offering satisfaction to weary individuals. In some circles—particularly the ones in which I have traveled—there is such a downplay of **experience**, one would think nothing was really to be experienced in Jesus. But this is not the case at all. Jesus offered satisfaction—thorough and refreshing satisfaction. Hear His words to a spiritually starved woman. *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall **never thirst**; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14). Again, hear His gracious words. *“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall **never hunger**; and he that believeth on me shall **never thirst**”* (John 6:35).

And what does *“never hunger”* and *“never thirst”* mean? It means the person will be satisfied, gratified, contented, and pleased. It means Jesus brings delight, exultation, and satiation. This aspect of salvation could do with a lot of shining and polishing in our day. Depression and dissatisfaction are at unusual levels in our time. Suicide is rocketing to new levels. If ever there was a time when our society needed to hear these words, it is now. **“COME!”** The Spirit says **“COME!”** The bride says **“COME!”** The person who is thirst is urged to **“COME!”**

Whoever wants the glorious benefits of salvation is invited to come: *“And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”* Why should any person linger where they are not satisfied? What possible reason can be adduced for remaining where the soul is not fed, the heart grows weak, and discontentment assumes the throne of the heart? In the words of the prophet, *“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness”* (Isa 55:2).

Does the message of Christ sound good? Then come and take of the water of life, and do so freely! Does triumph, nourishment, and a home in glory sound pleasant to your heart? Then Come, and take of the water of life freely! Does a time when tears are wiped away, sorrow and pain banished, and the devil removed, sound good? Then come and take of the water of life freely. If you want what Jesus offers, you can have it!

### A MESSAGE OF SALVATION

The book of Revelation is a message of salvation. It is a summons to come and *“take of the water of life freely.”* Through it, Jesus and the Spirit are calling the saints into the most holy place. Any interpretation of the book of Revelation that pushes salvation into the background is of man, not of God. By *“salvation,”* I mean the appointed results of Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation. If that is not what surfaces when we hear or read the words of this book, we have missed both the point and the blessing. This book is nothing less than an encouragement to **“COME!”** It gives good reason for those who are thirsty to come expecting a blessing. It provides incentive for those who desire the marvelous promises of this book to *“come and take of the water of life freely.”* Do not fail to grasp these things in your study of the Revelation. Come! Come!

### DO NOT TAMPER WITH THESE WORDS!

***“ 18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”***

If ever there was a book with which men have taken unspeakable liberties, it is the book of the Revelation. Fearlessly pretending theologians rush through the book, making every effort to bring it into accord with their preconceived notions of what God is doing and will do. Now the Holy Spirit takes care to warn us against such sinful tendencies. Actually, this is a statement of Divine principle. Through Moses, the Lord said to Israel, *“Ye shall not add unto the word which I*

*command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deut 4:2). Again, He said, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deut 12:32). Solomon warned, “Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Prov 30:6).*

Jesus said to those who had added to His Word, *“Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition . . . But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:6). Tremendous penalties are paid for tampering with the text of Scripture, both in this world and in that which is to come.*

This proscription is involved in Paul’s

Our country could do with a fresh dose of respect for the Word of the Living God! It is to be *“handled aright”* (1 Tim 2:15), and treated with the utmost respect. If this word is *“wrested”* or distorted in any way, the penalty cannot be escaped. Such individuals are *“unstable”* and will be destroyed.

admonition to Timothy. *“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:13, NKJV).* It is vitally important to say it the way God says it, not adding or taking from the words. This is the point made by Paul to the Corinthians. *“Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:13, NASB).* In my judgment, this needs to be taken more seriously in academic circles. Of old time, scribes were afraid to say God’s name, or even write it. Somehow, with the proliferation of professionalized religion, this sensitivity has been lost. It is even fashionable today to issue Bibles that contain the commentaries of men. In fact, it is growing exceedingly difficult to purchase a Bible that does not contain these additions. While it is not my purpose to sit in judgment on all of these Bibles, together with the various paraphrases and free translations, it is my business to point to the word of the Lord concerning adding or taking from His words. His warning is to be taken seriously.

## NO DISCRIMINATION

There is an absolute lack of discrimination in the words of the Spirit. The testimony is given ***“TO EVERYONE,”*** not just the churches in Asia, or those of the first century. The curse is pronounced on ***“ANYONE”*** who *“adds to these things,”* and ***“ ANYONE”*** who *“takes away form the words of this book.”* No leniency in this matter is given to the expert in language or the person with historical and cultural expertise. Because a person is a scholar, he may not handle these words as though they were a mere literary presentation. Nor, indeed, is permission granted to the disinterested to play with the text as though it were an intellectual toy. These are the words of God, given to Jesus, who gave it to an angel. John did not add to them. Nor, indeed, did he take from them. He himself took the admonition seriously, and so must we.

Our country could do with a fresh dose of respect for the Word of the Living God! It is to be *“handled aright”* (1 Tim 2:15), and treated with the utmost respect. If this word is *“wrested”* or distorted in any way, the penalty cannot be escaped. Such individuals are *“unstable”* and will be destroyed. As it is written, *“Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to **their own destruction** , as they do also the rest of the Scriptures”* (2 Pet 3:15-16, NKJV ). The *“destruction”* to which the Spirit refers is not that of the Scriptures. The Word of God lives and abides forever, and cannot be destroyed (1 Pet 1:23). Again it is written, *“the Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35). It is the person who distorts the Scriptures that will be destroyed!

## WHAT WILL BE DONE?

And what will the Lord do to the person who dares to tamper with the words of the prophecy of Revelation? Such a person will meet with no penalty by the religious academic community. They may even applaud his additions or subtractions as though they had some value. Such modifications may be added as footnotes to special Bibles, and highly lauded for their scholarship. But what will the Lord do? How will he react to taking such liberties with His Word? The Spirit leaves no doubt!

## The Plagues of This Book Added

*“God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”* Is there a soul with but a modicum of intelligence that questions the seriousness of God on this matter? Perhaps there are some who conceive of God as being so loving and kind He is incapable of doing such a thing. If such be the case, let such a deluded soul think about Egypt, and the grievous plagues poured out upon it by God! Let them recall how God once said He would *“smite”* people with *“the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed . . . with madness and blindness and confusion of heart”* (Deut 7:27-28, NKJV ). Let them remember the leprosy of Gehazi (2 Kgs 5:27), the death of Herod (Acts 12:23), and the death of Ananias and Saphirra (Acts 5). Recall those stricken with sickness and death in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 11:30), or how the Lord *“plagued Pharaoh’s house”* for daring to want Abram’s wife Sarai (Gen 12:17). There is simply too much in the Word of God on this subject for anyone to doubt its reality.

Considering *“the plagues of this book”* will provide sufficient incentive to refuse to meddle with its words. Read again of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials of wrath. Remember the opening of the bottomless pit, the plague of the warring locusts, and men desiring to die rather than live. Time does not allow an extensive development of this word, and it should not be necessary to do so. If there are frightening things in this book (and surely there are), consider God will add them to the person presuming to add to the words of this prophecy. The *“plagues”* even include being *“tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb”* (14:10). Oh scholar, take heed how you handle the good Word of God—particularly the *“words of the prophecy of this book.”* Make sure you do not leave people thinking it says more than the Spirit says. Give all diligence to ensure your words are not so mingled with it men cannot tell the difference between what you thought and what God said. Let *“the words of the prophecy of this book”* take the precedence over your opinion. The promised penalty is not worth lifeless conjecture and vain philosophizing.

And what will the Lord do to the person who dares to tamper with the words of the prophecy of Revelation? Such a person will meet with no penalty by the religious academic community. They may

even applaud his additions or subtractions as though they had some value.

### **His Part in the Book Of Life Taken Away**

God has no care for the sectarian interests of men. Those who say a name cannot be removed from the book of life must contend with this text. If they hold to their contrived doctrine, they do so at the jeopardy of their souls. This is not a war of words between denominations. It is the Word of the King on what will happen if but a jot or tittle of His Word is considered expendable.

Again, there is no discrimination here. No class of people may remove from these words what God placed there. Words can be "*taken away*" by an historical perspective that makes the words of the book of no relevance. They can be "*taken away*" by withholding the warnings issued to the churches, or the promises given to the faithful. Men "*take away from the words of the book of this prophecy*" when they fail to accentuate the triumph of Jesus, the demise of Satan, and the certainty of Divine purpose. They "*take away*" from the words when the surety of our inheritance and certainty of the glory to come is obscured by lifeless tradition. Men also "*take away*" from these words by simply refusing to declare them.

And what will be the portion of those bold souls who dare to "*take away from the words of the prophecy of this book?*" God will prune such people from the Vine! "*God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*" Other versions read, "*God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book*" (NIV, NASB). But the intent is the same. The point is they will have no part in eternal life! Their names will be removed from the book of life, their access to the tree of life, and their part in the glorified church. There is only one other alternative: the second death.

None of the marvelous promises of this bok will be experienced by those taking from the works of the prophecy of this book. Such people will not be sustained in this world, or glorified in the one to come. They will not reign with Jesus. They will not be nourished from the face of the serpent. They will not experience the wiping away of all tears, the termination of sorrow and pain, or an abundance

entrance into holy city.

It is not necessary to say any more on this matter. The gravity of handling the book of Revelation correctly is clear. Among other things, that accentuates its importance. It is not a book that is expendable, or to be placed on the theological trash heap.

## THAT IS THE WAY WE WANT IT

***“20 He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”*** Again, the Lord testifies He is returning. That is a central message in this book, as I have already pointed out. It is not the coming of an antichrist that is the point, but the coming of Jesus. The coming of the “*first beast*” is important, but the coming of the Lord Jesus is more important. It is essential to comprehend the dangers of the coming of the “*second beast*,” but it is more essential to discern the coming of the Lord. Understanding something of the involvements of the “*great harlot*” and “*Babylon the Great*” is important, but to understand the coming of the Lord is more important.

By saying “*Surely I am coming quickly*,” the Savior is emphasizing the suddenness of His return. He will suddenly interrupt the affairs of men, bringing the war to an abrupt conclusion. It could happen at any moment. Your troubles could be interrupted by the Lord’s return! The weaknesses with which you now grapple will suddenly and effectively terminate when the Lord comes.

If you are weighed down with the affairs of this life, Jesus says: “*Surely I am coming quickly*.” If you are being persecuted for righteousness sake, the Lord says: “*Surely I am coming quickly*.” Perhaps you are discouraged in your labors, tempted to think they are in vain. To you, the Lord says: “*Surely I am coming quickly*.” If you are languishing on the bed of sickness, or hindered in frustrating ways, Jesus says: “*Surely I am coming quickly*.”

And how does faith respond to that glorious promise? What does the heart of

those fatigued by the battle say to a word like that? What of a wearied Apostle on a lonely Isle, isolated from his brethren? What will he answer to such a Divine affirmation.

Ah, weary soul, hear John's shout reverberate through nearly two thousand years, and let his words be your own. "***Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!***" "*Amen*," meaning, let the promise stand just as it is! That is the way we want it. That is what we long for. We believe what our Lord has said, and will conduct our lives in preparation for His return. "*Amen!*"

"*Even so*" – come just that way! Quickly, suddenly, and without announcement! Break through the din of carnal noise, and interrupt the transient things of this world! Come now! Come swiftly! Come surely! Do not hesitate! When the word comes, fly swiftly to the harvest, taking us to Yourself! Those who are "*saved by hope*" speak in this manner. They know the return of their Lord will mean the end of all their troubles, and the beginning of an eternal reign.

## THE FINAL BLESSING

"***21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.***" Here are the final words of the Bible—the last words to Christ's body, which is the church. They are found in a book many have disassociated from "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Settle it in your mind, such a word could not be a fitting conclusion for a book devoid of grace. The grace of God has been vividly depicted in the care and sustenance of the church, the overthrow of all of her enemies, and the proclamation of the glory of her future state

Why is it called "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?*" Most of the time, we read of "the grace of God" (24 times). But **ten times** we read of "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phil 25), and one time of "*the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Thess 1:12). It is Christ's grace because He is the Cause and Dispenser of it. He alone has given God the Father a just reason to bless us, lavishing His love and favor upon us. It is ever true, "*God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph 4:32). God has been favorably impacted by the death of His

Son, and so can you!

As eternity rolls its ceaseless cycles on, God will “*show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:7). Throughout eternity, in honor of God and His great salvation through Jesus Christ, the saints will shout: “*Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*” (Rev 7:10). In this world, we come to believe and embrace that truth. In the world to come, we will see more fully the grandeur of what we have now known only in part. Just as our vision expands, so will our expressions—and it will all be to the glory of the conquering Lamb. It is He that satisfied God, destroyed the Tempter, and brought unspeakable joy to us.

## CONCLUSION

Thus we conclude this overview of the book of the Revelation. It has been my intention to show its relevance to the life of faith. It contains comfort for the godly, and warning for the ungodly. But above all of this, it provides a glimpse of the grand purpose into which you have been called by grace. It confirms that Jesus is presently at the helm, governing all things with a keen interest toward His people. With alarming clarity it affirms this world is but a temporary stage upon which the drama of redemption is being fulfilled.

Although we are involved in a fierce battle, the outcome of it all is sure. There are marvelous promises to be possessed by those who sense the greatness of the cause. There is a grand supper—a feast of fat things—to which we have been summoned. All of the grace required to safely arrive on the other side is there, and can be accessed by faith.

Whatever your lot in this life, and wherever you may be in the progressive change from glory to glory, hold on your way! The battle will not be long, and the outcome will be glorious. Soon the King will appear, and when He does, you will also. Grace will keep you until that day.