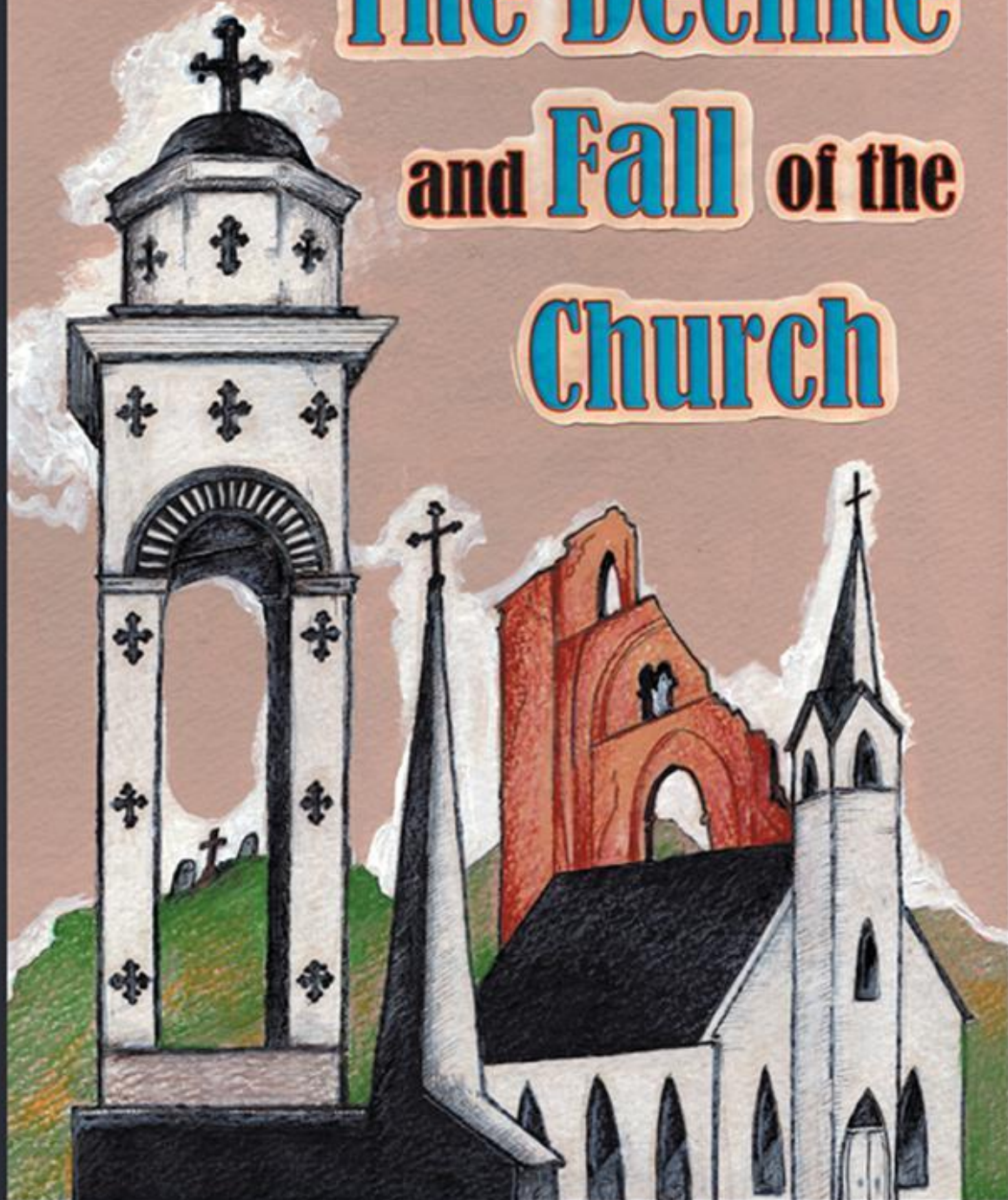


The Decline and Fall of the Church



GIVEN O. BLAKELY

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE CHURCH

Including An Exposition on the Vision From Christ Recorded
In The Book Of Revelation and The Return of Christ

and

Divers Teachings From The Book Of Revelation, Corruption Of Religion And Babylon's Influence On
the Church Of Today, Oppression Of The Saints, Wicked Alliances, and The Nature of God's Wrath
And Judgment

GIVEN O. BLAKELY

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ISBN:	Hardcover	978-1-5245-8690-4
	Softcover	978-1-5245-8689-8
	eBook	978-1-5245-8688-1

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Rev. date: 03/20/2017

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Milligan’s Commentary on Revelation

Preface

The author... Given O. Blakely

Why this book needed to be written/why I am writing this book.

Over the past four or five decades (before 2017), there has been a marked deterioration in the nature, representation, and character of Christianity. There is, in my judgment, an inordinate level of ignorance concerning the things of God, and an obvious and disturbing lack of moral and spiritual power.

Who is the intended audience?

In order of perceived priority, this book is written for leading teachers and preachers, elders, local church leaders, and those who have been “Christians” for a significant period of time. It will be helpful to other Christians to assist them in developing a better grasp of Divine intentions.

The structure and order of the book/chapters contents.

The first section of the book traces, what I perceive to be, the cause for the decline and fall of the church – today’s church, as compared with what has been revealed in Scripture as the Divine objective for “the church.”

The second section is devoted to an exposition of “Babylon he Great,” as made known in the book of the Revelation (Rev 14:18; 16:19; 17:1-7; 18:1-24).

The third section is an appeal for those who are aware of the diminished capacity of the nominal church to come out from it, as Jesus exhorts them to do (Rev 18:4).

Encouragement to read it – straight through from beginning to end, and/or certain chapters, etc.

I respectfully and thankfully dedicate this volume to my beloved wife of thirty-seven years (as of June 2017)

Date: **Published in March 2017**

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The professed church of today bears only a faint resemblance to the church whose nature and labors are chronicled in the book of Acts. Although God revealed through Daniel that His Kingdom (set up on the earth in the days of the kingdoms mentioned in Daniel chapter 2) was one that would increase (Dan 2:35; 2:44), the modern church presents a *decreasing* Kingdom stance, as evidenced by its alarmingly distant relationship to God.

The manner in which the church is identified by the apostles accents that its primary relationship is with God and Heaven, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of God. Thus, the following descriptions are given for the church; these are not goals, but current realities:

1. "The church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5)
2. "The church of the living God" (1 Tim 3:15)
3. "Churches of Christ" (Rom 16:16)
4. "Churches of God" (1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4)
5. "The body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12)
6. "... the church, which is His body" (Eph 1:23; 5:30)
7. "Household of God" (Eph 2:19)
8. "The fulness of Him [Jesus] that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23)
9. "The house of God" (1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17)
10. "The pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15)
11. "Christ... whose house are we" (Heb 3:6).
12. "The temple of God" (1 Cor 3:16-17)
13. "A holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21)
14. "An habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph 2:22)
15. "The church of the Firstborn" (Heb 12:23)

The character of the constituents of "the church" is seen in the reference to "all churches of **The Saints,**" or holy ones (1 Cor 14:33); the members are also addressed as:

1. "The churches of the Gentiles" (Rom 16:4)
2. "The churches of Galatia" (1 Cor 16:1; Gal 1:2)
3. "The churches of Asia" (1 Cor 16:19)
4. "The churches of Macedonia" (2 Cor 8:1)
5. "The churches of Judea" (Gal 1:22).

We also see individual churches referred to as:

1. "The church of the Laodiceans" (Col 4:16; Rev 3:14)
2. "The church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)
3. "The church of Ephesus" (Rev 2:1)
4. "The church in Smyrna" (Rev 2:8)
5. "The church in Pergamos" (Rev 2:12)
6. "The church in Thyatira" (Rev 2:18)
7. "The church in Sardis" (Rev 3:1)
8. "The church in Philadelphia" (Rev 3:7)
9. "the church 'in someone's house'" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 1:2).

No church, regardless of its location or constituents, was ever addressed unless it had to do with its identity with God – whether favorable or unfavorable. Were it not for their association with God through Christ, no word would ever have been addressed to the churches, and no direct mention

would have been made of them in the sacred writings.

In view of these rather elementary observations, the thrust of both the message and the life of the church ought to be obvious. Through the scriptures, God has made clear that the church's strong point should be its relationship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, as the following attributes illustrate:

1. She is designated the "bride" of Jesus Christ (John 3:39; Rev 21:2,9; 22:17).
2. It is currently "espoused" to Him, and is scheduled to be presented to Him as a "chaste virgin" (2 Cor 11:2),
3. She is depicted as being in the process of readying herself for that presentation; it is said of that occasion, "His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev 19:7),
4. She has been called into the fellowship of Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and is admonished to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16,25),
5. Those who are part of this church are said to have been "added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14),
6. Members are said to have been "joined unto the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17),
7. Having been justified, they are said to "live by faith" (Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

These are not goals, but present realities; they are, among other things, what makes the church "the church." Now, with these truths before us, we're better able to perceive the subject in hand and we might ask "*What would lead any person to imagine that a worldly-minded church, or one that is morally decrepit and ignorant of God's Word, is in any way acceptable?*" The answer is of course, there is no reciprocity between such a church and God. To the person imagining, we are compelled to declare of such churches and their constituents the truth – that is:

1. This is not the way people are when they are "born again" (1 Pet 1:23),
2. It is not the way they are "created" in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10),
3. When a person is "baptized into Christ", they do not begin with a flawed life (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17),
4. Those who are being saved are categorically declared to be in a process of continued change from one increasing state of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

If the nature of God's kingdom is to grow, how, then, can spiritual decline be explained? Furthermore, why should there be any need to explain such a phenomenon? The letters written to first century churches sound strange in the churches of our time, and are even the subject of endless disputation. Staggering numbers of professing Christians have no comprehension of what Jesus, through the Spirit, has written to His churches (see Rev chapters 2 and 3.)

Some people, unlearned in the criticality of doctrine tritely say they are not interested in it, although the letters addressed to the churches are full of doctrine. What has happened?

The purpose of this book is to set forth the postulate that Satan, working through obtuse Christians, has produced a religious environment that is conducive to a falling away, or departing, from the faith. It will demonstrate how, working with characteristic subtlety, Satan has diverted the attention of the church, thereby bringing it down, just as surely as Peter began to sink in the stormy sea when he looked away from Jesus (Matt 14:30).

From yet a higher perspective, God has handed the saints over to inimical powers for a season, as He did Job to Satan (Job 1:12; 2:6). His purpose is to sift out the pretenders, as Paul stated in the Corinthian letter: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor 11:19), "for [doubtless] there have to be factions among you, so that those who are of approved character may be clearly recognized among you." (AMP), "For doubtless there have to be factions *or* parties among you in order that they who are genuine *and* of approved fitness may become evident *and* plainly recognized among you." (AMPC).

Daniel describes this phenomenon in these words, "And he [an enemy] shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High... and they shall be given into

his hand until a time and times and dividing of times.” (Dan 7:25). The Book of Revelation reads, “And it was *given unto him* [the beast] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them:” (Rev 13:7, emphasis added). Those texts reveal that the people of God are made known in a context of contradiction – one in which they must demonstrate their singular commitment to the Lord.

Scripture affirms that, by giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (that is, demons), some shall “depart from the faith.” Paul taught that “a falling away” would occur (2 Thess 2:3). All of that posits a change of spiritual environment in which it is easier for the wicked one to work.

I understand the seeming success of Satan to actually be God working to remove contamination from the body of Christ. However, this by no means minimizes the seriousness of a falling away – the condition wherein a profession of faith is not accompanied by godliness. How is it possible for any person to support the postulate that an individual can maintain an acceptable status with God, while the objective of salvation is not being fulfilled in him? That objective is succinctly stated in these words: “... our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:13-14).

This volume represents my own thinking on the matter, and I submit it for your thoughtful consideration. In the following pages I set forth five major shifts in thinking that I will affirm weakened the church, gradually turning its attention away from its Head and the goal which has been appointed to it by the Lord. With respect to the foregoing, I will show that the stage was set for the professed church to decline and fall – which is evidenced in the present times to those with eyes that see.

CHAPTER 2 POPULARIZATION

(Roman Emperor Constantine's Empowerment Of Christianity In the Realm Of Politics)

Background

To appreciate the severity of the condition to which the modern church has fallen, it is helpful to have some understanding of the social and political influences to which the early churches were subjected. The Encyclopedia Britannica (Britannica) describes Constantine as follows:

“Constantine I, by name Constantine the Great, Latin in full Flavius Valerius Constantinus, the first Roman emperor to profess Christianity. He not only initiated the evolution of the empire into a Christian state, but also provided the impulse for a distinctively Christian culture that prepared the way for the growth of Byzantine and Western medieval culture... Constantine was totally ruthless toward his political enemies, while his legislation, apart from its concessions to Christianity, is notable mainly for a brutality that became characteristic of late Roman enforcement of law... Constantine left much for his successors to do, but it was his personal choice made in 312 AD that determined the emergence of the Roman Empire as a Christian state. It is not hard to see why Eusebius regarded Constantine's reign as the fulfillment of divine providence – nor to concede the force of Constantine's assessment of his own role as that of the 13th Apostle.” (Britannica)

For the first three hundred years, the church was, for the most part, clearly separate from the world. However, when Constantine was converted to Christianity, he changed the entire landscape of the religion. Significantly, Constantine made the decision to halt the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, and in A.D. 313, he and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, lifting the ban on Christian worship. Although Constantine was not responsible for the decision to make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire (that would come later), he is recognized by the world as being largely responsible for popularizing Christianity (that is, the version of Christianity that he espoused) among the peoples of the Empire.

However, the will of Constantine did not comport with the Will of God, as Constantine saw the religion of the Christians as a means of politically uniting the Roman Empire, which, at the time was fragmented across a wide area that took in all the regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and countries of Western Europe. Thus, through political motivations the seeds of perfidy were sown, and a new and invalid perspective toward ‘Christianity’ began to develop. An official ‘Roman’ form of Christianity was embraced that was too close to the world, relied too much upon the world, and tended to adopt the world's manners. A religious hierarchy was formed that mirrored the wisdom of the world, and in the church, it became acceptable to compromise the sacred truths because of the popularity of ‘Christianity’, even though Constantine himself promoted godliness, particularly among church leaders.

During Constantine's rule, the words of God's eternal truths and commands such as “love not the world” (1 John 2:15), “crucified unto the world” (Gal 6:14), and “not of the world” (John 15:19; 17:14) began to sound more strange, and their power was neutralized because of the popular acceptance by the people of Constantine's version of Christianity. The affirmation of Jesus having “delivered us from this present evil world,” (Gal 1:4) now had the mantle of obscurity draped over it, and the prodigious implications of that statement began to fade from view.

Now that Christianity had achieved wide acceptance and popularity throughout the Roman Empire, the world was not perceived by those who professed to follow the religion to be as ‘evil’ as it really was. While immorality was not directly condoned, worldly wisdom now had found a way to enter undetected into the church. The organization of the church now moved away from being the purpose for ‘the body of Christ’, to being the means to maintain an authoritative structure much like

that of the kingdoms of this world. Now, instead of identity with Christ being perceived as the means to Divine approval, it began to be seen as the way to make the world a better place for man in which to live. At the same time, Rome viewed its government as the pre-eminent authority, and Christianity was co-opted by leaders in Rome who saw it as an influential movement that could be used to enhance Rome's authority.

To this very day, the political acceptance of Christianity is considered to bring certain advantages to the church. Further, there is a notable tendency to seek to please and gain the approval of men, which reflects the imagination that it is advantageous for men to be favored by the world. Even though Jesus plainly said, "Woe unto you, when all men speak well about you" (Lk 6:26), that word was now contradicted by the posture of the professed church.

Seeking To Please Men

The consequences of men seeking to please others, instead of pleasing God are clearly laid out in scripture. While believers are not to go out of their way to agitate the heathen, they are to maintain the perspective that they no longer essentially belong to this world – not in any form: domestic, social, political, academic, and especially religious. If our religion, or external manner, has the smell of the world upon them, it is actually offensive to God. That is the kind of posture that got Israel into trouble with Him (Isa 13:15; Amos 5:21-23; Hos 8:13).

Scripture affirms that at the precise point a believing individual, or group, seeks to please men, they are no longer the "servants of Christ" (Gal 1:10). James, in his letter to the dispersed Christian community makes clear that friendship with the world, regardless of the way it is portrayed, causes enmity with God: "You adulteresses [disloyal sinners – flirting with the world and breaking your vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend [that is, loving the things of the world] is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4, AMP);

"You are like unfaithful wives, flirting with the glamour of this world, and never realising that to be the world's lover means becoming the enemy of God! Anyone who deliberately chooses to love the world is thereby making himself God's enemy." (James 4:4, PHILLIPS). To be persuaded of this consequence, one need look only as far Paul's letter to the church in Rome "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom 8:7)

To fully appreciate the severity of the church's fallen condition in those early times, it is profitable to direct our thoughts to the following truths:

1. It was Satan who offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus, and He straightway turned down the offer. It required that he fall down before Satan, and that is still the requirement. "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt 4:8-10; Lk 4:5-8). Those who seek political advantage in the name of Jesus each need to explain why he thinks differently than the Lord Jesus.
2. Jesus said, "Woe to the world because of offenses" (Matt 18:7). If that is all we knew about the world, it is on the part of wisdom for us not to court its favor in any way. 'The world' is, according to this word, the place where 'offenses' – not advantages – are found.
3. It is written, "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not" (John 1:10). That is neither a commendation nor an excuse, but rather a Divine confirmation that Jesus Himself is not of this world. He does not fit into it because He belongs to a radically differing order. Why, then, would anyone wearing His name, in any way seek the favor of the world? Jesus also confirmed that the world hated Him (John 7:7; John 15:18; 17:14), and politics is nothing less

than the world honed to its finest edge. The world's hatred of Jesus springs from the acute variance between His nature and that of the world.

4. Jesus told His disciples that He had chosen them "out of the world" (John 15:19). What advantage, then, is there in being favored by the world? Knowing this, it is not possible to reason that being chosen out of the world could provide any rationalization for seeking its favor.
5. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). As such, it is not possible for the Kingdom of Heaven and the world to be merged together. Just as it is not possible for earthly man to be in harmony with God, it is not possible for a world system to be merged with a Heavenly order.
6. God chooses the things that "confound" the world, not the things that promote it "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;" (1 Cor 1:27). The world does not comprehend the things of God, and he is a fool who seeks to adapt them to the world, or make them palatable to it.
7. Those in Christ have not received "the spirit of the world" (1 Cor 2:12). The principles that motivate and animate the world are not only diverse from the things of the Spirit of God, they are antithetical and inimical to it. The fount of worldly wisdom has nothing to contribute to the Heavenly Kingdom, since its total water supply spiritually is contaminated.
8. Jesus died to "deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4), not to make us acceptable to it. If deliverance from this present evil world is at the foundation of the grand work of salvation, how can it possibly be right to seek to sanctify worldly institutions by throwing some religious perfume upon them?
9. For those in Christ, the world is crucified to them, and they are crucified to the world (Gal 6:14). An enmity exists between the systems and ways of this world and the people of God. The only way for the enmity to be successfully addressed is to die to the world, that is be crucified to it.
10. All that is in the world is "not of the Father," and "the world" is the realm to which the governments of the world are confined. For this cause, they will perish. Ponder the sobering words of Scripture: "For all that is in the world – the lust *and* sensual craving of the flesh and the lust *and* longing of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the boastful pride of life [pretentious confidence in one's resources or in the stability of earthly things] – these do not come from the Father, but are from the world. The world is passing away, and with it its lusts [the shameful pursuits and ungodly longings]; but the one who does the will of God *and* carries out His purposes lives forever." (1 John 2:16-17, AMP).

While Constantine did not openly oppose these affirmations, the popularization of the church in the Roman world reduced the significance of them. A remarkable amount of current church activity is pitched toward impressing the world and courting its favor. Christian education has been tainted by this quest. That is why Christian institutions of higher learning seek accreditation; it is why the concept of the 'religious professional' and 'social expert' have crept into the church. And it is why there is a lot of talk about supposed 'seeker friendly' activities, while gatherings are in reality tailored to appeal to those who are worldly-minded. These things have all resulted from an inordinate value being placed by the church on the assessment it receives from the world.

Is all of this harmless? Indeed, it is not. It has left ajar the door of entrance unto the sowing of tares, erroneous doctrines, and a kind of lackadaisical attitude that disarms the mind. Admonitions such as, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." (2 Cor 6:14), "... and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor 6:17), and "Set your affection on things above" (Col 3:2) now have a strange sound to them. That is why you do not often hear these eternal words of great truth and meaning. It is no longer religiously fashionable to say, "abstain from *all* appearance of evil." (1 Thess 5:22, emphasis added). Spiritual victory is too often described in language that the world understands, being ascribed to life disciplines, procedural precision, and other things that are espoused by

heathen religions.

It all started with the promotion of the imagination that “pure religion” is fully adaptable to worldly principles and institutions; that favor with the world constitutes some kind of spiritual advantage.

CHAPTER 3 INSTITUTIONALISM

(The Roman Catholic Church)

Background

The Christian church devolved into a recognized worldly institution following the point at which Christianity was decreed to be the official religion of the Roman world. We will begin this chapter with a review of the historical events leading to the institution of the church.

The Catholic Church, also known as the 'Roman Catholic Church', is the largest Christian church, comprising more than 1.27 billion members worldwide (at the end of 2014), representing more than one sixth of the world population ("Catholic Church", Wikipedia), and over half of all professing Christians.

The Catholic Church

As already mentioned above, the popularity of Christianity in the world was a consequence of Constantine's personal conversion to the faith and his subsequent efforts to establish an 'official' version, and to help it flourish across the Roman Empire. To this end, in A.D. 325, he called together the Council of Nicea, in an attempt to 'unify' Christianity. However, he envisioned it as a religion that could unite the Roman Empire, which at that time was beginning to fragment and divide. Emphasis was not placed on removing worldly and pagan associations from the developing church, and the religious lives of those who had come to Christianity from other pagan religions.

The origin of the Catholic Church, then, lies in the tragic compromise of Christianity with worldly politics and the pagan religions that surrounded it. Instead of proclaiming the Gospel and converting the pagans, the Catholic Church, in the view of many has "'Christianized' the pagan religions, and 'paganized' Christianity." (www.gotquestions.org) In A.D. 380 at the Edict of Thessalonica, Emperor Theodosius I declared Nicene Christianity the state church and sole authorized religion of the Roman Empire.

Thus, following closely on the heels of popularization came the institutionalization of Christianity – some of the world's historians link that institutionalism to Constantine himself. Now 'the body of Christ' was, for all practical purpose replaced with an institution, or human organization. Rather than a body with individual members (1 Cor 12:12,27), who were joined together by their faith and the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:13), the humanly-elected leaders became the focus, and the maintenance of the institution, the unveiled objective. Identity with the institution replaced identity with the Lord Jesus Christ, and membership in His body.

Now, the Divinely profitable placement of each member in the body (1 Cor 12:18) gave way to a religious hierarchy of authority which, for all practical purposes, obviated the necessity of Jesus Christ, who is 'the Head of the church', ministering to it through its various members (Eph 5:23). Also, a certain professionalism was inducted at this time that placed a greater emphasis on appearance and status than on the edification of the body. For this reason, edification – the revealed objective for every assembly of the saints (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:12,16) – began to dissipate because it did not contribute to the maintenance of the institution.

There was a corresponding ignorance that accompanied this change of emphasis from the body of Christ to the professional leaders of the church. Gradually, the knowledge through which we are sustained, and in which we are to grow, was viewed as a luxury, rather than a necessity. This sustaining knowledge, in its practical availability to the members of Christ's body, was significantly lowered in both substance and quantity, and in the church there developed a marked tendency to

entrust the required knowledge to the leaders, rather than distribute it to the members.

In this present time, religious men have become so used to this corrupt arrangement, that it has been readily accepted, with few rising up to question the legitimacy of the whole arrangement. Consequently, a wave of spiritual darkness has swept over the church, leaving the sediment of defection and ignorance in its wake. A kind of new 'dark ages' now exists in which the marvelous body of knowledge that has been revealed for the whole of Christ's body, is scarcely known. This is a travesty that goes beyond the communicable capacity of words.

Enter A New Kind Of Religion

A breed of Christianity has risen from this institutional monster that allows for the entrance and dominance of sin. Paul described this lifeless form of religion when he wrote to Timothy, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." (2 Tim 3:15).

A form of religion now commonly accepted is one that does not flow from a new heart and a changed character. Empty form that is little more than mockery is embraced. Having now been institutionalized, the modern church too often evidences the very characteristics from which salvation delivers the individual: covetousness, boasting, pride, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, unthankfulness, unholiness, a state beneath what even nature allows, untrusting, false accusations, uncontrollable lusts, heartless savageness, despising those who are good, being treacherous, rashness, haughtiness, and a hunger for pleasure that supercedes a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Yet, because of the undue exaltation of the institution, it is imagined that membership in it, or identification with it, somehow compensates for a dolorous moral condition.

In fact, the professed church often maintains a set of programs that are designed to teach people new habits and slowly wean them away from the outward sins from which they were supposedly once washed. When encountering such people, the mandate of the Spirit is clear: 'from such turn away!' This condition is so pronounced, that in any large congregation, the greater part of the humanly-proposed 'staff' are put in place to deal with problems, outbreaks of sin, and a failure of the people to be holy. Religious schools now specialize in providing these professionals who are not known for edifying the saints, or for strengthening those who are living by faith; those that *do* edify and strengthen the saints, are now found to be the Christian minority.

Institutionalism does not stop with a named denomination. It is also displayed in the segregation of groups of the church's members – such as the youth, or the seniors, or the married, or the singles. The special programs and activities provided for these groups are not designed for the whole body. There is *no* record of the Head of the church ever providing any spiritual gift, aptitude, or ministry that is not designed to profit the *entire* body of Christ. In fact, it is said of all Divinely-provided gifts, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Cor 12:7, NKJV).

This whole spiritual conglomeration is identified in several figures in Scripture. It is a form of godliness that has no power (2 Tim 3:5). It is a city of confusion, "Babylon the Great" (Rev 17:5; 18:2). It is the "Mother of Harlots" (Rev 17:5a), fostering spiritual harlotry and unfaithfulness to God, all the while claiming identity with Him, and participation in His great salvation. It is "The Mother... of the abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5b). The worldly order was brought even lower because this spiritual aberration failed in its commission to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). With sin left largely undefined, and with no threat of the wrath of God – "which is revealed against all ungodliness" (Rom 1:18) – the shackles of sin were broken off society, and it plunged even deeper into the morass of iniquity.

With the advent of institutionalism, the Divine order of the church was placed aside, and men endeavored to take over the building program assigned to the Son of God. In the real church, God Himself “set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). But that is no longer the perceived manner of placement. Now, the members are placed in the body where the institution pleases, with a special criteria being adopted. Israel wanted a king who would judge them “like the other nations” (1 Sam 8:5). However, in order to obtain their desires, the people of God had to reject Him! “but they have rejected me” (1 Sam 8:7). It is noteworthy that this fact is often overlooked.

Furthermore, a certain deterioration commenced among the Israelites with the fulfillment of their desire, often preferring the kings who did not serve God with their whole heart. To he who cites Solomon and David as examples of kings that God gave to the Israelites, let it be clear to him that these were not kings “like the other nations.” Solomon was renowned for divinely-bestowed wisdom, and David for his tenderness toward God – traits that are not of worldly kings.

In summary, to the professed church, institutionalism brought a ready acceptance of worldly manners, both political and social. It has undoubtedly contributed to the state of the modern church, because it widened the door through which the devil could enter, working with less opposition amidst a sea of spiritual ignorance.

CHAPTER 4 THE ENLIGHTENMENT

(Enlightenment, Or The Age Of Reason)

Background

The Age of Reason (also referred to as the Enlightenment, and Age of the Enlightened) transpired roughly over the course of the 17th and early 18th centuries A.D. and can be described:

“...German Aufklärung, a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries in which ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity were synthesized into a worldview that gained wide assent in the West and that instigated revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition. The goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness...

...Inevitably, the method of reason was applied to religion itself. The product of a search for a natural, rational, religion was deism, which, although never an organized cult or movement, conflicted with Christianity for two centuries, especially in England and France...

...The Enlightenment produced the first modern secularized theories of psychology and ethics.”
(Britannica)

In a sense, the Enlightenment was a human response to religious institutionalism. A certain intellectual sterility characterized a religion that was content to leave the masses fundamentally ignorant of the things of God. There was also an emphasis upon human religious authority. As a result, England and France (for the most part), sought to expel religion and replace it with bald human reasoning. Out of this movement Higher Criticism (the judging of the validity of Scripture) was birthed, together with psychology – which is nothing more than a human effort to comprehend the intricacies of man’s intellectual makeup. From that point on, a plethora of differing versions of Scripture was produced that reflected this new way of thinking.

This movement was also accompanied by a despising of revealed knowledge. There was an undue exaltation of human reasoning, and the development of hermeneutics [defined as “the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. For both Jews and Christians, throughout their histories, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values of the Bible.”] (Britannica)

With the introduction of this erroneous science, emphasis ceased to be placed upon obtaining wisdom from above (James 1:17). Largely ignored was the fact that all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge reside in Jesus Christ (Col 2:3), and are accessible only by faith.

Scriptural Affirmations

There is considerable affirmation in Scripture of man’s natural intellectual capacity and ability. What is declared on man’s part is not commendable, however, as it reflects the fact that man’s mental makeup has been impacted by sin. This requires that men experience a rebirth, or recreation, or regeneration in which a new mind is acquired. This postulate is fundamental to the proper assessment of the Scriptures and man’s relation to them:

1. During the days of Noah, the thinking of the entire world with the exception of Noah, is stated in these words: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). The word ‘imagination’ has to do with the framing of an idea, intention, or purpose by the human mind – a mind that is not in synchronization with the Lord. This clear assessment of the natural, or unregenerate human mind is reaffirmed after the flood “for the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil

from his youth;" (Gen 8:21).

2. Concerning the thoughts of man, it is written, "The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity?" (Psa 94:11). Other versions read, "are futile" (NKJV), "empty breath" (NRSV), and "a mere breath (vain, empty, futile)" (AMP).
3. Solemnly the church is told, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom 8:6-7).
4. It is written of the 'natural man' – which is the man who has only been born naturally, and not spiritually "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14).
5. God has revealed that the wisdom that originates 'beneath', or outside of the Heavenly domain "descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish." (James 3:15).

Concerning the scope of such wisdom, it is limited to the earth – it is 'earthly.' With respect to the objective of this lower wisdom, it is centered in self, having no fundamental regard for God; it is 'sensual.' Viewed from the standpoint of its true origin, lower wisdom has been foisted upon men by the powers of darkness, it being 'devilish.'

If we were limiting our consideration to the fields of mathematics, medicine, agriculture, and economics, this matter would be approached differently. However, God does not allow His people to approach life in such a manner. In fact, concerning the whole subject of economy, Jesus said "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Matt 6:31-32). The people of God have been called to a higher perspective in which 'the Kingdom of God and His righteousness' are the fundamental matters of concern. (Matt 6:33). Everything is to be integrated into those priorities. Furthermore, man is to make no attempt to adapt the kingdom of God and His righteousness to this world. Man is intended to eventually blend with eternity.

The Age of Reason blurred these realities, moving the professing church to imagine that it has more liberty than that which the Creator had assigned to it. Consequently the mind of the Christian world was poisoned with the idea that human wisdom could actually assess and safeguard the truth. The training of the mind took precedence over the maintenance of a pure and tender heart. Educational credentials upstaged being taught by the 'unction' that is given to every believer (1 John 2:20, 27). Edification was replaced with such things as lectures, seminars, problem resolution, and regulatory and recovery programs. Having the mind shaped by those who were solidly of this world was now permitted within the church – even sought out.

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, defined The Enlightenment this way:

"Enlightenment is the liberation of man from his self-caused state of minority. Minority is the incapacity of using one's understanding without the direction of another. This state of minority is self-caused when its source lies not in a lack of understanding, but in a lack of determination to use it without the assistance of another." (AllAboutHistory)

Kant further alleges:

"The Age of Reason was fraught with attacks on basic Christian beliefs, rejection of God and denial of miracles. In an attempt to divorce himself from the mysticism of the Middle Ages, man during the Age of Reason, applauded intellect and disdained spirit. God was believed to be unknowable, if He existed at all, and certainly there was no need for Divine communication or revelation. Nature was revelation enough, showing all that needed to be known of God. Man was now free to postulate his own theories of existence and ideas about earth and its relation to the sun." (AllAboutHistory)

The firm exhortation of the Holy Spirit could now be more readily ignored, although Paul clearly

instructs the saints: “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called” (1 Tim 6:20). In the place of “oppositions of science,” other versions read, “what is falsely called knowledge” (NKJV), and “the subtleties and the contradictions in what is falsely called knowledge and spiritual illumination” (AMP). Extensive bodies of human knowledge exist that are based upon nothing more than human supposition and analysis, having no basis in what has been revealed by God. Such bodies of knowledge address earthly disciplines such as Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Statistical Analysis, Evolution, Anthropology, and Sociology.

Theological bodies of erroneous knowledge include Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Apologetics, and more. Although ostensibly dealing with subjects of a *spiritual* nature, all of these areas of knowledge are founded upon mere human analysis and conclusions. None of them have been erected upon the pillars of indisputable facts. Whatever value may be obtained from such ‘knowledge’ cannot be foundational in nature. These areas of knowledge bring nothing that can be integrated with the truth itself. The thread of inconstancy and fickleness is woven throughout them.

Yet, the Age of Reason made a valiant attempt to vaunt the worth of human knowledge, and the ability of natural men to arrive at valid and stable conclusions that could be applied to theological, or God-centered, thought. In the English Enlightenment, for example, John Locke argued for “man’s essentially good nature”, while Thomas Hobbs, an atheist, contended that government should have a single absolute ruler because man, “in his natural state, is selfish and savage.” Hobbs also contended that “religion is useful as a propaganda machine for the state.” Voltaire, “world renown champion of Deism, was a child of The Enlightenment. He was noted for his skepticism and mockery of religion that began to blossom while he was a student at a Jesuit college in Paris.” (Britannica)

Commensurate with the acceptance of the postulates of The Enlightenment, doubt and confusion were given a way of entrance into the church. Men felt free to critique the Word of God, oppose it without shame, and misrepresent it with their opinions. Due to the nature of the intellectual twins of doubt and confusion, the spiritual caliber of the church began to sink beneath the wave of carnality. More and more immorality arose, while faith diminished.

Thus the very thrust of men’s approach to, and use of, the Scriptures and Christianity in general was pitched in a direction that assigned too much worth to the mind of men, and too much value to life in this world. To this day, the church has not recovered from this subversion.

CHAPTER 5 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND TECHNOLOGY

(The Creation Of More Leisure Time And Its Effects On Religion)

Background

The term 'Industrial Revolution' is more convenient than it is precise. It is convenient because history requires division into discrete portions for purposes of establishing on the historical time continuum chronologically-related events in the past. Such annotations of significant periods aid in man's reference to them relative to one another, and aid in understanding and instruction. It is widely acknowledged among historians that the period known as the Industrial Revolution occupied the years between around 1760 A.D. and 1840 A.D.

During this period, and beginning in western Europe and north America, machines began to replace man's hand-production methods, most notably, initially, in agriculture, building and textile production. Its affect was to rapidly accelerate the transformation of agrarian, rural societies based on a handicraft economy into urban societies with economies dominated by industry and machine production. From the perspective of men, "the Industrial Revolution marks a major turning point in history; almost every aspect of daily life was influenced in some way." (Wikipedia)

A 'New' Industrial Revolution

Those who study such things suggest the world in the late 19th century A.D. entered another industrial revolution, albeit with different driving factors, technologies and outcomes than the revolution of the 17th-18th centuries. Encyclopedia Britannica describes this in the following "Despite considerable overlapping with the 'old,' there was mounting evidence for a 'new' Industrial Revolution in the late 19th and 20th centuries. In terms of basic materials, modern industry began to exploit many natural and synthetic resources not hitherto utilized: lighter metals, new alloys, and synthetic products such as plastics, as well as new energy sources. Combined with these were developments in machines, tools, and computers that gave rise to the automatic factory. Although some segments of industry were almost completely mechanized in the early to mid-19th century, automatic operation, as distinct from the assembly line, first achieved major significance in the second half of the 20th century." (Britannica)

While *this* revolution produced many things that can be profitably employed by the people of God, there has been a corresponding increase of idle time that has proved to be detrimental. Some religious movements, such as the Shakers, have produced remarkable innovations that made work easier and quicker, enabling them to spend more time with the Lord and His Word. This kind of productivity, however, was not common. Some of the attitudes with which the Shakers approached work are as follows:

1. In menial jobs, labor and time spent is considered a service to God,
2. Strive for perfection in all work,
3. No ornamentation of the items they produced,
4. No wasted effort in their activities,
5. No signature is to be applied on one's material work,
6. Production of items through work is not for profit, but for perfection,
7. Order is Heaven's first law.

It is widely contended that some of the Shakers' inventions included the following: oval boxes, flat brooms, the circular saw, round barn, apple peeler, applesauce tub, revolving oven, candlestick with adjustable height, clothes pins, dough mixer, fire doors, fly catcher, rat trap, yarn winder, washing machine for small items, and others. Although the Shakers on very rare occasions patented an

invention, they generally believed “that making them free to their fellow man and women to be a better goal.” (courtesy Warren County Historical Society)

The motivation for convenient helps that drove the Shakers, however, was not common among the technical innovators in the rest of society. They had no mind for targeting an increase of time spent with the Lord and His Word, or for expending their available time doing good to all men – especially those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Owing to the thrust of The Enlightenment, and the consequent elevation of self-will and gratification, coupled with a diminished knowledge of God and His authority, non-working, idle, or ‘leisure’ time was now viewed quite differently.

The step-up of idle time became the occasion for an increased emphasis on pleasure and self-gratification. Entertainments of various sorts received increased societal emphasis, giving even more of an advantage to charlatans and moneymakers than to believers. Athletics, which require an excess of time on the part of the masses, were emphasized above all standards of ethical behavior.

These developments led to creation of a social environment that made it more difficult for believers to live and witness for the Lord Jesus. Simultaneously, greater societal pressure was placed on believers to compromise with the world, and seek to make friends with it; this was accordingly accompanied by an increase in spiritual ignorance and a decrease in spiritual appetite. Taken together, these circumstances contributed to inordinate worth being placed on fleshly pleasure and entertainment – the pursuit of which each require unproductive time. However, keep in mind that I am speaking of an unlawful *emphasis* on these two things.

The Scriptures On Worldly Pleasure

Considerable is said in Scripture about *worldly* pleasure. It is not all condemnatory in nature, but is sufficient to leave the thoughtful reader with the impression that this is a spiritual danger zone, and must be approached with sobriety (emphases mine):

1. “FOLLY is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly” (Prov 15:21).
2. “He that loveth PLEASURE shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich” (Prov 21:17).
3. “I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with MIRTH, therefore enjoy PLEASURE: and, behold, this also is vanity” (Eccl 2:1).
4. “I said of LAUGHTER, It is mad: and of MIRTH, What doeth it?” (Eccl 2:2).
5. “And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of His hands” (Isa 5:12).
6. “Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to PLEASURES, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children” (Isa 47:8).
7. “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and PLEASURES of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14).
8. “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have PLEASURE in them that do them” (Rom 1:32).
9. “But she that liveth in PLEASURE is dead while she liveth” (1 Tim 5:6).
10. “Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of PLEASURES more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4).
11. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and PLEASURES, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).
12. “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the PLEASURES of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25).
13. “And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it PLEASURE to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they

feast with you” (2 Pet 2:13).

Of course, there is a higher form of pleasure that does not need to be closely monitored and controlled, and can be enjoyed to the fullest extent possible. There are ‘pleasures’ that are at the right hand of God, and are “for evermore” (Psa 16:11). There is a place where one day outweighs a thousand anywhere else “For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand.” (Psa 84:10). There is a satisfaction in the Lord that cannot be matched by any other experience. The industrial revolution produced more time for such experiences, but men exploited the time for pleasures that fade, and entertainment that purposed to distract.

Tragically, this trend was not limited to the irreligious and champions of self-indulgence. It also penetrated the church, creating a kind of religious aberration or caricature that has brought great dishonor to the Lord of glory. There are churches that are in reality little more than entertainment centers – places where sacred thought and holy resolves are scarcely found. There are whole societies of people given to religious pleasure and entertainment that, at the very best, cavort on the surface of life like a spider walking on water. We have a generation of young people who are strangers to profitable thought, and know nothing of holy contemplations. Praise has been turned into a time that excites the senses of the flesh, instead of the spirit, and allows for the entrance of people who are undisciplined in both mind and body.

These things have produced an astounding degree of spiritual shallowness in the professing church. That, coupled with an inappropriate emphasis on pleasure and entertainment, has swung the door of entrance wide open to charlatans and those who seek opportunity to fulfill their fleshly desires.

I realize that these traits have been present among professing Christians since the times of the church fathers. Peter spoke of professed teachers “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children”(2 Pet 2:14). Paul spoke of pretentious teachers who “creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts” (2 Tim 3:6). One of the marks of a departure from the faith is when those who profess to be followers of Christ are classified as people who are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4).

The tragedy is that these conditions have now become normal in the churches of our land. They are stark evidence of the success of a Satanic strategy that has diverted the attention of professed believers from God to self, from Christ to lesser things, and from Heaven to earth. It has all been gradual, but what has occurred and can readily be observed cannot be denied.

What a far cry the modern church is from this lofty description of the real church: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). And, “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46). And again, “Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The church is being built by Jesus for a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). It is the place into which “all the fulness of God is poured” (Eph 3:19). It is where fellowship with Christ is realized (1 Cor 1:9), as well as the “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14), and “fellowship with the Father as well as with the Son” (1 John 1:3).

However, all of that requires focus – consistent and persistent focus. That is the very circumstance that has been interrupted by the trends covered above.

CHAPTER 6

THE VAUNTING OF PSYCHOLOGY – PART 1

(The Undue Exaltation Of The Individual)

Background

It is instructive first to have an understanding of the thinking on the subject of psychology by publishers of information who have established themselves as being accepted sources of such in the world:

“Psychology (lit. ‘study of the soul’ or ‘study of the mind’ is an academic and applied discipline which involves the scientific study of human (or animal) mental functions and behaviors. In this field, a professional practitioner or a researcher is called a psychologist, a profession included in the social sciences.” (Wikipedia)

“Sigmund Freud, physiologist, medical doctor, psychologist and father of psychoanalysis, was an influential thinker of the twentieth century. Working initially in close collaboration with Joseph Breuer, Freud elaborated the theory that the mind is a complex energy system, the structural investigation of which is the proper province of psychology. He articulated and refined the concepts of the unconscious, of infantile sexuality, of repression, and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. Notwithstanding the multiple manifestations of psychoanalysis as it exists today, it can in almost all fundamental respects be traced directly back to Freud’s original work.” (Internet Encyclopedia Of Philosophy)

“The history of psychology is the history of thought about human consciousness and conduct. Psychological theory has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy and has been fed from streams such as epistemology (the philosophy of knowing), metaphysics, religion, and Oriental philosophy... Sigmund Freud (1856-1939A.D.) may justly be called the most influential intellectual legislator of his age. His creation of psychoanalysis was at once a theory of the human psyche, a therapy for the relief of its ills, and an optic for the interpretation of culture and society... If, as the American sociologist Philip Rieff once contended, ‘psychological man’ replaced such earlier notions as political, religious, or economic man as the 20th century’s dominant self-image, it is in no small measure due to the power of Freud’s vision and the seeming inexhaustibility of the intellectual legacy he left behind.” (Britannica)

Introductory Thoughts

This is the new baby in the birth of various forms of human wisdom. However, one would think it had its origin of old time, judging from the impact it has had upon Christianity. The very thought of any mortal developing a systematic means of diagnosing the human mind ought to be seen as absurd. It is written, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor 2:11). Other versions read, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?” (NASB), “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?” (BBE), and “After all, is there anyone who knows the qualities of anyone except his own spirit.” (NJB). From the very tone of this verse it is clear that what is said is to be considered obvious, evident, or apparent. It is something that will be recognized by those who are described as possessing “... a contrite and humble spirit.” (Isa 57:15), and who “... tremble at his word;” (Isa 66:5).

The Lord Knows

While men themselves can only speculate about such matters, the Lord can, and does look upon and consider, the rational processes of men, doing so without flaw and with perfect consistency. Divine analysis, wherever it occurs, is equated with reality, and supersedes any contrary critique.

Mere men cannot speak with authority concerning the details of the thoughts and motivations of the individual. In light of this, men cannot offer acceptable resolutions to genuine human need. This is to be compared with the Word of God, which is declared to be “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). On the other hand, God’s Word works effectively in those who believe (1 Thess 2:13).

Add to this, the Divine assessment of the thoughts of unregenerate humanity: “for the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth;” (Gen 8:21). The existence of this irrepressible trait of fallen humanity is precisely why God declared, “neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (Gen 8:21). As it is written, “The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity” (Psa 94:11). And again, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” (1 Cor 3:19-20).

Given these facts, how likely is it that any man, or group of men, could develop an accurate science concerning the mind of man, then employ that pseudoscience to diagnose and cure the ills of humanity? If this circumstance was confined to a secular view, it would be bad enough. Now, however, psychiatry has been largely embraced by the professing church, and havoc is found in it’s wake.

The Emphasis Has Been Switched To The Individual

In Scripture, when addressing and speaking of the people of God, the emphasis is placed upon the “the body” of Christ, or the saints in the aggregate. A sterling example of this can be found in Paul’s writings to the church in Corinth. The particular problem related to a certain man who was living with his father’s wife: “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife” (1 Cor 5:1). The action to be taken was spelled out in no uncertain words. “And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.” (1 Cor 5:2-8).

Note, the focus of attention is “the whole lump,” or whole body of believers, and not “the little leaven,” which was localized in a single individual.

There was no admonition to pray for the fornicator, or to counsel him or restore him – not so much as a word. Later, in clarification of the matter Paul wrote, “Therefore, although I wrote to you, *I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong*, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.” (2 Cor 7:12, NKJV, emphasis added). Paul did not write to Corinth to become wrapped up in the personal affairs of the family involved.

Albert Barnes said it well when he wrote of Paul’s text: “I wrote mainly that I might show the deep interest which I had in *the church at large*, and my anxiety that it might not suffer by the misconduct

of any of its members. It is from a regard to the welfare of the whole earth that discipline should be administered, and not simply with reference to an individual who has done wrong, or an individual who is injured. In church discipline such private interests are absorbed in the general interest of *the church at large.*" (emphasis added).

Paul's ultimate aim was not to inflict punishment on the offender – the son who was living with his father's wife. Nor, indeed, was it to vindicate the one who had been offended – the father. Both would be affected by the carrying out of Paul's instruction, but neither of them were the focus of attention.

In our present church environment, however, the *resolution of the problem* has ascended to the primary objective, with little or no regard for the *welfare of the whole body of believers*. This is largely, if not completely, owing to the psychological thrust of the modern church. In this corrupted view, the "care of all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28) has been supplanted by a professed interest in helping individual people with their personal problems, while the church as a whole has been left unattended. This is in violation of the mandate delivered to those who feed the flock of God: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to *all the flock*, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to *feed the church of God*, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28, emphases added).

The failure to provide for the proper maturity of the church has been augmented by moving the emphasis which rightly belongs to the church to the individual, rather than to the whole body. Solemnly the body of Christ is admonished, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." (Heb 12:15).

CHAPTER 7 THE VAUNTING OF PSYCHOLOGY – PART 2

(The Neglect Of The Body Of The Church)

Introduction

In addressing the rise and prominence of Psychology, I am presenting more the effects of this body of knowledge rather than its unauthentic origin and claim to legitimacy. I am also endeavoring to show the impact it has had on the church, which is the body of Christ. Whether unwittingly or not, the thrust of the attention of those professing to be in the “one body” has been turned to the individual members, rather than the body of Christ – the whole church. If the message of God centers in any one person, whether by its content, or by those to whom it is delivered, that one Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Any message or body of knowledge that focuses on anyone else is unworthy of the embrace of believers in Jesus.

The Departure From The Norm

After the Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven, He was exalted to the right hand of God, and given all power in Heaven and in earth, with “angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.” (Matt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22). He was given to the church as the Ultimate Ruler over everything, whether inimical or helpful. As it is written “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all *things* to the church,” (Eph 1:22). Other versions read, “Head over everything for the church.” (NIV).

This particular text in Ephesians 1:22 does not refer to Jesus as the Head of the body, although that is stated elsewhere: “And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the Beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence.” (Col 1:18). The Colossians text refers to Jesus as the Head who ministers to His body through its various members – the ones who by faith, *are* “holding to the Head.” (Col 2:19).

That, however, is not the emphasis of the aforementioned Ephesian text. There, the point is that Jesus has been given to the church as the glorified Man who has absolute control and Sovereignty over everything. It is essential that this be the case, and be recognized by all as the truth in this matter. The whole redemptive enterprise requires a “Second Man” who thoroughly addresses what was done by the “First Man” (1 Cor 15:45,47). Satan had to be defeated by a Man – the “Seed” of the woman (Gen 3:15). Man brought sin into the world, and a Man had to take it out (Rom 5:12-19). A man caused mortality to enter the world, and a Man must oversee and accomplish death being swallowed up of life (1 Cor 15:21).

Once Jesus had ascended back into Heaven, He gave “gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8). These were provided for Christ’s body, and had the perfection, or maturity, of the body in mind. The particular gifts mentioned in the Ephesians text are “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). The purpose for these gifts is clearly articulated “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:12). This is intended to produce a condition described as “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” By ministering to the whole, provision is made for each member to mature in their particular capacity, so that the whole body can “edify itself in love” (Eph 4:13-15). That is the revealed objective for the church.

Yet, one is hard pressed to find a solitary contemporary example of a church that is engaged in such activities – an assembly where all contribute to the process of edification, speaking the truth in love. In fact, upon searching, it is very difficult to find people who are even casually acquainted with the foundational teaching of God’s word in Ephesians 4:11-16.

Where the people of God are concerned, the focus must be *the whole body* of Christ, or *all of its members*. We are told Jesus "... loved *the church*, and gave himself for it;" (Eph 5:25, emphasis added). He is "bringing *many* sons to glory" (Heb 2:10, emphasis added). In the Divine economy, no person is an entity unto himself. Rather, all believers are "one body in Christ, and everyone *members one of another*." (Rom 12:5, emphasis added).

Further, those things that cause us to belong to 'one body' are not our gender, our age, or, as some imagine, peculiar weaknesses. It is quite true that Paul affirmed, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This confession accounts for *why* Paul forsook all, and followed Jesus. It is understood Paul's confession was not intended to be a declaration of the Gospel itself, but was rather the confession of a soul that had perceived the power, as well as the truth, of that Gospel.

When those in 'the body of Christ' meet together, they do not meet according to their office or function, but according to their commonality in Christ Jesus – they share a "common salvation" (Jude 1:3) and a "common faith" (Tit 1:4). Someone who advocated making a unique body out of only arms, or legs, or hands, we would consider to be deprived of wisdom, like the ostrich described in Job 39:13-17. Yet, there are religious professionals in our generation who advocate the coming together of groups of believers who have common weaknesses. Of course, this cannot possibly be done without fastening the attention upon individuals, rather than upon the entire body. Those things – a common salvation and a common faith – that unite the people of God, and also matures them, are common to *all* believers.

The genius of God's great salvation is found in the manner in which provisions are distributed by various members when the body comes together. In this environment, when sin is introduced into the assembly, the danger of that sin pervading the entire assembly looms before the people. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9), and a root of bitterness in one person can cause "many" to be "defiled thereby" (Heb 12:15).

You may recall how Israel murmured because God gave them manna to eat – even though it was food appropriate for their journey. However, not all of the people of God commenced murmuring about the manna. It was "the mixed multitude" that came out of Egypt with them who started the murmuring (Num 11:4). The Israelites followed them, and were judged with them. It was not until some time later, when Israel had heard the Law again, that "they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude" (Neh 13:3). Indeed, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump!"

It is possible for a person who needs to be convicted, to realize that conviction in an assembly, where all are speaking insightfully (1 Cor 14:24-25). The ones speaking may be completely unaware of the stranger who has entered their assembly, or the manner in which God will deal with him. This is because it is God who takes the insightful words of many 'members' and applies the words to a single individual. Rather than placing the emphasis on the individual, Paul places it on the body, pointing out that God intentionally positions every believer in Christ's body, so that mutual edification can take place (1 Cor 12:12-20). This body, or whole group of believers, comprises various members who are fitted together in the body, so that there will be 'no schism', or "division" in the body (1 Cor 12:25-27). Of course, for any kind of schism to arise, the attention must be drawn to individuals rather than to the whole.

The Divine intention for the saved is clearly delineated in Scripture. Together they are going to be presented to Christ as His bride, and they are to be ready for that occasion (John 3:29; 19:7; Rev 21:2,9; 22:17). Concerning their destination, Jesus is bringing them all to glory (Heb 2:10). Jesus is presently interceding for them as they come to the Father through Him (Heb 7:25). Together they "... are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph 2:22). God is presently demonstrating His manifold wisdom to principalities and powers through the church, which is "one

body” (Eph 3:10; 4:4). Glory is also being brought to God “in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.” (Eph 3:21).

When the professing church welcomed psychology and its tenets, the emphasis was firmly pitched toward the individual, and the body was consequently neglected. Edification was no longer the aim of its gatherings, and problem resolution took precedence over readiness for the coming of the Lord. Salvation is now largely presented from a personal point of view, with the blanket of obscurity being thrown over the nature of, and reason for, this great salvation. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers have now been replaced by worship leaders, specialized religious professionals, and speakers trained to present God’s word in a manner designed to engage the worldly lusts of the individual listener while giving short shrift to the Truth. The result is that Jesus has left the house, and the Holy Spirit no longer causes the Word to work effectively in the people. An unprecedented wave of scriptural illiteracy has swept like a tsunami wave over the church, and spiritual understanding can scarcely be found.

The true condition of humanity is understated, and thus the genuine need for a living, reigning Christ is not perceived. All of this is the fruitage of the modern preacher and teacher, together with the institutions that have trained them. Religious professionals will claim they are helping the people, bringing relief to communities, keeping wayward children off the streets, and similar crusades. However, unlike John the Baptist, these men are not making ready “... a people prepared for the Lord.” (Lk 1:17). A people solely devoted to the Lord and appropriate for His use, is not the outcome of their work (Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9; 2 Tim 2:21). As it occurred during the days of Israel’s prominence, today “... truth has stumbled in the street, And uprightness cannot enter. Yes, truth is lacking; And he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey...” (Isa 59:14-15).

The nominal church is simply not what Jesus is building. That condition is the result of a Satanic strategy in which the focus has been shifted from Heaven to earth, from Christ to worldly things, and from the body of Christ to purely selfish interests. In this kind of setting, if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit left the people, they would continue their program, unaware of the poverty of their situation.

I have sought to clarify why the professing church is in its present condition. Ultimately, it is because it has wandered into forbidden territory, the result of making a place for Satan to work (Eph 4:27). It has neglected God’s great salvation (Heb 2:3) in preference for earthly priorities. Using his wiles and craftiness, the devil has turned the head of professing Christendom. Now, because Christendom is looking upon things that are seen, it has become a powerless institution that neither brings glory to Christ, nor hope for the world to come.

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate why it is essential that the professing church regain the glory of God, not neglecting the great salvation, recognizing the ultimate rule and involvement of Heaven, and preparing the body of Christ for His return.

CHAPTER 8 THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

(Including Expositions On The Truth Of The Gospel, The Effective Spread Of The Gospel And The Things Surrounding Christ's Return As Revealed In The Book Of Revelation)

“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.” (Rev 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 winged 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

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 a final view to be seen. Ultimately, evil will be sent 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 does 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 high intentions, 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, exulted and extolled, while Satan is being exposed and overthrown.

Avoid Distraction

Notwithstanding our 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 John's 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. We will consider the consummation toward which the history of this world is presently moving. The things surrounding this event 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 "the Heavens do rule." (Dan 4:26), but not in absentia, or apart from a direct involvement. They are ever active in the affairs of men, particularly so in the matter of 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, Satan has maintained a 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 fundamentally 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, in the Book of Revelation we find confirmation of 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 (Rev 1:12; 4:8; 5:10; 17:17; 18:20), together with the Son (Rev 1:8; 2:23; 5:13; 17:14), the Holy Spirit (Rev 2:7; 11:11; 22:17), and all of the holy angels (Rev 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 4:69), cherubim (Psa 80:1), and seraphim (Isa 6:12). 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 unto glory," (Heb 2:10) through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is in perfect accord with the remainder of Scripture that consistently presents Heaven as being 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 John's vision. The first has "the everlasting Gospel" (Rev 14:6). The second cries out "Babylon is fallen!" (v. 14:8). A third angel affirms that all who worshiped the beast and received his mark would taste of God's wrath (v. 14:9-11). A fourth angel comes out of the Temple of Heaven and tells the reigning Christ the time for reaping has come "time has come to harvest" (v. 14:15). A fifth angel also comes out of Heaven's temple having a sharp reaping sickle (v. 14:17). 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 (v. 14:18). How glorious is the Heavenly involvement in this!

There is a note of authority and effectiveness in evidence 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

In his vision, John hears a voice from Heaven affirming the blessedness of those who die in the Lord (Rev 14:13). 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 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 (Rev 14:14). 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 (v. 14:16).

The "vine of the earth" is finally plucked out of the domain of men, and cast into the "winepress of the wrath of God." (v. 14:19). 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 in Christ’s revelation as recorded by John 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 the reader 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 true church, praise God, is in good hands. Our faith in Christ is well founded, and will be richly rewarded.

The Everlasting Gospel

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people...” (Rev 14:6). Why is it that “an angel” is seen “having the everlasting Gospel?” And why is he seen “flying in the midst of Heaven?”

It is interesting 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 (that is, the fall of Babylon, or other occasion.) 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 7:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8).

Is The Gospel Preached By The Angel?

The angel in Revelation 14:6 is not carrying the Gospel through the midst of Heaven to proclaim it himself, but to personally ensure 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 also “spoken” *by* them. (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). These holy beings play an active role in the dissemination of 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), and an angel orchestrated the events that led to Cornelius hearing the Gospel (Acts 10:33-48).

In the vision, 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 scarcely can it be found in all of its purity. With the institutionalization of religion and the

professionalism of its promoters has come unparalleled corruption. John's 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

To re-iterate, in the previous Bible texts into which we have delved, the restoration of the ancient people was portrayed. I have said this is the appointed prelude to a worldwide 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.

Those parts of John's vision that are mentioned in the pages above address 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” (Isa 49:8; 2 Cor 6:2), and the “acceptable year of the Lord.” (Lk 4:19). We currently 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 entirety of mankind.

In Harmony With Scripture

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 perused with the recollection that God cannot lie or renounce His Word.

1. “The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.” (Isa 60:3).
2. “The Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth...” (Jer 16:19).
3. “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).
4. “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).
5. “God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” (Psa 67:7).
6. “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name.” (Psa 86:9).
7. “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 2:23; Micah 4:12).
8. “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).
9. “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).
10. “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 I am 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 divine pattern of things until this time. There has, prior to these days, 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 1:13), as used in reference to the “day of salvation.” Such usage is attended by thoughts of opportunity rather than the announcement of harvest. It is my considered opinion that 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 it pains me to say so, this is not an apparent requisite in the contemporary church. 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 effectuating the will of God among men. We are living in a time when preaching is generally deprecated. Religious sophists have chosen to emphasize everything from entertainment to small group discussions in attempt to bring about renewal. However, and in a manner contrary to this, preaching has consistently been the Divine means of effectuating the new birth and revival.

Jesus was introduced to the world by a man named 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); the Apostle 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 the alert reader will already 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).

It is my considered opinion that 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.

An 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 human race, and therefore the Gospel is for the entire human 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

In the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of healing waters, we are given 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 reference and it is indeed glorious.

In this vision, a Heavenly visitor showed the prophet that water was 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. We read that Ezekiel saw “water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east.” It was coursing “from under from the right side of the house, at the south *side* of the altar.” (Ezek 47:1).

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.” As a result 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 to souls. However, the waters 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 delusion and corruption were not healed, and certainly would be classified as more than 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. I am of the understanding that it will occur under the leadership of Israel. There are several prophecies that speak of this form of the spreading of the Gospel: "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 2:34), and "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 magnitude of the vision. It does not speak of a few among many being recovered, but of the masses being recovered, and a few remaining unhealed. It is an exact reversal of our present experience.

Whatever view the reader may have of the end times, the scriptures are emphatic: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S: and he *is* the governor among the nations." (Psa 22:27-28). Although, it must be said 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, it is on the part of wisdom to remember what was earlier stated – "For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S: and he *is* the governor among the nations."

Why Is It Necessary To Address The Circumstances Surrounding The End Times?

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. There is an additional observation to point out: being described here is an elaboration of what occurred after the sealing of the 144,000 in the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation. 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

(Rev 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 Judgement

“Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made Heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Rev 14:7)

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 is 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 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 in the world, 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.” He 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 as being under oppression by the world. Spiritual corruption has been introduced in the second beast (Rev 13:11-18), 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 wrath in the form of 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 possessed of Adam in Eden, or that possessed of 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), and “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 religion.

The Hour Of His Judgement Has 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 will the righteous remain incriminated. 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 worshiping Him, they are recognizing His judgment and acquiescing to it. This manner of worshiping God is something in which the Gentile church has been very deficient! The current trend in ‘worship’ is a far cry from what we see in our text, wherein 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.

CHAPTER 9 THE NECESSITY OF RELIGIOUS SEPARATION

(A Personal Exhortation To The People)

I am more and more coming into the fuller realization of the absolute necessity of total separation from the nominal church-world. When the truth is registered upon the heart and conscience of an individual by the Holy Spirit, his first obligation is to sever relationships with spiritual Babylon – the systematized form of religion that pervades virtually all churches in the present generation. One of the marks of such systems is the building of theological fences around denominational dogmas and limited concepts. It is very reasonable to label a church that operates within such systems as a ‘false church’ and preaching a false religion. Within such churches, the Scriptures are thus viewed in association with the (so-called) ‘church’, and not correctly viewed as the bulwark of truth themselves, axiomatically apart from any institution.

The effect of new-found truth on a believer has been lost in many a life simply because of a carnal refusal to separate from denominational Christianity. But the Word of God is not vague or ambiguous on this point. Disobedience here constitutes and manifests definite and basic enmity and rebellion against the Lord within the recesses of the heart, however sincere and docile external actions and works may appear. How plain does the Spirit witness to us on this point. Let all that name the Name of the Lord see to it that they take heed to these things. The Lord has clearly stated His behest:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:14-18).

The intention of this exhortation is to awaken the people of God to the incompatibility of Heaven with earth. The very climate of these churches is an abundant demonstration that no ‘true worshiper’ of God ought to be found identified with them. It is written “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (expose) them” (Eph 5:11). Any works that do not result in fruit toward God are “unfruitful works of darkness”. No child of God is to engage in the participation of them, that is clear! The ‘church schemes’ of religious bigots and opportunists exist, and there is no immediate evidence that they are ceasing to exist. But the believer is not to have fellowship with these works! Rather, influence is to be expended toward exposing such spiritual debauchery, and not being involved in the vanity of it. Especially is this true in relation to one’s spiritual affiliation. If, for instance, a believer is associated or identified with a religious institution that is engaged in all sorts of carnal programming and appeals to the flesh, he becomes partaker of the curse of God upon those things. We are told to come out from among Babylon that we “be not partakers of her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

That is one of our chief means of exposing or rebuking the unfruitful works of darkness. The Lord said “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” (2 Cor 6:17). If God Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ is not among such people, neither should His children be among them!

The Lord commands us “be not partakers of other men’s sin.” (1 Tim 5:22) – to not become identified with them, to not be a partaker with them. Many people find great delight in being called a Baptist, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and so on, but in so doing they have distracted men’s hearts from “the one and only Potentate” (1 Tim 6:15), and are “delighting” in the “legs of a man” (Psa 147:1). True

separation, which the Lord commands (2 Cor 6:17), cannot be expressed from within the walls of the religious institution, but only from without. Therefore, let all that name the name of Christ “come out” as the Lord has commanded!

Paul further develops this great truth in his letters to Timothy. He spoke of those who deal in “vain babblings”, “Of these things put *them* in remembrance, charging *them* before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, *but* to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:14-15). The words of those who deal in ‘vain babblings’ has a deteriorating impact upon the soul: “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus” (v. 16-17). So contaminating is their word that it “overthrows the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:18).

These false teachers who pervert the truth (Gal 1:7), posing a great threat to men, do not, however, upset the election of God, for that “... the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” (2 Tim 2:19). These beguilers, however, are in the presence of God’s people. They are like “vessels of wood and earth” that are in a great house; vessels unto “dishonor” – like spiritual garbage cans (2 Tim 2:20). These are men that instruct in things they do not understand, who “intrude into things that they have not seen” (Col 2:18). They speak traditionally, and are mouthpieces for a man-made institution rather than prophets of the most high God.

What is to be the relationship of the believer to these men? Is he to tolerate them, remain in their presence, and generally affiliate with the circles wherein they traverse? The word of the Lord is strong on this matter; “If a man therefore purge himself of these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). Those therefore, who sustain an association with those whose mouths are unbridled, and whose lips give forth the uncomely sound of liberty (2 Pet 2:19) are unfit for the Master’s use – primarily because they are living in active rebellion against the King of kings!

Our lives are to be purged from the influence of those teachers who know not the truth. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, our obedience to the precept is also to grow: “If a man *purge him self* from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor!” (emphasis added). Our mandated response to powerless religion is clear: “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : *from such turn away.*” (2 Tim 3:5, emphasis added). Here, once again, God’s command is clear. Those who have outward forms (or any other type of form) – but are devoid of the power of God – are not our companions en route to glory! From such we are to ‘turn away’, knowing that “... evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33).

By ‘turn away’, it is meant that we are to remove our ears from the sound of their false words, and our hearts from sympathy and carnal connection with them. The fact that they may be congenial people, friendly and pleasant, is not to affect our judgement in this matter. If such have merely a form of godliness but deny, or reject, the power of that godliness refusing by an act of their will to submit themselves unto the Lord, they are not to be our companions. We are to ‘turn away’ from them, reject their formal fellowship and refuse identification with them – that is the edict of God Almighty! Such are these that lead captive those that are as the “silly dove” and “silly women” (Hosea 7:11; 2 Tim 3:6). These are they that are “ever learning, and never *able* to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7).

The “things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14) always have a strange sound to such people. If we speak of spiritual things in traditional or sectarian tones, these will think they know whereof you speak. Let such words as ‘evangelism’, ‘soul winning’, ‘missions’, ‘Sunday School’, ‘crusade’, and so on, be found in your lips, and at once you have the ear of these sophists. But speak in words “which the Holy Ghost teacheth;” (1 Cor 2:13), such as ‘regeneration’, ‘justification’, ‘atonement’, ‘redemption

in Christ Jesus', 'sanctification of the Spirit', 'the spirit of faith', 'the mind of the flesh', 'the election of grace', 'predestination', and so on, and suddenly the veil is over such men's eyes, and they are unable to enter into the joy of these things. They have a "form of godliness", their words and positions may bear some resemblance of reality, and yet, it is not real. The command is "from such, turn away." Their religion has never touched their lives; they live in abject disobedience to the Lord of Lords. The words of the Scripture too often contradict their manner of life and their general deportment; to say nothing of their heart.

The Lord said "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before (concerning the end of the world), beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." (2 Pet 3:17). That is the note of alarm to the age in which we live.

"The error of the wicked" has penetrated into the very inmost portals of "Christian" congregations. Myriads have been so carried away with it, that they have fallen from their own steadfastness. I speak not altogether of regular attendance in assemblies, callings, or other various external involvements, which of themselves are right. I am persuaded that Peter is speaking of the steadfastness that touches the heart of the believer. The Psalmist referred to this type of steadfastness when he spoke of those whose spirit was not "stedfast" (Psa 78:8). Paul spoke of hope that was "stedfast" (2 Cor 1:7). It is also witnessed by the Holy Spirit that there is a confidence that may be held "stedfast unto the end." (Heb 3:14). Also, there are those who are "stedfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:9).

The early church continued "stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine" (Acts 2:42), and the Colossians were commended for "the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." (Col 2:5). There is hardly a child of God that does not begin with these traits. Their appetite for the Word is virtually insatiable. Every sermon seems good, they cannot get enough of studying the Scriptures, and live to them and for Christ. Those who are really born again are enthralled with the message and exposition of the Gospel. They confidently live to the Lord day-by-day, and the Lord Jesus is not divorced from anything they do. But, alas, some get involved with the "church program" and soon fall from their steadfastness. The reading of the Scriptures is brought down to a minimum, and is all too often merely perfunctory. Such operate too much without God in their thoughts and in their hearts. They are no longer ravished with the thought of personal communion with God.

What caused this retrogression to come about? True, such men still retain a form of godliness. They may be involved in numerous religious activities – and there is no end of them. But these have been caught up in the "error of the wicked." The 'error' tends away from "as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). There may be a certain appeal to 'truth', but it is to the carnal nature – the Adamic part of man. The leader may tell the people of 'practical' applications of the Word, but it seems to lack any Divine power. We are to beware of all such communications; that is the solemn warning of the Lord.

Some of these basic and fundamental errors have the appearance of humility, some of spirituality, some of even miraculous power. Others appear to be precise Scriptural orderliness. However, they all actually tend away from the bosom of Christ wherein the spirit of the believer is hid (Col 3:3). That circumstance is what initiates leaving the One who called us (Gal 1:6), falling away (2 Thess 2:3), going "backward and not forward" (Jer 7:24), and becoming "lukewarm" (Rev 3:15-16).

Now, why does Babylon so flourish? One of the reasons (I speak now as a man) for the flourishing of Babylon is the tenacious hold it maintains over those who have caught a glimpse of fuller light. Were all of the spiritually-informed people to obey the Lord, as they are enjoined, and "come out from among them," many of the institutions we have mentioned, if not all of them, would cease to be so influential. In view of this, those who maintain fellowship with inferior and fruitless denominationalism – in comparison with the freedom which is in Christ (Gal 5:1-2) – even though they have been apprised of the truth, shall become "... partakers of her sins", and shall receive "... of her plagues."

This is the plea of the Spirit: “And I heard another voice from Heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto Heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.” (Rev 18:4-5). Ignoring this admonition is not a minor matter! When this is not obeyed, error is fostered, truth hindered, Christ reproached, and the admonitions or Holy Scripture ignored. Who in such a case as that will be able to abide the day of “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16), who came to “destroy the works of the Devil?” (1 John 3:8).

Come, you who have been subjected to truth that militates against your church beliefs! What will you do when you face the Lord? How will you defend your unseemly conduct and your ungodly disobedience to His Divine summons? Why do you insist on being identified with divisions and factions? Why do you devote the Lord’s money and dollars to the propagation of sectarianism? The Savior shall not long abide such insolence, such a flagrant ignoring of His Word. This is a day and time that calls for true soldiers – those who are willing to “quit themselves like men” (1 Cor 16:13), instead of being characterized by a cowardice that leaves them affiliated with that which God has condemned.

Will you answer the summons? Is your heart tender toward the Lord that you profess to love and follow? Ah, you say, “You should not speak with such harshness toward us. We are trying to influence these people for Christ.” But ought soft and easy words be spoken to such as you? – to such as have disobeyed the Lord God of hosts, to whom have “trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:29)? Does such conduct merit repeated soft and palpable pleas? Is it not time that you were apprised of the case as it really is? Are you not weary of your spirit being famished? Do you not acknowledge that there is a pitiable deficiency where you are at? Or have you come to the place of cursing as Jehosaphat of old. “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.” (2 Chron 19:2).

O, I summon you dear reader to run with swiftness of foot before God brings down the walls of that high and revered Babylon. God has told us what He is going to do with her. Rest not in human systems, pilgrim of God! Lean not on an institution, lest it pierce your hand (Isa 36:6). Give no allegiance to that which is empty and void of life, where dead men flourish and religious politicians pacify the hearts of wicked men. “Come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor 6:17; Rev 18:4). Take the same stand against these as our Lord takes.

Admittedly, you will probably have to forfeit a lot of the religious pomp and splendor that you have come to hold sacred. But there are blessings ten thousand times ten thousand in the Lord Jesus’ bosom. Comparatively small bands of believers may be scarce, but they are here and there, dissociated from denominations and institutions, just seeking to worship the Lord in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3). They are not well known, and often have been known to “wander about” having no certain dwelling place (1 Cor 4:11). You may not be able to explain satisfactorily to religious bigots where you “go to church”, but what matter is that? Is Christ there? Does He gather there with the saints? Is there inward peace, joy, righteousness, and communion of the Holy Ghost (Rom 14:17)? Is the mind there molded in the image of the Lord? To that, my fellow pilgrim, I summon you!

Given O. Blakely

ADDENDA

The following sections contain divers teachings from the Book Of Revelation, including the corruption of religion and Babylon's influence on religion and the church of today, oppression of the saints, wicked alliances, the nature of God's wrath and judgement, and the Revelation of Christ.

The writings are taken from a series of the author's in-depth teachings to the saints on the subject of these precious and everlasting Kingdom things.

ADDENDUM A

THE REVELATION OF THE FALL OF BABYLON

Introduction

“And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” (Rev 14:8)

Here, for the first time, we hear of ‘Babylon.’ This city figures frequently in the remainder of the Book of Revelation, which now will be examined. In the above text, 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. Later, Divine judgment will “divide” this city, causing massive disruption in the world (v. 16:19). The demise of this ‘city’ will be disruptive to everything and everyone affected or influenced by it.

With unusual clarity, Babylon is depicted as a fornicating woman, sitting on a blasphemous beast, with a cup of abominations in her hand. She is vividly described as “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” (v. 17:5). The image of the personhood of the fornicating woman is presented as a Satanic means of promoting unfaithfulness to God. Even though it appears dainty and harmless embodied in a beautiful woman, it mothers both spiritual corruption and things hated by, and abominable to, God.

In its fallen state, we are told the Babylon “is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.” (v. 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.

The “kings of the earth” will grieve over her sudden and thorough fall (v. 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. Later, a mighty angel will affirm that “with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” (v. 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

Babylon is one of the primary keys to understanding the Book of Revelation. For some who read this book, Babylon 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, Jerusalem is still found, and was not utterly removed from the earth when she was judged. The view that Babylon is a type of Jerusalem does not comport with the text.

Symbolic Language In The Book Of Revelation

Symbols are utilized extensively throughout the Book of Revelation. The churches were seen as “candlesticks” (v. 1:20a); their messengers were seen as “stars” in the hand of the Lord (v. 1:20b); the Lord Jesus is seen as a “Lamb” (v. 5:6), and the purpose of God is depicted by a seven-sealed “book” (v. 5:12). Satan is seen as a “dragon” (v. 12:3), and the organizations he uses to oppose God’s people as “beasts” (v. 13:1,11). The people of God are perceived as “the woman” (v. 12:4), and Satan’s aggression against them as “a flood” (v. 12:15). Sustaining fellowship with the Lord is seen as “a place prepared in the wilderness” (v. 12:6), and the faithful testimony of the truth is perceived as “two witnesses.” (v. 11:3).

Also, the primary assault of Satan is described with symbolic language. Babylon 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' can be thought of as 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), and 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 do "seek one to come." (Heb 13:14).

The Language Of Typology

The term 'Babylon', though nominally referring to a city, is to be understood within the context of Scripture. When Israel was captured, the disobedience of the ancient people caused them to be "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, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows *shall be* as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain. And Chaldea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the LORD. Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine 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 the Book of 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 And The Present Church

The false church of the present generation can now be recognized as nothing less than 'Babylon The Great' wedded to the world, with the 'world' as its wedded name. It is the apostasy of which Paul spoke (2 Thess 2:35; 1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 3:17; 4:34). That is why it is called "the great whore" (v. 17:1). She is unfaithful to Christ, having a preference for "this present evil world." (Gal 1:4). 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 (Rev 16:6; 17:6; 18:24). With aggressiveness, it has sought the approval of the world, which is alienated from the life of God. John gives us a 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." (v. 14:8; v. 17:2; v.18:3; v. 19:2).

In this passage, we behold what God thinks about the corruption of His truth, and the prostitution of the love and affection due Him. We comprehend why God is righteous to be angered and

intolerant of this condition in His church. This brings to mind 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). Here, consider 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

In the false church, the defiled hearts of the people have 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 in new believers who simply do not have a grasp of the truth. It is a matter of "fornication" – of having a preference for this world. God will not allow such religions to populate the earth and He will bring all such religion down. Furthermore, John's texts in the Book of Revelation reveal those things God will do *before* the Lord comes, and before 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 The Nations

Whereas those who comprise His church are "the salt of the earth", and the "the light of the world," (Mat 5:13; 5:14), 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.

The scriptures are clear on the subject of spiritual corruption – we are told the Lord lays the responsibility for its appearance at the door of spiritual Babylon. To this, one might object, contending that the false church is not the only purveyor of error and misrepresentation. However, that is not the point. Notice that 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 considered to be righteously so. Those who choose to ignore the Christ, and even worse, corrupt His Gospel, will be charged with responses similar to those charged of former generations. Even though this assessment may not fit well into stereotyped theology, it is what Scripture teaches.

Spiritual Babylon's Fall Association With The Gospel

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.

The following words from Apostle Paul to the church in Rome are instructive for our discussion: "... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Rom 11:25-26). 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 in the above text.

Just as it is 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. Each is cautioned to avoid any religious emphasis that must be abandoned when the record of God’s Son is embraced. It is the author’s settled conviction that much of contemporary Christian church religion is so off-center it is rather easy to abandon once Christ and His great salvation are correctly seen. This is a tragic circumstance. Truth will expose error, and effectively so, inducing the believer to abandon it with haste.

Divine Retribution Against Spiritual Corruption

Let us now examine the fierceness of the Divine wrath which will come 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 it:

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” (Rev 14:9-11).

This language portraying these events 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. There are many who would read these words with great consternation, but it is not a cause for such to be frightened. Those who embrace the Son and come away from the course of this world have nothing to fear in this proclamation.

From Awakening To Decline – A Rapid Fall

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 these 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 the Divine determination that we have discussed in the previous pages. 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.

A Collective Fall Has Personal Consequences

Just as salvation is personal, so is condemnation, and those who believed on a fraudulent religion are marked to receive a penalty from God : “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; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:” (Rev 14:9-10)

When Babylon is brought down, all who were aligned with her will not disappear. There will remain a body of people who have chosen corrupt religion over 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).

There are places in the Book of Revelation where the condemned are identified as generally immoral and disobedient people (Rev 21:8). Those whose names are NOT written in the Lamb's book of life are also said to be condemned (v. 13:8; v. 17:8). Here, however, we see quite another view, and we have God's words outlining His reasons for bringing condemnation on those who embraced lies perpetrated against the Christian religion and God.

We have a picture 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 such chose a "form of godliness that denied (rejected) the power thereof." (2 Tim 3:5).

God Assesses A Penalty On Those Embracing False Religion

What will be the portion of those making such a choice? "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God," (Rev 14:10). The unfaithfulness of those who embrace a fraudulent Christianity will never be ignored by the Lord. Babylon had something to drink also – "the wine of the wrath of her fornication." – which Babylon made all nations to drink (v. 14:8; 18:3). Later, the horrid mixture is called "a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (v. 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 brought down upon them. Twelve times this wrath is mentioned in the Book of Revelation. It is called "the wrath of the Lamb," because it is under His supervision (Rev 6:16). As the time of its administration is appointed, it is also called "the day of His wrath," and is said to have "come" (v. 6:17; v. 11:18). It also is assuredly an expression of the Divine nature, and is therefore called "the wrath of God" (v. 14:10,19; v. 15:1,7; v. 16:1). As it cannot be averted, it is called "the wrath of Almighty God" (v. 19:15), and to its all-consuming nature, it is appropriately called "the fierceness of His wrath" (v. 16:19).

This is a portrayal of the hatred and indignation of the Lord where false religion and poisoning of His Word is concerned. 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.

God Will Not Be Merciful

God says "... which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation." (Rev 14:10). As if this description were not alarming enough, He provides further explanation of this wrath – which will be unlike any historical display thereof; it will be greater than the wrath suffered by those in the flood, or Sodom, or Egypt. God granted mercy in all of those instances. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, Lot and his daughters were saved from Sodom and Israel was delivered 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 being depicted in the text concerning God's degree of punishment of those embracing false religion. 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 in its severity. It will be "without mixture" – and all because those who drink it chose alignment with "the beast."

Sufferance Of The Wrath Will Not Be Private

"He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev 14:10)

Some punishments have been administered in privacy as was Judas Iscariot's. The torment of those who took hold on lifeless religion, however, will be dreadful. As mentioned, 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).

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." It is possible this refers to the 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).

The Condition Of Torment Is Permanent

"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." (Rev 14:11).

To appreciate the severity of the condition of the tormented, we need only look at the above text. But, those who are "chastened of the Lord" in this world, are given opportunity to recover. In fact, that is the reason for the chastening: "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor 11:32). But what we are here beholding in the text from the Book of Revelation is not chastening. The torment is permanent of those suffering God's wrath, and extraction from it is not possible. There is no cessation of the torment, no time of rest and recuperation.

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 the Greek *basanismos* [βασανισμοῦ] (Strong's Concordance), the word 'torment' means 'torture 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 never shall be quenched:", and that place "Where their worm dieth not." (Mark 9:43-48). 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 of text in the Book of Revelation 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). To many, 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 impossible that this *not* occur!

The Patience Of The Saints

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Rev 14:12).

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 (v. 13:10). At the very beginning of the Book of Revelation, John described himself as a "companion" in the "patience of Jesus Christ," indicating he was not being overcome by his own exile (v. 1:9).

In Scripture, 'patience' is endurance, or perseverance. In this text from the Book of Revelation, 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 of God, 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.

The people of God were also described earlier as those who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (v. 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 the keeping of the commandments of God." is what matters (1 Cor 7:19).

Furthermore, these commandments can be reduced to their essence. In this context, '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 – the originator, founder, or initiator. Those who “keep the faith of Jesus” maintain their persuasion of, and reliance upon, the Christ 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

How, amidst a view of two notable events (the recovery of Jacob, and the fall of Babylon), does Heaven speak concerning death? Why is such a matter introduced at this time? To many, the answer will be obvious, as the previous pages have provided 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: “And I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” (Rev 14:13). What a contrast to the destiny of the wicked! The wicked were cursed, while the righteous are blessed – even as we refer to 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 Christian believers, that death is a sleep of both body and soul. 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 have 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, Paul referred to death as being a condition wherein we are “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). Peter referred to death as “putting off” his “tabernacle” (2 Pet 1:13-14). In all of these examples, 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, thankfulness and joy. 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.

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 – that is, from a conscious realization of His love, as well as the benefit of it (Rom 8:38). Death only concluded their labors and suffering, not their existence or their consciousness. I am unaware of the Scripture ever presenting unconscious persons as being “blessed.”

The Lord Jesus Continues To Reign

When the voice said “from henceforth,” (Rev 14:13) 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 one whit the blessing of the righteous. The reign of the Lord Jesus is again confirmed in the blessedness of the saints *after* the devil has done his worst.

The Response Of The holy Spirit

“‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” (Rev 14:13).

Here the vision reveals that The Holy Spirit joins in the comfort of the saints. 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! Too, 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.”, and 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 their 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 nonexistent 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

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.” (Rev 14:14).

This is a fresh phase of John’s 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 Significance Of 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), and 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 and the fulfillment

of an appointed purpose. This is not a review of history, but a declaration of something God Almighty has determined.

Clouds Represent Christ's Second Coming

The clouds mentioned in the Book of Revelation, are doubtless showing 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 the Book of 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 and the time when the Lord Jesus will come again.

Like Unto The Son Of Man

The phrase "like unto the Son of man" (Rev 1:13; 14:14) does not mean this was *not* the Son Himself. Prior to this, the Savior had appeared as "a Lamb," emphasizing His redemptive role (Rev 5:6; 14:1). He had also been seen as a rider on a horse, going forth conquering and to conquer, depicting His kingly role (v. 6:2). Now, 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" (Rev 14:14), confirming He is in charge of the situation. This is an aspect of His reign.

The Sickle And The Harvest

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 Is 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.'" (Rev 14:15).

Some of the last words Jesus said when upon earth included a unique reference to the glorious occasion of 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 13:32). It is this author's 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 in the vision 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 angel says "for 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. From the viewpoint of the text of the Book of Revelation, that time is when "the earth is ripe." The earth 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

“And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.” (Rev 14:16).

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 the Book of Revelation 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 Bible 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 where the phrase ‘foundation of the world’ is found, the word (katabolas) 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 in order to prepare them for eternity. The ‘harvest’, of which we have already read, is therefore the time at which that purpose will be fully realized.

One further observation on this matter will prove to be instructive – 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.

The Priority Of The Reaping

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 of the saints is when we also anticipate the time. Where men are not in 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

On this subject, our discourse will clash with humanly-conceived views of the end of time. The text of the Book of 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 13:41-42; 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.

Events Divinely Ordered

"And another angel came out of the temple which is in Heaven, he also having a sharp sickle." (Rev 14:17).

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, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe." (Rev 14:18).

We must continue to marvel at the amount of angelic activity in this revelation! 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

In John's text, 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" (Rom 8:7; Col 2:18) is nothing less than evidence of being connected to the "vine of the earth" (Rev 14:19). 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).

We should not leave this section without expressing a considerable amount of sorrow at the dominance of “the vine of the earth” in contemporary religion. There is too much of the world in the contemporary church, and too much of the wisdom of the world being purveyed by its ministers. The church has formed an alliance with this world that will, if not averted, result in its condemnation.

Ripe Gapes

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

“And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.” (Rev 14:19-20).

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

In John’s text, 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).

Trodden Without The City

The text tells us “And the winepress was trodden without [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 63:34). 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 the text we are looking into, it is the wicked themselves that are “trodden in the winepress.”

In the term “without” the city, God emphasizes the intended separation of the ungodly from Himself; the ungodly 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). “Without 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.

Blood To The Horses Bridles

“... and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.” In these words, 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 words bring forth an image that depicts the thorough removal of the life and influence of the wicked. Blood [of the grapes] “even unto the horse 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 – as even unto 180 miles of blood to the horse bridles. No one throughout all of Heaven will wonder if Satan will ever rise again, or iniquity will ever again assert itself. We see that none are 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! Let the reader ask of himself whether he is ready.

Conclusion

The sections above briefly review 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, dear reader, cannot be included! Make sure you are being nourished by the right Source!

ADDENDUM B

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). Sennacherib’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 2:13, 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.

The 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 (aiona), which is ordinarily translated “age” or “world.” The word “world” comes from (kosmoo), 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 World

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 this 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

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" (1 Tim 4:1) 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 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 twentyone 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!"

ADDENDUM C

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 vision described in the Book of 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 18:67). 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

“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 sanction,

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, it is necessary for them 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 94th 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.

ADDENDUM D

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.” (Rev 16:18)

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.

- 1.The flood (Gen 7:11-12).
- 2.Fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain (Gen 19:24-25).
- 3.The plagues of Egypt (Ex 9:12).
- 4.The giving of the Law (Ex 19:18).
- 5.Great hailstones from Heaven killed the enemies of Israel (Josh 10:11).
- 6.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 shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.” (Isa 31:4).

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.

ADDENDUM E

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 11:68). 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 “thirtytwo 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. 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 onethird in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take onethird and strike around it with the sword, and onethird 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 disruptiontotal destruction. The idea is thatrecovery is impossible. The Lord totally decimates the “great city” which dominated religion for centuries.

God Remembers

“And great Babylon was remembered before God.” (Rev 16:19). It is not that God ever forgot “great Babylon.” The expression “was remembered before God,” or “came in remembrance before God”, 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; that is, 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’s 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 (Babylon) 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.” (Rev 16:19). The word “cup” is a significant one in Scripture. It denotes the Divine apportionment of something to the individual or group. Thus 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 73rd 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 breathe 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” (Rev 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!

ADDENDUM F

OVERWHELMING JUDGEMENT, YET NO REPENTANCE

This 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 /s 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 8:24), can send great hailstones (Ezek 13:13; Rev 16:21; Josh 10:11) 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 long-suffering 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).

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.” (Rev 16:21). 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” (vv. 9,11,21). It is one thing to blaspheme the Lord when times are going well, and selfreliance 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).

ADDENDUM G

PURPOSES FULFILLED IN THESE JUDGEMENTS

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” believers (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 mindset, 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 (Rev 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 (3:13). 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.

ADDENDUM H

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

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.

1.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” (2:45).

2. 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).
3. 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).
4. 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” (3:13).
5. LAODICEA: This church was lukewarm nonassertive 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 backsliding churches of Asia, the Lord says after each warning: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Rev 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22) 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 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 Rev 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..." (17:1). 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 with those close to Him, things 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.

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...” (17:1). 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..." (17:2). 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.

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." (17:2). 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 the Book of 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 13:14). 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 1:34), 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

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-home-ness 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.” (17:3). 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 the Book of Revelation, John writes he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Rev 1:10). That circumstance made him capable of receiving God’s Revelation, given to him by the angel.

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

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” (Rev 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). Herein the wilderness is where the Lord can speak more directly with men: that is, “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...” (Rev 17:3). 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 4:57).

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 19th century, had something to say about this situation and he said it well. “To religious man, there 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, 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 Christa 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 the Book 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, corrupting the Word of the Almighty.

THE BEAST IDENTIFIED

"... having seven heads and ten horns." (Rev 12:3). 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 and 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..." (Rev 17:4). This language of worldly opulence is also used by Ezekiel. The passage is lengthy, but provides the spiritual reasoning contained in this passage.

"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.

- 1.Trusted in their own beauty.
- 2.Played the harlot because of her fame.
- 3.Disseminated her harlotry, pouring it out on everyone.
- 4.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.” (17:4). 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. Theirs 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 selfindulgence. 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. Hers 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." (Rev 17:5). 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" (Rev 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. While the name is on the forehead, its significance is apparent only 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; 3:34,9; 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 text is devoted to its demise in the Book of Revelation.

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 Wesleys, 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 mantle 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." (Rev 17:6) 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 12:16). 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 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, NKJV). 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. In the year 1524, at a town in France, called Melden, one John Clark set up 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 A.D.

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 the Book of 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.

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.

1. Arrayed in exquisite raiment (17:4).
2. Holding out an alluring cup (17:5).
3. The mother of harlot (17:5).
4. The mother of abominations (17:5).
5. Drunk with the blood of saints (17:6).
6. Corrupting the world (18:3).
7. Names of blasphemy upon it (17:3).
8. In a wilderness (17:3).
9. Ruling over the kings of earth (17:18).
10. Enriching earth’s merchants (18:3).
11. Imaging stability and security (18:7).
12. 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 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 beastriding 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 site 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 menmen 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.” (Rev 17:7, NKJV). I will tell you that this explanation will NOT satisfy the carnal mind. There is a tendency in men to view the text of the Book 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 causeforce. 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.

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..." (Rev 17:8). 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." (Rev 17:8). 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 (Rev 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

"... 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." (Rev 17:9-13, NKJV) 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 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" (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) Capitolinus, (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 selfindulgence rather than selfsacrifice, and have substituted covetousness in grasping, for generosity in distributing what they hadthere has been a part of the spirit of Babylon.”(Milligan’s Commentary on Revelation) 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. 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

If we limit the city to Rome, taking the hills to be literal, the seven kings would be emperors of Rome. The first emperors were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Cladius, and Nero (the first five). The existing ruler would be Galba, succeder of Nero, and the seventh Otho. This would place the time of John’s writing the Book of Revelation very precisely, to the seven months that Galba reigned, between June of 68 A.D. and January of 69 A.D. Otho would then be the emperor who reigns for only a little while, which, indeed, he did – just three months. If Julius Ceasar is considered to be the first emporer, then Nero (reigned 54 A.D. To 68 A.D.) would be the then-reigning emporer after the fallen five, placing the time of John’s writing of the Book of Revelation between 54 A.D. and 68 A.D. But neither of these alternatives appear plausible. Also, it is the manner of Revelation to speak more of principle than of particular individuals.

THE KINGDOM VIEW

If the “seven kings” 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.”

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...” (17:14, NKJV) 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 noninstitutional 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, NKJV).

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 shortlived. 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

“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” (Rev 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 mantel 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 mindheartily 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 Jesusa 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.

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 womancorrupt 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 childrenand 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

advantageand, 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 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

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 18:18, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The section of the Book 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. Other 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?

THIRD, the symbolic, or 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 the Book of 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 the Book 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 the 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.” (Rev 18:1, NASB) 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

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 one’s 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!

"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 Heaventhings 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..." (Rev 18:2). 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.

But John writes to those who are in tribulation. He himself is a "companion" in their tribulation and in their perseverance (Rev 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 4:45), 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 corruptionsomething 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. 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 Babylonthe overthrow of powerless religionthe uprooting of lifeless forms. This section of the Book 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 Babylonthe "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 2:14).

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." 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 mantle. 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 Lawan external, or visible, one (Heb 9:1).

The NASB employs "worldly" 5 times. First, it is used to identity 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 PREDOMINANTLY 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 menany men.

This type of mindset 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.

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 12:12).

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!" (Rev 18:2, NKJV). 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

"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." (Rev 18:3, NKJV). 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 Book of 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).

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.” (Rev 18:4-5, NKJV). 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.” 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.

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 12:13). 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 of the Book of 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.

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 to 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 long suffering 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 long suffering to its limit, and He abruptly terminated their effort (Gen 11:18).

THERE COMES A TIME

There does come a time when the long suffering 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 seekerfriendly 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.

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." (Rev 18:6, NKJV). 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

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 megachurches 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.

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 53:23). 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 wall 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), RSV).

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 relic 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

"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 51:78).

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

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 16:23). 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 obstinately refusing 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

THE WORLD LAMENTS

“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 section of the Book 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 weightloss 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.

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 (Rev 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 (17:12; 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).

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 MedioPersian 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’” (Rev 18:10). 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”. 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 seatrader lamented, “Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hourshe 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

“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.

- 1.VEGETABLE: wood, cinnamon, fine flour, wheat.
- 2.MINERAL: Gold, silver, precious stones, brass, iron, marble.
- 3.ANIMAL: beasts, sheep, horses, ivory.
- 4.PERSONAL ADORNMENT: Pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet.
- 5.FURNITURE: Vessels of wood, brass, iron, marble.
- 6.SENSUAL GRATIFICATION: odors, ointments, frankincense.
- 7.FOOD: wine, oil, fine flour, wheat.
- 8.SOCIAL INFLUENCES: slaves, souls of men.
- 9.THINGS IN THEIR RAW AND UNREFINED STATE: Gold, silver, beats, sheep, pearls.
- 10.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.

- 1.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.
- 2.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.
- 3.The Best of Earth. As the refined diet of Babylon of old, spiritual Babylon offers the best of this world’s victuals. Thus, the worlds 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 1:56), 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 3:13). 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 lustungodly 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

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 1:13). 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 megachurch, 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 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 one's 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" (Rev 18:14, 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" (MirriamWebster 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

"The merchants of these things..."

The first reference is to "the merchants of the earth" (Rev 18:11). 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 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.

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! 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 (Rev 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

“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

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 3:45).

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 messageso 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

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 farreaching 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.” (Rev 18:21, NKJV). 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” (Rev 10:16). 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

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).

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).

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 to 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

"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" (Rev 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 nosepeople 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 54:56).

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 greatits 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" (Rev 18:24, 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!