

SECTION SIX

CHAPTERS 17–19

THE FALL AND JUDGMENT OF BABYLON



○ U T L I N E

- 17:1-6 The wickedness of the Harlot-woman
17:7-11 The Harlot rides the eighth head of the Beast
17:12-18 The Beast persecutes the Harlot
18:1-3 An Angel announces the fall of Babylon
18:4-8 God's people taken out of Babylon before her destruction
18:9-19 The world laments the utter fall of Babylon
18:20-24 Heaven rejoices at Babylon's final judgment
19:1-10 Heaven prepares for the marriage supper of the Lamb
19:11-16 Christ returns for His saints
19:17-21 The end-time Battle of Armageddon—the Beast and False Prophet cast into the Lake of Fire.

Primary Symbols:

The Harlot—the false end-time Church, corrupt and sinful.

Babylon—the worldly realm under Satanic control. Lusts of the flesh, pride, materialism, self, and sinful living.

REVELATION CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



- 1. And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:*
- 2. With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.*

THE HARLOT: THE FALSE CHURCH

Chapter 17 begins the next-to-last section of the Book of Revelation, a new vision that again ends with Christ's return (Chapter 19). The first section contains the timeless messages to the seven churches, and the next three sections each present a full view of the Gospel Age. The last three sections focus primarily on the last era of the world. Chapters 17-19 describe the final end of the Church's two major enemies—the Beast and the

False Prophet, and the last section will explain the final end of God's major enemy—the Dragon.

Chapter 17 is actually a prophecy of the end of the False Prophet, whose history, as we saw back in Chapter 13, is inextricably interwoven with that of the Beast. Chapter 18 is a figurative lament by the *kings of the earth*—the Beast—for the fall of Babylon, the human-world system, itself a product of Beast-government. Chapter 19 finishes the section, giving a detailed picture of the downfall of both beasts at Christ's return and also the blessed triumph of those who have overcome them.

The vision begins with a connection to the previous section: *one of the seven angels which had the seven vials* invites John to contemplate the *judgment of the great whore*. She is usually called a *woman* in this chapter, but the introduction and the summary (v15-16) leave no doubt as to her true character. She is a *whore*, a *harlot*. Both words are translated from the Greek *porne*, which is used to refer both to prostitutes and to married women who are unfaithful to their husbands.

The symbolic meaning of a *harlot* can easily be found by studying the figurative writings of the OT prophets, who often likened rebellious and apostate Jewry to a harlot. The entire Book of Hosea and Ezekiel 16 and 23 are based on the symbolism of God and Israel as husband and adulterous wife. *And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also* (Jer 3:8; see also Is 1:21; Jer 2:20, 3:1f; Nah 3:4). A harlot is an unfaithful wife, one who has left her first love for another. The *Harlot* symbolizes a people who have backslidden from God. They have given in to the temptations of the world and left their place as a legitimate wife for the pleasures and sins of Babylon.

The fact that the Harlot *that sitteth upon many waters* is called a *woman* more often than she is called a harlot is noteworthy, for this Harlot was at one time *a wife of youth*—the Bride of Christ (Is 54:6). The Church as the *Bride, the Lamb's wife* (21:9) is symbolized by a pure and holy woman, *arrayed in fine linen, clean and white* (19:8) and presented *as a chaste virgin to Christ* (II Cor 11:2). Likewise, in Ephesians 5:21-33 the Church is the Bride and Christ the Groom: *That He might present [her] to Himself a glorious church,*

not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that [she] should be holy and without blemish.

The Harlot is a corrupt and wicked woman, tricked by the great Deceiver into an adulterous relationship with the world. She represents the apostate church, the flock of the False Prophet. The true Church has always been the special target of the False Prophet. He works primarily among the people of God, siphoning off the weak and feeble-minded and deceiving their minds into accepting a counterfeit Gospel that is compatible with prevailing world opinion and societal code. Some of these false teachers are well-intentioned individuals, not realizing that they are actually trying to establish their own righteousness and advancing the False Prophet's agenda. Others are well-trained charlatans, preying on gullible Christians who fall for moving sermons and spiritual experiences.

The Bible warns that false teachers would come early in Church history (Mt 7:15; Acts 20:29; II Peter 2:1) and would increase in number until the end (I Tim 4; II Peter 3:3). The Bible also tells how to recognize these false teachers. First, *Ye shall know them by their fruits* (Mt 7:16), meaning that their lives will not express the holiness that God requires. Second, they will teach a partial Gospel (I John 4), subtly diminishing its power while they attempt to increase their own. The surest way to avoid deception is to love the truth (II Thes 2:10-11). The more one studies the Bible and receives its truth into his life, the easier he will be able to recognize the counterfeit.

The Harlot is closely aligned with *Babylon*, for she is dressed in *goodly Babylonish garments* and wears the name of Babylon on her forehead. Babylon is a type of the world, and the church that this woman typifies is so fully compromised with the world that she is actually a part of it—she is *full of abominations and...fornications* (v4). Led by the False Prophet, she deceives the *kings of the earth* and *the inhabitants of the earth* and commits fornication with them.

These deceived ones are said to have been *made drunk with the wine of her fornication* (v2). This word-picture is given four times in the Revelation, always in connection with worldly Babylon (see 14:8, 16:19, 17:2, 18:3). The thought conveyed is that they have indulged in Babylon's sins, excesses, wickedness, and rebellion; they are spiritually unconscious and morally

depraved. They have been deceived by Babylon's fair speech and flattering words as Solomon describes: *I beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart... With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him... Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death* (Pro 7:7f). The lure of Babylon has been taken by many within the Church, and now this false church offers it to the simple and unconcerned passing by.

Sadly, many congregations have not learned from this powerful picture and have fallen into the same sin of spiritual adultery—leaving their first commitment to Christ and committing fornication with the world. The end-time era of the world will see increasing numbers of Christians, and even whole congregations, leaving the true faith for the idolatry of the world. The glitter and bright lights of Babylon are just like Solomon's picture of the harlot tempting the wandering young man.

The passage before us describes the *judgment*—the final end—of the great Harlot, corresponding to the False Prophet (v1). Next we will see the fall of the Beast (Chapter 18) and lastly the eternal fate of their supreme leader, the Dragon (Chapter 20). It is appropriate that the realm of religion is first addressed, for *judgment must begin at the house of God* (I Peter 4:17).

We saw the rise of the False Prophet earlier, symbolized by the lamb-like beast from the earth with the character of a dragon (13:11-18). The Harlot and the lamb-like beast are almost the same. They share the traits of deception, infidelity, and hidden wickedness. Both appear to be innocent and even worthy personalities, but their inward characters are rotten to the core, and they deceive the people of the world to commit sin against the true God of the universe. Both are under the control and direction of the Dragon, whose chief aim is to destroy the goodness of God.

There is however, a significant difference between the Harlot and the False Prophet. Symbols represent individual features of a complete entity or greater

concept—they are part and not the whole. The greater entity here is false religion that leads people away from God. These religious systems have taken different forms down through history, and that is the symbolic meaning of the False Prophet (see Chapter 13). The symbolism of the Harlot-church, however, is expressly said to be related to the end-time. The Harlot represents the deceived church during the last era of history, and describes the events leading to her judgment.

There is yet a surprise in store for the Harlot. Her lovers will begin to hate her, and will turn upon her in persecution and contempt (v16).

3. *So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.*
4. *And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:*
5. *And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*
6. *And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*

THE HARLOT IDENTIFIED

John is carried *in the spirit*, evidently in a vision, *into the wilderness*, where he sees a startling and amazing sight—a beautifully dressed but immoral woman riding a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. We have already proposed that this woman symbolizes the end-time false church, and this figurative description further confirms this. Notice that the woman is in *the wilderness*, a symbol of punishment and judgment. The children of Israel were punished for their disobedience by being forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and the prophets often spoke of a nation becoming a

desolate wilderness by the hand of God because of their sin and wickedness. Today, when we learn a lesson the hard way, we sometimes call it a “wilderness experience.” All Christians go through these “wilderness experiences,” but God does not intend for us to live in the wilderness. (See glossary for more on the symbolism of a wilderness.)

It would seem out-of-place to see a richly-favored woman in a wilderness, but symbolically that is exactly where she belongs. Remember that the celestial woman in Chapter 12, which represented the Jewish Church, had fled into the wilderness when the Dragon persecuted her (12:14). The Harlot and the woman of Chapter 12 are two separate symbols, but they both dwell in the wilderness until the *times of the Gentiles are fulfilled* and the world comes to an end.

The Harlot has a name, or title, written on her forehead: *MYSTERY, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth*. The Apostle Paul had warned the early Church that this very *MYSTERY of iniquity*—which began with the Roman apostasy and Popish heresy—was already at work in his day, and would be revealed shortly (II Thes 2:7).

The Harlot-church applies naturally to Roman Catholicism led by the *man of sin*—the Bishop of Rome called the Holy Father. The harlot’s lineage is traceable to the first anti-God religion of the post-flood earth, the Babylonian religion which began at the tower of Babel. Whether intentional or coincidental, Catholic symbols and forms of worship are copies of the earlier Babylonian system, leading some scholars to interpret both *Harlot* and *Babylon* as the Roman Catholic system. Compare the Harlot’s abhorrent title to the Jewish High Priest, who wore a miter of gold on which was engraved *Holiness to the Lord* (Ex 28:36). The Pope’s miter is of gold and precious stones, and in a ceremony called “the adoration” he sits at the supposed altar of God’s temple while the cardinals (who by papal decree must wear scarlet) kiss his feet. Much could be written about the many heresies and abominations of the Catholic Church, but that has already been done by many eminent writers. Alexander Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*, written in the 1800’s, is a full treatise on the subject. Some of Hislop’s conjectures are questionable, and he believes that mystical *Babylon* symbolizes the Catholic Church, but the general ideas he presents are compelling.

Our own opinion is that *Babylon* symbolizes the world—its culture, values, and wisdom, and all the accompanying anti-God agenda. Babylon is the earthly empire of Satan as opposed to the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. We will study and derive the full symbolic meaning of Babylon in Chapter 18. Here it is sufficient to apply Babylon as a figurative name for worldliness, materialism, and the worship of humanity as the highest and ultimate god. Throughout the Bible there are two great cities: the first is *Mount Zion*, the symbolical *city of the Great King*, also called *the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all* (Gal 4:26), which represents the Kingdom of Christ; the second is *Babylon the Great*, the figurative city of the world which is opposed to Christ's Kingdom.

The *Mother of Harlots* is dressed in *purple and scarlet*—colors of rich people, kings, and royalty (II Sam 1:24; Lam 4:5; Dan 5:7; Luke 16:19). It is the clothing of choice for the people of Babylon (18:16). She wears expensive jewels of *gold and precious stones and pearls*, symbols of pride, self-love, and the worldly values that accompany such displays. Modest women are admonished not to thus adorn themselves (I Tim 2:9). The picture is one of great wealth and worldly treasure. This is first true of the Catholic Church, for she is rich beyond all others, both monetarily and in valuable works of art and antiquity. She adorns herself in these, relies on them, and uses them to increase her arts of deception.

Protestantism, however, does not fall behind the Roman church by much, and it would be inconsistent to lay all the abominations and fornications of false religion at the feet of Catholicism. This *woman* is the *Mother of Harlots*, implying that she has many children who perpetuate her deceptions and wickedness. The Harlot represents the sad condition of the end-time churches of the Kingdom, and is set in contrast to the pure but persecuted woman of the true Church. The Harlot relishes all the benefits of Babylon while the virtuous woman faces the hardships of suffering, persecution, and strife.

The adulterous woman holds out a *golden cup* to the people of the world. It looks good, shining in her hand and inviting to the eye, but its contents are detestable, *full of abominations and filthiness*. Many have drunken from the wine of her cup (v2), and will share in her terrible judgment. They will be required to pay the full price for their fornication (18:6). The source text

for this imagery is Jer 51:7, *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.* Drunken men cannot think correctly. Drugged into a senseless stupor, they are unable to reason logically, and often in this state they commit horrible crimes. The golden cup of Babylon will do the same to the spiritual part of man if one drinks its contents. The pleasures of this world deaden the spiritual senses and dull the mind. *She hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her* (Pro 7:26).

What causes John the most wonder and astonishment is the sight of the woman *drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus* (v6). She is guilty of their death. Historically this is especially true of “the mother church,” Catholicism. It was an accepted part of its dogma. One of their own, the acclaimed Thomas Aquinas, wrote: “Heretics are to be compelled by corporeal punishments, that they may adhere to the faith...heretics may not only be excommunicated, but justly killed...the church consigns such to the secular judges to be exterminated from the world by death.” The Waldensians and Albigenses were some of the first to pour their blood into the harlot's cup, and millions more followed. Not to be outdone, Protestantism quickly adopted the single church-state doctrine, forcing men under pain of death to accept their particular ideology. That is mostly past history now. The Harlot is where she is in this picture because of her earlier errors. In the end-time she is content to dwell in ease and comfort with the seven-headed beast with ten horns.

The Harlot is the end-time manifestation of the lamb-like False Prophet (13:11-18). As we have discussed earlier, the Catholic Church is the greatest False Prophet the world has ever seen. But the Roman church is not the only anti-Christian religion represented by the Harlot. Presently, Islam is a militant enemy of Christianity, and many smaller cults and religions contribute their abominations into the harlot's cup. (See pages 333 and 360.)

The Harlot sits upon a *scarlet coloured beast*. The lamb-like Beast is an ally of the Beast from the sea (13:1-18), and the same relationship continues here, for this *scarlet beast* is that sea-Beast. Compare their descriptions: *And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of*

blasphemy (13:1). And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns (17:3). The only difference is that the Beast of the chapter before us is scarlet in color, while no color is specified in Chapter 13. The first Beast represents the Dragon-controlled government kingdoms of the world. The Harlot rides this Beast, working with them against the Kingdom of Christ. Their cozy relationship, however, is coming to an end, as we shall soon see.

7. *And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.*
8. *The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*
9. *And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*
10. *And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.*
11. *And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.*

SEVEN WORLD KINGDOMS

“Most of history since the time of Christ has been a direct result of how a person or society has viewed and reacted to Him,” someone recently told me. We discussed this concept and talked about how the Pope, Napoleon, Luther, the Crusaders, and the European wars contributed to shaping our world today. The *mystery of the woman and of the beast that carrieth her* is a commentary on this fact. In the broadest sense, the woman and the beast represent the whole Empire of Satan in its long war against the Kingdom of

Christ. Ever since Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been obsessed with wrecking God's plan for man. He has a three-pronged attack upon the people of the earth: false religion, worldliness, and blatant Satanism. In this section the angel explains the mystery of the Harlot and Beast—false religion and worldliness—and their coming fates.

First we must identify and pinpoint the time of the scarlet beast that the woman is riding. The Beast is the political *kings of the earth* and their kingdoms that we first saw in Chapter 13. We recognize this by the description, *seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads are seven mountains...and there are seven kings*. Mountains symbolize nations, or kingdoms, interpreted by the angel as *kings*, or rulers of individual kingdoms (similar to Dan 7:17). These seven kingdoms are world kingdoms, major powers that have borne rule over the people of the earth. *Five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space* (v10). The five fallen kingdoms predate the time of the giving of this vision to John, and are probably Grecia, Medo-Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. Israel may seem a likely choice, but the Jews were not a worldly kingdom. The identification of the five fallen kingdoms is inconsequential to the meaning of the vision.

Rome was the world kingdom existing at the time of John, and constitutes the *one [that] is* (v10), the sixth head. The seventh head of the beast *is not yet come*, in John's day, and when it does come it will continue only a short space. This kingdom is also unimportant to the vision, for after it is *the eighth* and final head of the Beast. It is this head that is crucial to the understanding of this prophecy. At a first reading, verses 7-11 are hard to follow, but if you put yourself in John's place and time and then re-read the passage, it becomes clearer. The angel is speaking to John, and the verb tenses are given relative to his time: the sixth head *is* (v10), the seventh head *is not yet come* (v10), and the eighth head *was, and is not* (v11) but will reappear after the seventh head has risen and fallen.

The eighth head is *the beast that was, and is not...and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition* (v11). It is this manifestation of the Beast that John sees carrying the harlotish woman. We say this with certainty for notice verse 8: *The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition*. The eighth head of the Beast is the last and

most determined effort of the Dragon to deceive the people of the world into entering his empire of darkness. The eighth head is a Beast in its own right, and is called such in verse 11.

We believe it an almost certainty that this Beast is actually the Dragon himself. It is a shocking and scary thought, but the proofs are most convincing. First, notice that this Beast *shall ascend out of the bottomless pit* (v8). We are told expressly that Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit and *loosed a little season* at the end of the world (20:3). Satan, then, is the Beast that ascends out of the *bottomless pit* and kills the *two witnesses* at the end of the world (11:7). Second, the eighth Beast is *scarlet* in color, and remember that the Dragon was called *a great red dragon* (12:3). Finally, when the Beast has ascended out of the pit, the world will marvel at this Beast that *was, and is not and yet is* (v8). It is difficult to imagine this applying to any other than Satan. It was at the Cross that Satan was defeated, Jesus *through death...destroy[ing] him that had the power of death* (Heb 2:14). The Greek word here used for *destroy* is **katargeo**, which means to abolish, cease, destroy, vanish away, make void (Strong's Greek Dictionary). Satan mystically still *is*, but only as to fulfill the purpose of God in bringing more sheep into His fold during this present Age of Grace. Satan's fate was officially sealed when Jesus defeated death, Satan's ultimate power. Now Satan's power is limited and restricted, and Christ reigns supreme from His heavenly Throne. God will permit Satan to be loosed from his prison for one last battle (20:7), a sort of filling up the earth's cup of iniquity to the brim before the final judgment thereof. He *shall ascend out of the bottomless pit*, but *go into perdition*. Then the *mystery of God* will be finished (10:7).

The exact nature of Satan's final attack upon the people of God is not directly stated here. But the unbelievers will *wonder*, that is to say they will marvel, *when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is*. They will marvel at his ingenuity, admire his incredible inventions, and wonder at his uncanny intellect. He comes to deceive the people of the world (20:8), and if we correlate that with the deception described in the sixth plague (16:12-16) it appears that his scheme includes inciting the world against Christianity.

In fact, this is exactly what we will see in the verses following: the Beast and his confederates will *hate the whore* and persecute her. Satan cannot stand

anything related to God, and evidently during his little season he will attempt to blot out both Harlot and Bride. Whether this is a physical, bodily persecution like our forefathers endured, or a spiritual persecution of conscience and mind is the question. It could be both.

In our country we see the sinister, *angel of light* persecution. The “great minds” of the world have set themselves against morality and responsibility. *Hath God said...?* they sneer. Politicians and judges steadily over-rule the standards of the Bible. Humanism and moral freedom are the gods that contemporary Babylon embraces and exalts. These war against and press down the *camp of the saints*, and today we see the battle almost as a siege already. The forces of darkness are growing in number and seem to come from every side. But the battle belongs to the Lord, and *when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him* (Is 59:19). The surrounding Satanic army will suddenly see the *Son of man* coming in the clouds of glory, and fire will fall from heaven and consume them (20:9). Jesus said, *When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh!* (Luke 21:28).

The eighth head of Satan is described under the symbolism of the Beast, and this clearly points to organized government. It *is of the seven* (v11). The NIV translates it, *he belongs to the seven* and the NASB, [it] *is one of the seven*. The Greek word is *ek*, strictly transliterated “out of.” The NASB version definitely takes liberty with the original Greek. The KJV is the most straight-forward, and the NIV makes it a little easier to understand: the eighth head is a product of the previous seven. It springs out of the seven, belongs to the seven, *is of the seven*. The implication is that the Satan-beast is of the same nature as the previous government beasts. It will not be literally Satan himself, but like the other *heads*. He will work through human leaders to form an anti-God world-kingdom that is breath taking in its scope of rebellion and wickedness. It is calculated rejection of God and His wonderful plan of salvation.

A popular interpretation among Historical and Futurist commentators is that the eighth head is a rising again of the Roman Empire to world power status at the end of the world. There are several reasons for rejecting this approach, the most obvious being the angel’s explanation in verses 8 and 11 that the eighth beast *was, and is not*, meaning that it did not exist at the time

of the giving of the vision. Rome, however, did exist in John's day; it was a most powerful and dreadful beast, severely persecuting the Church. The Roman Empire therefore cannot be the eighth beast.

If we take the NASB translation that the beast is *one of the seven*, we must select one of the five fallen beasts. Of these five, only the completely destroyed kingdom of Babylon would fit. Greece, Persia, Assyria, and Egypt still exist, along with their capitols. Physical Babylon will never rise again according to the OT prophets, and therefore Babylon would have to be a symbolic representation. The eighth head is either mystical Babylon that we will discuss in Chapter 18, or an ungodly government made up of all the previous seven heads.

Futurists envision a single world government that will rise after the Rapture. Led by Antichrist, this one-world government will attempt to wipe out the Jewish nation. We also believe the end-time will see the rise of a world kingdom, not physically led by Antichrist, but controlled by the Dragon. We do not however, imagine a "one-world government" scenario, as do most Futurists. Instead, we predict that the many governments of the world will unite in purpose, becoming more and more anti-God and immoral. Individually, they will press the siege against true Kingdom saints living in an increasingly hostile Babylon. The fight is most serious and the stakes are high. Yet it seems that many of our own people do not see the ominous clouds looming overhead. They are oblivious to the signs of the times, the encroaching wickedness on every side. The *summer is nigh* and the fig tree is putting forth its leaves, but has the true Woman, the Bride of Christ noticed the change in climate?

We deliberately delayed identifying the seventh head of the beast until now. What world kingdom followed the Roman Empire and fulfills this prophecy? First, remember that the Roman Empire did not officially end until 1806 (see page 310). The prophecy of Chapter 13 saw Rome, as the head of the Beast living at the time of John, given a death blow. The craft of the lamb-like Beast of Catholicism revived the Roman Beast, and this revived head, or second form of the Roman Empire, was called the Holy Roman Empire, which ended in 1806. If we look at world kingdoms since 1806 there are two that immediately jump out: the British Commonwealth and the United States of America. Both have had a huge influence on world history,

though the star of Britain has faded and that of the United States is rising. Whether either of these is the seventh head we do not claim to know, and it is even possible that the Holy Roman Empire was the seventh head of the Beast. Regardless, it is the eighth head of the Beast that must be identified in order to understand this vision.

12. *And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.*
13. *These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.*
14. *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*
15. *And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*
16. *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.*
17. *For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.*
18. *And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

THE EIGHTH HEAD PERSECUTES THE HARLOT

Let's review the picture of the Harlot's judgment thus far developed. We have seen the Harlot-church of Babylon, in league with the Beast's end-time world kingdom, dwelling in ease and luxury with the kindreds and peoples of the earth. The false church is dressed in rich clothes and reclines in sumptuous living and worldly pleasures. She is filled with iniquity, fornication,

and abominations. This is the prophetic appearance of nominal Christendom near the end.

Now the angel introduces a most interesting development. The ten horns of the eighth Beast turn against the Harlot-church. They persecute her, strip her of her finery, and *burn her with fire*. Each of the horn-kings gives its power to the Beast and his kingdom, warring against the Lamb and His chosen ones and inevitably bringing the world to its death. Then *the words of God shall be fulfilled* (v17). The word *fulfilled* is the Greek **teleo**, which is usually translated “finished, completed, concluded.”

Virtually all commentators connect the *ten kings* with the eighth Beast, though the text does not definitely say so. Certainly, we have no indication that the angel has changed the subject from that of the eighth Beast. Moreover, the ten kings are directly involved in the judgment of the Harlot, which must take place at the end. These ten kings were future to John’s day (v12), and unite their power *one hour* with the Beast. With *one mind* they gather in war against the Lamb and His saints. Notice the close correlation with the sixth plague and the battle of Armageddon. Earlier the Beast made *war with the saints, and overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations* (13:7). This was fulfilled in the centuries of time following Christ, but the judgment of the Harlot and the eighth Beast takes place at the end, and then Christ will be victorious over all, and the *Lamb will overcome* the Beast and *cast him alive into the Lake of Fire* (19:20).

The end-time kings number *ten*, but this is a symbolic number, indicating a confederation of many nations that align with the Babylonian beast. They are permitted power *one hour* with the Beast. The implication is that the time is short, the siege is not prolonged (compare 14:7, 18:10). They purpose to wipe out entirely the existence of the Harlot, a plan that was *put in their hearts* by God, *to fulfill His will*.

The figurative description of the way the kings carry out their plans is noteworthy. They *hate her, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire* (v16). Cannibalism is indeed an accurate picture. The Harlot is one with the world, and yet the world destroys her. It is a dishonorable death, like that of Jezebel, whose flesh was eaten by dogs (II Kings 9:36). James predicted the same for the rich of the world: *Your gold and silver is cankered;*

and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire (James 5:3). The fulfillment of this prophecy seems to be taking place today. The media has been extremely active in criticizing all things spiritual, gloating over any scandal that arises, whether Catholic or Protestant, conservative or liberal. The scientific community ridicules anything that would acknowledge the existence of a Creator, and the intellectuals churn out books that supposedly disprove the Bible and God. The Harlot-church has made it easier for them, for she is wholly given to sin, wickedness, and false teaching. Catholic and Protestant churches are under severe attack, as the scandals of child abuse and homosexual ministers, and declining financial support *desolate* their congregations.

The language of the Harlot's punishment is taken from Ezekiel 16, a long story of woe against the rebellious nation of Israel. *As a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband*, Israel had not only forsaken the Lord, she had embraced the sins of the nations around her. Because of this, God says He will let her enemies come and *strip thee also of thy clothes, and [they] shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare* (Eze 16:39). The metaphor of harlotry is exclusively used in the OT of a city or nation that has forsaken the true Covenant. This OT symbolism of spiritual adultery is not used of a heathen people, but of people who profess to know God, yet actually worship idols. It is an appropriate comparison, for many churches today are deeply involved in spiritual adultery. God is a jealous God; He will not allow His glory to be given unto another (Is 48:11). The punishments of those who have been exposed to the Gospel will be greater than those who have never heard it (Luke 12:47-48).

The Harlot sits *upon many waters*, explained to be *peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues* (v15). The Roman Catholic Church claims more adherents than all other Christian denominations combined—an estimated 1.1 billion people, a full sixth of the world's population. A character trait unique to Catholicism is the highly political nature of her rule. She pretends to be not only the religion for the masses but also their government, pressuring the *kings of the earth* to support her agenda and policies. We can still see this today, but in the past the “riding of the Beast” was much more obvious. Protestantism must be included in the picture of the Harlot, for though they

righteously “protested” Catholic wickedness and withdrew from her, many Protestant denominations have far outstripped their Catholic counterparts in condoning sin of the grossest order within their churches and behind their pulpits. It is indeed eye-opening that general public opinion would rank Catholicism as one of the more conservative denominations of contemporary Christianity. The entire Christian institution, which is classified as more than one-third of the world’s population, is mostly that in name only, being fully compromised with Babylon.

In the midst of this grim chapter gleams a gem: *the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful* (v14). This is all we shall see of the Bride of Christ in this chapter. The promise is especially important for those faithful ones living on the earth during these dark days, for the time-frame of this vision is the same as that of the two witnesses, who were killed by *the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit* (11:7). The people of the earth will rejoice and send gifts to each other when they see the death of the two prophets of God, for they tormented them that dwelt on the earth (11:10). This spiritual death of the Church—her power and authority—is not total. There will be Christians living on the earth who will see Christ returning in the clouds of heaven. However, both the Harlot and the Bride will experience the intense affliction of Satan during the *little season* that his kingdom of darkness is permitted greater power in its attempts to blot out any spiritual light that would cause men to acknowledge God and His requirements.

The final verse of this chapter is not exactly clear, though it is part of the angel’s interpretation: *the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. Rome? Babylon? Jerusalem? All have been proposed with equally convincing arguments. It is also very possible that the angel purposely left out the name of the city. Why would that be? Because coming up next in the Book is a great contrast between two cities that cannot be forced into one geographical place or time. First we will see the mystical city of Babylon, representing the kingdoms of the world and their glamour and wealth (Chapter 18). Then we will see the holy city of New Jerusalem (Chapters 21-22), the city for which Abraham *looked for, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Heb 11:10). These two cities are

opposites, and we should be ever so careful to be found citizens of the *city of the Living God* (Heb 12:22), though living as strangers in the *great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. Babylon is the timeless city of the world, the Dragon's tool to capture the souls of men and women.

Some interpret this *great city* to be Rome because verse 9 further says that *the woman sitteth...on seven mountains*. Ancient Rome was famous for this very attribute, and was sometimes called the "City of Seven Hills." Each of these hills even had its own name. The argument for this literal fulfillment is tenuous; the angel's own interpretation ascribes the *seven mountains* to *seven kings*, not seven literal mountains. A better argument for Rome as the *great city* is that at the time of John's writing Rome truly "was the great city that is holding reign over the kings of the earth," which is the strict translation of verse 18. It is indeed a tantalizing interpretation, for it would make the Harlot an even more definite symbol for the Church of Romanism and the apostate church in general. The only problem is that throughout the Revelation the *great city* is virtually always associated with Babylon, six times directly (14:8; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21). In 11:8, 16:19, and 17:18 the *great city* is left unnamed, though Babylon is a strong choice in all three. Also, *Babylon* was apparently used by Peter as a code name for Rome, possibly to throw off his enemies (I Peter 5:13). Therefore we could say that the Harlot can be called the "Church of Babylon," or the "Church of Rome."

Probably the safest approach is to take the text just as it reads. The unnamed *great cities* are definitely ungodly man-made societies, and their fulfillments have changed with time. Once it was ancient Babylon, then Rome, Paris, and London. Now it is New York, San Francisco, and many more. Together they make up symbolic *Babylon the Great*, the great rival of the Kingdom of Christ.

The Harlot also *is that great city*. Though the false church retains her name as Harlot, she truly belongs to Babylon—is part of Babylon. Babylon is more than Harlot only, but the Harlot is wholly Babylon. In other words, there are those within Babylon that are not part of the Harlot, but all within the Harlot are part of Babylon. The *great city* is also unnamed in the account of the deaths of the two witnesses on the high street of the *great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified* (11:8).

Some commentators view the Harlot and Babylon as equivalent symbols, identical in meaning and representing the world and its seducing of the Church into committing sin. The main problem with this approach lies at the end of the picture, which incriminates the kings of the eighth head of the Beast as the persecutors of the Harlot. Now if the Harlot is the world, are we to understand that the Beast will hate the world, persecute it, and burn it with fire? This seems highly unlikely, and even contrary to the other parallel visions of the end, which show the kingdom of darkness and worldliness at an all-time high just before the end of the world. The people of the world will be *eating, drinking, marrying*, and generally living it up until the very day of Christ's return (Mt 24:38).

Other commentators also view the Harlot and Babylon synonymously, but as symbols representing the Roman Catholic Church. The problem with this approach is that while the kings of the earth hated the Harlot and burned her with fire, they bewailed and lamented the fall of Babylon (18:9). In the next chapter we will try to show why we believe Babylon must represent the world and its temptations and materialism—the empire of Satan. We will show that the *Harlot* and *Babylon* are very similar, partners in crime even, but not one and the same.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (I John 4:1). False prophets and antichrists are of this world, but they began within the Church: *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us* (I John 2:18-19). The Harlot has left her true husband for an immoral and wicked “marriage” with Babylon.

REVELATION CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



- 1. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.*
- 2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*
- 3. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.*

THE HISTORY OF BABYLON THE GREAT

Chapter 17 revealed the judgment of the Harlot, which is the end-time form of the lamb-like beast of Chapter 13 and is called the False Prophet in Chapters 16 and 19. Chapter 18 details the judgment of Babylon, corresponding closely to the first beast of Chapter 13, and usually simply called the Beast. *And after these things* indicates a shift in the narration—not necessarily a change in subject or time-setting, but the introduction of a new topic. The entire chapter involves one theme: the final fall of Babylon.

The writing style of this vision is different from John's other visions. The language is still highly figurative, but not in the form of symbols like seals, trumpets, and bowls. It is very similar to the detailed prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah in describing ancient Babylon's destruction. The many figures of speech used in Chapter 18 are taken from these OT writings, and one should read them to get a full grasp of the meaning of this chapter.

The vision begins with John seeing a mighty angel descending from heaven, lighting the whole earth with His majesty and glory (v1). The description indicates that this angel is Christ, returning for His faithful saints. Christ was called a *mighty angel* in Chapter 10, and the picture there is almost identical: *And I saw another mighty Angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon His head, and His face was as it were the sun, and His feet as pillars of fire... And [He] cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth* (10:1-3). The angel possesses *great power* (Gk—*exousia*, authority), and has an important announcement for the world. He comes down (Gk—*katabaino*) from heaven and cries with a great voice: *Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen, and become the habitation of devils*. This is the subject of the whole chapter, and extensive details are given to describe Babylon's utter end.

Babylon has had a long and notorious history as a chief rival and enemy of God's people. Babylon was the first city built after the flood, and was the capitol of the *kingdom* of Nimrod (Gen 10:10). This is the first mention of a kingdom in the Bible, and it comes with negative connotations. Babylon means "confusion" and Nimrod, "he rebelled." After the flood, man lived a nomadic life, but eventually they found a *plain in the land of Shinar; and they*

dwelt there (Gen 11:2). It was here that the people of the earth conspired to build the tower of Babel as a monument to themselves and to what they could achieve together (humanism is not a new idea). But God intervened in this selfish project by confusing their language to prevent what He knew would be its ultimate end: *And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do* (Gen 11:6). This verse, written 4,000 years ago, predicts the scientific advances of the last century. Education and language translation aids have essentially made the earth *all one language* once again. By building on others' knowledge and passing it on to following generations, our contemporary world has grown and increased in knowledge and technology at an astonishing rate. The motto of today's humanism is "if you can imagine it, we can do it."

Nimrod made Babylon the center of his kingdom in direct opposition to God. After the scattering of the people at the tower of Babel, the followers of Nimrod stayed in the land of Shinar (Mesopotamia), where they became the originators of much of the idolatry, immorality, and materialism in the new world. Led by Nimrod and subsequent kings, they built a kingdom around wickedness and humanism. The first recorded war in the Bible was an invasion of Canaan by the kings of Shinar, who terrorized the people around them and defeated the combined armies of five kings at the Dead Sea, carrying away captive the family of Lot. Abram received word about his nephew's fate and pursued the Babylonians, defeating them in a desperate night battle (Gen 14). This was the first skirmish between the kingdom of Babylon and the kingdom of Israel. It was won by the people of God; but several later battles were won by Babylon.

Abram lived in Mesopotamia, in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:28), which was part of Nimrod's kingdom of Babylonia. But God had a plan for a new country and a new people that would live in righteousness before Him, and He called Abram out of Babylon and into the land of Canaan. This was the beginning of the great war between good and evil in the new world. The battle lines were set, both literally and metaphorically: the city of God, symbolized by Jerusalem, versus the city of Satan, symbolized by Babylon. For it was immediately after that first battle between Abram and Babylon that

Jerusalem is first mentioned in Scripture. Melchizedek, *king of Salem* [early Jerusalem], met Abram upon his victorious return and Abram gave him honor and tithes. Melchizedek was a type of Christ (Heb 7), and serves as the opposing king to Nimrod and Babylon.

Israel and Babylon lived and grew side by side for centuries. Israel was God's kingdom, rich in worship of the one and only God who made heaven and earth. Babylon was Satan's kingdom, a place of false religion and lust for earthly pleasures and possessions. The children of Israel were tempted with the things of Babylon as far back as Achan, who lost his life because he could not resist the sight of a *goodly Babylonish garment* (Joshua 7:21). Babylon was a long way from Achan and Ai, but the temptation was still there.

The distaste that God had for Babylon is illustrated in the account of King Hezekiah showing the wicked king of Babylon all the treasures of Jerusalem and the temple. This act of making friends with the world prompted a rebuke from God by the prophet Isaiah, who foretold that Judah and all her treasures would be carried captive into Babylon because of Hezekiah's infidelity (II Kings 20:12-18). The Babylonian Captivity at the hands of proud king Nebuchadnezzar was the lowest point in OT Israel's history. Though the Jews were miraculously delivered from Babylon 70 years later, the glory of their kingdom never returned. They remained a small and weak pawn in the hands of the feuding nations until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 finally ended their national identity entirely. There were still devout Jews living in Jerusalem and looking for the Messiah when He came, but the general disobedience of the nation did not allow God to work among them as He could have if they had fully worshipped Him.

BABYLON: SATAN'S EARTHLY EMPIRE

Babylon is a type of the world, but we need to define "the world." First, it is important to understand that the world is not a single place, but an influence, an attitude, a whole ideology that sets itself in opposition to true worship of God. Babylon therefore is not the physical world, but a type or name representing the spirit of this world. Nineveh, Tyre, Sodom, Egypt, Assyria, and Rome are all places in which the spirit and influence of worldli-

ness has flourished just as it once did in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. In light of its unique history against God's OT people, Babylon is a most appropriate type of the kingdoms of this world—Satan's earthly empire of materialism, pleasure, and self.

Nebuchadnezzar raised Babylon to the height of world power—the largest and most spectacular city of the world. Immensely wealthy, Babylon was symbolized by the golden head of Daniel's vision (Dan 2). The Hanging Gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was only a sample of the opulence and amusements that the city had to offer. The ease of living was so appealing that when the Jews were finally permitted to return to their land, only 40,000 did so, and that only after great appeals by her spiritual leaders. The fall of Babylon to the Medes produced the deliverance of the Jews in about 457 B.C., but it was not until Alexander the Great conquered the city in 323 B.C. that the city began to fall into complete and perpetual ruin. Alexander himself died at age 33 in Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

Much more has been written about ancient Babylon and her wickedness, most of it based on myths and non-Biblical sources of questionable accuracy. We have felt it better to err on the side of caution, and have not used these conjectures in establishing the symbolic meaning of Babylon. The Bible contains more than enough evidence supporting our interpretation of Babylon as a symbol for the world.

Who is the greatest enemy of the Church today? Who has led more people astray, sent more men to eternal Hell than any other? The obvious answer is "the world," under the command and sinister planning of Satan, the Dragon. *In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth* (18:24). How great is this enemy? Consider John 17, Jesus' special prayer for those He would leave behind. Over and over He asks God to keep them from the snares and temptations of the world. *World* occurs 19 times in John 17. *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil...And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are* (John 17:15,11).

Satan had come to Jesus early in His ministry and showed Him *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*. Satan promised to give Jesus the world if He would fall down and worship him (Mt 4:8-9). Of course, Satan had no intention of giving Jesus the world. The lie had worked with Adam, and he thought Jesus would fall for it too. No chance. Jesus knew that He stood to gain a Kingdom without end if He followed the great plan of redemption prepared from the foundation of the earth, and He was faithful in fulfilling the requirements of that promise. Here again we see the great conflict between the singular, spiritual Kingdom of Christ and the material, earthly kingdoms of the world under the harsh rule of Satan. New Jerusalem versus Babylon the Great—the conflict rages on.

The world as we define it is Satan's, a place of wickedness and sin. But we must be true to the full Biblical meaning. The world is the place that we as Christians must live, evangelize, and conquer. The Church should be *the light of the world* (Mt 5:14), for *the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* (I Cor 10:26). Satan, however, has corrupted the world through sin in an attempt to usurp the authority of God. Now *this present evil world* (Gal 1:4) lies in darkness, blinding the eyes and minds of those who choose to follow it (I John 2:11). There are many, many warnings of the perils that will befall those who listen to *the god of this world* (II Cor 4:4), and probably every Book of the NT has at least one. Below is just a short list of verses to show the exceeding great danger the world presents to the people of the Kingdom.

John 18:36 *Jesus answered, My Kingdom is not of this world: if my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight... but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

Romans 12:2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

I Cor 2:12 *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.*

II Cor 4:4 *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.*

Galatians 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.*

Ephesians 2:2 *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*

II Timothy 4:10 *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*

Titus 2:12 *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*

James 1:27 *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

James 4:4 *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

II Peter 1:4 *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

I John 2:15 *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

I John 4:4 *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.*

The world has always been a source of great temptation and seduction to sin. Babylon the Great was only the beginning. In John's day Rome was the ultimate *Babylon*, a city of great wealth, wickedness, and ungodliness. Never in the history of man, however, has the *spirit of this world* risen to such high

levels of influence and power as we see in the kingdoms of the world today. It should not be a surprise; the Revelation has repeatedly shown that the end-time era will be a time of great deception, wickedness, and apostasy.

The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (I John 2:16). In our day, these three categories of worldliness have found expression in ways far surpassing those of any time in history. We live in the so-called information age, with an unbelievable array of different gods clamoring for our attention and allegiance. These are gods of materialism, self, wicked desires, false intellect, fame, power, and much more. They have long been recognized as opposing God, but the extent to which they have been allowed to permeate our culture is rapidly approaching the invisible line of no return. Moreover, the lines of influence and power in our world are under the complete control of these very gods. Media attacks and “intellectual” criticism of Christianity have increased from a sizable wave to a virtual tsunami threatening to flood the whole earth and wipe out the true message of Christ.

Satan’s empire is both earthly and demonic. We can only see the outward earthly part, but the end-time Babylon ascends *out of the bottomless pit* (17:8), indicating its demonic origin. The shift in the prophecy from the Harlot to Babylon is a tactical maneuver by Satan in his evil quest to wreck the plan of God. The Harlot typifies the false church, especially the long-lived church of Rome. But at the end of Chapter 17 we saw clearly that Romanism had out-lived her usefulness to him, and he discards her for a new plan of action. The new plan to corrupt the world is basically humanism, the worship of man and his accomplishments. Humanism accepts no moral standard or god except the human mind. There is no good or evil, and therefore no human desire or pleasure is left unfulfilled. The spirit of humanism has engulfed the people of Europe and America, and is the god really being worshipped in many churches.

The word humanism is only a new word for an ancient religion. We saw that spirit in action when post-flood man built the Tower of Babel. Humanism is the gratifying of Self, living for Me. It is a Satanic spirit that leads man to self-destruction, for humanism glorifies rationalism without God, and

rejects the idea of Truth and the Bible. Where has it led mankind? Consider how today's "enlightened" and humanized culture has changed from that of yesteryear: mind-altering drugs, entertainment of the basest sort, homosexuality, hideous crimes and violence, contemporary art and music that has displaced beauty for chaos and unrest, the list goes on. Of course, Satan does not spring the whole thing upon us at once, but comes as a sly deceiver.

Yes, we live in a time of great danger, a danger different from that of our forefathers. Then the Devil used an all-or-nothing approach: recant Christ or die. Now he uses a subtle and sinister means to corrupt the souls of men. He has found that just a little poison taken for a long enough time does the job even better than a one-time overdose. Like the frog in a pot of hot water the foolish Christian is taken unawares, deceived, and slain (James 1:15).

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, cries the mighty Angel. The sentence is taken from Isaiah 21:9, and the fall of ancient Babylon described in the OT parallels the prophetic fall of mystical Babylon in the NT. The fall of the literal city of Babylon produced the deliverance of the chosen people of God from their 70-year long captivity. Here the fall of figurative Babylon will bring about the Rapture and deliverance of the saints. The fall of Babylon as foretold by the prophets is given a great deal of space in the OT, and we have already seen its fall once in the Revelation, when the sixth bowl was poured out on the Euphrates (see 16:12-16).

The fall of *Babylon* is utterly complete, like the fall of ancient Babylon into *perpetual desolations* (Jer 25:12). It has *become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird* (v2). Compare this language with the prophesied fall of Babylon in Isaiah 13:21, 14:23, and Jeremiah 50:39. It has become a prison, a cage that instead of holding wild creatures holds detestable spirits, devils, and demons. The words *hold* and *cage* come from the same Greek word (*phulake*), and is usually translated *prison*. The picture would seem to indicate Hell itself, full of *devils, foul spirit[s] and unclean bird[s]*. The day certainly comes, burning like

an oven, in which the Beast and his entire kingdom of darkness will become the inhabitants of Hell (19:19-20; Mal 4:1).

It is likely that this picture has a preliminary earthly fulfillment. Previous sections of the Revelation have already foretold that the world will become increasingly wicked and openly rebellious against the God of heaven and earth. Chapter 18 agrees and completes this theme. During the time of Satan's *little season* the nations of the world will be utterly deceived into following the will and command of Satan. The world will become a place inhabited by *devils* and *foul spirit[s]*. Why? The next verse answers: *For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her [Babylon's] 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* (v3). The wickedness of the world will spread through *all nations* until, as it was in the days of Noah, *every imagination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually* (Gen 6:5). Almost the whole world will be angry at God, and will blaspheme His name in both word and deed. However, there will still be a pure remnant that is following Christ, and the next verse speaks to them in particular.

4. *And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*
5. *For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*
6. *Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.*
7. *How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.*
8. *Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.*

THE CHURCH CALLED OUT OF BABYLON

The sins of Babylon have reached their full measure—the Greek draws a picture of a huge pile of sins that reaches into the sky. God will now recompense her evil ways with a righteous but terrible reward. Her judgment is swiftly approaching, and from heaven comes the call: *Come out of her, My people* (v4). This call has been ringing out to the Church since the time of Christ. We have already given several verses demonstrating the great divide required between Church and world, and here is one more: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you* (II Cor 6:17). Separation from the world's value system is essential to keeping oneself pure and to winning Christ's approval.

The warning that follows the call shows why: *that ye receive not of her plagues*. The command is clear. Leave Babylon and live, or stay and be punished with *death, and mourning, and famine* (v8). The picture describes a city ready to fall to an enemy army, and it is taken from the prophecy of ancient Babylon's fall: *Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; He will render unto her a recompence* (Jer 51:6). The separation is primarily spiritual rather than physical. We are not called to remove ourselves from the world, but to keep ourselves from the evil in the world (John 17:15). Many of our forefathers moved their families to spiritually safer climates at great cost of life and money, and the time may come that those in America will be called to make a similar choice. Our first calling though, is to keep ourselves *unspotted from the world* no matter where we are. The sins of Babylon are available world-wide already. Only the intensity level changes.

BABYLON: LITERAL CITY, OR SYMBOLIC EMPIRE?

Amazingly, many contemporary prophecy writers refuse to accept that the OT prophecies of the fall of Babylon (like Jer 51:6) apply to ancient Babylon. They adamantly proclaim that literal Babylon must be rebuilt because her destruction did not happen exactly the way the prophets foretold. We cannot disagree more strongly. The Bible is clear that Babylon was destroyed

and will never be rebuilt. Any “unfulfilled” prophecies of her destruction are simply not being understood correctly. Quoting Isaiah 13:19, *And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. 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* (see also Jer 50:39, 51:37).

Clearly this prophesies a total destruction, and history records that it really did happen. Babylon was overthrown and utterly destroyed. Over two millenniums have reduced it to ruins so unremarkable that the actual city site was not discovered until the late 1800's. Before it was found, skeptics used the missing city of Babylon as an argument against the accuracy of the Bible. It is now a place with only archaeological and historical significance.

Futurists contend that Babylon's fall left some prophecies unfulfilled. For example, Jeremiah's description of the sea overwhelming Babylon at her destruction when ancient Babylon had no sea nearby (Jer 51:42). They also insist upon literal fulfillments for the details of her fall: the sun, moon, and stars darkened on the Day of the Lord's fierce anger (Is 13:9-10), the statement that not one stone would be taken from her ruins to build another house (Jer 51:26) and that no shepherd would pitch a tent there (Is 13:20). However, these are simply figurative expressions that cannot be taken in such a hyper-literal way. The prophecies were fulfilled—ancient Babylon is no more. Jesus foretold Jerusalem's fall, and said that when it happened not one stone would be left upon another (Luke 19:44). That did not hyper-literally happen; some of the ancient city walls are still standing today. Figuratively, it conveys the point very well. The fall of Jerusalem would spell utter destruction and devastation of the city, and Jesus' words were perfectly fulfilled in that event.

Hyper-literalism is not an acceptable exegesis of any Scripture. Language is not able to perfectly present any detail without raising possible scenarios and questions; our legal system is a prime example of that. The best understanding of any topic is its general scope and content. The details must not

override that overall intent. Unfortunately, this most basic rule is often completely forgotten in today's Bible interpretation—not just in prophecy, but also in doctrine. Details become so important that the reason and purpose for the detail becomes secondary and the real intent of the Scripture is missed entirely. Often this is evidence of an ulterior motive—a hidden reason one chooses to believe something not consistent with all of Scripture.

Returning to Babylon, we note several prophetic details of the fall of ancient Babylon that would be very difficult to explain outside of a pre-Christ fulfillment. Jeremiah foretold that it would be the Medes who would begin her fall (Jer 51:11), a people who have long been lost to the mists of time. He also named the idols which would be destroyed—Bel and Merodach (Jer 50:2). These idols are no longer in existence. Then Isaiah foretells that Babylon, *the beauty of the Chaldees*, would become like Sodom (Is 13:19). The Chaldees of Babylon also are gone beyond memory. The prophecies of ancient Babylon's destruction do contain allusions and veiled details that apply to the end of the world, but their foremost and immediate fulfillment was for her historical fall.

The only way to understand the Babylon of Revelation and not cause conflicts with other Scripture is to see her in a symbolic sense. Babylon is the worldly empire of Satan in a deadly war against the Kingdom of Christ. She is a product of the work of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet. *She hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously*, she thinks she is a wealthy and unconquerable queen for she is a powerful city of merchandise and human knowledge, supplying the people of the earth with countless luxuries and pleasures.

The leader of spiritual Babylon is the Dragon, the very first Beast revealed in the Revelation (Chapter 12). Not coincidentally, the OT prophets spoke much about the king of ancient Babylon and his great wickedness and coming judgment. However, hidden within the prophecy is an oracle against Lucifer the Dragon, the king of spiritual Babylon:

Isaiah 14:4 *Take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual*

stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing...Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

BABYLON AND HER KING CAST INTO HELL

The Dragon as king of the empire of Babylon will be cast into Hell along with his entire contingent of demons and wicked men. His inglorious end will be final. Just as the people of Babylon in Belshazzar's day were unaware of their impending doom, so the empire of Satan will continue in rebellion and wickedness until the Day of Judgment. There are many warning signs now, even as there were in ancient Babylon, when the armies of the Medes camped outside the walls. The Babylonians were so convinced of their superiority and power that they were partying and reveling on the very night of their downfall. We have already described this scene on page 387.

Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double (v6). In our

words we might say, “Render unto her even as she has rendered to others. Pay her back double for all she has given, and in the cup of poison she made others drink, mix her a double portion and make her drink it.” (See 14:10 and Psalms 137:8.) The language is similar to that in Isaiah 40:2 or Jeremiah 17:18, and simply means that Babylon will be judged and punished to the full extent of her iniquity. God does not punish beyond what is just. The OT law of *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* (Mt 5:38) was a restriction on the amount of punishment. There were, however, specific sins that required double restitution, stealing being the most notable (Ex 22:9).

She once *lived deliciously* (waxed wanton, lived sensuously, I Tim 5:11), now she will receive *torment and sorrow* (v7), *and she shall be utterly burned with fire* (v8). This probably refers to the judgments of Hell that all who partake of her sins will experience. Her heart of pride that says *I sit a queen* will be cast down (see Is 47:7f) and her plagues will *come in one day*. Whether we take the day literally or figuratively matters little. Futurists may argue that we must take it as a literal day, but we would remind them that they interpret *the Day of the Lord* as lasting from the Rapture to the Second Coming—a period of 1,007 years according to their timeline.

So far in Chapter 18, the intent of the prophecy is clear. Babylon has lived exceedingly wickedly, and has deceived many into becoming partakers of her sins. She lives in pride, earthly wealth, and with every comfort available. She fears neither God nor earthly justice for her sins. She has given torment and sorrow to those who dare to oppose her, but now the day of reckoning has finally arrived. Because of her iniquities she must stand in punishment before God. Her plagues come suddenly: *death, mourning, famine, fire*. These plagues signal the end of *Babylon the Great*, the long empire of Satan that has corrupted the earth and much of the Church. From the continuing prophecy it would appear that her fall, though sudden, does not immediately close the history of the world. We will comment on this later.

9. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

10. *Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*
11. *And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:*
12. *The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble,*
13. *And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.*
14. *And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.*
15. *The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,*
16. *And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!*
17. *For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,*
18. *And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!*
19. *And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.*

BABYLON'S WEALTH AND LUXURY

When Jesus viewed the material glories of the kingdoms of the world that Satan offered Him, they were no doubt spectacular. They are even more so now. When one considers the human achievements and discoveries of just the last century we *wonder with great admiration*. What began as advances in communication and transportation have now spread into every area of human interest. Globalization is the latest catchword, describing the attempt to link the world's people into one grand business and cultural community. It sounds a lot like the goal of those building the tower of Babel back in ancient Babylon. The results of Globalization allow me to type these words on my laptop computer anywhere in the world, even without electricity, and send them at the speed of light to multiple readers anywhere on the planet. Entire businesses can be managed from virtually anywhere a person wishes to go. The stated purpose of globalization is to open national borders to free trade and a world wide standard of law. It attempts to bring the benefits of capitalism, industry, and law to the whole world. Notice the absence of religion. The chief reason for globalism is selfish, for while it expands markets and opens up new regions to economic development, it also expands the pocketbooks of merchants and politicians. The ever-increasing range of riches and amenities available to mankind is mind-boggling. Today's world is truly a place of unimaginable wealth, recreation, and luxury, all done for the purpose of gratifying Self.

The day is coming when all these great riches will go up in smoke. Babylon, symbolizing the worldly empire of Satan, has been with us for centuries, but as the end of the world draws nearer her iniquity, rebellion, pride, and opulence will grow. The people of Babylon withhold from themselves no *dainty and goodly* thing, and heap up riches and pleasures for selfish enjoyment.

Three times the account describes the sudden calamity of Babylon as coming *in one hour* (v10, 17, 19). An hour in figurative language is a short time that is still considerably longer than a single hour, possibly measuring several months or even a few years. Remember the *ten kings* of 17:12 who each received power with the beast for *one hour*. Not even the most literal commentator would take that literally. We simply cannot say with any certainty how

long the *one hour* lasts, and the main thought we should gain is that the fall of the world will be sudden and unexpected. The picture of destruction coming as a complete surprise agrees with I Thessalonians 5:2-3: *the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape* (NASB).

BABYLON'S FALL: WHEN?

It appears from this chapter that the burning of symbolic Babylon precedes the destruction of the world by a very short time. The continuing picture of verses 9-19 shows the kings, merchants, and sailors of the world *weeping and wailing* as they watch the smoke rising from the ruins of the once Great Babylon. They *bewail, lament, weep, mourn*, her fall because it affects them personally. They cannot sell their merchandise anymore, and the "delicious fruits that their souls lusted after are gone forever" (v14). Instead, *standing afar off for the fear of her torment, they say, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come* (v10). The Greek word for *alas* (*ouai*) is usually translated *woe*, as we read back in 8:13. All music and mirth have left Babylon along with the sounds of work and industry. In violence and vengeance she is cast down *to be found no more at all* (v21), and the many men who rejoiced in her now watch as she falls into perpetual ruin.

It is also possible that the picture is entirely figurative of the terrors of Hell, and that the destruction of Babylon and the world are simultaneous events. Under this interpretation the weeping, wailing, and lamenting of the world's leaders would be a description of Hell using a view that can be understood by the human mind, for just as we cannot comprehend the joys of heaven so we cannot comprehend the dreadfulness of Hell. We read beautiful descriptions of heaven, with streets of gold and a City of majesty and dazzling glory. Here we have the opposite picture: death, sorrow, crying, hunger, and pain. The New Jerusalem in Chapter 21 describes heaven as a place with no death, sorrow, pain, or crying.

Whether the fall of Babylon as described in Chapter 18 coincides exactly with the end of the world is not clearly stated in the passage itself. We do not

see the Church at all outside of the call to come out of Babylon in verse 4. While we know that this is a timeless call to the people of God throughout history, is it also the final trumpet calling the Church off the earth before the four angels release the winds of destruction? (See 7:1-3.) The picture of the end given in 11:12-19 hints that there may be a short time between the Rapture of the saints and the destruction of the world. We are told that the wicked will behold the saints rising into heaven (11:12), and then the mighty angels of heaven will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on the ungodly (II Thes 1:7-9). The destruction of the early earth at Noah's Flood came suddenly too, but it still probably took days and maybe weeks until death overtook the last wicked man. They saw the ark of safety leave without them, and they knew that their time of judgment had come.

If there is a period of time between the Rapture and the destruction of the world, it cannot be very long, and would serve only to increase the terror of the wicked as they realize their impending doom (6:15-17). *One hour*, even in figurative scope, cannot be extended much beyond the years of a king (17:12), and could be only hours long. After the saints ascend to meet Christ in the sky, they will return with Him in judgment (I Thes 4; Rev 19:11-14) on the wicked world. How and what exactly happens we are not told, *but the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up* (II Peter 3:10). The next chapter reveals first the marriage supper of the Lamb (the great reunion of all saints at the feet of Jesus) and then the return of Christ in judgment upon the wicked world. (See page 454 for a possible chronology of the events of the final *Day of the Lord*.)

THOSE WHO DEPEND ON BABYLON WILL BE PUNISHED WITH HER

Chapter 18 mentions three groups of men who mourn the fall of Babylon: *the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and all the company in ships*. Each of these groups cries "Woe, woe," at the sight of Babylon's burning. While we must keep the overall picture in perspective, these phrases have

been used in other prophetic contexts, and studying their usage there may broaden our understanding of this passage. *The kings of the earth* are the earthly leaders of the nations of the world. They have often revealed themselves as ruthlessly opposed to the Kingdom of Christ: *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed* (Ps 2:2). They will be with the Beast when he arrays his forces against the armies of Christ when He returns (19:19), and they will run in terror at the destruction of the world (6:15-17). Christ is *the Prince of the kings of the earth* (1:5), meaning that He holds the ultimate authority over them. Satan is their leader, but Christ is their Master. He has the power to over-rule, and then they must obey Him, for He rules *with a rod of iron* (2:27, 12:5, 19:15). In this passage, the kings of the earth are likely part of the Beast's confederation of *ten horns* (17:12) that unite in rebellion and iniquity against God.

The *merchants of the earth*, as well as the *shipmaster[s] and sailors*, are the worldly rich men who have fared sumptuously and lived deliciously; they too have committed fornication with the Harlot and Babylon. In this there are unmistakable parallels with the *merchants* and *mariners* of Tyre (also called Tyrus) in Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 27-28. Like the accounts of the fall of Babylon, these two prophecies of the fall of Tyre have hidden meanings. The *prince of Tyrus* in Ezekiel 28 is a veiled reference to Satan; the account foretells his final demise. The *king of Babylon* (Is 14:4) was similarly portrayed (see page 432), the only two times this happens in the Bible. The quotations involved are too lengthy to reprint here, but in order to see the correlation, a reading of these OT accounts would be rewarding.

In Revelation 18, the merchants and sailors represent the materialistically minded people of the world who have lived a selfish life of ease and luxury (v15, 19). Quoting the parable of the rich man they say, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?* (Luke 12:19-20). The sin of this rich man was not in the greatness of his wealth, but in how he lived because of his wealth. Rich men do not automatically go to Hell, nor is it sinful to be rich. Poorer men can be guilty of the same sins of greed, selfishness, and discrimination that rich men are especially tempted with. In America and

many developed countries, most people are rich. Think about the amount of money you spend now on living essentials compared with what a similar person would have spent 50 years ago. Now look at the amount you spend on comfort items compared with 50 years ago. To really appreciate how things have changed, notice that many “essential” items today were comfort items in the past. Again, having money is not intrinsically wrong; but being poor stewards of money is.

The list of merchandise in verses 12-13 is almost entirely made up of the luxury items of John’s day: *gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, thyine wood, vessels of ivory, vessels of most precious wood, brass, iron, marble, cinnamon, odours, ointments, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, beasts, sheep, horses, chariots, slaves, and souls of men*. The Greek word here translated *merchandise* is **gomos**, and has more the idea of cargo or freight, as in a ship’s load of goods. (See Acts 21:3 where the same word is used.) The intent of this long list of wares is to impress us with the magnitude of Babylon’s commerce and industry. The expensive goods in great demand in high societies are all here, from costly jewelry, clothing, spices, and perfumes to premium building materials, livestock, food commodities, and professional servants.

The *slaves and souls of men* are, in the Greek, both peculiar terms that evidently mean both servants and slaves. The Greek word here used for *slaves* is **soma**, and is usually translated *bodies*. Out of about 150 occurrences in the NT, only here does the KJV translate **soma** as *slaves*. *Souls of men* comes from Ezekiel 27:13, and seems to refer to dishonest profiting and manipulation of common men by ungodly overlords and leaders. The drug trade comes immediately to mind, as do prostitution and organized crime groups like the Mafia. The Bible also says that false prophets handle men’s souls as if they were *merchandise*, using them to further their own ambitions (II Peter 2:1-3).

Many of the items listed here are found also in Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning the fall of the wicked city of Tyre (Eze 26-27). In fact, much of the description concerning mystical Babylon in Chapter 18 fits ancient Tyre better than ancient Babylon. Tyre was a highly developed Phoenician city on the western coast of Israel. Being situated on the Mediterranean Sea, Tyre and her sister city, Zidon, were important merchant cities that traded by land and sea

with nations near and far. Tyre was unimportant militarily and never threatened Israel by force. She was, however, a big problem for the Jews because of her great prosperity and fame. Baal and Ashtoreth were Phoenician gods that tempted the Israelites constantly into idolatry. Solomon contributed to the problem by marrying Zidonian wives and allowing their idols to be set up and worshipped in Jerusalem. Jezebel was a daughter of the king of Zidon, and she brought even more idols of Baal into Israel. The Phoenicians were famous craftsmen, and even helped in building parts of the temple. However, their idolatry and licentiousness were legendary, and the Israelites too often were found guilty of following Tyre's example.

There is an interesting twist in the account of Tyre that must not be left out. In a Messianic prophecy, *the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift* (Ps 45:12). And after the many details of Tyre's fall are given in Isaiah 23, hope for the future is extended to her in that after being forgotten for a period of 70 years she will return to the world stage as merchant city, but that *her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord* (Is 23:18). These prophecies were fulfilled in the spread of the Gospel by the early Church into the Gentile cities of Tyre and Zidon (Mt 15:21; Acts 21:3). This stands in contrast to the city of Babylon, which was divinely decreed never to be rebuilt.

Babylon's goods are not immoral in themselves; it is their misuse that requires her fall. Fine linen, for instance, was used extensively in the OT temple, and is worn by the saints in heaven (19:8). It was also worn by the rich man who *fared sumptuously every day* (Luke 16:19). Cinnamon was an ingredient of the holy anointing oil and was a delectable plant in Solomon's garden (Song 4:14), but it was also used for immoral purposes by the adulteress of Proverbs 7:17. Babylon's real offense is to be found in the sinful attitudes and actions of those who depended on these commodities. The merchants and seamen had been *made rich...by reason of her costliness*. Their goals were wealth, fame, and power, *the fruits that thy soul lusted after* (18:14). The Greek word for *fruits* (*opora*) is used only here in the NT and indicates the ripe autumn fruits of harvest.

The close association of the Harlot with Babylon is seen in verse 16: *Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!* This is an identical description

of the attire of the Harlot in 17:4. By the time of the events of Chapter 18, the power of the Babylonian Beast has exceeded that of the Harlot-church, a direct reversal of the two beasts in Chapter 13. The sea traders mourn the passing of Babylon in an emotional description of shock and fear: *when they saw the smoke of her burning...they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing* (v18). Their cry of sorrow is not for the city, but for their own fates, now so obvious and terrible to them (6:15-17).

What city is like unto this great city! the men of Babylon cry. They said almost the same thing when they viewed the early form of the city (the Roman Beast) back in Chapter 13: *Who is like unto the Beast, they marveled, Who is able to make war with him?* (13:4). The empire of Satan is impressive to earthly minds, and his devices have deceived many into foolishly despising their souls in order to gain the world for only a short time. How important it is that soldiers in the Kingdom of Christ are equipped and willing to stand for truth and virtue in a world of lies and decadence.

20. *Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*

21. *And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.*

22. *And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;*

23. *And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.*

24. *And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.*

THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

We have seen nothing concerning the Church in the picture of the fall of Babylon outside of verse 4. However, one brief scene records the reaction of the saints in heaven: *Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her* (v20).

The inclusion of the *apostles* is unique. None of the other Revelation passages describing heavenly scenes mentions them. Being in context with verse 24 it appears that John may have had in mind the words of Christ: *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* (Luke 11:49-50). In this passage, Christ was speaking directly to the Jewish leaders, and several ideas have been given about what Christ meant by *this generation*. It would be hard to see Christ holding the Jews of His day guilty of the blood of every past martyr. Probably He used the word in a broader sense, applying it to the race or generation of the Jews (Mt 23:33; Luke 17:25). The universal Church is called a *chosen generation* (I Peter 2:9), while the *children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light* (Luke 16:8), but are also called *an evil and adulterous generation* (Mt 12:39). The generation of this world has always antagonized the people of the Kingdom, murdering and persecuting both leaders and lay-members.

God has *avenged* the murders of the righteous in judging Babylon. A few verses later this is repeated by the heavenly multitude: *True and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand* (19:2). Thus, Babylon and Harlot fall together, both being guilty of the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. At the opening of the fifth seal, *the souls of them that were slain for the word of God* had asked how long it would be before their deaths would be avenged (6:9-10). The judgment of Babylon and the Harlot will answer their question, and correct the injustice of their deaths.

The comment that Babylon was found guilty of *all that were slain on the earth* (v24) is hard to harmonize with any interpretation for Babylon other than the world-long earthly empire of Satan. The interpretation that makes

both Harlot and Babylon represent Roman Catholicism (page 419) must reconcile this verse with the fact that many Christians continue to die at the hands of Muslim extremists and Communist regimes. The other problem with that approach is that the lament of the kings and merchants, who depended on Babylon and who lost their luxurious lifestyle at her fall, does not fit well with end-time Catholicism because Chapter 17 says that the ten horns of the eighth beast will persecute and harass the Harlot, but Chapter 18 shows these horns mourning the fall of Babylon. This strongly indicates that the symbolic meanings of the Harlot and Babylon are not synonymous.

The Futurist sees a huge and powerful city rising on the ashes of literal Babylon in the future. It is proposed that Babylon will be the world capitol for the kingdom of Antichrist, and that the fall of Babylon as foretold in Chapter 18 will happen exactly as said. The time setting is a little under dispute, but most Futurists believe that the fall of Babylon will take place after the Rapture and before Messiah comes to set up His earthly kingdom. This leaves a maximum seven year window for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

We have already shown that the OT prophets have said that Babylon will never be rebuilt. Our thinking is that if taking a passage literally causes it to contradict other Scripture something is wrong with the interpretation. *Let God be true, but every man a liar* (Rom 3:4). Some Futurists agree on this point, and look for a fulfillment of Babylon in a literal city, but not upon the site of ancient Babylon. Thus she is a city, but a symbolic one that is similar to Babylon the Great. Several cities have been proposed under this approach, the most notable ones being New York, Rome and Jerusalem. While this interpretation has much better Biblical support, verse 24 continues to pose a problem to that approach.

Babylon's fall takes place in violence and bloodshed: *And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all* (v21). The imagery is probably taken from the account of Jeremiah taking the scroll of the prophecy against Babylon, binding it to a stone, and throwing it into the middle of the Euphrates River, saying, *Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her* (Jer 51:64). The

scene of a *millstone* being cast into the sea bears ominous allusion to the words of Jesus, *And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea* (Mark 9:42). Our mind's eye sees all of wicked humanity tied to this huge stone and hurled into the deep, never to rise again. The Greek word for *violence* (*hormema*) has the idea of an assault or attack by an armed force, and ties in well with the last battle at the end of Chapters 9 and 19.

Complete destruction, emptiness, and desolation comprise the picture of verses 22-23. Six times the phrase is repeated, *they shall be found [or heard] no more at all in thee*. The implication is that Babylon still exists, but in destitute and dishonorable estate—her new abode is eternal Hell (19:20). In contrast to the joy of the redeemed, not a trace of gladness, joy, peace, or happiness is heard or felt in her forever. It is a place of darkness and death; not even the light of a candle is to be seen anywhere. Compare this passage with Jeremiah 25:10, *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 candle*. Sorrow, sadness, and the constant reminder of squandered opportunities for salvation are the bitter fruits of those who fall with Babylon. Truly Jesus spoke: *whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder* (Mt 21:44).

The sinful reasons for Babylon's fall are plenteous, but one last summary statement is given: *for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived* (v23). The literal reading of *sorceries* is witchcraft by drugs and enchantments, but there seems to be a more figurative meaning. Harlotry symbolizes a people who have forsaken their rightful husband for another. Sorcery is a similar symbol, but indicates those who have allowed themselves to be deceived and tricked into leaving their first love by lies and false miracles. In figurative contexts of the OT, harlotry and sorcery are named together at times (see Is 47:9, 57:3). The violent fall of Babylon as described in Chapter 9 also mentions the sin of sorcery: *Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts* (9:21).

Is there any special significance in *the harpers, musicians, pipers and trumpeters*? Probably only in the fact that while we see in heaven an abundance of music and singing, Hell has only weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The figurative language is taken from passages like Ezekiel's prophecy against Tyre: *I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard* (Eze 26:13; also Is 24:8; Jer 25:10). The sounds of work are not heard any more either, all sounds of goodwill and production are silent and still.

REVELATION CHAPTER ΠΙΠΕΤΕΠ



- 1. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:*
- 2. For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.*
- 3. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.*

HEAVEN'S REACTION AT THE FALL OF BABYLON

Chapter 19 continues the fall of Babylon and the Harlot, but there is a change in the setting beginning with verse 1. After the two dark chapters of death, burning, and destruction, we finally see again into the heavenly realm, where we view the saints' reaction to what has been happening on

the earth. The first ten verses describe the rejoicing of the redeemed as they see that great day approaching—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then the vision returns to the earth, and we are given perhaps the Bible's most detailed description of the glorious return of Christ. Chapter 19 will close the sixth section of the Book, leaving one more section for the final presentation of the history of the Church.

The scene in heaven is one of great rejoicing and anticipation as the redeemed of the earth prepare for the greatest reunion ever planned. The fact that the great Harlot's day of judgment has come is met with a song of praise: *Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are His judgments* (19:1). This great heavenly multitude encompasses the saints of all time who have passed through the gate of death. They have been waiting *under the altar* for the day that those who have shed their innocent blood will receive the just recompense for their wicked deeds (6:9). Now the wait is over, and the judgment of Babylon and the Harlot is final—*her smoke [rises] up for ever and ever*.

Four times the saints shout *Alleluia*, and these are the only Alleluias of the NT. The word is taken from the Hebrew Psalms (Heb—*halal yah*) and means “praise the Lord.” (See Psalms 149:1 for an example.) The joy, praise, and thankfulness of the redeemed saints in heaven is a familiar sight in the Revelation, and includes scenes at the end of the seals (7:10), the trumpets (11:15), and the saints victory over the Beast (14:3, 15:3). In this chapter, the picture forms a most striking contrast to the sorrow and mourning of the previous chapter's depiction of the worldly empire of Satan falling into perpetual desolations and punishments.

4. *And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.*
5. *And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.*
6. *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

7. *Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*
8. *And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

HEAVENLY PRAISES

After the initial praise of the redeemed, the 24 elders and the four living creatures (see 4:4) fall down in worship before their all-wise, all-loving God: *Amen; Alleluia*, they say, agreeing to the words of the previous song. A voice comes from the Throne telling every servant of God to praise Him, *both small and great*, and at this, John hears a deep, swelling sound that grows and grows into a mighty and thunderous crescendo. It is as though the very heavens are shaking with the volume and power of the sound. The *great multitude* speaks with one voice: *Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*. It is a spectacular, indescribable display of praise, coming from souls bursting with joy and the overwhelming gratitude of being found worthy to be part of this triumphant, victorious multitude. The great Day of the Lord has come, the moment for which all creation has groaned and travailed (Romans 8:22), *that mortality might be swallowed up of life* (II Cor 5:4).

Here is the only time we read the word *omnipotent* in the Bible, though its Greek form (*pantokrator*) is found ten times, and is usually translated *Almighty*. Nine of those ten times the word is found in the Revelation. Omnipotent and Almighty are synonyms, meaning all-powerful, all-ruling, universal sovereign. It is obvious that the attribute of complete omnipotence can be claimed by only one being: the God of heaven and earth.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

The celebration could go on and on, but there is one more important event on the heavenly calendar: *the marriage of the Lamb* (v7). The symbols employed here have already been explained in this study, and have obvious meanings. Christ is represented by a Lamb 28 times in the Revelation; only

once is the word used for any other purpose (13:11). The *Lamb's wife* is the Church, whom Christ has purchased with His own blood. The relationship of Christ and the Church, that *great mystery*, is compared to the husband-wife union in Ephesians 5:25-32, and is seen again in the *Spirit and the Bride* calling to all who are thirsty to *take of the water of life freely* (22:17). The *holy city*, representing heaven in Chapter 21, is also called the Bride of the Lamb (21:2, 9). (See also Romans 7:4, where Paul uses the ordinance of marriage as an illustration of Christ and the Church.)

Surprising as it may seem, some interpreters ignore these Scriptural evidences and propose that the wife of the Lamb is the Jewish people turning to Christ toward the end of the age. While we sincerely hope that the Jews do accept and worship Jesus the Messiah, the notion that this passage advances that prediction is wrong on two fronts. First, the idea of earthly Jews accepting Christ is not even slightly contained in this scene. The picture is set in heaven, and surely has its fulfillment there. Second, the correct symbols have wide Scriptural support and usage; they are neither vague nor rare. The *Lamb's wife* represents the people of God—Jew or Gentile makes no difference.

The marriage bond is the highest human relationship possible, and as a type, Christ and Bride implies perfect union, love, knowledge, and participation in His glory, holiness, and power. The hidden secrets and mysteries of the ages will be revealed, and we shall know even as we are known, not through a darkened glass, but face to face.

We read that in the Garden of Eden, Eve was taken from Adam's side, to be his companion and help throughout life. Eve was not created like the rest of God's creation, but was formed from a piece of Adam. This is an intricate type of the Church, *the Lamb's wife*, which began at Calvary. The *Bride* was taken from His pierced side, out of which blood and water flowed after His death. Now, finishing the analogy, we see the *marriage of the Lamb* that begins the final state of the Christian's soul. What began as a literal marriage in a perfect garden on earth will end in a spiritual marriage set in a perfect garden in heaven (Chapter 20).

In this life, the Church of Christ is *espoused to one husband*, waiting for the day that she is presented *as a chaste virgin to Christ* (II Cor 11:2). She is not standing idly by, growing lazy and fat. Rather, we read that the *Lamb's wife*

bath made herself ready. She is prepared, watching and waiting. How carefully and particularly a bride prepares herself for her wedding day! She makes sure that every detail is correct, that her clothes are clean and neat and her hair nicely done. Time is spent checking and rechecking that all is perfectly fitted and matched. And when all is done, there is still no rest. “Is my hair right? How do I look from the back?” And other questions, right up to the very last moment. The Bride of Christ must also keep herself ready for her Husband’s coming: *for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh... therefore be ye also ready* (Mt 24:44).

At this wedding however, the Bride’s garments are a gift from the Groom. *And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints* (v8). The saint’s righteousness is not their own, it is imputed righteousness from Christ. Only a man who has never committed a sin can count his own righteousness, and *all have sinned*. But Christ, being the perfect, proper sacrifice, is rightfully able to offer His own righteousness to those whom He has chosen. Here is true eternal security, for the Lamb does not impute His righteousness to those who have not made themselves ready (v7), yet no work of righteousness of man will count for salvation—that would be like trying to use a credit card to buy a newspaper from a vending machine that accepts only coins. Though coins and credit cards are both forms of money, vending machines only accept coins.

As a bride adorns herself for her husband, so the people of Christ must *cleanse [them]selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (II Cor 7:1). The *righteousness of saints* (v8) is the Greek *dikaïoma*, and all the other translations render this *the righteous acts of the saints*. These are the ones whom Christ elects to redeem with His own blood, and only these will join Him in eternity. Thus again we are impressed with the importance of being ready, of preparing ourselves so that we are accepted by the One who has bought us for His own peculiar possession.

The effort of God and man together in effecting reconciliation and man’s salvation is a wonderful commentary on the plan and purpose of God. Man’s part is small compared to God’s, and yet it is essential to his receiving the gift of salvation. God has provided the means and prepared the way for every person to be reconciled to Him, and to share in the joys of eternity

with Christ. But man must choose to accept the Covenant, to press into the Kingdom (Luke 16:16), and then he will be found worthy to wear the fine linen garment of salvation that Christ will give to His Bride on the greatest wedding day ever planned. In the words of Paul the Apostle, *Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish* (Eph 5:25-27).

Our salvation is entirely dependent upon Christ, but this does not mean that it is arbitrary. Christ chooses those who love and serve Him instead of enjoying the pleasures of Babylon for a season. Man's attempts at righteousness are as *filthy rags* (Is 64:6); of his own merit he can never purchase salvation. This does not mean that the righteous acts of the saints are as filthy rags to Christ, but that as payment against a debt of sin they are completely worthless. The gracious work of Christ in paying that debt is illustrated in Ezekiel 16:6, *And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.* From unloved and unattractive to chosen and blessed: no wonder all heaven rejoices at the announcement that the *marriage of the Lamb has come!*

Fine linen was produced from the flax plant, and was specified to be worn by the priests of the OT (Ex 39:8). In 19:14 the armies of heaven, coming with Christ to judge the wicked world, are also wearing fine linen. It is *clean and white* (Gk—*lampros*), which represents purity and holiness. The same word is used in 22:16, *I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.* At Jesus' transfiguration His clothes shone exceeding bright and white, beyond any earthly comparison (Mark 9:3). Such will be the garments of the saints in heaven.

There are three women in the Revelation, and their clothing illustrates their striking differences. The first woman was *clothed with the sun*, and symbolizes Israel, who gave birth to the Manchild (12:1-6). The second woman was arrayed in *purple and scarlet*, the apostate Harlot-church of the end-time (17:1-7). The last woman is the *Lamb's wife*, who is clad in *fine linen, clean and white* (19:1-10).

PREPARING FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

There are several Bible passages that supply details to the figurative picture of *the marriage supper of the Lamb*. One is in Luke 14:16-24. It describes a ruler who makes a great supper for his friends and neighbors. When the supper is prepared, he sends his servants to invite everyone to his feast, but immediately they all make excuses for why they cannot come: one has just bought a field and must go see it, another has married a wife, and a third is out with a new team of oxen. The lord who has spent so much time and effort to make the feast is angry at their ungratefulness and sends his servants back out into the highways and back-streets of town to invite the poor, the blind, and the lowly people to enjoy the great feast. There is plenty of room for all except those who had rejected the gracious invitation: *For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper* (Luke 14:24).

Jesus may have primarily given this parable to predict His own coming rejection by the Jews, but the *supper* will take place in heaven, after this life is over. A similar and even more relevant passage in Matthew 22:2-14 tells how a king, after making great preparations for the marriage of his son, invites many people to come and share in the festivities. Nobody is interested in coming, so he sends out more servants who speak glowingly of the immense feasts and gifts that have been prepared. These are first scorned, then beaten and killed. This makes the king angry, and he sends an army to punish the murderers and burn their city. Then he sends out more servants into every part of his Kingdom and invites everyone, *bad and good*. Now the place is filled. At the feast, the king sees a man arriving without a wedding garment. "Why are you here without a wedding garment?" He asks. The man is speechless; he has no excuse for his forgetfulness. *Bind him hand and foot*, says the king, *and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called but few are chosen* (Mt 24:13-14). In this parable, more emphasis is given to the wedding feast itself. All are invited, good and bad, but those that have not prepared themselves for the wedding are cast out.

The *marriage of the Lamb* is the one event that the Christian anticipates and longs for beyond all others. How terrible that some will come to that

event without a wedding garment! They may have waited and watched diligently for a time, but the deceptions of the False Prophet and the temptations of Babylon have diverted their attention, and they are caught without their wedding garment on. *At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him* (Mt 25:6). When the Bridegroom comes there is no time to get ready. Just a few chapters earlier we were warned, *Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame* (16:15, 3:18). Figuratively speaking, the wedding garment is given when a person accepts Christ as King of his life and enters the Kingdom. If he does not keep the wedding garment, his ticket to the marriage supper is invalid—whether he loses it by deceit or by personal neglect. Many will be shocked to discover on the day of the feast that they are naked (Mt 7:22-23), and they will be cast into outer darkness. *And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut* (Mt 25:10). A marriage supper is a joyful celebration and is an appropriate symbol for the joys of being *forever with the Lord*. However, not all will be worthy guests, as Jesus' parables also show. The negative perspective will be given in the picture of the *great white Throne Judgment* (20:11), where the many who come without their wedding garments must explain their ungodly actions and lack of faith. Speechless, they will stand before God without excuse.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The *marriage supper of the Lamb* is essentially the last event of all time; it stands at the threshold of eternity, dividing the souls of men into two groups whose destinies are both eternally fixed and radically different. The events making up the final *Day of the Lord* is difficult to put together chronologically from the Biblical texts, and we make no dogmatic claims to fully understand the exact schedule that God has planned. Time itself will end somewhere during the final *Day of the Lord*.

In our view, the first indication of the returning Christ will be the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. With Him will be the souls of the saints who have died in Christ, and also the angels of heaven. Every eye

shall see and every heart will instantly know that this is the Sovereign Master of the Universe. At the command of Christ the graves will open up and the dead in Christ shall be resurrected, meaning that their earthly bodies will be reunited with their spiritual soul and become a glorified, heavenly body. Then the saints which are alive on the earth will rise up into heaven also, their earthly bodies being transformed in the twinkling of an eye into incorruptible, heavenly ones.

While the redeemed form a huge multitude visible in the air, the living wicked ones are struck with the awful realization that their end has come. They call for the rocks and the mountains to fall and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, and all tribes of the earth will mourn and wail at the fearful sight in the sky. At the signal of Christ, the armies of heaven will mete out the judgment of death and complete destruction of the wicked world. The Dragon will be cast into the *Lake of Fire*, and the heavens and the earth will be entirely burned up and melt away. For the wicked, the end is not over. Their bodies will also be resurrected and stand before the judgment seat of God, who will demand that they give account for their evil deeds. The books will be opened, and the evidences that substantiate each one's rejection of Truth and God will be clearly shown. They will then be thrown into the *Lake of Fire* to experience forever the horrors and torments of Hell. In contrast, the resurrected saints will enjoy eternal happiness and fulfillment with the One who redeemed them from the Devil who had held rightful title to their souls.

We said that the marriage supper of the Lamb is essentially the last event in time. After reading all that must take place during the Day of the Lord, one can appreciate the difficulty of placing chronologically exactly when the marriage supper takes place. Is it the first wondrous meeting in the air? Or is it the final peace and happiness of living with Christ in the all-perfect holy city of God? It really makes no difference, because the time for all these events would seem to take place rapidly. We believe this because in every Biblical passage describing the end of the world, the judgment and the eternal states are presented as virtually simultaneous events (page 142). Remember also that the testimony of the seals, trumpets, and vials each give only one of their seven symbolic capsules to describe all of the major events of the end—Second Coming, judgment, heaven or hell.

The mysteries and questions of how and when the Day of the Lord will take place can only be fully known by those who actually experience them on that day. Right now these mysteries only add to the hope and anticipation of being there in person.

THE JEWISH WEDDING ANALOGY

As other writers have pointed out, the parts of an OT Jewish marriage make a striking analogy to the plan of God for His relationship with man. He designed it all before the earth was formed, and it will not be completed until world and time have forever ended. In a Jewish marriage, the groom would first choose a woman to be his bride. He did not select arbitrarily, but found one that fit his needs, that loved him, and pleased him. Of course, the woman must also choose to return his love and share her life with him. Their mutual choice was called the betrothal, or engagement, which in OT Jewish culture was as binding as marriage. During the engagement period, the bride prepared herself for the marriage, keeping herself pure and faithful to her betrothed. The groom, meanwhile, was expected to pay a dowry to the bride's father; in effect, he was purchasing his bride. Sometimes the dowry was given in the form of service rather than in the form of money. At the appointed day of the wedding, the groom would lead a procession of his friends and relatives to the house of the bride's father, where the bride and her friends awaited the coming of the groom and his entourage. The meeting of the two parties initiated a great marriage feast and celebrations which could last a week or more. The wedding ceremony itself took place immediately upon the groom's arrival, though both bride and groom remained at her house until the celebration was over. Finally, the groom returned to his own home, taking his bride with him.

Beyond all doubt, God ordained the marriage relationship as a special type of an even greater one to take place hereafter. The wedding analogy is especially meaningful in the NT period of the "engagement." The OT period corresponds to the woman choosing to become the Bride. And when Christ paid the dowry price on Calvary, the Church of the Old and New Covenants

became espoused to Him (II Cor 11:2). Now the Bride of Christ must remain faithful in returning His love, and in keeping herself unspotted from the world until He comes for her and the marriage is completed.

Paul explains the marriage/church analogy in Ephesians 5, but one little-remembered detail is worth considering. In the NT, divorce is entirely unacceptable except for immorality, and if divorce is chosen in those cases the parties are never to remarry except to each other. In the OT, divorce and remarriage was more generally permitted, but only on the condition that they were never to remarry each other (Deut 24:1-4). Of course, even in the OT it was not God's perfect plan to allow divorce, but because of Israel's hardness of heart He permitted it (Mt 19:8). How does one explain the complete change in the issue of remarriage from the Old Testament to the New? The typological meaning seems to be this: Christ and the Church are promised to each other forever and will never be divorced. A severed marriage destroys this God-ordained type, and thus, under the New Covenant, we do not remarry except to our rightful spouse. The OT divorce-law would destroy this type, and to be consistent, the remarriage law must be reversed—no remarriage was permitted to a previous spouse, even if the second spouse died (Deut 24:3). Stated in another way, the NT makes a marriage between a man and woman irrevocable except by death; any subsequent marriage is invalid in the sight of God. In the OT, a marriage could be annulled, and the new marriage then became the valid one. Going back to a previous marriage would not only be an *abomination*, it would break the type, for that marriage has been *defiled* by a later marriage (Deut 24:4). This may also be why God allowed men to have more than one wife in the OT, though that was not His perfect plan either.

9. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

JESUS IS THE CENTER OF PROPHETIC TRUTH

John seems to be so caught up in the heavenly scene before him that he must be reminded by the angel to continue his writing. Or maybe the command to *write* is simply to emphasize the statement that follows: *Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*. This is the fourth of the seven beatitudes (*blesseds*) in the Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14). To be *blessed* is to be fortunate, well off, happy, contented, and joyful.

The blessing is given to those who are *called* to the marriage supper—those who have responded positively to Christ and whom He has chosen. It is the effectual call, not the general gospel invitational call extended to every person. *Many are called but few are chosen* (Mt 22:14). Some have misunderstood this verse, thinking that it says God chooses at random some for salvation and some for damnation. That would be entirely contrary to His nature and is at odds with the rest of Scripture. Notice the progression in Revelation 3:20, *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me*. Christ's call to salvation is universal, the first choice is man's, and the election (often translated choice, as in Mt 22:14) is God's. This does not diminish the sovereignty of God, for He can choose whomsoever He will. He has, however, laid out very clearly the requirements of His elective choices. He is neither capricious nor vague, and He has communicated clearly by His written and manifested Word what His requirements for salvation include. God's omniscience means that He knows beforehand those who will be saved and those who will reject Him, and His impartiality ensures that each soul will fully choose his own eternal destiny.

In his excitement John falls down to worship the angel who is showing him the amazing scenes. Does he mistake the angel for Christ? Or is he simply overwhelmed by the magnificence and wonder of it all? Regardless, the angel immediately directs John to worship the One who is responsible for the heavenly glories and blessings that are being revealed in this vision. The lesson is applicable for us today. Do not worship the messenger, but the One who has sent the message. Sometimes a powerful speaker becomes almost an

object of worship, coercing unstable people to follow him, often into error. Virtually all of the cults begin in this way. We are called to *worship God*, not a man or creature whom God has created.

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (v10). This is given as the reason John should worship God instead of the angel, and it points to the purpose and scope of prophecy. Take Jesus out of prophecy and you have not purpose, object, or end. Study the life and work of Jesus and you will find the design and meaning of prophetic truth. It is this that inspires and gives breath (Gk—*pneuma*, spirit) to all prophecy. Stepping outside of *the testimony of Jesus* in understanding prophecy puts one on unstable footing, for Jesus Christ and His spiritual Kingdom are the focal points of the Revelation.

Prophecy should not be thought of as only the act of predicting the future, for that has a very limited usefulness. The greater purpose of prophecy is to warn the people of God about the future—the deceptions and temptations that all who attempt to *live godly in Christ Jesus* will endure. Prophecy encourages the faint-hearted to persevere, admonishes the backslidden to repent, exposes the errors of false teachers, and rebukes the sinfulness of the wicked. This purpose guided the prophets of the OT and is also the intention of the Book of Revelation.

11. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16. *And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The Second Coming of Christ is the culmination of God's plan for earth and humankind. In the marriage analogy we gave above, Christ's return is the arrival of the groom at the house of the bride for the marriage supper and celebration (Mt 25:1f). Following the marriage, Christ will take the Bride into His own home, forever to live in peace, joy, and love. The Second Coming will in many ways be a contrast to His first coming: then in lowliness and obscurity, now in majesty and power; then He rode a meek donkey and wore a *crown of thorns*, now He rides a *white horse* and wears *many crowns*. The contrast is illustrated in the different perspectives of the four Gospels versus the Book of Revelation. The message of the Gospel necessarily presents Christ in His humanity, showing how the plan of salvation is accomplished. The Revelation presents the risen Christ, fully God and ultimate King of the universe in complete command of His spiritual Kingdom. John saw the Second Coming in a vision, the heavens being opened and the Son of man revealed in regal power and awful might. Someday the eyes of billions will see the same sight, but in awesome reality.

The reason for the return of Christ is clearly given in Scripture and has two aspects. First, He comes for those He has purchased with blood, to take them to Himself as a spotless virgin. Second, He comes to carry out the sentence of Hell on those who have rejected God's plan of salvation. Christ has nothing left to prove, His work was wholly finished at the cross (Heb 10:12, 12:2). How is it then that some insist that His earthly work is not complete, that He must come to the earth and physically sit upon the throne of David and rule the world for a thousand years? These say that Christ did not do all that was prophesied of Him, and that His work must include ruling the world as a physical person. We maintain that this not only would demean His position and power, but flies in the face of the bulk of Scripture. *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and*

powers being made subject unto Him (I Peter 3:18, 22). Christ has done exactly and completely what He set out to do. He came *to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins* (Acts 26:18). He accomplished this by judging Satan at His death on the cross (John 12:31, Heb 2:14), parading him in open defeat in the heavens (Col 2:15). Now victory and salvation are available to every soul that chooses Christ, and Satan knows that his sentence of eternal existence in the *Lake of Fire* will be carried out at the word of Christ when He returns.

In the passage before us, Christ's coming is described entirely in terms of judgment and punishment of the wicked. Evidently the marriage has already taken place, and the saints have been taken from the earth and are seen coming with Christ, riding *upon white horses*. This has been the consistent picture within each of the individual sections of the Book of Revelation. The winds of judgment are held in check until the saints are raptured, and then sudden destruction falls upon the terror-stricken world. The reunion of living saints with those who have died in Christ takes place *in the air* (I Thes 4:17), after which the entire glorified army of heaven descends to the earth with Christ to cast the wicked into Hell.

Every aspect of His countenance is fearsome and terrible, given in descriptive yet figurative language. His eyes are as angry flames of fire; His garment is dripping with blood. Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword that slays the wicked and smites the nations of the world. He is treading in fierceness and wrath the winepress of God, and *blood flows out even unto the horses bridles* (14:20). There is none that can stand before Him, and He needs no help in carrying out utter destruction upon His enemies. At His word *the heavens were of old* (II Peter 3:5), and at His word they will dissolve into nothingness again. We have already quoted Isaiah 63 in connection with the coming of Christ in judgment at the end of the world (see page 352). Rereading that chapter will add to the picture of this passage because many of the figures of speech are identical.

Though wrath, fury, and destruction are evident characteristics of the returning Christ, perfect justice and righteousness are also prominent attributes. There is no mistake in His judgments for He is *Faithful, True*, and

righteous. This is a comfort to the saints, but a fearful terror to the wicked, for *with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked* (Is 11:4).

The opening of the first seal back in Chapter 6 revealed a *white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him: and He went forth conquering, and to conquer* (6:2). We interpreted the first seal as the going forth of the Gospel, which spread the spiritual Kingdom of Christ into the nations of the world. Here we see the Rider on the white horse again, coming not to conquer and rule but to utterly destroy all flesh. The picture is obviously of the end of the world, *when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats... Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels: and these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal* (Mt 25:31-46).

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

The figurative language describing Christ (19:11-16) is not to be fulfilled physically. Rather, the metaphors and figures of speech are intended to highlight the attributes of Christ, to identify His position and authority. Note that He has four separate names, or titles: *Faithful and True* (v11), *The Word of God* (v13), *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (v16), and a *written name* which only He Himself knows (v12). Each of these titles presents a special aspect of Christ, which we will study individually in the next few pages. The same is true for the symbols of the white horse, the crowns, the bloody raiment, the unique sword, the rod of iron, and the winepress. Each one of these represents a part of His character, forming a picture that only dimly outlines His essence, for human language and the human mind cannot describe or comprehend the Triune Jehovah-God.

It is important to note that the primary intent of verses 11-16 is not to describe how Christ will return, but to describe Christ Himself. The highly figurative picture is similar to the first view we saw back in Chapter 1, but with some added symbols. John saw *One like unto the Son of man...His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters...out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in His strength* (1:13-16). His name was *Alpha and Omega, the first and the last*. Chapter 1 revealed Christ reigning from His heavenly Throne, at the right hand of the Father. Chapter 19 reveals His character when He returns to earth in majesty and power.

We will now examine the individual figures of the picture as John has described them.

A white horse. White symbolizes purity, righteousness, and holiness (Dan 11:35). The horse symbolizes swiftness, strength, and war (see glossary). The two symbols combine to offer a balanced picture of Christ at His coming. He comes in power, judgment, and punishment, given fairly and with impeccable justice, for *in righteousness doth He judge and make war* (v11).

He was called Faithful and True. Here is the first of four separate names for Christ in this passage. It repeats what was said in 3:14, *These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.* The meaning is plain and straightforward, for Christ is the ultimate example of faith and truth. It is especially appropriate in this scene of Christ's return because scoffers increase daily, sneering, *where is the promise of His coming?* But Christ is both faithful and true; He will keep every one of His promises. Though human faith wanes, this fact remains: Jesus is going to return on the appointed Day of the Lord.

His eyes were as a flame of fire. Here the figurative meaning indicates the all-knowing perfect wisdom of Christ, seeing into the deepest recesses of every human heart. The eye symbolizes knowledge and wisdom (see glossary), and the flaming fire symbolizes His vengeance against the wickedness He sees (II Thes 1:8). *All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do* (Heb 4:13). Christ comes with full knowledge of the deeds and attitudes of every soul. This is why the wicked implore the rocks and

mountains to fall and hide them from the face of the Lamb (6:16). They realize in an instant that He knows every intent and thought of their hearts. His questions do not even require an answer from them, for He knows them thoroughly (Mt 22:12).

On His head were many crowns. Not one, two, or a dozen crowns, but *many crowns*. The *crowns* (Gk—*diadema*) are not like the victory wreaths (*stephanos*) in 3:11, 4:10, or even 6:2, but the diadems of ruling royalty and kingly power. What a contrast to the *stephanos of thorns* (Mt 27:29) He wore at His first coming! The many crowns symbolize that He is all-powerful, all-authoritative, the Victor and Master of all, and that He has *put all enemies under His feet* (I Cor 15:25).

He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. This rather obscure phrase would seem to illustrate the inscrutable, unfathomable ways of God. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out* (Rom 11:33; I Cor 2:11; Mt 11:27). In the messages to the seven churches we read that the victorious ones will receive a white stone and a new name written that nobody else understands (2:17). When the Groom takes His Bride, she will receive His name and finally know and understand His mysterious ways. The fact that the name is *written* speaks both to its eternity and to its importance. *Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret?* (Judges 13:18). The names of God we have in the Bible describe His character: *Wonderful, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Immanuel, Counselor*, and many more. Man cannot understand the essence of God, and that name remains knowable only to Himself. One of the chief names for God in the OT was Jehovah (Heb—*yhwh*), which some today pronounce “Yahweh.” To the Jews, the name was so sacred nobody was permitted to say it out loud, and by the time of the Babylonian captivity, its true pronunciation was lost entirely (see Adam Clarke).

He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood. Blood is a symbol of killing and death. Is this His own blood or the blood of the wicked that He is coming to require in just vengeance? The figure of the blood of Christ is a common one in the Revelation (1:5, 5:9, 7:14, 12:11) as it well should be, for the applied blood admits the righteous and denies the wicked. The Greek word here translated *vesture* is *himation*, a common word that has also been trans-

lated garment, raiment, clothes, cloak, and robe. It is *dipped* in blood. The Greek word is not consistent among the manuscripts of our NT. The KJV uses *bapto*, a weakened form of the word “baptize.” But a few manuscripts have the word *rantizo*, which would be translated “sprinkled.”

It is most likely that the blood on the garments of Christ is that of His enemies. Figurative pictures abound in the OT of the vengeance of God, and there is no greater fulfillment possible than that of the ultimate Day of the Lord. Here are just a few examples: *For this is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood* (Jer 46:10). *The sword of the Lord is filled with blood* (Is 34:6).

He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (v15). This goes with the *vesture dipped in blood* and is a figurative picture of severe and utter punishment and death. A winepress in Bible times consisted of an upper vat with a hole and channel that led to a lower vat. The grapes were thrown into the upper vat and a person would trample around in the vat and crush the grapes into juice which would run into the lower vat. This imagery was already used in the description of the final end of the wicked back in Chapter 14, and is based upon the full picture in Isaiah 63:3, *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.* “Sinners in the hands of an angry God” is the title of a famous sermon preached by Jonathan Edwards in 1741. In the process of proclaiming to the world His great love and sacrifice, have we lost the fear of God? Surely many live as if they have, for it is not the heathen who should be most afraid, but those who have heard about God and have turned Him away.

His name is called The Word of God (v13). The basis of Christ’s authority is the *Word of God*. It spoke the world into existence and will also declare its end. The *Word* (Gk—*logos*) is used exclusively by John in the NT as a name for Jesus. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (John 1:1, 14). Jesus as *The Word* signifies the divine expression of God as recorded in the Gospels. It expresses His authority, doctrine, purpose, and requirements. *He*

that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations (v15). The sword of His mouth was interpreted as the word of Christ in Revelation 1:16. It is this word that *smites the nations* (Gk—*ethnos*) on the last day, as alluded to in II Thessalonians 2:8, *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.* The Greek would show that this sword (Gk—*rhomphaia*) is a large battle weapon, not a knife or short sword (*machaira*). It is *sharp* (Gk—*oxus*) which is translated *swift* in Romans 3:15. The sword as a figure of the word of God can be seen in Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* The authority of Christ was admired at His first coming, when even the winds and waves obeyed His spoken command. His Second Coming will reveal even greater authority and power, for every creature and created thing will obey His spoken word without the slightest thought of rebellion.

He shall rule them with a rod of iron. Here is an interesting figure of speech, taken first from Psalms 2 and repeated three times in the Revelation. The *rod of iron* (2:7, 12:5) is a symbol of discipline, like the shepherd's rod, which punishes and trains those sheep that do not conform to his wishes. The word for *rule* is *poimaino*, and is taken from a shepherd caring for his flock. It is never used in the sense of ruling people, and its meaning implies tending, feeding and correcting (see pages 161 and 283). The apparent contrast is explained well by the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary:

“He shall rule--the HE is emphatic, He and none other, in contrast to the usurpers who have misruled on earth. ‘Rule,’ literally, ‘tend as a shepherd.’ But here in a punitive sense. He, who would have shepherded them with pastoral rod and with the golden scepter of His love, shall dash them in pieces, as refractory rebels, with a rod of iron.”

The use of *poimaino* in a disciplinary sense is much like the account of Gideon “teaching” some lazy Israelites: *And he took the elders of the city, and*

thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth (Judges 8:16). The lesson is simple. Let us mind the gentle rod now so that we need not experience its awful punishment later. Jesus' parable of the talents ends with these chilling words: *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me* (Luke 19:27).

He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (v16). The last of the four names of Jesus in this passage, this title sums up the whole picture. Jesus Christ is Lord and Master of the Universe, a King over kings and the Lord of all lords. At His first coming, the soldiers who crucified Him cast lots for His *vesture* and divided His garments among themselves (John 19:24). He did not need those earthly garments anymore anyway. He will return clothed in celestial vesture befitting the King that He is. In the OT, the thigh symbolizes strength and honor because the sword was worn there. When a vow was made, putting one's hand under the other's thigh was a solemn sign of the agreement (Gen 24:9). There is a definite parallel here with the Messianic Psalm 45, a beautiful figurative picture of Christ and His Bride. Studying that prophecy of so long ago would be greatly rewarding, but for brevity's sake we quote it only in part: *Gird thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty. And in Thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness... Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy Kingdom is a right sceptre...therefore shall the people praise Thee for ever and ever* (Ps 45).

And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (v14). Are these heavenly armies angelic or saintly? We believe the Bible teaches that both will accompany Christ at His return. Verse 8 seems to identify them as the redeemed saints of God, and Jude 14 indicates likewise. The enemies of the Church will see her ascend into heaven at the call of Christ (11:12), and it is most appropriate that the world will see the glorified Church as they come with Christ in honor and recognition. Mocked and ridiculed by the elites and intellectuals in the day of Satan, the true Church will shine as the sun in the day of Christ.

Angels also will be present on the Day of the Lord (II Thes 1:7, Mt 13:41) and will assist in carrying out God's wrath upon the world (9:15). To the Christian of every age the picture carries this inspiring promise: the troubles

and afflictions of life, though great they seem, are but for a moment, and then they are gone. Those who prevail against the Beast, False Prophet, and the Dragon shall come, riding in triumph and salvation under the banner of the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

HEAVEN IS OPENED

The opening of heaven reveals the picture of Christ as Lord coming in the clouds of heaven to the earth (v11). Three other times in the Bible when we read that heaven is opened an especially important message is given. The first time occurred at Jesus' first coming, when at His baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove (Luke 3:21). Stephen, the first martyr, also saw heaven opened; and Peter *saw heaven opened* at his special vision that extended the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:11). The last time we read that heaven is opened is in the passage before us (19:11).

There seems to be more than a literal meaning to heaven being opened. The opening of the book (5:2) and the seals (6:1-12) revealed things that had been previously hidden. The opening of heaven will undoubtedly reveal spiritual mysteries and sights that our eyes cannot now see. Even the living wicked of the earth will see the unveiling of heavenly wonders, and for every person it will be a time of instant knowledge and recognition of Truth, Christ, and God. His appearing will be seen by all, and even in this day of unbelief and cynicism not one will question its veracity.

Questions of how it will all happen remain, and some cannot be answered from Scripture. We will simply have to wait until the day reveals the details. How, for instance, will the Rider on the white horse be seen by every eye around the world as He comes with the armies of heaven in the sky? Will those in China be able to see Him at the same time that Americans see Him? We do not know, and speculation is not necessary. The important points are these: Christ will personally return to this world to take possession of His purchased Bride and to righteously sentence every unrepentant soul to eternal damnation. The sin-stricken earth will be burned up and time will cease. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness* (II Peter 3:11).

17. *And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;*
18. *That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.*
19. *And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*
20. *And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*
21. *And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.*

ARMAGEDDON

The last piece of the prophetic picture completing this sixth section of the Book describes the terrible destruction of the wicked and the final consignment of the Beast and False Prophet into the *Lake of Fire*. Each of the seven sections of the Revelation has a scene showing the end of the world, but none is given in such terms of total destruction as this one. Not even a *remnant* will remain after this battle in which the earthly has no chance against the sword of the King of the Universe. The overall picture foretells a great, yet strange battle which ends with the wicked cast into Hell, symbolized by a new term thus far in the Book—the *Lake of Fire*. The details describing the basic prophecy are highly figurative, adding vivid and graphic concepts to the overall picture.

The description of final judgment is a familiar one to us by now, having been given five separate times to this point in the Book. The closest parallel of this prophecy with the previous accounts is that of the Battle of Armageddon in the sixth and seventh bowls of Chapter 16, where the sixth bowl described the maneuvering of the trinity of evil as they deceived the people of the world into rejecting God and His righteous laws and the seventh bowl described the final judgment of the wicked. This passage also bears close similarity to the reaping of the earth and the treading of the winepress of God in Chapter 14, and to the opening of the sixth seal in Chapter 6.

The picture is introduced by the sight of an angel standing in the sun crying out to the fowls of heaven to come *unto the supper of the great God* (v17). Is this supper related to the *marriage supper of the Lamb* in verse 9? Probably so, for the Greek word for *supper* is the same in both cases, and the Scripture passage forming this symbolism (Mt 22) shows both the marriage of the Bride and the casting out of the wicked. Obviously, the Second Coming will be a time of great rejoicing for the saints and a time of intense mourning and punishment for the wicked. Both will take place immediately after the appearing of the *Son of man* in the air.

The angel is *standing in the sun*, which intimates brightness and intense heat (16:8). When used figuratively by itself, the sun symbolizes the revealing of God's justice and righteousness (see glossary).

The angel's call to the fowls of the air to *come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God that ye may eat the flesh of kings* is taken directly from Ezekiel 39:17-20, *Thus saith the Lord God; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you...that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth... And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken...thus ye shall be filled at my table.* Ezekiel 38-39 describe the great battle of Gog against Israel, which is the most difficult prophecy of the entire Bible, in my opinion. Not only are the details obscure, but also its chief characters, which are taken from the table of nations given in Genesis 10. These people groups were of uncertain status by the time of Ezekiel, who wrote more than a millennium after Moses recorded the Genesis account.

The interpretation that makes the most sense to me is that Gog is a name for Satan, and the battle described is the end-time battle given in Revelation 16, 19 and 20—the Battle of Armageddon. Isaiah 34 and Joel 3:9-21 are prophecies that also appear to describe the same battle. The Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanes may have been the chief subject of the prophecy (see Adam Clarke for Ezekiel 38:1), but the final end of the world is certainly a secondary fulfillment of the passage.

Fowls eating the flesh of battlefield dead is a common scene in the Bible (Deut 28:26; I Sam 17:46; Ps 79:2; Is 18:6; Jer 16:4; Mt 24:28) and speaks of dishonorable death and widespread slaughter. In the OT accounts however, almost always *the beasts of the field* join the *fowls* in their repulsive eating of dead men's flesh. Maybe the Revelation account omits the *beasts* because the armies of Satan are symbolized by the Beast (v19). The Greek word *orneon*, here translated *fowl*, is translated *bird* in 18:2. Though the words *fowl* and *bird* occur elsewhere in the NT they never derive from *orneon*, making it unique to these two passages of the Revelation. The ultimate fall of Babylon into the *habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird* (18:2) is also the ultimate conclusion of the final Battle of Armageddon.

Although there is no direct statement that this passage describes the Battle of Armageddon we read about in Chapter 16, there are several distinctly similar features between the two. First, both show the gathering of *the kings of the earth* in battle against God. Second, *the whole world, small and great* will be there. Third, the Beast and False Prophet figure prominently in both accounts. And finally, both passages happen at the very end of their sections, making the time settings nearly equivalent. Additionally, the list of men in verse 18 is similar to that given in 6:15, another description of this same event.

Armageddon is not a physical battle between men that happened or will happen in history. It is a gathering of the people and nations of the world before Christ at the end of time, and every person *small and great* must attend. The fowls eat not just the flesh of warriors in battle, but *the flesh of all men, bond or free, small and great*. This is the final roll call of all humanity to give account for their deeds before the Creator. The entire “battle” is given in one short phrase, *and the beast was taken*. Death does not come by physical

sword, but by the spoken word of God. The fighting is not fierce; it is wholly one-sided and single-handed. Notice that there is not one hint of weaponry on the earthly side, though we do see armies mounted on horses. This must be taken as a figurative description of the coming of Christ in judgment. To those who insist that the Battle of Armageddon must take place literally, we would ask that they remain consistent to their literal interpretation standard, and teach also that this will be a battle on horseback, with Christ sitting upon a horse and wielding a sword from His mouth.

THE BEAST AND FALSE PROPHET ARE CAST ALIVE INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE

The Beast and False Prophet are cast alive into the *Lake of Fire burning with brimstone* (v20). As we have already shown, the Beast represents the rulers and governments of this world, which have a long and notorious history of antagonizing the Kingdom of Christ. The False Prophet represents deception and false teaching of the church in general, responsible for the physical and spiritual death of billions of people. These will continue and grow in power until Christ's coming brings their wicked works to an end. According to Chapter 17, we should see the power of Beast-government rising at the expense of false religion, though we are expressly told that the work of the *man of sin* will be ended only by the breath of the returning Christ (II Thes 2:8).

Some scholars have criticized the interpretation of the Beast and False Prophet as representing corporate entities of power rather than individuals. They make the point that it is impossible to cast concepts, governments, or religions into Hell. This misunderstands our interpretation. Both government and false religion are made up of individuals who give themselves to advance the Dragon's deceptive work. It is these that are cast into the *Lake of Fire* along with their evil leader. Besides, if the two spiritual realities of death and Hades can be cast into the *Lake of Fire* (20:14), it does not stretch the symbolism at all to see evil things like worldliness, deception, and persecution end forever in Hell.

At first glance it would appear that the foremost enemy of God—the Dragon—goes unpunished. In my own study this was an unwanted and yet

undeniable detail. Unwanted because each section should have a tidy end, with all the enemies of God defeated. Yet here, the worst of the three goes unmentioned as to final judgment. The reason for this apparent omission suddenly became clear when I remembered that in this section the Beast is actually the Dragon. See page 411, where we show that the end-time eighth beast is the Dragon ascending out of the bottomless pit during the little season of his power at the end of the world. The figure of the Beast being cast into the *Lake of Fire* is equivalent to the Dragon being cast into the *Lake of Fire*, for he is this very Beast, gathered with the *kings of the earth* against Christ. What at first seemed an omission immediately turned into a perfect harmony!

Has this happened at other times in our study of the Revelation? There is no doubt that this Book is precisely written and that each detail and omission are intentional and purposeful. Critical scholars have long criticized the writing of the Revelation, calling it poorly written and full of grammatical errors. We do not believe this for a moment; each word has been chosen carefully to best convey the picture intended. The Holy Spirit moved John to write exactly and perfectly each sentence and phrase so that the meaning would be consistent and true.

Of course, another explanation for the Dragon going un-named in this section can be seen in the thematic descriptions of the trinity of evil. The middle section of the Book (Chapters 12-14) revealed the Dragon in Chapter 12 and the Beast and False Prophet in Chapter 13. However, while Chapter 14 was a spectacular vision of the wrath of God in casting the wicked into Hell, not one mention is made as to the judgments of the three beasts. That theme is not revealed until the last two sections of the Book, and each of those sections has its own particular theme to give: the judgments of the Beast and False Prophet (Chapters 17-19), and finally, the judgment of the Dragon (Chapters 20-22).

The *Lake of Fire* represents the final state of Hell. It is not the same thing as the *bottomless pit* (the dwelling place of the fallen angels) or Hades (the holding place for the spirits of the wicked dead awaiting the resurrection). (See page 194.) Death and Hades will be thrown into the *Lake of Fire* at the end of

time (20:14), another proof that the *Lake of Fire* is eternal Hell. The symbolism of the *Lake of Fire* is drawn from *the furnace of fire* in Matthew 13:50 and similar passages describing Hell as a place of endless burning and torment.

Two points are made in the figure of the wicked being *cast alive* into Hell. First, it is an unending death: *their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched...and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever* (Mark 9:44, Rev 14:11). Second, it is a living death. The resurrection reunites the body and soul into a new and wonderful birth, but for the wicked the resurrection serves only to intensify their torments and sorrows. The picture reminds us of that remarkable account of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up by the earth so that *they went down alive into the pit* (Num 16).

The Beast and False Prophet are *cast alive into the Lake of Fire*, while *the remnant* is simply said to be slain by the sword of His mouth. This seems to continue the emphasis of judgment upon those souls making up the Beast and False Prophet. There will be differing stages of punishment in Hell (Luke 12:47), and those who have been exposed to the plan of salvation and then rejected it will be held more accountable than those who knew it not. The fact that the remnant is slain also underlines the point that this is a universal, final destruction. There are no survivors—not one person escapes. The buzzards eat the *flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great* (v18).