

THINGS OLD
AND THINGS NEW
FROM THE BOOK OF
REVELATION

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CHAPTER ONE REVELATION CHAPTER FOUR

The book of Revelation is, as we read in the first verse of the first chapter, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” The message of this revelation is therefore primarily prophetic, relating to future events, particularly pertaining to the end time.

But the book is also full of spiritual instruction. Devotional themes are woven into the prophetic to help prepare God’s people for the future they forecast. The main object in presenting future events is to inform and warn, edify, comfort and encourage the church in preparation for them.

THREE-FOLD DIVISION OF THE BOOK

We read in Rev. 1:19 that Christ told John to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” These three things represent a three-fold division into which the book is divided. “The things which you have seen” refers to the symbolical vision of the glorified Christ in Ch. 1:11-16. “The things which are,” relates to the messages of Christ to the seven churches in Asia, recorded in Chapters 2 & 3. “The things which shall be hereafter” pertains to the prophetic section contained in chapters 4 to the end of the book. This third section is by far the largest, and the focus of this series of studies shall be upon this in particular.

CHAPTER FOUR VERSE ONE

The third section commences in chapter 4:1 with these words: “After this I looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was, as it were, of a trumpet talking with me which said, come up here, and I will show you things which must take place in the future.”

The words “after this” probably mean after John had finished writing the messages to the 7 churches. As we have seen in chapter 1:19 he was told to write. In fact, at the beginning of all 7 messages to the Asian churches, John was told to “write.” There is no reference to the angel giving John pen and parchment to do this. Although John was taken prisoner into exile to the island of Patmos for his faith, he probably made sure he took pen and parchment with him to record anything that might be

revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. His chief preoccupation and meditation was the Word of God, and he made provision to record Revelation relating to it.

The fact that the command to “write” is repeated at the beginning of each of the 7 messages to the Asian churches, suggests John wrote each message as it was dictated to him, and the Spirit waited until he had finished each message before dictating the next.

Throughout the whole book of Revelation, John was told to write 12 times, 9 of which relate to the first 3 chapters, and the last 3 occur in 10:4, 14:13, 19:9. These last three occasions were after he was taken up into heaven. It is not difficult to imagine that John got so caught up in the dramatic visions he saw there, that he stopped writing while gazing intently at what he saw before him, and had to be reminded to write!

There is no mention of John being told to take his pen and parchment with him to heaven, or of anyone in heaven giving them to him. This suggests he voluntarily took his own with him - the same pen and parchment he had used on the isle of Patmos when recording the messages to the 7 churches.

Once again this indicates how important it was to John to record the Word of God. How many people, upon being invited to go through a door into heaven, “whether in the body or out of the body,” would think to take pen and paper with them to record what they see and hear?! Later, in Rev. 5, we see that the Word of God and new revelation was so important to John that he wept when he thought access to it was denied.

A DOOR WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN

When John finished writing the last message to the Asian churches, he either looked up and saw an open door in heaven, or, the trumpet voice which said: “Come up here and I will show you things which must happen in the future,” directed his attention to the open door.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus said: “Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man” (Jn. 1:51). John may have thought of this when he saw the door opened in heaven. Certainly in the chapters that follow, many references are made to angels ascending and descending to and from the throne upon which Jesus sits with his Father. The words of Jesus in Jn. 1:51 are taken from Gen. 28:12 which records a dream seen by Jacob as he slept in the area of Bethel on his journey to Syria. In the dream he saw a ladder or stairway standing on the earth with its top reaching to heaven.

The Lord was at the top of the ladder and angels were ascending and descending upon it. But, instead of referring to angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, Jesus referred to them ascending and descending upon himself, revealing he was represented by the ladder.

Angels don't need a ladder to travel between heaven and earth, but they do need a reason and purpose. And God's purpose of redemption in Christ is the reason for angelic ministry. Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Without God's purpose of salvation in Christ, there would be no basis for angelic visitation and activity. As a man needs a ladder to ascend to greater heights and descend, so the angels need the eternal divine purpose in Christ to descend from heaven to visit the heirs of salvation and ascend again. There is much ascending and descending of angels for this and other purposes, and the book of Revelation gives insights into this.

In Jacob's dream, the ladder acted as a bridge, uniting earth with heaven. Christ, of course, as our high priest is a bridge, reconciling man with God. Significantly enough, the Latin word for priest - "pontifex," means bridge builder. Through him all the true saints will become equal to the angels and gain access to the house (city) and presence of God.

As a result of his dream, Jacob called the place "Bethel," which means house of God. He said: "How awesome is this place. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate (door) of heaven." Jacob was not invited to go through the door and ascend into heaven, but John was, and this was a unique experience due to the atoning sacrifice and mediatorial position of Christ.

The heavens have been opened for a number of men of God, resulting in visions being seen and voices heard. For example, the heavens were opened to the prophet Ezekiel and he saw visions of God (Ezk. 1:1). However, the heavens were not opened for Ezekiel himself to ascend through to see the throne and glory of God, but for the throne and glory of God to descend and be manifested to him on earth (Ezk. 1:26-28).

The heavens also opened to Stephen and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. But when he declared this, the Jews let out a cry of protest, put their hands over their ears, seized him and stoned him to death (Act. 7:55-56).

As we shall see, the reference in 2 Cor. 12 to Paul being caught up to paradise, the 3rd heaven, refers to the same place where John was taken. But Paul's lips were sealed. He heard things that were for him alone that could only be uttered by John when the time came for the canon of Scripture to be completed.

John's lips are therefore not sealed. We are transported there with him and permitted to see and breathe the atmosphere of heaven and hear the voices of those who live there. John is the representative of the church and is taken there for us and was told what to write for our benefit.

We read in Jn. 21:21 that at the end of his earthly ministry, prior to ascending to heaven, Jesus said that it was his will for John to tarry till he came. This did not mean that John would remain alive till the second coming as some incorrectly concluded at the time, but that John should remain alive till Jesus sent his angel to give him the revelation. This took place over 60 years later when John was an old man, probably in his nineties.

When John passes through that "door" in heaven, he finds himself in a rapturous and blissful place; a place glistening with the glory of God, pulsating with the power of God, and resounding with magnificent music, and ecstatic pealing praise. John gets a glimpse of the heaven which will ultimately come to earth, and is asked to write it all down and describe the scenes which meet his eyes for our benefit. What he sees is the joy that was set before Christ that enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame, resulting in him being set down at the right hand of God.

When it says "a door was opened in heaven," it does not mean that the door is normally shut and was temporarily opened for John's benefit. The Greek word implies that the door had previously been opened and remained open. (The word "was" is in italics in the A.V. indicating it is not in the original text. Therefore, instead of reading "a door was opened" it should read: "I saw a door opened," or, as the Good News Bible renders it: "I saw an open door.")

The door leads into heaven, the holy of holies which was represented by the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple. A door made of olive wood, decorated with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees and flowers overlaid with gold, led into the holy of holies of the temple (1 Kng. 6:32-32). This door was usually shut and stood as a barrier preventing access. Only the high priest could enter once a year with the blood of a sacrifice for sin to make atonement for all. It represented a closed door. It taught that heaven's door had been shut to humanity because of sin and could not be opened to man without a sacrifice. No man could ascend to, or enter heaven. Up until the sacrifice of Christ and his ascension to heaven, "no man ascended to heaven" (Jn. 3:13).

Heb. 9:8-9 clearly teaches that the opening of the door only once a year for the high priest to enter, signified that the way into "the holiest of all" (heaven) was not yet "opened" (RSV). It could only be opened by

sacrifice. This all pointed forward of course to the sacrifice of Christ, by which he conquered sin in the flesh and death, and ascended to heaven.

Up until the time of Christ, no man had been able to conquer sin in the flesh and live a sinless life. All sinned and therefore all died. The flesh was like a barrier preventing access to eternal life and eternal fellowship with God. For this reason, Heb. 10:20 teaches that the veil (curtain) in the tabernacle (which was replaced with the door in the temple), preventing access to the holy of holies, represented the flesh.

By partaking of the same sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3) and being tempted in all points like us (Heb. 4:15), Jesus conquered and crucified the propensity of sin, and broke through its barrier, nailing it up once and for all upon the cross in his own body of flesh. As he did so, the veil in the temple was significantly torn apart from top to bottom, signifying that heaven's door was now open to receive him. All who belong to him can now enter the open door by prayer and praise, and ultimately in person when heaven comes to earth at Christ's second coming.

Heb. 10:19 puts it like this:- "We have then my brothers, confidence to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Christ. He has opened for us a new and living way through the veil, that is, his flesh. So let us draw near to God with a true and sincere heart in full assurance of faith." In view of all this, it is very tempting to relate the open door in Rev. 4:1 which gave John access to heaven, to the atoning work of Christ by which we can boldly enter heaven to the throne and presence of God.

A THEME ON DOORS

There is, as Bible students know, a theme in Scripture on doors, relating to Christ. Jesus said: "I am the door: if anyone enters by me he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (Jn. 10:9). Because he has the key, what he opens no man can shut, and what he shuts, no man can open (Rev. 3:7-8). His promise is that to all who "knock, it shall be opened to them" (Matt. 7:7).

A variation of this is given in Rev. 3:20 where we read that Jesus stands at our door and knocks and asks us to open. If we do, he opens his door. This speaks of reciprocal hospitality. Imagine a wealthy powerful king who is willing to open the door of his palace to us if we are willing to open the door of our humble abode (our hearts) to him!

Persistent prayer is the key to opening closed doors (Lk. 11:5-10. 18:1-8). Persistent prayer on the part of Christ certainly had a lot to do with heaven's door opening for him (Heb. 5:7).

We read in Jam. 5:9 that the judge stands at the door. To some he will say “enter,” and to others he will say “depart.” To some there will be joy unspeakable and to others weeping and gnashing of teeth. The door was shut to the foolish virgins because they ran out of oil (the Spirit), and therefore had no light (Matt. 25:1-10). Jesus warned that many will seek to enter and shall not be able because he will shut the door to them due to their works of iniquity (Lk. 13:23-28). How important it is therefore to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

WHAT HEAVEN?

Coming back to the “door opened in heaven” in Rev. 4:1: In Scripture the word “heaven” often means the sky or atmosphere where birds fly, clouds float, and into which mountain peaks reach. Is this what “heaven” means in Rev. 4:1? When it says a door was opened in heaven, do we conjure up a picture of a solitary door hanging or floating or suspended in space above John’s head, surrounded by blue sky? Such a scene would look as strange as a door standing by itself in the middle of a large paddock with no fence on either side and open fields surrounding it.

The function of a door is to give access to a place to which there is no other means of access. But this would not be the case with a solitary door suspended in the wide open space. It is not likely therefore that “heaven” means the atmosphere or space. What it means is indicated in verse 2 where we read that as a result of John going through the door, he saw a throne set in heaven and God sitting on it, surrounded by another 24 thrones on which “elders” were sitting, and they were surrounded by myriads of angels.

The “heaven” into which the door opened, was the heaven where God sits on His throne, and where the angels are stationed and dwell in His presence. This heaven is no mere visionary symbol or empty space, but a literal physical tangible place. It is not something ethereal or spectral. The Father, son and angels are not floating on clouds or cosmic dust in space without any fixed abode.

Just a few verses prior to Rev. 4, Jesus refers to the throne of God and says: “To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on His throne” (3:21).

As we know, Christ’s throne will be the restored throne of David on Mount Zion. It will be a literal physical throne upon which he will sit and rule as David did. The reference in Rev. 3:21 to sitting on Christ’s throne

“even as” Christ sits on his Father’s throne, suggests that the Father’s throne is just as literal. If so, then it is reasonable to conclude that the “heaven” where John sees it, is a literal physical place.

Ps. 103:19 says the Lord “prepared” His throne in the heavens. The word “prepared” means “set up” and is used frequently in the sense of to make or create. For example, 1 Kng. 5:18 refers to workmen who “prepared” timber and stones to build Solomon’s temple. Chapter 6:19 goes on to say Solomon “prepared the oracle,” i.e. the most holy place in the temple which housed the ark of the covenant which represented God’s throne in heaven.

Reference to God preparing His throne in heaven likewise indicates that it is a physical throne He made or created for Himself. It is not a mere metaphor, neither is it something ethereal or spectral. It is something that can be sat upon - solid and substantial.

What then is heaven? Ps. 11:4 says “The Lord is in His holy temple; The Lord’s throne is in heaven.” We learn from this that heaven is a temple. Other verses in the Old Testament also refer to heaven as a temple. See 2 Sam. 22:7. Ps. 5:7. 18:6. Hab. 2:20. There are also a number of verses in the book of Revelation in which heaven is referred to as a temple (7:15. 11:19. 14:15, 17. 15:5, 6, 8. 16:1, 17.). The fact that some Scriptures refer to heaven being the place of God’s throne, and other Scriptures refer to the throne being in the temple, clearly reveals that heaven is a temple.

The temple is referred to as the place of God’s throne several times in the book of Revelation. For example, the same scene depicted in Rev. 4 of God sitting upon His throne in heaven, surrounded by the 4 living creatures, 24 elders and other angels, is referred to again in 7:11, and v15 refers to the throne being in God’s temple. Reference is also made in Rev. 16:17 to a great voice coming out of “the temple of heaven, from the throne.”

Now, in Rev. 22:1-2 we read that the throne of God is “in the midst of the street of it,” i.e. in the midst of the street of the holy city, new Jerusalem, which John saw descending to earth in Rev. 21:2. God only has one throne, so the throne in the city must be the same throne in heaven referred to in Rev. 4:2 and 5:1. Heaven is therefore not merely a temple, but a temple-city, i.e. a city that is all temple. Ultimately it is coming to earth and will be heaven on earth. It is the ultimate home of the saints.

Subconsciously, some think of heaven in terms of another planet. But it is not a planet, it is a city - a mobile city which involves a mobile throne. No wonder the city is so mind boggling in size and grandeur and is

of such dazzling beauty! What else would you expect of heaven! Planets and stars are in a fixed orbit and restricted as to the amount of space they can traverse, not to mention the speed at which they can travel, and they are regularly plunged into darkness due to revolving on their axis. But heaven, the city of God, is not in a fixed orbit and is not restricted in its movements, or in the speed of its movements, and it is certainly never plunged into darkness. God is “the Father of lights with whom is no darkness due to turning” (Jam. 1:17). His everlasting light fills heaven with light.

The mobility of heaven is seen in the city of God descending to earth in Rev. 21:2, 10. This could be one of the reasons for it being called a “tabernacle” (Rev. 21:3. 13:6. 15:5). In Greek the word is “skene” and means a tent. A tent is a moveable and transportable dwelling, but a temple is a fixed and solid structure. The city of God is both of these; it is a solid structure and it is also moveable, and is therefore called both a temple and tabernacle. Similar sentiments to those taught in Rev. 21:2-3 were expressed by God long before in Ezk. 37:26-27: “I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore. My tabernacle shall be with them ...”

A MOBILE CITY AND THRONE

The mobile nature of heaven, the city of God, and the throne of God, is indicated elsewhere in Scripture.

Ezekiel chapter one refers to a vision or revelation that the prophet had of the glory of God. He saw the 4 living creatures referred to in Rev. 4 standing in the immediate presence of God around His throne.

But Ezekiel also saw a wheel alongside each living creature, making 4 wheels altogether. They were not ordinary wheels. Each one was a wheel within a wheel; i.e. each wheel had another wheel intersecting it at right angles, enabling them to travel in any direction without swerving. The size and height of the wheels was “dreadful,” i.e. awesomely huge - mind-boggling in size compared to normal wheels. They gleamed and sparkled like a radiant jewel, and the rims were full of eyes. The wheels and eyes signify mobility and perception or insight.

When the living creatures moved or ascended, the wheels alongside them moved with them without revolving.

A divine chariot or vehicle is conveyed in this vision.

The 4 living creatures are referred to as “cherubim” in Ezk. 10. Some believe that they refer to the redeemed and glorified saints, but Scripture

makes a distinction between the saints and the 4 living creatures, not to mention the 24 elders. For example, Rev. 7:9-10 depicts the saints standing before the throne praising and thanking God. Then verses 11-12 go on to refer to the angels, 24 elders and 4 living creatures worshipping God. They are clearly separate and distinct from the saints. Also see Rev. 14:1-3. 19:4-7.

The 4 living creatures, being in the immediate presence of God around the throne are clearly very high ranking beings (angels?), if not the highest. The suggestion that Ezekiel's vision of the wheels alongside the cherubim conveys the concept of a divine chariot or vehicle, calls to mind a statement in 1 Chr. 28:18 which refers to "the chariot of the cherubim." In this particular verse the "chariot" refers to the ark of the covenant in Solomon's temple of which figures of the cherubim formed a part, standing at each end with wings outstretched.

The ark of the covenant represented God's throne. Being mobile, and leading God's armies into battle, it was thought of as a chariot.

In fact, as it was carried, with the wings of the cherubim outstretched, it gave the impression of the cherubim bearing or transporting the throne. Hence the phrase: "chariot of the cherubim."

The concept of the cherubim transporting the throne is significant in the light of Ezk. 1. Verse 22 says an awesome, awe-inspiring firmament that sparkled like crystal, radiating all the colours of the rainbow, was above the heads of the cherubim and above the wheels, like a dome or ceiling. And above that, according to verse 26, was a throne like a sapphire stone (Ezk. 10:1 repeats this) and upon the throne sat a radiant divine being.

So then, the crystal firmament, being above the cherubim, was like a dome or ceiling to them. But to the one on the throne above this, the firmament would be a floor or pavement.

Wherever the cherubim and wheels went, the firmament and throne went with them. This clearly conveys to us a mobile throne borne by the cherubim.

Ultimately, as we read in Ezk. 43:1-7, the throne comes to dwell on earth. Dan. 7:9 refers to it: "His throne is fiery flames and its wheels burning fire."

Now, regarding the firmament or pavement of crystal under the throne, Rev. 4:6 refers to what appeared to be a "sea of glass like crystal before the throne." Being like a "sea of glass like crystal" suggests the colour of sparkling blue sapphire. Who could fail to see the connection between this and the firmament like crystal before the throne in Ezk. 1?

This would mean that the cherubim in Ezk. 1 transported Yahweh and His throne from heaven, along with the crystal-looking pavement (divine platform) upon which or above which the throne sits. This reveals that the throne can leave the city and be transported without it, as in the case of the ark of the covenant which could be conveyed to another place without the temple having to go with it. The ark of the covenant was not a fixture, cemented or bolted to the floor of the tabernacle or temple, and neither is the throne of God in heaven.

A PAVEMENT OF SAPPHIRE STONE

With these thoughts in mind, we go to Ex. 24. When God gathered Israel to Sinai, He invited Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons) and 70 elders up the mountain to worship Him "afar off" (at a distance). Moses alone was allowed to draw near, but not the others.

Verses 9-10 say they went up and "saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there was what appeared to be a pavement of sapphire stone, clear blue like the heavens" (i.e. like the firmament of heaven).

This pavement of sapphire stone under God's feet is the sea of glass in Rev. 4:6 and the firmament like crystal in Ezk. 1 on which, or above which is the throne of God.

There is no reference to the throne in Ex. 24:10 but it would not be surprising if it was there, along with the cherubim, not to mention other angels, for we read in Ps. 68:17 that "the chariots of God are 20,000 even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place."

We have also seen in Heb. 12:22 that "an innumerable company of angels" is identified with "the city of the living God," and they are seen around the throne in Rev. 5:11. It is not impossible that the whole city travelled to Sinai and hovered above, for which reason there was thick cloud to prevent the people from seeing it (Ex. 19:9, 16).

In Ex. 19:10-11 we read that the Lord told Moses to tell the people to sanctify themselves because "Yahweh will come down ..." The following verses reveal that when Yahweh came, "there were thunders and lightning and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud." Mount Sinai was covered with smoke and the whole mount quaked violently, causing the people to tremble. Significantly enough, thunder, lightning, smoke, an earthquake and a trumpet voice are also mentioned in connection with the throne and temple of God in Revelation (4:1-5. 8:4. 11:19. 15:8).

GOD RIDES UPON THE HEAVENS

Some may find the concept of God riding through the heavens on His throne or in His city rather bizarre. But Scripture plainly teaches this. For example: Deu. 33:26 says: “There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, and in His majesty through the skies.” Similar statements stating that God rides through or upon the heavens also occur in Ps. 68:4, 32-33. Ps. 18:9-10 says “He bowed the heavens and came down: thick darkness was under his feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.” Reference here to the “cherub” runs parallel with “wings of the wind” which refers to angels (Ps. 104:3-4) indicating that the cherubim are angels. In Hab. 3:8 we read: “Thou didst ride upon Thine horses and Thy chariots of salvation.” (The “horses and chariots” also refer to angels. See Ps. 68:17. 2 Kng. 6:17. Zech. 6). Reference is also made in Mic. 1:2-3 to the Lord coming down to earth “out of His place” from “His holy temple.” This is what Ezekiel saw (Ezk. 1).

It would also not be surprising if the city of God visited and hovered above planet earth during creation week, during which the angels shouted for joy as they beheld the wonderful creative works of God taking place, creating order and beauty out of chaos Job 38:4-7. (The Hebrew word translated “moved” in Gen. 1:2 in relation to the creative Spirit of God, means “brooded” which is consistent with the concept of hovering).

In view of the size and brightness of the city, it could easily have provided light for the earth during the first few days until the light of the sun and moon appeared on the 4th day. Due to the earth revolving on its axis, night and day would occur while the city cast its light upon it.

MOSES SAW GOD

Coming back to the Sinai episode: the reference to Yahweh coming down is commonly understood to refer not to Yahweh Himself, but a high ranking angel representing Him. It is also commonly believed that the “Lord” (Yahweh) who allowed Moses to see His back but not His face, saying: “You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live,” was also an angel. If so, then Yahweh Himself could not have been at Sinai at all, which means His throne and city could not have been there either.

The question that needs to be asked is: Why would Moses not be allowed to look at an angel’s face, and if it was an angel, which one was

it? According to the throne room scene in Rev. 4, the highest ranking angels are the 4 living creatures which stand in the immediate presence of God around His throne. Then there are “the 7 Spirits of God” standing before the throne, who are the 7 angels referred to in 8:1 who “stood before God” and who blow the 7 trumpets. The fact that the 7th (last) trumpet is associated with an “archangel” (1 Thes. 4:16. 1 Cor. 15:52), indicates the 7 angels are archangels. The name of one of them is given in Scripture, namely: Michael (Jude verse 9). And Dan. 10:13; 12:1 indicate archangels are “chief princes.” Gabriel may have been one also.

Further out from the throne of God surrounding the 4 living creatures and 7 Spirits, are 24 elders, and beyond them multitudes of other angels (Rev. 4:4. 5:11).

These 4 groups, the 4 living creatures, the 7 Spirits, the 24 elders and many millions of angels, represent the angelic hierarchy in heaven, in order of rank.

Who then, among these, appeared to Moses whose face could not be seen? Ezekiel saw the faces of the 4 living creatures and so did John. John also saw the 7 archangels. In view of the fact that archangels are chief princes, the angel who appeared to Joshua and referred to himself as “prince of the host of the Lord” (Josh. 5:14), is believed to be an archangel, probably Michael, and Joshua saw him!

Daniel, Zecharias and Mary spoke to Gabriel face to face. John also saw the 24 elders and spoke to some of them face to face (Rev. 5:5. 7:13).

The fact of the matter is that the face of angels belonging to all ranks in heaven have been seen by men.

This indicates that it must have been Yahweh Himself whose face Moses was not allowed to see; only his back. It is evident from Ex. 33:20 that the reference to no man being able to see Yahweh and live, means seeing His face.

The words of Jesus in Jn. 5:37: “You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape,” are applied to the faithless Jews of his time, and cannot be applied to Moses.

Moses actually saw God - from behind! God Himself was at Sinai as many Scriptures testify. Moses did not ascend Sinai to worship an angel, and it was not the presence of an angel that caused his face to shine. Many men have been in the presence of an angel, but there is no reference to their face glowing as a result. It is not difficult therefore, to believe that God’s throne or city or both were there, hidden and concealed above the thick clouds and smoke.

The question is: If the city of God was there, did Moses see it? The

apostle John saw it and so did the apostle Paul. There is therefore no reason why Moses could not see it also.

Moses was up Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights and God told him to “make a sanctuary according to the pattern I will show you,” and it is significant that this sanctuary, like heaven itself, was called a “tabernacle.”

THE CITY OF GOD IS HEAVEN

Now, during the days of the tabernacle and the temple later built by Solomon to replace it, the high priest went into the most holy place once a year with the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the lid of the ark of the covenant (the “mercy seat”) to make atonement for sins.

According to the New Testament, this ritual was a type pointing forward to the day when Jesus would offer himself up as a sacrifice, shed his blood as an atonement for sin, and enter into heaven itself as a result.

We read this in Heb. 9:24: “For Christ is not entered the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” We are told here that the holy places in the tabernacle and temple were “figures” i.e. representations or counterparts of heaven.

Again we read in Heb. 8:1-2 that “we have a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the holies (sanctuary) and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man.” (i.e. whose builder and maker is God).

Here again we are told that heaven is the true holy of holies and that it is the true tabernacle. The word “true” means heaven is the reality represented by the tabernacle. (Compare Jn. 6:32. 15:1. 1 Jn. 2:8 where Jesus is referred to as the true bread, true wine and true light. In these places the word “true” carries with it the sense of antitype).

Heb. 8:5 says the tabernacle and its service was only an example and shadow (rough outline) of things in heaven. The writer then goes on to explain that this was implied when Moses was instructed by God to make the tabernacle according to “the pattern” shown to him at Sinai.

The Greek word for “pattern” is “tupos” which means ensample, resemblance, model, type. Act. 7:44 says Moses made the tabernacle “according to the fashion (tupos) he had seen.” Ps. 78:69 says “He built his sanctuary like the high heavens.”

Heb. 9:23 says the tabernacle and all that pertained to it was a “pattern of things in the heavens.” On this occasion the Greek word for

“pattern” is “hupodeigma” and means exhibit for imitation, specimen, copy.

The word “figure” is used in Heb. 9:9 which is “parabole” in the Greek and is elsewhere translated “parable.” It means similitude, comparison, and usually relates to earthly things which have a heavenly significance. The tabernacle was a living parable of heaven.

The word “shadow” occurs in Heb. 10:1 and is explained in the same verse to mean “not the very image.” A shadow is a faint rough outline or representation of a physical reality.

In Act. 7:44 we are told that the tabernacle was “the tabernacle of witness,” and it certainly was, for it witnessed and testified to greater things in heaven.

All these words used to describe the purpose of the tabernacle, saying it was an “example,” “pattern,” “figure,” “shadow,” “witness” of heaven, teach us that it was an earthly copy - an inferior replica or scale model - an inanimate miniature of heaven. Heaven, the city of God, is, as we read in Heb. 9:11: “a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands,” i.e. not made with human hands.

SEVEN FEATURES IN THE THRONE ROOM SCENE

It is clear that many aspects and features pertaining to the tabernacle made by Moses and the temple made by Solomon, bear a striking resemblance to the features seen by John in the temple city of God. Description after description of heaven’s temple or tabernacle in the book of Revelation recalls and reminds us of the tabernacle and temple built by Moses and Solomon.

The throne of God is clearly in the centre of the scene, and 7 aspects are mentioned in relation to it in Rev. 4. First, the glorious being who sits upon the throne (v.3). Second, an emerald rainbow around the throne (v.3). Third, 24 elders around the throne (v.4). Fourth, lightnings, thunders and voices proceeding out of the throne (v.5). Fifth, 7 lamps of fire burning before the throne (v.5). Sixth, a sea of glass like crystal before the throne (v.6). Seventh, 4 living creatures in the midst and round about the throne (v.6). More details are given in later chapters. For example 5:11 refers to 100 million angels round about the throne, and an altar of incense is mentioned in chapter 8.

This is the fullest and most detailed vision of heaven recorded in Scripture. For example, Micaiah the prophet, as recorded in 1 Kng. 22:19, “saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven (angels)

standing by Him on His right hand and on His left.” Isaiah the prophet “also saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.” He also saw seraphim in the immediate presence of the throne (Isa. 6). But the details of the throne room scene in heaven are quite scant compared to what is given in the book of Revelation. In view of the fact that “Revelation” involves the disclosure of knowledge previously unknown, it is to be expected that a book bearing this title would supply such knowledge.

STRIKING RESEMBLANCES BETWEEN THE TABERNACLE AND HEAVEN

We will now consider some of the examples of features that correspond between heaven’s tabernacle or city-temple, and the earthly tabernacle and temple built by Moses and Solomon.

1. As we have seen, both the city of God and the earthly sanctuary built by Moses and Solomon are called “tabernacle” and “temple.” Both are also called “the tabernacle of the testimony” (Num. 1:50, 53. Rev. 15:5).

2. Heaven’s city-temple “lieth foursquare” (Rev. 21:16). Israel’s encampment around the tabernacle was also foursquare. But the city of God did not only measure the same in length and breadth, but also in height, making it a cube - a cubical city (Rev. 21:16). The most holy place in the tabernacle and temple, into which the high priest entered once each year, and which represented heaven, was also a cube. The length, breadth and height were equal (Ex. 26:15-25. 1 Kng. 6:19-20).

3. A door led into the most holy place of Solomon’s temple (1 Kng. 6:31). The apostle John entered heaven through a door (Rev. 4:1).

4. The doors and walls in the most holy place of Solomon’s temple were decorated with carvings of trees and flowers, giving the atmosphere of a garden (1 Kin. 6:29-35). According to Rev. 22:1-2 the city of God is a garden city, containing a river and trees.

5. All the boards inside the tabernacle and temple were overlaid with gold (Ex. 26:29. 1 Kng. 6:20-22, 30). Even all the drinking cups and utensils were solid gold (2 Chr. 9:20). According to Rev. 21:18, the city of God is pure translucent gold, like clear glass.

6. Solomon’s temple was adorned and decorated with precious stones (2 Chr. 3:6). Precious stones also adorn and decorate the city of God (Rev. 21:19-21).

7. The city of God was surrounded by a wall with 3 gates on each of

the 4 sides, making a total of 12, and the gates were inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12-13). A wall also surrounded the tabernacle and temple. The 12 tribes of Israel also surrounded the tabernacle on all 4 sides and were divided into groups of 3 on each side, corresponding to the city gates.

8. The ark of the covenant was in the most holy place in both the tabernacle and temple. It represented God's throne - the place where He was enthroned between and above the cherubim (Ex. 25:22. Ps 80:1. 99:1. 2 Kng. 19:15). God's throne in Rev. 4:6 is also intimately connected with the cherubim. Also see Ezk. 1:26 where God's throne is depicted over and above the cherubim.

Cherubim were not only part of the seat of the ark of the covenant with wings outstretched over it, but also around it, carved in the walls and ceilings and sewn into the veil or curtain. The cherubim in Rev. 4:6 are also referred to as being "in the midst" and "round about" the throne.

Being situated in the holy place of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was in the midst of the foursquare encampment (Num. 5:3). As far as the city-temple of God is concerned, God's throne is also in the midst of it. This is inferred from the fact that the tree of life is in the middle of the city (Rev. 2:7), and according to 22:1-2, the throne of God is situated there also.

Rev. 11:19 makes reference to the ark of the covenant: "And the temple was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings and an earthquake and great hail." The fact that these same lightnings and voices and thunderings proceed from the throne of God in Rev. 4:5, suggests the ark of the covenant and the throne are one and the same.

This link between the ark of the covenant and the throne can also be seen in Jer. 3:16-17 where it is stated that the time will come when Israel will no longer seek the ark of the covenant of the Lord, because Jerusalem shall be the throne of the Lord!

9. The glory of God ("shekinah glory") shone forth from the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple; and reference to the bow around the throne in Rev. 4:3 suggests it was surrounded by a halo of glory.

10. A golden altar of incense was in close proximity to the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple (Heb. 9:3-4). Reference is also made to a golden altar of incense in heaven in close proximity to the throne (Rev. 8:3. 9:13. 14:18. 16:7. Also Isa. 6:6).

A veil separated the altar of incense from the ark of the covenant in

the tabernacle and temple. It represented the flesh (Heb. 10:20) i.e. the sinful nature of man which prevented him from living eternally with God and His angels. But Christ conquered the flesh resulting in the veil being ripped down the middle from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). By his obedient life and sacrifice he has opened up the way to eternal life and fellowship with God. There is therefore no veil or barrier of any kind for those who live in the city of God.

11. A 7 branched lampstand was in the tabernacle, and its lamps were always burning. Reference is also made to “7 lamps of fire burning before the throne” in the city of God (Rev. 4:5). They signify the 7 Spirits of God.

12. A laver of water was situated in front of the tabernacle and temple, and the one in front of the temple was so large it was called a “sea” (1 Kng. 7:23-44). This immediately invites comparison with the “sea of glass” before the throne in the city of God (Rev. 4:6).

13. Rev. 4:3 says “He who sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone.” The breastplate worn by the high priest of Israel when he stood before the ark of the covenant contained precious stones, and the jasper and sardine stones are the first and last stones mentioned (Ex. 28:15-20).

Many of the stones that adorn the 12 foundations of the wall around the city of God correspond with the stones in the high priest’s breastplate.

14. Reference is made in Rev. 4:4 to 24 elders sitting around the throne in heaven. Israel’s priesthood also revolved around the throne of God in the tabernacle, and was formed into 24 orders or courses (1 Chr. 24:4-18). Priestly duties were rotated so that all the priests could have a turn at ministering in the presence of the Lord each year.

This same principle could operate among the angels in heaven, enabling them all to have a turn sitting in the immediate presence of God, worshipping Him at close range around His throne. If so, when the saints are made equal to the angels, the same will apply to them.

15. When the tabernacle was consecrated by Moses, the glory of the Lord filled it and Moses was not able to enter because of it (Ex. 40:34-35). This also happened when Solomon dedicated the temple. Due to the cloud of the glory of the Lord filling the house, the priests could not enter to minister (1 Kng. 8:10-11. 2 Chr. 5:14).

Reference is also made in Rev. 15:8 to the city-temple being filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, preventing anyone from entering. Isa. 6:4 is similar: “The house was filled with smoke.”

These examples of features of the tabernacle corresponding with the city-temple of God, show that the tabernacle was built according to the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary - the holy city. The tabernacle and temple were clearly inferior replicas or models - miniatures of heaven.

A CONTINUING VISION

The city-temple of God in the book of Revelation is the city Abraham looked for, “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” as we read in Heb. 11:10. This city has been “prepared” by God for Abraham and his seed and is going “to come” to Mount Zion (Heb. 11:16. 13:14). The prospect of being in the city in joyful festal gathering with myriads of angels is presented as the hope of the Christian faith in Heb. 12:22.

The apostle John was given a preview of this city, and in prophetic vision he saw the redeemed and glorified saints worshipping God there in high festival (Rev. 7:9-12). Visions such as this will not be fulfilled until the city comes to earth, which John witnessed in prophetic vision in Rev. 21.

The heavenly temple of Rev. 4 is a continuing vision and we catch glimpses of it again and again in the book of Revelation, learning more and more about it, especially in relation to features of the tabernacle corresponding with it. Visions of the city-temple reach a climax in chapters 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the book, forming the crown and culmination of the word of prophecy. The prophetic section of Revelation starting at chapter 4, therefore begins and ends with the city of God.

Throughout the book, the temple is the backcloth against which most of the action takes place. All actions and judgements on earth originate and are controlled from this power centre. They take effect as the result of symbolical rituals such as blowing trumpets, offering incense, thrusting with sickles, emptying out bowls, casting a millstone into the sea, binding with chains etc.

When the city finally descends from heaven, the earth will continue to be controlled from this centre; not by angels, but by Christ and his church (Heb. 2:5). It will truly be “heaven on earth.” In that day the Lord’s prayer will start to be fulfilled: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.” The whole earth will ultimately be turned into a paradise, and the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the mighty deep.

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he who sat upon the throne said, behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:3-5).

THE TRUMPET VOICE

When John saw the open door in heaven, he heard the voice that sounded like a trumpet which he had heard previously as recorded in 1:10: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, what you see, write in a book, and send it to the 7 churches in Asia ... And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And, being turned, I saw 7 golden lampstands, and in the midst of the 7 lampstands, one like the son of man, clothed with a garment down to his foot ...” This was the first vision seen by John and was a symbolical appearance of Christ, the high priest of the church.

Rev. 4:1 is John’s second vision and is also introduced by the same trumpet voice that introduced the first vision. But John did not turn to see it behind him, as in the case of the first vision, for the trumpet voice said to him: “Come up here and I will show you things which must be hereafter. At once the Spirit took control of me, and, I saw a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.”

It is natural to wonder why the voice sounded like a trumpet. Why not like a flute or harp or some other musical instrument?

Being a Jew, John would be familiar with the fact that the trumpet had been ordained by God in Moses’ day to be used in connection with various divine appointments, and that prior to these appointments being made, a divine trumpet sounded exceeding loud and long from Mount Sinai, and became increasingly louder to announce the presence of God causing the people to tremble (Ex. 19:16-19). Significantly enough, John was about to be ushered into the presence of God when he heard the trumpet voice!

According to Numbers chapter 10 God instructed Israel to use the trumpet to assemble the army, to sound the attack and also to stop the pursuit. The trumpet was also used to gather the people together for religious feasts and festivals and solemn occasions. On the first day of every month at the new moon, trumpets were blown over the sacrifices

and offerings as a joyful memorial before God. The day of atonement was also preceded by the blowing of trumpets.

Watchmen on the city walls blew the trumpet to sound the alarm and warn of invasion by enemy forces. The blast of a trumpet proclaimed the accession of a king to the throne. God was also praised on the trumpet (Ps. 150:3. 47:5).

Revelation chapter 8 refers to 7 archangels blowing 7 trumpets to herald end time events. Was the angel with the trumpet-like voice in Rev. 4:1 one of these archangels? Do angels who blow trumpets have voices like trumpets? The 7th trumpet, being the “last trump,” heralds the second coming, resurrection, rapture, and battle of Armageddon, and various Scriptures link the trumpet with these events. (Rev. 11:15. 1 Cor. 15:52. 1 Thes. 4:16. Matt. 24:31. Zec. 9:14. Isa. 27:13).

THE LORD’S DAY

In the book of Joel’s prophecy and elsewhere, God’s judgement upon Israel in the end time in the form of anti-Israel nations invading and occupying for 3½ years, until the second coming and battle of Armageddon which results in judging and destroying the enemy, is referred to as “the day of the Lord” (Joel 1:15. 2:1, 11, 31. 3:14). And we read in Joel 2:1 that a trumpet is blown to announce it to warn the people. This could all have a bearing on the statement in Rev. 1:10 that John was in the spirit on the Lord’s day and heard a great trumpet voice.

The “Lord’s day” hardly refers to the particular day of the week that John received the revelation, be it Saturday, Sunday or Monday etc. In Christ every day is the “Lord’s day” so it would be immaterial what day of the week John received the revelation. The “Lord’s day” refers, not to the day John received the revelation, but a specific period in the future to which the revelation related, namely: “the day of the Lord” in Joel’s prophecy. This means therefore that the prophecy given to John relates to the end time period, not a long continuous period of history from the end of the first century A.D. to the end time.

The only other place in Scripture besides Rev. 4:1 where a man’s voice is likened to a trumpet, is Isa. 58:1 where the prophet Isaiah is told by God to “Cry (shout) aloud, spare not, (i.e. don’t be timid and restrained, soft and apologetic). Lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their sins.” The New Living translation puts it like this: “Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast....”

Now, the trumpet voice that spoke to John said: “Come up here and I

will show you things which must be hereafter.” As the sequel reveals, John was shown many things. He was shown the sinfulness of Jerusalem (the Jews) and the world, which will ultimately incur judgement. He was shown the gathering of nations for the battle of Armageddon, the second coming, resurrection, the gathering of the saints, and the setting up of the kingdom and millennium. In view of such events, it would certainly be appropriate if the voice of the person who was going to show them to John, sounded like a trumpet! As we have seen, certain Scriptures teach that the trumpet will herald those events.

Some see the significance of the voice being like a trumpet simply in the same light as Isa. 58:1, i.e. it was loud, in order to alert, and doesn't necessarily mean it had the same sound or tone of a trumpet. Loud voices are certainly characteristic of angels, as many Scriptures testify; especially in the book of Revelation: (Rev. 5:2, 12. 6:10. 7:2, 10. 8:13. 10:3. 11:15. 12:10. 14:7, 9, 15, 18. 16:1, 17. 18:2. 19:17. 21:3. Ezk. 9:1).

We read in Isa. 6:3-4 that the voices of the Seraphim were such a thunderous roar as they cried holy, holy, holy, that the foundations of the temple city shook or vibrated.

Humans also, under the inspiration of the Spirit, whether preaching to people or praising God, do so in a loud voice (Lk. 1:42. 17:15. 19:37. Jn. 11:43. Matt. 27:46, 50).

THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER

At the very beginning of the book of Revelation, in chapter 1:1, we are told that the purpose of the revelation was “to show things which are shortly to come to pass.” But it is not until we reach chapter 4 that John is told that the time has come to disclose the future - “show thee things which must be hereafter.” Three chapters therefore pass before John is reminded of the promise given at the beginning, and is told to enter a door to see it unfold. It is almost as if the Spirit is saying: “Now that the preliminaries have been dealt with, we will move on to the main task and look at the future.”

In order to see things in the future, heaven either has to come to inspire man with visions, or man has to go to heaven to be inspired! In John's case, he had to go up through a door into heaven. There was nowhere on earth he could go to see the future. World events are in God's hands, as we read in Dan. 4:17: “The most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whoever He chooses.” “The heavens do rule” v26. Because world events are in God's hands and are conceived and planned

and implemented in heaven, John is invited to go there for a preview. The preview involves a series of vividly colourful dramatic visions, more lifelike than any 3D movie could be.

“IN THE SPIRIT”

We read in Rev. 4:2 that “immediately” after being told that he would be shown the future, John “was in the Spirit,” confirming 1:10 which states he was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day.”

Being “in the spirit” doesn’t merely mean he was feeling spiritual or thinking about spiritual things, as if to say on other occasions he didn’t. Being spiritual is a daily experience of all true Christians and would certainly be that of the apostle John, and therefore hardly needed to be stated. It would be a foregone conclusion. After all, he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos due to his love for the word of God and his insistence on preaching it and testifying to Jesus (1:9), and had just written messages to the seven churches in Asia.

In its context, being “in the spirit” means being inspired by prophetic visions. John of course, being an apostle, had possessed the Holy Spirit for many years and possibly had visions during those years.

However, the best of spiritual people have the potential, due to the weakness of the flesh, to revert to the flesh and be led by the carnal human spirit instead of the Holy Spirit. All false prophets fell into this trap, and were deceived by false visions and dreams inspired by their own wishful imaginations and vain optimisms. For example, see Ezk. 13.

Emphasis at the beginning of the book of Revelation that John was “in the Spirit,” stresses the fact that the prophetic visions which follow, unusual and mind-boggling as they might be, are inspired by the Holy Spirit and are not conjured up by the human spirit. They are not the rantings and ragings of an old senile man driven crazy by the stress and strain of forced exile and tribulation. They therefore fit into the category of the “more sure word of prophecy” referred to in 2 Pet. 1:19-20: “...unto which we all do well to pay attention as we would to a light shining in a dark place ...knowing this, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Being “in the Spirit,” as far as being inspired by prophetic visions by the Holy Spirit is concerned, is referred to by the apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 12:1-4. In talking about “visions and revelations of the Lord,” he refers to

one experience in particular which involved being “caught up into paradise” (i.e. the city of God Rev. 22:1-2. 2:7). Paul says “whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell.” He did not know if he was actually physically transported to paradise or if the spirit of his mind was projected there in vision.

Visions can be either objective or subjective. The Holy Spirit can literally and physically take a person somewhere and show him things, or create visions of those things in the spirit of his mind while he is sitting or lying down. The fact that Paul says “whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell,” indicates visions inspired in the spirit of the mind are as real as actually being there in person. - so real that it is impossible to tell the difference.

Paul’s statement also indicates that he did not believe it was impossible for him to be physically transported to paradise the garden city of God. If this was impossible, he would not have said: “whether in the body I cannot tell.” He was more likely to have said: “definitely not in the body.”

So then, reference to John being “in the Spirit” and going through a door into heaven, can either mean he went there “in the body” or “out of the body.”

Paul says in 2 Cor. 12 that he heard things when caught up into paradise that he could not utter (possibly in relation to the materials and measurements of the city). The privilege of such utterances was reserved for the apostle John and had to wait to form the climax to the Word of God. The revelation of paradise, the 12,000 furlong cubical garden city of God, is withheld until the last book of the Bible, and the last two chapters of that book. It is the crown and culmination of divine revelation. No wonder Jesus said: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

ONE SAT ON THE THRONE

After saying: “and immediately I was in the Spirit,” John says “and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” The words: “and behold” are rendered “O the glory of it” by the Living Bible. This is a free translation but gives a good sense to the obvious exclamation of John. In modern terms we might say “wow,” “what a sight,” “you wouldn’t believe what I saw.”

As the following verses reveal, many awesome sights were to be seen

in heaven, but the throne stood out and captured John's sight first and foremost, mainly because of the dazzling glory of the one sitting upon it and the divine glory that surrounded it. In the scene that John saw, the throne was the focal centre and central object; everything and everyone was around it. As in the case of the throne in Isa. 6:1 which was "high and lifted up" (exalted), the throne in Rev. 4:2 was also no doubt not on ground level, but elevated above everyone else - conspicuous by its high and exalted position.

In the phrase: "one sat on the throne" the word "one" is in italics indicating it is not in the original Greek text. The Greek literally reads: "And on the throne sitting," or, "and there sat on the throne." The Greek does not denote singular or individual characteristics. It simply refers to the presence on the throne. (Some, who do not believe God is a physical person, make a big thing out of this!) However, in view of the fact that the singular pronoun "him" occurs in v9-10: "him who sat on the throne," most modern translations interpolate the word "one" in v2.

Some believe it refers to Christ on his millennial throne on earth, regarding it as a prophetic scene of the messianic kingdom. But the reference is unquestionably to Father God, as demonstrated by references to the throne elsewhere which clearly distinguish Christ from the one who sits on the throne.

For example, the first reference to the throne in Rev. 1:4-5 refers to "him who is, and who was, and who is to come," and says the throne is "his throne." The following statements refer to the 7 Spirits which are before the throne and Jesus Christ, making it clear that it is Father God's throne in heaven. The singular pronouns "him" and "his" indicate a single individual.

The second reference is in 3:21 where Jesus refers to himself as being "set down with my Father in his throne." Jesus makes it clear in this statement that the throne belongs to Father God, and he is the "one" whose presence is seen on it in the next (3rd) reference to the throne in 4:2. The hymn of the 24 elders in Rev. 4:11 makes it clear that the one seated on the throne is the Creator. And, as we read in Mal. 2:10 etc. Father God alone is Creator.

Jesus is particularly distinguished from the one sitting on the throne in Rev. 5, making it clear that the Father and son are not the same person. The son is seen approaching the throne to take a book out of his Father's hand. After that, praise is given to both Father and son (5:8-14 etc.), but in chapter 4 praise is only given to the Father. Throughout the book of Revelation a clear distinction is made between the Father and son

revealing them as two separate persons 5:13. 7:10-12, 15, 17. 14:4. 15:3. 21:5-7. The doctrine of the Trinity which makes the Father and son one and the same person is clearly incorrect.

The throne of God is not only the focal centre of the vision in Rev. 4, but the focal centre of the whole book. Altogether, there are about 40 references to the throne of God in the book of Revelation - more than any other book in the Bible, providing some rich and profound insights.

SET IN HEAVEN

Before moving on from the subject of the throne, some comment should be made in relation to the throne being “set” in heaven in Rev 4:2. The word “set” means placed, positioned. The same word occurs in Matt. 5:14 in relation to “a city that is set on a hill.” The hill was there first and the city was set upon it at a later date. (Did God create heaven first then set the throne in it later?).

The same word translated “set” is also rendered “lieth” in Rev. 21:16: “The city lieth (is laid) foursquare.” Elsewhere the word is used in relation to a body that “lay” or was “lying” somewhere. Jesus used the same word in relation to an axe “laid” to the roots of a tree, and of goods being “laid up.” The word “set,” used in Jn. 2:6 in relation to 6 water pots being set, is also the same word, and clearly means placed or positioned. In view of the fact that such pots are moveable and transportable, the word “set” can carry with it the implication of mobility.

As we have seen, the throne is mobile and can be “set” or transported anywhere in God’s universe (Ezk. 1:26. 10:1.) John saw it at a fixed point in heaven, the temple city of God, but it was not a permanent fixture. Like the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle or temple, it was not cemented or bolted to the floor! In relation to all this, see the reference to thrones being placed (set) in Dan. 7:9-10. Also see Jer. 1:15. 43:10.

After stating that he saw a throne set in heaven and one sitting on the throne, no reference is made in the verses that follow to physical shape or features, such as face, hands, legs etc. Reference is only made to the glory and dazzling brightness of the being who was sitting on the throne. However, the fact that he “sat” indicates a physical form, not to mention the “right hand” which held the book in 5:1.

Various references throughout Scripture to God having a face, eyes, ears, hands and nostrils etc, indicate that He is a person and has physical form and shape. He is referred to as a “person” in Heb. 1:3 and the words of Jesus recorded in Jn. 5:37 imply He has “shape.” Moses saw His back

and hand (Ex. 33:22-23.) The fact that man is made in the image of God indicates that God is the proto-type of the human form, and he is referred to in Ezk. 1:26 as having the appearance (form) of a man.

THE JASPER

As mentioned before, 7 aspects are revealed in Rev. 4 in relation to the throne room scene, and the first is the glorious being who sits on the throne. Verse 3 says “And he who sat there had the appearance of a jasper and a sardine stone.” The divine presence and glory that radiated from the throne is likened by John to dazzling, gleaming gemstones, which sparkle and glisten in the light, manifesting spectacular and awesome beauty.

In Rev. 4:3, 6, five stones are chosen from the mineral world to describe the glory of God and His throne: the jasper, sardius, emerald, glass, crystal.

The Hebrew word “yashpneh” is translated “Jasper” due to the resemblance in the name. According to Strong, the Hebrew root from which jasper is derived, means “to polish.” This suggests something bright, gleaming and glistening.

The jasper was the last of 12 stones inserted in the High Priest’s breastplate (Ex. 28:20. 39:13), and the first of 12 used to decorate and adorn the foundations of the city of God (Rev. 21:19). The wall around the city was also made of jasper (Rev. 21:18).

According to the World Book Encyclopedia, jasper is a mixture of quartz and iron oxide, formed in different colours such as white, red, yellow, brown, purple, grey, green and black. Sometimes these colours are arranged in layers in the rock. It takes a high polish, and is used for mantels, pillars, and other fancy interior finishings. Fine grades of jasper are polished into gems.

Such is our understanding of jasper today. But the question is: did those in Biblical times regard it in the same way? As far as Scripture is concerned, the characteristics of the stone are specified in Rev. 21:11. We are told here that the light of the glory of God shone like a precious stone, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Here we are informed that the jasper was a “precious stone” and “like crystal” - a stone that “shone” - a bright shining stone like “light.” The jasper would certainly need to be a stone of brilliant and transparent light, in order for it to be compared with, and be a symbol of the glory of God!

The stone regarded as jasper today does not fit this description. Some forms of quartz would be closer to the description. Many varieties of

quartz can come in six-sided crystals or in one mass. A pure quartz crystal has a clear glassy appearance. This type of crystal, called “rock crystal,” is sometimes cut for gems. All other kinds of quartz may be coloured.

Quartz can easily be recognized because it looks like pieces of broken glass. It is the hardest of all common minerals. Only rare minerals such as topaz and diamond are harder. But the quartz and jasper are both common minerals that can be found in many rocks. The stone regarded as jasper today is not “most precious” as we read in Rev. 21:11. It scarcely fits into the semi-precious category.

The fact that Rev. 21:11 describes jasper as “most precious” and “clear as crystal,” has led some to believe it refers to the diamond. Crystal certainly looks like a diamond and is sometimes referred to as the poor man’s diamond. Some modern translations of the Bible actually give “diamond” instead of jasper. As some commentaries point out: it would be unusual if there was no mention of the diamond in the lists of precious stones in the book of Revelation, especially in chapter 21. But this would not be the case if the jasper referred to the diamond. In view of the precious nature of the diamond, and the common nature of today’s jasper, it would certainly be more appropriate to liken the glory of God to the diamond!

Diamonds, like crystals, radiate a rainbow of prismatic colours, and are symbolic of the glory of God on the throne which radiates throughout heaven’s city. This may have been another reason why the curtains surrounding the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the tabernacle were white linen embroidered with gold, red, blue and purple thread.

This beauty of the glory of God, like bright sparkling diamonds, glistening and gleaming from the throne, was the first thing to strike the eyes of John when he went through the door into heaven.

BEAUTIFUL BEYOND DESCRIPTION

God is obviously a superbly glorious being, the “Father of Lights,” glorious in holiness, magnificent in majesty, awesome in splendour.

“For who in all of heaven can compare with the Lord? What mightiest angel is anything like the Lord? The highest angelic powers stand in awe of God. He is far more awesome than those who surround his throne. O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, Lord? Faithfulness is your very character” (Psalm 89:6-8). “Honour and majesty surround him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (Psalm

96:6).

A song expresses it in terms of: “Beautiful beyond description, too marvellous for words, too wonderful for comprehension, like nothing ever seen or heard. Who can grasp your infinite wisdom, who can fathom the depths of your love? You are beautiful beyond description, majesty enthroned above. I will stand, I will stand in awe of you.”

Or, in the words of another song: “Lord you are more precious than gold. Lord you are more beautiful than diamonds. Nothing in this world compares with you.” Who could possibly allow the shallow and superficial glory and glitter of the world’s cheap and fragile tinsel to draw us away from such a God?! The glory of man and the material world is dull and dim by comparison! Therefore, in the words of a well known chorus: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus and the things on earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glorious grace.”

DEGREES OF GLORY

While we are on the subject of the glory of God, it is interesting to note that 1 Cor. 15:41 refers to different degrees of such glory, and compares them with the glory of the sun, moon and stars.

The sun is the brightest and can be related to Father-God. He is the brightest being in heaven and clearly stood out in the throne room scene. According to Rev. 21:23 there is no need for the light of the sun or moon to lighten the city temple of heaven due to the brightness of the glory of God.

Being subordinate to his Father, but above angels, Jesus is second in rank - the second in brightness as it were, corresponding to the moon in the natural heavens.

Angels, being inferior to him, correspond to the stars which are of inferior brightness to the moon. Like the stars, angels also differ in degrees of brightness (rank). Ultimately the saints will also be made equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36) and are referred to as “stars” in Dan. 12:3.

Rev. 21:23 says “The city had no need of the sun neither the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light of it.” In this statement it is not difficult to parallel the sun with Father God and the moon with the Lamb (Christ).

THE SARDIUS

The glory of God in Rev. 4:3 is not only likened to a jasper stone (diamond) but also a “sardine stone,” (Authorised Version) elsewhere referred to as a “sardius stone.”

The sardius was the first of 12 stones set in the high priest’s breastplate (Ex. 28:17. 39:10). In view of the fact that the jasper was the last stone in the breastplate, the glory of God is represented by the first and last stones. God is the first and last! (Isa. 44:6 48:12).

The sardius was also the 6th of 12 stones used to adorn and decorate the foundations of the city of God (Rev. 21:20).

The Hebrew word for sardius is “odem,” which has the same consonants as “Adam” and “Edom,” all of which signify redness.

The sardius is generally believed to be the ruby or garnet or some other red gem, probably a form of cornelian; i.e. a deep red form of quartz - a fiery, sparkly red.

So then, reference to God’s glory looking like jasper (diamond) and sardius stones, conveys a picture of a brilliant flashing and sparkling of prismatic colours with a pronounced fiery red glow. Scripture certainly declares God to be a “consuming fire” and in Dan. 7:9-10 we read that “His throne was like the fiery flames and its wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream (glow - emanation - pulsation) issued and came forth from His presence.”

THE COLOUR OF AMBER

In Ezekiel’s vision of the throne and glory of God, he saw a great cloud in which was the throne of God riding upon the cherubim. Inside the cloud he saw fire enfolding itself, causing a bright glow in and around the cloud, the colour of amber (Ezk. 1:4). The Hebrew word for amber means highly polished brass. It only occurs in Ezk. 1:4, 27. 8:2.

The reference to amber in Ezk. 1:27 is clearly in relation to the glory of God upon His throne. Ezekiel says: “From his waist up, he looked like amber (gleaming bronze) glowing in a furnace of fire. And from his waist down, he seemed to be a fiery flame, shining brightly with splendour.” This description ties in with his presence and glory being likened to a sardius stone in Rev. 4:3, i.e. a fiery ruby red colour.

Ezekiel chapter 1:28 goes on to describe the jasper (diamond) appearance in these words: “Like a rainbow in the cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of brightness that surrounded him.” In other words the

encircling radiance was like a glowing halo. And, being likened to a rainbow suggests it manifested all the prismatic colours of a rainbow - the same colours seen in a sparkling diamond!

This description sounds like the actual body or person of God glowed like fire - fire that enfolded itself - like gleaming bronze glowing in a fiery furnace, or highly polished bronze; and surrounding and encircling him was a brilliant glow or radiance of rainbow colours that sparkled like diamonds.

Ezekiel goes on to say in v28: “That was the way the glory of the Lord appeared to me. And when I saw it, I fell face downward on the ground, and I heard a voice of one speaking.”

God manifested Himself as a dazzling colourful being, so awesomely beautiful and bright to behold, that Ezekiel fell prostrate upon the ground. In view of the colourfulness of the glory of the Creator, is it no wonder that His creation is so full of colour! He clearly loves colour.

The third reference to “amber” in Ezk. 8:2 repeats the same description as 1:27. Ezekiel says: “The hand of the Lord God fell upon me. I looked and saw a form that appeared to be on fire. He seemed to be all fire from the waist down, and to shine brightly like amber (gleaming bronze) from his waist up.”

LIKE POLISHED BRASS

This aspect of polished or gleaming bronze is also mentioned a number of times in Scripture in relation to angels and Jesus. For example, Ezk. 1:7 says the cherubim (4 living creatures who bear the throne of God) “gleamed like polished brass.” We also read in Ezk. 40:3 that the angel who described the temple to Ezekiel was “a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass.”

Dan. 10:6 says the angel who appeared to Daniel had a face like lightning, eyes like fire, “and the colour of his arms and feet was like polished brass.” The feet of Jesus in Rev. 1:15 are also described as being “like burnished (highly polished) brass, as if they glowed in the furnace.”

Brass, of course, is impervious to fire; it can withstand great heat, and for this reason was used to make fire pans and tongs etc. to be used at the altar. Reference to angels looking like brass speaks to us of beings with skin and body that cannot be destroyed - immortal bodies, glowing with the glory of God.

THE BERYL

It is interesting to see how the divine nature and glory is compared with, and likened to certain minerals such as the jasper (diamond) and sardius, and metals such as brass.

The beryl is another mineral that is sometimes used in the description of divine beings. Referring to the angel who appeared to Daniel, we read in Dan. 10:6 that “his body was like the beryl.” The Hebrew word for beryl is “tarshiysh” from which “Tarshish” is derived, suggesting the stone came from the region called by that name in Scripture.

According to Ezk. 28:13 the beryl was a “precious stone” and it is generally believed to be of a greenish colour. Some say it is a sea green colour. Others say it was closely allied to the emerald.

The beryl was the first stone in the 4th row of the high priest’s breastplate, making it the 10th stone out of 12 (Ex. 28:20. 39:13). The beryl was also the stone used to adorn and decorate the 8th foundation of the city of God (Rev. 21:20).

Reference is also made to the beryl in Ezk. 1:16. 10:9 in relation to the wheels of the cherubim. It is stated that the colour of the wheels was like the beryl. More will be said about this when dealing with the 4 living creatures in Rev. 4:6.

Keeping in mind that the beryl is a green gemstone, similar in colour to the emerald, we now move on to the second aspect of the throne.

A RAINBOW THE COLOUR OF AN EMERALD

Rev. 4:3 says: “And there was a rainbow round about the throne the colour of an emerald.” The New Living translation puts it like this: “And the glow of an emerald circled the throne like a rainbow.”

The colour of an emerald of course, is green. But a rainbow displays the 7 colours of the spectrum, from red on the outside of the arch, to orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo (dark blue) and violet. Green is at the centre of the spectrum.

The fact that the rainbow around the throne of God is green like an emerald, indicates that the word “rainbow” refers to shape rather than colour. It conjures up a picture of a green ‘halo’ of glory encircling the throne.

Reference to it being “round about” the throne, as in the case of the 24 elders who sat “round about” the throne (v4), means to completely encircle the throne. It was a circular rainbow.

Various suggestions could be made as to why the rainbow is green instead of being multi-coloured. One reason could be that it would not be as discernible from the glory and beauty of God if it consisted of the 7 prismatic colours.

As already pointed out, Rev. 4:3 says the glory of God Himself radiating from His presence, was like a jasper and sardius stone. And, as we have seen, the jasper stone is likened to crystal in Rev. 21:11 and could be quartz or diamond, which radiate a rainbow of prismatic colours. Such a spectrum of colours were radiating from the throne where God sat. As we saw in Ezk. 1:28, the glory of God is described as an encircling radiance around Him like a glowing halo, “like a rainbow in the cloud on a rainy day.”

Now, if the rainbow that encircled the throne in Rev. 4:3 was not like an emerald in colour, but displayed the same prismatic colours as the glory of God, the colours would all merge and blend in together and the rainbow would not be as discernible. But, being a rich band or bow or glow of green, enabled it to be seen and discerned amidst the blaze of God’s glory. Reference to it being a “rainbow” is surely significant - a key to the interpretation.

The original rainbow was ordained by God for a spiritual purpose and significance. It was to act as a sign of God’s covenant (promise) that He would never again allow a universal flood to destroy earth’s population (Gen. 9). The rainbow was therefore a sign of love, grace, mercy, forgiveness. It signified a restraint on wrath and judgement. It represented promise and hope.

In view of this, the green rainbow, forming a backdrop or surrounding support to the throne of God, could signify, as we read in Pr. 20:28: “God’s throne is upheld by mercy.” Or, in the words of Isa. 16:5: “In mercy shall the throne be established.” God’s mercy triumphs over judgement and is the overruling and overriding factor of His throne. Mercy hovers, as it were, like a halo or crown.

WHY GREEN?

But why is the rainbow green? What is the significance of green? In God’s natural creation on planet earth there is a predominance of green, due to rain, which causes the rainbow. In this creation, green is the sign of young healthy growth and of fresh verdure. It is therefore the symbol of new life, fruitfulness and plenty.

For this reason we have the “Green Party” sometimes referred to as,

or nicknamed “The Greenies.” Their vision is to keep New Zealand green; i.e. healthy and fruitful, which means resisting all polluting influences which threaten life or the quality of life on planet earth.

Pollution, famine and war have destroying and devastating effects, turning green pastures and forests into dry and brown wilderness and wasteland. “Green” therefore signifies no war, death, destruction or pollution, but rather peace and prosperity - life - abundant life - revival, refreshing, restfulness - paradise!

This significance of “green” comes out in various passages of Scripture. For example: Ps. 23:1-3: “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not lack. He makes me rest in green pastures; He leads me to quiet pools of fresh water. He revives my soul” (i.e. gives me new life and strength). In this passage, “green” is in the context of fruitfulness, peace, plenty. There are many Scriptures in which green signifies this.

Job 8:16 refers to the man who is healthy and prosperous, and says: “He is green before the sun.” He is likened to a healthy plant thriving in the sunlight.

Job 15:32 says the foolish man who trusts in evil will be cut off before his time “and his branch shall not be green” (i.e. it will wither away and become dry).

Ps. 52:8: “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.”

Lk. 23:31: “If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

Rev. 9:4: “And they were commanded not to hurt the grass of the earth nor any green thing” (Also Rev. 8:7).

In view of the significance of the colour green in God’s natural creation, and the significance of a rainbow, it seems reasonable to suggest that a green rainbow could signify the promise of peace and prosperity. This is God’s plan and purpose and the power of His throne will perform it. This is His covenant based on His promises, and for this reason the green bow of glory encircles His throne.

The only other places in Scripture where reference is made to the emerald are in Ex. 28:18. Ezk. 27:16. 28:13. Rev. 21:19. In Ex. 28:18 the emerald is the 4th stone (i.e. the 1st in the 2nd row) on the high priest’s breastplate. In Ezk. 27:16. 28:13 reference is made to Tyre importing the emerald from Syria; and Rev. 21:19 refers to the emerald adorning and decorating the 4th foundation of the wall around the city of God.

24 SEATS AROUND THE THRONE

The 3rd aspect in relation to the throne in heaven is mentioned in Rev. 4:4: “And round about the throne were 24 seats, and upon the seats I saw 24 elders.”

The Authorised Version says “seats” but the Greek word “thronos” should be translated “thrones.” It is the same word translated “throne” in v2 and in 3:21. Most modern translations translate it “24 thrones.” It is evident then, that in the centre of the scene in heaven is the throne of God, and surrounding it, forming a circle around it, are 24 thrones.

As far as the 24 elders are concerned, seen sitting on the thrones: the Greek word for “elders” is “presbuteros,” derived from “presbus,” which means elderly, older, senior. In Old Testament times an elder was generally one who was older and more senior in age, but in New Testament times it relates not so much to age, but spiritual maturity and ability to lead and govern.

Basically, elders were a governing body of men - leaders in the church. All the apostles were “elders” in this sense, and John refers to himself as an elder in 2nd John v1. 3rd John v1. Peter also refers to himself as an elder (1 Pet. 5:1). However, although all apostles were elders, not all elders were apostles, and this distinction can be seen in Act. 15:1-6, 22-23. 16:4. These elders were appointed by apostles or by the deputies of the apostles such as Timothy and Titus.

The fact that John was an elder and one of the 12 apostles, and was not sitting on one of the 24 thrones, indicates the 12 apostles were not among the 24 elders sitting there. The 12 thrones that Jesus promised the 12 apostles (Matt. 19:28) are clearly not among the 24 thrones in Rev. 4.

Because of the Authorised Version translation of Rev. 5:9 which says the 24 elders sang a song to the Lamb saying: “Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every nation,” many have concluded that the elders must be the redeemed and glorified saints. However, the Authorised Version translation is incorrect. Practically all modern authorities and translations agree that instead of reading: “thou hast redeemed us,” it should read: “thou hast redeemed men.”

The 24 elders are not celebrating their own salvation, but the salvation of men, indicating that they are not redeemed men but angels. The words in 5:9 are sung about the saints, not by them. If the 24 elders were among those redeemed from mankind, they would surely include themselves among those redeemed, but they don't.

A careful reading of the book of Revelation reveals that a clear

distinction is made between the 24 elders, 4 living creatures and the saints. For example, Rev. 7:9-10 depicts the saints standing before the throne of God praising and thanking God, then verses 11-12 go on to refer to the angels, 24 elders and 4 living creatures worshipping. The 24 elders and 4 living creatures are clearly distinguished from the saints. Also see 14:1-3. 19:4-7.

Throughout the book of Revelation, angels talk to John and explain the significance of symbols and events. The fact that one of the 24 elders spoke to John in 5:5, giving him a word of explanation, also indicates that the elders are angels. Other references to them in the Revelation confirm this.

In view of the Bible teaching on “elders,” it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the 24 elders who sit on thrones around the throne of God, represent a ruling body of angels - angels of senior status - leaders. They could be archangels.

Archangels are “chief princes” (Dan. 10:13. 12:1) and later references in the book of Revelation indicate that the elders direct the activities of angels in their missions on earth.

A hierarchy clearly exists in heaven - an ascending scale of rank among the angels, as there will be among the saints in the kingdom. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore, that the 24 elders are celestial beings of a high order, who under God, assist in the administration of heaven and the universe.

Regarding the reference to the “thrones” of the 24 elders in Rev. 4, it is tempting to connect them with the “thrones” referred to in Dan. 7:9. These thrones are “set” or “placed,” indicating they are portable. This verse relates to the judgement at Christ’s return, and not only is he referred to as sitting on a throne to execute judgement, but other thrones are also mentioned upon which others also obviously sit to share in the execution of judgement.

Who else could this refer to but angels? And if angels, possibly the 24 elders. Jesus taught, as recorded in Matt. 13:37-42, that angels will be involved in the day of judgement. He says they will “sit down and sever the good from the bad.” Where will they sit? On the grass? No! on seats i.e. thrones.

Now, as has been pointed out previously, God’s appointments in His kingdom on earth (the kingdom of Israel), were ordained according to the pattern of things in the heavens. It is not surprising therefore, that if “elders” are involved in the administration of heaven, that God also had elders over His people Israel, and elders in the New Testament church.

Neither is it surprising to read in Isa. 24:23 that when Messiah sets up God's kingdom on earth and reigns upon his throne at Jerusalem, that he will do so "before his elders in glory." Isa. 32:1 says "Princes shall reign" with him.

This suggests that Christ's throne on earth, like his Father's throne in heaven, will be surrounded by elders on thrones, assisting in the administration of the kingdom. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that Jesus promised the 12 apostles (elders) that when he sits on the throne of his glory, they would also sit on 12 thrones ruling the 12 tribes of Israel, and eat and drink with him at his table (Matt. 19:28. Lk. 22:30). In Rev. 21 the 12 foundations of the wall around the city are named after them.

If it be wondered who will sit at Christ's right and left hand, this question has already been put to him and his answer was: "It shall be granted to those for whom my father has prepared it" (Matt. 20:23).

Is it possible that there will also be 12 Gentile apostles, making a total of 24? One thing is certain: angels will not be ruling and reigning with Christ. It is taught in Heb. 2:5 that the age to come will not be put into subjection to their rule. When Christ comes to reign with his church in Rev. 19, we hear no more of the 24 elders in the ensuing chapters!

Jesus, of course, as we read in Rev. 3:11, 21 promised that all who overcome and hold fast to their crown, will sit with him in his throne. This implies that they will sit with him with their crowns. However, this hardly means that the millions who rule and reign with Christ will literally sit with him on the same throne! Sitting with him in his throne means representing him and exercising his authority, sharing in his rule and reign. The power of his throne will be behind those who rule with him. Wherever they are sent and commissioned to rule, they will have the full authority of the throne behind them.

OTHER REFERENCES TO 24

There are several occasions when the number 24 comes up in relation to the kingdom of God on earth when David was king, as a result of divine appointment.

For example, in 1 Chr. 24 we read that Aaron's descendants through his two surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were divided into 24 orders or courses, performing priestly ministry in the tabernacle by rotation, each course having a turn for a term each year (Lk. 1:5).

1 Chr. 25 records how the Levite clans of Asaph, Heman and

Jeduthun were chosen to lead the services of praise and worship. They were to proclaim God's messages in song, accompanied by the music of harps and cymbals. Asaph's 4 sons, Jeduthun's 6 sons and Heman's 14 sons, made a total of 24. These 24, along with other trained and skilled musicians among the Levites, totalled 288. They were all divided into 24 groups of 12, each group being led by one of the 24 sons, rotating their duties turn about, and casting lots for their duties.

The number 24 comes up again in 1 Chr. 27:1-15 where we read that the Israeli army was divided into 12 regiments, each consisting of 24,000 troops, including officers and administrative staff. Each unit was called up for active duty one month each year, involving the administration of the kingdom.

The 24 orders of priests in 1 Chr. 24 represented the sum total of priests, involving many thousand. There were too many to serve at the same time, so they took turns and served by rotation. Is it possible that the number 24 in Rev. 4 in relation to 24 elders, suggests rotation? Significantly enough, the complete cycle of a day involves 24 hourly rotations.

It may be that the saints themselves, in the age to come when equal to the angels, will have turns sitting around the throne of God in His immediate presence.

The comparison between the 24 elders and 24 courses of priests is made more plausible by the fact that both groups are depicted with harps. (Rev. 5:8. 1 Chr. 25).

CLOTHED IN WHITE RAIMENT

It is stated in Rev. 4:4 that the 24 elders were "clothed in white raiment." The "white raiment" no doubt refers to linen garments. It is evident from other Scripture that angel's garments are made of linen (Rev. 15:6. Ezk. 9:2, 3, 11. 10:2, 6, 7. Dan. 10:5. 12:6-7).

There are also other references to angels being clothed in white garments and dressed in white apparel, and they also no doubt involve linen. (Matt. 28:3. Mk. 16:5. Jn. 20:12. Act. 1:10).

Linen is made from flax fibre, a product of the earth, which suggests products of the earth are used to make angel's garments, unless of course they are created in heaven.

However, it is interesting to note that the golden girdle worn by the angel in Dan. 10:5 was made of "gold from Uphaz." Uphaz was a place on earth from which gold was procured, as we read in Jer. 10:9. (Some

believe it was another name for Ophir, which was well known as a source of gold).

If, therefore, the gold used to make the angel's girdle came from earth, the linen out of which his and other angel's garments are made, could also have come from earth. This would mean that earth's resources have not only been created to supply clothing for mortal man, but also immortals such as angels and those who will ultimately be made equal with them.

The priests in Old Testament times wore linen garments, and Jesus, the high priest after the order of Melchizedec, also wears linen. He is referred to in Rev. 1:13 as being "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle." The Greek word translated "garment down to the foot" is the same word used in the Greek Old Testament in relation to linen.

All the members of Christ's church will also ultimately wear linen garments. The reference in Rev. 19:14 to armies dressed in linen, following Christ, is generally regarded as referring to the church. Certainly the reference in Rev. 3:4-5 to those who will be "clothed in white raiment" and "walk in white" with Jesus, is to the church. Also 3:18. 6:11. 7:9.

In view of the millions of people involved, a considerable amount of flax will be required to make their garments, which can raise some interesting questions. It is also interesting to consider where, when and how they will be made and by whom, and at what point of time they will be bestowed. The angels will no doubt be involved in all this!

Some of the references to the garments of angels not only refer to them being white, but "white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). The same expression is used of the garment of the "Ancient of days" in Dan. 7:9.

When Jesus was transfigured, his garment became "dazzling, glistening white like snow, whiter than anyone could bleach them - white as the light." (Matt. 17:2. Mk 9:3. Lk. 9:29).

While it is true that linen can be bleached very white and become quite bright, the whiteness of Christ's garment and the angels obviously exceeded that. It was clearly due to the radiating effect of the power and glory of God, for not only did Christ's garment become white as the light, but his face shone as the sun.

It has been said that there is only one original colour - white. Everything else is mixed. White light, such as sunlight, can be broken up into the colours of the rainbow, and these colours, when combined, form white light. In this sense, white is the original unmixed colour, and

typifies spirit - power. For this reason God is likened to the sun (Ps. 84:11), and when His power transfigured Jesus, his face shone as the sun.

Because Jesus now radiates the glory of God, “his countenance is as the sun shines in his strength” (Rev. 1:16). Act. 26:13 refers to him being “brighter than the brightness of the sun,” and Heb. 1:3 refers to “the brightness of his glory.” His second coming is therefore referred to in terms of “the sun of righteousness arising with healing in his beams” (Mal. 4:2). His coming will obviously be very bright and glorious, and the apostle Paul refers to it in terms of “the brightness of his coming” (2 Thes. 2:8).

In view of the whiteness and brightness of God’s power, it is therefore appropriate that Jesus and the angels who possess and radiate that power, and the saints who will ultimately possess and radiate the same, should be dressed in white. The ultimate destiny of the saints is to be real stars - dazzling and sparkling like stars! (Dan. 12:3).

We are not told in Rev. 4:4 if the 24 elders were dazzling glistening white, but it would not be surprising if they were. If so, encircling the throne of God as they do, they would form, as it were, a halo of bright white light, brighter than the sun, around the throne. What a sight to behold with the even greater glory of God in the centre with the emerald rainbow around it.

WHY AND WHEN DID ANGELS START WEARING WHITE?

White also of course, signifies righteousness and holiness. Rev. 19:8 for example explains that the “fine linen, clean and white,” with which the church will be clothed, represents the “righteousness (righteous deeds) of the saints.”

Righteous deeds involve right living - obedience to the commandments of God - a clean, pure and holy lifestyle. Angels are certainly holy and obey God’s commandments (Ps. 103:20-21), and for this reason it is also fitting that the 24 elders are seen clothed in white raiment.

But it is interesting to note that as far as the saints are concerned in Rev. 19:7-8, they are clothed in the white linen after, or as a result of righteous deeds. Righteous deeds - living a holy, righteous and obedient life preceded the wearing of the white linen garment.

This raises the question: If the saints have to go through a probation period, living by faith and obedience, before becoming equal to the angels and being clothed in white like them, what about the angels themselves?

Did they receive their immortality and white garments as a hand-out, with no probation - no testing of faith and obedience, or did they have a similar probation experience like the saints?

If Jesus, the very begotten son of God, could not attain to immortality without a mortal experience involving tests and trials, is it conceivable that angels could?

It seems to be a fixed Divine principle that it is impossible to please God and attain to immortality without obedient faith (Heb. 11:6). And, in view of the fact that faith involves having conviction and confidence in things that are hoped for which cannot be seen (Heb. 11:1), it would not be surprising if angels, like ourselves, had to go through a period of probation during which they were not in heaven and not able to see God, and had to believe and hope for immortality.

Scripture makes it clear that an untried faith is valueless to God. It is only the faith that passes tests and trials that is precious to God (1 Pet. 1:7). Such testing involves encountering and experiencing temptation, which, if yielded to, results in sin which produces numerous evils such as mortality and various curses that go with it.

According to Gen. 3:5, 22, this is what resulted from Adam and Eve's sin. They ended up "knowing good and evil." They came to know experimentally good and evil. The evil they experienced was a mortal sinful nature, and the sorrow, sickness, suffering and death that it involves. As a result of experiencing such "evil," they then came to know, understand and appreciate as never before, the "good" they had experienced prior to the introduction of such evil.

Good and evil are relative conditions and the one cannot be fully known, understood or appreciated without the existence of the other. Adam and Eve did not know how good their situation in paradise was until they were expelled and experienced evil. They then came to "know" both good and evil.

It is significant that when God warned Adam and Eve about the consequences of sin, He said: "You shall be as gods (angels) knowing good and evil." This teaches that angels know and have experienced good and evil in the same sense as Adam and Eve and their posterity. If so, this indicates that angels were once in a sin-stricken state, involving mortality and its accompanying curses. In this state they, like us, were required to live by faith and hope, doing righteous deeds. Those who were obedient were clothed in white raiment, made immortal and became angels. The 24 elders are part of this company.

According to Isa. 45:18, God did not originally create the earth in

vain. That is, He did not create it a chaos, without form. (The Hebrew word translated “in vain” is “tohu.” It is the same word translated “without form” in Gen. 1:2).

According to Gen. 1:2 in the Authorised Version, “the earth was without form” prior to God creating man. But, because the Hebrew word “hayah” translated “was,” means “to be or become” and is translated “became” 65 times and “become” 68 times in the Old Testament, some translators translate it as “the earth became formless.”

If then the earth was not originally created formless, why did it become formless? Why did God inundate it with water? Well, if history is anything to go by, it could have been a judgement. Due to sin and rebellion, the earth was later plunged into an identical state in Noah’s day. If this was the reason for the chaos in Gen. 1:2, it would imply that mortal men were living on earth prior to the creation of Adam and Eve.

In view of this it is tempting to consider that this is where the angels came from. Planet earth could have been their probation arena as well as ours! It is clear from Heb. 12:22-23 that we are ultimately going to live together with them in the city of God when it comes to earth, so it would be rather fitting if we were all tested and put through our probation processes on the same planet.

It is not difficult to imagine sin increasing upon earth during the probation period of those who were to become angels, ultimately ending in the judgement of God in the form of a universal flood, as in Noah’s day, causing the earth to become formless as we read in Gen. 1:2.

The fact that angels differ in rank also suggests that a period of probation preceded glory.

If the rank of members of the church is to be governed by diligence and application during mortal life, as is indicated in Lk. 19:12-27, why should it be any different for angels? It is hard to believe that God has dished out ranks and positions willy-nilly to the angels, without any moral or spiritual qualities or qualifications, reasons or factors being involved.

Rank before God is not a superficial, mechanical, perfunctory or arbitrary matter. In order to sit at the right hand of God on His throne, Jesus had to endure and overcome much trial and tribulation and set an exceedingly high standard of faith and obedience. Surely the 24 elders who sit on thrones around the throne of God also had to endure trials of some sort, and set some standard of faith and obedience!

CROWNS ON THEIR HEADS

After stating that the 24 elders were sitting on 24 thrones clothed in white raiment, Rev. 4:4 says: “And they had on their heads crowns of gold.”

The Greek word for “crowns” is “stephanos.” It is derived from “stepho” which means “to twine or wreath; that which surrounds or encircles.”

In New Testament times “stephanos” signified a wreath or a garland of flowers used in connection with athletic events. Winners in Grecian games were given “crowns” or wreaths that were usually made of the leaves of trees and adorned with flowers. It was a symbol of triumph and victory. Such crowns or wreaths were also bestowed as a token of honour for distinguishing service and military prowess etc.

Stephanos is used in the New Testament to signify the reward or prize received by all Christians whose faith persistently battles with sin in the flesh to the end; those who fight the good fight of faith and run the race to eternal life with patience. See 1 Cor. 9:25. 2 Tim. 4:8. Jam. 1:12. 1 Pet. 5:4. Rev. 2:10. 3:11.

There is another Greek word translated “crown” in the New Testament, namely: “diadema,” and Vine says it is never used as stephanos is. Diadema is always the symbol of royal rule, kingly authority and dignity. In the revised versions it is translated “diadem” instead of “crown.” It only occurs 3 times in the New Testament, all in the book of Revelation (12:3. 13:1. 19:12). In these verses it signifies the rule respectively of the dragon, beast and Christ.

The crowns (stephanos) worn by the 24 elders in Rev. 4 are gold, not leaves or flowers that can wither and fade away. And the fact that they are stephanos, not diadema, i.e. wreaths associated with victory in athletics or military service, suggests they represent reward for service - service that involved conquering, overcoming, triumphing.

The fact that the same crown that will be given to the saints is symbolic of being an overcomer during a probation period involving tests and trials, suggests the same or similar application be given to the 24 elders. Reasons have already been given which indicate angels have been through a probation period.

OTHER REFERENCES TO THE 24 ELDERS

Other references to the 24 elders in the book of Revelation are: 4:10. 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14. 7:11, 13. 11:16. 14:3. 19:4. A brief look at these will enable us to learn more about the elders.

1. Rev. 4:10. Reference is made here to the 24 elders falling down from their thrones and casting their “crowns” before the throne of God as they fall down to worship Him. This is the first reference in the book of Revelation to them falling down from their thrones (i.e. dropping to a prostrate position) but not the last. There are references to them doing this on 5 different occasions. It is evident that the 24 elders are not motionless. They do not remain fixed and stationary on their thrones without moving.

Rev. 4:10 is the only reference in the book of Revelation to the elders casting their crowns before the throne of God. It seems that they removed their crowns as their heads bent down to worship. It would be inappropriate to prostrate in worship with crowns on their heads. Casting their crowns before the throne of God is an act of submission - a symbolic gesture of returning to God the emblem of victory given to them, acknowledging Him as the source of all power and victory. (There is no reference to them collecting their crowns). Their position in glory around the throne is not due solely to their own might and power, righteous deeds and effort, but to the Spirit and grace of God (Zech. 4:6), so the furthest thing from their minds is to exalt themselves in the presence of God. They are quick and eager to acknowledge their own inferiority and dependence on God. Although they are on thrones in highly exalted positions, they acknowledge the sovereignty and superiority of the One seated on the throne in their midst. Christendom’s doctrine of Lucifer being one of these highly exalted angels who was full of pride and coveted God’s throne, contradicts what Revelation says about them.

2. Rev. 5:5. In this verse we read that one of the 24 elders spoke to John and comforted him. (Did this elder remain seated on his throne when he talked to John or did he leave it to approach John? Either way, John must have been near the circle of thrones upon which the 24 elders were seated, and therefore near the throne of God).

We learn from Rev. 5:5 that the 24 elders have compassion. This confirms that they can be touched by human feelings and emotions. They are not unemotional machines or robots. They exercise initiative. They are not so focussed upon, pre-occupied and absorbed by the glory of God’s presence, that they cannot see or notice the needs of man. They are not so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good! Other Scriptures relating

to angels and angelic ministry bear this out. For example Dan. 10:10-11. Matt. 18:10.

3. Rev. 5:6. We learn from this verse that the 24 elders not only form a circle around the throne of God, but also the Lamb (Christ). The Lamb is referred to as being “in the midst” of both the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures, which is the position of the throne of God.

4. Rev. 5:8-10. In these verses we are told that the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb in worship as they did to Father God in 4:10. Such is the Father’s will, for He declared long ago that it was His intention for the angels to worship His son (Ps. 97:7. Heb. 1:6). This is the second reference to the 24 elders falling. They obviously sat back on their thrones after falling in 4:10 and did not remain permanently prostrate on the floor.

Each of the 24 elders are musicians because they are depicted holding a harp in one hand and a golden bowl in the other. They are seen falling down holding their harps and bowls. They may represent an elite group of musicians who play in the immediate vicinity of the throne of God. In view of the fact that they also cast their crowns before God’s throne, they certainly seem to have their hands full! They obviously do not remain in a prostrate position, because they sing while playing the harps. It is hard to imagine them doing this lying face down on the floor.

There is quite a theme in the book of Revelation on the 24 elders and 4 living creatures falling down in worship before both the Father and son. And it is interesting to note that new and different doxologies follow each action of prostration and worship.

The elders and angels don’t repeat the same hymn or chorus every time they sing. They have an extensive (unlimited) range or repertoire of songs. They clearly love music and song, especially when played and sung to the glory of the Father and son, which again indicates they have much heart and emotion. The atmosphere in heaven is highly charged with emotion.

Rev. 5:8 says “every one” of the 24 elders have harps and bowls in their hands. (In its context the “every one” could include the 4 living creatures). According to v8, the golden bowls are full of incense and represent the prayers of the saints. It is evident from this that angels are identified with the prayers of the saints. This is borne out in Rev. 8:3 which refers to an angel coming to the altar holding a golden censer containing incense “to offer up with the prayers of the saints.”

Other Scriptures which relate to angels being involved with the prayers of the saints are: Dan. 9:21-23. 10:12. Act. 10:3-4.

Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister on behalf of the

saints. They present their prayers and petitions to the throne of grace where Jesus intercedes and mediates. Does the fact that the angels have a harp in one hand and a golden bowl of incense (prayers) in the other hand, suggest they play and sing as they offer up incense? Does the new song in Rev. 5:9-10 which gives praise to Christ for redeeming men by his blood out of all nations, have any bearing on the golden bowls of incense? If so, then the prayers of the saints, represented by the incense, are not just petitions, but also praise, centring on their redemption in Christ and hope of the kingdom.

5. Rev. 5:11. As we have seen, the 24 elders formed part of an inner circle around the throne of God. And Rev. 5:11 informs us that “many angels” - “ten thousand times ten thousand” (100 million) encircled the 24 elders and 4 living creatures. A double circle of angels therefore surrounded the throne - an inner and outer circle and the 24 elders were clearly on the inner.

In Rev. 5:12-13 we read that all who are involved in both the inner and outer circle lift their voices together in praise and worship to the Father and son. Then in v14 we are told that the 4 living creatures say “amen,” no doubt in the deep thunderous voice that they have which causes the throne room to vibrate. As they sing the amen, the 24 elders fall down prostrate from their thrones again (third time) and worship God. Truly, a very dramatic scene, and one day we will be part of it as the next text reveals:

6. Rev. 7:9-14. This scene projects us into the future millennial reign of Christ, and depicts the saints standing before the same throne that the angels, 24 elders and 4 living creatures stand before, all worshipping together. In view of the fact that there are over 100 million angels involved, a huge circle of worshippers will be involved when the multitudes of saints are added to it. Obviously an enormous throne room would be required to accommodate these numbers. In view of the fact that the city of God is hundreds of miles square, there will be no shortage of room!

7. Rev. 11:15-. This passage contains the 4th reference to the 24 elders sitting on their thrones and falling on their faces in worship as a result of the 7th trumpet proclamation concerning the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdom of God. The 24 elders offer thanks and praise to God for using His power to accomplish this and their words of worship are recorded here.

8. Rev. 14:3. The 24 elders are referred to here in connection with the 144,000. A great multitude is seen in the city of God (heaven) above

Mount Zion singing a new song before the throne of God and before the 24 elders and 4 living creatures, while Christ stands on Mount Zion with the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel.

9. Rev. 19:4. This is the last reference to the 24 elders in the book of Revelation. It is the 5th time that they are referred to as falling down and worshipping God, and as they do so, they say “amen; alleluia.” (The 4 living creatures also fall down and worship with the 24 elders). This is in response to praise offered to God by a multitude in heaven for executing judgement on the great whore due to her corrupting the earth and shedding the blood of the saints.

LIGHTNINGS

The 4th aspect in relation to the throne of God in Rev. 4 is mentioned in v5: “And out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings and voices.”

This is quite a dramatic scene. Imagine the glory of God like a jasper and sardius stone along with the encircling emerald rainbow, with brilliant flashes of lightning darting forth, followed by roaring peals of thunder and loud voices.

It is very reminiscent of the manifestation of the presence of God at Sinai where there were also “thunders and lightnings and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud” (Ex. 19:16-19. 20:18). As pointed out previously, it is quite possible the city of God descended to Sinai and hovered above, being concealed by the thick dark clouds that clothed the area. (Wherever the mobile throne travelled, the lightning would go with it). The lightning was not striking anyone in heaven’s city in Rev. 4, and neither did it strike anyone in Ex. 19.

When Moses and the Israelites witnessed the lightning, thunder and voice, they trembled with fear. But there is no reference to John reacting this way and neither shall the saints when they are gathered to the city of God in high festival with myriads of angels. (Heb. 12:18-24). “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “Perfect love casts out all fear” (1 Jn. 4:18). “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

OTHER EXAMPLES

Lightning is associated with other divine manifestations as well. For example, we read in Ezk. 1:13 that lightning went forth from the

burning coals of fire between the 4 living creatures (cherubim). And v14 says the cherubim themselves darted to and fro like a flash of lightning.

Dan. 10:6 says: "The face of the angel was as the appearance of lightning," and Matt. 28:3 refers to the countenance of an angel being like lightning. The second coming of Christ is also likened to the brightness of lightning (Matt. 24:27).

Lightning and thunder conveys to us a storm, which can involve violence and destruction. As we know, there is incredible power in lightning. It has a devastating effect when it strikes. All the other references in the book of Revelation to lightnings and thunderings from the throne of God relate to divine judgement and wrath upon the wicked (8:5. 11:19. 16:18).

There are also a number of examples in the Old Testament of lightning and thunder being involved when divine judgement was executed. For example, fire was sent by God from heaven upon Egypt during the outpouring of plagues to punish Pharaoh (Ex. 9:23-24).

1 Sam. 2:10 says: "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He (God) thunder upon them." (Where there is thunder there is lightning).

1 Sam. 7:10: "The Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines and threw them into panic and confusion and Israel smote them."

1 Sam. 12:17-18: "The Lord will send thunder and rain (at the time of wheat harvest) that you may perceive how great your wickedness is."

2 Sam. 22:15 (Ps. 18:14): "He (God) sent out arrows and scattered them (the enemy); lightnings, and routed them." In this Hebrew parallelism, lightnings are referred to as divine arrows.

In ancient times the pagans believed lightning was a weapon hurled by their gods, but there is only one God, the God seen by John in Revelation, and He alone can control lightning.

Ps. 97:3-4: "A fire goes before Him (God) and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings lighted the world: the earth saw and trembled."

Ps. 144:5-6: "Bow Thy heavens, O Lord, and come down: touch the mountains and they shall smoke. Cast forth lightning and scatter them; shoot out Thine arrows and destroy them."

In Isa. 29:6, God's judgement upon the enemy by which Israel is saved and delivered, is referred to as "thunder and earthquake, great noise with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire."

Ezk. 21:10, 15, 28 refers to the sword of the Lord being sharpened

for the slaughter, and polished that it may flash like lightning. Lightning is here likened to the sword of the Lord. The sword of the Lord is swift and destructive like lightning!

Zech. 9:14: “And the Lord shall be seen over them (His people) and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning, and the Lord shall blow the trumpet, and shall march in the storms of the south.”

In these and most other cases in Scripture where reference is made to lightning and thunder, it relates to judgement and destruction. This is not surprising because lightning and thunder in the human experience involve storms which can be violent and destructive. When lightning comes in contact with humans it is usually hurtful or fatal.

So then, the lightnings and thunders proceeding out of the throne of God remind us that God is not only a God of mercy but also a God of judgement. He is a God of grace and mercy to those who are humble and obedient, but a God of judgement and consuming fire to those who are proud and disobedient.

When Israel witnessed the awesome power of God’s presence at Sinai in the thunderings and lightnings, they were humbled and trembled with fear, and God was pleased with this response. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Pr. 1:7). “To this man will I look, even him who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word” (Isa. 66:2). But it is a sad commentary on human nature that God sometimes has to “flex His muscles” in order to humble the flesh. (Isa. 26:9).

It is possible that the rainbow around the throne coupled with the lightnings and thunder which proceed from the throne, signifies mercy and judgement. Ps. 89:14 expresses it like this: “Justice and judgement are the foundation of Thy throne: mercy and truth are always in attendance before Thee.” Ps. 97:2 says: “Righteousness and judgement are the foundation of His throne.”

Isa. 16:5: “In mercy shall the throne be established, and the ruler shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness.”

The lightnings proceeding out of the throne are pulsations of Divine power emanating from the presence of God. They are not striking or hurting anyone, but could be directed at anytime upon anyone in judgement, causing destruction and death. The scene may be intended to suggest a storm of Divine judgement is brewing; i.e. God’s anger is being aroused and judgement is impending. Later on in the book of Revelation, the wrath of God is released from the throne and is manifested in judgements upon the earth causing destruction and death.

THUNDERINGS AND VOICES

Regarding the “thunderings”: In God’s natural creation, thunder is the loud roaring noise that follows a flash of lightning due to a discharge of electricity which heats the air and causes it to expand violently. Is the thundering in Rev. 4:5 also a loud roaring noise reverberating around heaven caused by the discharge of divine power? It certainly seems to have been at Mount Sinai. The noise was so great it caused the earth to shake (Heb. 12:26. Also see Ps. 29:8).

Elsewhere, of course, the voice of God and angels is referred to as being like thunder. (Job 37:1-5. Ps. 29. Isa. 6:3-4. Ezk. 1:24. Jn. 12:29. Rev. 6:1. 10:3-4. 14:2. 19:6). However, the fact that reference is made to “thunderings and voices” in Rev. 4:5 indicates the thunderings were not voices, but a roar separate from them.

The “voices” proceed from the throne. “Voices” implies more than one, yet only one (Father God) is upon the throne. However, the 4 living creatures whose voices are like thunder, are “in the midst of the throne” (v6). And v8 says they rest not night or day, saying “Holy, holy, holy” Is each “holy” like a peal of thunder?

The book of Revelation also records many “voices” coming forth from the room where the throne is situated. In fact, the words “voice” and “voices” occur over 50 times. There are the voices of angels and archangels; the 24 elders as well as the 4 living creatures, giving praise and worship, ascribing glory and honour to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb.

What a scene to behold as brilliant flashes of lightning dart forth from the shining radiant splendour of the glory of God which sparkles like a diamond, followed by the deep loud awesome roar of thunder that reverberates throughout heaven’s city, causing it to vibrate, accompanied by the voices of praise and adulation of the 4 living creatures and over 100 million angels (Rev. 5:11-14).

If the lightnings and thunderings signify that a storm of divine judgement is brewing and impending - the judgement of the last day, the accompanying “voices” of “Holy holy holy” uttered by the 4 living creatures in the midst of the throne, could signify the truth expressed elsewhere, that God’s judgements are holy and righteous (Rev. 6:10. 16:5, 7. 19:2).

There are also of course many “voices” in the book of Revelation in relation to commands, decrees, doxologies. (4:1. 10:7, 48. 11:2, 17. 12:10. 14:13. 16:1, 17. 18:4. 19:5. 21:3). In view of all these “voices,” we can

appreciate the impact of “silence in heaven” for half an hour (8:1). In view of the deafening roar of divine thunder, it would be a deathly silence!

SEVEN LAMPS OF FIRE

The 5th feature mentioned in relation to the throne room in Rev. 4:5 is that “there were 7 lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the 7 Spirits of God.”

7 lamps of fire immediately reminds us of the Menorah - the 7 branched golden lampstand in the holy place of the tabernacle and temple. Its oil was replenished every morning and evening, causing it to burn continually.

The 7 lamps of fire in Rev. 4 are obviously not inanimate lampstands made of gold. They are “the 7 Spirits of God.” In view of the fact that angels are Spirits (Heb. 1:7, 14. Ps. 104:4), it is generally accepted that the 7 Spirits are 7 angels.

The reference to them being “lamps of fire” calls to mind Heb. 1:7 and Ps. 104:4 which state that God makes angels a flame or flaming fire.

Examples of fire being involved in the ministry and manifestation of angels are found in Ex. 3:2. 13:21. Judg. 13:20. 6:21. 2 Kng. 2:11. 6:17. Ezk. ch. 1 and 10. Dan. 3:25. Act. 2:3.

Fire can be used in both a constructive and destructive manner. It can be used to give light and warmth, and it can also be used to consume and destroy. The ministry of angels can also be constructive or destructive!

Being “before the throne,” it is believed that the 7 Spirits are the 7 angels referred to in Rev. 8:2 who “stood before God,” and who blew 7 trumpets to herald end time events.

SEVEN ARCHANGELS?

The 7th trumpet is the “last trump” referred to in 1 Cor. 15:52. And in 1 Thes. 4:16 it is associated with the voice of an archangel. On this basis it could be concluded that the 7 Spirits are 7 archangels. If so, Michael could be one of these because he is referred to as an archangel in Jude v9.

“Arch” means chief, pre-eminent. In Dan. 10:13 Michael is referred to as “one of the chief princes,” implying there are more. (6 more?). And in Dan. 12:1 Michael is referred to as “the great prince” who has charge of Israel. Daniel therefore, who represented Israel, was told that Michael was

“your prince” (10:21).

The “prince of the host of the Lord” who appeared to Joshua to help Israel conquer the land, was probably Michael also (Josh. 5:14).

If archangels are “chief princes,” who are the “princes” under them among the angels? Could it be the 24 elders? It would certainly be appropriate for princes to sit on thrones as do the 24 elders. If so, the reference to “princes” in the divine title “prince of princes” in Dan. 8:25, would embrace both the archangels and 24 elders.

Reference is also made in Rev. 15:1 to 7 angels having the 7 last plagues which represent the wrath of God to be poured out upon the earth in the end time. These 7 angels are seen coming out of the temple (city of God) with the 7 plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles like Christ in 1:13. Are these 7 the same 7 archangels who blow the trumpets? If so, the angel in Dan. 10:5 who is similarly attired could also be one of the archangels; and the angel in Rev. 10 whose description is similar to the angel in Dan. 10, could be an archangel as well, possibly the same one.

THE TRUE TRINITY

The 7 Spirits of God are referred to for the first time at the beginning of the book of Revelation in chapter 1:4. In this verse, the benediction of grace and peace is given to the churches, not only by Father God and His son Jesus Christ, but also the 7 Spirits before the throne.

Instead of the benediction coming from the Father, son and Holy Spirit, it comes from the Father, son and angels. This three-fold grouping of Father, son and angels also occurs in 1 Tim. 5:21: “I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels.” It would be natural for a Trinitarian to wonder why reference is made to angels instead of the Holy Spirit. It would also be natural to wonder why it is that in the doxologies in the book of Revelation, reference is made to the Father and son on the throne, but never the Holy Spirit. Praise and worship is offered to the Father and son, but never to the Holy Spirit. Why not, if the Holy Spirit is an equal person in the God Head?

Various Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is the power of Father God by which He created heaven and earth, performs signs and miracles, and with which He anointed His son, making him the Christ. (Jer. 32:17. Lk. 1:35. Act. 10:38. Mic. 3:8).

Angels, of course, are energised and empowered by God’s Spirit.

This is why they are referred to as the chariots of God (Ps. 68:17). They are vehicles of His Spirit or power.

A theme involving countless Scriptures weaves its way through the Bible, relating to angels inspired and empowered to speak and act on behalf of God. They minister in God's name and to encounter them is as good as encountering God. So much so, that many references in Scripture to God, actually refer to an angel who was sent to represent Him!

In the aggregate, angels are "spirits" (Heb. 1:7, 14), because they are instruments and manifestations of the Spirit of God. However, individually, each angel is a "spirit" (1 Kng. 22:21). And, being "holy" (Act. 10:22), each angel is a Holy Spirit. It is not surprising therefore, that there is an intimate connection between the Spirit or Holy Spirit and an angel or angels in many Scriptures.

References in the book of Acts are particularly interesting in which reference to an angel is coupled with reference to the Spirit, leaving us with the distinct impression that "angel" and "Spirit" occur synonymously.

For example, in Act. 8:26 we read that "the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip," and then v29 continues by saying "the Spirit said to Philip." The same applies in Act. 10:3, 7, 19. 11:12-13.

It is also interesting that when Jesus promised the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, he said: "He will guide you into all truth and he will show you things that are to come" (Jn. 16). Of particular interest are the words: "He will show you things that are to come." The greatest showing of things to come was the Revelation given to the apostle John. Rev. 1:1 reads like this: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show his servants things that must shortly come to pass."

Now, the question is: How did Jesus "show" these things? Jn. 16:13 says it would be through "the Comforter," and Rev. 1:1 says it was by "his angel."

From this it seems reasonable to conclude that the Comforter, "the Spirit of truth," is an angel - possibly one of the 7 archangels before the throne in Rev. 1:4, who joined with the Father and son in sending grace and peace to the churches. Being a "chief prince," this archangel would have squadrons of angels under his control, acting as ministering Spirits with him to the church.

As a high ranking angel (Michael?) was appointed to superintend Israel's affairs on her journey through the wilderness to the promised land, it seems that a high ranking angel was also appointed to empower and superintend the New Testament church. He acted on behalf of, and was

under the authority of Jesus. As Jesus said: “He will not speak of himself (i.e. on his own initiative or authority), but whatever he hears he shall speak. He shall glorify me, for he shall take what is mine and declare it to you.” (Jn. 16:13-14).

And so, when the day of Pentecost came, Jesus sent his angel from heaven to empower his church. In view of the fact that God makes His angels flames of fire, it is surely significant that the Holy Spirit was manifested on the day of Pentecost as flames of fire (Act. 2:3). (This does not mean that the angels personally possessed the apostles, but that they imparted to the apostles the power they possessed).

When Peter said: “This is that spoken of by the prophet Joel,” he did not say “this is a fulfilment of that.” He couldn’t because it wasn’t. It is clear from the context of Joel’s prophecy that it relates to the end time. Peter’s words are therefore more likely to mean: “This is the same Spirit as that spoken of by the prophet Joel.” What happened on the day of Pentecost was an example of the end time move of the Holy Spirit, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:28-32).

The end time empowering by the Holy Spirit is referred to in Rev. 11:3: “I will give power to my two witnesses.” This empowering results in God’s witnesses prophesying and performing signs and wonders for 1260 days. We know from this reference to the 1260 days that the prophecy relates to the end time, for it is an end time period mentioned in other prophecies as we shall see in our study of the book of Revelation.

Of particular interest in relation to the subject in hand, is that the “I” who “gives power” in Rev. 11:3, is the mighty angel seen coming down from heaven in Rev. 10. And the description of him links him with the angel (archangel) in Dan. 10 who also talked about the end time 1260 days (Dan. 12:7).

It is surely evident that if one Scripture says the Holy Spirit gives power and another refers to an angel giving it, that there is some kind of connection. In such cases the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power, but a powerful person, manifesting the person of God who is the source and fountain of all power.

SEVEN GIFTS OR SEVEN ANGELS?

Coming back to the 7 lamps or spirits before the throne of God: we read in Rev. 3:1 that Jesus “hath the 7 spirits of God.” Some have interpreted the word “hath” to mean that Jesus possesses the 7 spirits and therefore apply them to the ministry gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are

related to the Messianic prophecy in Isa. 11:2-3 which refers to 7 functions of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Christ: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom (1), and understanding (2), the Spirit of counsel (3), and might (4), the Spirit of knowledge (5), and of the fear of the Lord (6); and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord” (7).

But it is clearly stated that these 7 gifts or abilities are imparted by the “Spirit” of God, not Spirits of God. There is only one Spirit as far as the personal inherent power of God is concerned (Eph. 4:4). And this one Spirit can impart a variety of gifts, and inspire many forms of operations. In connection with this, see 1 Cor. 12:4-11. It is evident from this passage of Scripture that as far as the gifts are concerned, there is only one Spirit, but many manifestations.

1 Cor. 12:8-10 lists 9 gifts of the Spirit, not 7, and it would be theologically incorrect for anyone who had the 9 to say “I have 9 Spirits.” The proper Scriptural way to express it would be: “I have 9 gifts of the Spirit.” The gifts, being many, are plural, but the Spirit, being one, is singular.

The statement therefore, in Rev. 3:1 that Jesus “hath the 7 Spirits of God” does not relate to him possessing the gifts of the Spirit.

The significance of the statement is indicated by what follows. Not only does Rev. 3:1 state that Jesus “hath the 7 Spirits of God” but also that he hath “the 7 stars.” The stars are explained in Rev. 1:20 to be the 7 messengers of the 7 churches, and in verse 16 of the same chapter Jesus is depicted as holding the 7 stars in his right hand. This signifies that Jesus has control over them, and this is what is meant in Rev. 3:1 where it says he hath the 7 stars.

The same applies to the 7 Spirits of God. As already pointed out, Rev. 1:4 refers to the 7 Spirits standing before the throne of God, joining in with the Father and son in sending grace and peace to the 7 churches in Asia. As already explained, they are archangels, and Jesus has control over them. All power and authority has been given to him by his Father in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). “Angels, authorities and powers are subject to him” (1 Pet. 3:22). This is what is meant by the statement that he “hath the 7 Spirits.”

The authority and control that Jesus has over the 7 archangels is indicated in Rev. 5:6 where he is depicted as a lamb, “having 7 horns and 7 eyes” which are explained to signify “the 7 Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” (Also see Zech. 3:9 and 4:10). A lamb of course, has complete control of its horns and eyes; the horns don’t control the lamb!

“Horns” in the Bible signify power, and “eyes” signify sight and perception. As a lamb uses its horns to exert its power and accomplish its will, and uses its eyes to see and perceive, so Jesus uses the angels to be watchmen over his church, and to exert divine power for the benefit of the church.

Rev. 5:6 says the 7 Spirits are sent forth into all the earth. Why? Because Christ’s church is universal - in all the earth. But they are not only sent on missions to minister to the church. They are also sent to execute judgement upon those who have opposed and persecuted the church. In Rev. 15:6. 16:1 they are seen leaving the city-temple and going their way on a judgement mission.

In Rev. 17:1. 21:9 we read that one of the 7 angels came and talked to John. In the first instance he wanted to show John the great harlot, and in the second instance he wanted to show him the bride of Christ.

It is interesting to notice in the book of Revelation how the different celestial beings converse with John. For example, the trumpet voice in 1:10. 4:1 was probably an archangel - the “Comforter.” One of the 24 elders spoke to John in 5:5. 7:13. One of the 4 living creatures spoke to him in 6:1. A voice from heaven spoke to him in 10:4, 8-11. And 19:5. 21:5 refers to a voice coming from the throne, from the one upon the throne.

John talked with representatives from all the different levels of heaven’s hierarchy!

In concluding this section, it should hardly be necessary to point out that a distinction needs to be made between the 7 angels of heaven before the throne of God, referred to as 7 spirits, and the 7 angels in Rev. 1:20 which are signified by the 7 stars held in the right hand of Jesus in v16. Verse 20 says the stars represent the angels of the 7 churches, and a message is sent to each one of them to read to each church.

The Greek word “angelos” translated “angel” literally means “messenger,” and equally applies to both human and divine messengers. For example, in 2 Pet. 2:4 “angels” refers to human messengers but in v11 the same word occurs again and refers to divine messengers.

Examples of angelos being translated “messenger” and “messengers” in relation to humans can be seen in Matt. 11:10. Lk. 7:24. 9:52. Jam. 2:25.

Examples of “angel” or “angels” referring to a human messenger or messengers are: Act. 12:15. 2 Cor. 11:14. Matt. 25:41. 1 Cor. 6:3. 2 Pet. 2:4. Jude v6. Rev. 1:20. 12:7, 9.

The 7 angels in Rev. 1:20 are leaders of the 7 churches. They receive

their messages from the divine angel sent to John. It is therefore not a case of a divine angel being sent to give messages to other divine angels!

The “7 lamps” in Zech. 4:2 likewise do not refer to angels, but the Old Testament church, in much the same way that the 7 golden lampstands in Rev. 1:12, 20 represent the New Testament church. There are lamps and lamps, involving both human and divine servants of God, and discernment needs to be exercised to distinguish between them.

A SEA OF GLASS LIKE CRYSTAL

The 6th feature in Rev. 4 in relation to the throne is mentioned in v6: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal.”

“Glass” comes from the Greek word *hualinos* and only occurs in the New Testament in Rev. 4:6 and 15:2. It is derived from *hualos* which is translated “glass” in Rev. 21:18, 21 to describe the glassy appearance of translucent gold. Vine says: “The word primarily denoted anything transparent e.g. a transparent stone or gem, hence a lens of crystal.” Others define it simply as glassy and transparent like a raindrop. The word has no connection with polished metal such as brass which was used as a mirror in ancient times, and is referred to as “glass” in some Scriptures.

Glass was first manufactured in the form of a glaze on ceramic vessels sometime in the 3,000’s B.C. The first glass vessels were produced about 1,500 B.C. in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

There are several points of interest to note concerning the sea of glass. In the other reference in Rev. 15:2 John says: “I saw as it were a sea of glass.” The words “as it were” mean “what appeared to be,” or “what looked like.” It was not a literal sea; it looked like a sea. Neither was it literal glass or crystal. It was “like” crystal, which suggests it sparkled and was probably a bluish colour like the sea. And, being like glass suggests it was flat and calm, stable, secure and tranquil. There were no waves or ripples. The word “sea” also suggests a large expansive area.

This is confirmed in Rev. 15:2 which says those who got the victory over the beast stand on the sea of glass with harps singing the song of Moses. Elsewhere in Revelation the victors are referred to as an innumerable multitude and a large area would be required for them to stand. The fact that they stand on the sea suggests it was not fluid or spectral.

As has been pointed out earlier, the sea of glass like crystal can be identified with the awesome firmament or expanse seen by the prophet Ezekiel, spread out above the heads of the cherubim sparkling like crystal.

And, sitting above it or on it, was a throne that looked like sapphire, and upon the throne was a glorious radiant divine being (Ezk. 1:10). The firmament like crystal was spread out before the throne like a sea as in Rev. 4:6.

It is a mobile firmament because the throne is mobile. Wherever the throne went, the firmament went with it.

The firmament is evidently transparent, because Ezekiel could see through it to the one sitting above it on the throne. This firmament was as it were, the floor or pavement of the throne, but being over and above the heads of the cherubim, it was seemingly a roof or ceiling to them.

Some earthly monarchs have marble tiles or richly embroidered carpets before their throne, but the divine monarch in heaven has a translucent pavement, the colour of the sea or sky, sparkling and glistening like crystal - like diamonds! Such a glorious and dazzling approach to the throne is fitting and appropriate in view of the glorious and dazzling being on the throne!

The “pavement like sapphire stone, clear blue as the heavens” seen under God’s feet in Ex. 24:10 (i.e. He was standing on it) is naturally linked with what both Ezekiel and John saw. The Hebrew word for “pavement” means transparent or whiteness, and a sapphire is blue and sparkles like crystal.

So then, Rev. 4:6 likens the area before the throne to the sea; Ex. 24:10 likens it to heaven, and Ezk. 1:22 likens it to the firmament, all of which look similar (“heaven” and “firmament” are synonymous and refer to the blue atmosphere (Gen. 1:8).

Ex. 24:10 says the expanse was under God’s feet; Ezk. 1:22 and 10:19-20 says it was above or over the heads of the cherubim, and Rev. 4:6 says it was before the throne. These descriptions make the position of the sea of glass quite clear.

As in the case of the throne in Isa. 6, the throne in Rev. 4 is also no doubt high and lifted up. It would therefore be above the cherubim, 24 elders and all other worshippers, otherwise they would be sitting or standing on the sea of glass. But there is no reference to them being in that position. The sea-like expanse before the throne would therefore be like a transparent ceiling to them. In order to approach the throne they would have to stand on the sea of glass. The saints in Rev. 15:2 are seen in that privileged position, standing on the sea of glass with harps, praising and worshipping God in song.

Rev. 15:2 says the sea of glass was “mingled with fire.” This could refer to the mingling of the angels in the firmament before the throne.

(Heb. 12:22-23. Rev. 7:9-11). As we have seen, angels are as a flame of fire and the saints will be the same when made equal with them. Dan. 12:3 says they shall be as the stars and shall shine in the brightness of the firmament.

When God glorified the church on the day of Pentecost by bestowing the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:22, Rom. 8:30, 1 Pet. 5:1), it was manifested by the mingling of fire (Act. 2:1-4.) The mingling of fire among the saints on the sea of glass in Rev. 15:2 as they stand before the throne of God may relate to the manifestation of the power of God at their ultimate glorification when they are made equal to the angels and endowed with the “tongues of angels.”

OTHER VIEWS

Another view is that the sea in Rev. 4:6 is real sea, and signifies nations as in 17:15. In Isa. 57:20 the constant conflict of nations is likened to the restless sea whose waves stir up the dirt. The calm sea like glass in Rev. 4:6 is therefore taken to signify the peace and calm that shall exist among the nations when the throne of God comes to earth.

The reference to the sea of glass being mingled with fire in Rev. 15:2 is taken to signify the judgement of God by which nations will be brought into subjection to God’s rule of peace.

Reference to the victors standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, singing the song of Moses, is regarded as significant in view of the fact that it was after Israel passed through the sea (led by the pillar of fire?) and God’s judgement fell upon the Egyptians causing the sea to crash upon them and become calm, that the original song of Moses was sung.

There was also a “sea” of water in the brazen laver before Solomon’s temple (1 Kng. 7). The priests had to wash themselves in this “sea” in order to be washed and sanctified before ministering at the altar or entering the sanctuary. This pointed forward to the cleansing effect of Christ’s ministry by which people can be sanctified and ultimately stand before the throne of God. Some see the sea of glass as representing this.

THE CHERUBIM

The seventh and final aspect in relation to the throne room scene in Rev. 4 is mentioned in v6: “in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne were 4 beasts full of eyes before and behind.” These 4

“beasts” (living creatures) seen by John are the cherubim, seen by Ezekiel and referred to in other parts of the word as well.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews referred to the cherubim in passing and said: “of which we cannot now speak in detail” (Heb. 9:5). None of the inspired writers of the Bible have expounded or explained in detail the significance of the cherubim. In some ways this is a disappointment because some explanations may have answered some of the questions that still remain after an exhaustive study is done on the subject.

Adam Clarke quotes Josephus in relation to the cherubim: “No one could tell or even guess what they were like.” Clarke also says, in view of the deep and complex nature of the subject, that it soon becomes evident why the council of Rabbis ordered 300 barrels of oil for Rabbi Ananias to light his lamp during the time it would be necessary for him to understand and explain the visions. He also says he has never read anything that entirely satisfies him on the cherubim. The literal meaning is plain, but not the significance.

Looking at the literal aspects of the cherubim and getting a clear mental picture of the physical features as described in Scripture is a good way to start a study on the subject. So what I propose to do is systematically go through the various sections in Scripture which refer to the cherubim, without trying to explain or expound them, in order to create a mental picture of what is said about them. Hopefully, as a result of doing this a basis will be laid, upon which a measure of understanding can be gained in relation to the nature, purpose and significance of the cherubim. Before doing so, two points should be made: Firstly, “cherub” is singular and “cherubim” is plural, not “cherubims.”

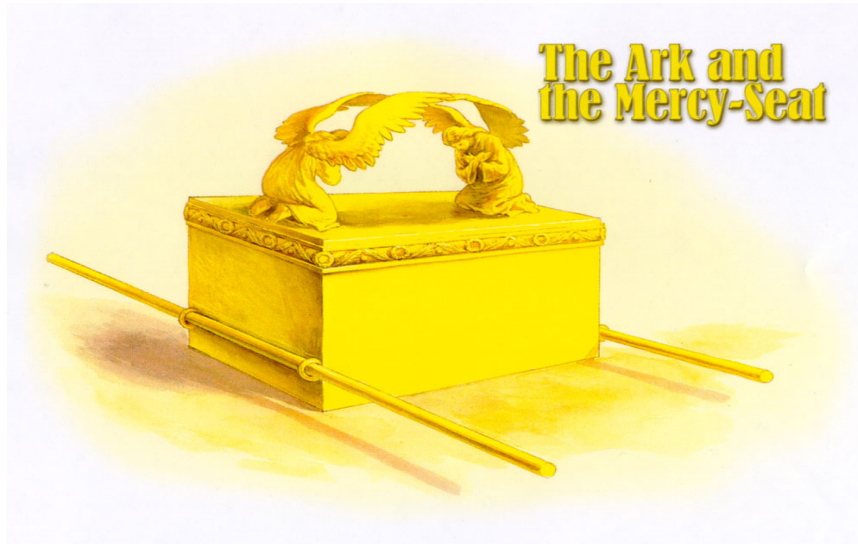
Secondly, it is evident from the many different meanings given to the word cherubim, that its original meaning is uncertain. Gesenius says: “The etymology of the word is doubtful.” Strong says: “of uncertain derivation.” Bullinger: “It is hopeless to arrive at the meaning of the cherubim from etymology. Only by the usage of the whole of Scripture can we form an approximately true idea.”

FIRST REFERENCE: THE CHERUBIM IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The first reference in Scripture to the cherubim is Gen. 3:24. When God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, “He placed at the east of the garden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every

way (4 ways) to guard the way (path) to the tree of life.” Usage of the plural “cherubim” indicates more than one cherub was involved, but we are not told how many. Neither is there any reference to form or shape.

SECOND REFERENCE: THE CHERUBIM ON THE ARK OF THE COVENANT



The second reference relates to making figures of the cherubim for the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle. (Ex. 25:10-22).

The ark of the covenant was an oblong box 137cm long (4ft 6in), 84cm wide (2ft 9in), and 84cm deep, made of acacia wood and overlaid on the inside and outside with gold. A rim or moulding of gold encircled it at the top. At the bottom were 2 golden rings on each side, through which poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were put for the purpose of carrying the ark.

The ark became the receptacle of the 2 tablets of stone on which were inscribed the 10 commandments. A pot of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded and blossomed, and the book of the law were also placed inside (Heb. 9:4).

The ark was covered by a lid of solid gold which was called the mercy seat. The cherubim were made out of one and the same piece of gold and therefore formed part of the mercy seat.

Two figures were involved, one at each end, facing each other, but looking down toward the mercy seat, with wings outstretched over the ark overshadowing it. We are not told if they had more than one face or not.

The ark of the covenant was kept in the most holy place in the tabernacle into which only the high priest was allowed to venture once a year to make atonement for Israel’s sins. He did this by taking the blood

of the sacrifice and sprinkling it on the mercy seat between the cherubim where God's presence dwelt and from where God spoke and met with man. (Ex. 25:22. Num. 7:89). Not only were there cherubim on the mercy seat in the tabernacle, but figures of the cherubim were embroidered into the 10 linen curtains which spread over the tabernacle forming its ceiling and internal walls. The veil which separated the most holy place from the holy place was also embroidered with figures of cherubim (Ex. 26:1, 31).

PARALLEL BETWEEN CHERUBIM IN GARDEN OF EDEN AND TABERNACLE

The cherubim curtain prevented access to the most holy place. Because of this, it is commonly believed that a parallel exists between this arrangement and the guardian cherubim in Gen. 3 who prevented access to the tree of life.

Under the law, Israel's high priest could not approach the cherubic figures in order to enter the most holy place, without the blood of a sacrifice. According to Gen. 4:3-4 and Heb. 11:4, Adam's son Abel brought an offering to the Lord, and the Lord acknowledged His approval of it. Such acknowledgement usually came through divine fire consuming the sacrifice, which signified God eating and enjoying the offering. Cp. Lev. 9:24. 1 Kng. 18:38. 2 Chr. 7:1. Ps. 20:3 marg.

It is not difficult to imagine Abel coming before the cherubim to an altar with his sacrifice, resulting in it being consumed by the flaming sword. An action similar to what we read in Judg. 6:21 could have taken place. This verse refers to an angel touching a sacrifice with the end of his staff, setting it on fire and consuming it.

Reference in Gen. 4:3 to Abel offering his sacrifice "in process of time" (Marg: "at the end of days") suggests a specific time was appointed by God for the offering to be made. Under the law later given through Moses, the high priest of Israel came before the cherubim to bring the offering to the Lord at the end of a certain number of days, once a year.

If the cherubim are angels, it is appropriate that a flaming sword is mentioned in connection with them, for angels are described as "flaming fire," and various verses link fire with angels (see Page 51).

The flaming sword in Gen. 3 could not only be used in love, grace and mercy, by consuming sacrifices to show divine approval and acceptance. It could also be used to show God's displeasure and disapproval by slaying and destroying. Anyone who attempted to break through the barrier formed by the cherubim, would be cut down and

consumed. God is a “consuming fire” in more ways than one! As shall be pointed out later, one of the functions of the cherubim is to execute the judgement of God upon the wicked.

A number of Scriptures also refer to swords in connection with other angels: Num. 22:23. Josh. 5:13. 1 Chr. 21:16. Ezk. 9:2.

THE ARK WAS THE THRONE OF THE LORD

The ark went before the Israelites when they left Mount Sinai (Num. 10:33), like a king in the midst of his troops leading and directing the march. It also went in advance of the people into the river Jordan and halted, causing the water to cease from flowing, enabling the Israelites to cross over. (Josh. 4:9-11). It also accompanied Israel for 7 days around the city of Jericho before the walls fell down. (Josh. 6:1-20).

Believing that the Lord dwelt between the cherubim, the Israelites took the ark out with them into the battlefield to war against the enemy (1 Sam. 3). Because of the Lord’s presence being between the cherubim, above the mercy seat, the ark was regarded as the throne of the Lord.

The size or height of the cherubim which formed part of the mercy seat are not given, but in view of the fact that the ark itself was only 137cm long, and 84cm wide, they would not have been very big.

3RD REFERENCE: GOD RODE UPON A CHERUB

The 3rd reference to cherubim is in 2 Sam. 22:11 (quoted in Ps. 18:10). It refers to God who “rode upon a cherub and did fly upon the wings of the wind.” This statement is made in relation to God coming from heaven to deliver David from his enemies. (“Cherub” normally refers to one being, as in Ex. 25:19. Ezk. 10:9. 28:14-16. 41:18. But it is also used as a collective term for the 4 living creatures in Ezk. 10:2, 4).

4TH REFERENCE: CHERUBIM IN SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

The 4th reference is in 1 Kng. 6:23 - and refers to the figures of the cherubim made for the ark of the covenant in Solomon’s temple. They did not face each other as in the tabernacle, but faced the entrance (2 Chr. 3:13). They were made of olive wood overlaid with gold and were much larger than those that were in the tabernacle. They were 4.57m high

(15 feet), and each had 2 wings. The wing-span from one wing-tip to the other was also 4.57m. (Each individual wing was 2.28½m long (7ft 6in). 1 Kng. 6:23-26).

The holy of holies in Solomon's temple was a cube, 9.14m (30ft) square. (1 kng. 6:20). The outside wing of each cherub therefore stretched out and touched the wall on each side, while the inside wings stretched out over the mercy seat and touched each other in the centre (1 Kng. 6:27).

Figures of the cherubim were carved on the walls and doors of Solomon's temple and embroidered in the veil (1 Kng. 6:29, 32-35. 2 Chr. 3:14). The frames of the 10 bronze carts which supported lavers were also ornamented with figures of cherubim (1 Kng. 7:27-37). Cherubim were everywhere - a predominant feature in both the tabernacle and temple. Although God strictly forbade the making of figures of any kind, He made an exception with the cherubim.

In 1 Chr. 28:18 the ark of the covenant is referred to as "the chariot of the cherubim."

REFERENCES IN THE PSALMS ETC

There are several references to the cherubim in the Psalms. Ps. 80:1. and 99:1 refers to God being "enthroned over the cherubim" (RSV) or "dwellest between the cherubim" (A.V.) This expression or description is used a number of times in other Scriptures: 1 Sam. 4:4. 6:2. 2 Kng. 19:15. Isa. 37:16 etc.

THE CHERUBIM IN EZEKIEL

We read in Ezk. 1:1 that the heavens opened and the prophet saw visions of God, involving 4 living creatures. The word "cherubim" does not occur in Ezk. 1, but the living creatures are called "cherubim" in Ezk. 10:15.

Ezk. 1:4 says Ezekiel saw a whirlwind or storm coming from the north - a great cloud with a fire enveloping it, flashing continually with brilliant light like lightning, causing the sky around it to glow. Within the cloud was a radiance like highly polished brass glowing in the heart of the fire. The picture painted by these words is one of brilliant, golden, radiant glory, vibrant with life and movement.

Verse 5 goes on to say that out of the midst of it, i.e. from the centre of the cloud, came 4 living creatures which looked like humans but had

animal characteristics. They looked like creatures and they looked like men, and they caused a glow in the cloud.



According to v6-8 each one had 4 faces and 4 wings. Their legs were straight like human legs, but their feet were like the hooves of a calf and they shone like polished brass. In addition to their 4 faces and 4 wings, they each had 4 human hands, one under each wing. Some, however, do not believe that the hands were distinct from the wings, but that the arms were feathered like wings and the hand terminated the arm. Because the long front feathers of the wings extended beyond the fingers, the hands would appear to be under the wings.

Verse 9 continues by saying “the wings of each living being touched the wings of the 2 beside it,” i.e. as the Good News Bible puts it: “two wings of each creature were spread out so they formed a square with their wing tips touching.” In forming the square, they would stand back to back. As they moved (flew), their faces did not turn. They went straight ahead as a group, in any direction without turning their bodies.

Verse 10: Each one had the face of a man in front (i.e. facing south, because Ezekiel saw them coming towards him from the north v4). Each one also had the face of a lion on the right side (east), the face of an ox on the left side (west), and the face of an eagle at the back (north side).

Verse 11: Two wings of each creature were outstretched and touched the tips of the wings of the creatures next to them on either side, and their other 2 wings were folded against their bodies.

Verse 12: Each creature faced all 4 directions, so the group (squad) could go wherever the spirit directed them, without having to turn their bodies.

Verse 13: In the midst of the living creatures there was what looked like burning coals of fire; like torches moving to and fro, flashing back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was very bright and out of it went forth lightning. (According to Ezk. 10:2, the coals were under the cherubim between the wheels).

Verse 14: And the living creatures darted to and fro with the speed of lightning.

THE WHEELS



Verse 15 then records Ezekiel saying: “Now as I was looking at the living creatures I saw one wheel upon the ground beside each of the 4 living creatures.”

Verse 16: “As to the appearance of the wheels and their construction: all 4 sparkled and shone like a beryl (precious stone), and each wheel was like a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (i.e. each wheel had another wheel crosswise inside, intersecting it at right angles having a similar appearance to a gyroscope.)

Adam Clarke disagrees. He says: “I cannot see how, on this supposition, they could have any motion; for if one was moved on its axis, the other must be dragged contrary to its axis. I have conjectured it rather to mean a wheel within a wheel, or a wheel with 2 rims, working on the same axis.”

The problem with this is, as v17 goes on to say: “The wheels could move forward in any of the 4 directions they faced, without turning (swerving, swivelling) as they moved.” If the wheels had 2 rims working on the same axis, they would still be “dragged” when moving in a direction contrary to their axis. However, such a drag would only apply if they were used for traction on land. But they are celestial vehicles, not terrestrial. They travel through the air and space, not on land.

Verse 18 says: “The rims of the 4 wheels were awesomely tall.” The Amplified Bible says: “They were so high they were dreadful. Verse 18 also says: “And the rims were filled (covered) with eyes all around their edges.”

Verse 19: “When the 4 living creatures moved forward, the wheels moved forward with them (beside them). When they were lifted up (rose) from the earth, the wheels were lifted up with them.”

Verse 20: Wherever the Spirit went, they (the 4 creatures) went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the Spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.” (The wheels were alive, endued with life from “the living creature”).

It is interesting to note in this verse in the A.V. that the singular word “creature” is applied to the 4 living creatures. The same applies in v22 where reference is made to “the heads (plural) of the living creature” (singular). The 4 living creatures were a unit, joined by the touching of wings.

However, instead of saying “The spirit of the living creature,” Rotherham says: “The Spirit of the living One.” Others, including the A.V. margin, give “the Spirit of life.”

This indicates that the reference to “the Spirit of the living creature” means “possessed by.” Being a “creature,” the 4 living creatures are created by God and therefore are not the fountain or source of the Spirit. God alone is the source, and He endows the living creature with it.

Therefore, reference to the Spirit of the living creature being in the wheels, either means God Himself personally and directly endowed the wheels with the same Spirit possessed by the creature (cherubim), or the cherubim transmitted God’s Spirit to the wheels by contact with them, as the Apostles bestowed the Spirit on others by laying on of hands.

Verse 21: “When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved. When the living creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. When the living creatures were lifted up (rose) from the earth, the wheels were lifted up with them: for the Spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.”

A DAZZLING CRYSTAL DOME

Verse 22: “Above the heads of the animals there was something that looked like a dome made of dazzling crystal.” (Good News Bible). Or, as we read in the New Living Translation: “There was a surface spread out above them like the sky.” The New English Bible reads: “Above the heads of the living creatures was, as it were, a vault glittering like a sheet of ice, awe-inspiring, stretched out over their heads above them.” The Living Bible puts it like this: “The sky spreading out above them looked as though it were made of crystal; it was inexpressibly beautiful.” The Amplified Bible says: “Over the head of the (combined) living creature, there was the likeness of a firmament, to look upon like the terrible and awesome dazzling of shining crystal or ice, stretched across the expanse of sky over their heads.”

Verse 23: “Beneath this firmament two wings of each living creature stretched out and touched the other’s wings, and each one covered its body with the other 2 wings.”

Verse 24: “I heard the noise their wings made in flight; it sounded like the roar of the sea, like the noise of a huge army, like the voice of Almighty God (thunder!). When they stopped flying, they folded their wings.”

Verse 25: “As they stood with their wings lowered, a voice spoke from the crystal firmament above them.” As we shall see, this voice spoke to Ezekiel (v28-2:1. 3:1. 10:1-). The voice directed Ezekiel’s attention to its source - the firmament above the living creatures.

THE THRONE

Verse 26: “Above the firmament over their heads there was what appeared to be a throne made of beautiful blue sapphire stone, and high above all, upon the throne, a form in human likeness.”

Verse 27: “From his waist up, he looked like gleaming bronze, glowing in a furnace of fire. And from his waist down, he seemed to be a fiery flame, shining brightly with splendour.” (Also see Ezk. 8:1-2).

Verse 28: “Like a rainbow in the cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness that surrounded him.” (The encircling radiance was like a glowing halo that had in it all the prismatic colours of the rainbow. The glory of God was a multi-colour manifestation). “That was the way the glory of the Lord appeared to me. And when I saw it, I fell face downward on the ground, and I heard a voice of one speaking.”

Reference is also made to this glory of the Lord in Ezk. 43:2: “And suddenly the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of his coming was like the roar of rushing waters and the whole landscape lighted up with his glory.”

In view of the glory of God manifested in, around and above the cherubim, it is no wonder that they are referred to in Heb. 9:5 as the “cherubim of glory.” The cherubim scenes are all about the glory of God! Ezekiel’s record of the cherubim combines all the ideas associated with the cherubim up to his time; i.e. those of the throne, and chariot, the glory, the power and the majesty.

EZEKIEL CHAPTERS THREE AND EIGHT

A brief reference is made to the cherubim again in Ezk. 3:12-14, where the prophet says God’s Spirit lifted him up and he heard behind him “a voice of a great rushing;” i.e. “the loud roar of a voice” (Good News). “A tumultuous shouting” (Jerusalem Bible). The loud shouting or roaring voice was a benediction, saying: “Blessed be the glory of Yahweh from His place.” Some translators say: “in His place.” The Good News Bible says: “in heaven above.” But the R.S.V. and others do not mention the benediction. Instead, they translate v12 like this: “Then the Spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord arose from His place (i.e. began to move away and depart from that place) I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake” (i.e. a loud roar). Verse 13 seems to confirm this translation: “It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a great earthquake.” (R.S.V.). So then, the loud roar that Ezekiel heard when he first saw the cherubim coming from the north (1:24), he hears again as they depart.

Some months later, Ezekiel saw the same manifestation of divine glory, as recorded in chapters 8 to 10, and many of the details are repeated. Ezekiel was transported in vision from Babylon to Jerusalem to see how apostate and ripe for judgement the Jewish people had become. He saw 6 angels coming towards the city of Jerusalem with swords in their hands to execute judgement. With them was a 7th angel, clothed in linen, with a writer’s case at his side, and all 7 of them went in to the temple complex and stood beside the brasen altar of burnt offering. “And the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested, to the threshold of the temple (Ezk. 9:1-3). The Lord then called (out of the glory) to the angel with a writer’s case, to go through the city

and put a mark on the foreheads of all in the city who deplored the sins being committed there. The Lord then told the other 6 angels to follow the angel with the pen, and kill everyone upon whose forehead he did not put a mark. (Ezk. 9:4-). Then, in Ezk. 10 we read that the prophet “looked and saw in the firmament that was over the heads of the cherubim, what appeared to be a throne of blue sapphire.” (Verse 3 indicates that the cherubim are, at this stage, standing just south of the temple).

In v2 we read that “the Lord spoke to the man clothed in linen (i.e. the angel with the pen) and said: Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim and fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. And he went in as I watched.” It seems that the space between the 4 wheels, which was on fire, was that from which the coals were taken. (Ezk. 1:13). And the action of scattering them over the city of Jerusalem was prophetic of the judgement of the city which involved it being burned by fire.

WHIRLING WHEELS

Regarding the “wheels” in Ezk. 10:2 among which the angel was told to go to fill his hand with coals of fire: many translate it as “whirling wheels.” For example: R.S.V, Berkley, N.A.S, the Amplified and Living Bible. The New English Bible gives “circling wheels.” Jerusalem Bible says the angel was told to “go under the chariot.”

The Hebrew word translated “wheels” in Ezk. 10:2 and in the first part of v6 is different from the word translated wheels in chapter one and 3:13. “Ophan” is the Hebrew word used in chapter 1, 3:13, the 2nd part of 10:6, and in 10:9, 12, 13, 16, 19. 11:22. Dan. 7:9. It simply means a wheel - something that can turn or revolve. It does not mean the wheel is revolving.

The other Hebrew word is “galgal” and means a whirling or rolling thing. For example, Isa. 5:28 refers to “wheels (galgal) like a whirlwind.” Galgal is translated “and like a rolling thing” in Isa. 17:13. And Ezk. 26:10 refers to the noise of horsemen and wheels (galgal). Wheels only make a noise if revolving. Stationary wheels are silent.

So then, it seems that the wheels (both the outer wheel and the one intersecting) under the cherubim turned in the sense of spun or revolved, but they did not turn in the sense of swivel.

It also seems that a loud deep roar was caused by the spinning as well as the wings of the cherubim touching. Some have suggested that the 4 wheels coupled with the cherubim, may have made as much noise as the 4

whirling jet engines of a 747!

Ezk. 10:3 goes on to say: “Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man (angel) went in (to get coals), and a cloud filled the inner courtyard.”

Verse 4: “Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and went over to the threshold (door) of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud of glory, and the temple courtyard glowed brightly with the glory of the Lord.” (A similar thing happened at the dedication of the tabernacle and temple: Ex. 40:34. 1 Kng. 8:10-11). Ezekiel also saw the millennial temple filled with the same glory of the Lord (43:5).

In Ezekiel’s day, the replica of the cherubim was still in the temple, but the glory of God was not manifested above the mercy seat due to apostasy. Even though Ezekiel had been taken to Babylon and banished from the temple, the Spirit of God came to give him visions of the true glory of God!

Ezk. 10:5 goes on to say: “And the noise of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far as the outer courtyard, and sounded like the voice of the Almighty God when He speaks.” (i.e. like a thunderous roar Ps. 29). Reference to the noise of the wings indicates the cherubim were getting ready to depart. We might compare it to an idling engine. The cherubim were clearly not expecting the Lord to stay at the temple. It was to be a fleeting visit.

Verse 6: “When the Lord commanded the man wearing the linen clothes to take some fire from between the whirling wheels, between the cherubim, he went in and stood beside a wheel.” There is no reference to the angel stooping or crawling as he went in between the wheels to get coals of fire between the cherubim. The wheels are very high! (1:18).

Verse 7: “And one of the cherubs stretched forth his hand (i.e. one of his four hands), and took some live coals from the fire burning between the cherubim, and put them into the hands of the man clothed in linen, who took them and went out.”

Verse 8: “All the cherubim had what appeared to be human hands under their wings.” (All were capable of reaching for coals, not just one of them).

Verse 9: “Each of the 4 cherubim had a wheel beside him (not just the one by whom the angels stood) and the wheels shone and sparkled like a beryl stone.” Or, as the Living Bible puts it: “sparkled like chrysolite, giving off a greenish-yellow glow.”

Verse 10: “All 4 wheels looked the same; each wheel had another wheel within it.”

Verse 11: “The cherubim could move forward in any of the 4 directions they faced, without turning as they moved. They went straight in the direction in which their heads faced, without having to turn around.”

Verse 12: “Both the cherubim and the wheels were covered with eyes. The cherubim had eyes all over their bodies, including their hands, their backs and their wings.”

Verse 13: “As for the wheels: they were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels” (Galgal). Adam Clarke says: “the wheels could be called ‘the roller’ or ‘a chariot,’ or ‘the swift roller.’”

Verse 14: “Each of the cherubim had 4 faces; the first was the face of a cherub, the second was the face of a man, the third was the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.” In Ezk. 1:10 the faces are given in a different order: man, lion, ox, eagle. The face of a cherub in Ezk. 10:14 is the face of an ox in 1:10 and a calf in Rev. 4:7. Hence, a cherub was in the likeness of an ox - a young ox, possibly a calf.

Verse 15: “And the cherubim rose upward. These were the same living beings I had seen beside the Kebar river.”

Verse 16: When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved with them. When they rose into the air, the wheels stayed beside them, going with them as they flew.”

Verse 17: “When the cherubim stopped and stood still, the wheels also stopped, for the spirit of the living beings (or, “spirit of life” A.V. marg.) was in the wheels.”

Verse 18: “Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple, and stood (hovered) above the cherubim” i.e. when the cherubim and wheels started to lift up off the ground from where they were standing south of the temple (v3), the glory of the Lord then departed from the temple and returned to the original position of the throne above the cherubim (10:1).

The cherubim is clearly the chariot or vehicle of the throne and glory of God, and is now about to transport the glory away, heading in an easterly direction: firstly to the east gate of the temple, then to the Mount of Olives (v19. 11:22-23). Ultimately the glory of God returns, not from the north (1:4) but the east (43:1-4).

Ezekiel says: “And as I watched, the cherubim went forth with their wheels and stood (paused - halted) at the east gate of the Lord’s temple. And the glory of the Lord was over (above) them.” (Ezk. 10:19).

Verse 20: “These were the same living creatures that I saw under (beneath) the God of Israel when I was beside the Kebar river. I knew they

were cherubim.”

Verse 21: “Each one had 4 faces and each one had 4 wings, and what looked like the hands of a man were under their wings.”

Verse 22: “Their faces were also like the faces of the creatures I had seen at Kebar, and they travelled straight ahead, just as the others had.”

In Ezekiel chapter eleven we read that while the cherubim hovered at the east gate, the Spirit lifted the prophet up and took him to the east gate and revealed to him the sin of the people and pronounced judgement upon them. The cherubim and glory of God then departed from the east gate and stood on the Mount of Olives.

There are also references to the cherubim later in the book of Ezekiel in relation to the millennial temple. In chapter 41:16-20 we are told that the walls of the temple are covered with carvings of the cherubim, as was Solomon’s temple. Each cherub has 2 faces: the face of a man and the face of a lion. The doors are also carved with cherubim (41:21-25).

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO CHERUBIM

So much for the Old Testament references to the cherubim. As far as the New Testament is concerned, the word cherubim only occurs once, in Heb. 9:5 where the writer makes a passing reference to the cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, and says: “about which we cannot now speak in detail.”

However, as we know, references are made to the cherubim in the book of Revelation, but not by the name cherubim. This brings us back to Rev. 4:6-8: “In the midst of the throne and round about the throne were 4 beasts full of eyes, in front and behind. The first beast was like a lion, the second beast was like a calf, the third beast had a face like a man, and the 4th beast was like a flying eagle. And each of the beasts had 6 wings, and they were covered with eyes, inside and out.”

Now it should be pointed out that the Greek word translated “beasts” in this passage is “zoon,” and primarily denotes a live or living thing. The English word “animal” in the phrase “animal, mineral, vegetable” is the basic meaning of zoon. “Living creature” is the basic significance of the word, and most translate it that way today instead of “beast.” As we have seen, the cherubim are referred to as “living creatures” in the book of Ezekiel.

The other Greek word is “therion” which almost invariably denotes a wild and dangerous animal. It is translated “wild beasts” in Mk. 1:13. Act. 10:12, and “venomous beast” in Act. 28:4. This is the word used in

relation to the beast in Rev. 13 etc which signifies an anti-God power.

It is not surprising therefore, that the word translated “beast” in relation to the cherubim, is different from the one used in relation to anti-God powers. Vine says: “zoon stresses the vital element (i.e. life - living - something alive)”, whereas therion stresses the bestial aspect of a living creature.

Rev. 4:8 says: “the 4 living creatures rest not day and night, saying holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” There is nothing bestial or anti-God about these creatures!

THE SERAPHIM

Before completing this consideration of all the references to, and descriptions of the cherubim in Scripture, mention should be made of the seraphim in Isa. 6.

Isaiah refers to a vision he had of “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” And, in this throne room scene, he saw seraphim standing there: “each one had six wings; with two they covered their face, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And they were calling out to each other, saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.” Their voices were so loud and thunderous that the temple shook and vibrated.

As in the case of the living creatures in Rev. 4:8, the seraphim also have 6 wings. The seraphim and cherubim both call out “holy holy holy,” and the voices of both are loud and thunderous. (Rev. 6:1 refers to one of the living creatures having a voice of thunder).

In view of the similarities between the living creatures in Rev. 4, the seraphim in Isa. 6 and the cherubim in the book of Ezekiel, it seems reasonable to conclude that cherubim and seraphim are the same creatures.

Some have suggested, in view of the fact that the cherubim in Ezk. 1:6 had 4 wings whereas the seraphim in Isa. 6:2 and the living creatures in Rev. 4:8 had 6, that they are different creatures and represent different orders in heaven’s hierarchy. It has been concluded that the living creatures in Rev. 4 are seraphim, not cherubim, due to having the same number of wings.

However, Rev. 4 presents a very detailed picture of the throne room along with heaven’s hierarchy. The order starts with the 4 living creatures in the immediate vicinity of the throne. Then there are the 7 spirits (archangels), the 24 elders and the rest of the angels. This scene does not

cater for both cherubim and seraphim, and neither does any other scene. This suggests they are one and the same.

SUMMARY OF PHYSICAL FEATURES OF CHERUBIM

Due to the complex nature of the subject and the many details involved, a summary of the physical features of the cherubim may be helpful:

1. The 4 living creatures were covered with eyes. The eyes were all over their bodies, including their hands, backs, and the inside and outside of their wings.

2. Each creature had 4 faces: the face of a man, lion, ox and eagle. (Does this imply that each creature had 4 heads, or just one head consisting of 4 faces?)

3. Each creature had 4 or 6 wings. The cherubim in Ezk. flew with 2 wings and covered their bodies with the other 2 but not their feet or face. The seraphim in Isa. 6 flew with two, covered their face with two, and covered their feet with the other two. (They probably covered their face when they “stood” before the throne but not necessarily when they “did fly” Isa. 6:2).

4. The tips of the two wings used in flight by the cherubim touched each other, forming a square.

The two wings that covered the bodies of the cherubim in Ezk. 1:11 either acted as a covering instead of clothing, or stopped clothing from flapping in flight. (The word “skirt” is the same in Hebrew as wings).

5. Because each creature faced 4 directions with 4 faces, the 4 of them could go in any direction the Spirit led them without having to turn or swivel their bodies. And when they flew, they darted to and fro at the speed of a flash of lightning. When they stopped, they folded their wings.

6. The noise that the wings made in flight sounded like the roar of the sea or an earthquake - like the noise of a huge army - like the voice of Almighty God. In other words, a deep, heavy, loud thunderous roar.

Adam Clarke says the whirlwind (Ezk. 1:4) drove the wheels and the wind rustled among the wings and made the noise. Another suggestion is that the noise was made due to the wings moving exceptionally fast (compare the humming bird).

7. Each creature had 4 human hands, seen under the 4 wings.

8. The legs of each creature were straight like human legs; i.e. their legs were vertical when flying, like a parachutist, not bent and not horizontal like superman! They did not tuck their legs up in flight like

birds.

9. Their feet were like the hooves of a young ox and shone like polished brass.

10. In the midst of the living creatures (i.e. in the midst of the square they formed) between the wheels were burning coals of fire like torches flashing back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright and out of it went forth lightning. The coals were used to execute the judgement of God. They were cast upon the city.

11. Four wheels within wheels were connected with the cherubim, not in a row, but each one was beside a living creature, forming a square. The height of the wheels was awesome. The cherubim may have also been very high compared to humans. Solomon made the cherubim in the temple 4.57m (15ft) high.

12. The rims of the wheels were covered with eyes which had the power of sight. All 4 sparkled and shone like precious stones - like the beryl or chrysolite, giving off a greenish yellow glow.

13. Wherever the cherubim went, the wheels went with them, one beside each living creature. When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved. When the cherubim stopped, the wheels stopped. And, like the cherubim, the wheels could also go in any direction without having to swerve or swivel, due to each one being a wheel within a wheel.

14. Although the wheels did not “turn” in the sense of swivel, it seems that they did turn in the sense of spin or revolve. They were “whirling wheels.” Both rims of each wheel could spin, but whether or not they spun separately or simultaneously, clockwise and counter-clockwise, we are not told.

15. Stretched out over and above the heads of the cherubim was a “firmament” like a vault or dome which sparkled and glittered like crystal - like diamonds. It was a dazzling and awe-inspiring sight - inexpressibly beautiful, emitting the prismatic colours of the rainbow.

16. Above the sparkling crystal firmament was a throne made of what appeared to be beautiful sapphire stone, and upon the throne was a form in human likeness - a radiant divine being. From his waist up he looked like gleaming bronze, and from his waist down he seemed to be a fiery flame, shining brightly with splendour. A brilliant radiance surrounded and encircled him like a glowing halo that had in it all the colours of the rainbow.

Such was the glory of Yahweh the God of Israel. And from this glory came forth His voice, causing Ezekiel to fall face downward on the ground while he spoke.

The glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and went across to the door of the temple, causing it and the courtyard to glow with the divine presence. The roar of the wings of the cherubim could be heard while this took place.

After this, the glory of the Lord left the temple and returned to the original position above the cherubim. The cherubim and wheels, accompanied by the glory of God above, then departed from the temple in an easterly direction and stood on the Mount of Olives.

The impression is clearly given here of the cherubim and wheels being like a chariot bearing the throne and glory of God.

VARIATIONS IN THE DESCRIPTIONS

In view of the variations in the descriptions of the cherubim and the unusual nature of them, it is not difficult to understand why Josephus concluded that “no one could tell or even guess what they were like.” It is also not difficult to understand why the Council of Rabbis ordered 300 barrels of oil for Rabbi Ananias to light his lamp during the time it would be necessary for him to explain the visions!

As we have seen, Isa. 6 says that each of the seraphim had 6 wings whereas Ezk. 1 says each one of the cherubim had 4 wings. On the other hand each of the cherubim in the tabernacle and temple only had 2 wings. Their wings touched each other in the temple (1 Kng. 6:27) but there is no reference to them touching in the tabernacle. Other variations are as follows:

1. The cherubim in the tabernacle and temple stood on and above the mercy seat which represented the throne of God. Cherubim were also embroidered in the linen ceiling above the ark. According to the A.V. translation of Isa. 6:2 the seraphim also stood above the throne. But the cherubim in Ezk. 1 and Rev. 4:6 were under, in the midst and round about the throne.

2. No reference is made in Isa. 6 to the number of creatures involved in the seraphim. Neither is there any reference to 4 different faces, or being covered with eyes, or having straight legs and feet like hooves. The only physical feature mentioned is the 6 wings and their functions. Reference is made to a face (not faces), feet and a hand, with no detailed description.

3. Rev. 4 mentions the 6 wings but gives no details of their function.

4. Each living creature in Rev. 4 seems to have only one face. One of them has the face of a lion; another has the face of a calf, while the other

two have the face of a man and a flying eagle. However, they may have each had 4 faces, but, standing back to back in a square only the external face is mentioned. (Viewed from inside the square, the faces would be reversed).

5. In Isa. 6 the feet of the seraphim cannot be seen due to being covered by one pair of wings. But the feet of the cherubim were not covered and could be seen (Ezk. 1:7). During flight overhead, Ezekiel saw “the soles of their feet.”

6. Isa. 6:6 refers to a seraph using tongs to take a live glowing coal of fire off the altar to place in his hand. But the cherub in Ezk. 10:7 took the coal of fire from between the wheels with his hand, not tongs.

7. The cherubim carved on the walls and doors of the millennial temple in Ezk. 41:18-19 do not have 1 face or 4 faces but 2 - the face of a man and a lion.

There is therefore considerable variation in the descriptions of the cherubim in Scripture.

THE ANOINTED CHERUB THAT COVERS (Ezk. 28:14)

There is one other reference in Scripture to a cherub, in Ezk. 28:14. This verse in the A.V. refers to the king of Tyre as “the anointed cherub that covers.” However, various authorities point out that it is obscure and uncertain in the original Hebrew text and not an easy passage to decipher. Many translations do not give the sense that the king of Tyre himself was the anointed cherub that covers, but rather that an anointed cherub (a divine being) was provided by God to be a covering or guardian for the king of Tyre. This teaches that one of the functions of a cherub is to guard and protect a nation - especially a nation that blesses Israel as Tyre had done in the past.

But Tyre turned against Israel so God turned against her, and used the same cherub to bring about her defeat, dispersion and destruction. Ezk. 28:16 conveys this in many modern translations.

We learn from this that it is also one of the functions of a cherub to execute the judgement of God upon a nation. A cherub is therefore an agent of both mercy and judgement, blessing and cursing.

THE CHERUBIM ARE NOT CHRIST’S CHURCH

In spite of all these references to cherubs and cherubim in Scripture, Jewish and Hebrew scholars still hesitate to say precisely what they

really are. However, all scholars are unanimous about one thing: the cherubim are not the Godhead! It is evident from their position before the throne and not on the throne, and their praise and worship directed to the throne, that they are to be distinguished from the throne. The God-head is not a Quad-head!

Because the cherubim are never actually described as angels, and are not dismissed or dispatched from the throne on errands as angels are, some have concluded they are not angels.

In view of the fact that the A.V. translation of Rev. 5:9 says the 4 living creatures sang a song to the lamb saying: “Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every nation”, some have concluded that the cherubim must be the redeemed and glorified saints of Christ.

However, as has already been pointed out when dealing with the 24 elders, the A.V. translation is incorrect. Practically all modern authorities and translations agree that instead of reading: “Thou hast redeemed us,” it should read: “Thou hast redeemed men.”

The cherubim are not celebrating their own salvation, but the salvation of men. The words in Rev. 5:9 are sung about the saints, not by them, indicating that the cherubim are not among the saints redeemed by Christ. If the cherubim were among those redeemed from mankind, they would surely include themselves among those redeemed, but they don't.

A careful reading of the book of Revelation reveals that a clear distinction is made between the 4 living creatures and the saints of Christ. For example: Rev. 7:9-10 depicts the saints standing before the throne of God praising and thanking God. Then verses 11-12 go on to refer to the 4 living creatures (along with the 24 elders and other angels) also worshipping God. The 4 living creatures, along with the 24 elders and other angels, are clearly distinguished from the saints.

The fact that one of the 4 living creatures calls forth the white horse in Rev. 6:1-2, and gives the 7 bowls of God's wrath to the 7 angels in Rev. 15:7, also indicates that the saints cannot be represented by the cherubim. The white horse and 7 bowls of wrath relate to events that transpire in the end time before the return of Christ and glorification of his saints. The cherubim seen by Ezekiel certainly existed before the saints of Christ.

(Incidentally, the statements in Rev. 6:1-2 and 15:7, along with Ezk. 10:7, Isa. 6:6, (Ps. 18:10?) indicate that each cherub or seraph can act separately from the others).

CHERUBIM ARE ANGELS

While it may be true that the cherubim are never specifically referred to as angels, this does not necessarily mean that they are not. Certain statements in Scripture suggest that they are angels. For example, Ps. 18:10 says: “God rode upon a cherub and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.” In this Hebrew parallelism “cherub” runs parallel with “wings of the wind,” and in Ps. 104:3-4 “wings of the wind” is linked with angels who are referred to as “winds.”

As suggested earlier, the seraphim in Isa. 6 seem to fit into the same category and be of the same order as the cherubim. “Seraphim” comes from the Hebrew word “saraph” which means “burning.” Strong says saraph comes from a word which means to be on fire, and it is translated “burn” and “burning” many times in relation to judgement.

Saraph is translated “fiery” in relation to serpents in Num. 21:6 and in 3 other places, due to their copper colour. It is also translated “fiery serpent” in Num. 21:8 in relation to the copper replica made by the Israelites of the serpents that had been biting them in the wilderness.

It is evident from the usage of the word, that saraph can mean burning in the sense of consuming like a fire, or glowing like burning copper or brass. This suggests that seraphim are celestial beings who can burn like fire and glow and gleam like burning or burnished brass.

This concept of fiery beings being able to burn and consume, calls to mind references in Ps. 104:3-7 and Heb. 1:7 where angels are referred to in the same terms, i.e. as “flames of fire:” and as has been pointed out, other passages of Scripture link angels with fire: (Ex. 3:2. 13:21. Judg. 6:21. 13:20. Dan. 3:25-28).

Isa. 6:6 also connects the seraphim with fire and reveals their control over it, by referring to one of them carrying a live burning coal from the altar. In connection with this, it is interesting to note that Ezk. 1:13 says the appearance of the cherubim “was like burning coals of fire.”

Reference is also made in Ezk. 10:2 to coals of fire between the cherubim, and v7 says one of the cherubim took hold of some of the coals in his hand.

In view of the fact that “seraphim” can be related to glowing or gleaming like burning brass, it is interesting to note that the feet of the cherubim “sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.” (Ezk. 1:7). So also did the feet of the angel in Dan. 10:6, not to mention the feet of Christ (Rev. 1:15).

In Isa. 6 the coal of fire was used for purification and sanctification,

but in Ezk. 10:2 the coals of fire were used for judgement and destruction. Once again we can see in this how God, who is both love and a consuming fire, uses the seraphim or cherubim as agents of both mercy and judgement. Many Scriptures could be quoted which refer to angels being involved in the same work and ministry.

In view of the foregoing it seems reasonable to conclude that the cherubim are angels - celestial beings of a very high order and rank. Their position in relation to the throne of God, being “in the midst” and “round about” it in closer proximity than any other creature in heaven, indicates that they are the highest order of angels in heaven.

Both the seraphim or cherubim clearly have a very special distinction in connection with the throne of God. They are always seen in the closest possible association with the throne, and at the very heart of God’s presence and glory. So much so, that the cherubim are referred to as “the cherubim of glory” in Heb. 9:5. They are never seen in Scripture apart from the throne of glory. Access to the throne involves passing the cherubim, as did access to the tree of life in the garden of Eden. As mentioned before, they are never dismissed or dispatched from the presence of God on errands quite like other angels are. The throne goes with them!

IN THE MIDST AND ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE

Reference in Rev. 4:6 to the 4 living creatures being “in the midst of the throne and round about the throne,” is rendered as follows by the Jerusalem Bible: “in the centre, grouped around the throne itself.”

This translation and others suggests that the 4 living creatures stand in the open space which immediately surrounds the throne, one at each of the 4 points of the compass, encircling it.

Reference to the 4 living creatures being “in the midst and round about” the throne calls to mind the fact that in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and temple, cherubim were in the midst of the throne inasmuch as they stood on top of the ark of the covenant. They were also round about the throne sewn into the veil, ceiling and wall curtains of the tabernacle, and carved on the walls and doors of the temple. The relationship between the type and antitype is evident.

If the throne of God was “high and lifted up” the 4 living creatures could be “in the midst” of it in the sense of being in the space directly beneath it. As we have seen, references are made in Scripture to God sitting upon or being enthroned over the cherubim.

In Ezekiel's visions the cherubim are seen under the throne of God, not only as attendants of the Lord, but also upholding and bearing the throne, along with the sparkling crystal firmament, referred to as a pavement like sapphire in Ex. 24:10 and a sea of glass in Rev. 4:6.

It is particularly clear from Ezekiel's visions that the throne of God is mobile, able to be carried or transported to any part of God's universe. For this reason the ark of the covenant, which represented the throne, was not a fixture in the tabernacle or temple. Poles were placed in the sides of the ark for carrying it, and the outstretched wings of the cherubim over it signified their bearing of it. For this reason, 1 Chr. 28:18 refers to the ark as "the chariot of the cherubim."

The wheels alongside the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions certainly convey the concept of a chariot bearing the throne of God. In this light, the cherubim are seen as the vehicle of the Spirit. Wherever the Spirit directed them to go, they went. By this means God "rides upon the heavens" (Ps. 68:4 etc. See p6 onward). It would be very appropriate therefore, if, as some have suggested, the word cherubim means to ride.

This is possibly one of the reasons for the 4 living creatures being so close to the throne of God: because they are used as a vehicle or "chariot" to transport it. They are on standby as it were, ready at all times to convey the throne and Him who sits upon it, to any place of His appointment.

From ancient times, it has been the custom in some countries for a king to sit on a throne or couch in a vehicle called a "litter" or "palanquin." This vehicle containing a couch or throne, also had curtains and was carried on men's shoulders or by beasts. Reference is made to one in Song of Solomon 3:7. In like manner the King of Kings is carried by His celestial attendants wherever He wants to go!

When the cherubim are not required to transport the throne of God, they do not stand before the throne idle and speechless. No! They "rest not day and night, saying holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Rev. 4:8).

As we have seen, the cherubim's connection with the throne of God is so close and intimate, that figures of them were displayed in the walls and ceilings surrounding the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. It has also been pointed out that Israel was strictly forbidden to make images of any kind, but an exception was made when it came to the cherubim. It would have been unthinkable to make figures or images of God, so figures of the highest order of celestial beings who stand in His immediate presence were used instead. The cherubim represented the heart and centre of heaven - the immediate presence of God. Would it be

going too far to suggest the cherubim acted, as it were, as a living standard, ensign or ensignia of God's throne, or even of God Himself. This may be the key to the 4 faces. They may represent, not merely attributes of the cherubim, but also of God Himself.

It would be inconceivable to depict God with 4 faces in order to represent His attributes, and would no doubt result in many misconceptions. Instead, the celestial beings closest to the throne are depicted with the 4 faces.

More will be said later about the significance of the face of a lion, ox, man and eagle. As we will see, they convey the basic concepts of being triumphant in rule and control; faithful, loyal and dependable in service; humane (gracious, merciful, compassionate); and divine (especially in judgement).

Solomon's throne, which represented God's throne on earth, had 6 steps. At the back of the throne was the figure of a calf's head (young ox?), and on each side of the seat were 2 figures of lions standing beside the arm rests. A figure of a lion also stood at both ends of the 6 steps, making a total of 12 on the steps (1 Kng. 10:18-20).

The calf and lions were of course inanimate figures, symbolic of things pertaining to the throne and the One sitting upon it. They were standards or ensigns of the throne. But in heaven itself the standards are not inanimate figures, but 4 living creatures!

MANY CHARIOTS OF GOD

The concept of the cherubim being the chariot of the Lord, is not confined or restricted to just the 4 living creatures. All angels, not just these 4 high ranking ones, are vehicles of the Spirit ("ministering spirits") and therefore chariots of God.

Ps. 68:17 says: "The chariots of God are 20,000, thousands upon thousands of angels." Every angel, being a "spirit," is energized by God's Spirit and constitutes His "chariot" through which He can perform His will, be it mercy or judgement, deliverance or destruction. Therefore, when referring to God coming to execute judgement upon the enemy and deliver the righteous, Hab. 3:8 says: "Thou didst ride upon Thine horses and Thy chariots of salvation." Verse 15 also refers to God walking through the sea with His horses.

Other examples of angels being referred to as horses and chariots are: 2 Kng. 2:11. 6:17. 7:6. Isa. 66:15. Zech. 6. Only 4 however, stand in the immediate presence of God and bear His throne.

In ancient times, horses and chariots and fire were involved in war; they were very much part of the battle scene. And, in many of the references to God's angelic horses and chariots the same applies. They relate to divine judgement and destruction. The "chariot of the cherubim" is no exception.

For example, when Ezekiel had his vision of the cherubim, the first thing he saw was, as we read in Ezk. 1:4: "a whirlwind coming from the north and a great cloud with a fire enveloping it." The A.V. says the fire was "enfolding itself" and the marginal reference says "catching itself."

SELF-GENERATING FIRE

The fire was self-generating, not fed by an external source. It was independent of combustion - unquenchable, perpetual, pulsating energy. It could be compared with the fire of the sun or the fire in the bush in Ex. 3:2 which continued to burn without consuming the bush; or the cloud and pillar of fire in Ex. 13:21 which burned for 40 years, leading Israel through the wilderness.

Adam Clarke gives a good description of the great cloud and fire enfolding itself. He says: "A mass of fire concentrated in a vast cloud, that the flames might be more distinctly observable, the fire never escaping from the cloud, but issuing, and then returning in upon itself. It was in a state of powerful agitation; but always involving itself, or returning back to the centre whence it appeared to issue."

This massive fiery cloud of course, caused a brilliant glow and radiance.

The 4 living creatures and wheels, bearing the throne of God, were within the whirlwind and fiery cloud, and came out as Ezekiel was watching. It seems that the whirlwind and cloud represented a storm which had the potential to cause great havoc and destruction.

THE WHIRLWIND

A "whirlwind" or tornado is rotary or spiral in its motion, and may have been created by the whirling of the 4 huge wheels rather than the wheels being driven by the whirlwind as suggested by Adam Clarke. (According to Ezk. 1 the Spirit was in the wheels). In Isa. 5:28 and Jer. 4:13, the wheels of chariots made by man are likened to the whirlwind. How much more divine chariot wheels! 2 Kng. 2:11 says a whirlwind accompanied the horses and chariot of fire that appeared above Elijah, and

sucked him up into the air. God also spoke to Job out of a whirlwind (Job. 38:1. 40:6).

Tornadoes as we know, suck up into their vortex everything that lies in their path. They are therefore a very fitting figure of the devastating judgements of God, and in Ezekiel's time (and ours) such judgements were impending. "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire and His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire." (Isa. 66:15-16).

Other Scriptures which refer to God's judgement as a whirlwind or liken it to a whirlwind are in Ps. 58:9. Pr. 1:27. Isa. 40:24. Jer. 23:19. 25:31-33. 30:23-24.

Sometimes the "whirlwind" which brings judgement and destruction is an enemy nation used by God as His rod of anger. Cp. Dan. 11:40. Ezk. 38:9. In Ezekiel's day the Lord sent the Babylonians against Israel like a destroying whirlwind and devastating storm and some of the prophecies refer to it in these terms. It was a divine judgement - as good as God doing it Himself personally, and the vision of the fire and whirlwind seen by Ezekiel in connection with the chariot of the cherubim, was prophetic of this.

The very first reference in Scripture to the cherubim in Gen. 3:24 in connection with a flaming sword, indicated that their purpose and mission involved the executing of Divine judgement. This is also indicated by the coals of fire they carry as we read in Ezk. 1:13: "In the midst of the living creatures there were what looked like burning coals of fire and out of the fire went forth lightning." We know that the coals of fire were for judgement because it is stated in Ezk. 10:2 that some of them were scattered over the sinful city of Jerusalem. This was a prophetic gesture of the destruction of the city by fire, and it was fulfilled by the Babylonians (2 Kng. 25:9).

Because it was God's purpose and He raised up the Babylonians to perform it, the prophetic vision seen by Ezekiel depicts the fire as coming direct from God - from the cherubim before His throne. Other references to God's judgement being signified by coals of fire can be seen in 2 Sam. 22:7-15. Ps. 140:10. Rom. 12:20. Rev. 8:5.

EAGLE'S WINGS

Another feature of the cherubim which suggests divine judgement is the eagle's wings; not that we are actually told they are eagle's wings, but it is a reasonable assumption on the basis that parts of the body

correspond with the 4 faces.

Corresponding with the face of a man are the hands and straight legs of a man. Corresponding with the face of an ox are the cloven feet of an ox. Corresponding with the face of a lion is the thunderous voice or roar of a lion (Rev. 6:1). In view of the fact that the face of an eagle is the only face of a bird, it is reasonable to assume that the wings would correspond, and be the wings of an eagle. It is not very likely that the wings of a sparrow, for example, would be on a creature that has the face of an eagle!

SYMBOLS OF JUDGEMENT

The eagle is a bird of prey and uses its wings to find and swoop down on prey. In Scripture it is sometimes used as a symbol of divine judgement. Nations sent by God against Israel to destroy due to sin, are sometimes likened to an eagle. See Deu. 28:49. Jer. 48:40. 49:22. Ezk. 17:3, 7. Dan. 7:4. Hos. 8:1. Hab. 1:8. Matt. 24:28.

Another feature of the cherubim which suggests divine judgement is the fact that one of its heads is the head of an ox. An ox is a very strong animal and if provoked can gore to death. (Ex. 21:28-32). Being large and heavy, oxen very effectively trampled with their feet, which is an expression used in Scripture in relation to judgement. Significantly enough, the soles of the feet of the cherubim were like the hooves of an ox and shone like polished brass.

In Biblical times (and in some countries today) it was customary to thresh corn by means of oxen or young calves (see Deu. 25:4 in the A.V. margin). In order that the animal might do its work effectively, its hooves were tipped with iron or brass. Threshing is used in Scripture as a metaphor for judgement. See Joel 3:14. Hab. 3:12. And, in view of the fact that the cherubim execute God's judgement upon the wicked, it is quite appropriate for them to be depicted with feet like calves (oxen) gleaming like brass.

How appropriate also, that those who belong to Christ, who shall ultimately join with him in judging and destroying the wicked, are referred to in Mal. 4:2 as leaping forth as calves from the stall to tread down the wicked.

Treading down under the feet is quite a common expression in Scripture to describe God's judgement upon the wicked. See Isa. 63:1-3. Ps. 8:4-6. Heb. 2:5-10. Rom. 16:20.

It is natural to wonder why the feet of the cherubim are depicted as being brass. Brass withstands and is impervious to fire more than most

metals. For this reason the plating of the altar where sacrifices were burnt with fire, along with the tongs and shovels etc, were all made of brass.

Significantly enough, after saying the saints will go forth as calves from the stall to tread down the wicked, Mal. 4:3 goes on to say that the wicked will be “ashes under the soles of your feet.” Why? Because as v1 says: “That day shall burn as an oven.”

In connection with this it is interesting to note that the body of the angel in Dan. 10:6 who came from the battlefield in answer to Daniel’s prayer, “was like a sparkling gem, his face like lightning, and his arms and feet like the colour of polished brass.”

The angel who appeared to Ezekiel in Ezk. 40:3 is also described as “a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass.” And, as previously pointed out, we read in Rev. 1:15 and 2:18 that the feet of Jesus were like fine brass as if they burned in the furnace. That is, they glowed and gleamed. The same is true of the mighty angel in Rev. 10:1 whose feet are described as being like “pillars of fire.”

WHY BRASS FEET?

There are therefore various examples in Scripture of feet being likened to polished brass - the feet of the cherubim, the feet of Jesus and the feet of angels. What does this signify?

Mic. 4:13 sheds some light on it: “Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make your horns iron and your hooves brass, and you shall thresh (crush) many people” Verse 8 further likens Israel to a beast who will “tread down the enemy.”

A similar metaphor is used in Dan. 7:19 in relation to an anti-Israel power described as a beast with “nails of brass, which devoured, broke into pieces and stamped the residue with his feet.”

There is going to be a lot of fire on the day of judgement, and the reference to feet like brass indicates God’s servants will not be burnt or blistered by it. This clearly implies immortality. Being immortal, angels are unaffected by fire. They are in fact, as already pointed out, referred to as “flames of fire.” And ultimately Christ’s saints will be equal with them and share their immortality. This is the blessed hope of the church and will not be realized until Jesus returns to earth, at which time there will be “burning coals at his feet.” (Hab. 3:5 A.V.)

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL, METAL

In passing, it is interesting to note that not only is metal (brass) associated with the cherubim, but also animal, vegetable and mineral as well. The cherubim combine all 4 of these features.

The animal feature is seen in the face of a man, lion, ox and eagle, four wings, calf's feet and the hands of a man.

The vegetable feature is based on the assumption that the cherubim, like all other angels, wore linen. Being made from flax, linen fits into the vegetable category.

The mineral feature is seen in the reference to the beryl in Ezk. 1:16. 10:9. These 4 features can also be seen in relation to the angel in Dan. 10:5-6.

Whether or not there is some special significance in this is open for conjecture. However, it should be noted that the word "like" is used in relation to the 4 features. The sole of the cherubim's feet were "like" the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled "like" polished brass. The wheels gleamed "like" a beryl. The word "like" indicates that a comparison is being made and should not necessarily be taken literally to mean that the feet were actually brass etc.

An example of this can be seen in Ps. 18:33 where David says that God made his feet "like hind's feet." The Good News translation captures the sense of this by saying: "He makes me sure-footed as a deer; he keeps me safe on the mountains."

David's feet were not literally hind's feet but were like hind's feet inasmuch as he was swift to avoid and escape the enemy who was pursuing him, and safe and secure in his hiding place in the mountains. The cherubim likewise do not necessarily have literal oxen's feet or hooves, but feet which can crush like oxen and survive fire like brass.

Ezk. 1:7 in the A.V. says the cherubim's "feet were straight feet." Most modern translations translate this to mean their legs were straight. As Ezekiel saw the 4 living creatures coming towards him in the sky above, they were gliding, not walking, so there was no flexure or bending at the knee. The legs hung down straight, vertical not horizontal.

The word "straight" used in relation to the legs, comes from the Hebrew word "yasher." It occurs many times in the Old Testament mostly in relation to moral condition and not to physical shape. It signifies "straight" in the sense of being right, righteous, good and upright in God's sight and pleasing to Him, and is translated in this sense frequently.

Because legs have to do with walking, some see the "straight legs" as

signifying a straight and righteous walk. The cherubim, being angels, are holy and righteous and their legs and feet always and only take a straight course to their divinely appointed destination. They are never side-tracked or deviate from duty; they do not turn to the left or right but go straight to the place of their mission.

Because their feet signify judgement, reference to being “straight” could also signify that the judgement they execute is a righteous judgement.

Not only do the features of the eagle and ox suggest judgement, but also the face and roaring thunderous voice like a lion. (Ezk. 1:10. 3:12. Rev. 6:1. 10:3. Isa. 6:3-4). Many times in Scripture the lion, a beast of prey, represents the judgement of God, and the lion’s roar represents God’s anger and threatened punishment. See Hos. 5:14. 11:10. Joel 3:16. Gen. 49:9. Num. 23:24. Pr. 19:12. 20:2. 28:1. 30:30.

The cherubim’s connection with judgement can also be seen in Rev. 6 where horses, representing the judgements of God, are summoned by the 4 living creatures. Also in Rev. 15:7, one of the 4 living creatures is seen giving the 7 angels 7 golden bowls full of the wrath of God to be poured out in judgement upon earth.

Some even see a connection between the cherubim and judgement in the reference to their wheels being like the colour of beryl (Ezk. 1:16).

The beryl was the first stone in the 4th row of 3 stones on the foursquare breastplate of judgement worn by the high priest of Israel (Ex. 28:20). The 12 stones on the breastplate represented the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:21) whose encampment was a foursquare arrangement consisting of 3 tribes on each side.

It is reasonable to conclude therefore that the order of the names of the stones corresponds with the names of the tribes in their foursquare encampment in Num. 2. If so, the beryl corresponds with the tribe of Dan, which means “judge.” This is conveyed in Gen. 49:16: “Dan shall judge his people.” On this basis it is concluded that the beryl represents judgement and it is therefore fitting that the wheels of the chariot of the cherubim should be likened to it, in view of it being an agent of divine judgement.

The same applies to the divine being in Dan. 10:6 “whose body was like the beryl.” This divine being was an agent of judgement which involved fighting against nations and bringing them into subjection to God’s will and purpose. (Dan. 10:13, 20).

PAGAN CORRUPTION OF CHERUBIM

When the various features connected with the cherubim are considered, such as the lion and ox aspects and the eagle's wings, along with the guarding and protecting of the way to the tree of life and holy of holies, it can be understood how the winged bulls and lions - the cherub-like creatures or sphinxes which guarded the gates and door-ways of the cities and palaces of ancient pagan kings, originated. They were a perversion or corruption of the Biblical cherubim.

The ancient Assyrians had winged man-headed bulls with cloven feet guarding the entrances of their palaces and temples. Assyrian reliefs depicting a human body with the head and wings of an eagle have also been found.

Archaeological excavation at the ancient Phoenician city of Gebal (the Greek "Byblos") revealed a carved representation of 2 cherubs supporting the throne of Hiram, king of Gebal. The cherubs or sphinxes had a lion's body, human face and conspicuous wings.

At Samaria some ivory panels were found depicting a composite figure with a human face, an animal body with 4 legs and 2 elaborate and conspicuous wings. The Egyptians also had winged creatures in some of their temples, and winged sphinxes ("griffins") having lion bodies and eagle heads which were familiar to the Hittites.

Interestingly enough, the cherubim in Rev. 4 do not stand guard at doors or gates. John saw them inside an open door around the throne of God, with no flaming sword involved. Due to no sin being in the city of God, and the impossibility of usurping the throne of God or assassinating God, swords are not necessary to protect Him or His throne.

However, as pointed out before, anyone approaching the throne would have to pass the 4 living creatures (and this would include Jesus himself when he approached the throne when he ascended to heaven). This was portrayed in the tabernacle by the fact that the high priest had to pass through the veil into which figures of the cherubim were woven, in order to stand before the ark of the covenant.

LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC?

Bullinger says the cherubim "cannot be merely symbols, for though symbolic and emblematic representations of them were allowed to be made, they themselves are not symbolic, or we would have symbolic symbols, and no reality at all." If the winged creatures in the tabernacle

and temple were symbols of a living reality in heaven, you would not expect the reality to be of the same appearance. The fact that it is, has caused some to conclude that the description of the cherubim cannot be merely symbolic but literal reality.

But what about the 7 lamps of fire which were not only in the tabernacle but also before the throne of God in Rev. 4? Does this mean they must be taken literally and not symbolically? No! In this particular case we are told that they were symbolic of the 7 spirits of God, i.e. 7 archangels.

Being “living” creatures (i.e. alive) has also caused some to conclude that they are real creatures, not symbolic. However, the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns in Rev. 13 is also alive, being healed of a deadly wound and having a mouth that speaks. He also makes war against the saints and is worshipped by all nations. But very few would regard him as a literal beast. Most would see him as being symbolic. The same applies to the dragon in Rev. 12.

God’s ability to create literal creatures like the cherubim with 4 faces etc is not in doubt, but such creatures would hardly be in the image and likeness of God as in the case of all other sons of God in heaven and earth, among the angels and humans. If the cherubim are angels - sons of God, would they not in reality be in the image and likeness of God? Would a human father who had sons with 4 faces, eagles’ wings and oxen’s hooves, regard them as being in His image?

Is it conceivable that God would have sons not in His own image? Is it conceivable that creatures not made in His image would occupy a position closer to His throne and higher rank, than sons who are made in His image?

The majority of Bible students believe that the 4 living creatures in Rev. 4 are symbolic, as in the case of the lamb with 7 horns and 7 eyes in the same context of the throne room scene, which symbolizes Christ (5:6).

Being symbolic would explain the variations of descriptions concerning the cherubim. There can be flexibility of features in symbology.

Reference has already been made to the symbolical significance of the straight legs and hooves like oxen which gleamed like brass. If the reference in Rev. 1:15 and Dan. 10:6 to Christ and an angel having feet like brass is regarded as symbolical, not literal, why not in relation to the cherubim?

THE WINGS

Regarding the wings of an eagle: as already pointed out, being a bird of prey, the eagle is sometimes used in Scripture to symbolize the judgement of God which swoops down upon the ungodly. However, the eagle does not only use its wings to fly upon the prey, but also to bear and protect its young. God actually refers to this as an example of His care and protection of His people as we read in Deu. 32:11-12. “Like an eagle watching its nest, hovering over its young, He (God) spreads out His wings to hold him (Israel); He supports him on His pinions. Yahweh alone is his God.” (Jerusalem Bible).

In Matt. 23:37 Jesus used the example of a hen gathering her chickens under her wings as an example of the care, protection and refuge he provides to all who come to him.

The idea of divine protection is also conveyed a number of times in the Psalms in terms of hiding or trusting under the shadow of God’s wings. See Ps. 17:8. 36:7. 57:1. 61:4. 63:7. Ps. 91 Ruth 2:12.

Psalm 91:4 not only refers to God’s wings but also feathers: “He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust.”

The references in these passages of Scripture to God’s wings and feathers are obviously symbolic, not meant to be taken literally. The wings of the cherubim can also be taken to signify, not only that they are agents of judgement, swooping down on the ungodly, but also that they are agents of blessing, watching over and protecting the godly.

In Rev. 12:14 we read that “to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly.” The woman refers to those who belong to Christ, and the wings of an eagle are obviously symbolic, not literal. They signify divine deliverance and escape from the enemy. David gave expression to a desire for escape from trouble in similar terms when he said: “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest.” (Ps. 55:6).

A symbolic significance is also applied to the eagle in Ezk. 17:3 where reference is made to “a great eagle with long powerful wings full of feathers.” A careful study of the whole chapter reveals that the eagle signifies the power of Babylon which swooped upon Jerusalem and Judea.

Dan. 7:4 also refers to Babylon in symbolical terms as a lion with eagle’s wings. This combination of a lion and eagle calls to mind the lion and eagle aspects in the cherubim.

Ezk. 17:7 refers to “another great eagle with great wings and many feathers,” and refers to the power of Egypt.

If such powers as Babylon and Egypt can be symbolized by an eagle with long powerful wings full of feathers, why not angels who are greater in power and who can really fly - as fast as lightning! Ps. 104:3 refers to them as “wings” of the wind,” i.e. wings of the Spirit. Ultimately the saints will be equal with them and shall “mount up with wings as eagles.” (Isa. 40:31).

THE EYES

What then do the eyes signify which are all over the cherubim and all around the wheels? It should firstly be pointed out that the Hebrew word translated eyes is the normal word used elsewhere in relation to the organ of sight - the organ by which men and animals see. The word does not mean portholes or windows as some have suggested who think the wheels were a flying saucer or some other form of U.F.O! Quite a different Hebrew word is used to describe windows. (Spacecraft would hardly have wings and feathers like an eagle or feet like the hooves of an ox!) Portholes are for looking through but eyes are for looking with, and there is a difference. It is the latter of these that is signified by the word eyes in relation to the cherubim.

There are several other Scriptures that may be helpful in determining the significance of the eyes. Zech. 3:9. 4:10 and Rev. 5:6 for example refer to Messiah having 7 eyes, which are explained to be “the 7 spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” As pointed out earlier (Page 51) the 7 spirits are the 7 lamps of fire before God’s throne in Rev. 4:5 and refer to 7 archangels. Jesus is depicted as “having” these eyes to signify his control of them. They are under his authority and act according to his will and command. As the church is Christ’s “body” on earth, acting as his mouth and feet to seek and find the lost and minister the gospel to them, angels act as his eyes in heaven, watching over this ministry, functioning as “ministering spirits.”

Archangels do not of course act alone as the eyes of the lord. Many other angels, if not all, act as the eyes of the Lord, watching events on earth and reporting back to heaven. This is a major theme in Scripture and many verses could be quoted.

In view of this, is it possible that the reference to the cherubim having eyes refers to the 4 living creatures having authority and control over the angelic hosts? As we have seen, the 4 living creatures are the highest ranking angels in heaven, even above the archangels. Being full of eyes could signify that when they embark upon missions, they are

accompanied and supported by hosts of angels. At Sinai, for example, there were tens of thousands of angels and they are referred to as “the chariots of God.” (Ps. 68:17).

The wheels being full of eyes is therefore a very apt symbol. Wheels speak of rapid motion and movement with ease, and eyes speak of insight and perception.

The eagle in particular is noted for its amazing telescopic sight. It can see objects at distances which cannot be seen by other creatures. It is the only creature that can look directly at the sun without squinting or blinking. When in flight, looking for prey, the eyes of an eagle are very alert and intense, in a state of total focus and concentration. Significantly enough, Rev. 4:7 says the cherubim was like a “flying” eagle. This does not mean it was flying, because it was standing before the throne. It probably means its eyes were very alert and intense.

The wheels full of eyes speaks to us of a divine surveillance chariot that runs or rides through the heavens watching the affairs on earth and the movements of man. As 2 Chr. 16:9 puts it: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.”

If anyone unfamiliar with Scripture was asked to think of a symbolism to signify eyes running, they might suggest legs and feet full of eyes. The Spirit however, has given us wheels full of eyes travelling through the sky, in order to convey a divine chariot.

The eyes are all around the rims of the wheels and all over the cherubim, both front and back. They have, as it were, eyes in the back of their head. No one can steal a march on them while their back is turned! Their sight is not limited to one angle or direction. There is nothing that anyone can do anywhere on earth without being seen. Angels are everywhere. This is all part of the omnipresence of God, and is emphasized repeatedly throughout Scripture.

Angels are particularly watchful over the heirs of salvation. “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.” “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.” (Ps. 34:7, 15).

EYES OF UNDERSTANDING

Eyes can also signify intelligence, and the multitude of eyes involved in the cherubim could indicate that many individual “intelligences” are involved. The eye receives impressions and conveys them to the brain, resulting in understanding. Hence, Jesus said: “The light of the body is the

eye” (Matt. 6:22), and Paul referred to the need for the “eyes of our understanding” to be enlightened. (Eph. 1:18). Seeing is often used synonymously with perceiving in Scripture, and blindness with ignorance.

The eyes of the cherubim and wheels can therefore speak to us not only of the angels’ ability to traverse the earth and see what is going on, but also their high intelligence which enables them to perceive the thoughts, intents and motives of people’s hearts. Those familiar with Scripture will be aware of examples of this - e.g. Gen. 18:12-15.

If it be insisted that the eyes in the cherubim are their own, and do not represent angels under their control, this would indicate extraordinary intelligence. Incredible brain power would be required to handle all the visual information that would come from so many eyes. Many humans cannot handle the visual information that comes from 2 eyes!

THE FOUR FACES

Regarding the symbolical application to the 4 faces of the cherubim: there are various interpretations on this theme. As mentioned earlier, a judgmental aspect can be applied to the lion, eagle and ox.

An old Jewish proverb presents another aspect, saying: “Four are highest in the world - the lion among wild beasts - the ox among tame cattle - the eagle among birds - man among all creatures. But God is supreme over all.” This proverb seems to suggest that the highest order of life is the characteristic feature of the 4 living creatures.

The 4 faces of the cherubim are therefore related by some to the 4 divisions of nature. Man is seen as the head of human-kind. The eagle is seen as the prince of the bird kingdom. The ox is seen as the strongest of domestic cattle. And the lion is king of the wild (non-domestic) beasts.

These 4 divisions are seen as representing the whole creation of living creatures in the physical world, and some believe the 4 living creatures are responsible for the directing of it; i.e. each of the 4 are in charge of a division of angels who direct and control the affairs pertaining to those divisions of the natural world.

But what about the oceans and sea life? None of the faces or features of the cherubim represent this huge section of physical creation!

Adam Clarke says the Rabbis believed that the standards of the 4 leading tribes of Israel in their four-square encampment around the tabernacle, were identical with the 4 faces of the cherubim. Although there is no specific revelation on the nature of the standards, certain Scriptures are regarded by some as supporting this: Judah is identified with the lion

in Gen. 49:9. Reuben with the man Gen. 49:3. 30:14-15. Ephraim with the ox: Deu. 33:17. Jer. 31:18. Dan with the eagle - this tribe covered the rear guard of all the camp, protecting it, hovering over it, as an eagle does over its young (Num. 2:25-31).

In the four-square arrangement, 3 tribes were on each of the 4 sides, and significantly enough, the standard or ensign of each side corresponded with the positions of the 4 faces of the cherubim.

Dan, whose ensign is regarded as the eagle, was the leading tribe on the north side. Judah, whose ensign was the lion, was on the east. Reuben, the “man,” was in the south, and Ephraim, the ox, was on the west.

According to Ezk. 1:4, the prophet saw the cherubim coming towards him from the north, heading south. Verse 10 says the face in the front (facing south) was that of a man. The face on the right (i.e. on Ezekiel’s right hand side, which would be east because he was facing north), was a lion. The face on the left side (west), was an ox, and the face at the back (north) was an eagle.

The position of each of the 4 faces was the same as the corresponding ensigns of the four-square encampment of Israel.

If this connection is legitimate, what could it signify? Some suggest it could mean that each living creature had special jurisdiction over one side. But together they support each other as a unit over all 12 tribes of Israel, whether it be for blessing or cursing.

Another view is that God’s kingdom or government on earth will be modelled or patterned after the kingdom in heaven. As the 24 elders had a counterpart in the 24 orders of priests in the kingdom of Israel, (which was the kingdom of God on earth), some believe the 4 living creatures and 24 elders etc will also have their counterpart in Christ’s government.

This same view maintains that the four-square encampment of natural Israel was a type or foreshadow of the future camp of the saints, the true Israel of God. One commentator points out that the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders, disappear in the book of Revelation when the bride and lamb have been united in marriage. It is suggested that the reason for this is because they don’t belong to Christ’s kingdom and their counterpart will be the body or bride of Christ. The fact that the cherubim were united with the mercy seat has also caused some to conclude that they pointed to those connected to Christ.

The mercy seat represented God’s throne and can certainly be related to Christ (Rom. 3:25. Heb. 9:5). Christ’s throne will be God’s throne on earth, so it is natural to see in the figures joined to the seat, something in relation to those who belong to Christ who will sit with him in his throne

(Rev. 3:21). As Eve was formed out of the side of Adam and represented the church, so the cherubim were formed out of sides or ends of the mercy seat. They were one and the same body as the mercy seat, being made out of one and the same piece of material (gold). Like Christ and the church, they were “one” - united - a unit. But they had to be “beaten” into shape to become part of the mercy seat. This speaks of the tests and trials which beat and hammer Christians into shape, conforming their character to the image of Christ’s character.

In the tabernacle, the 2 figures of the cherubim were made one in the mercy seat, and they faced each other, both looking towards the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. Angels of course, as we read in 1 Pet. 1:12 have always desired to look into the things concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glory that follows. The symbolism also has a very relevant application to the church. Jews and Gentiles, like the 2 figures of the cherubim, have been made one in Christ, their “mercy seat.” As followers of Christ, they are continually “looking unto” him (Heb. 12:2) and are focussed on the shedding of his blood by which they receive mercy and forgiveness. They also face each other which speaks of friendship and fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers who stand on Christ. And looking towards the mercy seat they are looking in the direction of the law of God under the seat which all true believers love and meditate upon daily. (Ps. 119:97).

Regarding the 4 faces of the cherubim: Ever since the time of Iranaeus in the 2nd century A.D. applications have been given to both Christ and his church. As a face can be an index to character, the 4 faces have been seen as representing characteristics of Christ and his church. The lion being king of the beasts, is a symbol of royalty, strength, courage, fearlessness, authority. (Pr. 30:30). Jesus, of course, is of royal descent, the Lion of Judah and king of kings, strong, courageous and fearless. And his church is a “royal priesthood” destined to reign with him as kings and priests (1 Pet. 2:9. Rev. 1:6. 5:10). Also the church is called to “fear not” and be bold as a lion, courageous in its spiritual warfare.

The ox was chosen by God for sacrifice and was used generally as a beast of burden and service for ploughing and treading out the corn etc (Deu. 25:4). The Apostle Paul refers to this in 1 Cor. 9:9 as an example of Christian service. The ox is a strong, patient, enduring, persevering servant of man; pulling its weight and giving its best without murmuring or complaining. Jesus was this kind of servant in the service of God during the days of his flesh; and his church is expected to follow his example.

The ox is also a ruminating animal; it chews the cud. This speaks of the spiritual person who eats the word and chews or ruminates upon it, i.e. thinks, ponders and meditates upon it to obtain the maximum spiritual nutriment from it. The ox is also cloven-footed which indicates sure-footedness, and speaks of the spiritual person who doesn't easily slip or slide away from the truth after taking a stand for it. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways," but spiritually single-minded people are unswerving in loyalty.

The man speaks of the only creature made in God's image capable of manifesting the divine attributes of love, grace, mercy, compassion, longsuffering. The "man Christ Jesus" certainly did this and was a perfect image and manifestation of God's moral and spiritual attributes, and his church is called to be conformed to the same image.

The "eagle" is a very strong bird and is able to mount to heights impossible to other birds. The majestic flight of the eagle soaring gracefully and swiftly into the blue heavens has ever been the admiration of observers. Often styled "the king of birds," it has been used from ancient times as a symbol of royalty and leadership. It was employed as the emblem of the Roman legions; it is found upon the seal of the U.S.A; it is used in the national insignias of Jordan and Egypt. Not only is the eagle noted for its powerful wings enabling it to soar high above the earth into the heavens, but also for its marvellous piercing telescopic sight as already pointed out (Job. 39:29). From the heights above, or perched upon towering craggy rocks of mountains, it can see and discern things which are undiscernible to other creatures. This reminds us of those who are in the spiritual heavenlies who can "see things unseen" (especially in relation to the future), by the Spirit of God in the word of prophecy. At incredible speed the eagle swoops down and grasps its prey in its talons. "Wherever the carcass is, the eagles will gather together!"

Seeing afar off is a divine attribute, not to mention being able to gaze without blinking at the sun which only an eagle can do. In Ex. 19:4 God used the example of an eagle bearing or carrying its young on its wings as an example of the divine deliverance of Israel from Egypt. (Wings also of course signify overshadowing care and protection Ps. 36. 57. 61. 63. 91).

As we have seen, the eagle is also used as an example of the swiftness of divine judgement (Deu. 32:11), and those who partake of the divine nature are likened to eagles that mount up with their wings (Isa. 40:31. Ps 103:5). It is not difficult to see in these references that the eagle is used as a symbol of divinity or divine power. In relation to Christ, divine power was clearly involved in his divine conception, miraculous

ministry and resurrection, and the same power empowered his church and will resurrect her.

In relation to Christ, it is interesting to note that the 4 faces of the cherubim correspond with the 4 different aspects mentioned in the prophecies concerning “the Branch.” This suggests that Christ is the sum of all their attributes! The lion aspect is seen in Jer. 33:15 where reference is made to the branch springing forth for king David. The ox aspect is seen in Zech. 3:8 where God refers to Messiah as “my servant the Branch.” The man aspect is seen in Zech. 6:12 in the words “behold the man whose name is the Branch.” And the eagle aspect is seen in Isa. 4:2 where reference is made to “the branch of Yahweh” (i.e. divinely begotten). However, the fact that the 4 living creatures fall down in worship before Christ (Rev. 5:8) makes it clear they are separate and distinct from him.

Another popular view is that the 4 faces are presented in the 4 gospels. It is believed that each gospel emphasises a particular face. Matthew emphasises the kingly (lion) aspect of Christ. Mark emphasises the servant (ox), Luke the man and John the divine (eagle). Let every Bible student form their own conclusion about this!

The passage in Plp. 2:5-11 also seems to bring out the same 4 important features of the life and work of Christ. He is referred to as being in the form of God (divinely begotten son of God). He is also referred to as a servant, for he took upon himself the form of a servant. He was son of man for he was made in the likeness of men; and he is king because every knee will bow to him.

Finally, some also see the same 4 aspects represented in the 4 colours in the robe worn by the high priest of Israel, namely: white (white linen), blue, red, purple. Blue is the heavenly (divine) colour (Ex. 24:10). Purple is the royal (kingly) colour (Mk. 15:17-18). Scarlet is a colour in Scripture linked with man. “Adam” is derived from a Hebrew word which means red, rosy, ruddy. And sin, which is deeply rooted in man’s nature (the flesh) is referred to in Isa. 1:18 in terms of being “as scarlet” and “red like crimson.” White of course is the colour of righteousness which involves becoming a fully dedicated servant of God, obedient to His will. In Rev. 19:8 white linen signifies the righteous deeds of God’s servants. Jesus is the supreme example and is referred to in Isa. 53:11 as God’s “righteous servant.”

HOLY HOLY HOLY

Rev. 4:8 says the 4 living creatures “rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” “Day and night” is to be understood from an earthly standpoint, for there is no day and night in heaven (Rev. 21:23-25).

In the tabernacle and temple, which were models or replicas of heaven, there was always light from the 7 lamps. The priests also offered continuous praise and worship, but it required a rotation system.

Around the clock as it were, the 4 living creatures continually and ceaselessly praise and worship God. Being immortal, there are no yawns, drooping eyelids or nodding heads, but lively, energetic, enthusiastic, exuberant, ecstatic praise. Other references to them worshipping are in 7:11. 19:4.

Ultimately, when we are made equal with the angels, we will also be able to offer ceaseless praise without tiring and sleeping. “They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

Rev. 4:8 says the 4 living creatures were “saying holy,” not “singing.” This could either mean chanting or declaring in song. It is evident from Rev. 5:8-9 that they do sing. In Isa. 6:3 we read that the seraphim “cried (i.e. called) to one another, saying holy” It seems that in this particular case they were not looking at God while they called out, but each other, as if affirming God’s holiness to each other in His presence. They were obviously calling out in very loud and deep voices, to cause the temple to shake and vibrate (v4). (Rev. 6:1 indicates that each of the 4 living creatures has a thunderous voice).

Isa. 6:4 also says that God’s temple was filled with smoke when the seraphim called to one another and affirmed God’s holiness. Verse 6 refers to an altar and hot coals which was probably the source of the smoke. In Old Testament times, smoke from the altar of incense wafted over the veil into the most holy place of the tabernacle every morning and evening. (Ex. 30:7-8. Lev. 16:12-13). This represented the prayers of Israel ascending to heaven into the presence of God. (Ps. 141:2. Lk. 1:9-10).

If the smoke in Isa. 6 was from the altar and represented the prayers and praise, we would be presented with a scene of the prayers and praises of the church mingling with the praise of the seraphim. There is no reference to an altar or smoke in Rev. 4:8, but there is in 8:3-4, which says smoke from the incense altar ascended with the prayers of the saints

before God.

Regarding the words “holy, holy, holy”: they obviously do not fit into the category of the “vain repetition” referred to by Jesus in Matt. 6:7-8. The context of the statement made by Jesus relates to asking for things. But there are no Scriptures which say we should not keep giving praise and worship. Quite the opposite! Many Scriptures encourage continuous praise.

Neither does the three-fold repetition of “holy” teach the Trinity as some Trinitarians claim. Rev. 4:9 makes it clear that the words “holy holy holy” were being addressed to “him who sat upon the throne” not “them who sat upon the throne.” And v2 refers to “one” not three, who sat on the throne, and the personal singular pronoun “he” is used in relation to him in v3, not the plural “they.” The same applies in Rev. 5:1 which refers to “Him who sat on the throne.” And the fact that the lamb (Christ) approaches the throne to receive a scroll from him who sits upon it, indicates he was not sitting on the throne when the 4 living creatures said “holy holy holy” in 4:8.

It is quite common in Scripture for a word to be repeated 3 times for emphasis. For example, “woe, woe, woe” (Rev. 8:13); “overturn, overturn, overturn (Ezk. 21:27). “O earth, earth, earth” (Jer. 22:29) clearly doesn’t mean there are 3 earths. The word “holy” is repeated 3 times to emphasize and stress the holiness of God. It is like saying God is very, very, very holy.”

The fact that the words “holy holy holy” are preceded by the statement: “they rest not day and night, saying holy.....,” indicates that the three-fold repetition is expressive of ceaseless unending praise. In reality, the words were repeated many more than 3 times. The New English Bible therefore translates Rev. 4:8 like this: “...without a pause they sang holy, holy, holy...” The same version translates Isa. 6:3 as follows: “and they were calling ceaselessly to one another, holy ...”

The statement in Rev. 4:9 that the 4 living creatures “give glory and honour and thanks to him who sat on the throne,” either indicates that this is the significance of the “holy, holy, holy,” or, that other words of praise such as “glory” and “honour” and “thanks” were used in conjunction with “holy ...”

Reference in Rev. 19:4 to the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders worshipping God saying “alleluia,” and reference to the words of a new song they sung to the lamb in 5:9-10 indicate that their repertoire was not limited to the one word “holy.” Bullinger points out that the “holy holy holy” is the first of 17 heavenly utterances in the book of Revelation. He

lists them as follows: 4:8, 11. 5:9, 10, 12, 13, 14-. 7:10, 12. 11:15, 17. 12:10-12. 14:13. 15:3. 19:1-3, 4, 5, 6-7.

The fact that the 4 living creatures rested not day and night from giving praise reveals that not only were there perpetual sights pertaining to the throne of God, but also perpetual sounds. Heaven is not a quiet place where a still silence and hush prevails. Only once in the book of Revelation is there reference to silence in heaven and it was only for half an hour (8:1). The fact that the silence is mentioned indicates in itself that this was unusual and abnormal. Background music and singing, praising God, continues around the clock ceaselessly in the throne room in heaven. Live music from living creatures with loud thunderous voices continually creates an awesome atmosphere of holiness in the presence of an awesome and holy God.

We who are mortal might think how boring and tiring it would be to keep repeating the words “holy, holy, holy.” Sometimes we may be tempted to say nothing in prayer or praise because we cannot continually say something new. But the holy beings in heaven never grow weary of the ceaseless repetition of the words “holy, holy, holy.” These words never grow old or stale to them because their hearts ever glow with a deep rich sense of God’s holiness, goodness and love.

Praise does not become monotonous to them, for with every utterance they gain a new view of the attributes of the Almighty. Being in the presence of His glorious, radiant power and majesty continually stirs their emotions and inspires ecstatic praise. It made Isaiah feel unholy (Isa. 6:5), and we would no doubt feel the same, but one day we shall join the ranks of the angels and be lifted into the same realm and dimension of profoundly holy praise and worship. At that time the ordinance of marriage will be over (Lk. 20:35-36) but the joy and pleasure experienced by the bride of Christ in the eternal presence of the bridegroom will far transcend the joy and pleasure of the best of marriages. “In God’s presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Of course, when the 4 living creatures sing “holy, holy, holy” they do not necessarily always sing the same melody or tune. Even today we have quite a variety of tunes and melodies that we sing to the same words “holy” If we who are mortal can do this, how much more those who are immortal! Supernatural beings would be capable of singing “holy, holy, holy” to as many different tunes as there are angels in heaven. One could stand in heaven for years and never hear the same tune sung twice! The Spirit of the Creator whose power creates endless varieties in His

creative works, could inspire endless varieties of melodies in those who stand before His throne. Add to this, singing in parts and rich harmonies, and it is not difficult to imagine awesome spine-tingling and hair-raising sounds that would produce goose bumps if we heard them.

The 4 living creatures could have addressed their “holy, holy, holy” simply to the “Lord” (as in v11) or “God” (as in 7:11-12. 19:4), or “Almighty” (as in 1:8), but they addressed it to “Lord God Almighty.” These same 3 titles also occur in 11:17. 15:3. 16:7. 19:6. 21:22. (The word “omnipotent” in 19:6 comes from the same Greek word translated “Almighty”).

In the Greek, “Lord God Almighty” is “Kurios Theos Pantokrator.” The Hebrew equivalent is “Yahweh El Shaddai.” “El Shaddai” (God Almighty) is the name by which God revealed Himself to Abraham, (Gen. 17:1), and “Yahweh” is the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses (Ex. 3:14-15). “Yahweh” is derived from “Ehyeh,” and in Ex. 3:14 “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh” is translated “I am that I am” in the A.V. Many scholars and modern translations maintain that it should be “I will be who I will be.” Whether or not it has a present or future meaning does not come within the scope of this present study; suffice it to say that in the book of Revelation the past, present and future aspects of God are emphasized. For example, Rev. 1:4, 8 make reference to “the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

A God who always was, always is, and always will be is obviously an immortal and eternal God, without a beginning or ending, “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 106:48) i.e. for ever and ever (Rev. 4:9-10). Such a God is clearly uncreate and self-existent; nobody created Him; all things were created by Him. The praise started by the 4 living creatures leads up to, and reaches a climax on this fact (Rev. 4:11).

Incredible power would obviously be required to create the universe, and the word “Almighty” is used by the 4 living creatures to convey this. As pointed out, it is translated “omnipotent” in Rev. 19:6 which means all powerful - power without limit; absolute power and sovereignty. Nothing is impossible to a God with such power and He is not only the God of the 4 living creatures, but our God also. There is only one God, and He is that God! And, if the 4 living creatures, who are highest in rank and greatest in power among the angels, worship and adore Him and fall down before Him, how much more should we!

In passing, it is interesting to note that the seraphim in Isa. 6:3 addressed their “holy, holy, holy” to “the Lord of hosts” i.e. “Yahweh tsaba.” “Tsaba” (hosts) means a mass of persons, especially soldiers,

ready and prepared for war or battle. It is a militant title of God and refers to the fact that He has millions of angels under His command to protect and bless those who serve Him, and to fight against those who resist Him.

GIVE GLORY AND HONOUR AND THANKS TO HIM

Having said that the 4 living creatures ascribe holy, holy, holy to the Lord God Almighty, Rev. 4:9 says they “give glory and honour and thanks to Him.” What is the difference between glory and honour? The following example may help: It is an honour and privilege to be a king and it brings glory, fame and respect if he is righteous and just and has victory and success. Many men have had the honour of being a king or a captain, but received no glory because of shameful conduct or defeat. God has the honour of being God and to Him belongs all glory because He is righteous and just and always victorious.

The reference to the 4 living creatures giving “thanks,” taken in its context, relates to giving thanks for creating all things. The 4 living creatures themselves are part of the all things created by God, and this would be included in their thanks to Him! How often do we thank God for creating us?!

Reading Rev. 4:9-10 in sequence; it seems that the 4 living creatures take the initiative to praise and worship God, then the 24 elders join in to take up the strain of praise and worship. However, in chapter 5:8-9 it seems that the 4 living creatures and 24 elders start singing their praise simultaneously, followed by the rest of the angels v11-12.

Verse 11, the last verse in chapter 4 says the 24 elders said: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.” Instead of saying “Thou art worthy O Lord,” many modern translations read: “Worthy art thou our Lord and God.” Or, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, even our God.” As mentioned before; all the angels were created or made by God (Heb. 1:7), so He is their God just as much as ours.

In human circles men sometimes get praise when they don't deserve it; when cheating, misrepresentation, stealing another man's ideas or stealing a march over someone, have been involved. God, of course, is pure and holy and does not claim praise and glory for what some other God has done, for there is no other God. He alone is creator. He therefore deserves to be praised, and this is conveyed by the 24 elders saying “Thou art worthy...” Ps. 18:3 expresses it in these words: “I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised.”

When the 24 elders say God is worthy to “receive glory, honour and power,” we obviously are not meant to read this to mean that He only has it because they give it to Him and if they did not give it to Him He would have no glory, honour or power. The word “receive” relates to it being ascribed to Him; i.e. the 24 elders acknowledge the glory, honour and power that belong to God and which has always belonged to Him, long before they were created. He has always had it and will always have it, whether angels or men acknowledge it or not. But true men of God like David do acknowledge it, saying: “Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our Father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chr. 29:10-11).

We read in Job 38:7 that the angels praised God with shouts of joy for His works of creation during creation week. It is not difficult to imagine them, as each creative act took place, shouting out in exclamation and clapping their hands like people responding to a spectacular fire-works display. Compare Jer. 32:17: “Ah Lord God! Behold Thou hast made heaven and earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee.”

At the time of Rev. 4:11 over 4,000 years have passed and the angels have still not got tired of praising and thanking God for His creation, and God has not got tired of being praised for it. Familiarity has not bred contempt. Creation was a massive achievement - something to be memorialized in praise for eternity. Rev. 4:8-11 is one of the greatest and grandest scenes of homage to God in Scripture. Other references to angels (“the heavens”) praising and blessing God for His wonderful works of creation are: Ps. 69:34. 103:20. 148:2, 5.

It is interesting and significant that Father God is said to be “worthy” due to creating all things, whereas the son is said to be “worthy” due to redeeming people by his blood (5:9). This raises a doctrinal point; namely, that the Father is the Creator, not the son. Mal. 2:10 plainly declares: “Have we not one Father? Has not one God created us?” Many Scriptures confirm this.

There are no Scriptures which openly and plainly declare that Jesus created all things. Some teach that the Father created all things “through” Christ, or “in” Christ or “for” Christ.” Such passages simply mean that it was “on account” of or because of God’s eternal purpose “in” Christ (in which Christ was the focal centre) that God created all things.

The Father’s purpose which centred in His son long before he was

born, even before the foundation of the world, was the divine motive and reason for creation. “In the beginning was the word” (‘logos’ i.e. thought, reason, purpose). In this sense the Father created all things “through” Christ. But the Father did the creating, not the son.

The fact that it is not until after the Father is praised as Creator in Rev. 4:11, that the son is seen approaching His throne, reveals that creation was not attributed to the son, only the father.

There are also other Scriptures in which reference is made to both the Father and son along with the work of creation, and the creation is attributed to the Father not the son. See Act. 4:23-30. 17:24-31. Isa. 42:1-9. Jer. 33:2-3, 14-15. The Old Testament passages clearly imply that creation took place before Messiah existed.

Scripture never uses the word “pre-exist” in relation to Christ or anyone else. It does however, use the words “foreordained” and “predestinated.” This is an entirely different concept and all the statements in Scripture which are regarded as teaching pre-existence can be understood in this light.

Regarding the statement: “Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created”: we learn from this that God’s motive for creation was His own personal pleasure. And the words “are” and “were” indicate that His creation not only gave Him pleasure when He created it, but still does, thousands of years later. He has not become bored with it or lost interest in it!

Even though God created everything for His own pleasure, the angels (not to mention ourselves) praise Him for it because we all get pleasure from it also. We could compare this with children being grateful for something their father made for himself but which they benefit from and get enjoyment. How disappointing it can be for a father if his children take no interest in what he makes and take it for granted!

People in the world, particularly inventors, who show initiative to create things from which not only they, but society also benefits, are usually respected and commended. How much more should God be respected and revered for what He has created, without which no human inventor would have any materials to create anything.

It should be evident that if God created everything for His pleasure, He would not hate anything that He made, including creepy crawly reptiles, spiders and snakes. To us some may appear ugly and scary, but to God they are all beautiful (Ecc. 3:11). God does however, frown upon those who fail to fulfil the function for which they were created, like humans in particular who misuse and abuse their freewill to live for their

own sinful, carnal pleasure instead of God's pleasure. Regarding those who turn back, God says "My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). But Ps. 147:11 declares that "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him and hope in His mercy." Ps. 149:1-4 further says that the Lord takes pleasure in those who sing, praise and rejoice before Him.

Statements such as these indicate the nature of the pleasure God was seeking when He created man and woman. Through the prophet Jeremiah He said: "Let not wise men boast about their wisdom, nor strong men about their strength, nor rich men of their wealth. If anyone wants to boast, let him boast that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices lovingkindness, justice and righteousness in the earth: For in these things I delight (take pleasure) says the Lord" (Jer. 9:23-24).

In Mal. 1:10 we read that the Lord has no pleasure in those who treat Him with contempt by not offering Him the best that they can give, and who give Him second rate service instead. But He takes great pleasure in those who truly fear and reverence Him and constantly talk about Him, and will make them His special possession (Mal. 3:16-17).



CHAPTER TWO REVELATION CHAPTER FIVE

The scene in Rev. 4 of heaven's throne room carries over into chapter 5 (there are no chapter divisions in the original Greek text). The stage has been set for something extraordinary to happen, and the scene now unfolds.

No reference has been made to Jesus so far in the throne room scene and it would be surprising if John did not wonder where he was. We are introduced to him in chapter 5 "in the midst of the throne and in the midst of the 4 living creatures and 24 elders," approaching the throne to take a book out of the right hand of God.

The point has been made earlier that Rev. 4 refers to the dazzling glistening glory that radiates from the one sitting on the throne, but there is no reference to the outward form or shape of the divine being who was sitting there. But in chapter 5, John begins to see more detail. He says in v1: "I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a book" We are told here that John distinctly saw a hand - the right hand of him who sat on the throne - not an empty hand - not a hand holding a sceptre, but a hand holding a "book."

This is not the only reference in Scripture to God having hands. See Ex. 33:22. 1 Kng. 22:19 etc. It is evident from this that God has form and shape, as has been discussed previously (see p. 26).

God was not reading the book. It was not written by someone else for him to read while sitting on his throne. No! it was written by his own hand or Spirit for the benefit of others.

In the past, the only book associated with God's throne was one that was placed in, or by the side of the ark of the covenant (Deu. 31:26). It is referred to as "the book of the law" in Gal. 3:10. It contained a copy of God's laws, referred to elsewhere as "the old covenant" which God made with Israel. Col. 2:14 refers to it as "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us," because it condemned, due to no one being able to keep it. It is therefore described in 2 Cor. 3:6 as "the letter (written code) that kills." Heb. 7:16 refers to it as "the law of a carnal commandment" because it depended on the fleshly physical descent of priests to operate. Heb. 9:10 says it consisted of "carnal ordinances," i.e. outward physical rituals involving food and drink regulations, washings (ablutions), animal sacrifices and circumcision etc; the mere physical motions of which could not make a person spiritual.

But the book in Rev. 5 is quite different. It is in God's hand, not

hidden or tucked away under or beside his throne, and it does not pertain to “carnal” rules, regulations and rituals that bring condemnation as we shall see.

ON THE RIGHT HAND

Regarding the reference to the book being in the right hand: the Greek text literally says “on the right” or “upon the right.” The word “hand” does not actually occur in v1 but it does in v7. The book was on or upon God’s right hand, not in, and the difference in terms could be significant.

The book was not grasped or held tight, but held in an open palm. There was no withholding on God’s part; no doubts, hesitations, reservation or reluctance as far as releasing it was concerned. He wanted to release it. He wanted it to be taken, opened and read. This is particularly true today of the book of books, the Bible, of which the book of Revelation forms a part and constitutes the crown and culmination.

A SCROLL

The Greek word for book is biblion or biblos from which the English word Bible is derived. Vine says biblos signifies the inner part, or rather the cellular substance, of the stem of the papyrus (Eng: “paper”). It came to denote the paper made from this bark in Egypt, and then a written book, roll or volume. Vine says: biblion denotes a scroll or small book.

Both biblion and biblos are translated “book” in the New Testament, and are used in relation to “the book of Moses” Mk. 12:26; “the book of the prophet Esaias” Lk. 4:17; “the book of the Psalms” Lk. 20:42, Act. 1:20; “the book of the prophets” Act. 7:42. In Gal. 3:10 and Heb. 10:7 the whole Old Testament is referred to by “book.”

In Biblical times a book was a cylindrical scroll, made of papyrus or vellum (animal skin, particularly calf). There were no hard-covered flat books in John’s time, and although God was more than capable of making one, He didn’t. This is indicated by the reference to the 7 seals that were affixed to the book. God conformed to the customs of the time by producing the book in a form and shape to which John (and Jesus) were accustomed and could readily identify. If a hard-covered flat book was in God’s hand, John would not have known what it was.

We are not told what material it was made out of, whether papyrus or vellum, and it is not important to know. It could have been either, and if

anyone thinks that nothing in heaven would be made out of materials that are used on earth, it should be pointed out that reference is made in Dan. 10:5 to a high ranking angel wearing a linen garment with his loins girded with fine gold from Uphaz (a place on earth noted for fine gold).

One thing is certain: the book on God's hand did not consist of gold plates, which Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, claimed to have received from an angel in order to write the book of Mormon. Only a carnal materialistic mind could dream up a story like that, as in the case of a south American woman who claimed that gold dust formed in her hair when she prayed, not to mention the claim of others that God filled their teeth with gold fillings!

The material on which God's revelation is written is immaterial. The revelation itself is the all-important thing, far more precious than gold, whether written on stone as did the finger of God in Moses' day, or on the plaster of a wall as in Belshazzar's day, or on papyrus or vellum as on other occasions, probably including Rev. 5. In each case, writing is only a means of getting a message inscribed upon human hearts, so the material on which it is written is not important.

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK

Now, the all-important question is: what is the nature and character of the book in God's right hand? What are its contents? There are several views: Most believe it is a book of prophecy consisting of the prophecies recorded in chapter 6 onward which John sees and hears as a result of the seals being removed. The prophecies in the book of Revelation are an elucidation of Daniel's prophecies, and in view of the fact Daniel was told to "seal the book till the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4), the sealed book in Rev. 5 is regarded as pertaining to those prophecies, and the unsealing signifies the revelation or unfolding of them.

Another view regards the book as representing a divine will. It is claimed that in ancient times 7 witnesses would attest a will, each affixing his seal for security. Before the will could be executed, the seals had to be broken. Failure to break the seals would mean that any promised inheritance it contained for Christ or his church could not be received.

Some hold to the view that the book is the book of life, containing the names of all who qualify for eternal life, not a book of prophecy. One of the reasons for believing this is because John weeps greatly when it seems no one is able to open the book and reveal its contents. It is felt that the contents would have to be more important than prophecy to have this

effect. However, this is not the case. The prophet Daniel for example, wept, being in a state of mourning for 3 weeks because he could not understand certain prophetic visions (Dan. 10).

The question that has to be asked is: Why would John weep if no angel in heaven or man on earth was qualified to open the book of life? Did he seriously think that this would disqualify him and all other believers from obtaining eternal life? Did he imagine that it would prevent the second coming of Christ and resurrection from taking place, and stop God's kingdom from being set up on earth? Hardly! He knew he was an heir of eternal life and the kingdom. John didn't need the book of life to be opened to see his name there to assure him of this. It is not likely that he would be taken through the door into heaven and see visions of God and heavenly glory if his name was not in the book of life.

So then, although no angel or man could open the book, John would know, if given time to think about it, that Jesus could, even though there was no sign of him at this stage. Had Jesus been present when the question was asked; "who is worthy to open the book,?" and he also along with angels and men was not worthy to open it, you could then understand John weeping if the book was the book of life. But to ask in relation to the book of life "who is worthy to open it?" would be as unlikely as asking "who is worthy to open the graves?" or "who is worthy to judge the living and dead and sit on David's throne ruling the world?" The answer to such questions would be self-evident to a man of God like John, and it would be superfluous to ask them. Jesus alone qualifies for such tasks as the volume of Scripture testifies. In view of this, it is unlikely that the book refers to the book of life.

Another reason why some believe that the book relates to the book of life and not prophecy is because other prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel etc were permitted to unfold prophetic programmes. Many of the elements in the prophecies in the book of Revelation such as the cherubim, beasts, 1260 days etc were revealed to these men. So why couldn't John open the book if it contained prophecies, and be a channel of the revelation like these other prophets? Surely, it is argued, the book must be more than prophecy seeing only Jesus is worthy to open it.

However, while it is true that other men were used to unfold the word of prophecy, there were many loose ends and missing links in their prophetic messages which prevented a full and complete understanding. A considerable amount of mystery surrounded many of their end-time prophecies in particular. Much of the symbol and detail was not understood. Daniel for example, as already pointed out, was told to seal

the prophecies given to him till the time of the end, signifying it would be a closed book and not understood. In relation to these prophetic messages he said: "I heard but I understood not." (Dan. 12:4-8).

Now, if John believed that the book on God's hand contained a revelation of the missing links that would fill in the gaps and bring about a better and fuller understanding, then it is understandable that he got upset when it appeared that no one was going to be able to open it.

On the other hand however, John had full Scriptural assurance from the Word of God that the book of life would be opened on the last day and that all whose names were written in it would receive eternal life. He had no reason therefore to weep if no angel in heaven or human on earth was worthy to open it. This failure in fact would not surprise or disappoint him. He knew that apart from God Himself, only Jesus, the son of God, had the authority to do this and would do it.

However, John did not have the same assurance that Jesus would open the book of prophecy or that it was God's will for him to do so. Jesus was absent from the scene when the proclamation went forth: "Who is worthy to open the book" And the fact that it is stated that "No man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth was able to open the book and read the book," could easily have caused John to conclude that God wanted either an angel in heaven or a human on earth to open the book. Because none of them were worthy enough to do this caused John to conclude it would not be done.

In view of the fact that the book of Revelation is the crown and culmination of the word of prophecy and ties up many loose ends and fills in many gaps, it is fitting and appropriate that Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, should alone qualify to put the finishing touch to the prophetic revelation, to which no one else is allowed to add (Rev. 22:18).

As we shall see, it was his sinless life and the offering of himself as a sacrifice for sin that qualified him above all others in heaven and earth to be the channel of this revelation.

It is actually because of the emphasis put on Jesus qualifying to open the book because of his sacrifice, that has caused some to conclude that the book is the book of life not prophecy. For example, the one who opens the book (Jesus), is described as "a lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (5:6). Again in v9 we read these words: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals: for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" In Rev. 13:8 the book of life is referred to as "the book of life of the Lamb slain," and also "the Lamb's book of life" (21:27).

In view of the fact that it is the sacrifice of Jesus and his redemptive work that qualifies him to open the book, it is believed that there is a connection between the book and redemption, and it would therefore be more appropriate if the book was the book of life containing the names of those redeemed by his sacrifice.

It is true of course that it is appropriate that the redeemer should open the book of life which contains the names of the redeemed, and that it should be referred to as “the book of life of the Lamb slain.” (13:8). But this in itself does not prove that the book in chapter 5 is the same book of life just because reference is made to Jesus being worthy to open it due to being slain.

Being slain as a sacrifice for sin qualifies Jesus to do many things, not just open the book of life. It would certainly be appropriate for him to also be the one to open the final consummating prophetic revelation of events which lead up to his coming and kingdom, due to the fact that the kingdom is only possible due to his redemptive work.

While it is true that other prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel etc received prophetic revelation, they certainly did not and could not approach God’s throne in heaven to take the revelation out of His hand in the form of a book. Only Jesus could do this due to his atoning sacrifice. As we read in Jer. 30:21: “I (God) will cause him (Messiah) to draw near, and he shall approach me, for who else would dare to approach me? says the Lord.” No wonder no one among the angels in heaven or humans on earth responded to the challenge to approach God’s throne and take the book from His hand to open and read it!

Another reason for believing the book in Rev. 5 is the book of life is because the “ten thousand times ten thousand” angels in v11 who say “worthy is the Lamb that was slain ...” after Jesus took hold of the book, are the same angels referred to in Dan. 7:10 in connection with “the books” that are opened on judgement day when Christ returns. Rev. 20:12 also refers to the opening of these books at judgement and says the book of life is opened at the same time. On this basis it is concluded that the book in Rev. 5 and the book of life are the same book.

But this is only an assumption. Just because the angels in Dan. 7:10 are the same as those in Rev. 5:11 doesn’t prove that the two accounts relate to the same time and place. They clearly don’t. Rev. 5 takes place in heaven around God’s throne long before the day of judgement, and Dan. 7:10 takes place on earth around Christ’s throne on the last day when judgement takes place. Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 20:12 relate to the same occasion, but such is not the case with Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 5. All that Rev.

5 and Dan. 7:10 have in common with each other is that they both refer to ten thousand times ten thousand angels.

BOOKS AND BOOKS

The word “book” occurs 28 times in Revelation and the plural “books” occurs twice, and these references do not always refer to the same book. There are a number of different books involved and discernment needs to be exercised to avoid mixing them with each other simply because they are referred to by the same word. The books involved are as follows:-

1. Rev. 1:11 refers to John being told to write in a book everything he sees. Reference in 1:3 to “this prophecy” and things “written therein” probably refers to what John had written. At the beginning of the messages to all of the 7 churches John is told to “write.” Other references to him being told to write are: 10:4. 14:13. 19:9. 21:5. The references to “the sayings of the prophecy of this book” in 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19 also refers to what John had written.

2. The second book is the one in Rev. 5 on God’s hand. If this book is a book of prophecy, and John recorded its contents in another book, then his book would be a replica of the original. The “book” already referred to in Rev. 22 would therefore incorporate this book.

3. The third book is the book of life, which contains the names of all who qualify for eternal life and is referred to 6 times in Revelation: (Rev. 3:5. 13:8. 17:8. 20:12, 15. 22:19).

4. The fourth book is referred to in Rev. 10. This chapter refers to a mighty angel descending from heaven holding a “little book open” in his hand, which John was asked to receive and eat. This little book contained prophecies concerning many peoples, nations, tongues and kings, which John had to record in the book he was writing. Rev. 11 is the beginning of this series of prophecies.

5. “Books” in Rev. 20:12 is the 5th reference. These books contain a record of the works or deeds by which people will be judged as stated in the same verse. Dan. 7:10 refers to the same books. The book of life is also referred to in Rev. 20:12 as “another book.” It contains the names of those whose works are acceptable to God and who therefore qualify for eternal life.

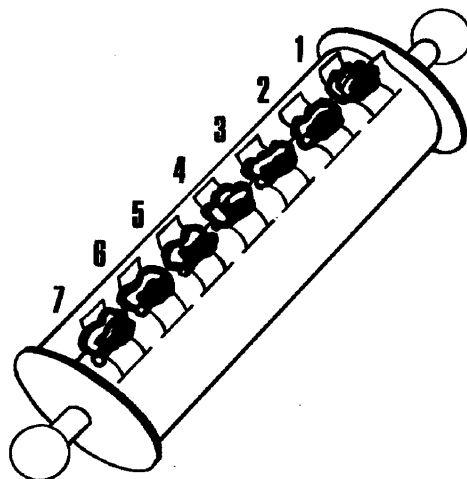
Reference is also made in Dan. 12:1 to “the book” in which the names of all who are saved will be found written. The reference is of course to the book of life. In v4 of the same chapter Daniel is told to “seal

the book.” This does not refer to the book of life, but “the words” of prophecy given to him by the angel as is evident in v9.

According to Dan. 10:21, the prophetic message given by the angel to Daniel was “inscribed in the Scripture of truth” i.e. written in a book, before Daniel recorded it. This seems to suggest that the original prophecy already existed in a book in heaven’s archives, and the same could very well apply to the book in Rev. 5 and 10.

We read in 1 Pet. 1:12 that the angels desire to look into the prophetic word, and would have been familiar with the first 65 books of the Bible. But they were not able to look into the 66th book, the final revelation because it was sealed, and none of them were worthy to unseal, open and read it. Since it has been unsealed, they would be familiar with the contents.

SEALED WITH 7 SEALS



One of the main reasons for some concluding that the scroll in Rev. 5 is not about prophecy is because of the 7 seals with which it was sealed. It is generally assumed that all 7 of the seals would be on the outside of the scroll as depicted in the diagram on page 116. If not - if only the 7th was on the outside and the other 6 were rolled up inside the scroll, how could John see them? All 7 of them therefore would have to be removed before the scroll could be opened to reveal its contents.

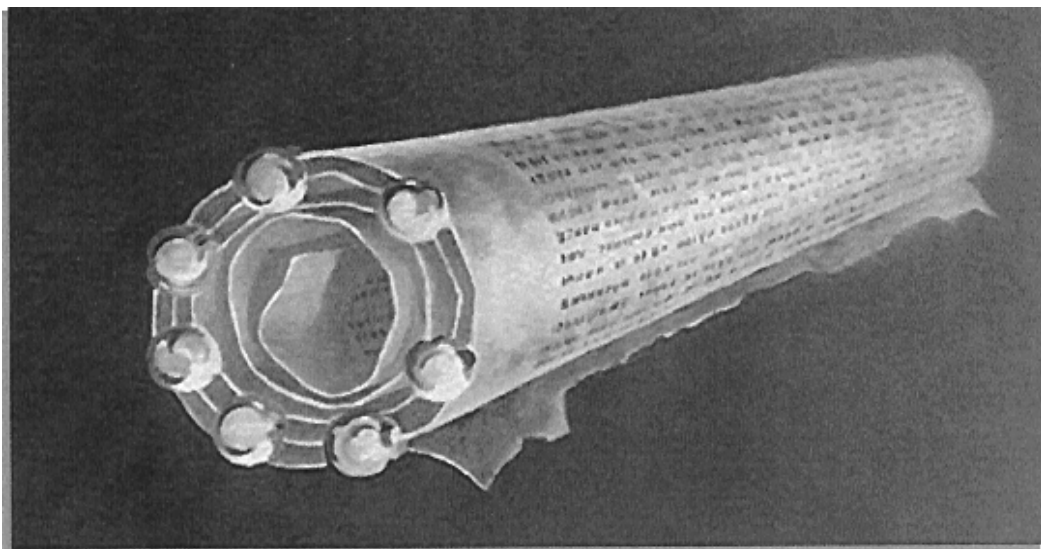
But according to Rev. 6, John received prophetic visions as each seal was removed, and there is no reference to the scroll being unrolled as each seal was removed. If each prophetic vision represented the contents of

each seal, it is argued that all 7 would have to be removed before the scroll could be unrolled.

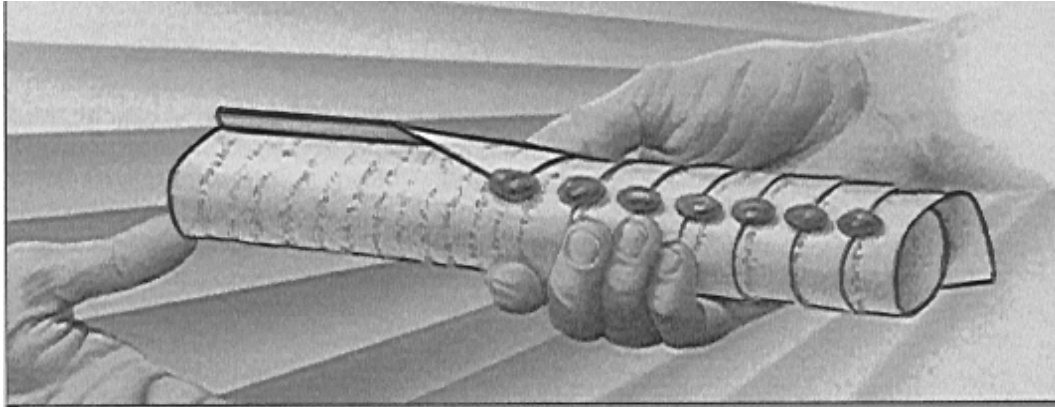
For this reason some have concluded that the prophetic visions in chapters 6 to 7 cannot be the contents of the seven-sealed scroll. Instead, they are believed to be events that have to take place before the book of life can be opened, i.e. events that will take place prior to, and as a sign of the second coming of Christ, at which time he will judge the world and bestow eternal life on all whose names are in the book of life.

However, in answer to this it could be argued that if all 7 seals were on the outside, and represented 7 specific messages recorded inside, it would be quite appropriate for each message to be dramatized in vision to John as each seal was removed, without having to unroll the scroll at all! The removal of each seal could signify the opening of the message on the scroll that it sealed. Rather than Jesus open the scroll and read it, the Spirit presented the contents in a live dramatic vision.

The 7 seals however, were not necessarily all on the outside face of the scroll. Scrolls in ancient times were composed of one or more strips of parchment. When more than one was involved, the strips were either sewn together or rolled up separately inside each other, each of which could be sealed separately. They could either be sealed on the face of the scroll or at the end. If 7 scrolls were rolled up together and each one was sealed separately on the end, all 7 seals would be visible. This could have been the case with the seven-sealed scroll in Rev. 5. as depicted in the diagram below.



On the other hand, some believe the scroll could have been rolled up and sealed as depicted in the next diagram, enabling a section of the scroll to be unrolled after removing each seal.



Whether or not the scroll consisted of one or 7 parchments; whether the 7 seals were on the face or end, and whether the scroll was a book of prophecy or the book of life, fortunately doesn't seriously alter any important truths or act as a stumbling block in relation to understanding the book of Revelation. Whatever view is taken in relation to the nature and significance of the scroll, does not undermine or have a detrimental effect on any fundamental doctrines in the Bible. Not accepting the scroll as the book of life does not reject the book of life, and not accepting the scroll as a book of prophecy does not reject the prophecy!

WRITTEN WITHIN AND ON THE BACK

There was writing on both sides of the scroll, front and back, which was not unusual. The prophet Ezekiel for example had a similar experience to what we read in Rev. 5 in that a hand was "sent" ("stretched out" R.S.V.) to him, holding a scroll that was written on both sides, with prophetic messages of lamentations and woe (Ezk. 2:9-10).

The book of Revelation also contains prophetic messages of woe. Ezekiel of course did not go to heaven and approach the throne of God to receive the scroll, and the hand from which he received it was the hand of an angel sent to him, not God.

Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll and then go and speak to the house of Israel. When he ate the scroll, it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth. (Ezk. 3). Jesus however did not eat the scroll that was given to him, but

later on in the book of Revelation in chapter 10 we read that John ate a scroll delivered to him by an angel. As in Ezekiel's case, it tasted sweet as honey in his mouth, but was bitter in his belly.

Some have related the reference to the scroll being written on both the inside and outside to those who are in Christ and those who are outside; i.e. those who are "into" the word of God and those who are outside the word. See 1 Cor. 5:12. Rev. 11:1-2. 22:14-15. On this basis it has been suggested that the writing within the scroll relates to the church and the writing on the outside to those outside the church. But there are no grounds for this view.

The scroll is clearly full of writing. It is not a scanty supply of knowledge and information but a liberal, generous disclosure which overflows to both sides. If the scroll was the book of life, there would be many names written in it. If it is a book of prophecy, there would be much information concerning the subject. This is certainly true of the book of Revelation.

There is an interesting theme in Scripture on scrolls, mainly because they relate to the Word of God. In most cases men were required to procure their own scroll parchment and write in it themselves at the dictation or inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For example: Ex. 17:4. 34:27. Deu. 17:18. Jer. 36:1, 28. Dan. 9:2. Hab. 2:2. There are only a few recorded cases in Scripture of a scroll coming to man with writing already on it. Reference has already been made to two of these: (Ezk. 2:9-10. Rev. 10). Zech. 5 refers to a flying scroll about 9 metres long and 4½ metres wide, covered with curses written on both sides.

Moses of course, received two stone tablets upon which the finger of God had written 10 commandments, and Belshazzar the king of Babylon witnessed the finger of God writing a message of doom on the plaster of his palace wall.

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The fact that the scroll in Rev. 5 was sealed indicates it contained classified information - information not to be seen, known or understood by anyone other than the person or persons for whom it was written. In Isa. 29:9-11 we read that due to the people having dull, apathetic and befuddled minds, the prophetic message was like a sealed scroll to them, i.e. not understood. Such was the case with the scroll sealed with 7 seals in Rev. 5. It was not known and could not be known until the seals were removed. Dull minds however, were not the reason for

this.

In Dan. 12:4 we read that the prophet was told to “close the book and seal it” until the time of the end. Why? Because he could not understand it and no one else would be able to understand until the time of the end (v8-9). The sealing of the book therefore was a symbolic gesture signifying it was a message not understood and not to be understood until the time of the end. As we shall see, many references are made in the book of Revelation to Daniel’s prophecies, and the unsealing of the book in Revelation leads to the unsealing of Daniel’s book.

Apart from the spiritual or symbolic significance of the number 7, the 7 seals suggests extra tight security - top security. To be sealed with 7 seals indicates, among other things, the scroll is a very important and significant document. The book of Revelation which arises out of the scroll is certainly a very important and significant disclosure of knowledge - a vital key which opens and unlocks all the end time prophecies which preceded it. The honour and privilege of having access to such divine information would obviously only be given to someone very special in God’s sight.

It is natural to wonder why the scroll, being in heaven, was sealed. After all, there are no thieves there, and angels would not open it if told not to because they obey God’s commandments (Ps. 103:20). In view of this, the 7 seals would indicate that the angels did not know, and were not privy to the information and contents of the scroll. We know from 1 Pet. 1:12 as previously pointed out, that they have a desire to look into things relating to the prophetic word, but they had not been allowed to look into the sealed scroll. It is made clear in Rev. 5 that none of the angels in heaven qualified to receive, open and read the scroll.

If there is a library in heaven, one could imagine the scroll with 7 seals sitting in a special place, conspicuously awaiting its unsealing and the revealing of its contents. If the scroll had been there from the foundation of the world, the angels may have wondered who would unseal it and when. Many angels over the ages had been involved taking information from heaven’s “books,” so to speak, to give to men to write in books on earth. But only God knew to whom the last one would be given to unseal and read, and until the time arrived for this to be done, no one knew that the son of God himself would be the one who would do it.

It must have therefore been a very dramatic moment in heaven when the scroll was seen sitting in the palm of God’s hand as He sat on His throne, and when the challenge went forth: “Who is worthy to open the book....?!”

A STRONG ANGEL PROCLAIMING

Verse 2 of Rev. 6 says the angel who proclaimed the challenge was “a strong angel” and he made the proclamation “with a loud voice.” In view of the fact that all angels excel (abound) in strength (Ps. 103:20), it is natural to wonder why John refers to this particular angel as being strong. In the scene depicted in Rev. 5 many angels are involved. Verse 11 refers to 100 million around the throne in addition to the 24 elders, 7 archangels and 4 living creatures. For John to specifically refer to this one as a strong angel suggests there may have been something about his appearance or voice that made him say this. Was he physically larger or taller, or his voice so loud and strong, that John referred to him as a “strong angel.” It is quite possible that angels, like humans, differ in size, height and weight, and that this particular angel was particularly large.

Without the aid of a microphone and amplifier, his voice would need to be loud to penetrate an assembly of 100 million angels. (On the basis of each angel standing in a space of 3 feet square, 100 million angels would occupy over 30 miles square). The loud voice also signifies that the message is urgent and important. It is an announcement that all must hear and to which all must pay attention. This is the first of 14 references in the book of Revelation to a loud or strong voice. (5:2, 12. 6:10. 7:2, 10. 8:13. 10:3. 12:10. 14:7, 9, 15, 18. 18:2. 19:17. There are no references to soft, quiet voices. Anyone who doesn't like loud voices and wants to be like the angels and assemble with them in high festival in the city, will need to become accustomed to such!

While on the subject of angels it is interesting to note that references to angels in the book of Revelation occur roughly 3 times more often than any other book in the Bible. There are about 75 references to angels in the book of Revelation.

WHO IS WORTHY?

“Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals?” is the message proclaimed in a loud voice by the strong angel. There is no reference to instruction coming from God to proclaim this, but the angel obviously would not do it on his own initiative. Angels, being spirits, possess and are directed by the Spirit of God. A voice from God may not have been heard audibly, but we can be sure the angel acted under the prompting of God. Extra sensory perception operates to the highest possible degree in the supernatural realm by the Holy Spirit!

It is interesting to note that throughout the book of Revelation, the “one on the throne” is not seen or heard initiating any action or activity, but is seen receiving praise and worship.

NO ONE IN HEAVEN OR EARTH OR UNDER EARTH

When the angel issued the challenge: “Who is worthy ...”, initially there was no response. Although it is not stated, there would have been a period of silent suspense in heaven. We know from Rev. 8:1 that silence can and does occur in heaven.

Many angels, if not all, would have desired to open the book and “look into it” (1 Pet. 1:12), but none regarded themselves as eligible or worthy. The angels, now being immortal, were sinless, but the criteria required to open the book as we shall see, was not merely sinlessness in immortality, but sinlessness in a previous mortal sinful state. In this respect not one of the 100 million angels qualified, even though they may have once been in a mortal sinful state. This being the case, it is not likely that any angel was used to write the scroll. It was written by God Himself. Millions of people lived on the earth, but none of them qualified to open the book either. John himself was very much loved by the Lord (Jn. 13:23. 19:26. 21:20) but he didn’t regard himself as worthy enough to open the book and therefore didn’t volunteer.

No one buried “under the earth” qualified either, and there would have been billions of people who had died and been buried during the 4,000 years of human history up to that time. Among those buried were Abraham the friend of God, Jacob the prince of God, Moses the law-giver of God, David the man after God’s own heart, Elijah the man caught up into heaven by God, Daniel the man greatly beloved of God. But none of these men were worthy to take the book, remove the seals and read it. And it was clearly not the intention of the One sitting on the throne, on whose hand the book was sitting, to open the book Himself and make its contents known.

JOHN WEPT BECAUSE NO ONE WAS WORTHY TO OPEN THE BOOK

John didn’t just weep; he “wept much.” He was emotionally overcome at the prospect of no one being able to open and read the book. He wept profusely - long and loud, at the thought of never coming to know the contents of the book. Disappointment led to dejection and despair.

There is no reference to any angels weeping. This is quite a scene! The lone figure of John, in the presence of God's throne of glory, surrounded by millions of angels, weeping; not for joy, but sadness.

On the surface it could seem a bit bizarre to some that a man who is taken to heaven and sees the throne and glory of God and mingles with the holy angels, instead of being ecstatic and filled with rapturous joy, ends up crying with sadness because of a book there that nobody can open. But this only goes to show what a profound love John had for the Word of God. His love for the Word and new revelation by which he could know God's mind and purposes better and deeper, was so great and intense, that nothing else could satisfy him or fill the vacuum; not even being in the city of God and basking in the glory of God!

The situation could be likened to a Christian who is very wealthy and lives in a beautiful mansion surrounded by the best of everything. But this will not satisfy him if there is a hunger and thirst for the knowledge of God in his heart. He would gladly leave the luxury and sit in an old tin shed if there is a book there that will take him deeper into the mind of God and unfold and expand His purposes.

They were not idle tears that John shed because a casual curiosity could not be satisfied, and he certainly didn't put on a mourning act like paid professional mourners, to induce God to open the book. They were the profound sincere tears of a man who loved God and His Word with all his heart and soul, who could see a book within his grasp which he perceived could take him deeper in the knowledge of God, yet was out of reach for him.

As pointed out earlier, some find it hard to believe that John would weep if the book that no one could open was about prophecy. It is thought that prophecy is not important enough to cause such a reaction. But, as was also pointed out, we read in Dan. 10:2 that the prophet Daniel was in a mourning mode for 3 weeks as he sought the Lord in prayer with fasting, for an unfolding and understanding of the prophetic word. He was so keen and determined to know more about the word of prophecy that he did not eat any pleasant food or any meat, or drink any wine or anoint himself during the three week period. And were it not for the fact that an angel came to him with a revelation at the end of the 3 weeks, he would no doubt have continued longer praying, fasting and mourning.

The Hebrew word for "mourning" means to bewail; lament, and is used in Scripture for internal mourning; i.e. weeping in the spirit. (Job 14:22). It is also used for mourning expressed outwardly and verbally (Gen. 37:34. 2 Sam. 18:33-. 19:1.). Daniel's mourning probably involved

both the internal and external forms of sadness and grief. No wonder the angel's response to Daniel was: "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you.I have come to make you understand what shall happen to your people in the latter days." (Dan. 10:11, 14).

It is significant that Daniel did not mourn when he was taken captive by the Babylonians, made a eunuch and placed under guard. He didn't mourn when he heard that the king of Babylon was going to cast into a furnace all who refused to bow down before his idol. He didn't mourn when taken to be cast into the lion's den, due to his refusal to obey the king's command to stop praying to his God. The only reference to Daniel mourning is in relation to a deep heart-felt desire to understand the word of prophecy. And the sequel reveals that this moved God and touched His heart, causing Him to respond by sending an angel with revelation.

The apostle John was of the same spirit as Daniel and his weeping also brought a response, not in an angel unfolding revelation to him, but the divinely begotten son of God Himself!

Daniel's prayer vigil was like Jacob's wrestle with the angel (Gen. 32). He refused to let go until the angel blessed him. As in the natural, so in the spiritual: winners never quit because quitters never win! Efficacious prayer has to be tenacious! "Men ought always to keep on praying and never lose heart" (Lk. 18:1). A casual half-hearted approach to the Word of God will not reap rich rewards of revelation and understanding. But, as we read in Pr. 2:4-5: "If you cry after knowledge and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you shall understand"

How many today when so many worldly pleasures, pastimes and pre-occupations seek to control our lives, are serious about, or have a deep desire to understand the word of prophecy like Daniel and John? How many agonize in prayer for it? How many would fast for 3 weeks for it and deny themselves pleasant food and drink? How many would weep or mourn for it, or at least have tears come into their eyes as they seek and search for understanding? Many even claiming to be Christians despise prophecy and treat it with contempt. They don't understand it and don't want to. Not only do they not want to study it; they don't even want to listen to those who have studied it. Daniel's prophecies and the book of Revelation are still sealed to them, and will remain sealed. Their attitude is in sharp contrast to Christ's who, when referring to Daniel's prophecy, said: "Whoever reads let him understand." (Matt. 24:15). And, in relation to the book of Revelation itself he said: "Blessed is he who reads and

those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Rev. 1:3).

If the “book” in Rev. 5 contains the word of prophecy, how amazing to consider that this book held on God’s hand, which no angel in heaven or anyone on earth was worthy to take hold of in their hand and read, can be in our hand and be opened and read today! Had it not been opened, Christians ever since would be curious and forever speculate about its contents and would wish they could read the book. What a tragedy it is therefore that although the book is now available, that so many professing to belong to Christ don’t open and read it and seek understanding of it. Many today need to capture the vision in Rev. 5 to realize the unique nature and origin of this book of prophecy.

The book of Revelation may not contain fancy formulas to enhance marriage or family relationships, or tell us how to have good health wealth and prosperity or how to run a business more effectively, efficiently and profitably. No! It is about knowing God and His “business” - His future purposes which lead up to the setting up of His kingdom on earth in which relationship with Him will be perfect and unending. But selfish and self-centred people are not interested in that. They will come to church to attend seminars on how to get God’s blessing on their marriage, family, business and health etc, because these things focus on self and self-interest and pertain to the now - the present. But they will not come to seminars that focus on God and His future purposes. Truly, “the heart is deceitful above all things.”

WORDS OF COMFORT FROM AN ELDER

One of the 24 elders comforted John, saying to him: “Weep not” It is evident from this that angels have feelings and compassion towards humans and can be touched by our upsets. Jesus used the same words of comfort and reassurance to the mother whose son was being carried out of the city of Nain in a coffin (Lk. 7:13). He also spoke these words to those who were weeping over the death of Jairus’ daughter (Lk. 8:52), as well as those who wept when they saw him being led away to be crucified (Lk. 23:28). Although he has since been glorified and is immortal, he also like the angels can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15) and says “weep not” in our times of sadness and mourning.

The reason given to John by the elder to weep not is not because failure for the book to be opened and read doesn’t matter and is not

important. No! Quite the opposite. The reason is: “Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has prevailed to open the book and to remove the 7 seals.” The reference is of course to the Lord Jesus Christ. The lion is a symbol of kingship, and Judah was the tribe among Israel’s 12 tribes out of which the kings came, and out of which the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ was expected to come on the basis of certain messianic prophecies e.g. (Gen. 49:9). Being a symbol of kingship and rule, the lion relates particularly to the second coming and kingdom of Christ, at which time he will roar as a lion from Zion and devour his adversaries (Joel 3:16. Pr. 19:12).

We read in Heb. 7:14 that “it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah.” The salvation of the world therefore came out of Judah. This is what Jesus meant when he said: “Salvation is of (out of) the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). (“Jew” is a nickname for Judah).

It is evident from this that the Jewish connection with Christ is important and must not be forgotten. Why? Because God ordained a special genealogical line for Jesus to come through, and the tribe of Judah formed an integral part of it.

THE ROOT OF DAVID

After stating that Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah, the elder then refers to him as “the root of David.” Rev. 22:16 refers to him as “the root and offspring of David.” We can readily understand how Jesus is the offspring of David because, through his mother Mary who conceived him and who was a descendant of David, Jesus became a descendant also. David of course was of the tribe of Judah and the first king from that tribe to reign over Israel.

David was given specific promises that Messiah would be his descendant and would reign as king upon his throne at Jerusalem. This is a major theme in the Bible as the following selection of Scriptures indicate: 2 Sam. 7:12-16 and Heb. 1:5. Ps. 89. 132:11-. Isa. 9:7. 11:1. 22:22. 53:3. Jer. 23. 33. Am. 9:11. Lk. 1:32. Act. 2:29-30. 15:16. Rom. 1:3. 2 Tim. 2:8. Rev. 3:7.

There is no difficulty therefore understanding how Jesus is the offspring of David, but how could he be the “root” of David? Both the aspects of root and offspring are also given in Isa. 11. Verse 1 says Messiah will be a branch that grows out of the roots of Jesse (David’s father), and v10 says he shall be a “root of Jesse.” How could Jesus be both a branch out of Jesse’s root and a root of Jesse as well? To be a

branch or offspring of Jesse and David, means coming or descending after them, but for Jesus to be a root, implies he must have been before them and that they owed their origin and existence to him.

According to Jesus, he was well before Jesse and David, for he said he was “before Abraham” (Jn. 8:58). Even John the Baptist said concerning Jesus: “He is preferred before me because he was before me” (Jn. 1:30). But when John said Jesus “was” before me, he did not necessarily mean “existed” before me, i.e. pre-existed. The word “pre-existed” never occurs in the Bible. It is an unbiblical term. Even though the Greeks used the word, because they believed in the concept of pre-existence, the New Testament Greek text studiously avoids the term and never uses it in relation to Jesus or anyone else. “Pre-existence” is not a Biblical concept or doctrine, either in the Old Testament or New Testament.

However, the terms “predestined” and “foreordained” are used. For example: 1 Pet. 1:20 says Jesus was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” i.e. God’s purpose in Christ was ordained - planned - appointed before the world was created. Jesus was destined to be the messiah long before Abraham and David existed. God’s purpose was not a last minute decision or last ditch effort. No! It was an eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11) and Abraham and David etc owed their existence to it.

Without Christ as the foundation of God’s purpose, you cannot make sense of Abraham and David. There is no point or purpose in their existence. Their place in Bible history only makes sense when Jesus is seen as the root of their life. Abraham and David were simply links in a chain that has its start and finish - beginning and ending in Christ. In this sense, he is truly the alpha and omega, the beginning and ending of God’s eternal purpose.

This is conveyed in Jn. 1:1: “In the beginning was the word” (Greek “logos”). Logos means the thought, plan, purpose, reason. This section of Scripture teaches that Jesus was the reason - the divine motive or purpose for creation. It was “through” him in this sense that God created the world. And God’s purpose which centred in Christ became the root or basis - the foundation of all developments in history, especially the unique holy genealogical line recorded in Lk. 3 which goes from Adam to Christ, covering a period of 4,000 years.

The prophecy concerning Christ in Mic. 5:2 which refers to his “goings forth” having been “from of old, from everlasting” actually refers to his genealogical line. “Goings forth” is more correctly translated “comings forth,” and relates to seminal outgoings which involves family

descent. The New English Bible translates the statement in Mic. 5:2 as follows: “whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by.” Jesus had as it were, from ancient times, been travelling down a divinely prepared and controlled genealogical line which culminated in Mary.

When we read that Jesus “was” before Abraham, it does not mean he “existed” before, i.e. pre-existed. It means he was “ordained” before i.e. fore-ordained, or “destined” before, i.e. predestined. Jesus preceded everyone in time and place in God’s eternal purpose. Everyone involved in that purpose therefore owe their existence to Jesus in that sense, not to mention the very creation of the whole world itself.

Long before sin even entered the world, God planned the redemption of mankind through the sacrifice of His son. All the animal sacrifices offered as a sacrifice for sin from the beginning of the history of fallen man, pointed forward to this. Jesus is therefore referred to as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). He did not of course have to pre-exist for this to be the case. He was not literally and physically slain every time an animal was slain for sacrifice! But he was there in the mind and purpose of God who ordained these sacrifices to be a type and foreshadow of his sacrifice. This purpose was the root and basis of all sacrifice for sin.

Not only did God foreordain the redemptive work in Christ before the foundation of the world, but also the glory that he would give him as a result of it. Jesus was therefore able to pray for the glory which he had with his Father before the world was created (Jn. 17:5). That it was God’s purpose long before Christ came and suffered his sacrificial death, to give him glory after his suffering, is evident by the fact that many prophets prior to Christ were inspired to see this glory in prophetic vision and speak about it. For this reason Jesus said on one occasion that Isaiah the prophet saw his glory and spoke of him (Jn. 12:41). God knows and sees the end from the beginning and could see his triumphant son ultimately with him at the right hand of his throne sharing his glory. Jesus knew and understood this and therefore when the time came to enter into that glory, he said in his prayer to his Father, “Glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was.”

Such language has nothing to do with pre-existence, but is fully in accord with the principle of predestination and foreordination. This principle is seen in relation to other men such as the prophet Jeremiah. Speaking to him God said: “Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you and ordained you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah was known by God and

ordained as a prophet before he was born! He was foreordained. Had the same words been spoken concerning Jesus, many would quote them as proof for pre-existence. They are not however the language of pre-existence but predestination and foreordination.

The same applies in Isa. 45:1 where reference is made to God holding the right hand of Cyrus king of Persia, decades before he was born. As the apostle Paul puts it in Rom. 4:17: “God speaks of things which do not exist as though they were in existence.”

The double title in the book of Revelation of Jesus being the root and offspring of David was the answer to the question Jesus put to his contemporaries: “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?” They replied: “The son of David.” This was correct because he was the offspring of David through Mary’s conception. But Jesus said: “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, called him lord (sir) saying, the Lord said unto my lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. If David called him lord, how is he his son?” How could Christ be superior to David if he is his son? In Jewish culture a father, having preceded his son, took precedence over him and was superior.

There were three reasons for Jesus being of superior status to David:

1. He was “before” David and took precedence over him in God’s eternal purpose. In this purpose, David was only a stepping stone but Jesus was the foundation and capping stone.

2. Jesus was divinely begotten but David was not. David was told in advance that this would be the case: “Thou art my son, this day I have begotten thee” (Ps. 2:7). “I will be his Father and he shall be my son” (2 Sam. 7:14). It is made clear in Heb. 1:5 that these words apply to the Lord Jesus Christ. Again in Ps. 89:27 we read that God promised to make Messiah “my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (including David)!

3. David sinned but Jesus didn’t. He was mentally, morally and spiritually stronger and superior. For this reason every knee must eventually bow before him and every tongue confess him as Lord (Plp. 2:8-11).

Traditional orthodox scholars who believe in the Trinitarian concept of God and the pre-existence of Christ, interpret the word “root” to mean Creator. They therefore conclude that Jesus was the Creator and created David. However, the word root does not mean Creator. A root in a family tree is something created, not the Creator. This is certainly evident in Isa. 53:2 where Jesus is referred to as a root that will grow up out of dry ground.

Regarding the word “offspring”: it is a biological term meaning progeny or issue - that which springs forth or out of. Offspring results from the conjunction of the female ovum and male sperm, by which the child is impregnated with genes from both parents which have been passed down a long genealogical line involving many ancestors. Personal, organic, genetic relationship with parents and ancestors is involved in all offspring. Jesus, through Mary’s conception, was impregnated with her genes, which had been passed down from David’s time and beyond. This therefore made Jesus the “seed” or “offspring” of David in a real genetic sense. (The Greek word for seed is “sperma”).

But what about the word “root”? Can it also be interpreted in a literal, biological sense? If so, we would have to conclude that Jesus was David’s ancestor - that he was not only David’s progeny but also progenitor. But in order for Jesus to be David’s progenitor would require him to pre-exist, not as God, but as a man, and to marry and have children so that a family tree could develop out of which David could spring. But most Trinitarians and non Trinitarians, if not all, would not find such a concept acceptable.

Does this mean therefore, that the word root is devoid of any biological significance? Not necessarily. It is interesting and significant that “the parent cells control the specific design of a baby, and it is a design that will follow a pattern passed along a chain of inheritance going back to the biological roots of the family.” (Quoted from a book written by Geraldine Lux Flannagan entitled “The first nine months of life”). It is now a known and accepted fact that the biological “roots” of a family determine the ‘design’ of a baby.

Now, it should be evident that if God wanted a holy genealogical line to be involved in producing His son, he would set in place the biological roots accordingly. In this sense therefore, Jesus could be described as the root of the tree out of which David came. The gene pattern or design of David and others before and after him, who formed links in the genealogical line, was based on God’s foreordained and eternal purpose concerning His own son!

The same book quoted earlier also points out that “when any two parent cells unite, they bring together a blend of attributes of all ancestors before them.” In view of this it is interesting that Jesus is not only referred to as “son of David” but is even called “David” (Jer. 30:9. Ezk. 34:23-24. 37:24-25. Hos. 3:5). “David” means “beloved” which is a title given to Christ in Eph. 1:6.

The word “root” also occurs in Rom. 11:16-18 and is generally applied to Abraham or the promises made to him. Vine says it is used

metaphorically of “cause.” Jesus was certainly the root of David in this sense - the cause or reason, not just for David’s existence, but also the Messianic promises and prophecies given to him.

PREVAILED TO OPEN THE BOOK

Having stated that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the elder then points out that it is he who “has prevailed to open the book and remove the 7 seals.” On the face of it, reference to Jesus prevailing as the Lion of Judah, could be taken to mean that because he will have kingly power and authority to set up his kingdom on earth at his second coming, he is worthy to open the book.

However, the Greek word translated “prevailed” is the same word translated “overcome” in Jn. 16:33 in relation to Jesus overcoming the world, i.e. the world of sin involving all fleshly lusts (1 Jn. 2:16). No one else in heaven or earth ever achieved total victory over sin in the flesh. Many have conquered cities and set up kingdoms, but not conquered sin and death.

The greatest conquest of all is self-conquest, i.e. conquest of the sinful self-will by humble submission and obedience to the Word and will of God. “Better is he who rules his own spirit than he who conquers a city” (Pr. 16:32). Mastery of self requires a quality of character that worldly conquests do not require. It is only because Jesus allowed the Word of God to take authority over his spirit, to rule and prevail over his life, that the Word allows him to take authority over the world and rule all nations. This same principle can be seen in Rev. 2:26-27 where Jesus makes the point that those who will rule the nations with him must firstly overcome and keep his works. Also see Rev. 3:21.

A LAMB THAT APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN SLAIN

When the elder said to John: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” he was asking John to look in the direction he was looking. Verse 6 says John “looked, and lo, (to his surprise) in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as though it had been slain, having 7 horns and 7 eyes”

Here we have another paradox. John looked for a lion and saw a lamb. It was standing and could walk and was therefore alive but appeared to have been slain. It represents a resurrected lamb! The lamb evidently bore the marks of slaughter, possibly displaying a wound or gash around

the neck where the throat was cut which stained the wool with blood.

Some believe the phraseology is designed to give the impression that the lamb was still in the act of being slain for sacrifice. On this basis the conclusion is drawn that the sacrificial offering of Christ is so important in the sight of God, that he is ever remembered and seen as being slain in sacrifice for the sins of the world. God never forgets and does not want us to forget it. For this reason the church has been commanded to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of his death and the shedding of his blood.

It is also no doubt for the same reason that the holes in his hands and feet inflicted at his crucifixion will remain visible throughout eternity. (Zech. 12:10. Lk. 24:39. Jn. 20:25-28). They will be an everlasting sign, witness and memorial to the fact that he was the Lamb slain in order to reconcile man to God.

Initially, when John was told that the Lion of Judah, the root of David, had prevailed to open the book, he would know immediately that the reference was to Jesus. But, up until this point of time, there has been no sign of Jesus in the throne room scene. As soon as reference was made to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, John probably expected to see him as a conquering captain. Instead, he saw him as a slain lamb.

Although John may have been surprised to see a slain lamb when he expected to see a lion, he would not be surprised at Jesus being represented as a lamb. A lamb was involved in Israel's Passover every year and John knew that this pointed to Jesus: (1 Cor. 5:7. Isa. 53:7. Act. 8:32. 1 Pet. 1:18-20. Jer. 11:19. Rev. 13:8).

It is significant that John was the only one of the writers of the gospels to refer to Jesus as "the Lamb of God." He did this when quoting the words of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (Jn. 1:29, 36).

So when John saw the lamb bearing the marks and wounds of slaughter, he would know it represented a sacrificial lamb and signified Christ crucified - the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. The following verses in Rev. 5 emphasize this. Verses 8-10 refer to the 4 living creatures falling down before the Lamb singing a new song saying: "Thou art worthy to take the book and open it, for you were slain and have redeemed men" Here the redemption of mankind, which involved sacrifice for sin, is linked with the slain lamb.

The apostle John was only a young man in his twenties or thirties when John the Baptist declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But now, over sixty years later, he sees the full

force of the words as he beholds the Lamb.

The most appropriate time to think of Jesus as the lamb slain for the sins of the world would have been as he was bleeding and dying on the cross. But John probably didn't think of the death of Jesus in those terms when he stood at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:25-26). The need for a crucified Messiah was a mystery to all the apostles until after his resurrection. (Mk. 9:30-32. Matt. 17:21-22. Lk. 24:18-27).

But now, in Rev. 5, John doesn't see the slain lamb nailed helpless on a cross, being taunted, reviled and reproached by ignorant, sinful and mortal men. He sees him in heaven in the midst of the throne of God being praised and worshipped by over 100 million divine, immortal angels! What a contrast! This is the joy that was set before him that enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame.

Reference to the lamb being "in the midst of the throne" doesn't mean sitting on it. He clearly wasn't, because we read in v7 that he approached the throne to take the book out of God's hand. The 4 living creatures are also referred to in 4:6 as being "in the midst of the throne" and they quite clearly were not sitting on the throne with God.

The fact that the lamb is in the midst of the 4 living creatures reveals that Jesus was closer to the throne than they were. Both the cherubim and the lamb are referred to as being "in the midst of the throne." As we have seen, the cherubim were in the midst of the most holy place in the tabernacle and temple, standing on the mercy seat which represented the throne of God. And the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled between them (in the midst of them) in the midst of the mercy seat. It is significant therefore, that the slain lamb is referred to as being in the midst of the 4 living creatures and in the midst of the throne of God. Although Jesus is not actually depicted in this scene sitting on the throne, we know he has been invited to do so (Ps. 110:1).

The lamb and lion then, speak of the first and second coming of Christ. He came as a lamb to suffer and conquer sin and death. And he will return as a lion to conquer the nations and set up the kingdom of God. Under the law, bullocks and goats were also offered as a sacrifice for sin, but neither of these were chosen to represent the sacrifice of Christ. It would not have been as appropriate for John to see Jesus represented by a bull or goat standing before the throne! Such animals are stronger; more assertive, pushy, stubborn and aggressive than lambs. Lambs are more meek and lowly, gentle, guileless and harmless by comparison. They are therefore a more fitting symbol for Christ who said: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29), and of whom it was testified: "He was oppressed

and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7. Act. 8:30-35).

It is interesting to note that Rev. 5:5 is the only reference to Jesus as a Lion in the whole book of Revelation. But once he is introduced as a lamb, he continues to be referred to as a lamb throughout the rest of the book. All in all, Jesus is referred to as “lamb” 27 times in the book of Revelation. He is the Lamb who opens the seals (6:1); it is the “wrath of the Lamb” that the nations are taught to fear (6:16. 17:14). It is the “marriage of the Lamb” in which the saints participate (19:7, 9. 21:9), and it is the “book of life of the Lamb” which is opened on the last day (13:8). And it is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” in the New Jerusalem (21:22-23).

This all indicates that although Jesus has become the Lion, he has not ceased to be the Lamb. A lion is known for its aggression and destructive force, and Jesus will manifest such attributes towards his foes. But his heart will still be gentle, meek, loving and lowly towards those who are humble, especially his friends. Heb. 13:8 says Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Yesterday he was meek and lowly and still is today and will be forever. Zech. 9:9 which refers to Jesus as the coming king, being just and lowly and having salvation, can be applied to both the first and second coming.

Jesus is a “gentle giant;” a lion-lamb; a merciful and faithful high priest, able to be touched by the feelings of our infirmities, and able to succour those who are tempted, having been tempted himself (Heb. 2:17-18. 4:15-16).

The aspects of lion and lamb are seen in Ps. 72. Verse 4 refers to breaking in pieces the oppressor, and verses 13-14 refers to sparing the poor and saving the souls of the needy, redeeming them from exploitation and violence.

Meekness is not weakness! Jesus himself said: “Blessed are the meek” (Matt. 5:5). Israel had constantly expected a conquering Messiah and therefore rejected a crucified king. Christ’s meekness displayed in the cross, turning the other cheek, was a stumblingblock to them. But it was a fundamentally important truth that the cross and the lamb-like meekness that it demanded, had to precede the crown of the Lion-king. Suffering had to precede glory for Christ and the same applies to his followers. It is only if we suffer with him that we shall reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12).

7 HORNS AND 7 EYES

A lamb with 7 horns and 7 eyes would be an unusual sight, obviously symbolic as in the case of the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns in later chapters. A horn to an animal is equivalent to a sword or bayonet to a man. Animals fight with their horns and for this reason they are used in Scripture to signify power. (Ps. 18:2. 89:17, 24. 92:10. 112:9. 132:17. 1 Sam. 2:1, 10. Zech. 1:18. Lk. 1:69).

The beast with 10 horns is a wild beast representing secular powers that are anti-God which end up fighting with Christ at the battle of Armageddon. The power of the beast is limited and restricted, but Christ has “all power.” Matt. 28:18 records him as saying: “All power is given to me in heaven and earth.” He has full, complete and perfect power at his disposal. 7 horns is a fitting representation of this because the number 7 sometimes signifies perfection and completion. 10 represents human government; 7 represents divine.

Jesus alone is the rightful owner and possessor of horns, because he is the rightful heir and ruler of the nations. Often, in relation to human rulers, power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This will certainly be the case with the beast. Not so with Christ. Scripture says: “He who rules over men must be just” (2 Sam. 23:3). Jesus certainly is and he will exercise his power in a just, righteous and God-glorifying way. His power and rule will be eternal. His horns can never be broken. Other powers like the dragon and beast may look powerful and ferocious, and be intimidating, but the lamb will overcome them and their horns will be broken. The Lamb has the power and strength to support and save his friends and deliver them from all evil. He is more than a “lamb”: he is a shepherd - the true Shepherd who protects his sheep and drives away the wild beasts that seek to devour his flock.

The 7 horns and 7 eyes of course, as explained earlier, can be related to the 7 archangels who are subordinate to Christ and who act as his agents and ministers. As an animal uses its eyes and horns to assert its will and prevail in its purposes, so Christ uses the angels. (See pages 51 to 56 and pages 94 to 96).

But in saying that the 7 eyes of the lamb represent angels, does not mean of course that Jesus would not see or know what was going on in the world or in his church without the angels! Rev. 1:14 depicts him with eyes like a flame of fire, signifying that they are very penetrating, able to burn into the innermost part of a person’s heart and soul. He is “a discerner (Greek ‘kritikos’ i.e. true critic) of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is hidden in his sight: but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:12-13).

In Rev. 1 Jesus is depicted with his eyes of fire, walking in the midst of the churches watching and assessing them. He does not sit back on the throne at the right hand of God in heaven, and leave it to the angels to do all the looking! In his message to the church at Thyatira he said: “These things say the son of God whose eyes are like a flame of fire I know your works” With his own personal eyes and the eyes of angels, represented by the 7 eyes, Jesus sees and knows what is going on especially in relation to his church, and he has the power at his disposal to control all events, causing them to work together for the good of his people and the ultimate establishment of his kingdom on earth.

HE CAME AND TOOK THE BOOK

Verse 7 reads: “And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him who sat upon the throne.” The idea of a literal lamb taking a book out of a hand from a natural point of view, would be quite incongruous, but the action in reality is not of course performed by a lamb, but by the one of whom the lamb is a symbol.

Once a year, Israel’s high priest went into the temple and approached the throne (ark of the covenant) holding the blood of a sacrifice in his hand, which he sprinkled on the mercy seat. But in Rev. 5 the slain Lamb himself approaches the throne empty handed, to receive a book in his hand. He could not carry the blood of the sacrifice in his hand because it had been poured out at the cross, and it was because of this that he was able to approach the throne of God and receive the book. The book did not come towards him as a “flying scroll” like the one in Zech. 5. Neither did God’s hand or an angel’s hand stretch out to give the Lamb the scroll at arm’s length as in Ezk. 2:9. No! The Lamb went up to the throne into close personal contact with the One sitting on it, and took the scroll out of the open palm of His hand.

When the strong angel made his proclamation in a loud voice, he did not say: “Who is worthy to approach the throne?” But what he said meant the same thing. Opening the book required approaching the throne and taking it out of God’s hand.

As the lamb was silent before his shearers in Isa. 53:7 and opened not his mouth, he is also silent in Rev. 5 before the throne. He did not respond to the proclamation: “Who is worthy to open the book” by calling out “I

am,” and then wait to be invited to approach the throne, or wait for the book to be brought to him. No! Without any hesitation and without saying a word, the Lamb confidently moved forward to the throne, reached out and took hold of the book. He knew he was worthy and that it was his prerogative, and did not indulge in false modesty by speaking or acting as if he was unworthy. If the followers of Christ are able to enter into the holiest of all with confidence and boldness by the blood of Jesus, (Heb. 10:20. Eph. 3:12) how much more Jesus himself?!

SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND?

Jesus clearly wasn't sitting on the throne at the right hand of God when he took the book. The book was in God's right hand and Jesus would have been sitting next to it if he was sitting at God's right hand. But Scripture does plainly teach, as is well known, that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after his resurrection as a result of atoning for sin. This was in fulfilment of Ps. 110:1: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until make thine enemies thy footstool." (Matt. 22:41:46. Heb. 1:3. 10:12. Rev. 3:21).

However, it does not necessarily follow that he therefore has to literally and physically remain seated there until he returns to earth. If this were the case he could not have appeared to Saul as he journeyed to Damascus, which he clearly did. (Act. 9:1-5). Neither would Stephen have seen him "standing on the right hand of God" (Act. 7:55). Other Scriptures also refer to Jesus standing instead of sitting: (Jam. 5:9. Rev. 3:20).

Even in human circles, being a "right hand man" does not mean literally and physically remaining at a particular person's right hand. It is a figure of speech - a constitutional expression. Consider for example Matt. 23:2 which records Jesus as saying: "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;" meaning they exercised authority as teachers of God's laws like Moses. They did not literally sit on a seat or bench upon which Moses once sat. There is no evidence that any such seat existed.

Reference is made in Eph. 1:20 to God raising Christ from the dead and setting him at His own right hand in the heavens. Then in 2:6 we read that God has also raised up the followers of Christ and made them sit together in the heavens in Christ Jesus. The word "sit" is clearly not to be taken literally here either.

Consider the promise of Jesus in Rev. 3:21 that all who overcome, he will grant to sit with him in his throne, even as he overcame and is set

down with his Father in His throne. This hardly means that the thousands or millions who will reign with Christ will all literally and physically sit with him in his throne and remain seated there for 1,000 years! Sitting with Christ in his throne means exercising the power and authority of his throne when ruling the earth with him. The power and authority of Christ will be vested in all who reign with him and who act as his representatives. The same applies to Christ sitting in God's throne. The power and authority of the Father has been vested in the son, enabling him to speak and act as his representative.

Now this does not mean of course, that the son has never and will never literally sit at the right hand of the Father on His throne. Neither does it mean that there will not be literal thrones involved upon which the saints will sit when they reign on earth. There is every reason to believe that there are times when Jesus can and does literally sit at the right hand of his Father in His throne. And we have it on record that the 12 apostles at least will sit on thrones when Jesus sets up his throne on earth (Matt. 19:28). But there is no more reason to believe that they must remain seated during the whole 1,000 year reign of Christ, than there is to believe that Christ has remained seated during the past 2,000 years since he ascended to heaven. Neither is there any reason to believe that when Jesus is not sitting next to his Father on His throne, that he ceases to be "at His right hand."

In connection with this it is interesting to note that in Ps. 110:5 the Father, although on His throne in heaven, is referred to as being at the right hand of His son while he is doing battle with the enemy on earth. In Scripture, the "right hand" signifies power and is associated with approval and blessing (Gen. 48:13-14. Ex. 15:6, 12. Ps. 16:11. 17:7. 18:35. Rev. 1:20).

So then, coming back to Rev. 5, it should not be regarded as strange that Jesus was not initially seen seated on the throne at his Father's right hand. For the purpose of the symbolical vision, which was to depict Jesus approaching the throne to receive the scroll from the Father, it would have been inappropriate to depict him sitting next to Him to receive it.

Imagine the strong angel proclaiming in a loud voice: "who is worthy to open the book?" and then reference is made to a lamb sitting at the right hand of God on his throne reaching over or across and taking it out of His hand! Anyone worthy enough to sit next to God on His throne would obviously be worthy to open the book. And if such a person was already sitting there at the time, it would hardly have been necessary for an angel to call out in a loud voice to the other angels: "who is worthy to open the

book?”

The fact that the lamb had to approach the throne to receive the book conveys a number of spiritual significances. It particularly conveys the supreme authority and headship of the One on the throne over the one who approaches. The One on the throne is Father God - the blessed and only potentate - the most blessed of all and above all. It is more blessed to give than receive, and it is always the Father who gives revelation to the son.

Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus constantly confessed dependence upon his Father for knowledge, wisdom and power. He said: “The son can do nothing by himself” (Jn. 5:19, 30). He certainly didn’t claim to be omniscient. This is evident by the fact that he said neither he nor the angels knew the day or hour of the second coming, only the Father (Mk. 13:32). Jesus never claimed equality with his Father. The Jews, who did not understand his teaching falsely accused him of claiming equality, but he denied it saying: “My Father is greater than I.” (Jn. 14:28). And the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God has not changed this. The apostle Paul plainly declared that “the head of Christ is God.” (1 Cor. 11:3). This declaration was made years after Christ’s ascension. It is certainly evident from Rev. 1:1 that Christ did not become omniscient when he ascended to heaven, because it states that he received revelation from God. “Revelation” means disclosure of knowledge previously not known. There is no co-equality in this! Receiving the scroll from the Father in Rev. 5 reinforces this!

However, the scene in Rev. 5 also reinforces how blessed, highly favoured and exalted the Lamb is, being allowed to approach the throne and receive the scroll. Plp. 2:9-11 puts it like this: “God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and in earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.”

Pharaoh’s exaltation of Joseph was a type. He set Joseph up as ruler over his house and nation and all bowed the knee to him. But in the throne Pharaoh was greater. (Gen. 41:40-45).

It seems reasonable to conclude that Rev. 5 does not relate to when Jesus first ascended to heaven after his resurrection. His ascension took place around 60 years before the scene in Rev. 5 took place.

Putting out a challenge to come forward and open a scroll would hardly be the procedure chosen by God to cause His son to approach the throne for the first time after his resurrection and ascension. It is hard to

imagine Jesus ascending to heaven and being obscure among the crowds of angels for 60 years waiting for a challenge to open a scroll before he can approach the throne of his Father for the first time!

It is more likely that when he first ascended to heaven after his triumphant victory over sin and death, that he approached the throne to a fanfare of trumpets and to the clapping of the hands of all the angels whose eyes gazed upon him as he sat down at his Father's right hand in response to His welcoming voice: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Unto which of the angels did God ever give such an invitation? None! (Heb. 1:13). Christ's enthronement was an unprecedented historical occasion in heaven no doubt causing much joy and celebration!

Giving Jesus the book would hardly be a first priority. And if it was given to him when he first ascended to heaven, why would he be depicted opening it 60 years later in front of John? It is clear in Rev. 5 that Jesus received the book while John was watching and that the book was opened shortly after. It would be ludicrous to depict John weeping because he thought no one was worthy to open the book, if in fact it had been opened over 60 years before! Prophets do not have visions of past events!

AND WHEN HE HAD TAKEN THE BOOK....

We will not dwell on how a lamb with cloven hooves could reach up and take a scroll out of God's hand. All things are possible in symbolic dreams and visions! There is no need to imagine the lamb took the scroll in his mouth. He could hardly open seals with his mouth and it would lack dignity to do so. But it is interesting to consider what Jesus did after receiving the scroll. John saw him opening the seals (Rev. 6:1-) so he obviously did not take the scroll away and disappear out of sight to read it privately. Did he remain standing by the throne when he opened the seals, or is it possible that he sat down at God's right hand on the throne? Does the fact that praise is given "to him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb" in v13 imply that the Lamb was then upon the throne?

Reference is also made in Rev. 7:9-10 to the redeemed standing "before the throne and before the Lamb" but it does not necessarily imply that the Lamb was on the throne, because 14:3 refers to a song being sung "before the throne, and before the 4 beasts and the elders." But this does not mean that the 4 beasts and elders were on the throne.

After reading that the redeemed stood "before the throne and before the Lamb" in 7:9, we read in v17 that the Lamb was "in the midst of the

throne.” But once again this does not necessarily mean that he was sitting on the throne either, because the 4 beasts are also referred to in 4:6 as being “in the midst of the throne.” However, as already pointed out, Rev. 5:6 not only says the Lamb was in the midst of the throne as in the case of the 4 beasts, but also in the midst of the 4 beasts. Being in the middle of the inner circle of 4 beasts, Jesus was obviously closer to the throne than they were - close enough to step forward, reach out and take the scroll out of God’s hand.

Rev. 22:1, 3 refers to “the throne of God and the Lamb” but does not make specific reference to both the Father and son sitting together, side by side, on the throne at that particular time. In fact there are no specific statements of this kind in the whole book of Revelation. Not one verse plainly refers to Jesus sitting at the right hand of his Father. It appears that in all the throne room scenes involving Christ, he is, as Stephen saw him, standing on the right hand of God.

THE 4 BEASTS AND 24 ELDERS FELL DOWN BEFORE THE LAMB

No sooner does the Lamb take the book out of God’s hand, and before he even opens the first seal, the 4 living creatures and 24 elders “fell down before the Lamb.” Prior to this the 24 elders fell down in worship before “Him who sat upon the throne” (Father God. 4:10) and now they and the 4 beasts fall down and worship the Lamb as he stands by the throne with the book in his hand. This is in fulfilment of the prophetic commandment of God recorded in Ps. 97:7: “Worship him all ye gods,” which is quoted in Heb. 1:6: “Let all the angels of God worship him.” (Angels are “gods”!)

The wise men from the east also fell down and worshipped Jesus (Matt. 2:11) and John himself fell down at the feet of Jesus (Rev. 1:17). John also fell at the feet of an angel to worship him, but the angel would not allow it (Rev. 19:10. 22:8-9). No wonder Peter wouldn’t allow Cornelius to worship him! (Acts 10:25-26).

We are therefore in good company when we worship Jesus in view of the fact that he is worshipped by angels. It is hard to understand why some professing to be Christians believe that Father God alone should be worshipped and not His son, and refuse to worship him. Is it conceivable that God would command angels who are higher in rank and greater in power than ourselves, to worship His son, but not want or allow those who have benefited the most from his atoning sacrifice to also worship

him?

Jesus made it clear in his teaching that God wanted all men to honour the son even as they honour the Father. Those who refuse to give such honour to the son, dishonour the Father (Jn. 5:23). Failure or refusal to worship the son is an offence and insult to his Father who wants him to be worshipped. This makes it a very serious business indeed!

As we have seen in Rev. 4:11 the Father is worshipped because He created all things, which the son could not and did not do. The ground for worshipping the son, is because he was slain and redeemed men to God by his blood. This involved partaking of mortal sinful flesh, being tempted and put to death. The Father could not do this because He is immortal, cannot be tempted and cannot die (1 Tim. 1:17. Jam. 1:13). Worship of both the Father and son is therefore appropriate because both were required and involved in the redemption of men.

Jesus, like all members of the human race, had no control over his birth, even though he was divinely begotten, neither did he plan his mission. It was foreordained by God long before he was born. However, the mission involved total subordination of his will and life to the will of God, and he did have control over that. Like all other men, he had freewill to obey or disobey.

It is because his love and respect for God and His commandments was so great, causing him to totally subordinate his will to God and render one hundred percent obedience to His commandments, even though it involved the torture and pain of the cross; ridicule, reproach, ignominy and shame, that God has highly exalted him and wants every knee to bow in worship before him. "He made himself of no reputation, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"

It is interesting to note that the angels did not fall down before the Lamb when he first appeared in the midst of the throne, but when he took the book out of God's hand. It was not until the Father gave him the scroll that they fell down in worship. They did not presume anything, but waited for the divine sign of approval. It was a foregone conclusion of course, that the Father would give His son the scroll, but the angels did not fall down until this took place.

HARPS AND GOLDEN BOWLS FULL OF INCENSE

All 4 of the living creatures and the 24 elders are holding a harp in one hand and a golden bowl of incense in the other. (At one stage, the 24 elders had their crowns in their hands also! 4:10).

This is the first reference to harps in the book of Revelation. They are also referred to in 14:2. 15:2. Harps are also mentioned in 18:22. among the musical instruments played in Babylon. The fact that harps are played in heaven even though they are played in Babylon, should be noted by those who object to guitars etc being played in “church,” simply because they are played in the world and used for worldly music. So are pianos and organs!

There are many references to harps or “stringed instruments” in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. They were used in the temple service for thanksgiving and praise. Quite a range of musical instruments in fact were used to praise and glorify God. Ps.150 for example refers to the trumpet, flute, timbrel and cymbal.

God clearly delights in His people making a loud and joyful noise of praise to Him and has no objection to a wide range of musical instruments being used. Those who claim that no musical instruments or only a piano or organ should be used, have no Scriptures to support their view. Such a view is based on an old conservative English custom and tradition, not the Word of God.

The first reference to the harp in Scripture is in Gen. 4:21 where we are told that Lamech’s son Jubal was the “father” i.e. originator or inventor of the harp and flute. He was a secular man and no doubt used the instruments for secular purposes to play secular songs. But this did not stop God’s people using the same instruments to play spiritual music.

Angels no doubt had harps long before man invented them, and used them to glorify God. This was the original intention for music and musical instruments. But sin, which corrupts and perverts everything, uses them for carnal purposes to gratify the flesh and glorify man. Ultimately, when heaven comes to earth, and God’s will is done on earth as in heaven, all music will be spiritual not secular, and all musical instruments will be played to the glory of God. The whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Regarding the golden bowls full of incense: they “are (signify) the prayers of the saints.” This connection between incense and prayer can also be seen in Rev. 8:3-4. Lk. 1:9-11. Ps. 141:2.

Under the law, which was a shadow of things to come, incense was

offered every morning and evening by the priests on the golden incense altar in front of the ark (throne of God), in the tabernacle and temple. Once a year the high priest entered through the veil into the holy of holies where the ark stood, and offered incense upon the incense altar before doing so (Lev. 16:12-13). The cloud of incense would rise and enter the most holy place and fill it with a cloud of sweet smelling odour. On these occasions, whether daily or annually, the incense represented prayer for Israel rising to the throne of God.

In view of the fact that under the law only the priests could offer the incense, it is natural to conclude that the angels in Rev. 5:8 who hold the bowls of incense, exercise some kind of priestly function in heaven. Jesus, of course, is our high priest, and has entered God's presence as our mediator to make intercession. However, in Rev. 5 he is not depicted holding incense as he approaches the throne of God. Instead, it is being held by the angels surrounding the throne. And in Rev. 8:3-4 one of these angels is seen offering incense with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar before the throne of God.

This indicates that angels, who are subject to Christ and sent forth to minister to those belonging to him, are involved in their prayers. "Bowls" are used for carrying things, including liquids, and no doubt signifies that angels carry or convey our praise, prayers and prayer-tears to the presence of God where Christ intercedes before the throne of God. In Judaism, it is believed that the offering up of prayers in heaven is performed by archangels. Every believer can be sure, especially in times of tribulation and trouble, that the angels who are sent to minister to them, are aware of their needs, and will present them before the throne of God where our mediator intercedes.

In Rev. 8:3-4, incense is added by the angel to the prayers of the saints prior to severe judgements being poured out on the earth. Some see in this the prayers of the saints being supported and reinforced by the ministering spirits, and interpret Rom. 8:26 in this light: "We know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." (Also see Zech. 1:12-17).

In Rev. 5:8 the bowls of incense are held by the angels as Jesus takes the book out of the right hand of God. The fact that these bowls are held while they praise the Lamb in song, declaring that he is worthy to take the book and open it, because he was slain and redeemed men to God by his blood; suggests that the prayers of the saints express the same sentiments. The scene portrays all the redeemed on earth and the angels in heaven acknowledging that Christ is worthy.

Reference to the bowls of incense being “golden” suggests that the prayers and praise of the saints, like gold, are precious, and are treated with respect by the angels who convey them. This is not surprising considering the number of times Scripture assures us that the saints are precious in God’s sight.

AND THEY SANG A NEW SONG

According to v8, the 4 living creatures and 24 elders “fell down” before the Lamb with harps and golden bowls full of incense in their hands. So they were in a prostrate position, probably with hands stretched forward holding (offering) the incense. Verse 9 then says: “They sung a new song.” It is not impossible that they sung this song while in a prostrate position, but if they played their harps while they sang, it would be natural to assume that they arose, leaving the bowls of incense on the floor. It is hard to imagine them holding a harp with one hand and playing it with the other while holding on to a bowl of incense!

The song they sang was not an old song but a new song - a song never sung before because it relates to an event that has never occurred before, namely the son of God taking a book out of the hand of God to open and read it. Until Jesus took possession of the book, the song could not be sung. Obviously this is the first time he has taken possession of a book in this way. (Reference is also made in Rev. 14:3 to the 144,000 in the presence of the 4 living creatures and 24 elders, singing a new song to the accompaniment of harps).

The expression “new song” occurs a number of times in the Bible, and usually relates to God being praised for some mighty act of deliverance (Ps. 96:1. 98:1. 144:9). Heaven’s praise is not controlled, restricted or limited by a hymn book. Heaven is not like some churches which put out a hymn book and insist that only the songs in that book can be sung, and resist the introduction of new songs that are not in the book.

New works of God require new songs! New promptings of the Spirit in new composers produces new songs. Singing is the highest form of speech, and can be a very effective means of commemorating and memorializing in a heart-felt way, the works of God. No wonder that we are constantly exhorted and encouraged in the Scriptures to sing to God. Whether or not the angels’ new song was rehearsed or was a spontaneous prompting and inspiring by the Spirit, we are not told. It was probably spontaneous.

For millenniums all the songs of praise and thanksgiving offered in

heaven were directed wholly, solely and exclusively to Father God. But now, since the son of God has been glorified and exalted, the angels fall in adoration before him at his feet and sing a new song extolling him and his accomplishments. This new era, which was actually inaugurated at the ascension, is now conveyed symbolically. Not only is there now, as always, one God to be praised, but also “one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).

Rev. 5 is part of a long introduction to the prophetic section which starts in earnest in chapter 6. The reason for this seems to be to make it clear, that the revelation of the future to the church, like salvation itself, is only possible by Christ’s willingness to be a sacrificial lamb. Only such a lamb could receive the scroll from God, and only those redeemed by him can receive and understand it and ultimately reign with him.

Other references to angels singing, besides those in the book of Revelation are Job 38:7. Lk. 2:13.

Other places in the Old Testament where reference is made to a “new song” are: Ps. 33:1-3. 40:3. 96:1. 98:1. 144:9. 149:1. Isa. 42:1-10.

THOU ART WORTHY TO TAKE THE BOOK

There are no sour grapes on the part of the angels because none of them were worthy to take the book and open it. They give honour to whom honour is due without envy, malice or resentment, saying: “Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals.” This song is an angelic acknowledgement of the justice of God in giving the book to Christ. Not that God needed their approval, but would be blessed by it!

The same applies to our prayers and praise. Due to the fact that we have freewill and can disagree with God and object to what He does, He is blessed when we submit to His decisions, rulings and appointments, and acknowledge the justice and righteousness of them. This is particularly the case when God’s decisions involve others being appointed to a position or for a task instead of ourselves.

The reason given for acknowledging that Christ was worthy to take the book is: “For you were slain ...” This is repeated in verse 12 by the 100 million angels who surround the 4 living creatures and 24 elders.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the angels fell down before Father God prior to the Lamb coming on the scene, and said: “Thou art worthy” (4:10-11). Not, of course because he was slain, because it is impossible for an immortal God to be slain and die. No! the reason or ground given for the praise is because “thou hast created.” The son

however, is not praised for being Creator, but for being slain and shedding his blood as a sacrifice for sin in order to redeem men. The Father and son are unquestionably worthy of praise for what they have done, and we do well to join the angels in giving thanks and praise to them.

Regarding ourselves: We are accustomed to thinking that we are unworthy of anything and cannot expect to be worthy in any way. Such, however is not the case. We can be worthy in certain senses, and it can be a fruitful exercise to see what Scripture says about what makes us worthy or unworthy. See Lk. 20:35. 21:36. Act. 13:46. (Eph. 4:1. Col. 1:10. 1 This. 2:12). 2 Thes. 1:5, 11. Rev. 3:4.

Other Scriptures of course, caution us against developing an over-rated and egotistical opinion, and failing to maintain a humble assessment of ourselves. We must leave it to the Lord to do the exalting and commending (Lk. 17:10. Gen. 18:27. 32:10. Matt. 3:11. 8:8).

The song of praise given to the Lamb after he took the book was not: "Thou art worthy to take the book and open the seals because of the revelation it will give of future world events." No! The praise is not offered for revelation but redemption: "Thou art worthy ... for thou wast slain and hast redeemed ..."

Without redemption, prophetic revelation is of no value or consequence. It becomes a vain intellectual or academic exercise. As we know, all world events in the word of prophecy lead up to and have as their climax the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. This is the aim and objective of prophecy. In view of the fact that only the redeemed qualify for the kingdom, there is nothing to be gained by studying the future in Bible prophecy unless we are among the redeemed. Knowledge of Bible prophecy alone cannot save anyone. Jesus said: "He who believes (i.e. in him and his atoning work) and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Redemption comes through the sacrificial death of Christ and the shedding of his blood, and true believers formally and publicly identify with this in the symbolical act of baptism (Rom. 6:3-6).

Unfortunately, many people are not willing to do this, but are keen to have their ears tickled with Bible prophecy and end time events. But without commitment to Christ, confirmed in baptism, all this "tickling" will be to no avail and participation in the ultimate prophetic future impossible. End-time signs of the second coming and kingdom of Christ can only be meaningful and exciting to those who belong to him, and who will live and reign with him in the future. For this reason the Word of prophecy is addressed to them, as we read in Rev. 1:1: "The revelation of

Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to shew to his servants things which must shortly come to pass.”

The A.V. translation says the 4 living creatures and 24 elders declare that the Lamb “hast redeemed us.” However, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter, this is an incorrect translation. It should read “men” or “them” instead of “us.” The angels are not celebrating their own salvation but the salvation of men. (See pages 79-80).

The incorrect translation in the A.V. is supported by the Catholic Douay and Knox translations, and derives from the Latin vulgate, but is not supported by the Catholic New American Bible or the Jerusalem Bible. The incorrect translation probably arose as a result of the belief that the 4 living creatures and 24 elders were apostles and prophets, not angels.

Jesus of course, as we read in Heb. 2:16 did not come to redeem angels. They did not need redeeming. They were already immortal, dwelling in the immediate presence of God in heaven. Yet, in spite of this, they are seen in Rev. 5 singing a song to the Lamb, praising him for being prepared to be slain to redeem men. Praising him for redeeming men is not surprising in view of the fact that the whole purpose and function of their ministry and service involves the salvation and redemption of men: “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14).

In view of the fact that there is joy and rejoicing in heaven among the angels at the repentance of sinners, which qualifies them for redemption, (Lk. 15:7, 10) it is not surprising that the angels rejoice in a song of praise, extolling the redeemer himself when he appears in heaven, triumphant over sin and death. The angels, like God Himself, cannot be tempted, shed blood and die to redeem men, but like God, they can love the world (Jn. 3:16), and share with God in His desire to save men and prevent them from perishing.

EVERY KINDRED, TONGUE, PEOPLE AND NATION

It is stated in Rev. 5:9 that the Lamb redeems men “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” The doctrine of universalism is not being taught here, but the doctrine of a universal church. Every single soul from every nation will not be saved, but individuals from all nations will be redeemed.

The gospel preached to Abraham long ago was that “in thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). Reference is made in Rev. 14:6 to “the

everlasting gospel” being preached right up to the last day “to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.” And John saw in prophetic vision “a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, kindreds, people and tongues,” standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands (Rev. 7:9).

God is clearly no respecter of persons and does not discriminate between nations when it comes to inviting people to be part of his redemptive plan in Christ. But, unfortunately, as Jesus taught: “many are invited but few are chosen.” Not all people in all nations will be redeemed, only those who respond to the invitation to come out and not be conformed to the world.

Acts 15:14 makes the point by saying God is visiting the nations to “take out of” them a people for His name. This same emphasis is in the declaration in Rev. 5:9: “For you have redeemed men ... out of every nation ...” This is the basic meaning of the word “church.” The Greek word is “ekklesia” and means “a calling out of.” The true church of Jesus Christ consists of people who have turned their backs on the worldly ways of sin and have separated themselves from all forms of evil. Although living in the world, they are not of the world. Church is not a material building made by human hands, but people who live a holy, sanctified, Christ-centred life. Such people form a spiritual temple not made by human hands in which the Lord dwells (Acts 7:48. 1 Cor. 3:16-17. Eph. 2:19-22).

The assurance affirmed in the song sung to the Lamb that men will be redeemed from every kindred, tongue, people and nation, has inspired organizations such as the Wycliffe Bible translators to translate the Bible into every language spoken on earth. This calls to mind a story about Mr and Mrs Phil Bair, Wycliffe Bible translators to the Lacondone Indians of Mexico. They ministered to these Indians for years, and one of the promises of God that spurred them on was that one day a Lacondone Indian would be included in the redeemed!

KINGS AND PRIESTS

In verse 10 the song continues by declaring that the Lamb, as a result of redeeming men out of all nations by his blood, “has made them unto God kings and priests, and they shall reign on the earth.”

This is a repeat of Rev. 1:5-6 which states that Jesus Christ loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, “and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Prior to this, the apostle Peter stated

that Christians are “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet. 2:5). Verse 8 of the same chapter expresses it in terms of “a royal priesthood,” i.e. a priesthood that is kingly in nature. This links with the references to “kings and priests” in the book of Revelation.

In a kingdom, kings deal with the secular matters of state, and priests deal with spiritual matters. The saints, being kings and priests are called to deal with both.

The statements in Rev. 1:6, 5:10. and 1 Pet. 2:5, 8, speak in the present tense and affirm that all true Christians are kings and priests now. The clergy-laity distinction in some churches which maintains that only the clergy are priests is clearly unscriptural, and therefore artificial and false.

The priesthood of believers is “royal” because the high priest to whom they belong, and under whom they serve as subordinate priests, is from the royal tribe of Judah and is King of kings. In this respect it is quite different from the priesthood under the old covenant. Aaron the high priest, those who served under him, and their descendants were from the tribe of Levi, which was not a royal tribe. No kings of Israel ever descended from this tribe, and none were allowed to sit on the throne of David at Jerusalem.

Jesus was not a priest according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchisedec who was both king and priest of Jerusalem in the days of Abraham, long before the order of Aaron was instituted. It was a royal priesthood in which there was complete fusion of the office of king and priest in one man, resulting in an absence of antagonism which could occur between these two offices when operated by two different orders. For example, see 1 Sam. 13:9-14. 2 Chr. 26:16-21. For more information on the royal priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchisedec, and the peace and harmony it produces, see Hebrews chapters 5 and 7. Zech. 6:12-13.

The function of a priest is to know the Word of God in order to know God personally, and to be able to teach others, directing them into the way that brings them into fellowship with God and salvation (Lev. 10:11. Mal. 2:7). All who belong to Christ are called to function as priests in this sense today. 1 Pet. 2:5 and 9 put it like this: “To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

So much then for believers being priests. In what sense can they be kings now? Well, kings rule and reign and there is a certain sense in which

believers are called to do this, and failure to do so will result in failure to reign in the future kingdom at Christ's return.

“REIGN IN LIFE”

We read in Rom. 5:17 that as a result of Adam's sin, death reigned; but as a result of grace and the gift of righteousness through Christ, believers “reign in life.” This reference to reigning in life relates to walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), not allowing sin to reign in, and have dominion over our mortal body; refusing to obey its ungodly lusts (Rom. 6:12-14). This involves taking authority by the Word of God over all sinful urges, and spiritually adverse influences and circumstances in life, refusing to yield and surrender to them, crucifying and putting them to death instead. As the apostle Paul put it: “I severely discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27).

Not long after sin entered the world, Cain was instructed by God to exercise this rule: “If you do well shall you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is towards you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7).

“He who rules over his own spirit is better than he who captures and rules over a city” (Pr. 16:32). “He who has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls” (Pr. 25:28).

So then, ruling and reigning in this present life is not over other people or nations, but over ourselves - our own sinful self. This is what qualifies us to be kings in the future reign of Christ on earth. Failure to take authority and rule over ourselves, as already mentioned, will result in failing to qualify to take authority and rule over others at Christ's return. It is only those who overcome by exercising a tight and strict reign over themselves, continuing faithfully to the end doing God's will, that Christ will give authority over the nations, to rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27). “To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne ...” (Rev. 3:21).

There is therefore both a present and future aspect to ruling and reigning as kings and priests, both of which are conveyed in the words “have” and “shall” in Rev. 5:10: “have made us ...kings and priests: and we shall reign on earth.” The future aspect is emphasized in Rev. 20:4-6 where we read that the saints “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years.” Also Rev. 22:5: “And they shall reign for ever and ever.”

It would therefore be a fundamental doctrinal error to believe that

ruling and reigning with Christ is limited and confined to ruling over our own spirit during this present life. Scores of Scriptures teach that those who belong to Christ will ultimately rule over the nations when he returns to the earth, at which time “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS

Many modern versions of the Bible translate “kings and priests” as “a kingdom and priests.” According to this translation, the Christian community is called a “kingdom.” The apostle John referred to it in the same terms when he referred to himself being “in tribulation and in the kingdom” when in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). Many of Christ’s parables about the kingdom also relate to the church, and Paul refers to those who have been converted as being delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the son of God (Col. 1:13).

“Kingdom” is a fitting and appropriate term to describe the church because it signifies a dominion over which a king reigns. Jesus of course is the king, and being the head of the church, he reigns over it. True Christians are servants of Christ and they bow the knee to him in humble adoration and confess him as their Lord and king, the ruler over their life. The true church of Jesus Christ is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), “a chosen race,an holy nation, a purchased people” (1 Pet. 2:9), as was the kingdom of Israel under the old covenant in Old Testament times (Ex. 19:6).

However, it would obviously also be a fundamental doctrinal error to believe that the church today or yesterday, was and is the ultimate and fullness of Christ’s kingdom. It seems that some of the members of the Corinthian church had falsely formed this conclusion. They saw themselves as attaining the fullness of the kingdom and reigning as kings, causing Paul to say to them: “I wish you really did reign as kings so that we could also reign with you” (1 Cor. 4:8). The church at its best during this present life is only a microcosm or an earnest of the ultimate kingdom of Christ. Scores of Scriptures teach that the ultimate kingdom of God will not be established until the second coming of Christ. 2 Tim. 4:1 for example says the kingdom will come at the appearing of Christ when he shall judge the living and dead. Dan. 7:22 also makes it clear that the saints will not possess the kingdom until Christ (“the ancient of days”)

comes.

The ultimate kingdom will involve all nations being ruled and governed by Christ and the saints. As Paul said: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). The nations will not be brought into submission to Christ's rule and reign by preaching alone. The doctrine believed and taught by some that the church will bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God by converting all people in all nations by preaching, is false. Only God can confer immortality! The prophetic Word makes it clear that conditions in the church and the world will degenerate in the end time, not regenerate, necessitating the return of Christ and judgement. For example see Matt. 24. 2 Tim. 3-4:4. 2 Pet. 3. Jude.

In Dan. 2 the second coming of Christ is likened to a stone (asteroid?) hurtling down from heaven with tremendous force, smashing into, and destroying all human governments and worldly institutions. Only by this means will nations be humbled and made to submit to Christ's rule and surrender to his will and the way of his government and kingdom. The stone does not gently float down from heaven and passively absorb and assimilate all nations!

The world is becoming so steeped in sin; and the spirit of rebellion against God's laws is becoming so deep rooted and widespread; that it will require a very firm hand and a major shake-up to bring about a situation in which all people everywhere know and acknowledge God, and love Him more than themselves and their own pleasures. The reference in Ps. 2:9 and Rev. 2:27 to Christ and his church ruling with a "rod of iron" says it all! Only by this means will the pride, arrogance and haughtiness of the flesh be made humble and submissive. Only by this means will the Lord's prayer be fulfilled: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." When this is fulfilled, the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea bed (Num. 14:21. Hab. 2:14). Wars, famines, pestilences, poverty etc will cease. Righteousness, justice and peace will prevail throughout the whole earth. Paradise will be restored. See Isa. 2. Zech. 14.

The fact that this ultimate utopia can only come about as a result of the reign of Christ and the saints, and is only made possible by redemption through Christ's blood, should make us appreciate the full force of the angelic declaration: "You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals, for you were slain and have redeemed men to God by your blood out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation, and have made them to our God kings and priests, and they shall reign on the earth."

The angels themselves who sang this song will never reign on earth,

“For unto the angels God has not put into subjection the world to come” (Heb. 2:5). However, there is no resentment on their part! They share the same desire with Father God for the salvation and redemption of the world, and sing for joy at the prospect of it!

MANY ANGELS ABOUT THE THRONE

After hearing the 4 living creatures and 24 elders sing the new song to the Lamb, we read in verse 11 that John then looked and “heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and elders.” If we did not know the number of angels involved and were asked to guess, we might suggest 10 to 20 thousand. If so, we would fall far short of the mark. Verse 11 states: “The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”

“Ten thousand times ten thousand” is 100 million, and “thousands of thousands” is many millions. (100 million is roughly the population of Mexico or Japan; nearly twice the population of Great Britain).

This multitudinous body of angels forms an outer circle around the 4 living creatures and 24 elders who form an inner circle around the throne. The throne is in God’s temple (Rev. 7:9-17), and in Rev. 22:1-2, 14 the throne is referred to as being in the city of God, indicating that the temple is a temple-city. It is referred to in Rev. 21:2-3 as “the holy city, new Jerusalem,” and “the tabernacle of God.” In Heb. 12:22 it is called “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” and “an innumerable company of angels” is associated with it.

In order to accommodate over 100 million angels and millions of saints, the city would obviously have to be large. It certainly is! According to Rev. 21:16 it is many hundreds of kilometres square.

The 10,000 x 10,000 angels in Rev. 5:11 are referred to in Dan. 7:10 in the same numerical terms. They are seen accompanying Christ at his second coming and being in his company ministering before him at the judgement when the books are opened. According to Ps. 68:17 these angels were at Sinai when Yahweh came down to the mount, and Enoch prophesied that “Behold, the Lord comes with 10,000 of his saints to execute judgement upon all ...” (Jude 14).

In view of the hundreds of millions of angels; the “more than 12 legions of angels” that Jesus said were available for the asking (Matt. 26:53), would have been a very small drain on heaven’s resources! (A legion was the largest unit of the Roman army, containing about 6,000 men. Hence, 12 legions would be 72,000).

It would be interesting to know how many angels were involved in singing at Christ's birth. Lk. 2:13 says: "A multitude of the heavenly host praised God, saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward men." It must have been an awesome sound and would have taken the shepherds completely by surprise. It would be the last thing they would expect to see and hear out in the fields at night! The angels who praised God at Christ's birth would have been among the millions in Rev. 5:11 who said "Worthy is the Lamb ..." and had no doubt praised him when he first ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of his Father.

As in the case of Rev. 4:8-11, the angels in 5:12 were "saying", not singing. The Jerusalem Bible says they were "shouting." The 4 living creatures and 24 elders are depicted as singing: "Thou art worthy ..." (v9), but the 100 million angels surrounding them are saying "worthy is the Lamb," "with a loud voice." What else could you expect than a loud voice with over 100 million angels shouting out at the same time with all their heart and soul?! If just one angel's voice can sound like thunder, and the voices of four can cause the foundations and posts of the temple to vibrate, imagine the effect of 100 million voices!

It is interesting to note that the expression "loud voice" occurs 13 times in the book of Revelation - more times than in any other book. While it is true that God sometimes uses a soft or "still small voice" to speak to his servants, He never encourages His people to use a soft or whispering voice when offering praise and worship to Him. Many Scriptures testify that He wants praise to be loud, confident, affirmative, assertive, fervent, enthusiastic, like the sound of victory, power and joy. See Ex. 19:16. 2 Chr. 20:19. 30:21. Neh. 12:42. Ps. 33:3. 98:4. 150:5. Lk. 17:15. 19:37.

Statements such as: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10); "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20); and: "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation" (Zech. 2:13), are directed to the heathen who rant and rage against God, and whose mouths and tongues will be stopped from giving expression to ungodly and carnal speech. Ultimately, when Christ's kingdom is established, all flesh will be humbled and will glorify and magnify God in a loud voice of praise.

What a contrast between the scene of Christ standing before the throne of God while crowds of angels shout out "Worthy is the Lamb," and the scene where he stood before Pilate, wearing a crown of thorns, while the crowds shouted out "crucify him." Jesus' ability to see beyond the suffering, ignominy and shame to the joy and glory that lay before

him, was what enabled him to endure the cross and gain the victory (Heb. 12:2).

POWER, RICHES, WISDOM

The song of the 4 living creatures and 24 elders declared that Jesus was worthy to receive the scroll, but the other angels declare that he is worthy to receive 7 things: “power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, blessing.”

1. Power. The Greek word is *dunamis*, from which the English word *dynamic* is derived and the explosive power of dynamite. In the New Testament *dunamis* frequently relates to the supernatural power of God by which miracles, signs and wonders are performed. Jesus of course received and ministered in this power during his earthly ministry and performed many mighty works to the glory of God. In fact, the references to his “mighty works” in the gospels come from the Greek *dunamis*.

Since his victory over sin and death, Jesus has “gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God; angels, authorities and powers being made subject to him” (1 Pet. 3:22). His Father has given him all power and authority in heaven and earth, and has highly exalted him, giving him a name which is above every name (Matt. 28:18. Plp. 2:9-10). When he returns to earth in great power and glory, he will use his power to subdue the nations and establish his everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace. Indeed, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power”!

2. Riches. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus never pursued or encouraged the pursuit of material or worldly riches and wealth. To him, true and lasting riches related to the knowledge and wisdom, grace and glory of God. Because of this, he super-abounded in these things and brought much glory to God.

However, as in the case of Solomon, to whom God gave great wealth because he sought spiritual understanding and discernment rather than material riches, God will also give Jesus great wealth. He has promised to give him all nations for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession (Ps. 2:6-8). As in the case of Solomon, the wealth of all nations will also pour in to him (Isa. 60:5, 11, 16). Seeking first the kingdom of God and giving top priority to spiritual precepts and principles results in material blessings being added to both Christ himself and his servants (Matt. 6:33).

3. Wisdom. From an early age, Jesus increased in, and was filled with wisdom (Lk. 2:40, 52) due to the Spirit of God resting upon him (Isa.

11:2), causing his contemporaries to marvel (Matt. 13:54 Jn 7:15). “Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:46).

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and because Jesus had such a profound reverential respect for his God and Father, manifested in his totally obedient life, he was worthy to be blessed with a double portion of wisdom and discernment.

Since his ascension to heaven, he has received a further impartation of wisdom in being given the Revelation. It is clear from its contents that wisdom is required to discern the message. For example: “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding compute the number of the beast ...” (Rev. 13:18). “And here is the mind which has wisdom. The 7 heads are 7 mountains ...” (17:9).

Great wisdom will obviously be required to govern all the nations on earth, establishing and maintaining law and order, righteousness and peace; and Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world, is worthy to receive such wisdom.

4. Strength. The Greek word is *ischus* and denotes ability, force, strength. The word occurs in Mk. 12:30 and 33 which record Jesus saying we must love the Lord our God with all our strength. This refers to inner personal strength which involves single-mindedness, tenacity, zeal, persistence, perseverance etc, all of which have to do with character.

Character is determined to some degree by genetic factors, but mostly by the attitudes we develop in response to our encounter with good and evil in life. Jesus, being conceived by Mary, a descendant of Abraham the friend of God; and David, a man after God’s own heart, was impregnated with genes pertaining to that holy royal line. He was also impregnated with “genes” from God due to the fact that His Spirit caused Mary to conceive. This no doubt contributed towards the strength of character he manifested and he was worthy to receive it being the divinely begotten son of God. He was however, even more worthy to receive such strength, due to his steadfast love, grace and tenacity of faith in spite of the prejudice, hate, envy, jealousy, anger, persecution and suffering he had to encounter and endure.

Because he determined in his heart to do the will of God and be obedient even to the death of the cross; God helped, encouraged and strengthened him. For example, when he knelt down in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and said: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done,” “there appeared an angel to him from heaven, strengthening him” (Lk. 22:41-43). The angel probably strengthened Jesus’ faith and resolve by speaking

words of comfort and encouragement, and reminding him of the promises of hope and reward in the Word of God. Compare Dan. 10:18-19 which refers to Daniel being strengthened by an angel appearing to him and talking to him.

The prayer of the Psalmist: “Strengthen thou me according to Thy word” (Ps. 119:28) had a very real application in the life of Christ. Also Ps. 27:14: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart.” Jesus was truly the branch that God made strong for Himself, strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, in order that he might atone for the sins of the world and reconcile man to God. He is the greatest and strongest character ever to be conceived and born of a woman, and it is fitting that the angels should ascribe strength to him.

5 & 6. Honour and glory. As pointed out on page 105, honour has to do with the privilege of being in an exalted position such as a king. Glory has to do with the fame, praise and respect such a person receives if he is righteous and just and has victory and success. Many men have had the honour of being a king, but received no glory due to shameful conduct or defeat. Jesus is entitled to the honour of a king because he is the son of God and divinely appointed heir to the throne of David. He is also entitled to glory, fame and praise because he is righteous and just, and had victory and success over the power of sin and all forces of evil. Truly, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive honour and glory.” Ultimately, every knee, not only in heaven, but also in the earth, will bow before him, and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

7. Blessing. This is an all embracing and all encompassing word when it comes to the blessing of God, and includes praise. Pages upon pages would be required to list the blessings to which Jesus is entitled due to his exaltation. They are all summed up in living forever in the eternal presence of God in a glorious kingdom where there is no sin, sickness, pain, sorrow or death, but joy unspeakable and full of glory. The good news is, that the blessing is not for Jesus alone, for he will share it with his bride. “Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the gates into the city.”

EVERY CREATURE GIVES PRAISE

Verse 13 continues by saying: “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto

him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.”

“Every creature in heaven” refers to all the angels previously seen worshipping the Lamb. But now they are seen worshipping God as He sits upon the throne, and the Lamb.

Not only are all the angels depicted worshipping, but also all who are on the earth, under the earth, on the sea and under the sea. Those under the earth and under the sea are dead, and must be resurrected to be able to worship God and the Lamb. Rev. 20:13 refers to such a resurrection: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them.”

We therefore have in Rev. 5:13 an example of what often occurs in the Scriptures; namely, a declaration thrown in out of its chronological order, for the purpose of following out to its completion some previous statement or allusion. In this particular case, the time is anticipated when resurrection and redemption is accomplished. In verse 10 the 4 living creatures and 24 elders had declared that the redeemed “shall reign on earth.” Now the prophet’s mind is carried forward to that time.

Having introduced the greatest act of love in the history of man - the shedding of Christ’s blood; nothing could be more natural than that the vision should, for one moment, look forward to the time when the grand result of this sacrifice should be accomplished, when a song of adoration goes up to God and the Lamb by all the redeemed.

It is futile to attempt to apply this to the church in its present state, as many commentators do, or to any time in the past since sin entered the world. For at the time of which John speaks, every creature on earth, without any exception, was offering up praise and worship. This points to the time when the whole scheme of redemption is completed, after the second resurrection and at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, when God shall be all and in all.

It is also clearly futile to attempt, as some do, to regard the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb as one and the same person, namely Jesus Christ. The ascribing of blessing, honour, glory and power “unto him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” clearly speaks of two separate individuals, and no amount of juggling with words and indulgence in semantics can prove otherwise.

So then, in 4:8-11 praise is offered by the 4 living creatures and 24 elders to Father God as He sits upon His throne. In 5:8-10 the 4 living creatures and 24 elders offer praise to Christ who stands by the throne of God after taking hold of the book. In 5:11-12 the rest of the angels, over 100 million, worship Christ. Then, in 5:13 every creature in heaven and

upon earth is seen worshipping both the Father and son.

The exaltation and glorification of Christ has clearly not resulted in the Father receding into the background and taking a back seat, and being excluded from worship. Even in the moments of supreme joy of giving thanks and praise to the Lamb for his redemptive work, the supremacy of the Father is never forgotten.

Today, especially in certain Pentecostal circles, the majority of the songs of praise and worship are Jesus oriented, not Father oriented. This is unbalanced and unscriptural. On the other hand, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction in other groups where their songs are entirely Father oriented. Some actually believe it is wrong to praise and worship Christ.

It should be evident that if Revelation depicts angels and every creature on earth praising and worshipping Christ, that it could not be wrong for us to do it now. After all, Jesus will be no more exalted when he returns to earth than what he is now, being at the right hand of God. Therefore, if we are going to worship him when he returns, why not now? If angels who are greater in power and might than us, worship Christ now, why not us?

As pointed out previously, it is the Father's will for us to honour the son even as we honour the Father. "He who honoureth not the son honoureth not the Father" (Jn. 5:22-23). It is not an insult to the Father to honour the son. It is rather an insult to the Father to not honour the son. As we have seen, honour is ascribed to both the Father and son in praise by the angels in Rev. 4:11. 5:12.

Although the Father is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3), honouring Christ as we honour the Father does not negate the Father's headship. For example: The head of the woman is the man (1 Cor. 11:3), but it is the will of God for children to "honour father and mother." This likewise does not negate the headship of man. True men of God who are fathers would be angry if their children did not honour their mother. Godly children "arise up and call her blessed, and her husband praises her" (Pr. 31:28). But "there are those who curse their father and do not bless their mother" (Pr. 30:11).

"And the 4 living creatures said, amen (in a loud thunderous voice). And the elders fell down and worshipped." This is the 5th of 10 amens in the book of Revelation. It means: surely, so be it, verily. It is translated "verily" (truly) 100 times in the New Testament. The 4 living creatures and 24 elders are in total agreement with the praise offered to the Father and Son and put their seal of approval on it with a loud and vehement

amen. Hopefully they can say amen to our prayers and praise, and willingly and joyfully carry them in their golden bowls to the throne. If offered in spirit and in truth, they surely will!



CHAPTER THREE REVELATION CHAPTER SIX

It was pointed out at the beginning that a three-fold division is involved in the book of Revelation. John was told to “write the things which you have seen, the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” It was suggested that the things which John had seen were those recorded in Rev. 1, particularly the symbolic vision of the glorified Christ. The “things which are” were related to the 7 churches in Asia which existed at the time, and the messages sent to them. (Rev. 2 to 3). And “the things which shall be hereafter” were related to the prophetic section from chapter 4 to the end.

However, in view of the fact that chapters 4 and 5 relate to heaven, the city-temple or tabernacle of God, they could also be included in “the things which are.” And, because the city-temple is ultimately coming to earth in fulfilment of many kingdom prophecies, chapters 4 and 5 could also be included in “the things which shall be hereafter,” as stated in Rev. 4:1. The city-temple, being heaven; the place of God’s throne, like God Himself, “was, is and is to come.”

As far as future developments on earth are concerned which precede the coming of the kingdom: the prophecies concerning them start in earnest in chapter 6, commencing with 4 horsemen riding forth having different effects wherever they go, such as war, famine and pestilence.

SHORTLY COME TO PASS

The all-important question is of course, to what period in history does this prophecy and those that follow apply? One school of thought is that the Revelation was given to John in A.D. 96, and because John was told that the prophecies “must shortly come to pass,” (1:1. 22:6) it is concluded that the first prophecy must have started to be fulfilled shortly after A.D. 96. Because the 4 horsemen in Rev. 6 are the first prophecy, it is believed that the first horse relates to a period of history starting at the end of the first century, and the other horses relate to succeeding centuries up to the middle of the 4th. The 7 trumpets and 7 vials are regarded as continuing sequences of events in history, following the 7 seals.

This view is known as “the continuous historical interpretation.” It basically maintains that the prophecies cover the whole period of history from John’s day to the second coming. The prophecies are seen to be progressively fulfilled down the centuries from the first to the last.

Interpreting the book of Revelation therefore requires a good knowledge of 2000 years of secular history and the ability to pick out of the volumes of data and detail, a sequence of events which fits the prophecies.

There are several problems with this view. Firstly, Rev. 1:1 does not say the prophecies must shortly “begin” to come to pass. It simply says “shortly come to pass.” From a Divine perspective of time, this does not have to mean within a year or two. This is evident in Rev. 22:6 where, in relation to the paradise of God being restored on earth, it says it “must shortly be done.” Nearly 2000 years have passed and this has still not been fulfilled, and will not be fulfilled until Christ’s second coming. The Spirit clearly teaches us here that “shortly” relates to the last days - the end time era of Christ’s return.

The same applies to the words “for the time is at hand” which, in Rev. 1:3 are taken to mean the prophecies were about to begin fulfilment in John’s day. But the identical phrase is used in Rev. 22:10 in the context of the second coming of Christ. Verse 7 records Jesus as saying: “Behold I come quickly.” Modern versions translate this to mean he is coming very soon; his return is at hand. It is evident from this that “the time is at hand,” relates to the end time, not the time of the first century when John received the Revelation.

The same applies in Rom. 16:20: “The God of peace will bruise Satan shortly under your feet.” This did not happen or start to happen within a few days or years after the words were penned. It still hasn’t happened and will not be fulfilled until Christ’s return. Even back in Haggai’s day (500 B.C.), the Spirit referred to the time of the end coming in “a little while”: “For thus says the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth” (Hagg. 2:6. Heb. 12:26). It is evident in all these passages of Scripture that God has a different perspective of time from man. What is a long time for mortal man is a short time for the immortal eternal God. One thousand years to man is only as a day to God (Ps. 90:4. 2 Pet. 3:8). From His point of view therefore, events that will take place in a thousand year’s time or two thousand, will “shortly come to pass” or happen in “a little while.” Because He is the author of the book of Revelation, not man, we must view these statements from His perspective of time, not man’s!

ISRAEL - THE PIVOTAL POINT OF PROPHECY

Another problem with the continuous historical interpretation is that it moves away from the focal centre of prophecy established during

the preceding 4,000 years of Old Testament prophecy. Throughout Old Testament prophecy, and the prophecy of Jesus, known as “the Olivet prophecy,” as well as Paul’s prophecy concerning the temple of God in 2 Thes. 2, the nation of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem are the focal and geographical centre. Only nations and the movements of nations that have an influence on the nation of Israel come within the scope of the word of prophecy. Evidence demonstrating this could fill a book as all diligent and unprejudiced Bible students will be aware.

The word of prophecy never sets out to tickle the ears of the historian by giving a running commentary of the movements of nations that do not affect the movements of Israel. Prophecy revolves around the land and people of Israel; they are the pivotal point of Scripture’s prophetic programme. As soon as eyes are taken off Israel, one runs the risk of going out of prophetic orbit, and becoming a wandering, rambling historian, filling pages with irrelevant material.

Now the nation of Israel was terminated by the Romans in A.D. 70 and was non-existent until 1948. During this period the Jews were uprooted from their land and scattered throughout the earth. This means that if the prophecies in Revelation relate to a continuous period of history from the end of the first century onwards, the land and nation of Israel cannot be the focal centre. This would be a major alteration from the volume of prophetic testimony up to this time. It would be a fundamental departure from the original and long standing basis of the word and spirit of prophecy.

We read in Rev. 19:10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” which can be interpreted to mean that the prophetic testimony of Jesus in the book of Revelation is inspired by the same Spirit that inspired prophecy in the Old Testament Scriptures. In view of the fact that the prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures only related to the nation of Israel and the nations that affected her fortunes and misfortunes, it would surely be reasonable to expect that the same would apply in the Revelation prophecies seeing they are inspired by the same Spirit.

THE ISRAELI CONNECTIONS IN REVELATION

The Israeli connection is seen from the very outset in Revelation in the prophetic voice being described as sounding like a trumpet (4:1). As already pointed out, the trumpet had been ordained in Moses’ day to be used in connection with various divine appointments for the nation of Israel. In Joel’s prophecy, the trumpet is blown to warn the nation of Israel

that “the day of the Lord cometh, for it is near at hand” (2:1). This involves the invasion of Israel by Gentile nations and ultimately Divine intervention at the battle of Armageddon. As we shall see, the prophecies in Revelation relate to this.

We shall also see that the seals in Rev. 6 reveal links with the Olivet prophecy. The connections and parallels are unmistakable, making it difficult to deny that they relate to the same time and events as the Olivet prophecy. Although the Olivet prophecy encompasses Gentile nations, especially those who tread down Jerusalem and persecute the Jews, the land and people of Israel are the central focus of the prophecy, and the same applies to the seals.

Specific reference is made to the 12 tribes of Israel by name in Rev. 7, and the number redeemed from each tribe out of the end time tribulation is given. Reference to them being sealed in their foreheads is based on a previous incident involving a similar experience in the land of Israel (Ezk. 9).

The “locusts” in Rev. 9 which torment those who are not sealed can be linked with the locusts in Joel 1 which represent nations that will invade Israel in the end time.

Reference to “the great river Euphrates” in Rev. 9:14 takes us to the northern border of the land of Israel, where a multitudinous army will be held back until the appointed time to invade.

The mighty angel in Rev. 10 who gives power to the two witnesses to prophesy for 1260 days (Rev. 11:3), is the same angel who appeared to Daniel (Dan. 10) and who spoke about the 1260 days (Dan. 12:7). He explained that a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation shall occur during this 3½ year period, as a result of Israel being invaded, and that the purpose of it is to “shatter the power of the holy people” (i.e. Jews. Read Dan. 11:40- 12:7). But some of Daniel’s people (those sealed by God in Israel) shall be delivered, “everyone that shall be found written in the book.”

The giving of power to the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11:3 will be the end time fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 which has the land of Israel as the focal centre. The ability of the empowered witnesses to command fire to devour their enemies and to command rain not to fall during the 3½ years that they prophesy, is reminiscent of Elijah’s ministry, (1 Kng. 17:1. 2 Kng. 1) during which rain did not fall for 3½ years (Lk. 4:25. Jam. 5:17).

It is plainly declared in Mal. 4:5 that an Elijah ministry will take place in the end time prior to the Day of the Lord. The original Elijah

ministry took place in the land of Israel among the people of Israel. The same applied to the ministry of John the Baptist who came “in the Spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk. 1:17). The same will also apply to the 2 witnesses. This is further indicated in Rev. 11:4 which says they are “the 2 olive trees ...” This is an allusion to the 2 olive trees in Zec. 4 which refer to the 2 Hebrew prophets, Haggai and Zechariah who ministered in Israel.

The statement in Rev. 11:2 about the holy city being trodden under foot by the Gentiles for 42 months (i.e. a time, times and dividing of time) is almost a verbatim quote from Lk. 21:24: “Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The focal centre of the prophecy is unmistakably Jerusalem in the land of Israel. Verse 8 of Rev. 11 says the witnesses will be killed there by the enemy, “and their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city ... where our Lord was crucified.” This also is an unmistakable reference to Jerusalem.

Rev. 12 refers to a woman in heaven clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. The only other place in Scripture where the symbols of the sun, moon and 12 stars are combined is Joseph’s dream which relates to Israel (Gen. 37:9-11). On this basis it is believed that Rev. 12:1 refers to the nation of Israel, often referred to as a “woman” in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Being “in heaven,” on the basis of the application of this expression in other Scriptures, signifies attaining political power. It can be related to the revival of the nation of Israel in 1948 when she became an independent political power, and took her place among other nations in the political heavens. In view of Israel being the focal centre of the word of prophecy, and in view of the miraculous resuscitation and revival of the nation which had been dead for nearly 2,000 years, it is to be expected that reference would be made to this somewhere in Revelation.

Rev. 12 also refers to a great red dragon being in heaven who hates the woman (Israel) and attacks her. The dragon represents another nation which attains political power contemporary with Israel. And the fact that the dragon has 10 horns, indicates other nations are confederate with him and support him in his hatred of Israel. In the Old Testament prophecies the dragon either refers to Egypt or Babylon (Iraq today), both of whom have a history of hating and attacking Israel. It is believed that the dragon with 10 horns represents an end time anti-Israel coalition of 10 Moslem nations led by Egypt or Iraq. The prophecy clearly revolves around Israel, and affects not just secular Jews living in the land at the time, but also Christian Jews, as indicated in Rev. 12.

The beast in Rev. 13 and 17 is Gog and his confederates, referred to in Ezk. 38. This is indicated in Rev. 19:17-21 where the prophecy in Ezk. 39 which describes the slaughter of Gog and his forces is quoted and applied to the destruction of the beast. Once again, as is evident in Ezk. 38 and 39, the land and people of Israel are the focal centre of the prophecy.

Rev. 14 commences with a vision of the lamb (Christ) standing on Mount Zion with those redeemed from the 12 tribes of Israel. Mount Zion, of course, is in Israel, and is sometimes used as a synonym for Jerusalem.

“The city” in Rev. 14:17-20 to which the vine of the earth will be gathered, and outside of which the winepress will be trodden is also Jerusalem.

According to Rev. 16 the place to which the nations will be gathered for the battle of that great day of God almighty, “is called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” The fact that it is a Hebrew word indicates it is a place in the land of the Hebrews, which is the land of Israel. Without any shadow of a doubt, the battle of Armageddon will take place in the land of Israel. Many Scriptures testify to this.

Finally, in the closing vision in Revelation, John is taken by the Spirit to see the city of God descending to earth out of heaven. Where was he taken to see this? “To a great and high mountain” (21:10). Where was this mountain? In the land of Israel! See Ezk. 40:2. Which mountain was it? Zion of course, the same mountain Jesus is seen standing on with the 144,000 in Rev. 14:1. See Heb. 12:22.

In this brief overview of the prophecies in Revelation, it should be evident that, as in the case of the Old Testament prophecies, Israel occupies a central position. The prophetic testimony of Jesus is truly according to the same Spirit of the former prophets.

COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

There are over 700 quotations from the Old testament in the book of Revelation. The entire book is a masterly mosaic of quotations from, and allusions to, the Old Testament Scriptures. In view of this it is reasonable that the first step that should be taken in seeking to interpret Revelation, is to compare its statements with the Scriptures to which they allude. This is what is normally done when it comes to interpreting doctrine or theology, and it is also the key to interpreting prophecy. 1 Cor. 2:13 puts it like this: “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” This involves comparing Scripture with Scripture.

It stands to reason that when we encounter an Old Testament

statement or symbolism in Revelation, it suggests we consider that the fulfilment may correspond to it. When such is the case, the Word of God becomes its own interpreter, and we are not left at the mercy of guesswork or assumption.

This is where the continuous historical approach often falls short. In many instances it is based on history books instead of the books of the Bible. Due to men being convinced that the book of Revelation relates to the whole period of history from the end of the first century through to the last, they have searched the highways and byways of secular history books (especially the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire), to find events that can be made to correspond with the prophecies; instead of giving the Scriptures to which they allude an opportunity to correspond. In many cases the prophecies in Revelation have been forced into the mould of history, instead of interpreting history in the light of prophecy.

In some cases, the facts of history together with the plain language of Revelation, have been strained to the limit to justify the historical interpretation. In other cases many of the symbols in Revelation are much too great and out of all proportion to the events in history to which they have been applied.

Because the continuous historical view has its set chronological place or slot in history for each prophecy to be fulfilled, it is forced to ignore obvious connections in Scripture and gives applications that are totally foreign, and sometimes the very opposite, to the content of those Scriptures. In other words, the Scriptural roots of various prophecies are ignored and rejected in order to uphold a preconceived concept and support tradition. For example: The “man-child” in Rev. 12:5 which is a reference back to Isa. 66:7 and refers to the spiritual rebirth of Jews in Israel, has been applied to Constantine, Emperor of Rome, regarded as a spiritually apostate man of sin.

The woman in Rev. 12:1 with the crown of 12 stars, instead of being identified with the revived nation of Israel, is identified with a reprobate church system.

Although 12 tribes of Israel are mentioned specifically by name in Rev. 7, the continuous historical interpretation is forced to spiritualize it all away and reject all connection with the 12 tribes, because the chronological slot it has trapped itself in for this prophecy won't allow this application.

The same applies to the reference in Rev. 11:8 to the city “where our Lord was crucified.” This is plainly and clearly a reference to Jerusalem, but the continuous historical interpretation is forced to deny the obvious,

and applies the city to the whole Roman Empire, because Jerusalem will not fit in with its fixed chronological sequence of events.

Likewise, the holy city trodden down by the Gentiles in Rev. 11:2 which is an obvious reference to Lk. 21:24 and refers to the city of Jerusalem, is not applied to Jerusalem but to the body of Christ instead.

The divine power bestowed upon the two witnesses by the mighty angel from heaven, enabling them to prophesy and perform signs, miracles and wonders; is robbed of its connection with Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days, and is not regarded as the divine power of God's Holy Spirit at all.

The 1260 days which is clearly explained by the Spirit to be "forty two months" (Rev. 13:5) has been changed to 1260 years which is 15120 months. 3½ years is obviously too short a period for anything in the long drawn out continuous historical view. All in all, the continuous historical interpretation involves considerable misapplication of the Word of God resulting in faulty exposition.

TOO COMPLICATED

The historical facts involved in the historical interpretation are so involved and require so much reading of history, that they can really only be assessed by a competent historian as to whether they represent a balanced view of the situation. And the plain fact is that many Bible readers are incapable of doing this and have been put off seeking to understand Revelation because of the critical knowledge of history it appears to demand. And, if the layman cannot be sure of history, how can he be sure of the interpretation? Was it really the intention of the Lord Jesus to leave his servants at the mercy of competing historians to reap the blessing he offers to those who read and understand?

Surely the repeated reference in the book of Revelation to the Scriptures, teaches that Bible knowledge, not history knowledge, is the key to the interpretation of the book. Being familiar with the Scriptures is the indispensable requirement to discern the true nature of the prophecies.

THE JEWS ARE AN ETERNAL WITNESS

One argument put forward by those who hold to the continuous historical interpretation, is that if the prophecies do not cover the whole period of history from the end of the first century to the last, then we end up with centuries of history during which the witness of prophecy

was non-existent.

But this is not the case at all. The Jews are God's eternal witness due to being a living fulfilment of the Word of prophecy in all ages (Isa. 43:12). All enlightened Christians from the first century onward knew from the prophetic Scriptures that the Jews had to be scattered into all nations upon earth, suffer persecution, yet survive as a race due to the divine preservation of their national identity, and finally be regathered to their land, revive as a nation, re-occupy their capital city Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and be invaded by anti-Israel forces, before Jesus Christ returned.

In view of this, there was no need to give prophecies of the decline and fall of the Roman empire and the rise and fall of other Gentile nations during the intervening centuries, especially when they had no bearing on the return of the Jews and the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. Such information might be interesting to a historian, but irrelevant to a Bible student.

Christians living during those centuries certainly did not need such prophecies to prove that the Scriptures were reliable and accurate. The dispersion, persecution and preservation of the Jews was ample witness to the truth of the Word of God. For example, it is on record that around 1,200 A.D. King Frederick the Great of Prussia asked his Christian physician why he believed the Bible. His answer was: "The Jews your majesty." He did not quote any prophecies in the book of Revelation which he believed were being fulfilled in his time, or prior to his time.

There is in fact no evidence that the Christians who lived prior to the reformation and invention of the printing press, all had access to the book of Revelation let alone believed in the continuous historical interpretation of it. If this be the case, there would obviously be no point in giving such prophecies if those who lived during the fulfilment of them could not be aware of their fulfilment. They would hardly be given only for the benefit of those in the future so that they could look back in the past and reminisce over history!

All informed Christians knew that the time of the end would not come until the Jews were regathered to their land. It was not necessary therefore, for the prophecies in the book of Revelation to give a detailed run-down of the movements of Gentile nations prior to the establishment of the nation of Israel. If the prophecies did give such a run-down, the reaction of Christians living at the time would be: "yes, but, when will the Jews return to their land and revive as a nation?" As we shall see, the reference in Rev. 12 to a woman in heaven crowned with 12 stars refers to

the rebirth of the nation of Israel and is central to the prophecies in Revelation as in the Old Testament prophecies.

THE TIME OF THE END

According to Dan. 11:40 “the time of the end” will start in earnest when Israel is invaded. Other Scriptures confirm this (Ezk. 38. Joel. Zech. 14). Joel expresses it in terms of “the day of the Lord.” This phrase is expressive of divine judgement and in Joel’s prophecy it has two phases. The first is judgement upon the nation of Israel in the form of invasion by enemy nations. Joel 2:4 says “as horsemen they shall charge.” These invading forces will occupy the land of Israel for a period of time referred to in Joel 2:25 as “years.” At the end of this period they shall be judged at the Battle of Armageddon, which is also referred to as “the day of the Lord” (Joel 3:14) and is the second phase.

So then, “the day of the Lord” is an end time period involving some years. I believe that this can be related to the statement in Rev. 1:10 that John was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” and heard a great trumpet voice. As pointed out earlier, it is unlikely that the reference to the Lord’s day refers to the particular day of the week that John received the revelation. In Christ, every day is the Lord’s day so it is immaterial what day of the week John received the revelation. It is more likely that the Lord’s day relates to “the day of the Lord” in Joel’s prophecy and other prophecies, namely the end time period, and not a long continuous period of history involving hundreds of years.

Central to the prophecies in Revelation is a specific time period defined as “a time, and times, and half a time,” or “a thousand two hundred and threescore days.” As mentioned before, this is explained to be “forty two months” which is 3½ years. As we shall see, two separate periods of 3½ years are mentioned in Revelation, making a total of seven years. The first is connected with the dragon, and the second with the beast, both of whom signify end time confederacies against Israel, who will attack in turn. This seven year period will be the last heptad in human history - the period during which the prophecies in Revelation and the rest of Scripture reach their grand climax and consummation.

Reference to John being in the Spirit on the Lord’s day is therefore taken to mean he was projected in prophetic vision to the time of the end, to see the events leading up to the return of Christ in the last lap of human history.

THE FUTURIST INTERPRETATION

This view of the book of Revelation is known as the futurist interpretation, because it awaits the future to be fulfilled. It maintains that the chapters in the book are not in chronological order. Instead of seeing the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 thunders and 7 vials etc as one long continuous narrative forming an unbroken chain of events stretching from the first century A.D. to the last, it sees them as being layered and overlapping, and pertaining to a relatively short period in the end time.

Evidence of the overlapping nature and structure of the prophecies can be seen for example, in the way the judgements of the bowls overlap. They come with such swiftness, one upon the heels of the other, that the effects of the first bowl (sores: Rev. 16:2), are still present at the time of the judgement of the 5th bowl (v11), which refers to people still suffering from their sores. The series of judgements which fell upon Egypt prior to the Exodus can be compared with this. They all took place over a relatively short period of time, and overlapped each other.

A careful reading of the prophecies in Revelation reveals a specific structure: each seven-fold sequence terminates in the kingdom of God. Each sequence has a particular theme and reference is made to the kingdom; then the next sequence, though having a different message, follows the same pattern, also culminating with the kingdom. Although each preceding seven-fold theme of prophecy ends with the establishment of the kingdom, the next theme goes back to the period leading up to the kingdom to give more detail of events. The layered style of the prophecies can be seen in this, and follows the style of Old testament prophecies. For example: Joel chapter 2 finishes with the kingdom established, but chapter 3 goes back to deal in detail with the invasion mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, and leads up once more to the kingdom. There are many examples of this in Old Testament prophecies. It is a favourite style or structure of the Holy Spirit, and it is not surprising that it is used in Revelation.

This structure can be compared with a telescope consisting of 7 extending parts. As each part is extended, more detail can be seen of the scene in the distance towards which it points.

THE LAMB OPENED ONE OF THE SEALS

Rev. 6:1 commences by saying John saw the lamb open one of the seals, i.e. the first seal. Having taken the book from the hand of him who sat on the throne, the lamb did not walk off with it and retire to a

private room to open the seals. He remained before the throne, in the midst of the 4 living creatures, in the presence of God, the angels and John; and started to remove the seals.

When the first seal was removed, John says: "I heard as it were the noise of thunder." This is the only place where the Greek word "Phone" is translated "noise." It is translated "voice" 131 times in the New Testament, 48 of which are in the book of Revelation (e.g. Rev. 6:6, 7, 10).

The words "as it were" indicate that it was not thunder that John heard, but a voice something like the sound of thunder. The next statement explains that it was the voice of one of the 4 living creatures, which, as we shall see, was the one like a lion. As we know, the roar of a lion is like thunder, and the voice of God is likened to thunder (see page 49-50).

A lion's roar is associated with the devouring of prey, and thunder is associated with a storm. Both of these aspects are used in Scripture in relation to the impending judgements of God. This is appropriate in view of the fact that the 4 horses and horsemen which come on the scene as a result of the voice of thunder, represent judgements of God.

According to the A.V. translation, the voice like thunder said "come and see." However, the Greek text simply says "come." It is not an invitation to John to come and see what is written in the scroll, but a call or command to the first horse to come on the scene and enact what is written in the scroll. This is evident from the fact that the first of 4 horses (a white horse) comes forth in response to the call and embarks on its mission. John had already "come" (4:1) and been invited to see the prophetic scenes.

The fact that Rev. 6:3 refers to "the second living creature," v5 refers to the third, and v7 to the fourth, indicates that the living creature in v1 is the first, which, according to 4:7 "was like a lion." The second horse (red) is summoned by "the second living creature" which was like a calf. The third horse (black) is called by "the third living creature" which "had the face of a man." The fourth horse (pale) is beckoned by "the fourth living creature" which was "like a flying eagle."

Because death by war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts results from the first 4 seals being opened and 4 horses being sent forth, it is natural to relate them to the "four sore (hurtful, painful) judgements" of God, referred to in Ezk. 14:21. They are listed as "the sword (war), famine, evil beasts and the pestilence." In Ezekiel's day, God threatened to send these 4 judgements upon Jerusalem and the Jews as a result of their wickedness.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HORSES

Before attempting to identify the 4 horses and horsemen, we need to consider what the horse signifies or symbolizes in Scripture. In ancient times the horse was used for battle and warfare, to execute judgement against the enemy, which often led to famine, pestilence, and wild beasts and birds of prey devouring the wounded and the unburied dead. As Pr. 21:31 puts it: “the horse is prepared for the day of battle.” There are many examples in Scripture of God summoning nations and sending them with their war horses against other nations, particularly Israel, to execute His judgements. The Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans in particular were used in this way, and they became the rod of God’s anger - His horses and horsemen.

Because God sometimes uses angels to execute His judgements and fight His battles against the enemy, they are also referred to symbolically as horses, horsemen and chariots. But it seems that the horses and horsemen in Rev. 6 do not actually refer to specific people, be they angels or men. This is indicated by the fact that the fourth horseman is called “death.” Death is not a person but a state or condition. So also is war, famine and pestilence.

But it must be kept in mind that God controls these conditions and uses either nations or angels or both to implement and execute them, and the sending forth of horses and horsemen can signify this. It is only when a seal is broken on the book in heaven, that a horse and horseman appears on earth. Heaven controls the conditions on earth. The snap of a seal, like the snap of fingers, is all it takes to set in motion times of trouble and tribulation on earth!

EACH HORSE IS SUMMONED BY A LIVING CREATURE

It is natural to wonder if there is any significance in the fact that each horse is summoned and introduced by a different living creature, other than the fact that the 4 living creatures are clearly of very high station to do this instead of God Himself who is sitting on His throne before them. Some interesting observations are made by Geoff and Ray Walker in their book: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” upon which some of the following comments are based.

As we know, the 4 living creatures are the cherubim, and as we have seen in Ezk. 1 etc they are the horsemen and chariots of the Lord - divine vehicles by which He executes judgement. In view of the fact that the 4

horses in Rev. 6 execute the judgements of God, it is fitting that the 4 living creatures commission them to go forth on their missions. It is evident that in this particular case the 4 horses are not the 4 living creatures. The 4 living creatures summon the horses. Two separate and distinct sets of four are involved here.

Horses of different colours are also mentioned in Zech. 1:8-9, and are referred to in v10 as “those whom the Lord has sent to walk through (i.e. patrol or inspect) the earth.” They refer to angels. See 2 Chr. 16:9 and Job 1:7. In Dan. 4:13 an angel is referred to as “a watcher” i.e. inspector. As a result of these horses going forth into the earth, peace and rest was established (Zech. 1:11). This is the reason and purpose of God’s judgements: to humble man and bring about peace.

Zech. 6 also refers to 4 chariots pulled by 4 sets of horses of 4 different colours. Verse 5 refers to them as “the 4 spirits (winds) of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.” Being referred to as “spirits” or winds indicates they do not represent human agencies but divine, as indicated in Ps. 104:4 where angels are called “spirits.”

As in other places, they are symbolically depicted as horses and chariots because horses and chariots were used in warfare to do battle and conquer the foe. Being God’s army, angels are used by Him to punish and destroy nations when the cup of sin and iniquity fills to overflowing, and in so doing, God’s anger is appeased. For this reason we read in Zech. 6:8 that as a result of the horses going forth on their mission, they “quieted” God’s Spirit, i.e. they calmed down His anger and put His Spirit at rest.

Each of the 4 chariots in Zech. 6 are pulled by more than one horse for the plural word “horses” is used in each case. At least 2 horses pulled each chariot. The first chariot is pulled by red horses; the second by black horses; the third by white and the fourth by “grisled and bay” (A.V.).

Rev. 6 also refers to red, black and white horses, although not in pairs nor in the same order of colour. The fourth colour in Rev. 6 is “pale” and in Zech. 6 it is a mixture of “grisled and bay.” (“Grisled” means spotted, as with hail. “Bay,” according to Strong, can mean reddish).

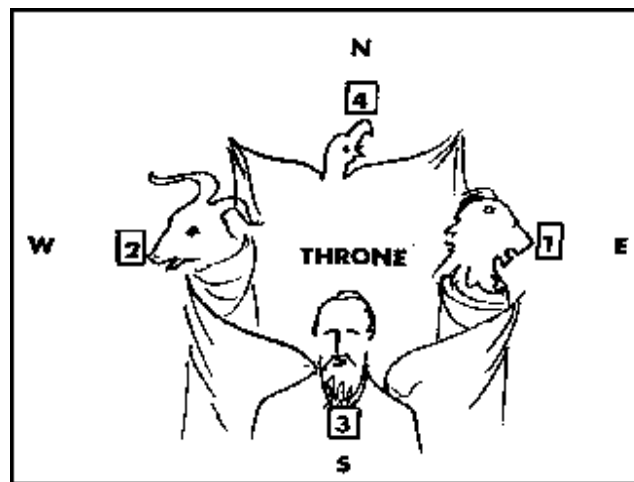
Because the horses and colours are not literal realities, but symbols, colours can be changed, and fluctuate to suit the differing circumstances of God’s judgements without creating contradiction.

The horses in Zech. 6 head off in different directions, each toward one of the 4 points of the compass. The black horses head north; the white horses go west and the grisled go south. We are not told the direction taken by the bay horses, but it is reasonable to assume it was east, seeing

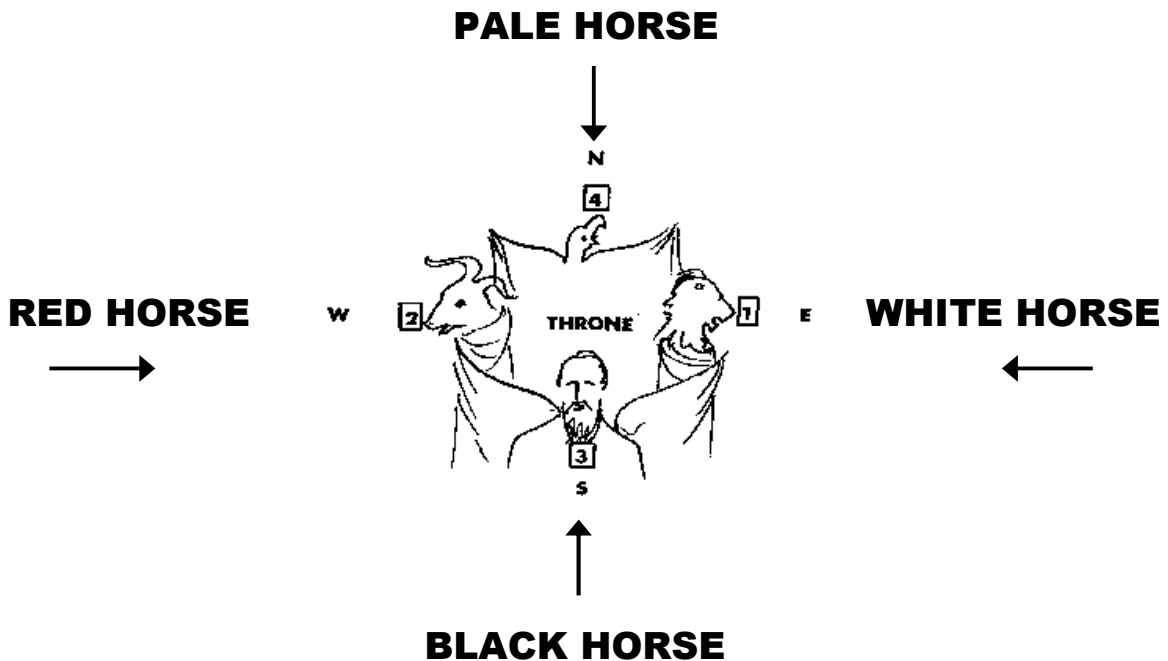
that is the only point of the compass remaining. (The red horses in v2 do not go forth on a mission, and the grisled and bay horses which together pulled the fourth chariot in v3 are separated and sent forth separately in v6-7. No reason is given for this. Maybe the mission of the red horses was already achieved, and the condition signified by the red was prevailing on earth at the time the prophecy was given).

According to Ezk. 1:4, 10, the 4 living creatures (cherubim) also face in 4 directions. The face of a man was on the south; the face of a lion was on the east; the face of an ox was on the west, and the face of an eagle was on the north.

As we have seen in Rev. 4:7, the 4 living creatures are given numbers: “the first was like a lion, the second like a calf (young ox), the third had the face of a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle.” This is illustrated below, taken from Geoff and Ray Walker’s book on Revelation.



If the living creatures in Rev. 4:7 stood in the same directional positions as the cherubim in Ezekiel’s vision, the lion would be first, facing east, and he calls the white horse. The ox is second, facing west, and he calls the red horse. The man is third, and he calls the black horse. The eagle is fourth, facing north, and calls the pale horse as seen in the next diagram.



The fact that each living creature says “come” to each horse indicates they are summoning them - calling them forth in their direction, not sending them away in the opposite direction. This means that the black horse travels north; the white horse travels west; the pale horse travels south and the red horse travels east, as depicted in the diagram.

Keeping this in mind, we go back to the horses in Zech. 6 which are referred to as “spirits” or “winds”: “The 4 winds of the heavens (i.e. north, south, east and west winds) which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.” The directions in which they head are given as follows: The black horses head north and therefore represent the wind judgement that comes from the south. The white horses head west and represent the wind judgement that comes from the east. The grisled (pale) horses head south and represent the wind judgement that comes from the north. This means the red horses had headed east and represent the wind judgement that came from the west. (The bay horses do not head in any particular direction, but patrol the whole earth).

It is surely due to divine design and not coincidence that the compass positions of the 4 living creatures in Ezk. 1 and the corresponding positions of the horses in Zech. 6 correspond with the order in which the 4 living creatures are presented in Rev. 6, and the order in which the 4 horses are called. Each living creature calls to the horse of the correct

colour which, according to Zech. 6 should move toward it. Three separate Scriptures thus combine to form a picture which could hardly have been accidental.

The mathematical chances against this arrangement happening by accident would be quite high. Just one number different in Rev. 4 or an alteration in the order of faces in Ezk. 1, or a change of place or position of the horses in Zec. 6, would have resulted in no relationship between the 4 living creatures and the 4 horses.

If the 4 living creatures stand on 4 sides around the throne of God (Rev. 4:7), it seems that each of the 4 horses when called, came forth from each side. The colour of the horses therefore, could signify not only the nature of the judgement they execute, but also the direction from which it comes. Winds are directional; i.e. they move in a particular direction. The 4 winds come, and blow towards the 4 points of the compass. This means that the 4 sore judgements of the Lord executed by the 4 horses, could fall upon all 4 quarters of the earth or portion of the earth to which they are sent, in the order of east, west, south and north. Between them, they affect all parts of the country or countries where they go.

The fact that a white horse responds to the call and command of the first living creature, and a red horse responds to the call of the second living creature etc, could also imply that each living creature is in control and has charge over the particular judgement represented by the horse that responds to his call. After all, only one specific horse responds to the call of each living creature.

Because God's judgements involve war, famine and pestilence etc, it could be that each living creature is in charge of one of these, and between the 4 of them, the 4 sore judgements of God are executed.

The fact that it was not until the lamb opened each seal that each living creature was able to summon each horse, indicates that Christ has charge of, and is director of all affairs concerning earth. All power in heaven and earth has been entrusted to him by his Father (Matt. 28:18). Angels, authorities and powers have been made subject to him (1 Pet. 3:22).

So then, let us capture the scene. Jesus takes the sealed book out of the hands of the One sitting on the throne. He then breaks the seal. There is probably a hush - a silence of expectation. Then the silence is broken by a loud thunderous voice, like the roar of a lion. It is the voice of the first living creature who looks like a lion. His thunderous voice only utters one word: "Come." In response to this, a white horse and horseman appears.

After breaking the seal, Jesus did not unroll the first section of the

scroll and read out aloud about the white horse. Neither did he pass the scroll to John to read. No! As a result of breaking the first seal, the living creature called out “come” in a loud voice, resulting in John seeing a white horse and horseman.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it seems reasonable to conclude that the scenes represented before John were pictorial illustrations of the events which the book contained. Although there is no reference to Jesus unrolling and reading a section of the scroll each time he breaks a seal, the breaking of a seal signifies access to a section. Instead of reading it, the contents are conveyed in signs by a series of action-packed scenes involving horses and horsemen etc. The message of the scroll is therefore presented in the form of a dramatized vision, which makes it much more dramatic and interesting than reading it out.

TOO MUCH ASSUMPTION

Regarding the 4 horses and horsemen: the continuous historical interpretation of course, assumes that each horse has its own separate historical period during the history of the Roman empire. It maintains that the historical periods of the horses run consecutively and continuously without any overlapping, so that there was a “white horse period,” a “red horse period” etc, stretching from A.D. 96 to A.D. 324 when Constantine overthrew paganism.

No time periods or dates are mentioned in the narrative of course, in relation to the seals, yet various expositors have compiled elaborate time charts in which the seals (and the trumpets and vials), are related to specific periods of history starting at the end of the first century and working systematically and chronologically through the centuries to the second coming of Christ.

There is however, no indication or evidence in the text itself, that each horseman completes his mission before the next begins. There is no reference to the white horse or others returning with its rider to stable at the conclusion of its mission, before another horse can go forth on its mission.

The 4 seals could have been broken fairly rapidly, resulting in the 4 horses coming forth in quick succession and operating together concurrently. Their missions could run roughly parallel with each other, as indeed has been the case with war, famine and pestilence in many countries, many times in history. One particular mission may of course, dominate for a while, but they can still all be there together, pursuing their

courses.

The 4 horses in Zech. 1 and the 4 chariots in Zech. 6 certainly seem to walk concurrently throughout the earth and operate simultaneously, not successively.

It seems reasonable to conclude that most of the visions in Revelation, be it the seals, trumpets or vials, are to be taken simultaneously not chronologically. The beginning of each seal, trumpet or vial does not have to wait for the one before it to be completely fulfilled before it can begin to be fulfilled. They are all different aspects on one mighty expression of judgement and tribulation, and because of the variety of issues involved, overlapping is inevitable.

Many Bible prophecies follow this pattern. For example, the sequence of prophecies in Zech. 12 to 14 is anything but chronological. Neither is Isaiah's "little apocalypse" in chapters 24 to 27. It is also evident that God's "four sore judgements" on Jerusalem, involving war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts (Ezk. 5:17. 14:12-21. 33:27) all come together and not one after another over a period of centuries. Even the Olivet prophecy lacks straight chronological order. The reason for the seals being given in order, one to seven is probably because from the very nature of the case it would have been impossible to describe them all simultaneously.

THE WHITE HORSE

In response to the first living creature's call to "come," John says: "I saw, and behold a white horse: and he who sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer."

The identity of this white horse and the horseman with a bow has caused more confusion and consternation among Bible students than the other 3 horsemen combined! Various alternatives have been suggested.

Those who believe Revelation was given prior to A.D.70, believe the white horse represents Rome whose armies went forth to conquer the Jewish rebellion in A.D. 70, and whose success is represented by the crown given to the rider.

The continuous historical view, which believes Revelation was given in A.D. 96 and started to be fulfilled soon after, believes the white horse represents the Parthians who attacked Rome, followed by the Sassanians. The Parthians were a horse-and-bow people whose king rode a ceremonial white horse, and carried on state occasions, a bow without arrows as part of his regalia. The Parthians were Rome's greatest enemy during this

period and did more than any other enemy to bring about the fall of pagan Rome.

Others say the white horse represents Constantine or “Christian governments” so called, which came later, who conquered heathen nations in the name of Christ. Some have advocated that it refers to Elijah preparing the way for Christ. Others have suggested it represents the second coming of Christ, while others think it is a flashback to Christ’s first coming.

A common view is that the white horse and horseman with a bow represents the preaching of the gospel by the church to conquer men’s minds, bringing them into subjection to Christ. The crown given to the horseman as a result of his victory is linked with passages such as 1 Cor. 9:25. 2 Tim. 4:8 which refer to an incorruptible crown and crown of righteousness which shall be given to all the saints who gain victory over the flesh and the world and keep the faith to the end.

Those who hold to the continuous historical view, say the white horse indicates that Christianity would gain victory over paganism. Due to no reference being made to an arrow or arrows, they maintain that the rider of the white horse had an arrowless bow, indicating that the weapon did not signify a carnal weapon to be used for carnal warfare, but a spiritual weapon, as for example “the sword of the Spirit” in Eph. 6:17.

But the horse in Scripture is a symbol of warfare and bloodshed and judgement, and would not be an appropriate symbol of evangelism.

The horse generally represented reliance on natural forces and physical might instead of God, and for this reason Israel was forbidden by God to depend on horses to fight their battles and defend themselves (Deut. 17:16. Isa. 31:1). A horse would therefore not be an appropriate symbol of evangelism. Jesus never used a horse during his earthly ministry. He did however ride upon a donkey, not to preach the gospel, but to ride in to Jerusalem in fulfilment of Zech. 9:14.

Too much should not be made of the fact that there is no reference to arrows. To argue on this basis that no arrows were involved is to argue from silence. Without arrows a bow would be useless. An empty bow is more likely to mean the arrows have been fired. In the Old Testament, bows are referred to on occasions without mention of arrows, and arrows are mentioned without reference to bows, but no one doubts the one required and involved the other. See for example Ps. 44:6. 46:9.

Some have linked the rider on the white horse in Rev. 6 with the rider on a white horse in Rev. 19, which refers to Christ at his return to earth. But a quick comparison between them reveals that the two riders have

little in common besides riding on white horses. There are significant differences: In Rev. 6 John sees a crown given to the rider, but he is not wearing it when he first appears on the scene. However the rider in chapter 19 has “many crowns” not just one. He is already “king of kings and Lord of Lords” (19:16).

The rider in Rev. 19 executes divine judgement for sin as we read in v11: “He who sat on him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (i.e. Armageddon). On this particular occasion, the white horse does not signify peace but war - war in righteousness with a view to establishing peace!

The rider in Rev. 19 does not however have a bow, but “out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations” (v15).

In Rev. 6, as we shall see, the second red horse represents war, resulting in peace being taken from the earth. This would not fit into the time sequence if the first horse and horseman represents the second coming of Jesus and the war of Armageddon, because Armageddon will be the war that ends all wars.

The same applies to the third and fourth horses which, as we shall see represent famine and pestilence. Famine and pestilence will not be the result of the return of Christ! Famines and pestilences precede the second coming and will cease as a result of Christ’s return and restoration of all things (Matt. 24:3-8).

The white horse in Rev. 6 is one of four. The other three clearly signify divine judgements and woes that scourge humanity prior to the second coming. We are therefore bound to find a meaning consistent with this for the first horse. In view of the nature and mission of the second, third and fourth horse, it is clearly not the right time for the first horse to represent the second coming and therefore cannot be equated with Rev. 19. We cannot put at the beginning that which comes in fact at the end! In the Olivet prophecy, the second coming is the last event and the same applies to the seals.

WHO IS THE RIDER?

Who then, is the rider of the white horse? Can we find the clues for the meaning in Scripture, or are we at the mercy of guess work where one person’s guess is as good as another’s, resulting in many different and conflicting interpretations? Fortunately there is a more sure method of interpretation based not on history but on Scripture. Careful study reveals that the general trends outlined in the seals are remarkably

similar to the course of events described in the Olivet prophecy. The links between the two prophecies provide a vital key to the interpretation of the seals. The connections and parallels are not vague or dubious, but clear and unmistakable, making it difficult to deny that the seals relate to the same time and events as the Olivet prophecy.

Seals 2, 3, 4 and 5 relate to wars, famines, pestilences and persecution of the church, and find their counterpart in, and run parallel with the second, third, fourth and fifth signs given by Jesus of his second coming (read Matt. 24:6-9). The sixth seal, relating to cosmic disturbances and celestial phenomena, finds its counterpart or parallel in Matt. 24:29, which forms part of the list of signs given by Jesus heralding his second coming.

So much then, for the second to sixth seals. What about the first involving the white horse? Well, it actually finds its parallel with the first sign Jesus gave in the Olivet prophecy. It corresponds with Matt. 24:4-5: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying: I am the Christ, and shall deceive many." So important was this sign, that Jesus not only gave it first, but repeated it twice (Matt. 24:11, 24:26). Significantly enough, the verses in Ezk. 14 which relate to the 4 sore judgements of war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts, are preceded by a reference to false prophets (v9).

Nearly all commentators label the white horse rider as Jesus Christ, or some form of his work on earth. But ironically enough, Jesus himself actually prophesied that there would be deception and misunderstanding in relation to his true identity. His warning is that prior to his return, there will be men claiming to be the Christ - claiming to be able to bring to humanity what only the true Messiah is capable of delivering. Such men will falsely usurp his title and lay claim to his authority, masquerading as deliverers and saviours, political and religious. It is true therefore that the rider of the white horse represents a Christ, but not the Christ. It is a false Christ.

It is fitting and appropriate that a counterfeit Christ should be depicted riding on a white horse - the same coloured horse that Christ himself is depicted riding upon in Rev. 19. A counterfeit is an imitation of the real and genuine. To be a counterfeit it has to have the same outward appearance. "And no marvel; for the adversary himself masquerades as a messenger of enlightenment. Therefore it is not surprising that his ministers also masquerade as the ministers of righteousness" (Christ) (2 Cor. 11:14-15, 23).

For this reason, because the true Messiah is seated on a white horse,

the false Messiah is also seated on a white horse. The counterfeit is so good, it has deceived many into thinking he is the Messiah! He is clearly not a counterfeit of Confucius, Buddha or Mohammed, but something closer to Christ. Although he, and his followers and supporters give expression to Biblical or gospel clichés, subtle flaws are discernible in the system by the elect.

The horseman in Rev. 19:15 has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth, which represents the Word of God (Heb. 4:12. Eph 6:17). His name is in fact called “the Word of God” (Rev. 19:13). The horseman in Rev. 6 does not have a sharp sword coming out of his mouth. He does not have the Word of truth. He and his teaching are not based on the Word of God.

In the second seal, the horseman holds a sword, and the horseman of the third seal holds scales. The sword and scales represent the nature of their mission: war and famine. The bow in the hand of the first horseman also represents the mission, but could not represent anything if no arrows were involved. But, as already mentioned, it cannot be argued that arrows were not involved simply because there is no reference to them. A bow implies arrows. Literal arrows can cause death, and we know from history and Rev. 17:6 that the false counterfeit church has killed and will kill again. If, as could very well be the case, the “them” referred to in Rev. 6:8 who “kill,” includes the first horseman, it would confirm that arrows are shot by his bow. Reference in Rev. 6:9 to the souls that “had (past tense) been slain for the Word of God and for their testimony” certainly indicates that Christians are martyred during the period of the seals. Later chapters in Revelation also refer to a great false prophet in the end time who will cause all to be killed who refuse to worship the beast.

TONGUES LIKE ARROWS

In some Scriptures arrows represent the false and destructive tongue: (Ps. 120:3-4. 57:4. 64:2-3. Pr. 25:18. Jer. 9:8). The tongue of false Christ's, false apostles and deceitful workers who disguise themselves and masquerade as the apostles of Christ such as those referred to in 2 Cor. 11:13, certainly pierce through and destroy all who fail to discern their true identity as wolves in sheep's clothing, and who listen to them and end up following them.

A sword is used in close physical contact whereas a target hit by an arrow is some distance from where the arrow is fired. This can be applied to false teaching and propaganda. The lies and false teaching of the tongue

can have far reaching effects upon people. Direct physical contact is not necessary for them to have an impact.

DECEPTION IS A JUDGEMENT OF GOD

Deception by false teaching will be a judgement of God upon those who lack spiritual discernment due to despising knowledge and not having a love for the truth. We learn from Scripture that God Himself deceives false prophets and even sends an angel to be a lying spirit in their mouth (Ezk. 14:9. 1 Kng. 22:22). He even allows false prophets to perform signs and wonders. One of the reasons for this is to test people to see if they love the Lord God with all their heart (Deu. 10:1-4).

It is stated in 2 Thes. 2:11-12 that God sends strong delusion to those who do not love the truth, causing them to believe a lie, resulting in them being damned. This reference to God sending delusion, or an angel as a lying spirit, could be coupled with the sending forth of the white horse.

If it be insisted or could be proved that the first horseman had no arrows, this would not necessarily negate what has been said. Absence of arrows could be taken to signify that the rider is a bluffer; he has a lot of thunder but no lightning! He has an outward form and profession of godliness but no power to influence true believers. He only has victory over those who do not love the Lord God and the truth with all their heart.

Victory over such people could be signified by the reference to a crown being given to him, and of him going forth conquering. The Greek word for crown is *stephanos* and refers to the coronal wreath of victory. (See notes on page 42-43). The victory gained by the false prophets of pseudo Christianity is universal, affecting all nations in the world and their leaders, as indicated in Rev. 17. We are told in Matt. 24:5, 11 that “many” will be deceived.

The false ecclesiastical system represented in Rev. 17 is bent on world-wide conquest because it believes it has been appointed by God to establish His kingdom on earth. Significantly enough, the words “and to conquer” in Rev. 6:2 have been translated “bent on conquests” in the New International version of the Bible.

Some also see the reference to a crown being given to the rider of the white horse as being significant, in view of the fact that the Pope who is the spiritual head of the apostate church, wears a crown.

The fact that the Greek word “*nikao*” translated “conquer” is rendered “overcome” many times, and mostly refers to Christ or his followers overcoming sin or the world, has convinced some that the rider

on the white horse is Christ. However, “Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:6, 15) is related to “nikao” and means “conquerors of the people,” which many relate to the clergy-laity distinction which ultimately gave rise to the Pope, supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic church.

Before moving on to the second seal, the following table illustrating the parallels between the seals in Revelation and the signs in the Olivet prophecy may be helpful. As pointed out before, not only do they both present the same ideas and symbols, but they are also given in the same order:-

MATTHEW		REVELATION	
24:4-5, 11,24	False prophets deceive many	6:2	White horse bent on conquests
24:6-7	War	6:4	Red horse
24:7	Famine	6:5-6	Black horse
24:7	Pestilence	6:8	Pale horse
24:9-10	Persecution and death	6:9-10	Persecution and death
24:29	“Immediately after...”	6:11	“A little season”
24:29	Signs in sun, moon and stars	6:12-13	Signs in sun, moon and stars
24:35	Heaven and earth pass away	6:14	Heaven departs as a scroll
24:7	Earthquakes	6:14	Mountains and islands move
Luke 21:23	Wrath upon people	6:16-17	Great day of wrath
Luke 21:36	Pray to be able to stand	6:17	“Who shall be able to stand?”
Luke 21:36	Stand before Son of man	7:9	Stood before the lamb
Matt. 24:21, 29	Great tribulation	7:14	Great tribulation
Matt. 25:31	Sit upon throne	7:17	In the midst of the throne

Not only are the links and parallels between the signs in the Olivet prophecy and the seals in Revelation significant, so also is the fact that the nation of Israel is the focal centre of the Olivet prophecy. This is evident in the reference to the temple at Jerusalem being destroyed; the city being trodden down, causing great distress in the land and wrath upon the people (Lk. 21:5, 23-24). The “holy place” where “the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet” shall stand, is the temple or temple mount at Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15), and “the mountains” into which Jesus encouraged his friends to flee are “in Judea” (Matt. 24:16). His advice to them to pray that they will not have to flee on the Sabbath day (a Jewish law) also confirms the central position of the land and people of Israel. “The coming” of Christ, which gave rise to the prophetic signs in the Olivet prophecy, will certainly be centred in Israel, particularly Jerusalem. “His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is east of Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:4).

In view of this, it is natural to expect the seals in Revelation to also have Israel at their centre if they run parallel with the Olivet prophecy. It is not surprising therefore to find specific reference to the 12 tribes of Israel in Rev. 7 in relation to the “great tribulation” (v14), to which the Olivet prophecy relates in a clearly Israelitish context (Matt. 24:21, 29).

However, in saying these prophecies centre on Israel, does not mean that they have no relevance to other nations. It would be a mistake to draw this conclusion. They clearly include and encompass other nations. For example, the Olivet prophecy refers to nation rising against nation, and famines, pestilences and earthquakes “in various places” i.e. in various countries.

Reference is also made to Gentile armies invading Israel, attacking and possessing Jerusalem, and to Jews being captured and deported into all nations. Reference is also made to the gospel being preached in all nations before the end comes, and of nations being in distress due to things which are coming upon the earth. Conditions in the earth will be as they were in the days of Noah, and of Lot who lived in Sodom. Violence, immorality and ungodliness filled the earth and God’s way was corrupted. As we shall see, in spite of Israel being the focal centre, these aspects and others relating to the nations, are encompassed in the prophecies in the book of Revelation.

One final observation: Because John’s gospel has no record of the Olivet prophecy, it is surely significant that he was the one chosen to receive the revelation and write it. The record of the 7 seals in particular, is John’s equivalent of the Olivet prophecy! It should become evident as

we proceed with the study, that it forms the basis or foundation of what follows, and constitutes a vital key to end time prophecy.

VERSE 3. THE SECOND SEAL

“**A**nd when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say come.” The second living creature was the calf or young ox (4:7). There is no reference to his voice being like thunder. This is only mentioned in relation to the first living creature - the lion. This could be significant if it be accepted that the white horse he summons represents false prophets, who go about like a roaring lion seeking whom they may devour.

Verse 4: “And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given to him a great sword.”

Taking away peace involves war, which results in shedding blood, and this is signified by the red horse. The second sign given by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy which runs parallel with this is: “You shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:6. Lk. 21:9).

By using the plural “wars,” Jesus indicates that there will be a general condition of war - local wars, civil wars and international conflicts among nations prior to his return. Ever since Cain killed Abel 6,000 years ago, there have been wars on earth, but the context of Jesus’ statement indicates they will build up to a crescendo and reach epidemic proportions in the end time “great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

The reference in Matt. 24:22 to no human being surviving unless the time is cut short, could very well be an anticipation of modern weapons of mass destruction, which, in the event of an all-out nuclear war, would result in the total annihilation and extermination of all life on planet earth.

Rev. 6:4 says the rider of the red horse is given power to take peace from the earth. The Greek word “ge,” translated “earth,” is used in Scripture to encompass the whole earth. For peace to be taken away from the whole earth could suggest world war involving all nations. This happened for the first time in world history during 1914-18, and was therefore called “the first world war.” Around two decades later it happened again for the second time, and has been recorded in history as “the second world war.” Millions of lives were lost in these two wars.

The 20th century was therefore quite a landmark in history as far as wars are concerned. It is now almost 60 years since the second world war ended, and the end has not yet come. In spite of the United Nations organization being set up to prevent wars, especially a third world war, nations have continued to war against each other, making world peace impossible. The prospect of a third world war, due to the fear of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons being used, not to mention laser beams etc, puts the world on tender-hooks, knowing that the potential exists for self destruction.

While it is true, as mentioned before, that the Greek word “ge,” translated earth, is used in Scripture for the whole earth, it is also translated “land” in relation to specific parts of the earth, particularly the land of Israel. See Matt. 2:6, 20-21. 4:15. Lk. 21:23. Act. 7:3-4. 13:19 etc.

It would be a mistake, on this basis, to confine and restrict the prophecy to the land and nation of Israel, but an application of it to this nation in particular is quite relevant. Since the Jews returned to their land at the end of the second world war and restored their nation, they have had 4 major wars with their Arab neighbours (1948, 56, 67, 73), not to mention other clashes with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. There have been countless “rumours of war” and threats of war in this region and this will continue until the end time.

With great difficulty peace treaties get signed, but the ink is hardly dry and the peace is broken. The Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly over the sovereignty of Jerusalem, is the most volatile conflict on earth, and has the potential to cause a third world war. Only time will tell if there will be a third world war before Christ’s return, but we do know for sure from Bible prophecy that Israel will be invaded and many nations will be involved. (Ezk. 38. Dan. 11:40-. Joel. Zech. 12-14).

This coalition of anti-Israel nations is referred to as a “dragon” and “beast” in Revelation as we shall see. It is “the abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Israel will have a temporary period of peace and safety prior to the time of the invasion (Ezk. 38:8-11), but this peace will be taken away as a result of the invasion of horses and horsemen bearing swords (Ezk. 38:4).

This invasion will be the formal and official commencement of “the time of the end” - the time of the great tribulation, especially for the nation of Israel. Unless the time was cut short and Messiah returned, the nation would perish and no Jews would survive. Nevertheless, a worse holocaust than the one implemented by the Nazis will still be involved.

The end time beast will not only be anti-Israel but also anti-religious,

particularly anti-Christian, and will war against the saints, putting many to death in an attempt to stamp out the faith. Reference to those slain for the Word of God and for their testimony in Rev. 6:9-10 can be applied to this period, and includes Jewish Christians.

But the Messiah will come and deliver the remnant of Israel, avenge the saints, and establish his kingdom on earth. His battle against the enemy will be of course, the battle of Armageddon, the mother of all battles - the war that will end all wars. In that day swords will be beaten into plowshares and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isa. 2:1-5).

In the meantime, on the road to Armageddon the opposite is happening, as prophesied in Joel 3:9-10: "Proclaim this among the nations; prepare war, arouse the soldiers, let all the men of war assemble and advance. Beat your plowshares into swords ..."

Coming back to Rev. 6:4, we read that power is given to the rider of the red horse to take peace from the earth, "and that they should kill one another." Some believe that this not only refers to nation fighting against nation, but can also be applied to civil war. Those who apply the prophecy to the past have applied it to the A.D. 70 era when the Jews turned on each other during the siege by the Romans, hastening their defeat. Others have applied it to civil unrest in Rome during which assassinations took place, weakening the rule of the empire. As far as the end time is concerned: civil unrest, disobedience, conflict and war is on the increase in many nations for many different reasons, causing violence to fill the earth as in Noah's day, as Jesus warned would happen prior to his return.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is also like a civil war due to both living in the same land. The way in which they are killing one another on such a regular basis is shocking and of great concern to other nations, particularly the U.N.O. The same applies, to a degree, to Israel's conflicts with Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, inasmuch as some of the land they occupy belongs to Israel according to God's promises.

A GREAT SWORD

After saying that people would kill one another due to the rider of the red horse taking peace from the earth, it then says: "And there was given to him a great sword." The Greek word for sword is "machaira", which Vine says means a short sword or dagger, or possibly a knife. It is distinct from "rhomphaia," which refers to a longer, larger sword, referred to in Rev. 6:8, 1:16 etc. Those who give Revelation the historical

interpretation, equate the sword in Rev. 6:4 with the assassin's dagger, and apply the passage to a time in early Roman history which was characterized by a spate of assassinations.

There is nothing in the text itself to suggest that it refers to the assassination of leaders, be they emperors, kings, queens, princes, presidents or prime ministers. Daggers can be used to kill anyone, and have been used to kill many besides leaders. Killings by knife have happened and are happening regularly throughout the world, and by hand guns which are the modern and more sophisticated substitute, as crime and domestic violence increase. Such killings all play their part in contributing towards peace being taken away from the earth and violence increasing.

However, the various usages of the word "machaira" in the New Testament, indicate that it is the most common word for sword, and refers generally to an ordinary fighting weapon, rather than an assassin's knife. See Lk. 21:24. Act. 16:27. Rom. 13:4. The reference in Lk. 21:24 and Heb. 11:34 to being killed by the "edge" of the sword, not the "point" as in the case of a dagger, indicates the reference is to a soldier's sword not an assassin's knife. The same applies to Rev. 13:10 which refers to killing with the sword, which involves beheading (20:4). The idea of assassination is not conveyed in any of these verses where machaira is used.

It should be noticed that Rev. 6:4 refers to a "great" sword. The Greek word for great is "megas" from which our English word "mega" is derived and means large. (Mega Bucks for example refers to a large amount of money). The Jerusalem Bible gives "huge sword" and states in the footnote that it is a symbol of war. Even if the sword referred to a dagger, a large or huge dagger would be like a short sword (bayonet), not easy to be concealed and therefore not likely to be used by an assassin.

POWER WAS GIVEN TO HIM

One more observation in relation to the second seal: Verse 4 says "Power was given" to the rider of the red horse. The word "power" is not in the original Greek text (but it is in v8). It therefore literally reads: "To the one sitting on the red horse was it given to take peace from the earth." There is a constant theme in the book of Revelation revolving around the words "give" and "given." For example: Death and hell are "given" power to kill (6:8); it was "given" to the 4 angels to hurt (7:2); locusts are "given" power to hurt (9:3, 5); The court outside the temple is

“given” to the Gentiles, and the holy city they shall tread underfoot (11:2); There was “given” to the beast a mouth speaking blasphemies, and power was “given” to him to continue 42 months (13:5). It was also “given” to him to make war with the saints, and power was “given” him over all nations (13:7).

The word “given” means granted, allowed, permitted, empowered. And if it be asked: “who does the granting and empowering?” there is only one answer: God! “The Most high rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will” (Dan. 4:17). “There is no power but of God: The powers that be are ordained by God” (Rom. 13:1). As Jesus said to Pilate: “You could have no power at all against me, except it were given to you from above” (Jn. 19:11).

Although human beings and human factors are involved in the wars, famines, pestilences and even persecution of the saints; God is in control, and His purpose, not man’s, is being fulfilled. “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). This is the underlying theme in the book of Revelation. God has got the whole world in His hands and no one can steal a march on Him. Nations can only move in directions He appoints, and achieve what He permits. History is not hurtling ahead aimlessly and uncontrollably towards some unknown goal, left to the mercy of the pride and avarice of man. A divine plan is in motion on planet earth and has a glorious future for those who belong to God and remain faithful to the end, even if it requires dying for the faith.

VERSE 5. THE THIRD SEAL

“**A**nd when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say: Come.” The third beast had the face of a man (4:7). When he said “come,” John saw “a black horse,” and the statements that follow in relation to weighing out food indicate that this horse and the rider signified famine.

Black is a dark and sometimes dismal colour - the funeral colour - the colour of mourning. Famines cause dark and dismal times during which death can take place if they are severe enough. As the heat of an oven can cause skin to go black, so in times of famine, the heat of sun day after day, bakes the skin of people. “Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.” (Lam. 5:10). Lam. 4:8-9 also refers to those living in times of famine: “Their appearance is blacker than coal; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin is shrunken against and clings to their

bones; it is withered and become dry as wood.” Also see Job. 30:30.

As surely as the third horseman appears on the heels of the second, famine follows on the heels of war. Scarcity of food and starvation are the natural and immediate results of crop damage, defoliation, and the unusually high demands for food for armies. But famine is not only caused by war. It is also caused by blight, plagues and failure of the rain, causing crop failure.

The third sign given by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy of his second coming corresponds with the third seal: “There shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in different places. All these (including wars and rumours of wars) are the beginning of sorrows” (i.e. the birth pangs of the new age). Matt. 24:7-8. As in the case of wars among different nations, Jesus also used the plural “famines” in different “places.”

As in the case of wars, there certainly have also been famines in different parts of the world over the centuries, causing huge loss of life. Between A.D. 1050 and 1350, severe famines struck all known lands, becoming especially severe in Egypt around A.D. 1065 and 1200, England around A.D. 1314, and all of Europe during the so-called “black death” of the 1350’s. Food was so scarce that even kings had a hard time securing food for their table. Men ate dogs, horses, cats, and even human babies. Cannibalism took place in a number of countries.

Throughout history, famines have come and gone in all the continents on earth, causing misery and death for many millions of people. However, the famines prophesied by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy with which the famines in the third seal run parallel, pertain to a particular epoch in history - the period of the end time prior to the second coming.

The sceptic of course scoffs at such prophecies relating to famines, pointing out that they are a natural and inevitable fact of history, and one does not have to be a prophet to predict them. However, the context in which Jesus places the famines, namely, a time of “great tribulation such as has never occurred since the beginning of the world,” immediately before his return, indicates that these famines (and pestilences) will occur during a particular epoch of history. There is no generalization in this prophecy. It relates to the time of the end, immediately prior to the second coming of Christ.

Today, as we approach that end time period, ominous signs are evident of very severe famines appearing on the horizon, due to dwindling food supplies and crop failures in poor countries coupled with the population explosion. Every day hundreds of thousands of new babies cry their way on to planet earth, but food production is not increasing at the

same rate and is therefore failing at an alarming rate to meet the demand. Weather patterns are changing around the world due to global warming, resulting in less rain in some countries causing drought, and too much rain in other countries resulting in floods, both of which have devastating effects on crops. Unfortunately, these conditions are going to get worse.

In view of these worsening conditions, coupled with increasing world population at a phenomenal rate, we can now see the world heading for the end time famines predicted by Jesus.

There are indications in Scripture that Israel will not be exempt or escape. When God first formed Israel into a nation He warned her that failure to conform to His will and obey His word would incur curses, including famine (Lev. 26. Deu. 28). Israel did fail to conform and the Old Testament records a number of famines sent by God as a punishment.

For example, Elijah the prophet, on God's behalf, told the people there would be no rain for 3½ years, resulting in an extremely severe famine in the land of Israel (1 Kng. 17:1).

According to Rev. 11, the end time witnesses of God who come in the spirit and power of Elijah, will also stop the rain for 3½ years and Israel will be affected. We learn this from Joel 1:20 which refers to the rivers or water brooks drying up when the enemy invades. (Brooks also dried up in Elijah's day: 1 Kng. 17:7). Initially, when the enemy invades, the land of Israel is "as the garden of Eden," but the invasion and war turns it into a desolate wilderness (Joel 2:3). Famine then follows, caused by failure of the rain to fall, resulting in rivers and water brooks drying up. But when the Messiah comes and restores all things, he will cause the former and latter rain to return (Joel 2:21-27), resulting in the rivers flowing with water again (Joel 3:18). God will never lay famine upon Israel again from that time forward (Ezk. 36:29-30).

BALANCES IN HIS HAND

Rev. 4:6 says the rider of the black horse "had a pair of balances in his hand." As the sequel shows, the balances (scales) are for measuring wheat and barley to reveal the inflated prices caused by scarcity, due to famine. Normally, such basic foods as wheat and barley, due to abundance, would not have to be weighed carefully or purchased in such small amounts as a measure at a time. Such careful weighing of food is referred to in Lev. 26:26 as a warning of the consequence of famine: "I will cut off your food supply, so that 10 women will need only one oven to bake all the bread they have. They will ration it out by weight, and

when you have eaten it you will still be hungry.”

In the days of Elisha, a particularly severe famine came upon Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, resulting in an ass' head being sold for 80 pieces of silver and a pint of dove's dung for 5 pieces of silver (2 Kng. 6:25). But the prophet Elisha prophesied that the next day things would return to normal (due to divine intervention), and a measure of flour would be sold for a shekel and 2 measures of barley for a shekel. (2 Kng. 7:1).

We read in Rev. 6:6 that John “heard a voice in the midst of the 4 living creatures say: a measure of wheat for a penny, and 3 measures of barley for a penny, and hurt not the oil and the wine.” In view of the fact that the 4 living creatures were “in the midst of the throne and around the throne” (4:6), does the reference to a voice coming from their midst mean it came from the throne, i.e. God Himself, or from the Lamb who is described as being “in the midst of the throne and the 4 living creatures”? (5:6) Or did it come from one of the 4 living creatures, or was it the united voice of all four? Whoever was the source of the voice, it represented or was prophetic of the edict relating to food prices when the famine occurs.

Regarding the “measure of wheat for a penny”: The Greek word for measure is choenix or khoinix and only occurs here. Some say it was about a litre - less than 2 English pints. Others say 1 or 1½ pints. Evidently, as early as the time of Homer and also in the days of Herodotus, a measure of wheat was consumed each day by each soldier in the army. So it represented one day's provision of food for one man, but not a family. The coin referred to as “penny” in the A.V. was the denarius, a Roman silver coin, the amount paid in wages to a farm labourer for a day's work (Matt. 20:2, 9, 13). A man would therefore be giving all his income for a basic food ration for himself, with nothing left over for anyone else. According to some, a day's wage for a litre of wheat or 3 litres of barley, was 8 to 10 times (some say 15 times) the normal price for those times.

It is evident from the fact that a measure of wheat and 3 measures of barley can be purchased, that the famine is not as extreme as famines can be. It speaks of a shortage of food, but not a complete depletion causing starvation for everyone, resulting in cannibalism as in other famines when food completely ran out. (See 2 Kng. 6:25. Lev. 26:25-29).

Three measures of barley seems to have been the proportion of value between wheat and barley, making wheat worth 3 times as much as barley. Barley was a coarser food, lower in quality and therefore cheaper. Adam Clarke says it was given to Roman soldiers instead of wheat by way of

punishment. Three measures for a denarius (one day's wage) still implies scarcity.

The third seal therefore speaks of shortage of food but not foodlessness. However, this does not mean that no one will suffer starvation or that death will not occur. The black horse signifies dark and bleak times, and verse 8 refers to hunger contributing towards the death of one quarter of the world's population. It is evident that if it requires the full day's pay of a man to buy his food for the day, his dependants and those unemployed will starve if there is no social security.

The world is already in this position in many parts, and will become increasingly worse, due to the population explosion and the effects of global warming on the weather and crops. Hundreds of millions of people will suffer under-nourishment, malnutrition and starvation, resulting in death.

Back in 1987, the World Food Council reported that 512 million humans were starving and that 40,000 children died of hunger related causes every day. Unfortunately, these statistics get worse every year as population increases, and in the event of a third world war, we would have a world wide disaster of terrible proportions: "a time of trouble such as never was nor ever shall be."

HURT NOT THE OIL AND THE WINE

The word "hurt" comes from the Greek "adikeo" and means to do wrong - cause injury or damage. It is used in Rev. 7:2, 3; 9:4 in relation to causing damage to trees and grass and crops. It is the voice in the midst of the 4 living creatures which says "hurt not." Is this message directed to the agents of destruction to not touch or tamper with the olive trees and grape vines? Or is it directed to those who grow olives and grapes and make oil and wine instructing them to handle the fruit carefully due to scarcity?

In order to extract oil from olives and wine from grapes, the fruit has to be squashed and crushed. Does "hurt not" refer to this? In other words: due to lack of food, olives and grapes will be eaten as food and not converted into unnecessary luxuries such as oil, to make the face shine and wine to make the heart glad. As Adam Clarke puts it: "Be sparing of these; use them not as delicacies, but for necessities."

The I.V.F. commentary says the words: "do not harm the oil and wine" presupposes ample supplies of less needed goods. It points out that "a few years before the writing of this book (Revelation), an acute

shortage of cereals, together with an abundance of wine in the empire, caused Domitian to order the restriction of vine cultivation and an increase of corn growing. The order created such a furore it had to be abandoned. The text may have such a situation in mind.”

Others have made the point that olive trees and grape vines are less affected by famine than the crops of the field like wheat which continually needs to be replanted and renewed. It would require a more serious drought to destroy olive trees and vines, due to them having a deeper and more substantial root system than wheat and barley. A drought that had a detrimental affect on olive trees and grape vines would totally destroy all wheat and barley leaving people foodless. “Hurt not the oil and wine” would therefore mean: “don’t allow the famine to be so severe that no plant life can survive, resulting in the starvation of everyone.” The famine will be bad, but not that bad. Not all on planet earth will die of starvation.

As far as Israel is concerned, Joel 1:6-12; 2:19, 24 indicate that her oil and wine (olive trees and vineyards) will actually be destroyed, not by famine, but by invading forces, making her plight worse than other nations.

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION?

Some give the oil and wine a spiritual application. In some Scriptures oil is applied to the Spirit of God and wine to the Word of God (1 Sam. 16:13. Ps. 23:4-6. Matt. 9:17). On this basis, the words: “hurt not the oil and wine” are taken to mean that despite shortage of natural food, there will be no limiting of spiritual provisions. The end time witnesses will be ministering the Word and Spirit. However, to be consistent, if oil and wine are given a spiritual application, wheat and barley should also be given a spiritual application. Another suggestion is that oil and wine signify joy and gladness (Ps. 104:15), which, in spite of shortages, trials and tribulations, God will not allow to be hurt or crushed in a true believer’s life. Cp. Heb. 12:1-.

On the other hand, the view has been put forward that despite shortages of such staple things in life as wheat and barley, men will still indulge in pleasure for its own sake, so as to forget their troubles and woes. It has always been typical of the flesh to drug itself into an unawareness of the problems facing it, putting on a false front, pretending all is well. The philosophy is: “Let us eat and drink (while we can) and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

Another view is that oil and wine are traditionally enjoyed by the

rich. As in the case of most wars and famine, the rich are less affected than the poor. For example, in Vienna during the period after the first world war, there was scarcity in the midst of plenty. There was no hurt to the luxuries of the rich. However, it should be pointed out that in the Middle East in Biblical times, oil and wine were not luxuries. They were basic commodities of life. Grain, new wine and oil was a standard threesome describing the staples of life (Gen. 14:18. Deu. 7:13. 11:14. Ps. 104:14-15. Hos. 2:8, 22). Wine was widely used for drinking and sometimes for medicinal purposes as an antiseptic (1 Tim. 5:23. Lk. 10:34). The widow at Zarepath during the famine in Elijah's day, poor as she was, still had some oil left with which to cook her remaining flour.

VERSE 7. THE FOURTH SEAL

“**A**nd when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say: come.” The fourth living creature that summoned the fourth horse was like a flying eagle, a bird of prey and a fitting symbol of judgement (4:7).

Verse 8: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse.” The word “pale” is translated from the Greek word “chloros.” It is the same root word from which we derive chlorophyll, a substance which helps make leafy plants green.

Because the name of the rider of the pale horse is “death,” the colour of the horse was probably pale green, the sickly yellowish-green colour of disease, literally livid or corpse-like, i.e. the colour of a rotting corpse. The New English Bible says: “A horse sickly and pale.” Phillips says: “A horse sickly and green.” Rotherham: “A livid horse.” The word is used in Greek literature to describe faces that are blanched, as if by disease. Chloros is also the name from which chlorine gas is derived; a lethal gas used in chemical warfare, causing death. Strong's concordance gives the meaning of chloros simply as “greenish.” The word is actually translated “green” in Mk. 6:39. Rev. 8:7. 9:4 in relation to grass and vegetation.

The fourth sign in the Olivet prophecy which runs parallel with the fourth seal, is pestilence, and refers to disease outbreaks and epidemics of world proportion - pandemics of unprecedented magnitude (Lk. 21:11).

The rider on the pale horse whose name is death, could represent the angel of death, called in 9:11: “Abaddon,” i.e. the destroyer. “Death” is the common term for pestilence. The plague of the Middle Ages, for instance, was called the Black Death.

After stating that the name of the rider was death, we then read: “And

hell followed with him.” Not on another horse! Hell is the grave. (The Greek “hades” is actually translated “grave” in 1 Cor. 15:55). In Rev. 6:8 both death and hell are obviously personified. It would be hard to imagine an open grave following a horse! Death is so inevitable through the pestilence that prevails, that the grave is depicted following behind to receive the dead. Because disease is caused by bacteria and viruses, the pale horse can be seen as representing a powerful and massive virus, galloping throughout the earth! However, because the horse is summoned and sent from before the throne of God, this clearly indicates it is a judgement from God, who created all viruses and bacteria in the first place. There are many references in Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, to God sending pestilence upon the nation of Israel and other nations as a punishment, causing much death. One only needs to look up the word pestilence or pestilences in the Concordance and follow the references through to see this.

Modern medicine will either be unavailable or ineffective to stop the pestilence, or cure those inflicted when the fourth seal is fulfilled. Could it be the Aids virus which is spreading at an alarming rate, for which, at the time of writing, there seems to be no cure? If not, maybe other worse viruses in the pipeline such as the mystery pneumonia strain from Asia receiving publicity recently which is immune to antibiotics and is deadly. New virulent strains of viruses and bacteria are developing all the time, not to mention the germs being cultivated in some countries for biological warfare. The implantation of such germs in food and water supplies of cities is frighteningly simple to do and is a fearful prospect to many. However: “Whosoever goes to the Lord for safety and shelter; whoever remains under the protection of the Almighty, can say to Him: ‘You are my refuge and my fortress. You are my God; in You I trust.’ He will keep you safe from all hidden dangers and from all deadly diseases” (Ps. 91:1-3).

Ultimately Jesus will return and create a new heavens and a new earth, in which there will be no sickness, disease or death, and no need for hell, i.e. the grave. This is symbolically depicted in Rev. 20:14 by the casting of death and hell into the lake of fire.

Rev. 6:8 concludes the fourth seal by saying: “And power was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and hunger, and with death, and with beasts of the earth.” The plural word “them” obviously cannot refer solely to the pale horse, neither can it refer to death and hell. Hell does not kill or cause death; it simply receives the dead who have been killed. The words clearly do not refer to the fourth seal only,

but are a tailpiece to this seal and the seals which precede. “Them” includes previous horsemen. This is indicated by the reference to the sword, hunger and death. As we have seen, the sword relates to the second seal, hunger relates to the third seal, and death relates to the fourth seal. This either reveals that the “sword” in v8 (Greek ‘rhomphaia’) is used synonymously with “machaira” v4, or that both short and long swords are used, i.e. daggers and bayonets.

There is no reference in v8 to the “bow” associated with the first seal, contributing towards the death of one quarter of earth’s population. This is understandable if those who suffer as a result of the first seal are Christians and not the world. The world is deceived by the rider of the white horse, not killed. As we have seen, war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts are the 4 sore judgements of God inflicted as a punishment for sin. In view of this it seems reasonable to conclude that the fourth part of the earth that will be affected by the sword, hunger, death and wild beasts, will be worldly sinners, not saints. The death of saints is referred to under the fifth seal (v9-11). Instead of reference being made to the “bow” of the first seal, Rev. 6:8 adds an extra aspect: “the beasts of the earth.” This makes up the 4 sore judgements of the Lord. However, it is possible that the reference to “death” in the fourth seal could include both pestilence and wild beasts.

“Therion” is the Greek word translated “beasts” in Rev. 6:8 and refers to dangerous animals, not tame domestic animals. In Old Testament times God allowed wild animals to increase, attack and devour those who rebelled against Him. Warnings that He would do this are recorded in Lev. 26:22. Deu. 32:24, and examples of it happening can be seen in 2 Kng. 17:25. 2:24. 1 Kng. 13:24. 2 Kng. 9:36-37.

The reference in Rev. 6:8 to the beasts of the earth does not necessarily mean that animals will attack living people on their feet. It could, as in the case of other Old Testament references, refer to the sick, injured or dead through war, famine and pestilence, being devoured by carnivorous creatures. For example, Jer. 15:3: “I, the Lord, have decided that 4 terrible things will happen to them: they will be killed in war; their bodies will be torn by dogs; birds will eat them, and wild animals will devour and destroy them.” Also see Ezk. 29:5. 33:27. 39:17-.

Many accounts have been given in relation to the first and second world wars and other wars as well as earthquakes, of the injured and dead being attacked and devoured by rats, dogs, birds etc. There must be millions of rats, dogs, birds of prey and other ravenous animals in the world today, which, in a time of war, famine and pestilence, would go

wild and be on the rampage, attacking, killing and devouring humans.

Nations are sometimes referred to metaphorically as beasts, due to the way they attack and devour e.g. Dan. 7. Hos. 13:7-8. Rev. 13. 17. Jude v10 says that men in the end time will be corrupt and like brute beasts i.e. men of beastly disposition like unreasoning animals; savage men committing atrocities, having no respect for person or property - fierce, unruly, inhuman, insensitive, without feeling or conscience. Such men indulge in violence, crime, murder, terrorism, bombings, house-invasion, rape etc. Scripture likens them to wild animals that prowl about looking for victims to attack and devour.

In the event of law and order breaking down through war, famine and pestilence, anarchy would reign. Life will be cheap, and violent vicious men in particular, who have no scruples will go on the prowl like ravenous wolves, killing without hesitation for a morsel of bread or a bite to eat. Man is beastly and barbaric by nature, and could easily revert to barbarism in the end time period of wars, famines and pestilences. Some interpret “the beasts of the earth” in Rev. 6:8 in this light. However, such an application, while true in itself, is not in keeping with the Biblical definition and order of the 4 sore judgements of God. Neither is the continuous historical interpretation which relates the beasts to the Roman amphitheatre.

According to Rev. 6:8, one quarter of the world’s population will be killed during the execution of the 4 sore judgements of God. In the year 2000, the world population was over six billion. One quarter would be one and a half billion (one and a half thousand million). The figure will be higher when the end comes! “Those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they will stay lying on the ground like dung” (Jer. 25:33). People will die like flies, as war, famine and pestilence ravages the population. There will not be enough undertakers or coffins to cope, resulting in bodies being left exposed out in the open. The expression “die like flies” is actually used by the New International Version in Isa. 51:6. “The slain of the Lord shall be many” (Isa. 66:16). Ultimately, when the judgements of the 7 trumpets and 7 vials have run their course, few survivors will be left, relative to the original world population (Isa. 24:5-6).

VERSE 9. THE FIFTH SEAL

As a result of opening the fifth seal, there is no reference to one of the 4 living creatures summoning a horse, as in the case of the first four seals. There are only 4 horses to be called, and only 4 living creatures to call or cry out. But, as we shall see, there is a crying out in the fifth seal - the cry of God's people who suffer persecution and death for their faith. Reference in Rev. 6:9 to the souls who were slain for the Word of God and for the witness which they held, is generally accepted as referring to the souls in Rev. 20:4 who were beheaded for the Word of God and for the witness of Jesus. The fact that Rev. 20:4 goes on to say that they worshipped not the beast, indicates the reference is specifically to the end time saints, many of whom will be killed by the beast, during his 3½ year reign of terror.

The two specific witnesses of Jesus referred to in Rev. 11:3-7 certainly belong to the end time era of the beast and great tribulation. The period during which they witness is referred to as 3½ years in v3, and is the last half of the last heptad of human history. According to v3-7 the beast makes war on these 2 witnesses at the end of this 3½ year period and kills them.

Careful study on this subject makes it clear that there are 2 separate and distinct 3½ year periods involved in the end time. The continuous historical interpretation which changes days into years, cannot acknowledge this, because it cannot fit the 2,520 years it would end up with into its framework.

It seems that the witnesses have a period of respite to witness prior to the onslaught of persecution and tribulation - prior to the 4 horsemen coming forth. This is confirmed in Rev. 7 which refers to the 4 winds being held back until a sealing work takes place among the tribes of Israel. As we have seen, the 4 horses in Rev. 6 can be linked with the 4 winds in Zech. 6, and the sealing work, as we shall see, is accomplished by witnessing. When this witnessing work is fulfilled, the 4 winds (horses) are released, resulting in the great tribulation. We know this due to the fact that Rev. 7:14 informs us that those who are sealed go through the great tribulation. It is evident from this that the 4 horses (winds) in Rev. 6 pertain to the end time tribulation period, and that the souls slain for the Word of God pertain to the same period.

It could also be significant that the witnesses who are beheaded are involved in the end time Elijah ministry (Rev. 11:3-7), in which John the Baptist was also involved in his day and was beheaded.

The situation referred to in the fifth seal involving saints being slain runs parallel with the fifth sign given by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy recorded in Matt. 24:9-14: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many fall from their faith (2 Thes. 2:3) and shall betray one another, (to the beast) and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise and deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound (2 Thes. 2:7) the love of many shall grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come.”

SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR

Rev. 6:9 says John saw the souls of those who were slain “under the altar.” The traditional orthodox view of this is that the souls refer to disembodied immortal spirits, and the altar, at the base of which they are depicted is in heaven. But there are many problems with this view:

1. As already pointed out, these souls are referred to in Rev. 20:4 as being beheaded. How could a disembodied immaterial spirit have a head?

2. Rev. 6:11 says white robes were given to them. How could spirits without bodies wear robes? And if they are immaterial, how could John see them?

3. The altar represents the place where the victims have been slain - the altar of sacrifice and cannot therefore denote an altar in heaven. The souls are represented under the altar, just as victims slain upon it would pour out their blood beneath it, and fall by its side. It would be incongruous for saints to be slain in heaven! The only altar we read of in heaven is the altar of incense (8:3) but it would not be correct to represent victims just slain as under the altar of incense, as that altar was never devoted to such a use.

4. If the souls are saints in a disembodied state in heaven, why are they shut up and confined under the altar? It is generally believed and taught that immortals freely walk the streets of gold in heaven and float on clouds playing harps.

5. Verse 11 depicts them crying with a loud voice for vengeance to be inflicted upon the enemy who killed them. Is it conceivable that the desire for vengeance would reign so supreme in the minds of souls in heaven as to make them, despite the joy and glory of that ineffable state, dissatisfied and unhappy until vengeance was inflicted upon their enemies? Would they not rather rejoice that they had been killed and thus hastened into the

presence of God in heaven, at whose right hand there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore? It is generally taught and believed that there is no sorrow or sadness, crying or tears in heaven.

6. Verse 11 plainly says the souls were killed. It does not make a distinction between body and soul and say that just the body was killed. It is clearly the souls themselves who are referred to as being killed. This being the case, the souls are obviously neither immortal nor immaterial.

The Hebrew word “nephesh” and the Greek word “psuche” from which soul has been translated in the Old and New Testaments, occur about 850 times in the Bible. They are very elastic words and have a great variety of meanings. A careful and systematic study of them all in their context, reveals that “soul” often refers to life in the sense of breath or blood. It also refers many times to the body.

It is significant to note that although hundreds of references are made to the soul in Scripture, the word “immortal” is never associated with it. The term “immortal soul” or “immortality of the soul” is unbiblical. It is not taught in the Bible. Quite the opposite. Various verses teach it is mortal. 326 out of the almost 700 references to nephesh say the soul is subject to death, and 45 of the 105 references to psuche say it is subject to death.

Many Scriptures could also be quoted to show that death is the cessation of life - a state of unconsciousness which is likened to sleep. The only hope the Bible offers of life and consciousness after death depends on the return of Christ and physical resurrection. God’s promised immortality relates to an immortal body, not a disembodied immortal. For this reason Jesus was raised as a physical bodily being, and became “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20), i.e. the first man in history to rise from the dead - from the death sleep to immortality. Being the “firstfruits” means Jesus is a specimen and earnest of the immortality that will be possessed by his followers when he returns (1 Cor. 15:23). “We shall be like him” (1 Jn. 3:2). Our present lowly body will be fashioned like unto his glorious body (Plp. 3:21).

Had Adam not sinned, he would have continued living as a physical bodily being, having continual access to the tree of life. This was God’s purpose in creating him, not that he should die and leave the earth to live somewhere else in a disembodied state. The immortality of the soul was the pagan’s philosophy designed to try and take the sting out of death. All the pagan nations - Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, believed it. They adopted this philosophy, like many since, due to not wanting to accept that death is a reality and a penalty - a curse! So they convinced themselves

that death is the gateway to glory. God clearly warned Adam and Eve that they would die if they sinned, and return to dust. The serpent contradicted this and said: “You shall not surely die.” This is the first lie recorded in the Bible and it is perpetuated in Christendom’s creed concerning the immortality of the soul, which basically teaches that we don’t really die. This doctrine neutralizes the Word of God because it makes resurrection unnecessary and superfluous, not to mention the second coming and judgement. Let’s face it: if we have an immortal soul that departs to heaven the moment we die, what is the point in Jesus returning to earth to raise and judge the dead?! Rewarding first and judging later would be a back to front procedure. Truly, as the Apostle Paul warned: “The time will come when they (people professing to be Christians) will not endure sound teaching ... they shall turn their ears away from the truth and be turned to fables” (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Paul also warned in 2 Thes. 2:10-12 that those who do not receive the love of the truth, God shall send strong delusion that they should believe a lie. Any doctrine that offers a hope to take the sting out of death, other than the hope of physical resurrection at the return of Christ, is a false hope - a lie! (1 Cor. 15:51-56).

Coming back then to the souls under the altar: What are we to make of this if it doesn’t refer to disembodied spirits?

In the tabernacle and temple service ordained by God, it was the blood from the sacrifices that ended up under the altar due to being poured out at the base (Lev. 4:7). The reason for this is explained in Lev. 17:11: The life was in the blood and by it atonement was made for sin on the altar.

As mentioned before, the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated “soul,” often means “life.” It is actually translated “life” 119 times in the Old Testament, and the Greek “*psuche*” is translated “life” 40 times in the New Testament.

Because the life is in the blood, the word sometimes refers to the blood. For example, Deu. 12:23 says: “The blood is the life.” The word “life” here comes from *nephesh*, translated “soul” elsewhere. Hence, Deu. 12:23 could read: “The blood is the soul.” Reference is actually made to “the blood of the souls” in Jer. 2:34 (Authorised version). Ps. 72:14 also refers to souls having blood. In Isa. 53:12 we read that Jesus, in his sacrifice, “poured out his soul unto death.”

In view of this, it is believed that the souls under the altar either refers to the blood of the slain, or the bodies themselves whose blood had been shed. It was common for the enemy to leave the bodies of those they killed, lying exposed on the ground, unburied, as an act of contempt (Ps.

79:2-3. Rev. 11:8).

Some may wonder how blood or dead bodies could cry out to the Lord as depicted in Rev. 6:10: “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” The answer is: in the same way that the blood of Abel could cry to God from the ground as we read in Gen. 4:10. Heb. 12:24. Abel’s blood is obviously personified, and in a book like Revelation where there is so much symbology and metaphor, such personification is not surprising.

Remember for example, Rev. 6:8 where death is depicted riding a horse. How could anyone dead let alone death itself, ride a horse? The answer is: in the same way that blood or dead bodies can be depicted crying out and being clothed with robes! Anything is possible in symbolic vision! Even birds and beasts are depicted speaking in Revelation, and wages are referred to as crying out in Jam. 5:4. Such statements are clearly expected to be spiritually discerned and not to be taken literally at face value. There is a saying which can act as a good basis for interpreting Scripture, namely: “When the plain sense does not make common sense, seek a spiritual sense, but if the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.” This is not an infallible rule, but 9 times out of 10 it proves to be a good principle when attempting to distinguish between the literal and symbolical.

Human fallibility unfortunately prevents it from being an infallible rule. To give an example: Rev. 21 refers to the holy city of God measuring 12,000 furlongs. To some, it does not make common sense to take this literally. It is too big for little minds to conceive. But to those who believe God can do exceeding abundantly above what they can think, it makes common sense to take it literally.

So then, words are put into the mouths of “souls” for the purpose of conveying to us information concerning the fifth seal, and to give assurance that those who die in the service of God do not die in vain and will, in a little season, be avenged and vindicated.

A cry has been going up to God from the time the blood of Abel stained the earth, through to the time of the blood of Zacharias who was slain between the temple and the altar (Matt. 23:35) and beyond. But Jesus promised that ultimately “God shall avenge His own elect who cry day and night to Him, while He listens patiently to them, and He will avenge them speedily” (Lk. 18:7-8).

Although the cry in Rev. 6:10 is not the general cry of all the righteous blood shed since the beginning of history, but applies to the end

time saints in particular, persecuted believers prior to the tribulation who had access to Revelation, would nevertheless be comforted and encouraged by the message, knowing it equally applied to them in principle as well. In this respect, the messages in Revelation, although pertaining to the end time period, are very relevant to saints in all ages.

The reference to “altar” in Rev. 6:9 is the first of 8 occurrences in the book. It basically has 4 applications in Scripture.

1. There was an altar of incense in the temple at Jerusalem (Lk. 1:9-11).

2. There is an altar of incense in heaven (Rev. 8:3-5. 9:13. 14:18. 16:7).

3. There was an altar to burn animal sacrifices by fire at the temple in Jerusalem (Mal. 1:10. Matt. 23:35).

4. Christ is referred to as our altar (Heb. 13:10). (Reference is also made in Scripture to pagan altars but are not relevant here).

As we have seen, the altar in Rev. 6:9 cannot be in heaven, which means it must either be the altar of incense or the altar of burnt offering at the temple in Jerusalem, or Christ. If the “souls” under the altar refer to their blood at the base of the altar, this suggests an altar of burnt offering and eliminates an altar of incense. (The blood of sacrifices consumed on the altar of burnt offering was poured out at the base of the altar. Ex. 29:12 etc). Our choice is therefore reduced to an altar of burnt offering at Jerusalem or Christ. It could have an application to both!

Regarding the altar at Jerusalem: The word of prophecy teaches that there will be a Jewish temple and altar at Jerusalem in the end time. (Dan. 12:11. Joel 1:8, 13-16. 2:17. 2 Thes. 2:4. Rev. 11:1-2). As in the past, when Zacharias was slain between the altar and the temple, some end time Jewish Christians could suffer a similar fate when the anti-God beast invades Israel. If Pilate had no scruples about mixing the blood of Jews he killed with the sacrifices offered on the altar, (Lk. 13:1) the beast would have less compunction killing God’s witnesses at the altar as an act of contempt towards the altar and witnesses. Reference is certainly made in Rev. 11:7-8 to the beast killing witnesses in Jerusalem and leaving their dead bodies lying in the street. If the man of sin (the beast) deliberately desecrates the temple by sitting in it, he would have no scruples about desecrating the altar by sacrificing humans upon it.

By leaving dead bodies lying unburied upon the ground or by shedding their blood at the altar, the beast will intend to bring ignominy, shame and contempt upon the witnesses. But, as far as Jesus is concerned, being their Lord and altar, they are at his feet. Their death is a sacrifice in

his service for his name and glory. It is a laying down of their lives - the pouring out of their blood at his feet. Wherever their blood or dead bodies fall, whether in a dirty open street, Jewish altar, prison or amphi-theatre; the fact they die in his service in which their lives were offered to him as their altar, they are depicted as being at the foot of the altar. Their death is therefore not in vain but will result in great reward.

The concept of a Christian's life being offered up, as on an altar, as a sacrifice for Christ is conveyed in several Scriptures: Rom. 12:1. Plp. 2:17. 3:8-11. 2 Tim. 4:6.

SLAIN FOR THE WORD OF GOD AND TESTIMONY

Rev. 6:9 says the souls ended up under the altar “for the Word of God, and for the testimony they held.” The apostle John himself was in exile “for the Word of God” (Rev. 1:9). For what more noble cause could one be sent into exile or be put to death, than the Word of God?!

The Greek word translated “testimony” is “marturia” and means evidence given, report, witness. It is translated “witness” in Rev. 20:4, and “testimony” in Rev. 6:9. 11:7. 12:11, 17. 19:10. It is derived from “martur” or “martus” which is translated “witnesses” in Rev. 11:3 and “martyrs” in Rev. 17:6. It is believed that all these references in Revelation to those who give witness and testimony to the Word of God and Jesus Christ, relate to the end time witnesses.

Rev. 6:9 says they are slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held. This is emphasized throughout the book of Revelation. See 1:9. 12:17. 19:10. 20:4. These references reveal that “the testimony” relates to testifying that Jesus is Lord and Christ (Messiah). Not all who have the Word of God testify that Jesus is son of God and Messiah (e.g. Judaisers). For this reason the Spirit refers not just to the Word, but also to the testimony. The true witnesses of Jesus give this testimony of course, and incur persecution as a result.

Rev. 6:9 says they are killed for the testimony which they “held.” In order to avoid persecution and death they could have stopped holding on to their testimony and surrendered it, abandoning their faith. Many will do this in the last days when the heat is turned on (Matt. 24:10. 2 Thes. 2:3).

Much is said in Scripture about holding fast to the faith, not fearing those who can kill the body but who cannot rob us of the eternal life promised in Christ. “Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). “He who loves his life shall lose it” (Jn. 12:25) i.e. he who avoids persecution to prolong his life by denying his faith, shall not

attain to eternal life. “Cast not away therefore your confidence (faith) for it carries a great reward ... if anyone draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:35-39). “Hold fast that which is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). “Stand fast and hold to the truths you have been taught” (2 Thes. 2:15). “Hold fast the form of sound words which you have heard” (2 Tim. 1:13). “Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Heb. 3:6). “Hold to your original confidence, steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:14). “Hold fast to your profession” (Heb. 4:14). “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (Heb. 10:23). “That which you have already, hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25). “Remember therefore what you were taught and heard, and hold fast” (Rev. 3:3). “Behold, I come quickly: hold fast to what you have that no man take your crown” (Rev. 3:11).

Rev. 6:10 says the souls of those who were slain “cried with a loud voice.” This reveals the mental and emotional state of the saints who suffer severe persecution and who are put to death for their faith. Although they passively resign and submit themselves to death, turning the other cheek and not physically resisting the evil men who arrest and execute them, they are nevertheless passionate and vehement about judgement and vengeance being executed by God upon their persecutors.

If we were to experience some of the violent handling, shocking and sadistic tortures, humiliating and degrading treatment that evil men can inflict, we would better understand the emotion and passion that wells up from within resulting in a loud cry to God such as we read in Rev. 6:10.

HOW LONG?

The cry is: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” It is interesting that, as this appeal: “how long,” comes after the 4 horses have been sent forth, so also in Zech. 1:12 a similar appeal is made after the horses were sent out: “O Lord of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah ...?” The enemy had invaded and desolated the land, destroyed the cities, killed many of the people and taken many of the survivors into exile. The cry: “how long ...” was an appeal for the restoration and restitution of Israel.

The same applies to the question in Dan. 12:6: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders (i.e. amazing events)?” In its context, the question relates to the end time invasion of Israel, the time of great tribulation, and the second coming of Christ, at which time he will deliver

the remnant of Israel and bring about the restitution of all things. Daniel was informed that the end time period would involve the shattering of Israel, and would take 3½ years (Dan. 12:7).

Similar events could very well have taken place when the souls under the altar in Rev. 6 call out: “how long ...?” The invasion of Israel could have taken place, resulting in the death of many in the land, both natural and spiritual Jews. Those who cry out in Rev. 6:10 are Christians of course, but it would be a mistake to limit them to Jewish Christians. The beast will not only have power over Israel, but “over all kindreds, and tongues and nations” (Rev. 13:7-8). Being anti-God, he will also be anti-Christian, and Christians will suffer in all the nations over which he has power.

The question: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” is basically asking how long it will be before Jesus returns, for it will not be until he returns that he will judge the wicked and avenge his servants, as taught in Lk. 18:7-8: “Shall not God avenge His own elect, who cry day and night to him, while He listens patiently to them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find the faith on the earth?”

As in the case of Zech. 1, the answer to the plea will also involve mercy being shown to Jerusalem, because she shall become the city of the great king and will cease to be trodden down by the Gentiles.

Ps. 79 is quite relevant to all this: “O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have reduced Jerusalem to a pile of ruins. The dead bodies of thy servants they have left unburied for the birds and beasts. Their blood have they shed like water around Jerusalem. We have become a reproach and a scorn to the neighbouring nations around us. How long Lord? Will you be angry (with Israel) for ever? Shall your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out your wrath on the nations ...”

It is natural and inevitable that in times of great distress and tribulation, that God’s people wonder how long it will last and how long before God intervenes to bring it to an end. For example Ps. 74:10: “O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name forever?” There are other examples as well, easy to find by checking the references to the word “long” in a concordance.

In view of the fact that the word of prophecy reveals that the end time tribulation during which Jerusalem is trodden down and the saints are persecuted will be a 3½ year period, it is natural to wonder why the saints

are depicted as saying “how long” if they know this. The fact that Rev. 6 says they “cried” with a “loud” voice when they asked “how long,” could very well suggest agitation or anxiety regarding the length of time. Could they represent Christians who did not believe in an end time tribulation and therefore did not anticipate it and are confused and perplexed by it when it comes? Or, could it refer to those among God’s people who changed the days in the divine prophecies into years, and end up all at sea and confused when the end time arrives, due to the time periods, according to their interpretation and calculation having run their course, still remaining unfulfilled?

On the other hand, it could refer to those whose interpretation of the time periods was correct, but whose application was incorrect. This could easily happen by getting the starting date wrong, and this would not be difficult to do.

For example: Dan. 12:11-12 says that “from the taking away of the daily sacrifice and the setting up of the abomination that makes desolate, there shall be 1290 days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the 1335 days.” In view of the fact that the 1260 days in v7 is clearly part of the developing sequence of time periods, it is generally believed that it shares the same starting date, i.e. when the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up.

But the daily sacrifice may not be taken away at the same time that the abomination is set up. In the days of the Maccabees, for example, the invader of Israel (Antiochus Epiphanes), did not set up the abomination (an idol) in the temple for some months after he took away the daily sacrifice.

The same situation could happen in the end time, in which case the 3½ year countdown would not necessarily start when the daily sacrifice was taken away, but when the abomination is set up. This would mean that those who date the 3½ years from the taking away of the daily sacrifice, would find that the tribulation continued beyond the time they thought it would be finished; causing them to wonder and cry out “how long?”

If, as in the time of the Maccabees, only a period of a few month’s difference was involved, the reference in Rev. 6:11 to it only being “a little season” till the end, would be literally true.

Because a 3½ year period is mentioned in relation to the witnesses (Rev. 11:3), the dragon (Rev. 12) and the beast (Rev. 13:5); and at least two of these are separate and distinct periods; this could also lead to confusion in the end time, resulting in using the wrong 3½ year period as

the final countdown period to the second coming.

So then, the cry “how long?” could very well be designed by the Spirit to indicate that, in spite of the prophetic time periods given in Scripture, there may be some confusion or misunderstanding among the saints in the end time in relation to the exact date of their fulfilment. If we find ourselves in that situation, certain Scriptures should be kept in mind: Hab. 2:3; Heb. 10:37: “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though he (seems to) tarry, wait for him because he will surely come and will not tarry.” Ecc. 3:1: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Act. 17:31: “God has appointed a day in which He will judge (rule) the world in righteousness ...” The times and seasons of God’s purposes are in His control and will be fulfilled exactly on time!

THE DIVINE DESPOT

When the souls cried to God, they addressed Him as “Lord” which is not “kurios” but “despotes” in the Greek text, from which the English “despot” is derived. It means one with full, absolute or dictatorial power and authority. Such an one has the authority and power to command and do according to his own will. The sense of the plea is therefore: “How long will it be before you exert your authority? You have the power to stop your people’s blood being shed; when will you do it and avenge our blood?”

The fact that this plea is depicted as coming from those who have been put to death for their faith, indicates they died with these thoughts, and that those still alive had the same thoughts, probably hoping they will be spared martyrdom and be among those who remain alive at the coming of Christ.

HOLY AND TRUE

After addressing God as absolute ruler, they then acknowledge Him as being “holy and true.” “Holy” means righteous - one who loves righteousness and hates sin and iniquity - one who will not condone or cast a blind eye to injustice. Therefore, by saying “how long, O Lord, holy and true,” they were acknowledging that they did not interpret their suffering and death at the hands of wicked men to mean God was unrighteous. Knowing that God is righteous, they knew and were fully persuaded that He would at some point in time intervene, judge the

wicked and vindicate the righteous.

Not all of God's people have found it easy to come to terms with the fact that the suffering of those called by God does not make God unrighteous. The prophet Habakkuk, for instance, had difficulty reconciling that God was righteous, when He allowed the unholy heathen to attack Israel and kill many. But Daniel had no problem with this. Even though the Babylonians had invaded the land, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, killed many Jews and took others back to Babylon as captives, including Daniel himself, he acknowledged in his prayer to God that he was righteous. He said: "O Lord, righteousness belongs to Thee" (Dan. 9:7).

In these particular cases, Israel had become unholy and had to be punished. Had God not sent punishment, He could have been accused of being unholy. Israel's tribulation and suffering was therefore a sign of God's righteousness. It was a righteous judgement. (In connection with this see Rev. 16:5-7. 19:2). As far as the end time tribulation is concerned in relation to the nation of Israel: it will be an expression of divine wrath and vengeance due to their ungodliness (Lk. 21:22-23). Such however will not be the case as far as the end time saints are concerned who suffer persecution. Their position is well described in Dan. 11:32-35: "The people who know their God shall be strong and do exploits. Those who understand among the people shall instruct many, yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity and plunder ... to test them and purge them and to make them white, even to the time of the end, because it is yet for a time appointed."

Persecution and suffering for the saints is designed to test and develop their faith, purge them of "spots" and "wrinkles," making them white like a bride in preparation for marriage with the bridegroom. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which comes to test you, as though some strange thing were happening to you: but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13). "My brethren, count it all joy when you face various trials, knowing this, that the testing of your faith develops patience ..." (Jam. 1:3). "For a season you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6-7). "When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

The appeal of the souls in Rev. 6:10 for God to judge the persecutor

and avenge their blood is not only made on the ground of Him having absolute power and being holy, but also because He is “true.” He is “the only true God” (Jn. 17:3), not a false god like the idols and figments of the imagination worshipped by the pagans. Not only does He truly exist and hear prayer, but His Word is truth (Jn. 17:17) and He is true to His Word. It is impossible for Him to lie (Heb. 6:18). Because His Word says He will execute judgement on those who oppress and persecute His people, the souls under the altar can therefore approach Him with full assurance and confidence and request this. In their mind it is not a question of “if” but “when.” Hence the question: “How long ...?” This confidence is based on knowing that God’s Word is true and reliable. “True and righteous are His judgements” (Rev. 19:2).

It is important to realize that in asking God to judge and avenge their blood, the souls are only asking God to do what He promises in His Word. Although they may be personally angry and upset by the way they have been treated, especially if terrible torture has been involved, their request is not so much due to personal pain and insult, but because it was done to them due to being the servants of God. Their plea is therefore a request for God to punish His enemies, knowing that the things inflicted on them were motivated by hatred of the God they serve. True servants of God are more jealous for His name and reputation than their own, and more concerned about Him being vindicated than themselves. However, in the event of God vindicating Himself and His Word, all who belong to Him and have witnessed to Him and His Word, will automatically be vindicated with Him.

So then, “dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.’ Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. Do not let evil get to you and defeat you; instead, overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:19-21). “Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” ... “Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. ... Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:11-12, 39-45).

The appeal of the souls under the altar for judgement has been contrasted with the appeal of Jesus and Stephen. After being spat upon, whipped, buffeted, smitten, nailed to the cross and reviled, Jesus cried out: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing" (Lk. 23:34). Stephen likewise, as he was being stoned to death, cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Act. 7:60). But those in Rev. 6 cry out for judgement and vengeance. The difference is possibly due to the fact that the plea of Jesus and Stephen was made at the beginning of the age of grace, whereas the plea in Rev. 6 takes place in the end time tribulation period when the age of grace is virtually at its end, and judgement is impending. If this is correct, it would confirm that the slain souls are end time saints and that the seals pertain to that period.

WHITE ROBES WERE GIVEN TO THEM

In the fifth letter to the 7 churches, it is said that those who overcome shall walk with Jesus in white (Rev. 3:5). And now, in the fifth seal, we read about white robes being given to those who were put to death for their faith. As mentioned earlier, something immaterial or disembodied could not be clothed with a robe. The putting on of a robe requires a body. The "souls" John saw had nothing to do with the immaterial souls of tradition. Whatever these souls were, they were killed, which is contrary to Christendom's concept that souls are immortal and cannot die. Also, as a result of being killed, the souls had to "rest" for a little season (v11). Rev. 14:13 puts it like this: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from this time forward (end time persecution period), that they may rest from their labours."

The word "rest" describes the state of the souls under the altar. Here, as elsewhere, rest, like "sleep" is a euphemism to describe the state of the dead. For example: Mk. 14:41. Rev. 14:13. Dan. 12:13, 2. Ps. 16:9. Isa. 57:1-2. If the souls were immortal and in heaven, they would not be resting but praising God energetically and enthusiastically, like the 4 living creatures who "rest not day and night saying holy,holy,holy ..."

Now, the dead in Christ will not be awakened and receive their immortal body and white robe until the second coming and resurrection. This is taught in many Scriptures and confirmed in Rev. 20:4-5 where we read that the souls of those who died for the Word of God came to life at the first resurrection. Prior to that they were dead souls!

How is it then, it may be wondered, that reference is made in Rev. 6 to white robes being given to the souls before the second coming and

resurrection? In answer to this question, another question could be asked: How is it that at the transfiguration, Jesus was seen wearing a dazzling white garment which he did not receive until after his resurrection? The answer is that the transfiguration was a prophetic vision (Matt. 17:9). As is evident in Scripture, prophetic visions are able to cause things that do not exist to come into existence. In Jesus' case, it encouraged his hope of immortality, enabling him, due to the glory set before him, to endure the forthcoming cross and despise the shame.

The same applies in Rev. 6. In prophetic vision, the servants of Jesus who also were called upon to die for the Word of God, were "transfigured" as it were, being clothed with white robes, which signified the immortal state. Their salvation was so sure, that John saw them in vision receiving it. What an encouragement for those who have to go through the ordeal of martyrdom!

In Rev. 19:8 the "fine linen clean and white" with which the saints will ultimately be literally clothed, is said to represent "the righteousness (righteous deeds) of the saints." And, as we have seen in Dan. 11:35, the testing and purging process of tribulation and persecution is part of the process that makes them white. This is also taught in Rev. 7. Verse 9 refers to the saints being clothed with white robes, and v14 says they came out of tribulation.

So then, those in Rev. 6 who are given white robes, have been through tribulation and are approved by God, being adjudged righteous. They have not died in vain! They die in faith, not having received the promise, but see it a little distance in the future, because God has made provision for others, that only in company with them will they be made perfect (Heb. 11:40).

LITTLE SEASON

Regarding the "little season" that the souls were required to rest before their resurrection: the Greek word for "season" is "chronos" and simply means a space of time. It is translated "time" on many occasions in the New Testament, and can refer to either a long or short period. For example, it relates to a long time in Jn. 5:6. 14:9, a "little time" in Rev. 20:3, and a "little while" (chronos) in Jn. 7:33; 12:35. The context of the "little season" in Rev. 6:11 requires it to be a short period of time from a human standpoint, because it is stated in response to a human question.

Emotional and heartfelt as the plea of the souls under the altar might

be, it does not induce God to immediately intervene and execute judgement and stop persecution. God's hour of judgement is pre-determined and fixed, and will come in a little while - in a little season.

According to Matt. 24:8, the first 4 signs which correspond with the first 4 seals, are "the beginning of sorrows," i.e. the beginning of the tribulation. "The end is not yet" v6. The fifth sign which corresponds with the fifth seal, involving the saints being afflicted and killed, is also not the end because Jesus says "he who shall endure to the end shall be saved." The period "to the end" (Matt. 24:13) corresponds with the "little season" in Rev. 6:11.

Though we have no means of knowing exactly how long the little season is, it is obvious that the time of the fifth seal is nearer the end than when the revelation was given to John around A.D. 96. As we have seen, the opening verses of Rev. 6 take us straight in to the last lap of human history. Revelation has done what other Scriptures have done, leaving out a large section of intermediate history and going on to detail the events of the end time.

“UNTIL THEIR BRETHREN SHOULD BE KILLED”

The souls were told that they had to rest "until their fellow-servants also and their brethren who were about to be killed, should be fulfilled." The One who numbers the hairs of our heads and is conscious of every sparrow that falls to the ground, has also numbered the end time martyrs! His purpose requires a certain number to be martyred, showing he has complete control of events and circumstances. Until the number pre-determined and ordained has been completed, and the divine purpose fulfilled, the first martyrs must remain at rest. All the saints, living and dead, are to be glorified together at the second coming (Rom. 8:17. 1 Thes. 4:17). None will precede others (Heb. 11:39-40. 1 Cor. 15:23). This is another reason why the souls under the altar cannot be in heaven.

What God in effect is saying to the first martyrs of the tribulation period is: "Don't be impatient; I have everything in control; those being martyred are monitored by my wise and mighty hand; not one of them could be killed unless I allowed it."

Because the word "fulfilled" means to fill up or complete, some have linked it with Matt. 23:32-36. In this passage Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees with these words: "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers ... I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them you shall kill and crucify ... that upon you may come all the

righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias ... Verily I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.” Although the judgement referred to here relates to God’s judgement upon the Jews in A.D. 70, we do learn from this, and other Scriptures such as Gen. 15:16, that when a certain measure of sin is fulfilled or filled full, God executes judgement. Such a measure was filling up in Jesus’ day as a result of the Jews shedding the blood of God’s servants. Jesus therefore warned the Jewish leaders that their persecution of the saints would fill the measure up, resulting in the judgement of God coming upon that generation.

The same principle will apply in the end time when the beast attacks and kills the saints. The number that God allows him to kill is the number that fills up the cup of iniquity resulting in judgement.

It seems to be plainly taught in the sixth seal that there is going to be a period of severe persecution for the saints in the end time, involving martyrdom for some, especially Jewish Christians living in the land of Israel, as will be seen in ensuing chapters in Revelation (e.g: chapters 7, 11, and 12).

The book of Revelation is in fact written primarily to prepare believers for the suffering and affliction that will occur in the last days leading up to the second coming. The same applies to the references to persecution in the Olivet prophecy: Lk. 21:12-19. Mk. 13:9-13. Matt. 24:9-13. However, as pointed out before, such warnings are not only relevant to the end time saints. They apply in principle to any age of persecution, and would encourage and strengthen the saints at whatever time in history they were persecuted.

THE SIXTH SEAL

As John watched the Lamb break the sixth seal “there was a great earthquake.” The language used in relation to this earthquake is taken from other prophecies which relate to the end time judgement of the world. Rev. 6:16-17 says it relates to the great day of the wrath of the Lamb, and the question “who shall be able to stand?” is drawn from Mal. 3:2 which refers to the second coming: “Who may abide the day of his coming and who shall stand when he appears?”

This great earthquake and other accompanying upheavals, being an expression of the Lamb’s wrath, is a divine judgement on all his enemies. It is the fulfilment of the cry for judgement by the souls under the altar. To place this seal, as some have, in the fourth century, in the days of

Constantine, is not acceptable. In those days the Christian epoch had at least another 5/6ths of its course to run (1,700-1,800 years) before the second coming and judgement, which does not tie in with the “little season” mentioned in the fifth seal.

LITERAL EARTHQUAKE OR SYMBOLICAL?

It is true that some prophecies in Scripture refer to earthquakes, stars falling, the sun becoming black and the moon becoming as blood, in a metaphorical sense to signify the upheaval and eclipse of a nation or kingdom, and the overthrow of kings and rulers. Such language, for example, is used to signify the fall of Babylon, Idumea (Edom), Judah and Egypt (Isa. 13:10. 34:4. Jer. 4:23-24). For this reason some of the continuous historical expositors have applied the language of the sixth seal relating to the earthquake, sun, moon and falling stars, to the fall of the pagan Roman empire, when the emperors were overthrown, the officers and magistrates deposed, and the priests cast out of office.

However, the sun, moon and stars in Rev. 6:12-14 are separate and distinct from the kings and rulers in v15. This indicates that the earthquake, cosmic disturbances and celestial convulsions are literal and physical and will have a profound effect upon all classes living on the earth. Other Scriptures certainly indicate that there will be a massive literal earthquake at the time of the return of Christ which will shake terribly the whole earth, causing mountains to tumble into valleys, and cities of the nations will collapse. The Mount of Olives will split in half; the hills of Judah will be levelled into a plain and the site of Jerusalem will be heaved up (Isa. 2. 24:1, 19-21. Ezk. 38:19-20. Joel 3:16. Zech. 14. Heb. 12:26-27. Rev. 11:13. 16:17-18).

In view of the literal, physical reality of the earthquake in these prophecies, and the dramatic awe-inspiring effect God intends it to have, one needs to avoid rushing in too quickly to reduce the earthquake in Rev. 6:12 to mere metaphor and apply it to a much lesser event by comparison in history. The same applies to the references to unusual phenomena occurring in the heavens involving the sun, moon and stars.

EARTHQUAKES AND EARTHQUAKE

In the Olivet prophecy, Jesus said there would be “earthquakes in different places” prior to his coming. Rev. 6:12 however, does not refer to earthquakes, but earthquake - “a great earthquake” so great that it

causes every mountain and island to move out of their place (v14). The Greek word for “great” is megas or mega from which the English “megaton” is derived, which is used to describe powerful atomic bombs, which cause the earth to shake. Revelation is truly a book of “great” things pertaining to end time events as they reach their climax. The word “great” occurs over 70 times in this book, referring to great tribulation, great sword, great earthquake, great day of wrath etc.

The great earthquake is the climax to a series of earthquakes in the end time and will be a cataclysmic upheaval of unprecedented magnitude, affecting the whole earth, not measurable on the Richter scale. All previous earthquakes in “different places” will be “rehearsals” - precursors -preliminary convulsions to the devastating finale.

SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

Reference in Rev. 6:12-14 to the sun becoming black as sackcloth, the moon becoming as blood, the stars of heaven falling and the heaven departing as a scroll, takes us back again to the Olivet prophecy in Matt. 24:29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days (i.e. the 1260 days) shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven ...”

The sequence in Rev. 6 can once again be seen to be the same as the Olivet prophecy. Both teach that heavenly signs - disturbing portents in the atmosphere will occur immediately after the tribulation when the time for the second coming and judgement arrives.

Joel 2:30-32; 3:15 also teach that there will be “signs in the heavens” before the great and terrible day of the Lord. “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood. On earth there will be blood and fire and columns of smoke.” Lk. 21:25 says there will be “distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear as they look with fearful anticipation at what is coming upon the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

It should be evident that the reference to stars falling from heaven on to the earth does not mean stars in the sense of suns as we now know them to be. It probably refers to showers of meteors or meteorites, which are still described today as falling or shooting stars. A small piece of rock just outside our atmosphere has a similar and sometimes greater brightness to a huge sun many light years away. Prior to the invention of the telescope

this was not known or appreciated.

There are Scriptures which refer to stars in a metaphorical sense and relate them to people. In Gen. 37:9. Dan. 8:10. Rev. 12:1-4 stars are a symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel. In Isa. 14:13 and Rev. 9:1 a falling star refers to a human ruler. However, while it is true, being obvious and inevitable that rulers of the world will fall from their positions of power and prominence when Jesus returns, it is not necessary to give a symbolical application to the stars in Rev. 6:13. As pointed out before, the rulers are distinguished from the stars in v15. It is because of the fear generated by the falling stars etc that the rulers and others run and hide in the dens and rocks of the mountains!

WHAT CAUSES THE EARTHQUAKE?

Many have speculated as to what will cause the great earthquake, the sun to be darkened, the moon to turn red and then become dark, and the sea and waves to roar. Will the earthquake be caused by a massive shift of the planet's platelets? Will it be struck by an asteroid? Or will the Lord personally shake it by His own direct power?

Evidently one of the effects of the earth being struck by a large asteroid would be the darkening of the sun and moon, not to mention making the sea and waves roar (especially if it hit the ocean). A great world-wide earthquake, whatever the cause, would whip up the oceans, causing giant tidal waves. The dust caused by an asteroid strike on earth, and the tumbling mountains that a massive earthquake would also cause, would blot out the light of the sun.

Excessive fire and smoke, especially from forest fires, can also cause the sun to go red in colour and even darken it out like a storm cloud. In relation to the sun being darkened and the moon being turned into blood, Joel 2:30 mentions "fire and pillars of smoke."

Cities on fire due to war, not to mention volcanic eruption, can also blot out the light of the sun or make it and the moon appear red.

It is clear that the wrath of the Lamb is going to have very wide-ranging effects, affecting the sun, moon, stars, sky (heaven), mountains, islands and earth. Whether in a supersonic jet or submarine, there will be no escape for any who try to flee. The Lord declares: "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations ..." (Haggai 2:6-7).

Rev. 6:13 says the stars will fall to earth "even as a fig tree casts her unripe (hard) figs, when she is shaken by a mighty wind." Reference to a

fig tree in connection with stars has caused some to regard the stars as Israelites, due to the fig tree sometimes signifying Israel in Scripture. But the same example of figs falling from the fig tree and stars falling, is given in relation to the non-Israelite nation of Edom in Isa. 34:4.

SIMILAR EVENTS BUT NOT THE SAME

In actual fact, the language of Rev. 6:13-14 concerning heaven departing as a scroll etc. is lifted from Isa. 34:4 almost word for word, which refers to God's judgements on Edom. Nobody would claim therefore that Rev. 6 is talking about Edom. Most would realize that the Spirit is simply saying that God will give vent to His wrath against those who persecute the saints as He did to Edom for oppressing Israel.

We learn from this that if a passage in Revelation refers to an Old Testament passage, or uses the same language, it may not be talking about the same thing. The two passages may be talking about similar things but not necessarily the same things. For example: the vial prophecies in Rev. 16 allude to some of the plagues referred to in Ex. 7 to 12 which fell upon Egypt. But this does not mean that Rev. 16 refers to Egypt. Very few, if any, would believe that. What it means is that the judgements of God upon Egypt by means of plagues will be repeated by judgements on the beast. God will treat the beast as He treated the Egyptians, and the way in which He will do this will follow a similar pattern to His judgement upon the Egyptians. This is all quite simple and straightforward and nobody would have difficulty with it. The ancient nation of Edom became extinct centuries ago, so the statement in Rev. 6:13-14 could not be referring to that nation, and the teaching of prophecy concerning the beast makes it clear that he is not Egypt.

It is therefore unfortunate that some exponents of the continuous historical interpretation have used the aforementioned examples of Edom and Egypt, to justify not applying passages in Revelation to Israel which are taken from, or allude to passages in the Old Testament which relate to Israel. But there is a difference! Israel is not extinct and occupies centre stage in all end time prophecies in the Old Testament relating to the day of the Lord.

In view of this; if the prophecies in Revelation relate to the Lord's day in the end time, it is to be expected that Israel will occupy centre stage there as well. It would therefore be a fundamental mistake to eliminate natural Israel from all Old Testament references and replace her with spiritual Israel, as the "replacement theology" is inclined to do. It is in fact

this theology which, when allowed to go to extremes, has rejected natural Israel altogether from the divine scheme of things, and cannot accept that the return of the Jews to their land, and the restoration of the nation of Israel has anything to do with Bible prophecy. All promises and prophecies of her revival and restoration are applied to the church instead!

If the plagues in Rev. 16 were said to be sent upon the land where Joseph died, would it still be insisted that it did not refer to Egypt? Not likely! Joseph died in Egypt. There is no excuse therefore for eliminating Jerusalem in the land of Israel from the prophecy in Rev. 11:8 which refers to it as the city where Jesus died.

If it was stated in Rev. 6:12-17 that the sixth seal related to the families of Esau and actually listed them individually by name, would it still be insisted that it did not refer to Edom, if the nation still existed? Probably not! Neither should natural Israel be eliminated from Rev. 7 which specifically mentions 12 of Jacob's families by name. (More about that in the next chapter).

As we know, it was always God's desire for natural Israel to be spiritual and have the same faith and obedience as Abraham their father. For this reason a large volume of the messages addressed to them related to this and were designed to achieve this, in order that they might be the true seed of Abraham. It is not surprising therefore that the New testament sometimes applies such Scriptures to the body of Christ, which, having the same spirit of faith and obedience as Abraham, forms part of his true seed and is an heir of the promises God made to him (Gal. 3:29).

However, God has not cast natural Israel away (Rom. 11). He has not eliminated the Jews from His purpose and certainly has not removed them from their position as prime witness in the prophetic Scriptures. As Jesus said: "The Scriptures cannot be broken." Because the book of Revelation is primarily prophetic, it is inevitable that Israel would occupy a prime position in its prophecies. To cast them away from the prophecies in Revelation and replace them with spiritual Israel, is to let the pendulum of replacement theology swing to an extreme that is unjustified.

HEAVEN, MOUNTAINS AND ISLANDS MOVE

“And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Will the earth be inverted - literally roll over, causing the stars to have a rolling away or falling effect? Instead of saying “the heaven departed” some translations say “the sky retreated.” “Behold, the Lord makes the earth

empty, and makes it waste, and turns it upside down and scatters its inhabitants ... The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall sway like a hammock.” These words taken from Isa. 24 may have a more literal fulfillment in the end than what some have been prepared to believe! Some have suggested that the mighty upheaval that will take place during the 6th seal could involve the whole surface of the planet slipping around on its foundations. Other references to God shaking the heavens and earth and creating new heavens and earth can be found in Matt. 24:35. Heb. 1:10-12. 12:16-27. 2 Pet. 3:10-13. Rev. 20:11. 21:1. Hag. 2:6, 21. Isa. 65:17. 66:22.

The moving of mountains and islands out of their place immediately calls to mind the reference in Zech. 14 to the Mount of Olives splitting in two; one half moving toward the north and the other half moving toward the south. But Rev. 6:14 is not referring to just one mountain. It states that “every mountain” shall move or be removed.

Rev. 16:20 also mentions in connection with “the great earthquake of a magnitude never experienced since men were upon earth,” that “every island fled away (sank?) and the mountains were not found” (levelled?). Isa. 40:4 says: “every mountain will be made low,” and Zech. 14:10 refers to the mountains of Judah becoming a plain. Rev. 16:19 also says: “the cities of the nations will fall.” A massive earthquake of unprecedented magnitude and unthinkable proportions is obviously going to occur at Christ’s return, and will come as a complete surprise and shock to those who spiritualize these prophecies away, robbing them of their literal dramatic reality. It cannot be denied that a mountain is sometimes used in Scripture as a symbol (Jer. 51:25. Zech. 4:7. Matt. 17:20. Mk. 11:23. 1 Cor. 13:2), but it also cannot be denied that many (most) references in Scripture to mountains are to be taken literally, and the context of Rev. 6:14 requires this.

HIDING IN THE DENS AND ROCKS

Reference to “the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the chief captains, the mighty men, and every slave and free man” hiding themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, indicates that all levels of society, from the highest to the lowest, from kings down to commoners, will seek refuge from the terrifying wrath of God. Position and wealth will be no advantage in that day and will not provide security. Guilty conscience as well as fear will cause many to run and hide, as in the case of our first parents who tried to hide from the presence of the

Lord after they sinned. Many of those who hide will have heard about the day of judgement and will realize it has arrived. Not being ready or prepared for it and not having ordered their lives to avoid it, due to procrastination, thinking there was plenty of time, they will panic. Knowing that it is too late to fall on their knees in repentance and call on the Lord for deliverance, they will call on the mountains to cover them and hide them from His fury.

The language in Rev. 6:15-16 is drawn from Isa. 2:10 which relates to the second coming. Nothing less than the second coming will completely satisfy this language. It is a very narrow and restricted view that limits the fear that men will have, to the fear some pagans might have felt when they knew Constantine was coming to attack them.

When the Assyrian army which was God's rod of anger and wrath, was sent to punish Israel for her sins, the people were trapped in their city of Samaria and had nowhere to run and hide, so they wished the hills could fall on them and the mountains cover them (Hos. 10:8). Jesus quoted these words and applied them to the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Lk. 23:30). What the Assyrians did to Samaria, the Romans were going to do to Jerusalem, and the response of the Israelites would be the same: they would wish they could hide in the mountains and escape the wrath and terror of the enemy.

Because Jesus applied Hos. 10:8 to the judgement of A.D. 70, some who believe Revelation was given prior to that date, apply Rev. 6:15-17 to the same judgement. During the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, Jews literally hid themselves in secret caverns and limestone chambers beneath the city, and were hunted out by the Romans. Others fled to the caves and rocks in the mountains of Judea, and the last great stand against the Romans by the Jews took place at the rocky mountain fortress of Masada.

However, Rev. 6:15 says the kings of the earth etc. would hide in the rocks. At the time of A.D. 70, the kings of the earth were Caesar and those appointed by him to rule the provinces of the Roman empire, and they clearly did not want to run and hide when the Roman legions invaded and attacked Jerusalem!

ALL NATIONS AFFECTED

Rev. 6 is not confined to Jerusalem or Judea or any other province or provinces in the Roman empire, but embraces all nations, and it will be the Lord Himself who executes the judgement. The "kings of the earth"

will include the 10 horns of the beast (Rev. 17:12) who will experience the terror of the Lord's judgement at Armageddon (Rev. 19:17-21). It is therefore significant that the Greek word translated "captains" in Rev. 19:18 in relation to the beast power, is the same word translated "chief captains" in 6:15. The judgement of the beast (Gog), referred to in Ezk. 38:18-23, is expressed as the Lord's "fury" (wrath), and involves "a great shaking in the land of Israel, ... the mountains shall be thrown down and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground."

The plea to the mountains and rocks to fall on them sounds like a prayer. Men who have never prayed will call out in prayer, not to the living God, the rock of ages, but to dead inanimate rocks! There is a sense of irony in this, that men with hearts as hard as rock, end up calling to the rocks. For many it will be their first and last prayer!

They prefer to hide from the face of the Lord rather than have to face Him: "Hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" they say. It is sad to consider that failure to enter into the rock Christ Jesus, and be rooted and grounded in him, will result in many ending up seeking to enter into mountain rock and hide in the dust (Isa. 2:10, 19). Rather than be covered by Christ and be saved, they will be covered by granite and be crushed to death. "Therefore," says Jesus, "whoever hears these sayings of mine, and puts them into practise, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and could not shake it or make it fall, for it was founded upon a rock."

WHO SHALL STAND?

As already mentioned, the question in the last verse of Rev. 6: "who shall be able to stand?" is taken from Mal. 3:2 and is alluded to in the Olivet prophecy in Lk. 21:36 and relates to the time of the second coming. "Thou, even Thou (God) art to be feared: and who may stand in Thy sight when once Thou art angry?" (Ps. 76:7).

Those referred to in Rev. 6:16-17 are fearful of the wrath of Christ, not the wrath of Constantine. The pagans did not believe in Christ, as is required by the continuous historical interpretation.

The question: "Who shall stand?" is answered in the next chapter. Rev. 7:9 refers to a great multitude which "stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, and they cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb." Among those who are clothed with white

robes, are of course those who “come through great tribulation” (v14), which is the same period during which the souls under the altar are slain. What a contrast between their situation under the altar and standing before the throne!

This brings us to the end of Revelation 6. In a sense the seals end with the sixth seal, for although there is a seventh, it only introduces the 7 trumpets that follow (Rev. 8:1). The removal of the last seal enables the whole scroll to be opened and unrolled. There is however no reference to it being unrolled at any stage of the removal of the seals. No wonder there is silence in heaven when the last seal is removed and the book can be fully opened! There is a hush of expectation and it is finally broken by a trumpet blast. The first 6 seals are a general outline of end time events - an introduction in which we have all the main elements of what is to come, as in the case of the Olivet prophecy with which it corresponds and runs parallel. The trumpets and vials etc. which follow, fills them out and expands them in more detail.



CHAPTER FOUR REVELATION CHAPTER SEVEN

There is a clear connection between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Revelation. The 7th seal is not opened until 8:1. Instead of immediately proceeding to describe the opening of that seal, the prophecy pauses in chapter 7 to answer the question with which the 6th seal concluded: “Who shall be able to stand?” i.e. in the day of the wrath of the Lamb.

Chapter 7 reveals that before the great day of God’s wrath comes, a special sealing work will take place among His servants. Before the unsealing of the 7th seal occurs, a sealing of 144,000 occurs!

John’s opening statement in Rev. 7:1: “After these things” clearly means after the things he saw and heard in relation to the 6th seal. But the word “after” does not necessarily have a chronological connotation. It does not have to mean that the prophecy which follows will be fulfilled after the 6th seal. It can simply be taken to mean that the prophecy concerning the sealing of the 144,000 was given to John after the prophecy concerning the 6th seal. Those familiar with the Word of prophecy will know that it is by no means a foregone conclusion that just because one prophecy follows after another, it relates to events that will be fulfilled after!

FOUR ANGELS AND FOUR WINDS

John says: “I saw four angels standing on the 4 corners of the earth, holding the 4 winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.” Although angels are referred to as winds (Ps. 104:3-4), the 4 angels in Rev. 7:1 are clearly separate and distinct from the 4 winds. The 4 angels are seen holding the 4 winds, preventing them from blowing on the earth, sea and trees. Each angel may be delegated to each wind.

According to v3, the blowing of the wind causes the earth, sea and trees to be “hurt.” Blowing therefore signifies hurting or damaging. However, the fact that in v2-3 it is the 4 angels, not the 4 winds, who are said to have the power to hurt and are told not to hurt, till a sealing work takes place, indicates that the angels do not merely let the winds go and blow of their own accord, but they cause them to blow; they impel forward the work of destruction with their own supernatural energy. God has committed both the work of holding and hurting into their hands. The

4 winds are therefore merely the agents by which the 4 angels achieve this.

In passing, it should be pointed out that the hurting process referred to here does not include the 7 last plagues. That work is given into the hands of 7 special angels, whereas this is given into the hands of 4.

Regarding the “four corners of the earth” on which the 4 angels are seen standing to hold back the 4 winds: some restrict them to the land of Israel. Adam Clarke, for example, says it means “on the extreme parts of the land of Judea.” To support this, passages such as Ezk. 7:2 are quoted in which the word “land” comes from the same Hebrew word translated “earth,” and is applied to the 4 corners of the land of Israel. (The Greek word “ge,” translated “earth” is also sometimes translated “land”).

Elsewhere however, both the Hebrew and Greek words translated “earth” frequently relate to the whole earth, and the phrase “4 corners of the earth” is used to signify regions or nations beyond the land of Israel extending to the 4 points of the compass. For example, reference is made in Isa. 11:11-12 to Jews in dispersion being gathered from “the 4 corners of the earth.” Some of the regions or nations that come within this compass are named; and put into modern terms include Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kuwait, Syria and Mediterranean islands and coastlands.

As we proceed with this study of Rev. 7, it will become evident that the 4 corners of the earth from which the 4 winds come, are regions well beyond the borders of the land of Israel. But the fact that the winds are held back until 144,000 among the tribes in the land of Israel are sealed, indicates that the land of Israel is the ultimate destiny of the winds and will be affected by them.

As we shall see, a similar sealing is recorded in Ezk. 9 and took place in the land of Israel prior to the judgement of God coming upon the nation in the form of invasion by enemy nations. Such nations were like a destroying wind that wreaked havoc in the land, causing much hurt and devastation. It is evident from certain Scriptures that reference to the wind does not always mean the literal wind, but is sometimes used as a metaphor to signify invading nations. For example, the same phrase “4 winds from the 4 quarters” which occurs in Jer. 49:36, refers to nations that would invade Elam (Iran) and cause destruction. Other examples of the wind signifying the military forces of nations can be seen in Jer. 4:11-. 25:32-33. 30:23-24. 51:1. Dan. 7:2.

(Sometimes the 4 winds simply signify the outer limits of the earth, as in Dan. 8:8. 11:4. Zech. 2:6. Mk. 13:27).

If these conclusions up to this point are correct, the prophecy seems

to be saying that nations, particularly the nation of Israel, will be seriously affected by invasion forces. The question is of course, who are the invasion forces and at what time in history do they invade?

Several clues are given. The first is that Rev. 7:14 informs us that it relates to the time of “great tribulation.” As we shall see, this relates to the end time period which culminates with the second coming of Christ. It is referred to in Dan. 12:1 as “a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation till that time.” According to the context, this great tribulation has its vortex in the land of Israel, and is caused by the invasion of enemy forces. See Dan. 11:40-45. Dan. 11:40 says the armies will come like a ferocious wind - “a whirlwind.” Ezk. 38 refers to the same invasion and says it will be led by Gog of the land of Magog, supported by nations from the 4 points of the compass. Ezk. 38:9 says they will “come like a storm.” Storms involve strong winds which can be very destructive!

In connection with this, it is interesting to note that Rev. 20:8, although referring to a different period and event from Ezk. 38, also refers to Gog and Magog, and says they represent “nations which are in the 4 quarters of the earth.” Significantly enough, the Greek word for “quarters” is the same as “corners” in Rev. 7:1. In fact, Rev. 7:1 and 20:8 are the only places in the New Testament where the phrase “4 corners of the earth” occurs. Could it be that the Spirit is telling us here that the 4 winds at the 4 corners of the earth are the nations involved in the confederacy led by Gog against the nation of Israel in the end time, at which time other nations on the earth such as Egypt will also suffer?! (Dan. 11:42-43).

A DISTINCTION WITHOUT A DIFFERENCE

The expression “4 winds of the earth” and “4 winds of heaven” both occur in Scripture, and some have made a distinction between them. It is thought that the 4 winds of the earth signifies human forces, and the 4 winds of heaven signifies divine (angelic forces). It is true as already pointed out, that angels are referred to as winds (Ps. 104:3-4. Heb. 1:7. Ps. 18:10. Ezk. 37:9. The 4 horses in Zech. 6:5 which are sent out into the earth by the Lord, are also referred to as “the 4 winds of the heavens”). However, the phrase “winds of heaven” is also used in Scripture in relation to earthly powers or places, as can be seen in Deu. 30:4. Isa. 13:1-5. Jer. 49:36. Dan. 8:8. 11:4. Zech. 2:6. Mk. 13:27.

It is certainly evident that the 4 winds in Rev. 7:1 are not angelic powers. The 4 angels would hardly have to hold back another 4 angels! Some equate the 4 winds with the 4 horses in Rev. 6, which cause war,

famine, pestilence and tribulation. Such could certainly be the effect of an invasion by nations from the 4 corners of the earth. According to Ezk. 38:4, “horses and horsemen” will be involved in the invasion.

HOLDING AND HURTING

Reference to the 4 angels “holding” the 4 winds means restraining them, holding them back, preventing them from blowing and causing damage. This is a picture of divine power or providence being exercised over nations, holding them back from invasion and war until the appointed time arrives for the 4 sore judgements to be inflicted. It represents a temporary suspension of judgement and tribulation, and illustrates the truth expressed in Dan. 4:17 that God rules in the kingdoms of men and gives it to whosoever He will. Through His angels, God controls the movement and destiny of nations and none can steal a march on Him. Nations can only invade (especially when it is the land of Israel they are invading), when it is God’s will and time. If it is not His time, He will restrain them and hold them back. An example of this is seen in 2 Thes. 2:6 where reference is made to the man of sin being restrained so that he will come to power and be revealed at the time appointed for him by God. Rev. 9:14-16 refers to 4 angels restraining an army of 200 million.

God’s control of the end time invasion of Israel is conveyed in Ezk. 38:8. Speaking to Gog, God says: “After many days you shall be visited” (mustered, gathered). Joel. 3:2 records God saying “I will gather all nations and bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat ...” i.e. for the battle of Armageddon. In Ezk. 38:4 God expresses His gathering and control of the nations in a rather graphic way: “I will turn you around and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you forth and all your army ...”

The “blowing” of the 4 winds in Rev. 7 is no ordinary blowing or gentle breeze. It is forceful, aggressive and destructive - a blowing that will “hurt” as we read in verses 2 and 3 i.e. injure, causing “great tribulation” (v14). The word “hurt” is used in Rev. 2:11 in connection with death (the second death), but it does not always convey the sense of death. For example, in Rev. 9:4-5, 10 it refers to torment (pain), like the pain caused by a scorpion, but lasting for 5 months, causing men to seek death but not find it. The word also occurs in Rev. 6:6 and 11:5 in relation to hurting oil and wine and God’s 2 witnesses. In these verses the word hurt can signify destroy.

It is evident from the various usages of the word that the forces represented by the 4 winds will cause injury and pain, death and

destruction. But they will be held back from doing so until it is God's time for them to be released. During this time of respite, a divine sealing operation takes place among the tribes in Israel, as the following verses reveal.

According to Ezk. 38:11, prior to Gog's invasion forces being released, Israel will be "at rest and dwell safely without bars and gates." This could very well be the period referred to in Rev. 7:1 during which the anti-forces are held back and restrained.

Joel's prophecy refers to the invasion forces as "locusts" and Ezk. 38:4 refers to "horses." Rev. 9:1 refers to an invasion by "locusts ... like horses," and indicates in v4 that they invade after God's servants have been sealed, i.e. after the events recorded in Rev. 7.

HURT THE EARTH, SEA AND TREES

As a result of the 4 winds being released, the earth, sea and trees are blown upon and hurt. How should this be interpreted? Are the earth, sea and trees to be taken literally or symbolically? Many take them as being symbolical, yet regard the reference in Rev. 6 to not hurting the oil and wine as being literal, not to mention the trees in 9:4.

The "earth" in Rev. 7, on the basis of the reference to "grass of the earth" in Rev. 9:4, probably means grass. Reference is also made in Rev. 8:7 to "green grass" along with "trees." But Rev. 7 not only refers to the earth and trees being affected by the winds, but also the sea. There are also other places in the book of Revelation where the sea comes within the scope of prophecy. For example, Rev. 8:8-11 refers to one third of the sea becoming as blood, one third of the sea creatures dying, and one third of ships being destroyed. Rev. 16:3 also refers to the sea becoming as the blood of a dead man, causing the sea creatures to die.

If the grass, trees and sea are taken literally, these prophecies anticipate judgements on all these ecological spheres. The grass, trees and sea are the sources of food. Damage to these would have a profound effect on the economy and infrastructure of any nation affected, resulting in famine and pestilence.

There is certainly no doubt that the end time invasion will cause a great deal of damage to the grass and trees. We read in Joel 1:19 that fire will devour the pastures and burn all the trees. The land that was as the garden of Eden will be turned into a desolate wilderness (Joel 2:3). All crops will perish (Joel 1:10-12).

According to Dan. 11:40, "many ships" will also be involved in the

invasion and will come like a storm with great fury down the Mediterranean sea. Missiles and marines will no doubt be unleashed, causing much hurt to those on the sea and land who they attack. A massive naval battle will no doubt be involved between pro-Israel and anti-Israel forces.

TWO INVASIONS?

In Rev. 9:4 the locust-horses are commanded to not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, nor any tree, but only those men who have not been sealed. Does the fact that the 4 winds do hurt the grass and trees and the locust-horses do not, suggest there will be two different invasions? The first involves a Moslem confederacy, represented by a dragon, and the second is Gog and the Moslem confederacy which transfers power to him after being defeated (Rev. 13:2). This second confederacy is represented by a beast.

If so, Rev. 9:1-12 would be the first invasion because there would be no point telling the forces to not hurt the grass and trees if they have already been destroyed (unless sufficient time elapsed for them to grow again).

Because the Arabs want the land of Israel for their own possession, they would naturally not want to destroy it. They would only want to destroy the Jewish people occupying it, and one third of them will be killed in the Israeli-Arab conflict (Rev. 12:4). Those sealed by God however, (the 144,000 in Rev. 7 referred to as the man child and woman's seed in Rev. 12) will be protected and preserved and will come through the tribulation.

After saying the grass, all green things and trees will not be hurt; Rev. 9:4 then goes on to say that only the men who are not sealed will be hurt. This has caused some to conclude that the grass, green things and trees, represent those who are sealed. If so, the grass etc would have to be equated with the 144,000 in Rev. 7. However, in Rev. 8:7 reference is made to all the green grass being burnt up. To be consistent, this also would have to be applied to the 144,000, but I am not aware of any expositor concluding that the whole of the 144,000 will perish in a holocaust.

There is certainly no mention in Rev. 7 of the 144,000 all suffering a fiery death. Verses 14-17 simply refers to the saints coming through the great tribulation during which they hungered, thirsted, were exposed to the scorching heat of the sun and shed tears.

ANOTHER ANGEL ASCENDING FROM THE EAST

After seeing the 4 angels standing on the 4 corners of the earth holding the 4 winds, John saw another angel - a fifth, ascending (not descending) from the east, having the seal of God in his hand. (In Scripture, “ascend” can mean advance e.g. Ezk. 38:9). We have here another literal angel, having charge of another specific work. Instead of the words, “ascending from the east,” some translations read “ascending from the sun rising,” which is a more literal translation. The expression can refer to both manner and locality. As the sun appears in the eastern horizon and advances to the west, so shall the fifth angel with God’s seal in his hand.

The question is: east of where? Without a reference point i.e. a specific geographical centre, east could be anywhere. Every country in the world is east of another. Because the angel comes to seal 144,000 from the tribes of Israel, this indicates he is heading for the land of Israel, and approaches from the east. This is further suggested by the fact that the “great tribulation” through which those sealed by God come (Rev. 7:14), is referred to by Jesus in his prophecy (Matt. 24:21) which clearly has Israel as the geographical centre. “East” therefore in Rev. 7:2 is to be understood in relation to the land of Israel. The same applies to the reference to east in Rev. 16:12: “the way of the kings of the east.”

Being the direction from which the sun rises, east is the point of the compass chosen by God for Christ to come when he returns to Jerusalem. In fact, even the first coming of Christ is likened to the sun rising (Lk. 1:78).

Possibly for this reason, east was the significant point of the compass in various institutions and operations of God in the past. For example: the cherubim were placed east of the garden to guard the path to the tree of life i.e. the entrance to paradise was on the east side (Gen. 3:24). The entrance to the tabernacle and temple was also on the east side. The royal tribe of Judah out of which Messiah was to come, camped on the east side of the tabernacle (Num. 2:3). Moses and Aaron the high priest and his family camped on the east side of the tabernacle (Num. 3:38). The tribes of Israel entered the promised land from the east (Josh. 4:19). A messianic prophecy in Isa. 41:2 refers to Jesus as “the righteous man from the east, whom victory meets at every step ...” The prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of God depart from the east of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, then return again later from the same direction (Ezk. 10:19. 11:23. 43:2).

Jesus likewise, the glory of God, departed to heaven from the Mount

of Olives east of Jerusalem, and will return from the same direction (Act. 1:9-12. Zech. 14:4). The prophet Malachi declared that Jesus will “come suddenly to his temple” (3:1). He also declared that “the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams” (4:2). Jesus himself put it like this: “As the lightning comes out of the east and shines to the west, so shall also the coming of the son of man be” (Matt. 24:27).

The significance of east in Scripture, being the direction from which the glory of God in Christ will come to Jerusalem, could very well mean that the reference to the angel in Rev. 7:2 coming from the east has something to do with the coming of Christ. The sequel to the prophecy confirms this. The angel comes to seal 144,000 from the tribes of Israel in preparation for the second coming. Prior to the son of righteousness arising, an angel arises to perform a sealing operation.

HAVING THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD

In ancient times a seal was usually a signet ring or a cylinder, engraven with the owner’s name or some design, or both (Ex. 28:11. Est. 8:8). It was worn on the finger, if a ring; or was strung on a cord and hung around the neck (Gen. 38:18. Jer. 22:24). Men affixed or stamped their seal as a signature to letters or other documents, which were usually written on soft clay (1 Kng. 21:8. Neh. 9:38. Est. 8:8. Jer. 32:10, 44). Chests, boxes, tombs or anything which was not to be touched or opened, were sealed with the signet of the person who had authority to prohibit it (Job 14:17. 41:15. Dan. 6:17. Matt. 27:66. Rev. 5:1). A seal was a sign, emblem or evidence of ownership, authentication and security. The seal proved that the article sealed genuinely belonged to the one whose seal was upon it, and therefore must not be touched or tampered with, without the owner’s consent. The seal was protection against public use and abuse.

The seal that the angel had was a divine seal - “the seal of the living God,” and was either on a ring on his finger, or held in his hand or strung around his neck.

According to Rev. 14:1, the seal contained the name of the Father and son, for this verse states that the 144,000 have the Lamb’s name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. According to Rev. 22:4, the name shall be in the forehead (no doubt invisible to the naked eye) of all the servants of the Lord, not just the 144,000. Also see Rev. 3:12.

HE CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE

The fact that it is stated that the angel cried with a “loud voice” to the 4 angels telling them not to allow any hurt until the servants of God are sealed, indicates that it was vital that the destructive winds be not released until the 144,000 are sealed. The loud voice indicates that the angel is eager and anxious to get this message across. It would be a disaster to have the destructive winds come forth prematurely. The 4 winds are eager to burst forth, but are prevented from doing so until the divine sealing takes place.

It is clear from this that the land of Israel is going to be “hurt” by the winds and therefore the people who are not sealed, and that it will happen in the end time great tribulation era.

It is interesting to note that in Rev. 7:3 the sealing angel uses the plural pronoun “we” in relation to the sealing work, saying: “till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” This fifth angel is spokesman for a number. Due to the number that will be sealed, (144,000), a number of angels will be involved in the work. The same applies when Jesus returns and gathers up his elect. Many angels will be involved. It should also be noticed that the sealing is not done in order to make people servants of God. Those who are sealed are already servants of God. The seal is to mark out the people who already belong to God to make it clear that they are His property.

A PARALLEL IN EZEKIEL 9

A very relevant passage of Scripture relating to the sealing can be seen in Ezk. 9, and for this reason the marginal references in most Bibles refer to it. As in the case of Rev. 7, Ezk. 9 pertains to the land and people of Israel during a period prior to invasion by enemy forces. According to Ezk. 8:1 the time period was around 592 B.C. 5 years before the Babylonians invaded and destroyed both the city of Jerusalem and the temple, which took place in 587 B.C. It was a judgement of God due to the abominations being committed by the Israelites. These abominations which incurred God’s wrath are referred to in Ezk. 8.

Ezk. 9 reveals that prior to the invasion and destruction, an angel went through the city of Jerusalem with a pen and ink, putting a mark upon the forehead of those who sighed and cried due to disapproving of, and deploring all the abominations being committed by their countrymen. (Rev. 11:8 reveals that abominations will also be committed in Jerusalem

in the end time, causing the city to be likened to Sodom and Egypt. Sodom represents sexual perversion and immorality, and Egypt represents idolatry and materialism. For this reason, invasion of Israel by enemy forces occurs in the end time).

Those who were marked on the forehead in Ezk. 9 were spared when God's judgements fell. Some however suffered prior to the Babylonians conquering the city. The prophet Jeremiah for example, was persecuted by the Jews, but he survived due to the grace and providence of God.

The reason for sealing the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel in Rev. 7 was also so that they would be spared and not hurt by the judgement of God upon the nation. This is indicated in Rev. 9:4 where it is clearly implied that those who were sealed were not to be hurt. There would be no point sealing them if they were going to be killed. God doesn't need seals to know who to resurrect, but angels need them to know who to protect. A similar principle to this can be seen in Gen. 4:15 which refers to the Lord putting a mark upon Cain to prevent him from being killed. As mentioned before, the 144,000 are among those referred to in Rev. 7:14 "who come through great tribulation." Due to being sealed in the forehead, they are spared and survive.

According to Adam Clarke, not one Christian perished in the A.D. 70 siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. They all escaped to Pella and were spared. They all took seriously the words of Jesus to "flee" (Matt. 24:16). Rev. 12:6, 14- refers to the end time Hebrew Christians doing the same, and they can be equated with the 144,000. If God could protect and sustain 2 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years in Moses' day, He could do the same for 144,000 for 3½ years in the end time!

THE MARK ON THE LINTEL

Prior to the second coming of Christ and resurrection, the following message recorded in Isa. 26:20-21 is addressed to God's people: "Come, my people, enter into your chambers and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves as it were for a little moment, until the wrath is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose the blood shed upon her and shall no more conceal her slain."

This language is reminiscent of the Passover, at which time the Israelites put blood on the door posts and lintel of their houses. They then remained indoors while the angel of God passed over them to execute the judgement of God, inflicting death in all the houses that were not marked.

The shape of the 2 door posts and lintel upon which the mark of the blood appeared would of course be like this:



This shape is very similar to the letter H of the Hebrew alphabet seen here:



This letter almost by itself spells the name “yah” (yh in Hebrew) which is the abbreviated form of Yahweh, the name of God, and is seen here:



As already mentioned, according to Rev. 14:1, it is the name of God that is sealed on the foreheads of the 144,000. But not only the name of God: the name of the Lamb (Jesus) also, whose name, being Yahshua in Hebrew, incorporates the name of God his Father. Had the 144,000 only been sealed with the Father’s name, some may have concluded that they were not Messianic Jews, but Judaistic Jews who believe in Father God but not the Son of God. Rev. 3:12 says that Jesus will write the name of his God, the name of the city of God and his own new name upon all who overcome, and refuse to let anyone rob them of their crown. The 144,000 obviously fit into this category. They overcome the enemy and do not allow him to take their crown.

We read in 2 Tim. 2:19 that “the firm foundation of God stands,

having this inscription (seal): the Lord knows those who are His.” As inscriptions were engraved upon seals, so also the names of persons were engraved upon foundation stones in buildings - usually the name or names of those by whom, through whom or for whom the structure was built. The seal or inscription on God’s foundation however, is: “The Lord knows who are His.” Names need not to be mentioned; the Lord knows who they are! And, as in the days of Noah and Lot, the angels of the Lord will be used to bring the Lord’s people to safety. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and in the remnant who the Lord shall call” (Joel 2:32).

IN THEIR FOREHEADS

The A.V. says the 144,000 shall be sealed “in” their foreheads, but most modern versions say “on” or “upon.” The word “forehead” is a speciality in the book of Revelation. The Greek word “metopon” occurs 8 times: (7:3. 9:4. 13:16. 14:1, 9. 17:5. 20:4. 22:4). The word does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It is used exclusively in Revelation.

The sealing of the saints on the forehead in Rev. 7 stands in sharp contrast to the mark imposed by the beast upon the foreheads of all who worship him (Rev. 13:16. 14:9. 20:4). It also stands in contrast with the name “mystery, Babylon” written on the forehead of the harlot in Rev. 17:5. It becomes evident as the Revelation unfolds, that there are two divisions into which the world will be irreconcilably divided shortly before the Lord returns. The mark or seal put on the foreheads of the servants of God obviously has nothing to do with the mark of the cross or trinity put on the foreheads of babies when sprinkled with water, or the gesture of the cross or trinity on the upper body, practised by some Trinitarians. Evidently the sealing of the forehead in Rev. 7 formed the basis of this tradition as a form of identification with Christ. Human tradition whittled down the true baptismal process, which involved full immersion in water followed by pouring oil on the forehead to signify baptism in the Holy Spirit. It will require more than the sprinkling of babies and the gesture of the cross on their foreheads to qualify for protection and deliverance in the great tribulation.

It is natural to wonder why it is on the forehead that the 144,000 are sealed. Why not some other part of the body, like the hand as is sometimes the case in relation to the mark of the beast (13:16)?

The word “forehead” is derived from the Greek word “meta” which

means “with,” and “ops” which means “an eye.” In view of the fact that the forehead is in front of the brain and it is through the brain that we see and perceive things, it is not difficult to see the connection with the eye (Eph. 1:18). As a doorway at Passover time, marked with blood in the shape of God’s name was the entrance to a house, so the forehead sealed with the name of God is the Spirit’s entrance to the house or temple of God, which each believer is (1 Cor. 3:16-17. 6:19). Also see Ps. 119:130.

The forehead signifies the inner man - the spirit of the mind; the attitude and character of a person. All believers have been called out from the world to be a people for God’s name (Act. 15:14). This involves manifesting the attributes of His name (Ex. 34:5-7). This is what knowing God involves, for it was in response to Moses asking God to “shew me your ways that I might know you,” that God declared His name, and the attributes it involves. Knowing God involves knowing who He is and what He stands for, and this all starts as knowledge which the forehead represents. Being sealed with the Father’s name on the forehead would therefore signify that the mind of those who were sealed was impressed with all that the name of God stands for and represents. God’s name would never be sealed on the foreheads of those who did not know it and respect it. For this reason the golden plate engraved with the words “holy to the Lord” was placed on the high priest’s forehead (Ex. 28:38). It represented the attitude of mind the priest was expected to have, especially when he went into the holy place to minister.

2 Chr. 26:19-20 refers to leprosy breaking out on the forehead of Uzziah, a rebellious king of Israel. Due to a contaminated mind and attitude, his forehead was inflicted as a sign. In like manner, Goliath was struck on the forehead by David’s stone, due to his ungodly reasoning and mental attitude.

Isa. 48:4 refers to Israel being obstinate, having a neck as stiff as iron and a brass brow (forehead). This signified a hard, inflexible, unyielding mind and attitude.

Jer. 33:3 is similar, referring to Israel having a “whore’s head” i.e. the brow of a harlot - a harlot mentality. This calls to mind Rev. 17:5: “And upon her (the harlot’s) forehead was a name written: mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”

In Ezk. 3:8 we read that God made the prophet’s forehead strong against the foreheads of the Israelites. This meant that in the clash of heads (attitudes) between the prophet and the sinful Israelites, God would make Ezekiel stubborn, determined and tough in conviction and mental resolve. Those in Rev. 7 who are sealed in the forehead, are no doubt also

strong in their mental resolve and commitment to the name of God and Jesus Christ.

SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is also another way in which the word “sealed” is used in the New Testament. For example: Eph. 1:13 says that those who believe the gospel “were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest (down payment) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Also see Eph. 4:30. 2 Cor. 1:22. Jn. 6:27. The word “sealed” in these verses comes from the same Greek word translated sealed in Rev. 7, and means that the Holy Spirit was God’s seal, sign or guarantee that He had chosen and commissioned those who received it.

Initially, the Holy Spirit came down upon the church like tongues of fire, probably resting on their heads or foreheads. Possession of it and the supernatural gifts it bestowed for the ministry, was a divine confirmation and authentication, validating and vindicating the ministry and ministers as being of God.

Those who received the Holy Spirit during the first century are referred to in Rom. 8:23 as having “the first fruits of the Spirit.” They were not the first to ever receive the Holy Spirit, for there are many examples of Holy Spirit possession in Old Testament times, not to mention Zecharias the father of John the Baptist, Anna the prophetess, Simeon and John the Baptist. Those referred to as having the “first fruits of the Spirit” were those who experienced a new move of the Holy Spirit as a result of Christ’s resurrection, ascension and glorification.

If there was to be another new move of the Holy Spirit in the end time before the second coming of Christ, those who experienced it might be referred to in terms of “first fruits of the Spirit.” As in nature, from which the term has been borrowed, “first fruits” are not limited to the first crop of fruit ever yielded by a tree. As a result of the first crop running its course and the tree becoming bare for a period, when the next fruit season arrives, the first to come to fruition are again called first fruits. On the basis of the context of Joel 2 :28-32 it is believed that there will be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the great and terrible day of the Lord, during which period the Elijah ministry will take place in Israel (Rev. 11:3). The 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel could represent the fruit or effect of that ministry. And if the sealing of the 144,000 involves them receiving the Holy Spirit, the reference to them in Rev. 14:4 as being “first

fruits to God and the Lamb” may not only mean that they are the first converts in Israel under the new end time move of God’s Spirit, but also “have the first fruits of the Spirit” as a result of that move. If the rejection of Israel resulted in the reconciling of the world, receiving and accepting them again will be life from the dead. For if the first fruit be holy, the rest will be holy also. Ultimately, all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11).

It is interesting to note that the sealing of the 144,000 in Rev. 7 is between the 6th and 7th seal, and the reference to power being given to God’s end time witnesses in Rev. 11 is between the 6th and 7th trumpet. Also of interest is the fact that an angel does the sealing in Rev. 7, and the “Comforter” sent by God to seal the first century Christians with the Holy Spirit was also an angel. The power given to the witnesses in Rev. 11 is also given by an angel - a “mighty angel” (Rev. 10:1). It could be that the same angel is involved on all of these occasions!

THE 144,000

John did not see the 144,000 or count them; he heard the number declared by the angel as in the case of the 200 million in 9:16. However, he later saw the 144,000 on Mount Zion with Christ (14:1).

According to Rev. 7:5-8 the 144,000 is made up of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. The number 144,000 is based on the square of 12. 12 is the basis of the number and is a specially significant number in Scripture, signifying divine government. There were 12 tribes and 12 apostles. The woman (Israel) in Rev. 12:1 has a crown of 12 stars, which represents the 12 tribes of Israel in Rev. 7. The new Jerusalem has 12 gates and at the gates 12 angels, and the names written on the gates are the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12). The wall of the city has 12 foundations and in them are the names of the 12 apostles (21:14). The dimensions of the city of God are also given in terms of 12. The city itself is 12,000 furlongs, its length, breadth and height being equal (21:16), and the wall is 144 cubits (the square of 12 - 21:17). The number 12 occurs 22 times in the book of Revelation.

Because true believers from all nations are referred to as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) and the “seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3), yet are not natural physical descendants of Abraham; many have concluded that the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel are not the physical descendants of Abraham and therefore not the literal tribes of Israel.

This has resulted in some Gentile groups laying exclusive claim to the 144,000 at the exclusion of all natural descendants of Abraham. Some

Seventh Day Adventists apply the 144,000 to the faithful in their community, who will be found observing the Sabbath at the Lord's return. They believe these will be raptured when the Lord descends and judgement poured out upon everyone else.

The Jehovah Witnesses teach that the 144,000 are an elite group from within their community, who alone are entitled to the communion. Other groups also believe that their followers alone will be the 144,000. All of these however, overlook the very simple fact that the 144,000 come from, and are composed of "all the tribes of Israel." There is not a Gentile among them! Ask those who claim to belong to the 144,000 which particular tribe they belong to, and they will invariably not be able to give an answer.

It is true, as pointed out, that Gal. 6:16 refers to Gentile believers as part of "the Israel of God." But neither this verse nor any other associates Gentiles with, or relegates them to any of the specific tribes of Israel. If Rev. 7 simply referred to the 144,000 as being "of Israel," it might be taken to mean believers of other nations. However, the specific reference to 12 tribes by name rules this out. Gentile believers are never assigned tribal positions in Scripture. Only physical descendants of the ancestors of those tribes can be assigned such positions. For example, when Jesus promised the 12 apostles that when he returns and sits on his throne, they shall sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28), he was referring to the literal tribes of Israel, not Gentile believers. The same applies to the "12 tribes earnestly serving God" in Act. 26:7, and "the 12 tribes scattered abroad" in Jam. 1:1. Each tribe is specifically mentioned by name in Rev. 7 to impress upon us how literally it is to be taken.

The Jehovah Witnesses rejected the application to the literal tribes simply because in spite of all their attempts to convert Jews, there has been next to no response. There are 2 reasons for this:

1. The Jehovah Witnesses are the wrong people to convert the Jews, due to being astray on the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant, which are central to the true "Hope of Israel" (Act. 28:20).

2. The Jehovah Witnesses' attempt to convert Jews was made at the wrong time in history. The word of prophecy teaches that it will not happen until the end time, prior to the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:28-32). This will be the effect of the ministry of Elijah and the witnesses (Mal. 4:5-6). Finally, when the fullness of time comes, when Messiah comes to Zion, and turns away ungodliness from Jacob, all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:25-27).

SOME POPULATION STATISTICS

Some say 144,000 is too large a number to take literally as applying to Jews converted and saved during the end time epoch. In 2002 Israel's population was around 6½ million and about 3% (195,000) professed to be Christians. The majority of these would of course be Arabs, not Israelis.

However, it is not hard to believe that in the end time when Israel's population will be greater, and the Elijah ministry, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit takes place, that thousands will turn to the Lord and qualify for sealing. John the Baptist came in the Spirit and power of Elijah and had a big impact on the Jewish population. When the Holy Spirit was poured out in the first century, 3,000 Jews were converted in one day (Act. 2:41). A little later on we read that the number of believers was about 5,000 (4:4), and this number kept increasing.

Supposing there were 9 million Jews living in Israel in the end time. 144,000 would represent less than 2% - far less than the one tenth referred to in Isa. 6:13. According to Zech. 13:8, two thirds of Israel's population will be killed by invading forces. This would involve the death of 6 million, reducing a 9 million population to 3 million. Zech. 13:8 also says the remaining one third will go through a purging process, further reducing the number. If half of what remains goes into exile (Zech. 14:2), the remnant would be a very small percentage of the original population indeed, and 144,000 would be a small percentage of that.

According to these figures, more Jews will be killed in the end time great tribulation period than the 6 million killed during the 4 years holocaust of the second world war. This would not be surprising because Jesus warned that the great tribulation will be the worst in the whole of history, and were it not for the elect and the second coming, all would perish (Matt. 24:21-22). Also were it not for the Lord preserving a small remnant, the end time holocaust would result in total annihilation of the nation, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Compare Isa. 1:9.

AN IDENTITY PROBLEM?

Another reason why some reject the literal application of the 12 tribes is because the identity of each tribe is not known today. This may be true as far as man is concerned, but man is not asked to seal the 144,000 in Rev. 7! Angels of God do the sealing. God has obviously preserved the identity of each tribe because they are mentioned in Scripture as being in

existence in the end time, and established in the land during the millennial reign of Christ (Ezk. 48). Specific families involving the descendants of David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei are also referred to in Zech. 12:12-14, all existing in the land when Messiah comes

In recent times, DNA testing involving the sampling of Y chromosomes, has discovered a genetic marker which identifies Jewish priests belonging to the tribe of Levi. If man can do this, think what God can do! Time will no doubt prove that genetic markers distinguish the other tribes as well.

Another objection by some is that the 12 tribes listed in Rev. 7 are not listed in order of birth. The order in which they are enumerated is found nowhere else, and is peculiar in the way in which the sons of different mothers, wives and concubines are mingled together. However, too much should not be made of the fact that the order of names is found nowhere else. It is by no means standard practice in Scripture to list the names in the same specific order. Take for example the list of names presented in Gen. 49, Deu. 33, Ezk. 48 along with Rev. 7. All four are different from each other:

Gen. 49	Deu. 33	Ezk. 48	Rev. 7
Reuben	Reuben	Dan	Judah
Simeon	Judah	Asher	Reuben
Levi	Levi	Naphtali	Gad
Judah	Benjamin	Manasseh + Ephraim	Asher
Zebulun	Joseph	Reuben	Naphtali
Issachar	Zebulun	Judah	Manasseh
Dan	Issachar	Levi	Simeon
Gad	Gad	Benjamin	Levi
Asher	Dan	Simeon	Issachar
Naphtali	Naphtali	Issachar	Zebulun
Joseph	Asher	Zebulun	Joseph
Benjamin		Gad	Benjamin

To be consistent, those who conclude that the tribes in Rev. 7 cannot literally be Israel's tribes because they are not listed in order of birth, would also have to conclude that the same applies in Deu. 33 and Ezk. 48. A better conclusion is that those in Rev. 7 are not listed in order of birth because their standing in God through the new spiritual birth in Christ does not depend on the old natural birth of the flesh! There is equality in Christ. There are no legal prerogatives or priorities based on law. Such legalistic order has been dispelled by grace, and the jumbling up of the tribes could very well be designed to show this. Every semblance of legal prerogative has been obliterated apart from Judah's place of honour.

The major differences in the lists of the tribes are:

1. Dan is omitted in Rev. 7.
2. The tribe of Simeon is omitted in Deu. 33.
3. Although Reuben was the first born and is mentioned first in Gen. 49 and Deu. 33, Judah is mentioned first in Rev. 7 and Dan is mentioned first in Ezk. 48.

4. The tribe of Levi was not given a specific land inheritance (Deu. 18:1-2. Josh. 13:14). Had the Levites been given a land inheritance, this would have resulted in 13 tribes instead of 12. Levi ministered as God's priesthood to the 12 tribes, and was therefore separate, distinct and superior. Being catalogued along with the other tribes in Rev. 7, does not mean that the tribe of Levi will have the same land inheritance in the kingdom. Rev. 7 has nothing to do with land inheritance. It simply relates to the tribes from which Israelites will be sealed in the end time prior to the great tribulation.

According to Ezk. 48, 12 tribes will each receive the same sized strip of land extending from the eastern boundary westwards to the Mediterranean sea. The tribe of Levi is not one of these 12, but will, as in Old Testament times, have a smaller, separate land inheritance in which a temple will be situated. As in Old testament times, the Levites will be used in the service of the temple, ministering to the mortal worshippers.

5. The 5th difference is that the tribe of Manasseh is mentioned in Rev. 7 but there is no mention of his brother Ephraim. However, reference is made to his father Joseph (v8) and no doubt refers to Ephraim. Ephraim was Joseph's legal heir and his name was named upon him (Gen. 48:8-20. Ezk. 37:16-19). Both Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned in Ezk. 48 among the 12 tribes to whom land inheritance is given.

12,000 FROM EACH TRIBE

The exact number of 12,000 from each tribe is regarded by some as too artificial, and therefore they cannot accept that the 144,000 is a literal number. It is felt that it is not conceivable that 12 tribes would all produce exactly 12,000 each.

This is human reasoning at work. It is not a question of the tribes producing 12,000 each, but of God sovereignly selecting 12,000 from each. If, for reasons He alone understands, He wants exactly 12,000 from each tribe, then 12,000 it shall be! The same applies to His city which measures 12,000 furlongs, the length, breadth and height being equal. Why? Because He sovereignly selected those measurements according to His own will and purpose. In the last of Moses' battles, 12,000 men were chosen; 1,000 from each tribe, to do battle with the Midianites (Num. 31:1-6). If selecting exactly 12,000 from each tribe is to be regarded as too artificial if taken literally, could not the same be said about selecting exactly 1,000 from each tribe? If Moses could, at God's instruction, select 1,000 from each tribe, could not God select 12,000 from each tribe?

We read in 1 Kng. 19 that in Elijah's day God had reserved for Himself 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal. But who would question or raise doubts about God selecting such an exact number? The same applies to the 1,000 years reign of Christ. Why not 998 years or 1002? Can we really believe and accept such a precise number literally?

Those whom Jesus fed on one occasion numbered exactly 5,000 (Matt. 14:21). Not long after, he fed another company which numbered exactly 4,000 (Matt. 15:38). Those who were converted and baptized on the day of Pentecost numbered 3,000 and shortly afterwards reference is made to 5,000 believers. Can we really believe such precise rounded numbers? Maybe not if uneven numbers were never given in Scripture. But such is not the case. Scripture abounds with uneven numbers.

In Josh. 8:25 we read that the whole population of Ai killed by Israel was 12,000. Judg. 21:10 records that Israel sent 12,000 men to smite Jabesh-gilead. Ahithophel also wanted to choose 12,000 men to pursue David (2 Sam. 17:1). And Solomon had 12,000 horsemen (1 Kng. 4:26). Can we really believe that all these references to 12,000 were literally true? Most do not have a problem taking such a precise number literally.

DAN IS ABSENT

Another reason for not taking the 12 tribes literally is because the tribe of Dan is omitted completely from the list. It is said that it is

inconceivable that one of the tribes would not be mentioned if the literal tribes were involved. The omission is therefore regarded as proof that the tribes are not to be taken literally.

However, the tribe of Simeon is not mentioned in the tribal list in Deu. 33. Do we therefore conclude it didn't exist? No! Because it clearly did exist. Do we reject all the other tribes and regard them as symbolical not literal? No! Because they were clearly literal.

We may not be able to understand why there is no reference to anyone being sealed from the tribe of Dan, but this is what the record says and we should accept it without trying to rationalize it away by rejecting all the tribes. Since no reason is given in the inspired record, any explanation offered can only be conjecture and therefore tentative.

A common explanation is that since Dan lapsed into apostasy at an early stage in Israel's history (Judg. 18. 1 Kng. 12:29-30), his name was blotted out. On the basis of Dan being referred to as a serpent in Gen. 49:17, Irenaeus believed anti-Christ would spring from Dan and for that reason the tribe is excluded in Rev. 7. But this cannot be sustained, because in subsequent Old Testament history there is no elimination of Dan (2 Sam. 24:2. 2 Chr. 2:14). Also, other tribes lapsed into idolatry besides Dan but were not eliminated. As we have seen in Ezk. 48, Dan is not eliminated from the list of tribes restored in the land of Israel after Christ's return. In fact, Dan is first on the list (v1-2)! Rev. 21:12 says the names of the 12 tribes are written on the 12 gates of the holy city, new Jerusalem. Ezk. 48:31 says the names of the 12 tribes will also be written on the 12 gates of the city "Yahweh Shamah," and Dan is mentioned by name as one of them.

Another explanation is that the names of the 12 tribes, when put together, especially in the order of birth, can be made to form a message of hope, confidence and blessing. But the name Dan which means judgement, does not fit into this optimistic picture in Revelation, which is concerned with blessing, not judgement or rejection. However, judgement forms an integral part of the book of Revelation, and it would not be inappropriate to include Dan in a sentence if the tribe was present.

In the final analysis, it may be that the tribe of Dan is not included simply because at the time of the end, when the sealing takes place, there will be no one living in the land of Israel belonging to that tribe. No one from that tribe would therefore form part of the "first fruits."

The tribe of Dan, situated in the extreme north of Israel in Old Testament times, was taken by the Assyrians (2 Kng. 15:29) into captivity to territories far to the north of Israel, and could have, over the centuries,

migrated further and further north into the remote recesses of Russia. Of all the 12 tribes, Dan seemed to be either content to stay in captivity or was too far away to return, for there is no mention of the tribe in the genealogies of 1 Chr. 4 to 8. Certain prophecies teach that a special migration of Israelites to their land from the north will take place at Christ's return, and it seems that it will not be until then that the tribe will be represented in the land as we have seen in Ezk. 48:1. Some of the prophecies which refer specifically to a migration of Israelites from the north are: Jer. 3:18. 23:8. 31:8. Zech. 2:6.

It is important to realize that the list of tribes given in Rev. 7 has nothing to do with land inheritance. Nothing is said in this chapter about the land being divided between the tribes. It simply relates to those who are sealed. Although no reference is made to anyone from the tribe of Dan being sealed, we know from Ezk. 48 that the tribe will definitely be one of those that will ultimately inherit a portion of the land of Israel when Messiah comes.

TWO GROUPS IN REVELATION 7.

As mentioned earlier, 2 groups of saints are referred to in Rev. 7: the 144,000 and an innumerable multitude. John "heard" the number 144,000 and then "saw" an innumerable number which no man could number.

Some read this to mean that John heard one thing but saw something quite different. Instead of a precisely counted 144,000, he saw a countless multitude which was drawn, not exclusively from the nation or tribes of Israel, but from "all nations, tribes and tongues" (v9). It has therefore been concluded that the 144,000 is symbolic of the multitude which no man could number, and therefore the expression "12 tribes of Israel" is to be understood in a non-nationalistic way.

However, a clear distinction is made in Rev. 7 between the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude. It is not reasonable or logical to suggest that the precise and countable number of 144,000 is represented as a multitude that cannot be numbered. If it cannot be numbered, why refer to it as 144,000 in the first place? 144,000 can be numbered. In Moses' day the tribes of Israel were numbered and the total was 603,550 (Num. 1:46). In David's day the soldiers were numbered and the total was 1,300,000 (2 Sam. 24:9).

If the 144,000 consists of an innumerable multitude of believers from all nations and tribes in the earth, why refer to such a multitude as only

144,000, and why limit it to only 12 tribes?

The simple truth of the matter is, as Rev. 7:9 points out, that the innumerable multitude involves “all nations and tribes.” This would involve hundreds of tribes, and the 12 tribes of Israel are included among them. (Compare the universal application of the word “tribes” in Rev. 1:7: “Every eye shall see him and those who pierced him; all tribes of the earth shall wail because of him”). In this particular vision John did not and could not see the 144,000 as a separate and distinct body of people because they were part of the innumerable multitude. As has already been pointed out: in order for John to know the number of his own fellow countrymen involved in the multitude, he had to be told. He did not see the 144,000 as a separate distinct unit, but “heard the number.” Had he not heard the angel declare that 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel were sealed, he would not have known at that stage how many of them formed part of the innumerable multitude.

Scripture clearly teaches that Abraham’s “seed” in the ultimate will consist of both Jews and Gentiles who belong to Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). This body of people will be an innumerable multitude and will constitute “the Israel of God” in the true spiritual sense (Gal. 6:16).

In Christ, Jewish and Gentile believers become one body, not two, and John saw this united body in vision, consisting of Jews taken out of the tribes of Israel, and Gentiles taken out of their various nations and tribes. (The word “of ” in Rev. 7:4, 9 means “out of ”).

But belonging to Christ does not destroy the national or tribal identity of a Jew. Even though a Jew such as Paul is “sealed” with God’s seal, the apostle made it clear that he was still “an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom. 11:1). But he stressed that physical connections such as these were of no advantage without Christ (Plp. 3). Even Jesus himself, in spite of his resurrection, ascension and glorification, has not lost his genetic connection with the tribe of Judah, and his belonging to it is emphasized in Scripture (Rev. 5:5. Heb. 7:14).

One commentator points out that a comparison between what is said about the innumerable multitude in Rev. 7 and the 144,000 in Rev. 14, reveals that both are depicted as being before the throne and with the Lamb, singing a song of praise. On this basis he argues that the same class of people is involved and not two different, distinct or separate groups.

It is true, as already stated, that believing Jews and Gentiles become one body in Christ, and the innumerable multitude consists of both. Because they share the same faith and hope, both are naturally depicted sharing the same reward, privileges and destiny. But this does not alter or

disannul the fact that the Jews originally came from the 12 tribes of Israel and the Gentiles came from other tribes and nations. Those who came from the 12 tribes of Israel number 144,000, and the number of those taken from all the other tribes and nations in the earth is not revealed. It is therefore stated as “a great multitude which no man could number.”

It is important to note that there is nothing stated or suggested in Rev. 7 to the effect that the 144,000 are chosen on account of their fleshly descent from Abraham. Neither is it stated that those in the other nations are chosen on account of Gentile ancestry or other natural connections. There is certainly no hint of a partition wall dividing the 144,000 from the multitude. To imagine that if the 12 tribes are taken literally, results in creating a division between Jewish and Gentile believers, is to read something into the text that is not there.

FIRST FRUITS AND VIRGINS

In seeking to cover the different interpretations of the 144,000, one other view should be mentioned. Some suggest that the 144,000 being “first fruits,” represent the Jewish and Gentile saints who will be redeemed and immortalized at the beginning of the millennium, and the innumerable multitude refers to those who will be given immortality at the end of the millennium. The problems with this view are:

1. The 144,000 only come from the 12 tribes of Israel and do not include Gentiles.

2. The innumerable multitude from all tribes, including the tribes of Israel, come out of the great tribulation (v13-14), not the peaceful millennial reign of Christ.

3. 1 Cor. 15:22-23 says the divine order of immortality is: “Christ the first fruits; afterward those who are Christ's at his coming.” Those who are redeemed at Christ's coming are not the first fruits as far as immortality is concerned. Christ is!

In view of the fact that “first fruits” in Jam. 1:18 refers to those who were converted during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the first century, suggests that the same expression as applied to the 144,000 could signify those converted in Israel during the end time outpouring which precedes the second coming. Compare Rom. 16:5 where Epaenetus, the first convert in Asia, is referred to as “the first fruit of Asia to Christ.” Also in 1 Cor. 16:15 the house of Stephanas is referred to as “the first fruits of Achaia” due to being the first converts in the region.

Rev. 14:4 says the 144,000 “are they who were not defiled with

women; for they are virgins.” The “women” probably refers to the harlot and her daughters in Rev. 17 which represents a world-wide apostate church. This system, which rejects the monotheistic God of Israel and has created its own triune god which it calls a “blessed mystery,” is appropriately depicted with the word mystery on her forehead in Rev. 17:5. Various evangelicals from this system have tried to convert Jews into believing in their trinity, and other false doctrines, and have had a measure of success. Not so with the 144,000! As a virgin keeps herself pure for her bridegroom and refuses to be corrupted by others, so the 144,000 hold fast to the truth as it is in Christ and refuse to be corrupted by false teaching (see 1 Cor. 11:1-4). The end time Holy Spirit ministry will contend for the One God of Israel and the true hope of Israel, and will be opposed to the false doctrines of trinitarianism.

If it can be accepted that the innumerable multitude which comes through the great tribulation includes the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel, it is evident that the 144,000 go through that tribulation period. As mentioned earlier, the 4 winds of Rev. 7 could be linked with the 4 horses in Rev. 6, which run parallel with the signs given by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy which cause the great tribulation. If so - if the 4 winds represent the destructive forces which cause the tribulation, then the sealing must take place prior to the tribulation period.

The 144,000 do not therefore represent the total number of Israelites saved since Old Testament times, but individuals converted in the end time period. If the 144,000 represented the total number of Israelites saved over the whole period of Israel’s history, the tribe of Dan would be represented. We would at least expect Samson, who belonged to the tribe of Dan (Judg. 13:2) to be included because he is listed in Heb. 11:32 as one of those whose faith pleased God.

STOOD BEFORE THE THRONE

The question put in Rev. 6:15: “Who is able to stand?” is answered in 7:9 which says the great multitude “stood before the throne and before the Lamb.” They stand before the throne not because they were great or mighty or rich and powerful, like the kings and rulers in 6:15. No! It is not through any human power, position or resource, but through the blood of the Lamb.

What a contrast between those in 6:15 and the redeemed in chapter 7. The mighty men of the world seek to hide in dens and rocks of the mountains, whereas the redeemed stand in joy and thanksgiving before the

full blaze of divine glory. Those of the world frantically and fearfully cry “fall on us and hide us,” but the redeemed cry out with a loud voice, “salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb” (7:10). Those of the world suffer the awful wrath of the Lamb, but the redeemed have every tear wiped away, and serve God day and night in His temple.

WHITE ROBES

Rev. 7:9 says those who stood before the throne are “clothed with white robes.” In verse 13 the question is asked: “Who are these clothed in white robes and whence have they come?” The answer is then given: “These are those who come through great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Angels are also clothed in white robes, so it is not surprising that the saints will also be clothed with the same, in view of the fact that they will be made equal with them. (See notes on pages 38 to 42 on the reference in Rev. 4:4 to the 24 elders being “clothed in white raiment.”)

The white robes worn by the saints in the future will be literal and physical, as in the case of the angels’ robes, and will signify righteousness, purity and immortality.

However, in a certain spiritual sense, the saints are clothed in white during their mortal life. Their old sinful life is like unclean filthy rags, and as a result of repentance and conversion, they put off these rags and put on Christ and his righteousness, which, spiritually speaking, is like being clothed with pure white garments in preparation for the wedding (Rev. 3:18. Job 29:14. Isa. 61:10).

It is therefore the duty and responsibility of each saint, to keep the garments clean and pure by living a holy and sanctified life. This involves not becoming a servant to sin, or conforming to the world, or allowing the pressures of tribulation and persecution to cause us to renounce our faith and commitment. Those who revert to sin and worldly ways and fail to be an overcomer of trials and tribulations, cause their garment to become “spotted” (soiled), “wrinkled” (creased) and “defiled” (Eph. 5:27. Jam. 1:27. Jude v23. Rev. 3:4). A bridegroom would not be very impressed to meet his bride on the wedding day wearing a garment that was creased and covered with dirty spots! A bride who truly loves her bridegroom will be diligent to prepare herself to look her best for the wedding day, and will not have a casual or slack attitude! (Rev. 19:7. Ps. 45:13).

As in the case of fire purifying gold by burning out the impurities; fiery trials and tribulations are also designed to purge out weaknesses and

purify, and will do so in those who respond positively to them. As Job said: “When God has finished testing me I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). Also see Dan. 11:35. 12:10. 1 Pet. 1:7. 4:12. Jam. 1:2-4.

The fact that the robes of those in Rev. 7 are washed and made white through tribulation indicates they have a positive response to their fiery trials. Such a response is inspired by Christ who is the ultimate example of this. He resisted the opposition of sin and sinners to the point of shedding his own blood. The pain and pressure of the trial and tribulation of the cross did not cause him to lose courage and faith. He was an overcomer and through the shedding of his blood he became clothed in white, and so shall all who belong to him.

PALMS IN THEIR HANDS

Regarding the palms in the hands of the great multitude clothed in white: the Greek word for palm is “phoinix” and it only occurs here and in Jn. 12:13 where reference is made to people waving palms in their hands as Jesus entered Jerusalem, crying: “Hosanna (“save, we pray”): blessed is the king of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord.”

When John saw the multitude in Rev. 7 with palm branches, crying out “salvation to our God ...,” his mind may have flashed back to the other incident. (The words “save, we pray...” cried out during that incident come from a Passover psalm in Ps. 118:25). The palm waving that took place as Jesus entered Jerusalem led to him wearing a crown of thorns and suffering the ignominy and humiliation of the cross as the Passover lamb. But here in Rev. 7, Jesus stands before the throne of glory, crowned with honour. The adulation he received during his first coming was a dress rehearsal of his second coming (Zech. 9:9-10).

In Lev. 23:39-44 palm branches are mentioned among others as being used to make booths or shelters to live in during the feast of tabernacles (Neh. 8:15). This annual event commemorated deliverance from Egypt. The palm branches therefore, had an association with salvation and deliverance. The feast was celebrated for 7 days, at the conclusion of which, the next day, (the 8th) was a Sabbath. Palms therefore signified salvation and deliverance, rest and peace, celebration and festivity. It was a time of great joy and gladness (Lev. 23:40. Deu. 16:14).

In 1 Macc. 13:51 we read that as a result of the Jews removing the yoke of the Gentiles and their pollutions, they entered Jerusalem “with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs.” The Jews made it a law to

commemorate this victory with palm branches and joy every year, and it could be regarded as a type of the end of the times of the Gentiles.

According to Zech. 14:16 mortal representatives of the nations will go up annually to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and palm branches may be involved. The immortal saints will not of course need palm branches to build booths. He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them, for they will dwell with him in his temple-city where “neither the sun beat upon them, nor any heat” (Rev. 7:15-16). Palms are associated with an oasis - a place of shade and refreshing from the sun in the hot wilderness (Ex. 15:27. Num. 33:9). The city of God is a garden city - an oasis - paradise. Is this where the palm branches come from? For the great multitude in Rev. 7 to all have palm branches would require a huge quantity!

We read in 1 Kng. 6:29-36 that cherubim, lions, palm trees and open flowers were carved on the inside and outside of the walls of Solomon’s temple. Being a type of the city-temple of God which is heaven itself, suggests it consists of palm trees and flowers. The same could apply to the references to palm trees in Ezk. chapters 41 to 42 in relation to the temple for the mortal worshippers during the millennium.

Other references to the palm tree are in Jer. 10:5 where it is referred to as an “upright” tree, and Ps. 92:12 where it is stated that “the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.” In view of this, it is fitting that the saints who are regarded by the Lord as being upright and righteous, should be seen in Rev. 7 planted in the house of the Lord, flourishing in immortality, with palm branches in their hands, no doubt waving them in the spirit as branches of the tree wave in the wind.

There is nothing said in Scripture to suggest the saints will be stoical. It would be a mistake to imagine them standing rigid, frigid and motionless, lacking emotion with the palm branches hanging in their hand. There will be joy unspeakable - rapturous joy and great excitement and the branches will be waved vigorously. This is suggested by the fact that they cry out with a loud voice (v.10). This is another of a number of references in Revelation to a proclamation of praise in a loud enthusiastic voice.

SALVATION TO OUR GOD AND TO THE LAMB

Though the great multitude consists of every tongue, it cries with a single voice saying: “Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and the lamb.” This means: “Let us acknowledge and ascribe praise to

God and the Lamb for the salvation which they have accomplished.” Cp. Ps. 3:8. Jer. 3:23.

Those in the great multitude in Rev. 7:10 are clearly the recipients of salvation and acknowledge both the Father and son for it. The Father conceived it, took the initiative and set it in motion by causing Mary to conceive and produce the Saviour. And His son Jesus put it into effect by living an obedient and sinless life, finally offering himself up as a sacrifice for sin. The Father then consummated it by raising him from the dead and giving him the power to raise all who belong to him.

Because those in Rev. 7:10 who cry out “salvation ...” are those in v14 who come through the great tribulation, some have interpreted the word salvation to mean being preserved during the tribulation and spared from death inflicted by man. However, it is more likely to relate to salvation from sin and the death it inflicts. Salvation merely from the great tribulation would only be a temporary salvation. Salvation from sin and death is an eternal salvation. Cp. 12:10. 19:1.

At the first coming of Christ, those with palm branches cried out “save we pray.” But at the second coming, “save we pray” will become “thou hast saved us,” for the salvation sought at the first coming will be accomplished. The proclamation of praise in Rev. 7:10 takes place at the end of the 1260 days’ tribulation in the city-temple of God as the following verses reveal.

AND ALL THE ANGELS SAID AMEN

Verse 11: “And all the angels who were standing in a circle around the throne, surrounding the elders and the 4 living creatures, prostrated themselves before the throne, and touched the ground with their foreheads, worshipping God with these words: amen ...” These are the angels of 5:11 who numbered 10,000 x 10,000, and thousands of thousands, who sang “worthy is the Lamb ...”

We therefore see in Rev. 7:9-11 a multitude of saints who come out of the great tribulation joined by an innumerable host of angels, involving many millions, joining together in praise and worship. As the innumerable company of saints who “stood,” started to shout out their praise and thanksgiving, the innumerable company of angels “fell down” in worship. While the saints stood praising, saying “salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb,” the angels prostrated themselves and worshipped, saying “amen ...”

As has already been mentioned previously, “amen” simply means: so

be it, sure, surely, true, it is truth, verily. It occurs 10 times in the book of Revelation. In saying amen, the angels give their assent and endorsement to the praise given to God by the saints. As we know, there is rejoicing in heaven among the angels when a sinner repents and reaches out for salvation. So it is not surprising that they say “amen,” no doubt loudly and enthusiastically, when a multitudinous company of repentant sinners join their company and give praise to God for that salvation, when they are made immortal and become equal, and wear the same white robes!

The angels agree emphatically with the redeemed saints’ ascription of salvation to God and the Lamb. However, although the angels’ function is to be ministering spirits to help the heirs of the kingdom on their journey to that salvation, they are not praised for it. Salvation is a joint effort between the Father and son, and they alone are praised for it. There is certainly no reference anywhere to the Holy Spirit being praised. The Holy Spirit inspires and empowers the praise in the glorified saints and angels, each of whom constitute a holy spirit.

BLESSING AND GLORY AND WISDOM

Not only do the angels consent to the praise and thanksgiving of the saints, they then add more of their own, and such a scene should stir our hearts and get us tuned for this future experience. The worship of the angels contains a seven-fold ascription of praise. Seven features of adulation are involved:-

“The blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honour, and the power, and the might.”

This ascription of praise is given “to our God for ever and ever. Amen.” Significantly enough, the new song sung in Rev. 5:12 by the 4 living creatures and 24 elders to Christ, for the salvation he secured by his own blood, almost involves the same 7 features. (Each word however, does not have the definite article as in Rev. 7:12). Only 2 words are different. Instead of giving “thanks-giving” and “might,” Rev. 5:12 has “riches” and “strength.” But the other 5, although given in a different order are the same.

It is possible that “thanksgiving” is offered by the angels to God but not Christ, because not being redeemed by his blood, they do not

REV. 7:12	REV. 5:12
Blessing	Power
Glory	Riches
Wisdom	Wisdom
Thanksgiving	Strength
Honour	Honour
Power	Glory
Might	Blessing

have grounds for thanksgiving.

WHO ARE THESE?

After the angels surrounding the 24 elders and 4 living creatures had offered their 7-fold ascription of praise, and while they were still probably in the prostrate position of worship, one of the elders spoke to John (possibly the same one who spoke to him in 5:5).

Verse 13 says the elder “answered,” and said to John: “Who are these who are clothed in white robes and whence came they?” The word “answered” generally implies a response to a question or comment. But there is no reference to John asking a question or passing a comment. However, this does not necessarily mean that he did not have questions in his mind in relation to what he had seen and heard concerning the multitude clothed in white. If so, the elder would be aware of such questions, and if the question he put to John, which led to the answer, was the question in John’s mind, it is appropriate that the record should say: “And one of the elders answered.”

In passing, it is worth pointing out that if, as some believe, both the 24 elders and the multitude clothed in white represent the church, we would be faced with the most unlikely situation of a member of the church having to inform John, an eminent apostle of the church, that the multitude clothed in white consists of members of the church.

In the throne-room scene up until Rev. 7, John had not actually seen any redeemed and glorified saints. Even those in Rev. 5:13, he only heard but did not see. As far as Rev. 7:9 is concerned, the impression is given that one minute the saints are not in the vision and the next minute they are.

As we shall see, John did not know who the multitude clothed in white represented or from whence they came. But, the fact that he says: “I beheld ... a great multitude ... of all nations, tribes, people and tongues,” indicates he knew they were from different nations which spoke different languages. If so, how did he know this? Were there different coloured skins and different facial features?

If so, this would indicate that immortals will retain their national and tribal features, which you would expect if they are going to be glorified versions of what they were, and if they are going to be recognized by family and friends. But this would not include tattoos, any form of cutting, mutilation or amputation, stunted growth or stretched necks and lips etc. All colours of skin: red and yellow, brown, black and white will be in the

kingdom, but all will be covered by a white robe.

We learn from the elder's question ("Who are these?") that it is important from God's point of view to know and understand the significance of what unfolds in the revelation. Failure to understand one part can result in failing to understand other parts. As we read through Revelation, we need to be saying: "What does this mean? What is the significance of that?" And if we don't know the answer, our response should be the same as John's. We should address heaven and say: "Lord, Thou knowest," and ask for help. Scripture assures us that if we ask we shall receive. If we seek, we shall find. If we ask not, we receive not.

We read in v14 that John's response to the elder's question was: "Sir ('kurios': my Lord) thou knowest." This either means: "I don't know," or "I'm not sure," or "you tell me," or "I would like to know." C.p. Ezk. 37:3. Zech. 4:5, 13.

It may seem strange that John did not know that those standing before the throne clothed in white, were fellow Christians. But if they were end time Christians who go through the great tribulation, he would not recognize any faces. Being dressed the same as angels, John may have even momentarily wondered if they could be angels. The only difference or distinguishing feature between them and the angels was that they were standing with palms in their hands, while the angels prostrated themselves and had no palm branches. (We do not know if angels have different skin colours).

Although the angel knew the identity of the multitude, there were possibly other things in Revelation pertaining to the end time, that he and the other angels did not know and would have to wait for the end time to unfold. Only Father God is omniscient, and angels can only know what He reveals to them. For example: angels did not know the day or hour of Christ's second coming (Matt. 24:36). They did not know the contents of the scroll sealed with 7 seals (Rev. 5:3). And the fact that they had a desire to look into the gospel (1 Pet. 1:12) indicates they had some learning to do in relation to the full import of it.

THOSE WHO COME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION

The elder told John that those clothed in white are they who have been through, or come out of great tribulation. Coming out of the tribulation doesn't mean avoiding and escaping it, but surviving it, as in Jer. 30:7 where reference is made to Israel being saved "out of" (not "from") the time of tribulation.

The saints in the end time will not be spared from the tribulation, but saved out of it, either by being sustained and protected through it, or resurrected at the end of it. Either way, the words “salvation to our God” would apply. The words of Jesus relating to the great tribulation are relevant:- “Some of you will be put to death, but not a hair of your head will be lost” (Lk. 21:16-18).

It is stated in Act. 4:22 that “we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God,” and the first century Christians certainly experienced that. Waves of persecution have crashed over the Christian community at different stages of history over the centuries. The apostle John, being in exile for his faith, refers to himself as being “in tribulation” (Rev. 1:9). The church at Smyrna was told of an impending “tribulation 10 days” (Rev. 2:10). And the church at Thyatira was warned that all fornicators would be cast into “great tribulation” if they did not repent (Rev. 2:22).

During his earthly ministry, Jesus warned that a “great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be,” would occur prior to his coming (Matt. 24:21). During this period, saints will be afflicted and killed, and there will be “great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in different places, great and terrifying sights and signs in the sky, and great distress in the land of Israel as God’s wrath falls upon the nation” (Lk. 21:11-19, 23).

Being a tribulation such as has never been before in history and will never again be paralleled in history, means it will be unprecedented in magnitude. Putting it into the modern vernacular: it will be the “mother” of all tribulations - the tribulation of tribulations.

The definite article is used in Rev. 7:14, making it “the great tribulation,” indicating that it is not referring to tribulation in general, but the final tribulation of unprecedented magnitude referred to by Jesus, which occurs immediately before his return.

Another reason for believing this, as already pointed out, is because in its context in Rev. 7, the tribulation seems to be caused by the 4 winds. These winds can be linked with the 4 horses in Rev. 6, which run parallel with the first 4 signs given by Jesus of his return, which relate to the great tribulation period (Matt. 24).

When the tribulation comes, the joy and glory set before us in the vision of the saints standing before the throne of God will help to inspire endurance, as the joy set before Jesus inspired him to endure the cross.

So then, the words: “they who come out of the great tribulation,” answer in the affirmative the question put by Jesus in Lk. 18:8: “When the

son of man comes, shall he find the faith on earth?” The answer is: yes he shall! See Matt. 24:22 which confirms this by saying the tribulation will be shortened for the elect’s sake. Verse 31 also refers to the elect living at the time of the second coming and being gathered up by the angels. Also see verses 40-41, 46-47, 25:10.

During the tribulation period when great pressure will be applied to the church, the faith of many will be tested. Those who weaken and surrender to the forces of evil will sin and cause their garment to be spotted and soiled. Their failure to let righteousness prevail and become overcomers, will result in failure to enter the kingdom. For others, whose garments were already spotted and creased before the tribulation, due to lack of commitment caused by sin and worldliness, the tribulation will be a challenge and a shake-up, hopefully shaking them out of spiritual apathy and lethargy. The tribulation will particularly stir and motivate those who know that its duration is 42 months, and that this period may be “shortened” as the result of an early return of Christ! Such knowledge and conviction will have a positive effect, resulting in people laying aside the sins that so easily beset us, and making a stronger commitment, washing their robes as it were, and making them white.

As pointed out before, “the blood of the Lamb” is the supreme example of faith, courage and commitment under the pressure and stress of trial and tribulation, which the cross unquestionably involved. Through the shedding of his blood, atonement was made for sin, resulting in us being washed and cleansed of sin and being clothed with his righteousness. But it is incumbent upon all to be inspired by the blood of Christ to maintain righteousness under the trials and pressures of unrighteousness.

THEREFORE THEY ARE BEFORE THE THRONE

“**T**herefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in His temple, and He who sits on the throne shall dwell among them.” The word “therefore” means “for this reason” and is saying that due to washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb, they will stand before the throne of God and serve Him in His temple. Our future hinges on our response. Failure to deal with the spots of sin by repenting and confessing; results in no forgiveness and no cleansing, as is implied in 1 Jn. 1:7-9: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we

deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Those in Rev. 7:14 who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are clearly those who are in the habit of repenting of their sins and confessing them to God, determined to keep in fellowship with God. Such people know that although they were clothed at conversion with Christ’s righteousness, and that salvation is by grace, not human works and effort; that this does not mean that no work or effort of any kind is required in God’s service. It is clearly stated in Eph. 2:8-10 that although we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, that we are nevertheless expected to do good works. In fact, it is stated that the whole purpose of being created new creatures in Christ is “for good works.” Such good works relate to walking in righteousness according to the Spirit and not the flesh, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Such works however cannot earn or deserve salvation for it is a free gift. To earn salvation would require living a sinless life like Jesus. No one else can do this due to the weakness of the flesh. Good works on our part therefore are not to earn salvation but to show our appreciation for the salvation given as a gift. Lack of good works shows lack of appreciation, which results in the garment of salvation being spotted by sin causing rejection. The importance of good works is conveyed in Rev. 19:8 where the clean and white linen with which the church is clothed, is explained to signify “the righteous deeds of the saints.”

Another point in Rev. 7:15 that should not escape our attention is that those whose robes are washed and made white, are said to be “before the throne of God” which is explained to be “in His temple.” This is the same throne mentioned in v9-11 before which the innumerable multitude of saints are gathered along with hundreds of millions of angels. It is clearly not in the temple described in Ezk. 40 to 48 which would be far too small, and which is only for mortal worshippers during the millennium, not immortal worshippers. The “temple” in Rev. 7 is “the tabernacle of God,” i.e. heaven, “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2-3), which measures “12,000 furlongs” (v16) i.e. 1,500 miles or 2,400 kilometres. To accommodate hundreds of millions of angels and saints, the city would obviously have to be huge. It certainly is!

Reference to the saints serving God day and night in His temple refers to praising and worshipping Him, as in the case of the angels with whom they will be equal. There is no day or night in the city of God (Rev. 21:23). The words are to be understood from a human perspective, and

mean continuous; unceasing. The service of the saints in God's temple is not temporary, but eternal. They become an integral part of it like a pillar: "He who overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev. 3:12).

The statement in Rev. 7:15 that God "shall dwell among them" can be linked with Rev. 21:3, which, after saying the tabernacle of God comes to be with men, then says: "And he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

The Greek word "skenoō," translated "dwell," is related to the word translated "tabernacle" elsewhere, which relates to a tent. Strong says it means "tent or encamp, occupy, reside (as God did in the tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion)." Instead of saying "dwell among" in Rev. 7:15, some translations say "shelter them with His presence." The tabernacle in Old Testament times foreshadowed this. It was placed in the midst of Israel so that God could "dwell among them" (Ezk. 25:8. 29:46). Isa. 4:5-6 refers to the effect of God's presence upon Zion: "The Lord will create over every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud by day and the shining of flaming fire by night, for glory shall be spread over all as a covering and a canopy. It will be for a shade in the day time from the heat, and for a refuge and shelter from storm and rain."

NO MORE HUNGER AND THIRST

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.” These words are quoted from Isa. 49:10. It is implied here that during the tribulation some saints hunger and thirst, as did Elijah due to famine, but he did not die of hunger or thirst. As we have seen, famine in the end time is taught in Rev. 6:6-8 and implied in the reference in Rev. 7:1-3 to the wind blowing upon the earth and trees. Joel's prophecy, as pointed out earlier, refers to famine conditions in Israel in the end time. Also see Ezk. 34:29. Hunger and thirst may also be caused due to refusing to receive the mark of the beast. Such refusal results in not being able to buy and sell. Imprisonment would also lead to limited rations.

Should anyone think that the servants of God should never hunger and thirst, see: Matt. 4:2. Jn. 19:28 which refer to Jesus being hungry and thirsty during his trials. The apostle Paul often experienced hunger and

thirst: 1 Cor. 4:11. 2 Cor. 11:27. Plp. 4:12. During the wilderness wanderings, Israel ran out of both food and water as a test of their faith. The promise given by Jesus that: “He who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes on me shall never thirst” (Jn. 6:35. 4:14), have a spiritual significance. The words “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore” in Rev. 7:16 have a natural application.

NEITHER SHALL THE SUN LIGHT ON THEM

The word “light” (A.V.) does not mean “shine.” It means to alight upon; fall upon, or beat upon. The Greek word for light here is translated “fell” or “fall” many times in the New Testament. The Good News Bible has captured the sense of the statement by reading: “neither sun nor any scorching heat will burn them.”

The reference in Rev. 7:16 to the sun not beating down upon the saints, indicates that they will be exposed to the elements during the tribulation, causing discomfort. This may involve forced servitude in the fields or labour camps, or as fleeing fugitives in the wilderness.

The heat of the sun can also be given a metaphorical application, signifying tribulation and persecution (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21. Ps. 121:6-7). Examples of literal applications can be seen in Jonah 4:8. Matt. 20:12. Lk. 12:55. Jam. 1:11. Rev. 16:8-11.

After stating that the sun shall not beat upon them, Rev. 7:16 then adds the words “nor any heat,” implying that there are other forms of heat besides the sun that will cause suffering during the tribulation. A similar Greek word is translated “burned” in Heb. 6:8 and “fervent heat” in 2 Pet. 3:10, 12, both of which involve fire. In times past God’s servants have sometimes been subjected to fire by the enemy and many have been burned at the stake. See Dan. 3:27. Heb. 11:34. Dan. 11:33.

THE LAMB SHALL FEED AND LEAD THEM

The reason why the saints shall hunger and thirst no more is stated in this last verse: “For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Being “in the midst of the throne” indicates that Jesus is still in the same position that John first saw him (Rev. 5:6). It is because of his position that he has the power and authority to lead all who belong to him to living fountains of water. At the time of this vision, the saints also

“stood before the throne, and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9, 15), surrounded by the angels (v11).

The words “shall feed them” can be translated “shall shepherd them” or “shall tend them.” We have here another paradox! A lamb is a shepherd! As a shepherd cares for his sheep and sees to it that he leads them to good pastures and springs or streams of water, so also will Christ, “that great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20. 1 Pet. 2:25. 5:4. Jn. 10. v3: lead, v9: feed). As quoted earlier: “He shall make unto all people a banquet of rich food, a feast of well aged wine, of food rich and juicy, a feast of old wine well refined” (Isa. 25:6. Matt. 22:1-4. 26:29. Lk. 14:15. 12:37). Also see Ps. 23:1-2. Ezk. 34. Mic. 5:4.

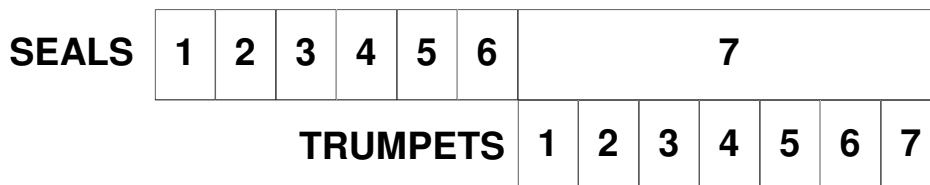
The “living fountains of waters” speaks of springs which perpetually bubble up with an endless unfailing supply of pure fresh water. This can be given a literal and symbolical application. For the literal application see: Joel 2:21-27. 3:18. Ezk. 47. Zech. 14:8. Rev. 22:1. For the symbolical application see: Jer. 17:13. Jn. 7:37-39. Isa. 55:1.

The last statement in Rev. 7:17: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,” speaks of a tender and affectionate gesture from a father. The “tears” that will be wiped away particularly relate to those shed during the great tribulation during which saints will be persecuted and martyred. Some of these saints are referred to in Rev. 6:10 crying out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” It will be at the time of the second coming and resurrection that their blood will be avenged, and their tears wiped away, as we read in Isa. 25:6: “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people shall He take away from all the earth” Rev. 21:4: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Matt. 5:4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”



**CHAPTER FIVE
REVELATION CHAPTER EIGHT**

Revelation chapter 8 commences with the opening of the seventh seal, and the opening of this seal introduces us to a series of 7 trumpets.



The seventh seal embraces the period of the trumpets. The trumpets seem to constitute the seventh seal as depicted in the diagram above.

It is obviously important to know what the connection is between the seventh seal and the 7 trumpets i.e. do the judgements of the trumpets come after the judgements of the seals, or do they relate to the same period?

As we have seen, the sixth seal in Rev. 6 introduced the great day of divine wrath that shall be manifested at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The seventh and last trumpet (11:18) takes us to the same time and event of the sixth seal, when God’s wrath comes, and the kingdom of the world becomes the Lord’s (11:15).

It seems evident from this that the preceding 6 trumpets, as with the 6 seals, both relate to events leading up to the second coming. This would mean that the 7 trumpets either recapitulate in different terms the judgements of the seals, or give extra information concerning events that take place during that period. Either way would mean that the seals and trumpets run parallel or concurrently with each other in the end time.

As we have seen, the seals can be linked with the Olivet prophecy, which Jesus gave in response to the question: “what shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?” And it is evident that the Olivet prophecy contains more than one sequence. Matt. 24:1-14 contains a prophecy covering the whole period to the end in broad outline, and the remainder of the chapter goes back and fills in further detail, reaffirming points already made, as for example the appearance of false Christs (v4-5, 24). The double sequence of the seals and trumpets can be compared with this.

The fact that the same signs and sequence of events in the Olivet

prophecy are presented in the 6 seals, are taken to mean that Jesus is saying to us: "I will help you to understand the revelation by providing an initial framework you will readily recognize from my Olivet prophecy."

The point was made in the preceding chapter that just because a section of the scroll was not unrolled and read each time a seal was removed, does not necessarily mean that the 4 horses and horsemen etc had nothing to do with the contents of the scroll. It was suggested that the scenes represented before John as each seal was broken, could be pictorial illustrations of the events contained in the scroll.

If however, as some believe, the scroll could not be opened and read and its contents revealed until all 7 of the seals were removed; it is unlikely that the 4 horses etc would be part of the contents of the scroll. And if this were the case, it would mean that the actual beginning of the prophecy of the scroll itself commences with the 7 trumpets, because they are introduced as a result of the seventh and last seal being removed.

If so, this would raise the question as to why the sequence of visions concerning the horses etc is given during the removal of the seals, if they do not form part of the message in the scroll. In answer to this it could be said, as has already been mentioned: being the same signs and sequence of events as the Olivet prophecy, they provide an initial framework that will be readily recognized, upon which the following trumpet prophecies can be based, or with which they can be paralleled. In other words, the 4 horses etc could be seen as visions inspired by the Spirit as the scroll is being opened, providing a basis and foretaste of what is to come.

This view is quite feasible, but which of the 2 views we take, both agree that the seals and trumpets fill out in more detail the Olivet prophecy, supplementing and complementing it with additional details of end time events.

This development could be likened to a fireworks display in which a giant rocket is shot into the air exploding into a great ball of fire. As it falls toward the earth, it bursts into a great number of balls of fire of various colours which, as they fall further toward earth, burst again into more balls of various colours. Sometimes, at the very end there is a climax involving a massive explosion with the greatest and most spectacular display of colours during the whole sequence. The telescope has also been used as an illustration. When one tube slides out, limited detail of an object can be seen. When the second tube slides out etc, more detail can be seen.

We have seen that as the seals of the scroll are removed, each one appears to be a judgement and we would expect that when we come to the

last seal, it would be the climax to the revelation. But instead, when the last seal is opened, the 7 trumpets appear on the scene which also represent a sequence of judgements. And the seventh trumpet, instead of being a climactic end to Revelation, is followed by 7 vial judgements. In each case, there is a series of 7 with the last being followed by a disclosure of more. In addition to this, there is a pause or parenthesis between the sixth and seventh in all 3 series.

SEALS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7																					
							TRUMPETS																				
							1	2	3	4	5	6	7														
														VIALS													
														1	2	3	4	5	6	7							

The parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seal has been considered in Rev. 7 relating to the sealing of the 144,000 while the 4 winds were held back from hurting the grass, trees and sea. When we come to the trumpet judgements in chapter 8, it is interesting to note that the first 2 trumpets do “hurt the grass, trees and sea.” The fact that the grass, trees and sea were protected until the sealing of the 144,000 Israelites took place, indicates that the sealing occurs before the trumpet judgements take place. Reference in Rev. 9:4 to “men who have not the seal of God in their forehead” at the time of the fifth trumpet, implies that some do have the seal, indicating again that the sealing takes place prior to the trumpet judgements. And, if the 4 winds can be identified with the 4 horses of the first 4 seals, this would mean that the sealing of the 144,000 occurs before the horses are released. It seems to be fairly obvious that the 4 winds will affect the land and the people of Israel. Why hold back the winds until those living in the land of Israel are sealed, if the winds are not going to affect them?

But it should be emphasized that the seals and trumpets cannot be confined or restricted to Israel. Although Israel is the focal centre of prophecy, other nations also come within its scope and will be affected by the end time woes and judgements. It is important to try not to impose a structure on the book of Revelation unless the book itself beckons us to do

so. The structure suggested in this study seems to be suggested by the book.

So then, the grass, trees and sea are to be “hurt” by the pending wind-judgements of God, after the 144,000 have been sealed. Now that the servants of God have been securely sealed, there is nothing to prevent those judgements being executed.

SILENCE IN HEAVEN

When the seventh seal was opened, “there was silence in heaven about half an hour.” In saying there “was” silence in heaven, the word “was” is not to be taken in the past tense. It does not refer to a silence that was prevailing prior to the opening of the seventh seal. Bullinger points out it means there “came to be” silence as a result of removing the seal. There was no silence prior to the removal of the seal.

This silence occurred “in heaven,” the place where John had been taken in vision (4:1), where the throne of God is situated (4:2), before which the Lamb of God stands (5:3-). It is the heaven where the angels live (8:1-5) and to where the prayers of the saints ascend (8:3).

The previous vision of heaven in chapter 7 witnessed an innumerable number from all nations, tribes and tongues, crying “with a loud voice,” saying: “Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.” Following this, all the angels and elders and 4 living creatures worshipped God (in a loud voice) saying: “Amen, blessing and glory ...” Heaven resounded with loud praise to God by hundreds of millions of worshippers. The scene depicted in 4:5 probably prevailed at the same time, involving lightnings, thunderings and voices proceeding from the throne.

So when we read that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour when the seventh seal was opened, it means all praise, music of harps and singing ceased. No voices or thunderings could be heard. The crescendo of sound turned suddenly to silence.

The Greek word “sige,” translated “silence” only occurs here and in Act. 21:40 where reference is made to a loud tumultuous crowd calling out for Paul’s death, suddenly becoming silent when he beckoned to them with his hand to hush, and spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue. The silence was in order to listen to what Paul had to say.

One of the most dramatic transitions from noise to silence upon earth must have been when the raging, roaring storm on the sea of Galilee was stilled by Jesus, as recorded in the gospels. The sudden silence must have

been almost as awesome as the noise of the storm.

The silence in Rev. 8 suggests that the whole of heaven held its breath as if in suspense, expectation or anticipation of something. What could this be? Some have suggested the silence is due to all the angels vacating heaven to descend to earth with Jesus at his second coming. But there is no reference to the seventh seal inaugurating the second coming. Instead it inaugurates a series of trumpet judgements which precede the second coming. Also, the silence is only for about half an hour - hardly enough time for the angels to accomplish their mission on earth with Christ at his second coming.

Others have suggested that the silence signifies the commencement of the eternal kingdom of God. But silence in the kingdom and city of God would be quite inappropriate for such a joyous occasion as that!

Those who believe the scroll could not be opened until all 7 seals were removed, believe the silence was a hush of anticipation; resulting from the removal of the seventh seal, enabling the scroll to be unrolled and have its contents revealed. It is believed that, as in the case of Act. 21:40, the silence was in order to hear a message about to be delivered; in this particular case, the message of the scroll. There is no reference of course to the scroll being opened as a result of removing the seventh seal, but those who believe it was opened then, use the same argument presented earlier in relation to the 4 horses and horsemen being a pictorial illustration of the contents of the scroll. They maintain that the 7 trumpets are a pictorial illustration of the contents of the scroll, not the 4 horses etc.

Some have suggested that the silence occurred when it was evident that 7 trumpets were being given to 7 angels. It would be natural to assume they were going to blow them, and equally as natural to be quiet and listen to what sound or tune they would blow, and what events would unfold. But the silence clearly occurred when the 7th seal was opened, before the angels were given trumpets.

It is possible that even before the trumpets were handed to the 7 angels, the Spirit could have witnessed to heaven's host and communicated to them that a time of silence was appropriate in view of the judgements that were about to be announced by the trumpets and unleashed. Even in heaven, judgements on earth are bound to be treated seriously and with solemnity. God Himself may have even raised His hand as Paul did in Act. 21:40 to signal silence! The sound of a trumpet would certainly be better heard if silence reigned.

There is a saying that "silence is golden," but this silence in heaven was ominous. It was the lull before the storm. Maybe it was the nature of

the judgements about to be unleashed that caused the angels to stand still and breathless, silent in awe.

If only men today would react this way to the prospect of divine judgement, treating it seriously and with solemnity. They would certainly be silent and still if they comprehended the awesomeness and terribleness of the judgements of God that are going to be sent upon earth.

Several Scriptures in the Old Testament also refer to keeping silent due to the Lord being in His holy temple, but they relate to mortal nations (“all flesh”) on earth, not angels in heaven. See Isa. 41:1. Hab. 2:20. Zech. 2:13.

Another view concerning the silence in heaven is that the deeply moving and inspiring vision of the kingdom in Rev. 7:15-17 resulted in a pause for quiet reflection and meditation. Alternatively, in view of what follows in Rev. 8:3-4, the silence has been regarded by some as a hush in order that the prayers of the saints may be heard and received before the throne of God, and answered. If so it would show that those in heaven whose voices are continually heard, show respect for the voices of those on earth.

Because the significance of the silence is not specifically stated, it is inevitable that conjecture will produce a variety of interpretations, and it is quite amazing how many different interpretations there can be!

ABOUT HALF AN HOUR

The silence in heaven, according to John, was “about half an hour.” This is the only reference in Scripture to this period of time. There are many references to half a cubit, shekel, tribe, kingdom, day and time, but only one reference to half an hour. It is the shortest fraction of an hour given in Scripture.

But half an hour can be quite a long interval in an action packed drama. If the scenes in the book of Revelation were acted out in a drama, half an hour’s silence would occupy a large percentage of the play, and would seem quite a long time.

But, although there is silence for half an hour, it is not a time of inaction or inactivity; it is not a time during which every single soul in heaven is standing still and motionless. Certain activities take place during this period of silence by certain angels - enough activities to occupy half an hour.

To begin with, the 7 angels present themselves before the throne of God to receive their trumpets (v2). Another angel (an 8th) then comes

forth and stands by the golden altar before the throne with a golden censer in his hand. His censer is then filled with sweet incense and he offers it up upon the altar, causing smoke to ascend before God. The angel then takes the censer, fills it with hot coals of fire and casts it into the earth, resulting in voices, thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake. Then the 7 angels prepare themselves to sound their trumpets. These events could have taken half an hour.

Under Jewish law, incense was burned daily at the incense altar inside the temple (Ex. 30:1-8). During the burning of the incense, the Israelites waited outside praying, no doubt silently in their hearts, to the one to whom the incense was ascending (Lk. 1:10). John sees a similar thing happening in heaven!

THE SEVEN ANGELS

John says: “I saw the 7 angels which stood before God.” These angels did not come and stand before God as a result of the seventh seal being opened. They were already there and are always there, awaiting assignment from God. These 7 angels are the 7 spirits referred to in Rev. 1:4, who join the Father and son in sending greetings of grace and peace to the churches. They are referred to as “7 lamps of fire burning before the throne” in Rev. 4:5, and 7 horns and 7 eyes of the Lamb in Rev. 5:6 (see p. 51-). Reference is also made to them in Rev. 3:1 and Zech. 4:10.

These 7 angels are probably the same 7 referred to in Rev. 15:1, 6-8. 16:1. 17:1. who pour the 7 last plagues out of the vials (bowls) of God’s wrath. And, in view of the fact that angels’ voices can be like thunder (Rev. 6:1. Jn. 12:29. Isa. 6:3-4), it could be that the “7 thunders” in Rev. 10:3-4 are also the same 7 angels.

We read in Rev. 21:9 that it was one of these 7 angels who talked with John and said: “Come here and I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” He then carried John away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed him the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. In this episode we have another example of an angel functioning as the Holy Spirit, giving John vision and revelation.

The 7 angels seem to be an inner circle of angels of high rank, used by Jesus in a special way to minister to his church, and to execute judgement against those who set themselves against the church and Israel. The fact that the last trump (the seventh) is associated with an archangel (1 Cor. 15:52. 1 Thes. 4:16), suggests the 7 angels who blow the trumpets could be archangels.

As we have seen, reference is also made to 7 angels in Ezk. 9:2. Six had a slaughter weapon in their hand and the 7th had an inkhorn and pen to put a mark on the foreheads of God's righteous servants in Israel, to protect them from forthcoming judgements.

And Mic. 5:5 refers to "7 shepherds" who, with an 8th, constituted "8 principal men." Some regard them as a special unit of angels that will be used by Christ at his second coming to destroy those who set out to destroy Israel. In connection with this, it is interesting to note that Rev. 8:2 refers to "7 angels," then v3 refers to "another angel" i.e. an 8th.

AND TO THEM WERE GIVEN 7 TRUMPETS

We are told in Rev. 8:2 that the trumpets were "given" to the 7 angels. They were handed to them by someone, possibly one of the 4 beasts as in the case of the 7 vials (15:7). The 7 angels do not carry these trumpets with them everywhere they go, or the vials. The trumpets were sitting somewhere in the throne room ready and waiting to be given to the 7 angels, made and prepared by divine power.

The concept of angels blowing trumpets takes us back to the first reference to the trumpet in Scripture in Ex. 19:13-. On this occasion the long loud sound of the trumpet came from the presence of God's glory on Mount Sinai, beckoning Israel to the mount for an encounter with God, and it had a very humbling effect upon them.

Jesus taught that when he returns he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather up his elect from the 4 winds of heaven (Matt. 24:31). The resurrection will take place at this time, referred to by Paul, as already pointed out, as "the last trump," which is the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15-19.

Rev. 8:13 in the Authorized Version refers to "voices of the trumpet" in connection with the angels who blow the trumpets. On this basis it is possible that one of them was the "great voice like a trumpet" that spoke to John in Rev. 1:10 and 4:1.

The trumpets were not given to the 7 angels for the purpose of playing a tune; they were to be used to herald divine judgements that will be sent in the end time to pave the way for Christ's return.

The involvement of 7 trumpets in God's judgements upon Jericho can be regarded as a type of the 7 trumpet judgements in Revelation. We read in Josh. 6 that 7 priests went before the ark of the covenant each day blowing a ram's horn as they walked around the city. On the seventh day they walked around 7 times and then blew one last loud and long blast

with the 7 trumpets. All the Israelites then shouted with a loud voice, and the walls of Jericho fell down, resulting in the inhabitants being put to death by the sword.

Jericho was a Gentile city with Gentile occupants whose sins had reached saturation point, making them eligible for judgement. The same will apply to the nations in the end time, and their cities will ultimately fall in the great shaking of God's judgement (Rev. 16:19).

The nation of Israel will not be exempt from this. The trumpet judgements will sound against her as well, due to her sins. Being guilty of the same sins of the world, Jerusalem, the capital of Israel and representative of the nation, is called Sodom and Egypt in Rev. 11:8. There would therefore be no difficulty in regarding God's judgement upon Israel as a punishment for immorality and idolatry (covetousness - materialism).

Finally, one more reference to 7 trumpets in Scripture, namely: 1 Chr. 15:24. Reference is made here to 7 Levites who were to blow with trumpets before the ark of God as it was taken up by David to be established in Jerusalem, amidst great joy and shouting and the noise of musical instruments. The event foreshadowed the return of Christ and his enthronement in Zion, and the 7 trumpets in Revelation certainly herald this (Rev. 11:15-18).

ANOTHER ANGEL - AT THE ALTAR

Verse 3 says: "And another angel came and stood at the altar." As mentioned before, this angel is in addition to the 7, making him an 8th. Reference to the altar is one of a number of statements in the book of Revelation which refers to vessels of service in heaven corresponding to those in the earthly sanctuary. The altar in the tabernacle and temple was a copy in miniature, i.e. a scale model of heavenly things.

After stating that the angel came and stood at the altar, Rev. 8:3 goes on to say that he held a golden censer, and much incense was given to him to offer upon the golden altar before the throne. Some have concluded that reference is made here to two altars. The "altar" at which the angel "stood" is thought to be the first and is regarded as an altar for burnt offerings. The "golden altar" is thought to be the second and is regarded as an altar for incense. It is thought that the angel moves through the temple from one altar to another.

The main reason for believing this is because both the tabernacle and temple had 2 altars, and if they were copies of heavenly things, it is felt

that there should be 2 altars in heaven.

If the altar at which the angel “stood” is an altar of burnt offering, there is no reference to any offering being on it. Some take this to mean that since the offering of Christ in sacrifice has taken place, there is no longer any need for sacrificial offerings. But, because the majority have rejected his sacrifice and refused to be reconciled to God by it, coals of fire from the altar are to be cast upon them in judgement, for there is no more sacrifice for sins that can be offered.

Most scholars however believe that the altar at which the angel stood is one and the same as the golden altar before the throne of God upon which incense is offered. Jewish Christian writers before A.D. 200 never allude to a second altar in heaven, and their language definitely excludes the possibility of the existence of more than one.

In tabernacle and temple times, coals of fire were put into censers from the brazen altar of burnt offering and transferred to the golden altar of incense for the burning of incense every morning and evening. But the angel in Rev. 8 not only offers incense upon the golden altar; he also fills his censer with coals from it. It would seem that the one altar in heaven represents both the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense, and serves a dual purpose. On the basis of Heb. 13:10, some see the altar as representing Christ.

The scene of heaven presented back in Rev. 4 contains no altar at all, just lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the 7 Spirits of God. The altar of incense would therefore be in close proximity to these 7 lamps of fire, who are the 7 angels who blow the 7 trumpets.

The first reference to an altar in the book of Revelation is in chapter 6:9 where the souls of those slain for the Word of God are depicted lying under it. The passage under consideration at the moment in 8:3-5 is the second reference to an altar.

The third reference is in 9:13 in relation to a voice coming from the 4 horns of the golden altar as the result of the 6th angel blowing his trumpet.

Chapter 14:18 is the fourth reference and it says: “Another angel (the one with the 6th vial) came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, thrust in thy sharp sickle ...”

The fifth and final reference is in 16:17: “And I heard the altar say, even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgements.”

The altar in these verses is clearly in heaven (8:1-3), i.e. in God’s temple (14:17-18), “before the throne” (8:3. 9:13). It should therefore not be confused with the altar in 11:1 which is on earth in the end time Jewish

temple at Jerusalem.

In connection with the angel in Rev. 8:3 standing at the altar of incense, it is interesting to recall that Lk. 1:11, 19 refers to the angel Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God, standing at the altar of incense in the temple at Jerusalem, as Zechariah was in the process of offering incense. Gabriel stood there to tell him: "Thy prayer is heard." Standing by the altar while incense was being offered, signified acceptable and answered prayer.

Would it be going too far to suggest that the angel standing before the Lord by the altar of incense in Rev. 8, could also have been Gabriel? If so, this would make him an archangel.

Amos 9:1 also makes reference to the Lord (an angel) standing by an altar. But this particular altar was neither in heaven nor at Jerusalem, but in a shrine at Bethel, two years before a massive earthquake which probably destroyed it (Amos 1:1). God issued a command to "strike," resulting in the temple building crashing down upon the heads of the worshippers. A series of illustrations is then given to show that retribution would fall on all who tried to hide or escape.

A GOLDEN CENSER

The angel who came and stood at the altar in Rev. 8 was seen holding a golden censer, i.e. a censer made of gold. The Greek word translated censer is "libanotos" and only occurs in Rev. 8:3, 5. It refers to a portable fire pan in which live coals could be carried to or from the altar of incense. In relation to both the tabernacle and temple on earth: the altar of incense was made of gold, but the censers used in the tabernacle were made of brass (Ex. 27:3), whereas those in the temple were made of gold (1 Kng. 7:49-50. 2 Chr. 4:22).

The reference in Heb. 9:4 in the A.V. to a "golden censer" being in the holy of holies, must therefore relate to the temple. The Greek word for censer in this verse is "thymiaterion" and only occurs here. Basically, the word refers to something connected with the burning of incense. Thayer gives its meaning as "a utensil for fumigating or burning incense." He then goes on to say that it can refer to a censer (i.e. a hand held portable censer) or the altar of incense.

Some translations therefore translate it as "golden altar of incense" instead of "golden censer." However, this cannot be correct because Heb. 9:4 says it was in the holy of holies, and the golden altar of incense was never situated there. It was stationed outside the holy of holies on the

other side of the veil.

In the Greek Septuagint, thymiaterion is always used with reference to the portable censer, not the altar of incense (2 Chr. 26:19. Ezk. 8:11). The Jewish mishnah indicates that a special golden censer came to be used on atonement day (Yoma 4:4. 5:1. 7:4). Adam Clarke says some believe the golden censer was left in the holy of holies just within the veil, so that the high priest, by putting his hand under the curtain, could take it out the following year when preparing for his next entrance.

The incense altar in the tabernacle was made of acacia wood, covered with gold, and it had 4 horns on the top, one in each corner. It was put in the holy place of the tabernacle in front of the veil before the ark of the covenant. Prescribed incense, the ingredients of which are recorded in Ex. 30:34- was burned there by one of the priests every morning and evening (Ex. 30:1-. 37:25). The daily burning of incense represented prayer, and the people prayed while it was being offered (Lk. 1:10. Ps. 141:2).

But once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest himself took a censer full of live coals from the altar of burnt offering and 2 handfuls of fine incense, and went within the veil into the holy place to the altar of incense. He then put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of it ascended over the veil as it normally would, and went into the most holy place and covered the mercy seat (Lev. 16:12-14). He then took some of the blood of the bullock that had been sacrificed for sin, went into the most holy place and sprinkled it on the mercy seat to make atonement for sin. (The mercy seat represented the throne of God).

In view of all this, it would seem that the opening vision in Rev. 8 of the angel taking a golden censer and incense to the golden altar and offering it up before the throne of God, alludes to the tabernacle and temple ritual, especially on the day of atonement.

Not only is there a parallel between the golden censer, incense and golden altar, but also, as mentioned before, the silence for half an hour during which the incense was being offered. It could also be significant that trumpets were blown as part of the build-up and preparation for the day of atonement (Lev. 23:23-28).

If the opening vision in Rev. 8 is intended to allude to the atonement ritual, it is evident that it does not avert judgement. It results in judgement, for which reason the trumpets are blown after the ritual takes place and not before.

MUCH INCENSE

As we have seen, the high priest of Israel went in before the Lord on the day of atonement with “his hands full of sweet incense” (Lev. 16:12). The angel in Rev. 8:3 was also given “much incense.” It is natural to wonder if this incense consisted of the same divinely prescribed ingredients recorded in Ex. 30:34-38. Was the incense offered in the tabernacle according to a heavenly pattern as in the case of other items?

There are cases in the Old Testament of burning coals being put into portable censers and then incense being added, resulting in the smoke of the incense ascending, as it were, from the hand of the one holding the censer (Num. 16:7, 46). The reference in Rev. 8:4 to the smoke of the incense ascending up “out of the angel’s hand,” has caused some to conclude that coals of fire were already in the censer and then the incense was added, causing the smoke to ascend from the angel’s hand as he held the censer.

However, a careful reading of the passage indicates that the angel put the incense upon the golden altar, and then filled the censer with live coals from the altar. The censer did not contain any coals until after the incense had been offered on the altar, and therefore smoke would not have ascended from it had incense been put in it. Because the smoke of incense ascended as a result of incense being put on the altar by the angel’s hand, it is referred to as ascending out of his hand. The Living Bible captures the sense of it by rendering it as follows: “And the perfume of the incense mixed with prayers ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out.”

The reference to incense in Rev. 8:3-4 is not the first in the book of Revelation. The same word occurs in Rev. 5:8 where reference is made to the 4 living creatures and 24 elders having harps and golden bowls full of incense, which are explained to be the prayers of the saints.

OFFERED WITH THE PRAYERS OF ALL SAINTS

Rev. 8:3 states that the reason for much incense being given to the angel is “that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints.” Here, as in the case of Rev. 5:8, the incense is associated with the prayers of the saints. Reference has already been made to other Scriptures which link incense with prayer.

The cloud of sweet smelling incense was a physical, tangible sign or representation of the prayers of the saints. The bowls of incense in Rev. 5:8 and the “much incense” given to the angel in chapter 8, could signify

that the accumulated prayers of the saints are stored in heaven. They have not vanished into thin air. They have not been forgotten. It was not the time for the prayers to be fulfilled when they were offered, so they have been stored away - kept in remembrance in heaven until the time to answer them arrives, as in the case of the prayer of Zecharias (Lk. 1:10-13).

Rev. 8:3 does not say that the angel offers up the prayers. He offers up the incense “with the prayers.” The prayers of the saints are already being offered before God and the angel offers up incense with them, as a physical, tangible sign of them. Compare Lk. 1:9-10 where we read that the people’s prayers were being offered when Zecharias went into the temple to offer incense. The incense therefore ascended with the prayers. While it is true that Rev. 5:8 says the golden bowls full of incense “are” the prayers of the saints, the word “are,” as in many other cases, means “signify” or “represent.”

It is natural to wonder what particular prayers are represented by the incense offered on the altar. The answer is: probably prayers like the one recorded in 6:10 which was offered by the souls under the altar who were slain for the Word of God during the great tribulation. Their prayer was: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Rev. 8:3 says the incense represented the prayers of “all saints.” This would particularly apply to all the saints who live during the great tribulation period, but does not have to be restricted to them. Saints in all ages have prayed for divine intervention and for righteous judgement upon the earth. All of these prayers have been preserved in heaven and are about to be answered. The first trumpet judgement therefore, that follows the offering up of the incense, represents the beginning of the answer to their prayers. The “little season” they had to rest, during which their fellow servants and brethren had to be killed before judgement could be executed and their blood avenged, is rapidly running its course.

INTERESTING CONTRASTS

Not only are there some interesting parallels between the ritual in Rev. 8:1-4 and the tabernacle ritual, but some interesting contrasts as well. In the tabernacle, the altar of incense was separated from the most holy place by a veil. But there is no veil in Rev. 8. The altar is in the most holy place - in heaven itself! On the day of atonement, the cloud of smoke from the incense in the tabernacle was intended for the protection of the

high priest “that he die not” (Lev. 16:13). But now that the high priest, Jesus Christ, is in heaven, having made atonement once and for all, there is no need for the altar of incense to be in a separate place.

Under the law, it was the priests who offered incense in the morning and evening of each day, and the high priest offered it once a year on the day of atonement. What do we make therefore, of the fact that an angel offers incense in Rev. 8, and the 4 living creatures and 24 elders have bowls of incense in 5:6? In view of the fact that when a priest of Israel went into the sanctuary to offer incense, it represented the prayers of God’s people and his own prayers, it seems reasonable to conclude that the incense offered by the angel represented not only the prayers of God’s people, but also the prayers and petitions of angels. Reference to the angel offering incense “with” the prayers of the saints could speak of the prayers of angels mingling with the prayers of the saints. If so, this would mean that the angels are so identified with, and supportive of those to whom they minister as ministering spirits, that they reinforce their prayers! The prayer of the saints would surely also be the prayer of angels: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge ...” The scene in Rev. 8 could therefore be viewed as angels adding their intercession to the prayerful intercession of the saints. The reference in Rom. 8:26-27 to the Spirit making intercession for the saints could be linked with this. Angels intercede for us before the throne, and Christ intercedes for us on the throne (Rom. 8:34). Also see Matt. 18:10. Lk. 12:8-9.

Therefore, in one simple symbolic vision, a very big picture is represented, involving a multitude of saints and angels. Who could think of a simpler, more brief and effective way, of presenting a scene that depicted the prayers of multitudes of saints, and the intercessory support of angels!

There can be no doubt that angels who are subject to Christ, and are sent forth to minister to those belonging to him, are involved in their prayers. “Bowls,” referred to in Rev. 5:8, are used for carrying things, including liquids, and are referred to as containing incense “which are the prayers of the saints.” This signifies that angels carry our prayers, not to mention our prayer tears, to the presence of God where Christ intercedes. “Golden” bowls signifies that the prayers are precious like gold.

Bowls are also used for storing things, and as already mentioned, could signify prayers that could not be answered at the time they were offered, and were therefore stored away until the right time. Sometimes we may think the heavens are as brass and our prayers are not getting through; but the truth is that they all get through and eventually get

answered in God's own time and way.

So then, in times of trouble and tribulation, the saints can be sure that the angels sent to minister to them are aware of their needs, and will present them before the throne of God where our Master intercedes.

CAST FIRE INTO THE EARTH

“**A**nd the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire (burning coals) from the altar, and cast it into the earth.” Casting hot coals of fire from heaven upon the earth signifies divine judgement. See Ps. 18:12-13. 140:10. Pr. 25:22. Hab. 3:5. The words of Jesus are also relevant: “I am come to send fire on the earth” (Lk. 12:49). The same Greek word translated “send” is rendered “cast” in v28 and 58, and many other places. The reference to Jesus casting fire upon the earth refers to his second coming when he comes in flaming fire and executes fiery judgement upon the wicked.

It is obviously significant that the fire cast upon the earth in Rev. 8:5 was taken from the altar of incense and is not depicted coming directly from the throne of God. The altar which receives the incense and sends the prayers to God is also the dispenser of the fire of judgement in answer to those prayers! The golden altar is used for 2 purposes: intercession for the saints and judgement for the sinners. The fact that the trumpet judgements immediately follow the prayers of the saints and angels, and the casting of fire upon the earth; reveals the nature of the prayers and the significance of the fire. The prayers were for judgement and the fire signified the judgement. The trumpet judgements are therefore the beginning of the answer to the prayers, revealing once again that prayers accepted in heaven can produce great changes on earth!

One more thought regarding the altar before the throne of God from which coals of fire were taken and cast in judgement upon the earth: is it possible that this altar has some connection with the cherubim, i.e. the 4 living creatures who are also before the throne?

In Ezekiel chapter 1 we read that the 4 living creatures with their wings stretched out and touching each other, formed a square, and they travelled in this formation. And in v13 we are told that inside the square that they formed, were burning coals of fire, out of which lightning darted forth. Then in Ezk. 10:2 we read that an angel took out some of the coals of fire from between the cherubim, and cast them upon earth, upon the city of Jerusalem. This signified divine judgement upon Jerusalem because of sin, and it was fulfilled by the Babylonians who besieged the

city causing famine and pestilence. They killed many Jews with the sword, and destroyed the city with fire.

It is tempting to wonder if the altar in Rev. 8 is a mobile altar, situated between the 4 living creatures, able to be transported with them on missions. Is it possible that it was from this altar that the coals of fire, referred to in Ezekiel's prophecy, were taken and cast upon the earth? If so, the voice that comes from the altar (9:13, 16:7) could be the voice of one of the 4 living creatures.

Isa. 6:6-7 refers to the altar and coals of fire in relation to the seraphim: "Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having a live (burning) coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: Behold this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." We learn from this that coals of fire from the altar can be used not only to punish sin but also purge sin. It purged Isaiah's sin because he was humble and confessed it, acknowledging that he was "undone, a man of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips." But coals of fire were cast upon the people in judgement because they refused to humble themselves, confess their sins and repent. God's Spirit can either be a consuming fire or an igniting fire; a destroying fire or a purging fire.

VOICES, THUNDERINGS, LIGHTNINGS AND EARTHQUAKE

As a result of casting the coals of fire upon the earth, there were "voices, thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake." We have seen in Rev. 4:5 that these lightnings, thunderings and voices proceed from the throne of God. This activity and the noise that accompanies it obviously ceased during the half-hour silence. But the silence in heaven is now broken by the return of this activity and noise before the first trumpet is sounded. The trumpet does not break the silence.

In addition to the lightnings, thunderings and voices in Rev. 4:5, we also have "an earthquake" in 8:5. If anyone has a difficulty with the concept of an earthquake in the divine sanctuary, remember Isa. 6:4 which refers to the foundations of the threshold moving as a result of the voices of the seraphim. One hundred million voices would certainly cause a vibration!

Revelation 11:19 also mentions "an earthquake" along with "lightnings, voices and thunderings" and adds "great hail" to the list. The scene is reminiscent of the divine presence and power at Sinai where there were thunders, lightning, the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud, and the

whole mountain quaked greatly. There was also a downpour of rain and possibly hail (Ex. 19:16-18. Ps. 68:8-9). Such was the effect of heaven coming to Sinai! The lightning was confined to the mount and did not strike anyone, but could have been directed in judgement upon anyone at anytime if God so willed. It was a demonstration of God's presence - a manifestation of the potential of His power to execute judgement and destroy; designed to inculcate fear and respect.

On one occasion, recorded in Lev. 10:1-2, God did direct it in judgement upon Nadab and Abihu due to disobedience. Reference is also made in Lev. 9:24 to fire being sent from the Lord to ignite and consume the offering upon the altar, demonstrating divine acceptance of it.

Lightning and thunder conveys to us an impending or threatening storm, which can involve violence and destruction. Lightning, thunder and hail were literally involved in the divine wrath and judgement poured out on Egypt (Ex. 9:23-24). The display of thunder and lightning at Sinai told Israel that they were in the presence of the same God whose power they witnessed in the judgements that fell upon Egypt. Other examples of lightning and thunder being involved in divine judgement have been given when dealing with Rev. 4:5. (See p47-49).

Most Scriptures that refer to lightning and thunder relate to divine judgement. On this basis it is concluded therefore, that the lightnings and thunderings in heaven signify that God's judgemental power is stirred and aroused, ready to be released on earth. As the lightning and thunder at Sinai pertained to the inauguration of a new era, it also pertains to the inauguration of a new era in Rev. 8. At Sinai, God was ready to destroy the Canaanites and establish His kingdom in Canaan, and He is now ready in Rev. 8 to start destroying the kingdoms of the world and make them His own.

The scene in Rev. 8:5 therefore signifies that judgement is imminent. The storm of divine wrath is brewing as a result of God fuming at the sin and wickedness mounting in the earth. The time to start answering the prayers of the saints to judge and avenge them has arrived.

Linking the voices, lightning and thunder etc. with judgement is confirmed in Rev. 11:19 and 16:18, where they are linked with the seventh trumpet and the seventh vial. The seventh trumpet involves "the wrath of God" which destroys those who destroy the earth, and ushers in the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15-19). And the seventh vial involves an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude, which destroys the cities in all nations. Great hail about the weight of a talent also falls - an exceeding great plague! (Rev. 16:17-21).

Reference to the “voices” in Rev. 8:5 as a result of the 7 angels positioning themselves to blow the trumpets, and the casting of coals of fire from the altar upon the earth, indicates that when the time arrives for the judgements of God to be released, in which angels will participate, there will be a stir in their ranks - animated talk and discussion at the prospect of the dramatic climax to human history about to take place. (In relation to the “voices” see p49-50).

PARALLELS BETWEEN TRUMPETS AND VIALS

Before considering the 7 trumpets in detail, it is interesting to note that there are parallels between them and the vials. On the following page is a table of comparison and in each case the key word or phrase is underlined:

It is evident from these parallels that the trumpets and vials have a common plan. In the first four judgements the spheres of operations are the same, namely: the earth, salt sea, fresh waters and heavenly bodies. In the fifth judgement of each series there is torment and darkness. The river Euphrates and the assembly of armies are found in the sixth, and the portents of thunder, voices and an earthquake introduce the resurrection, judgement and kingdom in the seventh.

Yet, despite the impressive parallels, the series are far from identical; there are significant differences. In the trumpet series it is repeatedly emphasized that a “third part” of the area under consideration is affected, not the whole. It is not a universal effect. But this fractional feature or qualifier does not apply to the vials. The devastating effect of the vials affects the whole, not just one third. For example, “every living creature” in the sea is said to die in 16:13, and the other bowls have every appearance of finality.

The trumpets and vials therefore seem to speak of 2 sets or 2 series of judgements; the trumpets first and the vials afterwards, but all within the end time period. The “signs” section of Revelation, a new section in the book, begins in chapter 12, and is sandwiched between the trumpets and the vials. Reference is also made to a time of witnessing between the trumpets and vials, giving the nations their last opportunity to repent before Christ’s return in flaming fire. This time of witnessing is referred to in Rev. 8:13. 10:8-11. 11:3-12. 14:6-7.

TRUMPETS

1. (8:7) Hail and fire mingled with smoke on the earth. The third part of the earth and trees burned up, and all the grass.

2. (8:8) A great mountain into the sea (salt water): the third of sea, ships and sea creatures affected.

3. (8:10) A burning star falls on the third part of rivers and fountains (fresh water), of which a third becomes wormwood and many die.

4. (8:12) The third part of the sun moon and stars are darkened.

5. (9:1) Stars fall on earth; abyss opened; invasion of locusts; darkness. Beast worshipped. Tormented.

6. (9:13-15) Angels at Euphrates river loosed. Kill a third of men. Army of 200 million go to battle. River is forded.

7. (11:15) Nations which destroy are destroyed, resulting in the resurrection, judgement and kingdom. Lightnings, voices, thunders and earthquakes.

VIALS

1. (16:2) A noisome and grievous sore on the earth on those bearing the mark of the beast, and worshipping his image.

2. (16:3) Poured into the sea (salt water). Every living soul in the sea dies.

3. (16:4) This vial was poured on rivers and fountains (fresh water) which are turned into blood.

4. (16:8) Poured on the sun which scorches men.

5. (16:10) Poured on beast's throne. Darkness. Men gnaw their tongue for pain and blaspheme.

6. (16:12) Poured on Euphrates river to gather all nations to battle. River is dried up.

7. (16:17) Babylon destroyed and beast conquered. Resurrection and judgement. Lightnings, voices, thunders and earthquake.

THE FIRST ANGEL SOUNDED

“**A**nd the 7 angels which had the 7 trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded ...” Various significances are attached to trumpets in the Bible, but it is evident that the 7 trumpets in Revelation are used to sound alarms and warnings of a destructive operation about to begin. Cp. Jer. 4:5. Hos. 8:1. Joel 2:1. Zeph. 1:14-16. The trumpet judgements are a sample of a full and complete outpouring of the final judgements that take place in the series of the vials due to the refusal of men to repent.

Divine intervention in world affairs is indicated in the trumpet judgements by the fact that they are all referred to as coming upon the earth from above: from the sky or heaven.

First trumpet: Hail and fire (lightning) come from heaven (8:7).

Second: A great mountain is cast into the sea from heaven (8:8).

Third: A burning star is cast upon earth from heaven (8:10).

Fourth: The heavenly bodies themselves are darkened (8:12).

Fifth: A star falls from heaven (9:1).

Sixth: The 4 angels at the Euphrates river who are loosed by divine command (9:12) come from heaven.

In the parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets, reference is made to 7 thunders sounding through divine command - “at the voice of an angel” (10:1). And reference is made to 2 witnesses having God-given power to smite the earth with plagues (11:4). Then comes the seventh trumpet which involves the kingdom of God replacing the kingdom of the world (11:15-19).

Some of these judgements and the vial judgements parallel with the plagues of Egypt and the miracles of Elijah, demanding a recognition that God Himself is actively at work. Reference in the trumpet judgements to hail and fire, the sea becoming blood, and darkness; not to mention “locusts” and an angel whose name means the destroyer; certainly recall some of the judgements inflicted upon Egypt.

In view of the fact that Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is referred to as “Egypt” in Rev. 11:8, it is to be expected that the nation would suffer the judgements of God as Egypt did. It is made clear in Deu. 28:59-60 that God would inflict Israel with all the plagues of Egypt if they spurned His Word and rejected His commandments.

Seeing that the 144,000 in Israel have to be sealed before the judgements burst forth, indicates the land of Israel is part of the one third of the earth that will be affected. This suggests that the trumpet judgements could relate to the Middle East. More about this later.

The judgements listed under the trumpets (and vials) could well be as literal and miraculous as Moses' plagues were, and it would be unreasonable to deny that this could be so. It is actually stated in Mic. 7:15 that the Lord will do marvellous things as He did when He brought Israel out of Egypt, causing nations to tremble and be afraid.

The words of A.D. Norris on page 153 of his book: "Apocalypse For Every Man," are worth quoting: "If it pleases God to intervene as dramatically as we know He will when the Lord Jesus returns, it would be folly to close our minds to the possibility that He will prepare the way for that return by actions no less miraculous. At least it seems quite plain from the record that the events in the trumpet category will be so plainly the work of God to every perceptive eye that, when coupled with the witness of preaching with which it will be associated, the world is expected to perceive God's hand and repent, and will be held guilty when it fails to do so."

HAIL AND FIRE

Although some of the trumpet judgements are similar to the plagues that fell on Egypt, they are not in the same order. For example, the hail and fire (lightning) of the first trumpet were the seventh plague on Egypt. In both cases, trees and crops were damaged (Ex. 9:22-26. Rev. 8:7). But the hail and fire that fell on Egypt was a significant plague because it was the first occasion on which Pharaoh appeared to repent and relent, but changed his mind as soon as the danger had passed. Previously, there had not been any sign of repentance on his part.

Most references to hail in Scripture refer to literal hail and relate to divine judgement. We read in Job 38:22-23 that God sometimes stores up hail for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war. This was certainly the case when He declared war on Egypt, and will also be the case in the "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." It is also stated in Ps. 148:8 that God uses fire, hail, snow, vapour (fog and mist), and stormy wind to fulfil His Word. This especially applies to His Word of prophecy concerning the end time judgements.

We are told in Josh. 10:11 that God cast down great "stones" from heaven upon Israel's enemy in Joshua's day. Some think that a swarm of meteorites is referred to by the stones, and others suggest stones of fire hurled out by volcanic eruption. But it could simply refer to hailstones.

"Hailstones and coals of fire" are referred to twice in Ps. 18:12-13 as part of divine judgement executed against the enemy, and the reference to

“lightnings” in v14 could relate to the “fire.” Ezk. 38:22 also refers to “great hailstones, fire and brimstone” as part of the judgement that God will execute against the armies at the battle of Armageddon. Being connected with “brimstone” (sulphur), the “fire” in this particular verse could be volcanic, as in the case of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24).

Adam Clarke says: “Some fruitful imaginations might see reference here to gun powder and canon balls and canister shot and bombs.” It is not likely that this is what is meant, but it would certainly be true to say that hailstones, meteorites and volcanic rock are the divine equivalent of bombs and can be used just as effectively to destroy. As we have seen, the hail and fire sent upon Egypt smashed and destroyed trees and vines (Ex. 9:25. Ps. 78:47. 105:32-33). Later in history, Israel had a similar experience (Hag. 2:17).

Due to the destructive effect of great hailstones, several Scriptures liken the invasion of an army to a hailstorm due to the damage and destruction it causes. For example, in Isa. 28:2 the Assyrian army which invaded Israel is referred to as “a mighty and strong one” raised up by God, “which as a hailstorm and overflowing flood of water shall cast down to the earth.” Verse 17 refers to this as the righteous judgement of God, and says the hail shall sweep away all the lies Israel depended on, and the flood will destroy her security. Also see Ezk. 13:11-13.

But eventually Assyria also came under the judgement of God and was destroyed. This is referred to in Isa. 30:30: “The Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the descending blow of His arm, with the fury of His anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, a cloudburst, thunder and hailstones.” In Isa. 32:19 the Assyrian army is likened to a forest which is flattened by hail. The same verse also states that the capital city will be utterly brought down.

These prophecies have both an historical and prophetic, metaphorical and literal application. The historical fulfilment involves the metaphorical application and relates to Assyria being attacked and destroyed by the Babylonians. The prophetic fulfilment involves the literal application which relates to the end time invader of Israel, referred to as “the Assyrian” in Mic. 5:5, being destroyed at the battle of Armageddon by “great hailstones” etc. (Ezk. 38:22).

As far as the book of Revelation is concerned, hail is referred to on three different occasions. It is referred to in relation to the first trumpet in 8:7, the seventh trumpet in 11:19, and the seventh vial in 16:21. The reference to hail in 11:19 says it is in heaven, along with lightnings,

voices, thunderings and an earthquake. This indicates that heaven is the source of, and in control of all these forces and powers. In the other 2 references to hail, it is seen being released from heaven upon earth in judgement in varying degrees of intensity.

MINGLED WITH BLOOD

Rev. 8:7 says the hail and fire was mingled with blood. One could well imagine that if fire and heavy hail fell upon the earth, blood (human and animal) would be shed and stain or mingle with the hail. The hail that fell upon Egypt not only broke every tree of the field, but also smote all the men and beasts who remained outdoors (Ex. 9:25), no doubt causing blood to be spilled. “Blood and fire” are also mentioned together in Joel’s prophecy (2:30), along with “pillars of smoke.”

But the statement in Rev. 8:7 could be read to mean that the hail and fire are already mingled with blood when cast upon the earth, and not as a result of being cast. If God is able to turn the Nile into blood, He is just as capable of mixing blood with hail and fire, or sending hail from above coated or dripping with blood. Ordinary hail would tend to be interpreted to be a natural phenomenon, but being mingled with blood would indicate that something unnatural and abnormal was taking place.

In view of the fact that the plagues which fell on Egypt were literal, and 5 of them are repeated in the book of Revelation, it is not by any means unreasonable to take these literally also. Some of the events may, at this stage, be beyond human understanding, but the physical effects they have upon mankind are clear enough, and are designed to engender fear and trepidation.

Some are of the opinion that the turning of the river Nile into “blood” doesn’t necessarily mean it was literal blood, but a discolouration that made it look like blood. Take for example a red sunset which some might describe in terms of the sky being on fire or turned into blood. Rev. 8:8 refers to one third of the sea “becoming blood” and this could be interpreted in the same way. There have been cases of blood-red rain occurring during storms in southern Europe. The usual explanation given is that the air was full of particles of sand from the Sahara.

TREES AND GRASS BURNT

According to the A.V. “the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up” as a result of hail mingled with fire being cast upon the earth. However, prior to saying one third of trees were burnt, most modern translations firstly say: “a third part of the earth was burnt up.” This means therefore that a third part of the earth (soil) was scorched, a third part of the trees were burnt up, and all the green grass.

Although hail, fire and blood are cast upon the earth, the fire does most of the damage. The word “burnt” is used 3 times. The hail would batter and crush grass, crops and trees, not to mention people animals and birds etc., but the burning effect of the fire will cause the greatest destruction. The burning of one third of the trees would involve massive forest fires and roaring fire storms. (See Isa. 32:19). While the 4 winds were held back by the 4 angels, the trees were protected (7:1), but not now that their trumpets sound.

Earth (soil), grass and trees are vital sources of food. All vegetables, cereals, fruit and meat depend upon them for growth. And the second trumpet judgement affects one third of the fish supply. It is evident from this that destroying one third of the soil, grass, trees and ocean, will create an environmental or ecological catastrophe of huge proportions. Yet these are only partial and preliminary judgements. Worse is to come under the vials!

LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC TREES?

Some commentators say the trees and grass are not to be taken literally. They regard the trees as being symbolic of the leaders and chiefs of nations (cp. Judg. 9:8-), and the grass as symbolic of the common people (Isa. 40:6-7). On this basis, Rev. 8:7 is interpreted to mean that high and low, rich and poor, are to be overwhelmed with one great destruction. Some suppose that the invasion of the barbarous nations on the Roman Empire is signified here.

But, as Adam Clarke says: “It is easy to find coincidences when fancy runs riot. Later writers might find here the invasion of the Austrians and British, Prussians and Cossacks, on the French Empire.”

In Ezk. 17:24 the “high tree” and “green tree” signifies those who are proud and prosperous and rejected by God, and the “low tree” and “dry tree” signifies the humble, poor and despised, chosen by God.

On the other hand, a green tree can also signify a spiritual and righteous person. See Lk. 23:31. Ps. 1:3. 52:8. A dry tree in the light of

this would therefore signify an unspiritual and unrighteous person. This is conveyed in Ezk. 20:47: “Say to the forest of the Negeb, hear the Word of the Lord; thus says the Lord God; behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you, and every dry tree; the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched.”

Reference several verses later in Ezk. 21:3 to God cutting off “the righteous and the wicked” suggests that the green trees represent the righteous, and the dry trees represent the wicked. However, because it is not God’s policy to destroy the righteous with the wicked when He executes judgement (Gen. 18:23-32. Ezk. 14:14-20. 18:5-9), it suggests that the “righteous” in Ezk. 21:3 who are cut off with the wicked, are those who think they are righteous - the self-righteous, like the Pharisees who, through spiritual pride, had a “holier than thou” attitude.

We are not told in Rev. 7 whether the trees that are blown upon by the 4 winds are green or dry or both. No reference is made to the state or condition of the trees here. However, reference in Rev. 8:7. 9:4 to “green grass” and “any green thing” in the same context as trees, suggests the trees are green, not dry. Therefore, because they are burnt up in the fire of the first trumpet judgement, means they cannot represent the righteous. This is confirmed by the fact the 144,000 are righteous servants of the Lord, and they were sealed, as in the case of those in Ezk. 9 as a protection against the judgement of God. If the 144,000 were represented by the trees upon which the 4 winds were going to blow (Rev. 7:1-3), what would be the point in sealing them and holding the winds back until they were sealed? To give an example: what would be the point of Israelites marking the door posts and lintels of their houses in Egypt with blood, if the destroying angel was going to come into their house anyway and destroy?!

All things considered, it seems reasonable to take the trees and grass literally in Rev. 8:7. It is not uncommon for the word of prophecy to make reference to literal trees being affected by God’s judgements. See Isa. 2:13-14. 32:19. Jer. 7:20. 21:14. Ezk. 20:47. Zech. 11:1-2.

As has been mentioned earlier, Joel 1:19-20 refers to fire devouring Israel’s trees and pastures on the day of the Lord. Reference is made in Joel 2:3 to fire turning the land that is like the garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness. The fire occurs prior to Armageddon and is caused by the end time northern army which invades the land.

Grass of course is not always green in Palestine, but only in the spring (Passover time - Jn. 6:4, 10. Mk. 6:39). Thereafter it becomes dried,

withered and scorched by the heat of the sun and the hot winds from the desert.

According to Josephus, the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 started at Passover time. He says the huge loss of life among the Jews was due to them being trapped by the Roman armies in the city at Passover time. Josephus also says that literal trees by the thousands were destroyed, causing the vicinity of Jerusalem to be ravaged for considerable distance around. Trees were felled indiscriminately to build engines of war and high platforms to besiege the city. And later, the crucifixion of prisoners had to cease through lack of timber to make crosses. These circumstances contributed towards Palestine continuing a treeless waste for many centuries. According to Joel's prophecy, trees and pastures will also be destroyed when the end time invasion takes place.

THE THIRD PART

The reference to a "third part" being affected during the trumpet judgements is quite explicit. It occurs 13 times in Rev. 8 and 9. A third is a considerable part of something, but by no means the whole. It signifies a partial judgement - a judgement in which bounds are initially set by God - a judgement tempered with mercy.

We come across the aspect of a third again in Rev. 12:4 which refers to one third of the 12 stars being cast down by the dragon. The stars signify the tribes of Israel and the casting down of one third of them refers to one third of the nation being killed in the end time by the anti-Israel forces represented by the dragon.

Ezk. 5 also refers to third parts. It refers to Jews being divided into 3 parts, each part being consigned to destruction by fire or sword or scattering. With the exception of a faithful remnant (those sealed in Ezk. 9), the entire nation in Ezekiel's day was going to suffer from one of these judgements of God.

In a prophecy of the last days, Isa. 19:24 speaks of Israel being "a third part with Egypt and with Assyria." Instead of Israel being a battle ground for Egypt and Assyria (Iraq today), as in the past (and the end time), the 3 will be at peace and form an harmonious unit serving the Lord when Messiah rules.

This passage which presents Israel as a "third part," has caused some expositors to conclude that the "third part" in Rev. 8:9 refers to Israel. They also point out that the Greek word for "earth" in Rev. 8:7 is also translated "land" many times in the New Testament in reference to the

land of Israel. Hence, the prophecy is taken to mean that as a result of the hail mingled with fire being cast down, one third of the trees and grass in the land of Israel will be destroyed.

Others who hold to the continuous historic interpretation maintain that the “earth” is the Roman earth, the territory of the Roman empire in its widest aspect. Before the Roman empire became divided permanently into 2 parts; the eastern and western; there was a tripartite division on two occasions. The first occurred in A.D. 311 when it was divided between Constantine, Licinius, and Maximian. The other, A.D. 337 on the death of Constantine when it was divided between his 3 sons: Constantine, Constans and Constantius.

Constantius possessed the east, namely: Asia Minor, Syria, Arabia, Egypt (and Palestine). His residence was at Constantinople, the metropolis of the empire. Constantine (the second) held the western part of the empire namely: Italy, Gaul (France), Britain, Spain, Northwest Africa. Constans held the central part, namely: Illyricum (the Balkans), Moesia (Hungary and Romania), Greece, Rhoetia.

Most of those who believe the third part of the earth in Rev. 8 refers to a part of the Roman Empire, apply it to the western part, and relate it to the invasion and attack by Barbarian forces on the western Roman Empire during the fifth century.

However, as A.D. Norris points out, the division of the empire between Constantine’s 3 sons “was extremely short lived and of no significance. Constantine lasted 3 years and Constans 13, and so within 16 years of the death of their father, Constantius was sole ruler of a united empire. After his death, and those of his 2 successors, the empire was again divided, this time into 2 parts, east and west, a division which became permanent in +395 A.D. After a few years of union under Theodosius the great” (p176 “Apocalypse For Every Man”).

The most common view is that the word “earth” in Rev. 8:7 means the whole planet (as it does in many other Scriptures). The prophecy therefore simply means that one third of the planet will be affected by the hail and fire.

Now, as has been pointed out, the “earth, sea and trees” in Rev. 7 that will be “hurt” by the 4 winds, involve the region occupied by the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel, namely: the land of Israel. If the earth, sea and trees affected by the trumpet judgements in Rev. 8 pertain to the same area, the land of Israel would therefore obviously be affected by them. If so, this would indicate that the land of Israel is part of the one third of the earth where the hail mingled with fire will be cast.

The question is: What other countries will be involved to make up the one third of the earth, if “earth” means the whole planet?

Unfortunately there are no Scriptures which specifically identify or name the countries or continents that are involved in the 3 parts of the earth. However, later chapters in Revelation refer to 3 specific beasts which seem to represent all the nations on earth that will be involved in end time events and Armageddon. They are the dragon, the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns and a lamb-like beast - a fearsome threesome (Rev. 16:13). As we shall see, they represent the Islamic Middle East; the so-called “Christian” Europe (the E.U.) and a revived atheistic communism in the U.S.S.R. The “third part of the earth” could be one of these.

THE SECOND TRUMPET

“**A**nd the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood. And the third part of the living creatures which were in the sea died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”

The first trumpet-judgement affected the soil, grass and trees, which are vital sources of vegetables, cereals, meat and fruit. The second trumpet-judgement affects the ocean, which is also a major source of food and important medium of international trade and commerce.

Most Biblical allusions to the “sea” refer to the sea that was prominent to the land of Palestine - the Mediterranean, which not only runs up the western coast of Israel, but also around the southern coast of Europe and the north coast of Africa. Some expositors therefore apply the prophecy to a third part of that area of sea.

Some have applied the prophecy to an encounter in the first century A.D. on the sea (lake) of Galilee between a Jewish fleet and many ships commandeered by the Romans, during which many were killed, staining the sea with their blood, and many ships were destroyed. But the lake of Galilee is a fresh water lake and the sequence in the prophecy requires salt water. The sequence is: soil, grass, trees, salt water, fresh water.

Some have also applied the prophecy to a fleet of Jewish insurgents destroyed by a mighty storm in the first century A.D. on the Mediterranean coast. Many of the Jews slew themselves rather than be killed by the Romans. Josephus says: “The sea was bloody a long way, and the maritime ports were full of dead bodies ... and the number of the bodies that were thus thrown out of the sea was 4,200.”

The continuous historical interpretation relates the prophecy to the

5th century A.D. to the time of Genseric, king of the Vandals, who organised piratical excursions, ravaging the coasts of the Mediterranean, and particularly north Africa, defeating the Roman navy, destroying by fire the new fleets that were built to oppose him. All maritime trade ceased and the sea became “as blood.” In 455 he gained access to Rome itself and died in 477.

However, the language of the prophecy in Rev. 8:8-9 involving one third of the sea becoming blood, one third of the creatures in the sea dying, and one third of the ships being destroyed, is too great and out of all proportion to the events in past history to which they have been applied. The blood of 4,200 Jewish insurgents and the blood shed by Genseric in the Mediterranean sea, could not under any stretch of the imagination be seen as causing one third of the sea to become blood. Not only that, but the prophecy also refers to one third of the sea creatures (fish) dying. This certainly did not happen as a result of the aforementioned naval battles. Neither is there any historical evidence that one third of the ships on the ocean were destroyed.

Those who believe the prophecy relates to the end time and that reference to the “earth” means the whole planet, naturally conclude that the word “sea” should be interpreted in the light of the end time concept of the sea, i.e. all the oceans of the world. They therefore believe it refers to one third of the world’s oceans. If such proves to be the case, the events in history which have been regarded as a fulfilment of the prophecy, would be grossly out of proportion.

This divine judgement involving one third of the sea becoming blood, calls to mind the turning of the river Nile into blood, resulting in it stinking and all fish dying (Ex. 7:19-21). When we read about this, we don’t have difficulty taking it literally. We do not insist on treating it symbolically and spiritualize it all away. Neither should we have difficulty accepting that God could cause one third of the ocean (be it the Mediterranean or the world ocean) to turn into blood (or look like blood).

Later, during the period of the second vial, the entire ocean becomes like the blood of a dead man (16:3); i.e. black and congealed like crude oil. The reference in Rev. 11:6 to the end time witnesses having power over waters to turn them into blood could have something to do with this.

Rev. 8:9 says one third of the ships will be destroyed. This obviously would not be caused by the sea becoming blood or by the marine life dying. Neither is it caused by a naval battle. No! It will be caused by “a great mountain burning with fire” being “cast into the sea.”

A GREAT MOUNTAIN BURNING WITH FIRE

The text actually says: “as it were a great mountain ...” The words “as it were” indicate it is not a normal mountain or hill. It is, as the R.S.V. puts it: “something like a great mountain.” (The word “great” comes from the Greek word “megas” which means big, exceeding large. It is intriguing to observe the continual occurrence of the word “great” in the book of Revelation. It occurs over 70 times).

For a normal mountain upon earth to be cast into the sea, would involve a massive volcanic eruption or earthquake. Ps. 46:2 seems to refer to this kind of thing: “...though the earth heaves, and though the mountains are hurled into the midst of the sea ...” Rev. 6:14 also refers to mountains and islands moving out of their places, and Rev. 16:20 says islands will flee away and mountains will not be found. Also Ezk. 38:20: “Mountains shall be thrown down.” Even Jesus said that those with enough faith can believe a mountain could be cast into the sea! (Matt. 21:21).

Several Scriptures refer to a mountain in a metaphorical sense to signify a nation or kingdom (Jer. 51:25. Dan. 2:35. Zech. 4:7). Because of this, some believe the mountain in Rev. 8 should be taken the same way, not literally. But, significantly enough, every other occasion where the word mountain occurs in Revelation, it refers to a literal mountain (6:14-16. 14:1. 16:20. 17:9. 21:10). Strangely enough, those who spiritualize it away and give it a metaphorical application, usually regard all the other elements in the prophecy as being literal, i.e. the sea, ships and blood. Inconsistency is involved here!

Now, talking about mountains: asteroids are huge pieces of rock like mountains. They are also called planetoids, or minor planets, because of their size. They vary greatly in size and have an irregular shape like some mountains. The smaller ones range from 1 to 24 kilometres long, but the longest one discovered is 772 kilometres in diameter. There are thousands of asteroids and they constitute the asteroid belt which is a belt of whirling rocks which lies between Mars and Jupiter.

A few small asteroids, about 24 kilometres long and 6 kilometres wide, move in oval shaped orbits that bring them near the earth at certain times. A collision, which does occur from time to time, could send one of them or fragments of it out of orbit and into collision with the earth. In the event of a piece of rock the size of a mountain hurtling down from space at 250,000 kilometres per hour into the sea, the heat generated by its entrance into our atmosphere would cause it to burn and glow with intense heat. In every respect it would be “as it were a great mountain burning

with fire.” Obviously such an impact upon the sea would destroy sea life and ships for a considerable distance from the point of impact.

Some have thought that the reference in Rev. 8:9 is the only place in Scripture that mentions the ocean and ocean life suffering a catastrophe and upheaval, and therefore we should not rush in to take it literally. Such is not the case. Consider for example the following Scriptures: Ezk. 38:19-20: “... there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; so that the fishes of the sea ... shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down ...” Hag. 2:6: “... I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the deserts.” Hos. 4:3: “... yea, the fishes of the sea shall be taken away.” Amos 7:4: “The Lord God called for a judgement by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part.” Zeph. 1:3: “I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea ...”

Rev. 8:9 is not the only place in Scripture where reference is made to ships being destroyed either. Ps. 48:7: “Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.” Isa. 2:16: “The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon ... all the ships of Tarshish ...”

The Mediterranean is the permanent home of the U.S. 6th fleet, not to mention many other ships. The “many ships” referred to in Dan. 11:40 will also come down the Mediterranean when Israel is invaded in end time.

So then, the great mountain burning with fire and cast into the sea could refer to a massive volcanic eruption in or near the sea, resulting in rivers of red-hot lava gushing forth from the huge storehouse of molten lava in the bowels of the earth, looking like blood. Or, the impact of an asteroid upon our atmosphere and sea, could cause dramatic changes to atmospheric conditions and colours, resulting in a red sky reflecting in the sea giving it the colour of blood.

THE THIRD TRUMPET

“**A**nd the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called wormwood: and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”

Judgement now extends from the salt waters of the sea to the fresh water of rivers and springs which of course, feed lakes. The cause of contamination is a great star called “wormwood,” burning or blazing “as it

were” like a torch, falling from heaven upon the third part of rivers and springs. The effect of this causes the third part of the waters to become bitter, resulting in men dying from drinking it.

The star that falls from heaven is obviously not a literal star in the sense of a sun, which would annihilate our whole planet if it fell on it. But what John saw was an object that had the appearance of a star, descending from the atmosphere above the earth. Meteorites are referred to as “falling stars,” and satellites, not to mention space stations, look like stars or falling stars if they drop out of their orbit and plummet to earth. See notes on Rev. 6:13 on p223.

A BLAZING TORCH

The star in Rev. 8:10 is described as being like a blazing torch. The Greek word for torch is “lampas,” translated “lamps” in Rev. 4:5, “torches” in Jn. 18:3 and “lights” in Act. 20:8. A torch in ancient times was a piece of resinous wood or a bunch or twist of absorbent material soaked in oil and carried in a narrow cone-like holder. Portable torches were a long narrow stem with fire flaring out one end. If John saw a modern rocket or missile, it would not be surprising if he would describe it as a blazing torch. Is not a rocket a long stem with fire blazing out one end? In view of the prophecies in the book of Revelation pertaining to the end time, it is natural and inevitable that connections such as this be considered. The same applies to “pillars of smoke” in Joel. 2:30 which some have linked with the columns of smoke produced by missiles and rockets.

It is not impossible that Rev. 8:10 could be referring to the deliberate sabotage of water supplies by an enemy nation. How often during the past few decades have rivers been poisoned and polluted by the outflow or dumping of wastes and chemicals from factories? And it would be an easy matter in this day and age for a nation to send a missile loaded with deadly chemicals, bacteria or radio-active material, into a major river and poison water supplies. World leaders have for some time expressed fear and concern about this, especially when they are aware of diabolical dictators manufacturing them. There could be no easier way of crippling a nation or winning a war than by poisoning water supplies.

WORMWOOD

Naming the star Wormwood because it made the waters bitter, calls to mind certain Scriptures in Jeremiah: “Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them among the nations” (Jer. 9:15-16). “Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land” (Jer. 23:15).

This language of judgement is based on an ordinance referred to in Num. 5 involving the trial of the bitter waters of jealousy. A man suspecting his wife of unfaithfulness could bring her to the priest who would give her to drink the holy water of the tabernacle mixed with the dust of the floor of the sanctuary. As she drank, a curse was uttered against her if she was guilty. If she was guilty the curse took effect, but if she was innocent, nothing happened.

In this light, the bitter water in Rev. 8 is appropriate for people who have not been faithful to God, especially Israel, who was joined to the Lord by solemn covenant and proved unfaithful.

In the waters made bitter in Rev. 8, we have a reversal of what Israel experienced at the beginning of their life as a nation. When they left Egypt and arrived at Marah, the waters were bitter and undrinkable, but they were made sweet when Moses cast in a tree which the Lord provided and showed him (Ex. 15:23-27). This strange experience was interpreted by the early church as a figure of the work of the tree (cross) of Christ. It will certainly require the work of Christ, the “green tree” and “branch of Yahweh,” to remove all pain, sorrow and bitterness caused by sin, at his second coming.

The name “wormwood” (Greek ‘apsinthos’) given to the star, only occurs in Rev.8 in the New Testament, and refers to a bitter, intoxicating and poisonous herb. The Hebrew word translated wormwood in the Old Testament is “la’anah,” and is never actually translated apsinthos in the Greek Old Testament. So in reality, we do not have an absolutely certain linguistic link with the wormwood in the Old Testament and Rev. 8.

In 1986 the name wormwood came to the attention of the world from an unexpected source and in an unexpected way. On April 26 of that year an explosion occurred at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl in the U.S.S.R. 100 kilometres north of Kiev, capital of the Ukraine. It resulted in releasing 7 tons of highly radio-active material into the atmosphere in a 5 kilometre plume of smoke resulting in many deaths.

Failure of the cooling system results in the radio-active core melting,

falling to the bottom of the reactor vessel, and burning its way through the steel and concrete, down to underground water supplies, contaminating them with highly radio-active material.

An enormous concrete case was constructed to enclose the reactor and was supposed to last for 30 years. But it has been reported that the concrete has for some time been deteriorating.

Now, the Chernobyl power station sits on the Pripet river, which flows into the Dnieper, the third longest river in Europe. It flows south to the Black Sea and out into the Mediterranean, and is the water source for the city of Kiev and other major cities. If the meltdown process continues, it will eventually contaminate this waterway, involving underground springs, lakes and rivers.

Considering that “Chernobyl” in the Ukrainian language means “wormwood,” it was inevitable that it would be connected with the wormwood in Rev. 8. Wormwood is the name of a bitter herb which grows abundantly in the area of the power station, and significantly enough, wormwood is associated with “gall” in Deu. 29:18, which comes from a Hebrew word “rosh,” which was the ancient name for Russia.

The nuclear fission process that occurs in the reactor core is the same as the fiery process of a star or sun, which means a nuclear core is a miniature star. In view of this, it is not surprising that the fall of the white-hot nuclear core at the Chernobyl power station and its threat to poison rivers, has been related to the fall of a star called Wormwood in Rev. 8.

After the tragedy occurred, a number of newspapers reported that Russians in possession of a Bible regarded it as the beginning of the fulfilment of Rev. 8:10-11, and a sign of the end time. One Russian writer even wrote a novel based on the nuclear accident and called it “The Star of Chernobyl,” which means “the star of wormwood.”

The U.S.A. energy department has since warned that 10 Soviet built nuclear reactors in eastern Europe, including 2 still in operation at Chernobyl, posed “significant safety risks.” Most nuclear power plants are situated on waterways which connect with rivers and there are hundreds of them throughout the world. Only time will tell whether the “star” in Rev. 8 relates to something nuclear, and whether the Chernobyl incident was a sign of things to come.

Rev. 8:11 says “many men died of the waters,” but it does not say, as in the case of the second trumpet, that one third died.

SYMBOLICAL APPLICATION?

Some Scriptures use the word star in a symbolical sense. See Rev. 1:16-20. 9:1. 12:1-4. 22:16. Gen. 37:9. Num. 24:17. Isa. 14:12. Dan. 8:10. 12:3. On this basis, various interpretations and applications have been given to the star in Rev. 8. For example, some apply the star to the star of David and believe it refers to the fall of Israel.

Others say it refers to the defeat or downfall of some world figure or kingdom, resulting in a poisoning effect. For example, in Jer. 8:14 and 23:15 the drinking of bitter water signifies life being made bitter as a result of the downfall of a king and his kingdom. In relation to the end time, it could even relate to an unscrupulous dictator, who, in revenge for being deposed by outside forces, arranges for chemical weapons to poison their water.

Some have even applied the fallen star to the effect of the French Revolution which caused kingdoms and monarchies to fall. Others who hold to the continuous historical interpretation say the star was Attila the Hun who led his barbarian forces from the east from the great plains of Russia to overthrow the western Roman empire in the period of 433-453 A.D. It is claimed that “wormwood” was the name of a river in Illyricum, the district from which Attila came. The area from the Danube to the Don, over which he reigned, now embraces modern Ukraine. He united the 2 mighty kingdoms of Germany and Scythia.

But it is hardly appropriate to liken Attila’s rise to power to a falling star! In Scripture, the symbolical significance of a falling star is not conquering and rising to power, but being conquered and losing power. For example, see Isa. 14:12-. Dan. 8:10. Rev. 12:4.

Other expositors of the historical view say the star in Rev. 8 refers to Genseric with his Vandals falling on the city of Rome. Others refer to Eleazar the son of Annas, spurning the emperor’s victims, and exciting the fury of the Zealots.

Some see the rivers and springs as representing sources of spiritual refreshment, and the fallen star as an apostate teacher who poisons the streams of spiritual life and people’s minds with false doctrine. The question is of course, in view of the countless false teachers that have come and gone, which particular one is referred to by the falling star? As Adam Clarke says in relation to all these views: “It certainly cannot mean all these, and probably none of them.”

Some see the star as the original New Testament church which apostatized from true Christianity and fell from its heavenly place in Christ. Instead of offering the pure water of the Word, it served up

“wormwood”; bitter lies such as purgatory, a fallen angel devil and demons, everlasting torment in hell-fire, penances, food restrictions, celibacy, forbidding marriage among certain members of the church. It has also persecuted, tortured and put to death many who refused to conform, and has led nations into war, causing much bitterness to millions. However, this apostate system is dealt with in Rev. 17 and we will consider that chapter when we come to it.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET

“**A**nd the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was struck, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.”

As has been pointed out, a particular sequence is involved in the trumpet judgements. First, the soil, grass and trees are affected. Second, the salt sea or ocean, along with sea creatures and ships. Third, the fresh water in springs and rivers which would also involve lakes, and now the fourth: the sun moon and stars.

The third part of the sun is smitten and the third part of the moon and stars, so that a third part of them was darkened, resulting in no sun-light for a third of the day, and no light from the moon for a third of the night.

During the ninth plague on Egypt, a literal, physical supernatural darkness took place during the daytime (Ex. 10:21-23). But not all the land of Egypt was plunged into darkness. The land of Goshen had light. If God could cause partial darkness on one area of the earth in the past, He is quite capable of doing it again over a larger area if it is His will.

ONE THIRD DARKENED

Under the fourth vial (Rev. 16:8-9), the light of the sun, moon and stars will be completely extinguished, resulting in the whole earth being plunged into darkness. Other prophecies also state that this will happen in the end time immediately prior to the second coming (Matt. 24:29-30. Joel 2:10. 3:15. Rev. 6:12).

However, the fourth trumpet does not result in completely extinguishing the light of the heavenly bodies. Only a third part of the sun, moon and stars becomes dark, and the light of the sun ceases to shine on the earth for only one third of the day, and the light of the moon for one third of the night. This would result in 4 hours less sunshine during the

day and 4 hours extra darkness during the night. This would result in 8 hours of daylight and a 16 hour night.

Rev. 8 does not say that this will be a continuing phenomenon. It says “the day” shone not for the third part of it. It does not say “days.” This seems to teach that it will be a one day event, like the day when God caused the hours of sunlight to be extended by making the sun stand still in Joshua’s day: “There was no day like that before it or after it” (Josh. 10:12-14). The same God who created the sun in the first place is able to diminish one third of its light as well as extend its light! When Jesus was crucified there were 3 hours ($\frac{1}{4}$ of a day) of unnatural darkness, and an eclipse was clearly not the cause of this (Matt. 27:45).

Such an event involving the diminishing of light by one third could be what Jesus referred to when he said there would be signs (strange things happening) to the sun, moon and stars, prior to his return to earth.

There is no mention in Rev. 8:12 of any bad effects resulting from the reduction of light. But it will no doubt cause fear and panic upon earth, especially if there is no scientific explanation for it such as an eclipse, volcanic ash, smoke from bush fires or thick dark cloud.

After saying that there shall be strange things happening in the sun, moon and stars, Jesus went on to say: “And upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity ... men’s hearts failing them for fear as they wait apprehensively for what is coming on earth” (Lk. 21:25-26). Those who know the signs will realize that worse woes are to come which will ultimately plunge the whole earth into total darkness. For this reason, the partial darkness of the fourth trumpet is followed by a voice declaring: “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth in view of the trumpets that the other 3 angels must blow.”

If the reference to the sun failing to shine for one third of a particular day is to be literally fulfilled, one third of the actual physical body of the sun does not necessarily of course, have to be literally smitten to accomplish this. One third of the sun etc. could have been smitten in John’s vision merely as a sign signifying that there would be less sunlight for one third of the day.

If however, the smiting of one third of the sun is to be literally fulfilled, would this have the effect of causing darkness on the earth? If the one third of the sun’s mass that is darkened involves the section seen from earth, i.e. the section the moon moves across and blots out when it causes an eclipse, the effect would be the same as an eclipse, and the moon and planets (regarded as stars in ancient times) would be affected by this.

Due to the fact that the sun spins on its axis, the darkness would not last, even if the third part remained “smitten.” However, the sun takes about one month to do a complete revolution, which means it would take about 10 days for the whole darkened section to revolve away out of sight, and for the full face of the sun to be shining on earth again. This would mean that after the dark period on earth, light would return gradually, much like the eclipse of the sun, except that it only takes a relatively short period of time for the full light of the sun to return after it has been eclipsed by the moon.

SMITTEN

It is significant to note that Rev. 8:12 says a third part of the sun is “smitten.” The Greek word for smitten is “plesso” and only occurs here. Strong says it means to flatten out, pound, inflict, smite. If taken literally, it means that a third part of the sun will be made to stop shining by a sudden violent action. (Different Greek words are used when repeated action is involved). This all suggests that God will smite one third of the sun and snuff it out. It will not go out slowly or gradually. It will be the largest “sun spot” in human history.

Imagine the effect on the world’s population of the sun shining one minute and suddenly going dark, plunging the earth into darkness! What chaos this would cause among traffic on the highways and at airports etc.

The words of Alfred Norris on p162 of “Apocalypse For Every Man” are worth quoting here:

“Whatever the partial darkness of the fourth trumpet may prove to mean, it denies men the light they have come to take for granted, and plunges the arrogant race, which has come to suppose that with its inventions it can turn night into day, into a groping and bewildered night ... What the world endured for 3 hours when it crucified its Lord, must in some manner be experienced again shortly before they “look on him whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10). None of this is intended to reject the possibility that sun, moon, and stars, which are sometimes intimately associated with Israel, may prove to have some such import in the fulfilment of this trumpet. Had it not been for the links between these trumpets and the plagues of Egypt, as well as a later prophecy (Joel 2:10. 3:15) this might even have been the preferred solution. But in the present context we are concerned with God’s judgements on the unbelieving world at large, and to restrict any of these signs to Israel uniquely seems alien to the context.”

Imagine actually witnessing one third of the sun being blotted out and

being able to relate it to Rev. 8. What a sign! What a testimony! We would certainly know it is the time of the fourth trumpet and that the fifth was impending. As we shall see, it will result in a testimony going forth in a loud, bold and confident voice, warning the world of the forthcoming final 3 woes of the last 3 trumpets.

WOE WOE WOE

“**A**nd I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the 3 angels who are about to sound.”

Instead of “angel” most revised versions give “eagle,” but the same phraseology “flying through the midst of heaven” is also used in Rev. 14:6 in relation to an angel: “another angel.” The word “angel” is correct in this case, and the word “another,” i.e. another angel flying in the midst of heaven, implies “in addition to” a previous one, which implies the eagle in 8:3 is an angel - an angel depicted as an eagle. It may refer to the living creature in Rev. 4:7 which “was like a flying eagle.”

What then, is the significance of the angel like an eagle flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice, woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, as the last 3 trumpets are about to sound? This surely represents a message that will be proclaimed to earth’s inhabitants, after the day that had its sunlight reduced by one third, warning that worse woes are coming.

If so, this raises 3 questions:

1. Why is an angel seen proclaiming the message of woe?
2. Why is he “flying through the midst of heaven?”
3. Why is he depicted as an eagle?

Messages to nations warning of impending doom are usually preached by men, not angels, so why is an angel depicted as doing this?

As pointed out in an earlier chapter (p52-), each angel, being a holy spirit, is an agent of the Holy Spirit, which empowered the preaching of Christ’s witnesses in New Testament times when the Holy Spirit was poured out. It was also pointed out that the evidence in the New Testament points to the Comforter being an angel, and that Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32), causing God’s witnesses to prophesy, pertains to the end time, “before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.” Rev. 11:3 refers to this: “I will give power to my 2 witnesses, and they shall prophesy.” The “I” who gives “power” is the

“mighty angel” in Rev. 10:1 - the Comforter.

Reference therefore in Rev. 8:13 to an angel proclaiming a warning message to inhabitants of the earth can be taken to signify a divinely empowered testimony. Being depicted as an eagle could simply signify that the message will go forth with speed and haste and cover considerable distance. Scriptures that convey the aspects of speed and haste etc in relation to eagles can be found in Deu. 28:49. 2 Sam. 1:23. Hab. 1:8. Rev. 12:14.

We read in Isa. 40:29-31 that those who wait upon the Lord shall be given strength and power and shall mount up with wings as eagles. In view of this, it would be quite fitting for the empowered saints to be represented by an eagle! They shall run with their message and not be weary or faint, warning of woes to come and calling upon all to repent. As we shall see in the next chapter (Rev. 9), the trumpet-woes involve invasion by enemy forces. In view of the fact that Israel will be affected by this, the language of the warning in Hos. 8:1 is quite relevant: “Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He (the invading army) shall come as an eagle ...”

THE MIDST OF HEAVEN

“**T**he midst of heaven” where the eagle flies to proclaim the message, is also referred to in Rev. 19:17 as the place where birds fly, which of course is the atmosphere. An angel silhouetted against the sun is seen calling the birds of prey to the supper of God’s judgement. David also saw an angel in the atmosphere who is described as “standing between the earth and heaven” (1 Chr. 21:16). He held a sword to execute judgement.

An angel is also seen in Rev. 14:6 flying in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation kindred and tongue. As we shall see when we come to that chapter, the “angel,” which means “messenger,” represents God’s messengers of the gospel on earth, who will be empowered by the divine messenger who ministers the Holy Spirit.

Because those who preach the gospel do so upon the earth, why is the angel seen in the atmosphere? There may be a special significance in this. Up until the 20th century, only angels could travel through the atmosphere to communicate God’s message to man (Dan. 9:21). But times have changed. Man is now able to use the same sphere for rapid travel and communication by means of aeroplanes, cell-phones, radio, computers and T.V.

Is it not significant therefore, that in the very passage where it is announced that “the hour of judgement is come,” the last message of the gospel is pictured being carried with the speed of an angel in mid-air to every nation, kindred, tongue and people? (14:6-7).

Rev. 8:13 could be interpreted in the same light, representing a rapid world-wide warning being given to the inhabitants of the earth of the woeful times that are coming, as a result of the final 3 trumpet woes.

The darkening of one third of the sun etc, will be the sign of the period of the last 3 trumpets - a sign that dark and woeful times are ahead. And such a sign as this would give God’s witnesses great courage and boldness to go forth proclaiming the warning. Reference to the proclamation being in a “loud voice” (Rev. 8:13) could convey this.

The 3 woes, as we have seen, relate to the 5th, 6th and 7th trumpets - the last 3 trumpet judgements. They are referred to again in Rev. 9:12 after the 5th trumpet: “One woe is past, and behold 2 more woes come after.” And after the 6th trumpet Rev. 11:14 says: “The second woe is past, and behold, the third woe comes quickly.” We are taught here that the woes are in strict chronological order or sequence. And, as in the case of the 7 seals, there is a break between the first 4 and the last 3 trumpets. The first 4 judgements affect people, indirectly through upheavals in nature, involving the soil, trees, grass, sea, rivers, lakes, sun, moon and stars. But the last 3 affect people directly by a face to face encounter with invasion forces.

This indicates that the last 3 trumpets will introduce judgements that will exceed in severity and be more painful and grievous than the previous 4. The word “woe” occurs quite frequently in Scripture and is usually used as a warning of judgement to come because of sin. The purpose of the message of woe will no doubt be designed to convict the world of sin and bring about repentance. But it is evident from Rev. 9:20 that it will be to no avail: “The men who were not killed by these plagues, repented not.” Like Pharaoh of old, they harden their hearts.

Finally, it should be pointed out that Rev. 8:13 uses the singular word “trumpet.” In view of the fact it relates to the last 3 angels, it comes as a surprise that the plural word “trumpets” is not used. However, the sense intended may simply be: “Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the remaining voices of the trumpet (of each) of the 3 angels, which are about to sound.” Most modern translations give the plural “trumpets.”



CHAPTER SIX

REVELATION CHAPTER NINE

Revelation chapter 9 introduces us to the fifth trumpet, and is regarded by some as the most difficult and challenging chapter in the book of Revelation. As in the case of the seals, much more space is given to the last 3 trumpets than to the first 4, as is seen on this graph:

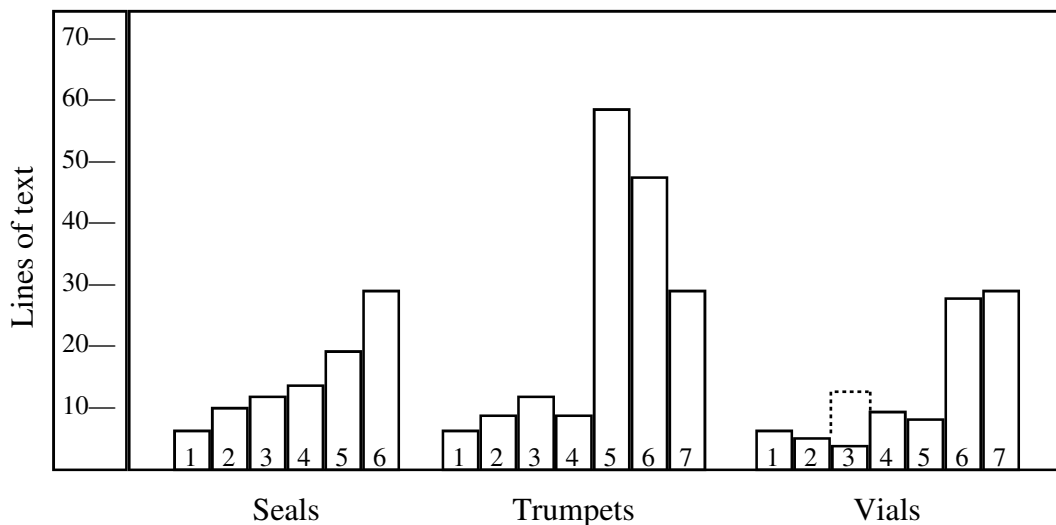


Fig. 1. The number of lines of text for the seals, trumpets and vials.

The first 4 parts of the 7 seals and trumpets are a general description - an overall picture of events, whereas more detail is given of the last 3. As in the case of the fifth seal, the fifth trumpet brings us close to the end. It is possible that the first 4 trumpets run parallel with the first 4 seals.

During the fifth seal, it was stated in response to the cry from the altar that it was only “a little while” to the end. And it is during the period after the fifth trumpet that a declaration is made that “there shall be time no longer” (10:6). Also, during the period of the fifth trumpet, reference is made to men being tormented during a period of “5 months.” If this period is literal, it is quite short, which would be expected if it takes place near the end. But if it is not literal, and is interpreted on the basis of a day for a year, it becomes 150 years. In view of the warning of impending doom in the message of “woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth” (8:13), 150 years would be out of proportion to the context.

It is true that there was a comparable period of 120 years in the days of Noah, during which the longsuffering of God waited for repentance, but this was a small fraction of a lifetime in those days when people lived for centuries, compared with the average lifetime in the period represented

by the trumpets. As A.D. Norris says in “Apocalypse For Everyman”: “It is hard to see the appropriateness of warning one generation of something which would come upon their great great grandchildren.”

A STAR FALLEN FROM HEAVEN

As a result of the fifth trumpet being blown, John says in v1: “I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit” (A.V.). Instead of saying John saw the star fall, most modern translations say he saw it fallen - “having fallen” (Diaglott).

In Scripture a star can either be taken literally to mean an object from space such as a meteorite or asteroid, or metaphorically to signify a person in a prominent position. Jesus is one of the best examples of this: (Num. 24:17. Rev. 22:16).

In the verse under consideration in Rev. 9:1, the personal pronoun “him” is applied to the star, indicating it is symbolic of a person. The fact that a key is given to him by which he opens the bottomless pit confirms this. This is further confirmed by the reference to him as a “king” in v11. This all suggests that the fallen star signifies a fallen king, i.e. a ruler who has been cast down from his throne or seat of authority and lost power.

Because v11 refers to this king as “the angel of the bottomless pit,” some have concluded that the fallen star is a fallen angel, and identify him with Satan. There is no evidence however, that Satan is a fallen angel. (A separate book dealing with this is available).

The fact that a divine angel is seen coming down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit in Rev. 20:1, has caused some to conclude that the star in 9:1 to whom the key was given, is the same angel. Not necessarily! The reference in Rev. 20:1 is to a righteous holy angel, and it would be inappropriate to refer to a visit to earth of such a being as “fallen from heaven.” Scripture never refers to the appearance of holy angels in terms of a “fall” or “fallen” from heaven, but rather as “come down” from heaven as in Rev. 10:1. 18:1. 20:1, or “descend” from heaven (Gen. 28:2. Matt. 28:2. Jn. 1:51). Also see Act. 10:11. Rev. 21:10.

It would also be inappropriate to give a divine angel the title of “king.” Archangels are given the title of “prince” (Dan. 12:1), but neither they nor other angels are ever called “king.” The only heavenly beings with the title “king” are the Father and His son.

The angel seen coming down from heaven in Rev. 20:1 is described as “having” the key to the bottomless pit. The key belongs to him; he is entrusted with it by divine commission and consent. Only he can use it,

and no one else, unless he gives it to them to use, as in the case of the fallen star to whom the key was “given” in Rev. 9:1.

The fallen star is not described as coming down from heaven having the key in his hand. He is given the key after his fall. God, who rules in the kingdoms of men by His angels, can give “keys” even to the basest of men, to unleash terror and torment!

Another view is that Rev. 9:1 should be read to mean that the key was given to the angel who blew the fifth trumpet, not the fallen star, and that the angel of the bottomless pit in v11 is the same angel. Most modern translations disagree. For example, the New International Version reads like this: “And I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key ...” This translation and others, agree that the key was given to the fallen star, not the angel who blew the trumpet. The key was actually given to the fallen star as a result of the angel blowing the trumpet.

Taking it a stage further, it could also be said that the star fell as a result of the trumpet being blown. In view of the connection between the blast of a trumpet and war in some Scriptures; this could signify that a divinely ordained war resulted in the star falling from power and prominence, resulting in him unleashing terror and torment.

Another popular view is that the fallen star in Rev. 9:1 is the same star named “wormwood” that John saw falling when the third trumpet sounded (8:10). However, John not only saw that star fallen but also falling: “it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters,” causing them to be poisoned, resulting in many men dying.

The star on that occasion is not referred to as a person; no personal pronouns are applied to it, and it has an entirely different effect from the one in Rev. 9. The star in Rev. 8 causes great loss of life, whereas the star in chapter 9 causes no loss of life (v5). There are no grounds for regarding them as one and the same star.

Some have even contended that the fallen star in chapter 9 is the star of David and refers to the fall of the nation of Israel in the end time. However, Scripture never refers to the nation as a single star but as “stars,” due to it consisting of 12 tribes. (Gen. 37:9. Ex. 32:13. 1 Chr. 27:23. Isa. 14:13. Dan. 8:10. Rev. 12:1, 4).

When all the alternative views of the fallen star are considered, the most satisfactory one is that it signifies a fallen king or ruler. Significantly enough, the only other reference in Scripture to a fallen star refers to a king - the king of Babylon (Iraq today). It is recorded in Isa. 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven O day star.” The “fall” represents the king’s

loss of power and authority due to being defeated and deposed by invading forces.

Other examples of falling or being cast out of heaven signifying defeat and demotion can be seen in: Jer. 51:53. Lam. 2:1. Dan. 8:10. Lk. 10:15, 18-20. Rev. 12:4.

It may be felt by some that if the fallen star represents a ruler who has been defeated, how could he have any power to unleash a scourge upon men such as we read in Rev. 9? In answer to this, attention is directed to Rev. 12 where a political power, symbolized by a dragon, falls from heaven, which signifies loss of power due to defeat. But the chapter goes on to say: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the dragon is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows he has but a short time." Reference is also made in Rev. 12 to the dragon, in spite of having "fallen," making war with, and persecuting God's people. Rev. 13:2 also makes the point that the dragon gives his power, throne and authority to the beast. The dragon clearly still has power after his fall.

It is not uncommon in time of war for a nation to make a last ditch effort by whatever means available, to cause as much injury and pain as possible to its enemy when it knows it is as good as finished as a power. For example, in relation to the recent ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein: it was feared that in the event of being defeated by the American and British forces, he might unleash chemical and biological weapons against Israel.

THE KEY

Rev. 9:1 says the key to the bottomless pit was given to the fallen star. Whatever the bottomless pit is, a key is required to open it, which implies it is locked.

The key is symbolic of the authority to open it. Compare Rev. 1:18 which says Christ has "the key of hades and death." The key is not literal but symbolic of his power and authority to open the graves and release the dead. The same applies in Rev. 3:7, taken from Isa. 22:22, which refers to Jesus having "the key of David; he opens and no man can shut, and shuts and no man can open." The symbolic application of the word "key" can also be seen in Matt. 16:19. Lk. 11:52.

In Rev. 20:1 the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain seen in the hand of the angel coming down from heaven, certainly signifies his power and authority to close down and shut away the dragon power.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

The words translated “bottomless pit” in the A.V. text of Rev. 9:1-2 come from the Greek words “phrear” and “abussos.” “Phrear” only occurs 7 times in the New Testament and basically means a hole in the ground. It is translated “pit” in Lk. 14:5 into which an ass or ox may fall. It is also translated “well” twice, in Jn. 4:11-12: “the well is deep.” It also occurs 4 times in the book of Revelation, all of which are in chapter 9:1-2 in relation to the bottomless pit.

“Abussos” means abyss, deep, depthless (bottomless). The word occurs 9 times in the New Testament, 7 of which are in the book of Revelation, and 3 of those are in chapter 9 (v1, 2, 11).

Although the phrase “bottomless pit” occurs 7 times in the book of Revelation, the 2 Greek words phrear and abussos only occur together on 2 of these occasions in chapter 9:1-2, and are literally translated “the pit of the abyss” in the Greek text. On the other 5 occasions (9:11, 11:7, 17:8, 20:1, 3), “bottomless pit” has been translated from the single Greek word “abussos,” but should be literally translated simply as “the bottomless” or “the abyss.”

In Revelation 11:7 and 17:8 reference is made to the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit. And in chapter 20:1, 3, reference is made to the dragon being consigned to the bottomless pit.

It is surely reasonable to expect that the bottomless pit has the same meaning in each of the 7 places it occurs in the book of Revelation. If the same symbol can be interpreted in different ways in different parts of the same book, and are not consistent, interpretation would be reduced to guesswork, which is not likely.

The other 2 places in the New Testament where abussos occurs are: Lk. 8:31 and Rom. 10:7.

Lk. 8:31 relates to a request for Jesus to not command demons to go into the abyss. The parallel passage in Mk. 5:10 says the request was that he would not send them out of the country. So they ended up being cast into the lake of Galilee. This suggests that the abyss was regarded as being outside the country of Israel, and not the lake of Galilee.

The other reference in Rom. 10:7 says: “Who shall descend into the deep?” (abyss). This is a quotation from Deu. 30:13 which reads: “Who shall go over the sea for us?” Here, the abyss is explained to be the sea or beyond the sea. To the Jews this would be the Mediterranean, stretching westwards to apparent infinity, in contrast to the limited span of the sea of Galilee and the Dead sea. Hence, it was termed “the great sea” (Josh. 9:1 etc).

This sea is also linked with the abyss in the book of Revelation. Chapter 11:7 and 17:8 refers to the beast coming out of the abyss, and he is also referred to as coming out of the sea in Rev. 13:1. The abyss seems to be synonymous with the sea in these passages.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES

Abussos occurs some 35 times in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), and goes back to “the deep” of Gen. 1:2, which refers to the waters that covered the earth and which ultimately became the oceans of the world. The same applies in Gen. 7:11 and 8:2 where “the deep” (abussos) relates to the fountains of the deep that burst forth at the time of the flood in Noah’s day.

Other verses in the Greek Old Testament where abussos relates to the springs and fountains of the sea are: Job 38:16. Pr. 3:20. 8:24. The word also relates to the depths of the sea in Ps. 33:7. 77:16. 104:6. 107:26. 148:7. Amos 7:4. Jonah 2:6. Hab. 3:10. The sea bed of the Red sea is also referred to by abussos in Ps. 106:9. Isa. 51:10. 63:13.

But abussos is not only used in the LXX to refer to the depths of the ocean. In Job 28:14 the abyss and the sea are treated as two separate entities: “The depth (abyss) says, it (wisdom) is not in me, and the sea says, it is not with me.”

In the context of Ps. 135:6, the phrase: “all deep places” can also relate to the land as well as the sea. And in Ps. 36:6 “the great deep” (abussos) is contrasted with high mountains and refers to the depths of the earth. In Deu. 8:7. 33:13. Ps. 78:15. and Ezk. 31:4 abussos refers to deep wells and springs of the earth, where subterranean streams flow. Even the bed of the river Euphrates is referred to as abussos and is translated “the deep” in the A.V.

GRAVE ASSOCIATIONS

In Ps. 71:20 abussos relates to “the depths of the earth” and refers to the grave. It is also associated with the grave in Ezk. 31:15-18. This is a particularly interesting passage of Scripture in relation to our subject because “the grave” with which abussos is linked, is referred to as “hell” and “the pit” and is described as “the nether parts of the earth” i.e. regions underground. This particular section of Scripture relates to the casting down and “fall” of Pharaoh, king of Egypt and his multitudinous army which involved being consigned to the abyss or pit.

Ezk. 32:17- is similar. It speaks of Egypt and other nations such as Assyria, Elam (Iran), Meshech, Tubal and all her multitude etc, falling from power and being consigned to the pit, “the nether (lower) parts of the earth.” In this particular passage, nations which fell from power and were consigned to the pit before the Egyptians, are symbolically depicted as taunting the Egyptians when they were also finally cast down among them.

The fall of Tyre is expressed in the same terms in Ezk. 26:15-21: “I (God) shall bring you down with those who descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set you in the low parts of the earth ...”

Isa. 24:21-22 also refers to “the armies of the high ones on high” (i.e. armies of nations in power - super powers), being cast down by God as prisoners into the pit where they will be “shut up” (bound) in the “prison” for many days. Here, the pit is referred to as a prison where nations once in power are shut up i.e. locked away. A “key” is required to lock prison doors, and this could be significant in the light of the reference in Rev. 20 to the dragon being “shut up” (locked away) in the bottomless pit by a key held in the hand of an angel - the same key “given” to the fallen star in Rev. 9:1 to open the bottomless pit.

In view of the connections between the book of Revelation and the Old Testament Scriptures, it would not be surprising if “the pit of the abyss” in Revelation has some connection with the references to “the pit” in “the nether (lower) parts of the earth,” referred to in Ezk. 31 etc, which relate to nations fallen from power being “shut up” and locked away there “for many days.”

As a result of such Scriptures, the word “pit” came to be regarded by the Jews as a vast subterranean cavern deep beneath the surface of the earth and ocean, to which the dead were consigned and which became the home of departed nations along with their rulers. Should any nation or nations consigned to the pit as a result of falling from power, end up rising to power again, it would not be surprising if such a rise to power was symbolically portrayed as being unlocked and released from the pit.

Reference to the abyss in Rev. 20:1-3 is particularly interesting in this light. As we have seen, it refers to an angel having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand, taking hold of the dragon and casting him into the abyss, locking him away for 1,000 years, after which he will be unlocked and let loose for a little season.

Letting the dragon loose would involve the same procedure mentioned in Rev. 9:1-2, i.e. opening the pit of the abyss with the key.

In the Old Testament the dragon symbolizes the political power of

both Egypt and Babylon (Iraq), and it is reasonable to assume the same or a similar application applies in Revelation. If so, the dragon represents a political power which is anti-Israel, and which deceives the nations into invading Israel, resulting in the battle of Armageddon, after which he is cast into the abyss.

The abyss therefore, as far as the dragon power is concerned, represents political death and obscurity. Being loosed from the abyss would therefore signify rising from obscurity and reviving as a national and political power. It represents a force that was once active, having lost its power and influence among the nations, but regaining and rising to power for one last fling.

A BEASTLY CONNECTION?

In connection with all this, it is interesting to note that the beast who is referred to as ascending out of the abyss in Rev. 11:7 and 17:8, is also referred to as a beast who “was and is not” (17:11) i.e. he was once a political power in the earth, but “is not” at the time the book of Revelation was given. The reason for this is because he was “wounded to death” (Rev. 13:3) i.e. he was destroyed and died as a political power, and was therefore consigned to the pit of the abyss like other nations who fall from power.

However, Rev. 13:3, 13 tells us that “his deadly wound was healed,” and he is seen rising to great power in the earth and exercising great influence over the nations. Ascending out of the abyss clearly signifies this rise to power. It is, as it were, a national and political revival or resurrection, emerging from political and national obscurity or impotence.

In view of the fact that Rev. 19:17-18, which relates to the destruction of the beast at Armageddon, is a quotation from Ezk. 39:17-20, which relates to the destruction of Gog and his forces; it seems reasonable to conclude that this reveals the identity of the beast.

According to Ezk. 38:1, Gog is from the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. These names must therefore be associated with the beast who ascends from the pit of the abyss, which means they must have been consigned there in the past. Such is the case as we have already seen in Ezk. 32:26 where “Meshech and Tubal and all her multitude” are mentioned among other nations in the chapter as having fallen by the sword and been cast into the pit - “the nether (lower) parts of the earth.”

The reference to the beast arising out of the pit of the abyss in Revelation signifies a revival of these nations in the political heavens.

As we have seen, in the Greek Old Testament, *abussos* is used to signify deep places under both the sea and earth. (The ancients regarded it as a deep subterranean cave that ran under both the land and sea). It is not surprising therefore that not only is the beast depicted as ascending from the pit of the abyss, but also rising up out of the sea (Rev. 13:1).

In connection with this, it is interesting to observe that Dan. 7:2-3 depicts 4 beasts coming up out of “the great sea” (Mediterranean), whereas v17 refers to them as kings who “shall arise out of the earth.” The fact that 2 of these beasts representing Babylon and Medo-Persia, did not originate from the borders of the Mediterranean, indicates that the reference to them coming out of the great sea does not necessarily mean that Mediterranean or maritime powers have to be involved. (The fact that smoke arises from the abyss in Rev. 9:2 and locusts emerge from it, certainly indicates that it relates to the earth not the sea).

However, it should also be pointed out that reference to nations arising from the deep does not always necessarily have to mean that they had previously attained to power and lost it. For example: the nations represented by beasts coming out of the sea in Dan. 7 had not previously attained power and lost it. In their particular case, arising out of the deep does not mean a revival of political power. On this occasion, the sea seems to signify the universal sea of nations - the mass of mankind out of which nations are formed and arise out of obscurity, and emerge to wield power and conquer.

As far as the book of Revelation is concerned, reference is made to 3 forces which emerge from the pit of the abyss:

1. The locusts in chapter 9.
2. The beast in chapters 11:7 and 17:8.
3. The dragon in chapter 20.

The verses relating to the beast and dragon indicate that their rise from the abyss represents a revival of power, but there is no mention in Rev. 9 of this also being the case with the locusts. If the locusts could be linked with the beast or dragon, the matter would stand differently of course.

LINKING THE LOCUSTS

It is possible that they can be linked. In the prophecy of Joel a plague of locusts represents a “northern army” which invades Israel in the end time (Joel 1:4 and 2:20, 25). As we shall see, there are similarities in appearance between the locusts in Joel’s prophecy and Revelation 9.

Many students of the prophetic word link the northern army in Joel with the army of Gog in Ezk. 38 which comes against Israel “from the uttermost parts of the north.”

If the northern army (“locusts”) in Joel can be linked with Gog and his forces, and if they are represented by the beast in Revelation who comes out of the abyss, it is natural to see a link between the locusts which come out of the abyss in Rev. 9, and the locusts in Joel’s prophecy. If so, this would suggest that when the abyss is opened, the beast emerges and rises to power and uses the “locusts” to gain power and victory.

ABADDON AND APOLLYON

Rev. 9:11 says the name of the king of the locusts is Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. Abaddon means ruin, destruction. As a proper name, abaddon means destroyer. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word abaddon only occurs 6 times, all of which translate it “destruction.” It is used as a synonym for death.

Both Dan. 8:24 and 11:44 emphasize that the policy and mission of the end time king of the north is to “destroy.” He is a destroyer, inflicting death and destruction wherever he goes. He is the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel the prophet and Jesus. “Abaddon” is a very significant and appropriate symbolical title for him. (“Gog” is also a symbolical title, and means mountain or elevation, signifying someone imposing, obstructive and arrogant which the king of the north will be. Dan. 11:36. 2 Thes. 2:3-4).

The Greek word “apollyon” also means destroyer. It is derived from apollumi which occurs many times in the New Testament and is mostly translated “destroy,” “perish” and “lost.” It is translated “perish” in 2 Thes. 2:10 and refers to those deceived by “the man of sin” which is another title for Gog, alias the beast. All who are deceived by this arrogant atheist who opposes theism and the worship of any god, and yield to his power, will be doomed to destruction.

Significantly enough, the Greek word “apoleia,” translated “perdition” in relation to the man of sin and the beast (2 Thes. 2:3. Rev. 17:8, 11), is derived from “apollumi,” the same word from which “apollyon” is derived.

In view of all this, it would seem that a case might be able to be made for seeing in the events of the fifth (and sixth) trumpet, the development of the beast and his agents or confederates in the end time and their invasion of the land of Israel. As has been mentioned previously and will

be covered in more detail in later chapters, it seems that there will be 2 invasions of Israel in the end time. The first will involve the dragon, a confederacy of Moslem nations, which will be defeated and expelled due to divine intervention by Michael and his angels.

The second invasion involves Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, plus the 10 Moslem nations of the dragon who transfer their allegiance to him after their defeat. Some relate these 2 invasions to the fifth and sixth trumpets in Rev. 9. 2 Thes. 2:6 says the power of the man of sin (the beast) will be restrained until it is time to be manifested. Rev. 9 could very well refer to the time when the restraint is lifted and the beast begins to be manifested.

LOCUSTS AND ARABS

If the 2 invasions of Israel can be related to the fifth and sixth trumpets, this would mean that the locusts of the fifth trumpet would relate to the Moslem confederacy which would involve Arab nations. In some respects, locusts would be an appropriate symbol for Arab regions. Consider the following:

1. The 2 words arbeh (locust) and arbi (Arab) are almost identical in Hebrew. In the Bedouin romance of Antar, the locust is introduced as the national emblem of the Ishmaelites. The locust has in the past been recognized as the national emblem of the Arabs. Mohammedan tradition speaks of locusts having dropped into the hands of Mohammed, bearing on their wings the inscription “we are the army of the great God.”

2. In Judg. 6:5. 7:12 the locust is used to designate the number and character of Arab armies which invaded Israel from the east.

3. The region of Arabia is one in which locusts are endemic. The plague of them in Egypt came from that area on an east wind (Ex. 10:13).

4. Invasions of Israel from the east came up through the rift valley (2 Chr. 20), known as the “arabah.” It is a great land depression which consists of the Jordan valley and the Dead sea, whose surface is approximately 400 metres below the level of the Mediterranean sea. Because the forces in Rev. 9 represented by the locusts coming up out of the abyss, are not likely to literally come up out of the bowels of the earth, some have suggested that the rift valley is signified by the abyss. However there are no Scriptures to support this. Although the rift valley is a deep land depression, it could hardly be designated a “bottomless pit.” People live and move about there!

5. The phrase “the smoke of a great furnace” in Rev. 9:2 out of which

the locusts emerge, is identical to the phrase in Gen. 19:28, which relates to the destruction by fire of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on the shores of the Dead sea. Some suggest that this could be designed to point to the region east of Israel, signifying Arab nations, who would like to destroy Israel as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

In the past, as a result of the rise of Mohammedism, the Arabs became very powerful and established an extensive empire. Eventually however, they fell from their position of power and ended up in the pits of political limbo. In view of the circumstances, “fallen star” would be an appropriate designation. However, due to the discovery of vast deposits of liquid gold (oil) in the “abyss” of the Arab world, (which is manifested by the “smoke of a great furnace” due to the heavy black smoke that belches up out of the ground when the oil is ignited), Arab nations have emerged from a poor, powerless and insignificant position, to a position of power and influence in the world. They have used their oil wealth to purchase weapons of war so that their armies can swarm out and attack Israel. The unlocking of the abyss and release of locusts in Rev. 9 would be an appropriate symbol of this revival and rise to power of the Arabs.

THE SMOKE OF A GREAT FURNACE

As the saying goes: “Where there is smoke there is fire.” The reference to a “furnace” - “the smoke of a great furnace,” suggests fire is the cause of the smoke.

Because of this, and the fact that Jesus referred to hell fire as a “furnace” (Matt. 13:42, 50), it is believed in some circles in Christendom that this is the significance of “the smoke of a great furnace” in Rev. 9:2. However, Scripture makes a distinction between the bottomless pit and hell fire. Those cast into hell fire are totally annihilated and will never revive and walk on the earth again (Rev. 19:20), whereas those cast into the bottomless pit can be revived (Rev. 20:1-3).

This distinction can also be seen in the two different and distinct Greek words which have unfortunately both been translated into the same English word “hell” in the A.V. They are “hades” and “gehenna.” Hades refers to the grave and includes the pit of the abyss. Gehenna, translated “hell fire” in the A.V. literally means “the valley of Hinnom,” and refers to a valley outside the city of Jerusalem which was used as a rubbish dump and where fires continually burned and worms (maggots) bred. Jesus used this as an example of the destiny and fate of the wicked. Gehenna was on the surface of the earth, not in some deep chasm under the earth. There is

no evidence of such a “hell fire” existing in a deep abyss under the earth.

Some see the smoke in Rev. 9 as representing the smoke of war which advances and spreads over the land of Israel, as armies, represented by the locusts, invade and cause darkness and gloom. As we read in Isa. 14:31: “Howl, O gate; cry, O city; ... for there shall come from the north, smoke; it is an army with no cowards in its ranks.”

When the end time king of the north (the beast) and his Arab confederates (the dragon) invade the land of Israel, “a fire devours before them and behind them a flame burns,” making it a “day of darkness and of gloominess; a day of clouds and of thick darkness,” causing the sun, moon and stars to be darkened (Joel 2:1-3, 10). Verses 30-31 say there shall be “blood and fire, and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness.” Rev. 9:2 also makes the point that “the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.”

Others who subscribe to the continuous historical view, see the smoke as representing the darkness and delusion of the religion of Mohammed which spread quickly as his numbers of followers multiplied like locusts and spread out over the Middle East and beyond. To other non-Islamic religions, Mohammedism was like an irritating and suffocating smoke, causing discomfort, pain and misery.

Others see the smoke as the darkness and delusion caused by the man of sin in the end time.

However, the fact that John saw locusts coming out of the smoke, suggests that the smoke is not real smoke, but a swarm of locusts which, in the distance looks like smoke or a cloud which literally darkens the sun by shutting out the sunlight. As the wind-borne “smoke” approaches, individual locusts can be seen.

That the smoke is not necessarily literal smoke, but looks like it, is indicated by the words “as the smoke of a great furnace.” The word “as” means “like” or “similar to.” It indicates that a comparison is being made.

One modern traveller who witnessed a swarm of locusts wrote these words: “We observed large dark clouds resembling smoke moving to and fro ... One morning these clouds came down and proved to be locusts.”

NOT NORMAL LOCUSTS

Rev. 9:3-11 gives a detailed description of a list of the features of the locusts, and it soon becomes evident that they are not normal locusts. Reference to them as smoke arising indicates they were air-borne. When John first saw them they were flying in the air, and v9 refers to their

“wings.” But they did not remain air-borne; they flew down “upon the earth.”

It is stated in v3 that “To them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.” This is the first indication that they are not normal locusts. Verse 10 says they had tails like scorpions and there were stings in their tails, giving them power to hurt men for 5 months. Normal locusts do not sting, neither do they have tails, let alone tails like a scorpion. And scorpions do not fly like locusts, neither are they restricted to a stinging cycle of 5 months.

Scorpion stings are obviously very painful because we read in 1 Kng. 12:11, 14 that they are more painful than whips. The sting of a scorpion is one of the most painful stings known. The venom seems to set the veins and nervous system on fire, and the effects last for several days. By contrast, the effect of the scorpion sting in Rev. 9 will extend 5 months.

Verse 5 says the sting is a “torment” i.e. torture. Putting it into modern terminology: “sheer hell.” It is the same word used in relation to a man being burnt by flames (Lk. 16:23-24), and the torment of disease (Matt. 4:24), which one modern translation translates as “racked with pain.” Under normal circumstances, 5 months is a relatively short period, but under sharp intense pain, it would seem an eternity. The pain is so bad and unbearable, that those who are stung want to die (v6). It should be noticed that Rev. 9:3 says the locusts have power to sting “as scorpions.” This suggests that the sting is not necessarily a literal scorpion sting, but like it. The pain is comparable to the pain inflicted by a scorpion.

Verse 4 states: “they were commanded to not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree.” This certainly reveals that they are not normal locusts. Locusts are herbivorous and have a big appetite for vegetation.

Verse 4 continues by saying they were commanded to only hurt those who did not have the seal of God in their forehead. In view of the fact that those who were sealed in their forehead were Israelites from the 12 tribes, living in the land of Israel, (Rev. 7), this surely means those who do not have the seal are the rest of the Israelites in the land who were not sealed. As pointed out in the chapter dealing with Rev. 7, only 144,000 are sealed, leaving millions who are not sealed and who will be inflicted.

All the evidence points very strongly to the land of Israel in particular being the geographical region upon which the locusts descend. Reference in v6 to those who are stung wanting to die but not being able to, would certainly be consistent with a Jewish population if it referred to suicide. It is contrary to Judaism to commit suicide, and as we shall see, there will be

a revival of Judaism in the end time, revolving around the rebuilt temple.

Three statements made in connection with the fifth and sixth trumpet also point to Israel being the land invaded by the locusts:

1. In 9:11 the name of the leader of the invasion force is given “in the Hebrew tongue” as well as the Greek. Why would it be given in Hebrew if it has no bearing on, or relevance to the Hebrew land and people? In Rev. 16:16 the name of the place to which all nations will be gathered for the battle of that great day of God Almighty, is given “in the Hebrew tongue.” Why? Because the battle will be in the Hebrew’s land, the land of Israel, and the name is “Armageddon.”

2. Rev. 9:14- refers to an army stationed at the river Euphrates waiting to invade. The river Euphrates was the northern border of the land of Israel (Gen. 15:18), from which invading nations in the past launched their attacks.

3. Rev. 11:2, which is part of the trumpet series, refers to the Gentiles treading underfoot the city of Jerusalem, which of course, is the capital of Israel. And v8 refers to the dead bodies of God’s people, slain by the beast who ascends out of the bottomless pit, left lying in the street of the city of Jerusalem.

The fact that the locusts are commanded to only hurt those not sealed with the seal of God, clearly speaks of it being a divine chastisement, as in the case of Ezk. 9. God is the ultimate source of the commandment and the “locusts” are the agents used to carry it out.

SEEK DEATH AND NOT FIND IT

Scorpion stings can be fatal, but only on rare occasions. Those who die from the sting are the exception not the general rule. In Rev. 9, the scorpion sting is not allowed to kill anyone, only torture. “Men will seek death and not find it, and shall desire to die but death will elude them” (v6). The phrase “and not find it” is a strong negative in the Greek and means “and in no way find it.”

There are several other Scriptures that relate to the situation of people experiencing prolonged pain or persecution, preferring to die rather than live: (Ecc. 4:2-3. Jer. 8:3). Job refers to those living in misery who long for death, but it does not come, and seek for it and desire it more than treasure (Job 3:20-22).

The reference in Rev. 9 to men seeking death does not therefore necessarily mean attempting to commit suicide. Neither do the words: “and not find it,” necessarily mean all attempts at suicide fail. Very few

serious attempts at suicide fail. If people are determined to kill themselves, most attempts are successful.

In view of this, the words: “seek death” could be taken to mean that people will desire, hope and possibly even pray that the pain of the sting will kill them and put them out of their misery. But it doesn’t because God has ordained that it shouldn’t. The pain is a punishment for sin and iniquity, so they must suffer it and not escape from it.

Some have suggested that the desire to die could be interpreted to mean that Israel, due to persecution, will want to die as a nation, and be assimilated by other nations to lose her national identity and escape persecution. Some Jews tried to do this in Europe during the Holocaust. However, the prophecy in Rev. 9 does not say the whole nation will seek death. It says “men” (i.e. individuals) shall seek death. The 144,000 will certainly have no reason to want to lose their national identity.

LIKE HORSES - CROWNS OF GOLD - - -

“**A**nd the shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold; and their faces were as the faces of men” (v7).

The shapes of the locusts were “like” horses, i.e. similar to, not necessarily exactly like. The likeness between the head of a locust in particular and that of a horse, has often been mentioned by ancient writers. However, the description in Rev. 9:7 does not say their head or face was like a horse: “their faces were as the face of men.” Their body or legs or both were probably like a horse. The words: “prepared for battle” i.e. “like horses prepared for battle” are translated: “armoured for battle” by the Jerusalem Bible, due to the fact that v9 says “they had breastplates, as it were: breastplates of iron” i.e. scales of iron. But once again notice the words “as it were.” They were not necessarily literal breastplates of iron, but had a similar appearance.

The same applies to the crowns of gold: “On their heads were as it were (what looked like) crowns of gold.” They were not necessarily literal crowns of gold.

“Crowns” comes from the Greek “stephanos” which occurs 8 times in the book of Revelation and means to twine or wreath. It can involve metal or flowers or even thorns, and was a symbol of victory and triumph. Stephanos is the word translated “crown” in relation to the crown of thorns put on Jesus’ head by the Romans. The same word is used in other places in Revelation: (Rev. 2:10. 3:11. 4:4, 10. 6:2. 12:1. 14:14).

The only other Scripture that mentions crowns in connection with locusts is Nah. 3:17. However it does not refer to crowns being on the heads of locusts. It simply likens the crowned princes and captains of Nineveh to locusts which flee when the sun arises and disappears. “Thy crowned princes are as the locusts, and thy captains as swarms of grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun arises, they flee away, no one knows where.”

Other features mentioned in relation to the locusts in Rev. 9 which indicate they are not normal locusts are:

1. Their faces were as the faces of men (v7).
2. They had hair as the hair of women (v6).
3. Their teeth were as the teeth of lions (v8).
4. The sound of their wings was as the sound of many horse-driven chariots running to battle (i.e. the combined sound of wings, not each individual locust (v9).

“And they had a king over them which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon and in the Greek tongue Apollyon” (v11). As mentioned before, the Hebrew word Abaddon occurs 6 times in the Old Testament and is translated “destruction” each time (Job 26:6. 28:22. 31:12. Ps. 88:11. Pr. 15:11. 27:20). In Job 28:22 it is linked with death and in Pr. 15:11 and 27:20 it is a partner with hell. Most of the Scriptures refer to Abaddon as a state - the state of the dead, but Job 28:22 personifies it: “Destruction (Abaddon) and death say, we have heard ... with our ears.” In Rev. 9 Abaddon is given as a symbolical name to the leader of the locusts and means destroyer - one who causes destruction.

“Apollyon” is the Greek equivalent of Abaddon and as we have seen, is from apollumi which is translated “destroy” and “destroyed” 26 times in the New Testament; “perish” 33 times; “lost” 3 times; “marred” once and “die” once.

This would suggest that although the scorpion stings do not kill, death and destruction is the ultimate purpose and intention of their king.

WHAT DO THE LOCUSTS SIGNIFY?

What then are we to make of the locusts? Verse 3 clearly states that they are locusts, but the detailed description that follows reveals that they are unlike locusts in appearance and act in an un-locust-like way. They are “hybrids” between completely different types of creatures. Normal locusts don’t have a tail like a scorpion or sting like a scorpion,

neither do they look like horses armoured for battle with breastplates of iron. They do not have faces like men, long hair like a woman, crowns of gold or teeth like lions. Unlike real locusts which do not have a king (Pr. 30:27), these have a king. And, contrary to normal locust practice, these are forbidden to touch grass and vegetation.

In fact, were it not for the fact that they are referred to as locusts, there is really nothing in the description of them that would suggest they are locusts or have any affinity with locusts. The only features in the description that conform to locust practice is their ability to fly and the 5 month period that they are active, unless of course it is the effect of the sting that is active for 5 months.

There are 5 months between seed-time and harvest, and 5 months is the normal breeding period for locusts. 5 months is also the normal life span of the insects, and the months May to September inclusive, are the normal season during which Palestine is likely to experience the inroads of locusts. Five months is therefore not an artificial period as far as locusts are concerned.

So the question is: what do these locusts signify? In seeking an answer to this question, it is interesting to notice that the locusts in Joel's prophecy have some of the same characteristics as those in Rev. 9, and represent an end time "northern army" that invades Israel. The parallels between Joel and Rev. 9 are quite obvious.

	<u>JOEL</u>	<u>REV.</u>
1. LOCUSTS	1:4	9:3
2. TEETH LIKE LION'S TEETH	1:6	9:8
3. DARKNESS	2:2, 10	9:2
4. "AS THE APPEARANCE OF HORSES"	2:4	9:7, 9
5. "LIKE THE NOISE OF CHARIOTS - SET IN BATTLE ARRAY."	2:5	9:9
6. CAUSE MUCH PAIN	2:6	9:5
7. DESTROYER - DESTRUCTION	1:15	9:11
8. FAITHFUL DELIVERED	2:32	9:4

However, the differences between the locusts in Joel and Rev. 9 are also as evident as their similarities. There is no reference in Joel to the locusts having stings like scorpions, faces like men, long hair, crowns of gold or breastplates of iron. The locusts in Joel devour the pasture and

trees and turn the land which is like the garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness (Joel 1:12-20. 2:3). But the locusts in Rev. 9 are commanded to not hurt the grass or any green thing, neither the trees (v4). (One third of the grass and trees were destroyed during the first trumpet: Rev. 8:7). It is also implied in Joel's prophecy that men are killed during the invasion, but during the fifth trumpet in Rev. 9 no one is killed, just tormented for 5 months.

Fire is one of the agents of destruction in Joel (1:19. 2:3, 5, 30), but there is no reference to fire destroying people or property during the fifth trumpet. However, fire is mentioned during the first and sixth trumpet (Rev. 8:7. 9:17-18). (Joel's prophecy also refers to the blowing of trumpets: 2:1, 11, 15).

Joel 2:10 refers to the earth quaking; and an earthquake is mentioned in Rev. 8:5. Joel 2:10, 31. 3:15 refers to the sun, moon and stars being darkened and so does Rev. 8:12.

Now, the locusts in Joel's prophecy are explained to signify "a nation" (1:6); "a great people and a strong" (2:2, 5); "mighty men" (2:7); "an army" (2:11, 25); "the heathen" (2:17, 19) i.e. Gentiles; "northern army" (2:20).

Even though the locusts in Joel's prophecy are described as having the appearance of horses, running like war horses, rumbling like chariots as they leap on the tops of the mountains, and having teeth like the teeth of a lion, the interpretation provided in the prophecy indicates that these are symbolical references to the invasion forces of man.

Locusts like horses with tails like scorpions, teeth like lions and crowns like gold on their heads etc. can be compared with the language of Rev. 13 which describes the beast. He is depicted looking like a leopard, having the feet of a bear, the mouth of a lion, 7 heads and 10 horns and 10 crowns upon the horns, and reference is made in Dan. 7:7, 19 to great iron teeth and nails of brass.

Such a fearsome creature (hybrid) does not exist in reality and we are not expected to interpret it literally. The same applies to the locusts in Joel and Rev. 9. The descriptive language is metaphorical - symbolical. The forces of man are being described by using a combination of things in nature as a comparison. For example, when God encouraged the prophet Ezekiel to not be intimidated by those who despised, defied and set out to hurt him; he referred to them as "briers and thorns" and "scorpions": "And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and you dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for

they are a rebellious house” (Ezk. 2:6).

Some of the descriptions given in Joel and Rev. 9 are given elsewhere in Scripture and can help us appreciate the metaphorical nature of them. For example, as pointed out earlier, armies invading Israel are likened to locusts in Judg. 6:5. Also see Isa. 33:4. Nah. 3:15-17. Invading armies are also likened to swarms of bees in Isa. 7:17-19. Deu. 1:44.

Regarding the locusts being likened to horses; reference is made in Jer. 51:27 to war horses advancing like locusts. Job 39:20 refers to horses leaping like locusts, and chariots are referred to in Isa. 37:24 as coming up to the height of the mountains.

As for the “teeth like lions”: many Scriptures liken the enemy of God’s people to a lion. Jer. 4:7 for example, likens the advancing foe to a lion coming up from his lair to hunt and kill, and Isa. 5:29-30 refers to invaders roaring like a lion. In Jer. 50:17-18 the invasions of Israel by the Assyrians and Babylonians are likened to attacks by lions. The beast referred to earlier in Dan. 7:7 with “great iron teeth” represented the Romans who attacked and devoured Israel. When the Lord delivered Israel from enemy attack, the people of God said: “Blessed be the Lord who has not given us as a prey to their teeth” (Ps. 124:6). And speaking about the enemy of Israel, Ps. 58:6 says: “Break their teeth O God in their mouth, break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord.” In these verses, men are referred to as having teeth like lions, but no one is expected to take the statements literally. The same applies to the reference to the locusts having “the teeth of lions” in Rev. 9.

“Teeth like lions” speaks of savage, ferocious men who rip and tear apart their prey, destroying and devouring it. (Remember that their king’s name means destroyer). But it is interesting and significant to note that although the locusts have teeth like lions in their mouth that could kill and devour, and their tail has a sting like a scorpion that can cause pain for 5 months, there is no reference in Rev. 9 during the fifth trumpet to their teeth being used to kill, but only to their tail causing pain. The killing takes place during the sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:13-). More about this later.

Regarding the “crowns like gold” on the heads of the locusts: as in the case of the crown on the first horseman in Rev. 6:2, they could simply signify victory - a successful campaign involving the incapacitation of their enemy prior to killing and devouring. Or, could the crowns of gold refer to something like soldiers’ helmets glistening in the sun?

The “faces of men” seen on the locusts indicates the human factor of the force involved, but it is clearly not humane. For example, Dan. 7:8 refers to a “little horn” on a beast, which represents an enemy of the

people of God. The horn is described as having eyes “like the eyes of a man” and a mouth speaking great things. The following verses reveal that he is very arrogant and aggressive and makes war with the saints.

Regarding the reference in Rev. 9:8 to “hair as the hair of women”: men with long hair would not be something new and peculiar as far as the history of the world is concerned. Arab horsemen and Barbarians in the past, not to mention others, grew their hair long as well as their beards, resulting in an untidy and unkempt appearance - a lion-like appearance. It has been fashionable for some time now in countries around the world for men to grow their hair long. 1 Chr. 12:8 refers to fierce fighting men “whose faces were as the faces of lions.” And 2 Sam. 23:20 and 1 Chr. 11:22 refer to “lion-like men.”

It has also not been uncommon during history for cavalry horses to wear breastplates, and the modern equivalent, the tank, is certainly “a breastplate of iron.” There is nothing difficult therefore about the reference in Rev. 9:9 to the “breastplates of iron.”

Adam Clarke relates the sting like a scorpion to a poisoned arrow shot from a bow in Roman times which was called a scorpion. In 1 Kng. 12:11 the statement: “My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions,” refers to a many tailed whip with hooked knobs of metal, not literal scorpions, but which caused as much pain.

Inflicting stings like scorpions obviously refers to some form of severe chastisement by which the unsealed in Israel will be incapacitated by the enemy as part of a process of destroying their morale and resistance. (Compare Jacob’s sons taking advantage of the pain suffered by the Shechemites as a result of being circumcised (Gen. 34). Because of the pain, they were unable to resist attack and were easily killed).

If it seems a foolish thing to suggest that a scorpion-type sting could be inflicted by some means or other, as part of an invasion process, it should be pointed out that God Himself resorted to similar tactics as part of the process of Israel’s invasion of Canaan. Prior to Israel’s army moving in with their swords to engage in open physical combat and kill, God sent hornets in among the Canaanites! (Ex. 23:28. Deu. 7:20. Josh. 24:12). Evidently the north Vietnamese adopted the same tactic, using hornets to attack the Americans in the Vietnamese war. Today, modern technology could easily devise a method to inflict people with a scorpion-type sting without involving scorpions. In the final analysis, the prophecy may relate to chemical or biological warfare of some kind.

AN A.D. 70 APPLICATION

Some put forward the view that the locust prophecy in Rev. 9 had at least a preliminary or precursory fulfilment in A.D. 70 when the Romans invaded Israel and laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. They see the fallen star as Israel and the locusts as representing the Romans. The smoke and darkness from which the locusts emerge are seen as representing the smoke from the burning cities of Judea they destroyed; finally Jerusalem and the temple. The command to not kill, only torment, is related to the desire of Titus, the Roman general, to not kill, destroy or afflict any more than necessary, hoping the Jews would realize the hopelessness of their situation and yield peaceably. Due to Jewish obstinacy, carnage and slaughter took place.

The reference in Rev. 9 to horses and chariots is related to the Roman cavalry. The “crowns of gold” and “breastplates of iron” are regarded as alluding to the defensive armour of the Roman soldiers, the former being a reference to the head-pieces of polished metal, as they glistened in the sun. Similarly, the “teeth like lions” are taken to signify the irresistible strength of the Roman legions (Dan. 7:7).

The stings like scorpions are seen by one commentator as possibly an allusion back to the time when rebellious Israel in the wilderness was smitten by serpents, or the poisoned arrows used by the Romans. Those who were spared due to being sealed are related to those who look to Christ as the Israelites looked in faith to the serpent nailed to the pole.

In seeking to apply the “hair like women” to the Romans, one writer freely confesses that “here is a difficulty of some magnitude.” He suggests that it is possible that it is a reference to the sexual perversions of the Roman soldiers like those mentioned in Rom. 1:24, 27. Another suggestion is that it may be an allusion to 1 Cor. 11:10 which states a woman’s long hair is a symbol of being under authority, “because of the angels,” and signifies that the Roman armies were under the divine authority fulfilling a divine commission and no doubt under the watchful eye of angels. Some have even related the hair like women to Jer. 51:27 which likens horses to “rough caterpillars” i.e. hairy locusts; a particularly destructive and repulsive kind.

The period of 5 months mentioned in Rev. 9 in relation to the scorpion-type sting, as mentioned earlier, is the normal period during which locusts invade. In connection with the invasion of Israel by the Romans in A.D. 70, one writer says that whilst the troubles associated with the fall of Jerusalem were spread over several years, the duration of the actual siege of Jerusalem, once it began in earnest, was from April

14th to September 8th, a period of precisely 5 lunar (and therefore Jewish) months. 5 months (150 days) was also the period during which “the waters prevailed upon the earth” during the divine judgement in Noah’s day (Gen. 7:24).

The statement in Rev. 9 that “in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it” is also applied to the siege of A.D. 70. Those who endured the siege were not slain but suffered terrible torments. Famine and pestilence inside the city caused much pain and tribulation. No consideration was shown to the aged and infants, and being Jews, it was against their faith to take their own lives.

PROBLEMS WITH THE A.D. 70 APPLICATION

Some of these applications to A.D. 70 seem to be able to be made to fit the Rev. 9 prophecy, but some don’t. Consider the following:

1. The smoke and darkness is related to the destruction of Jerusalem and is compared with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the destruction of these cities resulted in many being killed. The locusts in Rev. 9 however, are commanded not to kill anyone, only torment and cause pain. They do not come to cause fire, smoke and darkness. They come out from what appears to be smoke and darkness to torment.

2. Titus may have had good intentions of not causing a massacre and destruction, but that is what happened! Rev. 9 does not say that the locusts have good intentions to not kill. They are under divine command and control not to kill, so they don’t.

3. Relating the stings like scorpions back to the time when Israel was in the wilderness and smitten by serpents, shifts the prophecy from an A.D. 70 context back to a 1,500 B.C. context. It is an “out of context” application. Rev. 9 is prophetic not historical, and it refers to stings of scorpions not stings of serpents. The serpent stings were fatal, causing death. The scorpion stings only hurt and do not kill. The same applies to the poisoned Roman arrows. They were designed to kill.

4. Applying the “hair like women” to the Roman invaders is certainly, as one writer says: “a difficulty of some magnitude.” Roman soldiers did not have long hair, yet if they were represented by the locusts they should have had long hair. The attempts to link the long hair with sexual perversion, or to horses, or to being under authority, are not satisfactory or convincing. Long hair on women is certainly a sign of subjection, but on men it is offensive to God and therefore a sign of rebellion, not submission to the authority of God (1 Cor. 11). Reference to “faces of

men” in Rev. 9:7 reveals that the long hair is on men, and the statement that “they had long hair like women” confirms it. The Spirit is not likely therefore to use long hair on men to signify submission!

5. Applying Apollyon to a divine destroying angel is not satisfactory either. Apollyon is referred to as “king” of the locusts and as pointed out earlier, it would be inappropriate for an angel to be given the title of king, and Scripture never makes such an application.

6. The locusts in Rev. 9 clearly fly; they have wings which sound like many horse-driven chariots. Those who apply the prophecy to the Roman army in A.D. 70 offer no convincing counterpart for this aspect of flying.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL APPLICATION

There are several views of Rev. 9 held by those who subscribe to the continuous historical interpretation. The main one is that the fallen star signifies the flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. This was a result of being driven out due to renouncing polytheism and proclaiming the oneness of God, and also claiming to be God’s prophet. (At the time he only had 14 converts. It was the beginning of the Mohammedan era).

The “key” used by the fallen star to open the bottomless pit is regarded as representing power, and points to Mohammed’s ultimate power over the Arabs, and his power to establish a royal dynasty. The Moslem theologians call the sword “the key of heaven and hell.”

The “bottomless pit” is interpreted to be Arabia, the region from which Mohammed came and which is noted for the remarkable depression in the rift valley to which the Jordan valley and Dead sea belong. It is seen as an “abyss” through which the Arabs came to take control.

Opening up the abyss is regarded as meaning the letting loose of Mohammed’s followers to conquer. Having written the Koran and laid the basis for Mohammedism, he attracted large numbers to his cause. He conquered Arabia and invaded Palestine in 630 A.D. He proclaimed his belief in one God and declared open war upon the Trinitarianism and idolatry of Roman Catholicism, and decided to invade Europe. But he died in 632 before he could accomplish it and was succeeded by Abubeker, the first caliph and commander of the faithful, who declared a holy war. Under Abubeker, the Saracens advanced against the eastern Roman empire and waged war against those who were not “sealed,” causing smoke to arise.

Reference in Rev. 9 to the sun and air being darkened is taken to

signify the eclipse of the Roman power in the eastern part of the empire. Damascus was taken in 634 and Jerusalem in 637, giving rise to the Byzantine empire which had Constantinople as its capital, which lasted from the sixth to the fifteenth century.

The Saracen heraldic emblem was a locust, so it is natural to apply the locusts in Rev. 9 to the Saracens. It is also believed that this conclusion is justified in view of the fact that:

1. The Hebrew word for locust (arbeh) and Arab (Arbi) are very similar.

2. The land depression (“abyss”) in the rift valley is called “arabah.”

3. Locusts come from the east, and nations which invaded Israel from Arabia and came up through the Arabah are called locusts in Judg. 6:5. Scorpions also inhabit the east, so it is believed that they too are an appropriate symbol for the Arabs.

The Saracens’ fire, which was a substance used by the Greeks and apparently based on phosphorous which ignited in the air and had the power to kill, was used in instruments of war and was called a scorpion. It is claimed that this was the precursor of guns and gunpowder, and that guns were invented in Europe many centuries later in 1320, and gunpowder in 1250. Webster’s encyclopaedia however says gunpowder originated in China in the ninth century where it was used as fire crackers, and first introduced in Europe during the fourteenth century.

The Arab attacks on the eastern Roman empire were hurtful and destructive, but did not bring it to an end. It is believed therefore that this is signified by the fact that scorpions are aggressive and their sting painful, but not normally fatal.

Concerning the command to “not hurt the grass ... nor trees, but only those not sealed”: the trees are taken to signify the general population as well as literal trees. Abubeker’s proclamation is quoted to illustrate this: “Remember you are always in the presence of God, on the verge of death, in the assurance of judgement and the hope of paradise. Avoid injustice and oppression. Let not your victory be stained with the blood of women and children (i.e. don’t massacre and destroy indiscriminately). Destroy no palm trees nor burn any fields of corn. Cut down no fruit trees, nor do any mischief to cattle, only such as you need to eat. You will find another sort of people that belong to the synagogue of Satan who have shaven crowns; (monks) be sure you cleave their skulls, and give them no quarter till they either become Mohammedans or pay tribute.”

Within 100 years of 622 A.D. all Palestine, Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Spain were under Moslem rule.

It is not difficult to see how those who were sealed would have escaped. Islam is fiercely monotheistic, and against all idols and images. They therefore dealt severely with the Roman Catholic Trinitarians who had images of Mary and the saints. True Christians who did not believe in, and worship a triune God, nor bow down to images, had nothing to fear. Islam was only a torment to corrupt Christianity.

So the command to the scorpions in Rev. 9 that “they should not kill them,” is taken to signify that the eastern Roman empire would not be entirely overthrown and be put to death politically. Constantinople, its capital, was twice besieged but not taken. For a time, the political life of the eastern empire remained intact. The 2 occasions on which Constantinople was besieged were A.D. 668-675 and 716-718.

Regarding the “5 months” in Rev. 9:5 in relation to the scorpion sting: because this period is repeated in v10, it is claimed that 2 periods of 5 months are involved. 10 months on the basis of the 30 day month in prophecy, is 300 days, which, on the basis of one day representing a year, is 300 years. It is therefore concluded that those in the eastern part of the Roman empire were to be tormented for 150 years, then “the rest of the men” not included in the eastern part were to be tormented for another 150 years. 300 years is therefore seen as the duration of the fifth trumpet. This period is applied from A.D. 632, the year of the death of Mohammed and the accession of Abubeker, to A.D. 932, when Arab power declined and the secular authority was taken from the Caliph of Baghdad.

The statement in Rev. 9:6 that “men shall seek death” is taken to mean a desire for political death and peaceful incorporation with the conquering Moslems. The Byzantine rulers from Constantinople desired peace at any price, but could not get it without becoming Mohammedan.

“Like unto horses” in v7 is related to the Moslems’ outstanding victories which resulted mainly from their splendid cavalry and horse-drawn artillery. Adam Clarke says: “The Arabs are the most expert horsemen in the world; they live so much on horseback that the horse and his rider seem to make one animal.” The sound of an army of locusts on the move is akin to galloping horses.

It is said that the Arabs wore yellow turbans, and the “crowns like gold” in Rev. 9:7 are regarded as referring to this. An Arab poem says God gave them turbans instead of crowns.

THE MONGOLS?

Another view applies the prophecy to the Mongols who were pre-eminently a horse people, almost living on their horses, drinking mare's milk and eating horse flesh. Mongols had access to the rich Altai gold mines, and used gold as a common metal. Crowns of gold were worn by many, the height of the crown being an indication of rank.

"Faces of men" is taken to mean "bearded." The Arabs were bearded in contrast to the Romans.

"Hair as the hair of women" is linked with the flowing tresses - long hair of the Arabs.

"Teeth of lions" is taken to indicate the wild ferocious spirit of the Arabs. Those who believe the prophecy refers to the Mongols, point out that they have large and prominent teeth, and they ate their flesh raw like lions. They may have looked similar to the "lion-like" men "whose faces were like the faces of lions" in 2 Sam. 23:20. 1 Chr. 11:22. 12:8.

Regarding the Arabs: they dragged their artillery into battle, and swung their horses around to face the canon to the enemy. It is believed that this action of the Arab cavalry was seen by John in vision, and he likened it to the scorpion whose sting is in his tail.

The "breastplates of iron," are related to the polished steel body armour, and the "king," "the angel of the bottomless pit" is regarded as the Caliph, the king and high priest of Islam. The Saracens proved to be destroyers to those they attacked, so the names "abaddon" and "apollyon" which mean destroyer, are regarded as conveying that. It is believed that the name is given in both Hebrew and Greek because the attacks of the Saracens were felt mainly throughout Palestine and the Greek Catholic countries.

OBJECTIONS TO THE CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL VIEW

As in the case of the application of the prophecy to A.D. 70, there are also some unsatisfactory aspects of this application to the Mohammedan era. They are:

1. The fallen star is said to be Mohammed and is related to his flight from Mecca to Medina. But in Scripture, a fallen star is one who falls from a position of power and authority, as for example Isa. 14:12 which refers to the king of Babylon who lost his power, throne and kingdom. Falling from heaven also signifies loss of power in Lk. 10:18: "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven."

But Mohammed was in no position of power or pre-eminence when

he fled from Mecca to Medina. He only had 14 converts at the time. Neither did the Mohammedan power come out of an abyss. Mecca to Medina is on a high plateau and the Mohammedans did not go through the rift valley to Europe.

According to the continuous historical view, the mission of the locusts under the fallen star was only partly fulfilled by Mohammed. (He died before any invasions by the Mohammedans took place). His successor, Abubeker continued the mission and others after him. A number of men were therefore involved in the rise of the Mohammedan “star” and it did not “fall” until centuries later. But the singular word “star” signifies one, not many, and the singular pronouns “him” and “he” in Rev. 9:1-2 confirm that a single individual is signified. Examples of the singular “star” referring to one particular person can be seen in Num. 24:17. Isa. 14:12. Rev. 22:16. When more than one is involved, the plural “stars” is given (Gen. 37:9. Dan. 8:10. 12:3. Rev. 12:1).

The same applies to the word angels. Even those who subscribe to the continuous historical view claim that the “angels” in Rev. 9:14 refer to 4 swarms or divisions of Turks. The “angel” of the bottomless pit (v11) cannot therefore refer to more than one, and certainly cannot be Mahomet. When Mohammedism became a strong power, it certainly would not be fitting for the Caliphs to be signified by a fallen star. Mohammedism was a rising star during this period not a falling or fallen star!

2. The darkening of the sun and air by the smoke rising out of the abyss is taken to mean the eclipse of the Roman power in the eastern part of the empire, as a result of the hordes of Moslem “locusts” going forth. But the darkening of the sun and air is not depicted in Rev. 9 as something that is achieved as a result of the locusts going forth; they are seen coming forth from the darkness to go forth to sting men. As mentioned before, the “smoke” is the appearance of the plague of locusts in the distance.

3. The command in Rev. 9 that the locusts should hurt but not kill, is taken to mean that they should not destroy politically the eastern Roman Empire, but were allowed to kill many of its people. But Rev. 9 says nothing about not killing an empire politically; it says “they should not kill them,” and the “them” refers to the “men” in v4; i.e. individuals, not an empire. Rev. 9:4-5 is very explicit; the locusts are commanded not to kill men but only hurt. The Moslems killed many and therefore did not fulfil this prophecy.

4. Not only are the locusts in Rev. 9 commanded to not hurt or kill men, but “neither any green thing, nor any tree.” While it is true that on the eve of the Arab campaign, Abubeker told his army not to destroy

palms, fruit trees, or fields of corn; his words were not heeded later in the campaign. In North Africa fruit trees were cut down by the army and fertile land was reduced to desert.

5. The “5 months” in Rev. 9:5, 10 are taken to mean 2 separate 5 month periods, making a total of 10 months, which is 300 days and is turned into 300 years. On this basis, why not conclude that the “42 months” and “1260 days” in Rev. 11:2, 3 are 2 separate periods and treat the 3½ days in v9 as a third, making a total of 2523½ days, which, on the basis of a day for a year would be 2523½ years?

The same applies to the 2 references of 1260 days in Rev. 12:6 and 14. Why not make them 2 separate periods totalling 2520 days and convert them into years? Many Scriptures could be produced in which a certain period of time is mentioned twice in the same chapter but is not expected to be taken to mean 2 separate periods. For example: Gen. 40:12, 18.

If the 5 months in Rev. 9 is intended to be linked with the locust cycle, it would suggest that it be taken literally and not be regarded as an artificial time period.

So then, in order to come up with a 300 year period to fit in with Moslem history, 2 major assumptions have to be made. The first is that the 5 months, being 150 days, represents 150 years, and the second is that the other reference to 5 months represents a second and separate period of 150 years. Neither of these assumptions are valid.

According to Rev. 9:11, the 5 month period runs its course while the locusts have a king over them, which was not the case from the foundation of the Mohammedan empire. From the death of Mohammed until near the close of the thirteenth century, the Mohammedans were divided into various factions under several leaders, with no general civil government extending over them all. Near the close of the thirteenth century, Othman founded a government which has since been known as the Ottoman government, or empire. It extended over all the principal Mohammedan tribes, consolidating them into one grand monarchy.

6. “Tails like scorpions” have been linked by some with a substance based on phosphorous which ignited in the air, and others have linked it with the canon. Both of these methods employed in war were designed to kill men, but Rev. 9 specifically states that the tails like scorpions do not kill. Moreover, canons were not used in the Middle East at the time of Moslem history to which the historical view applies the prophecy.

7. As in the case of the view that applies the locusts to the Romans in A.D. 70, this other view which applies them to the Mohammedans also

does not offer an explanation in relation to the locusts flying and having wings that sound like horse drawn chariots. Adam Clarke suggests the wings could refer to hanging weapons and military trappings. Shields and swords clang and make a lot of noise when fierce onslaughts are made. However, under no stretch of the imagination could such trappings be seen as wings, and weapons such as swords are designed to kill, which the locusts are not commissioned to do.

A STRANGE SIGHT

Without a doubt, it is a strange power which emerges from the abyss. It does no damage to the environment and does not kill men; it only hurts them and operates exclusively against those “who have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” Nothing in the past or present is adequate to fully account for the description given of the locusts in Rev. 9.

Some have suggested a helicopter gunship, some of which have big teeth drawn on them around the front. A man’s face can be seen inside the cockpit, the whirling blade above, sparkling in the sun could appear to be a gold crown, and gun fire coming out the back could be described as a sting in its tail. The major problems with this view are that helicopter gun ships do not have wings and are designed to kill, not just sting or hurt. Neither is the shape of them like horses, and they do not have long hair!

Others have suggested that the locusts might be robots or a product of future genetic engineering, designed to incapacitate and throw people into disarray prior to invasion, much in the same way that God sent hornets ahead of Israel’s invasion forces to drive out the Canaanites.

If, as is believed, the prophecy pertains to the end time, there could be developments in science and technology that will produce something that is not conceivable at the present time, that will fit the description given in Rev. 9.

Whatever the prophecy involves, it only requires a relatively short period of 5 months to run its course. And, while it is evident that the saints will be persecuted and suffer at some stage in the end time, they are promised immunity from the scorpion sting of the locusts, as were the apostles promised immunity from real scorpions and serpents (Lk. 10:19).

THE SIXTH TRUMPET

The sixth trumpet is introduced in Rev. 9:12: “One woe is past; and behold, 2 more woes come after this.” The woe that had passed was of course the fifth trumpet involving the locusts, and the other 2 woes to

follow are the sixth and seventh trumpet. The sixth trumpet is sounded by the sixth angel in v13, and the record concerning this trumpet continues through to chapter 11:14.

After the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, John says: “I heard a voice from the 4 horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, loose the 4 angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (v13-14).

The altar from which the voice of command came to the sixth angel is no doubt the altar of incense referred to in Rev. 8:3. The voice may have come from the angel mentioned in the same verse who stood at the altar and offered incense with the prayers of the saints, and who took the censer, filled it with fire and cast it into the earth; resulting in voices, thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake. On that occasion the angel is seen as an initiator of judgement in order that the prayers of the saints for the kingdom can be fulfilled. So it would not be surprising if the voice from the 4 horns of the altar calling for the judgements of the sixth trumpet also came from the same angel. If so, this would suggest that the prayers of the saints are still in the process of being fulfilled, and that the events of the sixth trumpet are among those in the end time that must run their course before Christ returns and sets up his kingdom. In a sense, therefore, these woes come as a result of the prayers of the saints.

Under the law of Moses, blood shed for the forgiveness of sin was put on the 4 horns of the altar, and spoke of grace and mercy. It would be a most serious and solemn matter therefore if that altar and its 4 horns was depicted crying out for judgement. Being a pattern of things in the heavens, could it be that this is what is being conveyed by the voice coming forth from the heavenly altar? If so, the measure of sin in Israel is obviously full; the climax for vengeance has been reached. Judgement for a time must triumph over mercy.

ANGELS LOOSED AT THE RIVER EUPHRATES

Regarding the 4 angels which are bound at the river Euphrates and are set loose: it is tempting to see these angels as the same 4 mentioned in chapter 7:1, which were stationed at the 4 corners of the earth restraining the 4 winds. But here, in chapter 9, they appear at the river Euphrates restraining an army of 200 million men. The 4 angels are delegated by God to rule the nations from the 4 quarters of the earth that are involved in the huge army, and to have control of their movements.

The word “bound,” used in relation to the 4 angels being bound at the

river Euphrates, means tied up; fastened. It is used in Scripture in a literal physical sense in relation to John the Baptist being “bound” in prison (Matt. 14:3); an ass being “tied” (Matt. 21:2); Jesus being “bound” (Matt. 27:2), and Paul being “bound” with 2 chains (Act. 12:6).

But the word is also used in a metaphorical sense in Rev. 20:2 which refers to Satan being “bound” 1,000 years, and Matt. 12:29: “bind” the strong man. The apostle Paul’s reference to being “bound” in the Spirit (Act. 20:22, 22:5); “bound” by the law (Rom. 7:2), and “bound” to a wife (1 Cor. 7:27, 39), also use the word in a metaphorical sense signifying a binding, controlling commitment.

Reference to the 4 angels being bound at the river Euphrates can be understood in the same light. They were “tied up” in the sense of being committed to a divine commandment to stay at the river; to hold back the huge army until it was God’s appointed time for it to cross over and invade, much in the same way that they were committed to holding back the 4 winds in 7:1. As we shall see, the invasion results in “the third part of men” being killed. The angels hold back these forces from invading and killing, until the previous 5 trumpets are sounded, which cause harm to the environment and 5 months of pain to the people.

It is evident that the army in this sixth trumpet period will emerge from the river Euphrates. The same river is referred to again in the sixth vial (16:12), where reference is made to it being “dried up” to make way for “the kings of the east.” The river Euphrates is only mentioned in the New Testament on these 2 occasions in the book of Revelation. But it is mentioned by name 19 times in the Old Testament. It is also referred to simply as “the river,” a number of times e.g. Isa. 7:20, 11:15. It is one of the 4 rivers of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:14), and it formed the north-east boundary of the land promised to Israel (Gen. 15:18, 2 Sam. 8:3).

Being the boundary of Israel’s land, suggests the army is held back from entering that land until God’s appointed time to invade arrives. In Old Testament times, invading armies from Assyria and Babylon came across the Euphrates to invade Israel, and were a foreshadow of the greater invasion in the end time which leads to the battle of Armageddon.

In the Old Testament, the river Euphrates is pre-eminently the river of Babylon, especially in the book of Jeremiah. But the Babylon of the Old Testament is not the Babylon of the New Testament. The Babylon of the Old Testament was situated in the land occupied by Iraq today. Babylon in the New Testament is a false ecclesiastical system which has its power base in Rome (Rev. 17) where the river Tiber flows. Reference to “the river Euphrates” therefore, and not “Babylon,” makes it clear that Rev.

9:14 and 16:12 are referring to the area of the literal river, and not spiritual Babylon.

The anti-Israel confederacy referred to in Ezk. 38 which involves Iran etc, will come from beyond the Euphrates, and the political interrogation in Ezk. 38:13: “art thou come to take a spoil?” could be directed at them when they reach the Euphrates.

Rev. 9:15 says the 4 angels were “prepared” and “loosed.” “Loosed” means they were released and set free of their commitment or charge to restrain and hold back the army at the river Euphrates. (Compare 1 Cor. 7:27). “Prepared” means they were ready and on stand-by right up to the point in time ordained by God for the troops to advance, to send them on their way. The process of divine preparation and provision for future events is implied here. Compare Dan. 10:13, 20. Other places where the word “prepared” is used to signify the same principle are: Matt. 20:23. 25:34. Jn. 14:2-3. 1 Cor. 2:9. Heb. 11:16. Rev. 8:6. 9:7, 15. 12:6.

The same word is used in Rev. 16:12 where reference is made to the river Euphrates drying up as a result of the angel pouring out the sixth vial “that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.” Reference to the angels in 9:15 being “prepared” for the release of the great army could in fact relate to the same event, in which case “the kings of the east” would be part of the army in 9:15.

AN HOUR, DAY, MONTH AND YEAR

Rev. 9:15 in the A.V. says the 4 angels were prepared “for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, to slay the third part of men.” Modern versions more correctly translate it as: “for the hour, and day, and month and year.” Only the word “hour” in the sequence has the definite article. This refers to a fixed point of time, down to the last hour, and not a period of duration involving one year, one month, one day and one hour. The 4 notes of time being under one article and one preposition show that the occasion is one particular moment in time appointed by God. The date for the invasion is not left to chance, coincidence or accident. It has been precisely determined at a particular hour of a particular day of a particular month of a particular year! It has been set by God on His calendar and when it arrives, events will be set in motion that start the final countdown to Armageddon.

This could represent the formal beginning of the time of the end in Dan. 11:40; i.e. the time when the king of the north and his confederates, “after many days shall be visited” (Ezk. 38:8) and invade Israel. The Bible

records many invasions of Israel in the past, and other countries, but only in Rev. 9:15 is reference made to God setting a particular hour of a particular day of a particular month of a particular year for an invasion to take place. This must therefore be a very very significant invasion with huge ramifications as far as the prophetic programme of God is concerned. Arab incursions in the Middle East in the past when the nation of Israel did not even exist hardly fit into this category. Such invasions by various nations in all parts of the earth throughout history are a dime a dozen. However, the end time invasion against the nation of Israel is a different matter. This invasion leads to the battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ, which, significantly enough, are announced by the next (seventh) trumpet (11:15-18).

The reference to a particular hour and day etc being set by God resembles Rev. 14:7: "The hour of his judgement is come." Also the reference in Rev. 10:6 "that there should be time no longer" i.e. the appointed crisis is at hand and nothing will be able to prevent it. God "has appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness ..." (Act. 17:31). "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the son, but only the Father" (Mk. 13:32).

Rev. 9:15 goes on to say that the 4 angels were prepared "to slay the third of men." As we have seen, reference is made to "the third part" in the first, second, third and fourth trumpets (Rev. 8:7-12). The reference to "the third part of men" in the sixth trumpet in Rev. 9:15 and repeated in v18, is the last time the phrase is used in relation to the trumpet judgements. (It only occurs once more in 12:4 in relation to one third of the woman's (Israel's) stars being cast down by the dragon).

Who then, it will be asked, are the "men;" the third part of whom are slain? They are more than likely the same "men" referred to in the fifth trumpet (9:4) "who have not the seal of God in their forehead" i.e. the tribes in the land of Israel, excluding the 144,000 who were sealed (Rev. 7).

Because men are slain as a result of the 4 angels releasing the army at the river Euphrates, v15 reads as if the 4 angels themselves do the slaying. But verses 16-18 teach that the one third of men will be killed by the army of the horsemen by means of fire, smoke and brimstone. It is quite common in Scripture, when an army is divinely commissioned to kill, to attribute it to God or His angels. Remember Rev. 7:1-3: The 4 angels responsible for releasing the 4 winds to hurt, are themselves referred to as doing the hurting.

TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND THOUSAND

Rev. 9:16 states that the number involved in the army is “two hundred thousand thousand” which is 200 million. John “heard the number of them,” as he heard the number 144,000 in 7:4. He could not possibly have counted the 200 million himself. It had to be a divine revelation. This is quite a concept! Four angels hold back 200 million men until the arrival of the appointed time to invade! This works out at each angel being in control of 50 million men.

200 million fighting men in an army would have been quite unthinkable with the world’s population in John’s day and for many centuries later, even up to the time when the continuous historical interpretation of Revelation was first introduced. However, it is by no means unthinkable now in the twenty first century, but harmonizes with today’s population.

The world population in 1982 was 4,000 million and 6,000 million in 2000 A.D. Supposing there will be 8,000 million people on earth when the prophecy is fulfilled, of whom 50% are male, and 40% of those are between the approximate military ages of 18 and 45, then there might be 1,600 million men of military age in the world, of whom 600 million would live in Asia. In view of the fact that armies today consist of females as well as males, means the number would be greater. The figure of 200 million in Rev. 9:16 is therefore quite realistic in view of the number of soldiers that could be dispatched by the eastern countries or a western bloc of countries.

It could easily be regarded as evidence of divine inspiration, that reference is made to what would have been an astronomical and outrageous number at the time John received the Revelation, but is now a feasible number. Such figures would have seemed impossible and absurd when the continuous historical interpretation was first advocated, and for this reason it could not be accepted as referring to one and the same army at the same time in history.

Several decades ago, Mao Tse Tung widely publicized the fact that China alone had a militia of 200 million. “Let China sleep,” Napoleon advocated, “for when China awakes, let the nations tremble.” Back in May 1986, a newspaper article stated that Libya and Iran said they would try to mobilize from the eastern and western Islamic world, one billion (1,000 million) Moslems to fight what they called an American-Zionist crusade against Islam.

John not only heard the number involved in the army, but also saw them. He says: “And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sat on them” (v17). What a sight to see! 200 million men ready to advance from the river Euphrates. The number of 200 million would correspond with what he saw - a massive concourse of men. The number actually exceeds and outnumbered the number of heaven’s host given in Rev. 5:11, which is 100 million. The army in Rev. 9:16 is therefore twice that number. But there will not be one of them who will attain to immortality and membership among the angelic ranks! The majority will perish at Armageddon.

The army of 200 million seen by John were not standing on their feet but sitting on “horses.” There must have been therefore, 200 million horses! If they were literal horses, the amount of grass and vegetation they would eat would make them like a plague of locusts. But the description of them, as we shall see, indicates they are not literal or normal horses. This does not mean of course, that no horses at all will be involved. Ezk. 38:4 for example, refers to “all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.” They will come like a cloud and cover the land (v9); “multitudes, multitudes” (Joel 3:14).

BREASTPLATES OF FIRE, JACINTH AND BRIMSTONE

Rev. 9:17 says the horses and those who sat on them had “breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone.”

“Fire” comes from the Greek word “purinos” which, according to Thayer, means fiery, i.e. shining like fire. It only occurs in this verse in the New Testament, but it is used in Ezk. 28:14, 16 in the LXX in relation to “stones of fire,” referring to jewels that flicker like fire. It does not mean a literal flame of fire. The Greek word for literal fire is “pur” and occurs many times. For example, it is used in Rev. 9:17, 18 in relation to the fire that issued forth from the mouths of the horses resulting in men being killed.

“Jacinth” is a gem of a deep blue colour. The word only occurs here and in Rev. 21:20 where it is listed as one of the precious stones that formed the foundation of the wall around the city of God.

“Brimstone” according to Strong, means sulphur-like, i.e. sulphurous, which is yellowish. It comes from the Greek word “theiodes” and only occurs here. It is derived from “theion” which is also translated “brimstone” in Lk. 17:29 in relation to the overthrow of Sodom, and in the

latter part of Rev. 9:17 and 18 which says brimstone issued out of the horses' mouths and killed men. Brimstone also occurs in connection with fire in relation to divine judgement in Rev. 14:10. 19:20. 20:10. 21:8.

In view of the colours involved in fire, jacinth and brimstone, the statement in Rev. 9:17 is translated by some modern versions as follows: "Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur." The R.S.V. says: "The riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur."

Does this mean that all the breastplates were a mixture of red, blue and yellow, or that some breastplates were red, some were blue and others were yellow? Could it be that the breastplates of fiery red, blue (smoky blue?) and sulphurous yellow, correspond to the fire, smoke and sulphur which proceeds from the horses' mouths? Is it possible that the breastplates reflect the fire, smoke and sulphur? Is there any connection between the breastplates here and the breastplates of iron in Rev. 9:9?

Reference in Rev. 9:17 to the horses having heads "like the heads of lions" either indicates that they were not literal horses but symbolic of something else; or were horses clothed with some type of armour that gave them a lion-like appearance. Horses with lion-like heads calls to mind the description of the locusts in the preceding fifth trumpet whose shape was like horses and who had teeth like lions (9:7-8).

FIRE SMOKE AND BRIMSTONE

Regarding the reference in v17 to fire, smoke and brimstone issuing out of the mouths of the horses: this is repeated in v18 and it is stated that men were killed "by these three" (i.e. the fire, smoke and brimstone). Verse 19 therefore refers to the horses' power being in their mouth.

Fire, smoke and brimstone are also mentioned in Rev. 14:10-11 as part of God's judgement upon those who worship the beast: "They shall be tormented with fire and brimstone... and the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever." The fire, smoke and brimstone also calls to mind the judgement upon Sodom: "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire ... and lo, the smoke of a furnace" (Gen. 19:24, 28). It is generally believed that this came about as a result of a divinely timed volcanic eruption.

While it is evident that the fire, smoke and brimstone that issues from the mouths of the horses in Rev. 9 is not a volcanic eruption, it is nevertheless a divine judgement. This is evident from the fact that v20

refers to these three things as “plagues” - a word used elsewhere in Revelation for divine judgement.

That these “plagues” are a divine judgement is confirmed by the reference made to those who were not killed by them refusing to repent (v20-21). Repentance has to do with acknowledging sin before God, and plagues are one of the methods employed by God to humble men into such acknowledgement. The sins of which they refuse to repent are listed in v20-21 as idolatry, murder, sorceries (astrology, spiritualism), fornication and theft. All of these are sins against God’s will and Word. The army of 200 million is therefore used by God as His rod of anger - His agent of judgement, as were the Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans in the past, who all invaded Israel in turn as a result of her sins against God.

Rev. 9:18 says: “The third part of men are killed.” In the previous trumpets a third part of trees, grass, sea, fish, ships, rivers, springs, sun, moon and stars were affected, along with a third part of men being tormented by scorpion stings. Men would have died as a result of ships being destroyed during the second trumpet (8:9), and “many died” as a result of rivers and springs becoming bitter during the third trumpet (8:11), but no percentages are mentioned. However, with the advent of the sixth trumpet, one third of men are killed.

We can see in all this how one phase of God’s wrath (the first woe, i.e. fifth trumpet involving painful stings) gives way to a worse one. No men were killed during the fifth trumpet, but one third of men are killed during the sixth. (Compare this with Am. 5:18-19). Some expositors apply all references to percentages in the book of Revelation to the world population. Working on the basis of a population of 8 billion, the “fourth part” (25%) killed in Rev. 6:8 would be 2 billion, leaving 6 billion. One third of that (Rev. 9:18) would be 2 billion, making a total of 4 billion killed and 4 billion remaining which would be further diminished by the vial judgements. However, this view does not take into account the Israeli focus and factor of the prophecies in Revelation.

As we have seen, the reference in Rev. 9:19 to “their power is in their mouth” relates to the fire, smoke and brimstone which issues from the mouths of the horses and which kills men. But this power is not only in their mouth, but also “in their tails: for their tails were like serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt” (v19) i.e. the head on the tail could hurt, not the tail itself. The bite of a serpent always comes from the head (teeth) whereas the scorpion stings with its tail. Does the reference to “hurt” here mean the same as in v3-5, i.e torment with pain but not kill? If

so, then it would mean power was in the mouth to kill, but the power in the tail only hurt or tormented. Or is the word “hurt” in this context of snakes synonymous with kill? Many snakes are capable of killing.

SIMILAR BUT NOT IDENTICAL

The forces involved in the fifth and sixth trumpets are not identical, but have certain features in common:

FIFTH TRUMPET	SIXTH TRUMPET
LOCUSTS LIKE HORSES WITH	HORSES AND HORSEMEN
FACES OF MEN	
TEETH LIKE LIONS	HEADS OF LIONS
AND LONG HAIR	
BREASTPLATES OF IRON	BREASTPLATES THAT WERE
	RED, BLUE AND YELLOW
TAILS LIKE SCORPIONS	TAILS LIKE SERPENTS
HURT NOT KILL	KILL AND HURT
COME OUT OF SMOKE	CAUSE SMOKE

There is not necessarily any difference implied between heads of lions and teeth like lions. A lion’s head contains lion’s teeth! Lion’s teeth go with a lion’s head. A lion’s head also has long hair. Neither is there necessarily any difference implied between breastplates of iron and breastplates that are red, blue and yellow. The former describes the metal involved and the latter describes the colours. Although they were commanded to hurt and not kill under the fifth trumpet, they were capable of killing as is evident by the reference to them having teeth like lions, but under the sixth trumpet they do kill. Because they were only to hurt and cause pain under the fifth trumpet, their tail is likened to a scorpion. Because they were to kill under the sixth trumpet, their tail is likened to a venomous snake.

Features mentioned in the fifth trumpet but not in the sixth are:

1. Crowns like gold on their heads.
2. Wings that sounded like horse-driven chariots.

3. A king over them whose name was Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. But absence of reference to these features in the sixth trumpet doesn’t necessarily mean they cannot be associated with it. For example, the name of the king means destroyer, but the horse-like locusts in the fifth trumpet do not destroy anyone or anything. Why mention that their king is a destroyer unless he destroys at some stage? Destruction and

death do however take place during the sixth trumpet. A king whose name means destroyer would therefore be very relevant to this trumpet. Not all visions give or repeat every detail if they have been mentioned previously, and sometimes they add extra details.

This should be kept in mind in relation to the locusts in Joel's prophecy which are described as having the appearance of horses, "and as horsemen shall they run. Like the noise of chariots (tanks?) on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours stubble (the crackle of gun fire?) whose teeth are the teeth of a lion..." (Joel 1:6. 2:4-5). But the prophecy in Joel makes it clear that these horse-like locusts with teeth like lions represent a nation that invades Israel (Joel 1:6), "the heathen" (2:17), "strong and without number" - a "northern army" (2:20). It is God's army (2:11) sent by Him to execute judgement upon Israel.

Joel's prophecy is clearly end time, for the invasion of the northern army leads to the battle of Armageddon (Joel 3). The same applies to the fifth and sixth trumpet. The seventh trumpet up to which they lead and reach their climax, relates to the second coming and Armageddon.

Regarding the fire, smoke and brimstone coming out of the mouths of the horses, it may be helpful to point out that in the prophetic symbology of Rev. 16:13, frogs are depicted coming out of mouths, i.e. out of the mouth of a dragon, beast and false prophet. It is clearly not to be taken literally but has a symbolical significance. Reference to fire coming out of the mouths of God's 2 witnesses in Rev. 11:5 is also clearly symbolic. Real fire is involved, but it does not literally come out of men's mouths! The same applies to the sixth trumpet in Rev. 9. Real fire will be involved when the army invades, but it will not issue forth from the mouths of literal horses! Some expositors, totally perplexed as to the significance of the vision, conclude it refers to demons. This may be a quick easy answer, but a very unsatisfactory one, having no Scriptural support.

MODERN MILITARY MACHINERY?

In the final analysis, is it possible that the terms used in Rev. 9 to describe the forces of war, could refer to modern military vehicles or weapons? A tank, for example, has as it were "breastplates of iron;" runs into battle like a horse, leaps over the tops of hills, and the noise of the metal tracks sound like chariots of many horses running into battle. Projecting fork-like teeth used by some for mine-sweeping and other functions might be likened to lion's teeth and camouflage nets might be

likened to long hair. A man's head or "face" is often seen looking out of the turret, and the round turret at the top could be described as a "crown." The whirling tracks at the side which propel a tank forward might be seen as "wings" to one who had never seen such a vehicle before. Fire and a "roar" like a lion or thunder certainly comes out of the "mouth" of a tank, and the long narrow barrel of the gun on the swivelling moving turret, which can face backwards, and out of the "mouth" of which its deadly "sting" comes, could be likened to a serpent. How would we describe a modern tank if we lived 2,000 years ago when people did not have the slightest idea or conception of the modern military machinery of today? Maybe in similar terms to John's description! Of Course, between now and the end time, some other more advanced "war-horse" beyond our present conception may be invented which will more perfectly fit John's description in Rev. 9.

THE REST OF THE MEN REPENTED NOT

We are told in Rev. 9:20 that in spite of the invasion of the massive army and the huge loss of life, involving one third of the population being killed, "the rest of the men who were not killed" (i.e. the remaining two thirds of the population), "repented not." This is repeated in v21. Also see 16:9, 11. Because of the human instrumentality of their affliction - because God uses a human agency to execute His judgement, the people fail to see God in it! This has been a long standing historical problem, especially with Israel. But there is no excuse for it in view of the many clear warnings God has given them about this in His Word. For example: Deu. 28. Lev. 26.

Rev. 9:20 continues by saying they repented not "of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, silver, brass, and wood: which can neither see, hear, nor walk." Here, the "devils" are referred to as the works of men's hands (products of human invention), and are put into the same category as idols, which are inanimate, lifeless, powerless pieces of wood, metal or stone. Many "devils" or "demons" have been created in the past by pagan mythology and in more recent times in some sections of Christendom in fulfilment of 1 Tim. 4:1: "The Spirit says distinctly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits (false teachers claiming to be inspired by the spirit), and doctrines concerning devils" (demons). Many minds have been "possessed" with false superstitious doctrines of demons which regard them as fallen deities.

However, those referred to in Rev. 9:20 do not merely believe in such devils, but actually worship them. This could refer to Satanists, or at least include them. It is not surprising therefore that reference is also made to “sorceries” in Rev. 9:21 as an accompanying sin. Such sins are on the increase in the world today and Israel is clearly not exempt.

The situation in Rev. 9:20-21 seems to be describing the same situation described in Isa. 2:6-8: “Therefore God has forsaken His people the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and of sorcerers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.”

The fact that this passage of Scripture is in the context of the return of Christ indicates it has an application to the nation of Israel in the end time. (Read the whole chapter to see this).

That such a situation will exist in the land at that time is confirmed in Zech. 13:2 which says that at the time of Christ’s return, “It shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall be no more remembered: and also I will remove the (false) prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.”

Idolatry does not have to be limited or confined to physically bowing down before images. It is stated in Col. 3:5 that covetousness is idolatry. Covetousness is the spirit that is never satisfied or content with what it has, and is always craving more things in the material world, even when they belong to other people. People’s lives can be totally obsessed and preoccupied with covetousness, and it can lead to envy, jealousy, hatred, anger and even murder. Covetousness is a product of pride which wants to be the best and have the best, and can get very nasty when someone else seems to be better and have better things. Truly, pride is the mother of all sins!

Covetousness is an accurate description of modern civilization, including Israel, where a grossly materialistic society exists which focuses upon things made by man instead of God who made all things in the beginning for His glory. The humanism of today denies the work of God and puts all trust and confidence in the power and ability of man. The adoration of, and preoccupation with human skill, cleverness, achievement, money, wealth, houses and other buildings, is as much idolatry as bowing before idols.

MURDERS, SORCERIES, FORNICATIONS

Rev. 9:21 brings the chapter to a conclusion by adding: “neither repented they of their murders, sorceries, fornications, nor of their thefts.” Reference to these sins is particularly relevant in our day and age. Murder, fornication and thefts are on the increase as violence and lust increases, often due to covetousness (lust). Murder, fornication and thefts speaks of a violent, immoral and dishonest society, and today there is a general widespread abounding of such vices. This fits in with the warning of Jesus that as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, so shall it be prior to his return. And, as in the case of the days of Noah and Lot, the wrath of God will fall upon all who live in sin and refuse to repent, both inside and outside the land of Israel.

Regarding the reference to “sorceries”: the Greek word is “pharmakia” and is also translated “sorceries” in Rev. 18:23, and “witchcraft” in Gal. 5:20 where it is listed among “the works of the flesh.” It relates to spiritualism which believes the dead are still alive, and seeks to communicate with them through a medium.

In more recent times, neglect and ignorance of the Word of God has resulted in a resurgence of all kinds of superstitions, including spiritism, astrology, Satanism, black magic etc., all of which are condemned by God. So it is not surprising that they are listed as things to repent of in Rev. 9:21. Neither is it surprising they are in the list of things in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15 which cause people to be excluded from the city of God and suffer the second death.

According to Strong, Pharmakia means medication, especially in connection with magic. The word “pharmacy,” also known as “chemist” or “drug store,” is derived from it. Medication has to do with drugs and this thought could be conveyed in Rev. 9:21 by the word “sorceries.” This would be quite significant in the light of drug addiction which is continually on the increase and reaching epidemic proportions.

Drugs put the mind into an unreal and artificial world to escape the real world. But God’s desire is for people to face the real world with all of its trials, hardships and disappointments, and gain victory by faith and trust in Him, and by the wonderful and sure hope of His coming glorious kingdom at Christ’s return, at which time there will be no more sorrow and sadness, sickness, pain or death. To fall back on drugs is to turn the back on God and His Spirit which is able to give all who believe and seek, lasting love, joy and peace, without any bad side effects!

THE A.D. 70 APPLICATION

Before completing Rev. 9, something should be said about the A.D. 70 and continuous historical interpretation. The A.D. 70 application is untenable because it cannot accept the army of 200 million literally. The population of the whole Roman Empire at the time of Christ's birth when the census was taken (Lk. 2:1-) was only 70 million. There were nearly 30 legions in the Roman army each consisting of up to 6,000 soldiers, making a total of 180,000 soldiers. Whether or not the Roman legions were stationed at the river Euphrates prior to the invasion of Israel is therefore immaterial. Whether or not the invading forces of the Romans or any other nation or their weaponry can be linked with horses or likened to scorpions or serpents, is also immaterial. No nation or confederacy of nations in Biblical history had anything like 200 million men. It is clearly an end time number pertaining to a population explosion era.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL APPLICATION

The continuous historical interpretation of the sixth trumpet relates to the rise of the various Turkish hordes that crossed the river Euphrates to afflict and overthrow the Eastern Roman empire. Attention is usually directed to 4 particular waves of these hordes involving the Seljukians, Mongols, Tartars and Ottomans. It is believed that the 4 angels bound at the Euphrates either represent these 4 divisions or the 4 ruling angels who had charge of them. Being God's "messengers" of judgement, it is believed that the 4 hordes could appropriately be referred to by the word "angels" which means messengers.

They migrated from the north (some, such as the Mongols, from as far as the Russian Steppes), to the Euphrates, and were "bound" here for some time before being unloosed on to the Roman empire. Under various leaders, the Turks attacked the Byzantine, or eastern Roman empire in successive waves.

The units of "the hour, day, month and year" are added together making a total of 391 days and one hour, which, on the basis of a day representing one year, becomes 391 years and one month. It is affirmed that it took this period of time to conquer the eastern Roman empire and its headquarters at Constantinople. Thus was slain "the third part of men," for by this time Rome was divided into 3 parts: the western empire (the holy Roman empire), the eastern empire (Byzantium), and the Papacy. The Turks killed eastern Rome by putting it to death politically.

The horses and horsemen are seen as the innumerable cavalry which

was the great feature of the Turkish operations. Ishmael the Seljukian, for example, offered to help Mahmoud with 200,000 horses. In A.D. 1098-9 the Crusaders' 100,000 horses were met by Saliman's 300,000. The 200 million referred to in Rev. 9 are seen as representing cavalry operations during the 391 years and one month's Turkish domination.

The "breastplates" etc., are regarded as a descriptive account of the new method of warfare introduced by the Turks. The breastplates of fire indicate the breastworks upon which were mounted the "head" or canon of the horse artillery. "Fire, jacinth and brimstone" are related to gun fire. Jacinth is a dark blue, and is seen as describing the blue smoke of a sulphurous flame. One writer claims that the 3 colours of red, blue and yellow greatly predominated the dress or uniform of the Turkish warriors.

The "heads of lions" is taken to signify the roar of the canon which sounds like the roar emanating from a lion's mouth. Regarding the reference to their power being in their mouth and tails: this is related to the canon which was drawn into battle at the tail of the horses. In order to fire, the canons were swung around to the fore, so that the tails became the heads, from the mouth of which projectiles issue with fire, smoke and brimstone. It would therefore appear to John in vision as though the power was in the mouth and tail, for the gun at the tail became the mouth when the horse swung it around. In view of this it is felt by those who hold to this interpretation, that the analogy of the striking serpent is very apt.

Another view is that horses' heads were cast on the mouth of the canons, as a form of ornamentation. Another commentator puts forward the view that as the Turks rode with the barrel of their rifles held out parallel with the horses' head, fire, smoke and brimstone would seem to issue out of the horses' mouth when the rifles were discharged.

Regarding the "tails like serpents": it is pointed out that a serpent is able to spring in order to strike, by coiling its tail. It is felt that this can be likened to the breech-loaded canon. The charge of gun powder and the ball were pushed into its "tail" in order to get it to spring. Those who explain the vision by suggesting that horses' heads were cast on the mouth of the canons, suggest that the canons were ornamented both at their muzzle and at their breech, and that the breech had the appearance of a serpent's tail. Reference therefore to them hurting "with their heads" is related to the muzzle of the canon which became the head when battle commenced.

"The rest of the men" in Rev. 9:20 who were not killed is regarded as a reference to the western Roman empire and the Papacy which remained intact as a political force after the eastern third was politically killed.

These surviving Catholics still continued their apostate ways; they did not take to heart the lesson of the fall of Constantinople and the political extinction of the Byzantine empire. They continued their senseless worship of idols and images, angels, saints and relics etc., as they still do to the present day.

Adam Clarke's commentary on the continuous historical interpretation of the last verse in Rev. 9 says the "murders" are related to the Catholic's "cruelties towards the genuine followers of God, the Albigenses and Waldenses, and others, against whom they published crusades and hunted them down, and butchered them in the most shocking manner. The innumerable murders of the horrible inquisition need not be mentioned."

Regarding "their sorceries" he says: "Those who apply this also to the Romish church understand by it the various tricks, sleights of hand..., by which they impose on the common people in causing images of Christ to bleed, and the various pretended miracles wrought at the tombs etc.; of pretended saints, holy wells, and such like."

"Fornication" is related to giving that honour to various creatures which is due only to the Creator.

And "their thefts" is said to be their exactions and impositions on men for indulgences, pardons etc.

Adam Clarke then concludes his comments on the continuous historical view by saying: "These things may be intended, but it is going too far to say this is the true interpretation. And yet to express any doubt on this subject is with some, little else than heresy. If such men can see these things so clearly in such obscure prophecies let them be thankful for their sight, and indulgent to those who still sit in darkness."

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE HISTORICAL APPLICATION

There are a number of unsatisfactory aspects regarding the continuous historical interpretation of the sixth trumpet.

1. The correct translation of "the hour and day and month and year" in Rev. 9:15 signifies a precise period of time, right down to the last hour, that has been ordained by God for the great army to be released from the Euphrates to invade. It does not refer to the actual period during which the battles take place. The idea of a time period might possibly be read into the A.V. translation, and it is natural for the exponents of the long drawn out continuous historical view to prefer this translation, and want to see in it a reference to a period of 391 years 1 month. But the Revised versions

do not agree with the A.V. They convert the idea of a time period into that of a precise moment in time.

In order to make the time period fit the period during which the Turkish battles took place, a certain amount of inconsistency with dates is involved. Some of the expositors claim that the 391 years and one month that it took to conquer the eastern Roman empire and its headquarters at Constantinople, started on April 27th 1062 A.D. and was fulfilled on May 28th 1453 A.D. But according to others, Constantinople fell on May 29th 1453, not May 28th. Some claim that the first attack against the empire by the Seljuks was in February 1057, not April 1062. The period from this date to the fall of Constantinople on May 29th 1453, would therefore be 396 years 106 days, not 391 years and one month. This being the case, the long established belief that a year is 360 days in Bible prophecy is abandoned by some and changed into 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days instead, in order that the 396 years and 106 days will fit. We call this "fiddling with the facts," to make a pre-conceived view fit.

Another commentator affirms that the Seljuks first invaded the eastern Roman empire some years earlier in 1050 A.D! So we have at least 3 different starting dates in the offering: 1050, 1057 and 1062. 1062 is necessary in order for the 360 day-year to fit. The year of 360 days has to be changed to 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days to make the 1058 fit, and the 1050 won't fit.

According to A.D. Norris, 391 years one month subtracted from May 29th 1453 gives us 1052 A.D., and 396 years 121 days gives us 1057 A.D., both of which are unconvincing from a chronological standpoint. The time period given in Rev. 9:15 is exact down to an hour, not approximate, and therefore discrepancies involving years are quite unacceptable.

The fall of Constantinople in May 1453 is the only certain date in the sequence of Turkish invasions. The other dates are reached by an arbitrary fashion by deducting the required time period from that date. Those who want to make a 360 day-year fit or a 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ day-year can therefore both arrive at dates that satisfy their interpretation. But no such dates are given in history to confirm them.

2. There is nothing said in Rev. 9:16 to indicate that 200 million represented the number of horses and horsemen that would be involved over a 391 or 396 year period. The 200 million represents the number that would be ready all at one given point of time - at one particular "hour," to cross the Euphrates, invade and attack. Nothing like this number of cavalry, has been, or could be mustered at one time back in the days of the Turkish invasions. Even over a period of 391 or 396 years, there was

nothing like 200 million involved, and no one has produced evidence to prove otherwise.

3. Even if there were 200 million involved, they did not, according to Norris, prevail over the Romans by the use of gunpowder, which the “fire, smoke and brimstone” has been interpreted to signify. The Seljuks, Mongols and Tartars did not use the canon, and Gibbon implies that at Angora, when the Turks were crushed by Tartars, they did not then employ the canon, for he writes: “Had they borrowed from Europe the recent invention of gunpowder and canon, the artificial thunder in the hands of either nation must have turned the fortunes of the day.” In the last days of the eastern Roman empire, the Ottoman Turks did use the canon effectively against Constantinople, but not horse-artillery due to the batteries being so heavy.

4. Applying the killing of “the third part of men” to the political death of the eastern third of the Roman empire, does not fit in with what the prophecy says at all. It clearly states that the third part of “men” will be killed, not the third part of an empire. If it applied to the eastern third of the Roman empire, then all the men in that third should have been killed, which of course they weren’t.

NOT YET FULFILLED

This sixth trumpet prophecy has clearly not been fulfilled and yet awaits the future to be fulfilled, because it belongs to the end time, immediately before the seventh trumpet which heralds the second coming. It portrays a vast and massive military power in proportions never seen before, crossing the Euphrates, invading Israel, killing one third of the population. As we read in Ezk. 38:9: “They shall be like a cloud to cover the land ... many people ...” “Multitudes, multitudes ...” (Joel 3:14). As in the case of Rev. 20:8 the number will be “as the sand of the sea.”

In the past, those who believed that the drying up of the river Euphrates in Rev. 16:12 referred to the downfall of the Turkish empire, held that it was the last step in Revelation before Armageddon. But the fact that the largest part of a century has passed since Turkey ceased to control the holy land makes this view improbable. The structure of the book of Revelation with its brief time periods, does not allow for such long drawn out delays.

The drying up of the river Euphrates more than likely refers to the literal drying up of the river when the “hour” of God’s judgement arrives, allowing the army of 200 million to cross over quickly, avoiding

congestion on bridges. Compare the drying up of the river Jordan to prepare the way for the Israelites to pass over quickly under Joshua.

Rev. 16:12 says the river Euphrates will be dried up “to prepare (same word as “prepared” in 9:15) the way for the kings of the east.” As mentioned earlier, east is to be understood in relation to Israel, and points to Islamic nations - the dragon who becomes the 10 horns on the beast, referred to as 10 kings in Revelation (17:12). Being confederate with Gog of the land of Magog, will result in the multitudinous army referred to in Rev. 9.

The dragon invades Israel first and kills one third of the population (Rev. 12:4) but is ultimately defeated and evicted (v7-9). The dragon ends up transferring his power to the beast (13:2) forming a mighty confederacy to invade Israel again, resulting in another one third being killed (Rev. 9:18). This accounts for the “two thirds” referred to in Zech. 13:8 which “shall be cut off and perish.” But “the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle ... and the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and His name one” (Zech. 14).



CHAPTER SEVEN

REVELATION CHAPTER TEN

Rev. 9 brought us to the end of the sixth trumpet. Rev. 10 through to 11:14 is a paranthetical section, sandwiched between the sixth and seventh trumpet. As in the case of the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet is also followed by a pause. Once again the climax is postponed. But the visions recorded during this pause relate to events contemporary with those in previous visions. They are episodes in the main story. This parenthetical section in Rev. 10:1 to 11:14 is to the trumpets what Rev. 7 is to the seals - a description of conditions existing prior to the day of consummation.

ANOTHER MIGHTY ANGEL

Rev. 10:1 commences by saying that John “saw another mighty angel.” The word “another” comes from the Greek “allos” and means different; not the same as; distinguished from others. This mighty angel is not one of the 7 who blow the trumpets, but in addition to them.

The word “mighty” (Greek “ischuros”) means forcible, boisterous, powerful, strong. The same word is used in Rev. 5:2, and 18:21 in relation to a “strong” and “mighty” angel. John sees many angels in his visions, but only on these occasions are they described specifically as being “strong” or “mighty.” It is possible that each of these 3 references relate to the same angel.

The reference in Rev. 10:1 to the angel being “mighty” is the first clue as to who he represents and the nature of his mission. As we shall see, he represents power from high that is coming to earth to anoint and empower God’s witnesses in the last days, for it is he who gives power to the witnesses in Rev. 11:3.

According to the A.V. John saw the mighty angel “come down from heaven.” Most revised versions translate this as “coming down from heaven.” John saw him descending. Had John been above in heaven observing this descent, one would have expected him to say that he saw the angel “going down from heaven.” In this particular vision, John is upon the earth watching the angel come down. As we shall see, John had to be on the earth to receive a “little book” from the angel when he arrived.

AN ANGEL OR CHRIST?

The various descriptions given concerning the mighty angel correspond with descriptions elsewhere of Christ, and for this reason some have concluded that it is Christ. For example:

1. "Mighty." Christ is certainly mighty - "mighty God" (Isa. 9:6).
2. "Coming down from heaven." Many Scriptures refer to the return of Christ in these terms (Ps. 72:6).
3. "Clothed with a cloud." Lk. 21:27: "Then you shall see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Also: Rev. 1:7. 14:14. Dan. 7:13.
4. "A rainbow was upon his head." There was a rainbow about the throne (Rev. 4:3. Ezk. 1:26-28). Christ, being in the midst of the throne (Rev. 5:6) would have been surrounded by the rainbow.
5. "His face was as it were the sun." Rev. 1:16: "His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength. Also Matt. 17:2.
6. "His feet as pillars of fire." Rev. 1:15: "His feet like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace."
7. "Cried with a loud voice as when a lion roars." Being the "lion of Judah," Jesus also has a roaring voice (Isa. 42:13. Joel 3:16). Rev. 1:15 refers to his voice sounding like the roar of the ocean (or a waterfall).

However, in spite of these corresponding details and resemblances, the scene in Rev. 10:1 cannot be the second coming of Christ. Rev. 10 occurs during the sixth trumpet, but Jesus comes at the seventh. There are also a number of other reasons for not equating the angel in Rev. 10 with Christ.

One reason is because it would not be appropriate for Jesus, who has been given a name above all angels, and before whom all angels bow in worship; to be described in such impersonal and indifferent terms as "another angel." We read in Heb. 1:4-8 that: "He has been made so much superior than angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a much more excellent name than them. For unto which of the angels did God ever say: "You are my son, this day I have begotten you?" and again: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son?" And again, when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith: "and let all the angels of God worship him." And of the angels He says: "who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." But to the son He says: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom!" Also see Heb. 2:2-7. 1 Pet. 3:22.

Both the Greek and Hebrew word translated "angel" mean "messenger" and are actually translated messenger in various places,

including Mal. 3:1 where Jesus is referred to as “the messenger of the covenant.” But, although Jesus was regarded as an angel in the sense of the messenger of God, ministering the new covenant as he did during his earthly ministry, this is quite a different matter from making him one angel among others, as is conveyed by the reference to “another angel” in Rev. 10:1. Jesus clearly wasn’t an angel in the sense that angels in heaven are, during his earthly ministry to which the statement in Mal. 3:1 applies (see Matt. 11:10), and neither did he become an angel after that. He is above angels; they have all been made subject to him.

Whenever reference is made to Jesus in the book of Revelation, very distinctive titles are given which cannot be mistaken, such as: “The Lamb,” “the bright and morning star,” “the alpha and omega,” “the amen” “king of kings” etc. In view of this, it is not very likely that he would be referred to in such an impersonal way as “another angel,” especially if the passage referred to his second coming!

Reference to “another angel” in Rev. 18:1 certainly refers to an angel, not Jesus, and references to other angels coming down from heaven, abound in Scripture e.g. Rev. 20:1. Dan. 4:23.

The “little book” in the hand of the mighty angel, as we shall see, particularly relates to events that take place before Christ’s return. The scene in Rev. 10 could not therefore signify the second coming. This is further indicated by the fact that the contents of the book make John’s belly bitter. The second coming will not be a bitter experience to beloved disciples like John, but sweet. For this reason he said: “Even so come Lord Jesus.” When Jesus returns, he will not be giving out books prophesying judgement. He will be opening books at the judgement! (Dan. 7:10. Rev. 20:12).

INTERESTING COMPARISONS

When the features describing the angel in Rev. 10 are compared with the features describing the angel in Dan. 10, it is not difficult to conclude that it is the same angel. Consider the following parallels:

REV. 10	DAN. 10
v1. A mighty angel clothed with a cloud.	v5. A man clothed in linen.
Coming down from heaven.	v11-12: "I am come." "I am sent."
A rainbow was upon his head.	v6: His body shone like a jewel.
His face was as the sun.	Face like lightning.
His feet as pillars of fire.	Feet like polished brass.
v2. Open book in his hand.	v21. "I will shew you... the Scripture of truth."
Right foot on the sea and left foot on the land.	v7 standing on the waters.
v3. Voice as a lion.	v6. Voice of a multitude (roar).
v4. Seal up those things.	12:9. The words are sealed.
v5. Lifted up right hand to heaven.	10:7. Lifts hands to heaven.
v6. Swears by him who lives forever.	v7. Swears by him who lives forever.
v7. Mystery of God to be finished.	v7. All these things shall be finished.
11:1-2. Temple and altar desecrated.	12:11. Daily sacrifice taken away and abomination set up.
11:2. Holy city trodden under foot.	12:7. Power of holy people shattered.
11:2. 42 months.	12:7. Time, times and an half.
11:18. The time of the dead that they should be judged.	12:2. Many that sleep, awake to everlasting life or contempt.

If these parallels indicate that the angel in Rev. 10 is the same as the one in Dan. 10, the question of his identity still remains. The fact that Dan. 10:13 says Michael the archangel came to help him deal with the king of Persia, could suggest he was a fellow archangel who comes from before the throne of God in Rev. 4:5 which was encircled by a rainbow. Reference to the rainbow upon his head in Rev. 10:1 may be designed to connect him with the rainbow-encircled throne.

In view of the fact that in Dan. 10:21 the angel says to Daniel: "I will tell you what is inscribed in the Scripture of truth," and in 8:16 and 9:22 Gabriel came for the same purpose, to give Daniel revelation and understanding; it is tempting to conclude the angel in Dan. 10 and therefore Rev. 10, may have been Gabriel - the same angel sent to tell Zecharias about an Old Testament prophecy which related to the mission

of his son, John the Baptist, who was to precede and be a sign of the first coming of Christ, by coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. In Rev. 10 the angel comes to give prophetic signs of the second coming of Christ which will also involve a ministry in the spirit and power of Elijah in the end time.

Dan. 10:5 says his loins were girded with fine gold i.e. a belt of the finest gold was around his waist. This is quite a distinctive feature. The wearing of golden girdles is also mentioned in relation to the 7 angels who came out of the temple in Rev. 15:6 “having the 7 plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with gold.” (Jesus is also depicted wearing a golden girdle around his chest in Rev. 1:13).

As pointed out in a previous chapter, the 7 angels who blow the 7 trumpets are more than likely archangels, because the “last trump” (1 Cor. 15:22) i.e. the seventh (Rev. 11:15-18), is associated with the voice of an archangel in 1 Thes. 4:16. It would therefore not be surprising if the 7 angels who have the 7 plagues and are girded around the chest with golden girdles, are also archangels, and that the angel in Dan. 10 and Rev. 10 is an archangel as well. It would certainly be consistent with Gabriel’s name if he was the “mighty angel” in Rev. 10:1 because the name means “God’s strong one.”

The purpose of the angel coming to John was:

1. To inform him that during the period when the seventh and last trumpet is about to sound, time shall no longer be delayed, and the secret of God, as announced to the prophets, shall be fulfilled(v6-7).

2. To give him a “little book” which contained prophecies concerning many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.

3. To give him a reed to measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship there, and to inform him that the Gentiles shall tread under foot the holy city 42 months.

4. To inform him that “I will give power to my 2 witnesses and they shall prophesy 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth ...”

Up to and including Rev. 11:14, more is said of what the angel revealed to John.

THE COMFORTER

The mighty angel therefore announces things soon to come to pass and is the agent by whom divine power - the “fire” of the Holy Spirit, will be bestowed upon the witnesses who prophesy during a 1260 day or 42 month period.

This kind of mission was fulfilled by the Comforter in New Testament times. His function was to endow the church with power and set them on fire to be effective witnesses, and to “shew things that are to come” (Jn. 16:13) i.e. reveal future events.

As we know, the book of Revelation was given by God “to shew His servants things which must shortly come to pass, and He sent and signified it by His angel” (1:1). Jn. 16:13 says this mission would be fulfilled by the Comforter, and Rev. 1:1 says it was fulfilled by an angel. The Comforter was and is an angel! In the same way that a special high ranking angel was sent by God in a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, to superintend and oversee the church of the old covenant in the wilderness; performing signs and wonders; so also a high ranking angel - an archangel, was sent to superintend the activities and ministries of the new covenant church in New Testament times.

In Rev. 10 the mighty angel is seen coming again from heaven to empower the end time church for a special 3½ year ministry (the same period as Christ’s ministry). It will be a divinely attested appeal to many peoples, nations, tongues and kings, to repent and be converted before Christ returns at the last trump to judge the earth.

The mighty angel in Rev. 10 looks like Christ because he is Christ’s special envoy or ambassador, representing him and ministering to his church on his behalf. As Jesus himself said: “He shall glorify me and take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:14) i.e all revelation given by the Father to the son shall be given to the angel to declare it to the church. In the words of Jesus: “All things that the Father has are mine; that is why I said he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you” (Jn. 16:15). How fitting therefore that such an agent should look like Christ! (For more on this see page 52-).

COMING DOWN FROM HEAVEN CLOTHED WITH A CLOUD

Let us then consider the description in Rev. 10:1 in the light of it referring to an angel. John says he saw the angel “coming down,” i.e. descending from heaven. John’s experience was similar to Jacob’s who saw angels ascending and descending (Gen. 28:12). Jesus told John and the other apostles that they would experience this: “Hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man” (Jn. 1:51).

With regard to being “clothed with a cloud:” sometimes “cloud” can signify a crowd or large concourse of people. For example, Heb. 12:1

refers to being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. On this basis, references to Jesus coming “with clouds” (Rev. 1:7), or “in a cloud” (Lk. 21:27), have been interpreted by some to mean he will be accompanied and surrounded by many angels. As we read in Jude v14: “Behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of saints.” Also see Matt. 16:27. 25:31.

If so, reference to the mighty angel in Rev. 10:1 being clothed with a cloud, could signify being surrounded and supported by other angels. If he is an archangel, he would have other angels (his own “squadron?”) under him to assist him in his mission.

In connection with this it is interesting to note that throughout the chapter the angel is referred to by the singular pronouns “he” and “him,” but in the last verse, according to most reliable texts, the plural pronoun “they” is given: “And they say to me,” implying others were with the angel.

FEET AS PILLARS OF FIRE

The reference to being in a cloud along with having “feet as pillars of fire,” calls to mind Ex. 13:21: “The Lord (an angel) went before them in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire.” The cloud here is a literal cloud and the same could apply in Rev. 10:1. Being “in a cloud” could very well be expressed in terms of being “clothed with a cloud” and speak of miraculous guidance and supernatural provision and protection, involving signs and wonders performed by God’s power, as in the days of Israel’s journey through the wilderness.

Angels are “flames of fire,” and they can set on fire for God anyone they touch, as on the day of Pentecost when flames of fire settled on those in Act. 2:1-4, and filled them with the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising therefore, that “feet as pillars of fire” is mentioned in connection with an angel.

Dan. 10:6 refers to the angel’s feet being in colour like polished (gleaming) brass, and as mentioned before, the feet of Jesus are also given the same description in Rev. 1:15.

Angels can be flames of fire on either missions of mercy or judgement. As in the case of natural fire, angels can be both constructive and destructive. In Act. 2 the flames of fire came in grace and mercy for the construction of the church. But when the seventh trumpet is sounded, they will come with Christ in flaming fire to execute judgement upon the world and trample upon the wicked. The time for this is so close in Rev. 10, being at the end of the sixth trumpet, the angel is already “dressed” in

preparation for the occasion! It is clearly the final countdown period to Armageddon and the return of Christ when this angel is seen coming with feet as pillars of fire.

In Dan. 10 the angel was “dressed for battle,” so to speak, because he had come from the battle field (Dan. 10:13). He is also dressed for battle in Rev. 10 to support the end time witnesses in their last great spiritual battle, preaching to a sin-hardened world steeped in iniquity. Wherever his feet of fire tread, the feet of the divinely empowered witnesses will tread, and will be strengthened and supported by the pillar of fire and cloud that guides and directs them. The Comforter will be more than capable of treading down all mountains of obstruction which seek to impede their progress and curtail their mission, even to the point of sending fire down from heaven. The ministry of the witnesses will be “not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord,” causing mountains to be removed.

FACE AS THE SUN

Rev. 10:1 says the angel’s face “was as it were the sun.” If it said his face was as a dark cloud, we would probably interpret it to mean he was sullen, frowning and angry. But “face as the sun” surely signifies a face that is shining, and the expression “face shine upon us” occurs a number of times in Scripture to signify divine favour and blessing (Num. 6:25. Ps. 67:1 etc).

This is certainly true in relation to Rev. 10. The mighty angel comes to bestow divine favour upon John and fellow witnesses of God, imparting spiritual understanding and power - the gifts of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to prophesy and perform signs and miracles. The face of the angel must have been above the cloud for John to see it. “Clothed with a cloud” would therefore mean the cloud enveloped his body like a cloak.

RAINBOW UPON HIS HEAD

The rainbow upon his head may be due to the radiance of his face gleaming through the cloud that surrounded him, but a deeper spiritual significance is surely implied. Originally, in the days of Noah, the rainbow was appointed by God to be an eternal reminder that He is faithful and keeps His promises and covenants. Reference to a “rainbow round about the throne” in Rev. 4:3 no doubt signifies this, and the same significance can be applied to the angel who comes from before that throne.

In view of the fact that the angel comes to fulfil God's promise in Joel 2:28-31 to pour out His Spirit before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, and to fulfil the promise in Dan. 12 to unseal and open up the end time prophecies; a rainbow on his head is a very appropriate symbol. Basically, it signifies that he has come to fulfil the promises of God, which relate to His covenant.

The definite article is in the Greek text of Rev. 10:1, making it read "the rainbow" instead of "a rainbow." Because the only other reference to a rainbow in the book of Revelation is the one that surrounds God's throne in chapter 4:3, suggests it is this rainbow or some impartation of it that encircles the angel's head. If so, it would convey and emphasize that he comes from before the very throne of God as His representative and is of very high rank.

In nature, a rainbow sometimes accompanies thunder when a storm is brewing and threatening, and the scene of the mighty angel crying out with a thunderous voice (v3) while a rainbow encircles his head, reminds us of this. The storm clouds of Armageddon will certainly be gathering at this stage, being at the end of the sixth trumpet and on the threshold of the seventh. Many rumblings will be taking place, but although judgement and destruction are imminent and inevitable, God's abiding love, mercy and covenant-faithfulness is assured to His people and manifested.

PARALLELS WITH JOEL'S PROPHECY

The context of the divine empowering of God's witnesses by the mighty angel is interesting in the light of the context of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Joel's prophecy. The reference in Joel 2:28 to God pouring out His Spirit follows the account of the invasion of Israel by locusts, referred to as the northern army. And the reference to power being given to God's witnesses in Rev. 11:3 also follows the account of the locust invasion in chapter 9. The effect of the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel's prophecy is that the recipients will prophesy, and the effect in the Revelation prophecy is the same: "I will give power to my 2 witnesses and they shall prophesy."

In Joel's prophecy, the period during which the locusts take possession of the land of Israel, at which time the Spirit is poured out, is referred to as "the years" (Joel 2:25). In Rev. 11 the empowering by the Spirit is mentioned in connection with a period of 1260 days which is 42 months or 3½ years.

The continuous historic expositors maintain that the period signifies

1260 years, but this is not in keeping with the context. The mighty angel who comes down from heaven to give power, does so at the end of the sixth trumpet and shortly before the seventh and last. A period of 1260 years between the end of the sixth trumpet and the beginning of the seventh would be grossly out of proportion with the time sequences. It is a time in history when “there will be time no longer” (Rev. 10:6), i.e. no more delay. It is a time when the mystery of God is about to be finished and the kingdom of God established on earth (v7). Such statements cannot accommodate another 1260 years. It is obvious that the divine empowering takes place on the threshold of Christ’s return. It would be inconsistent with the context of the time frame to affirm that the 1260 days during which the witnesses prophesy is 1260 years!

One last comparison: In Joel’s prophecy, the Holy Spirit appeals to the people to humble themselves and repent in sackcloth that they might be delivered (Joel 1:8, 13). In Rev. 11:3, the witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, which is a common Jewish custom in Scripture in times of repentance and self-abasement. True prophets practise what they preach! Their clothing is both a sign of their nationality and a symbol of the nature of their ministry and testimony which involves calling people to repentance.

In view of the fact that Joel’s prophecy relates to the end time, the prophet Joel represents the end time witnesses who prophesy, especially Elijah. The name Joel consists of 2 Hebrew words: Yah and el and means Yah’s power. (Yah is an abbreviated form of Yahweh which is the name of Father God). The name Elijah consists of the same 2 Hebrew words el Yah, and is the reverse form of Joel but means exactly the same, namely: the power of Yah.

According to Mal. 4:5, God is going to send Elijah the prophet (or someone in the same Spirit and power, as in the case of John the Baptist: (Lk. 1:17), before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. During the original Elijah’s ministry, at the command of his mouth, fire fell from heaven and devoured his enemies, and he had power to shut heaven causing rain to be withheld for 3½ years. It is not difficult to see reference to this kind of ministry in Rev. 11:3-6 where we read about the witnesses having power to call forth fire and stop the rain for 3½ years.

It should be evident that this interim vision in Rev. 10 is designed to prepare the saints for a special time of witnessing immediately before the second coming.

A LITTLE BOOK OPEN IN HIS HAND

We are told in Rev. 10:2 that the angel “had in his hand a little book open.” Three different Greek words are translated “book” in Revelation and relate to 4 different books. “Little book” in chapter 10 comes from “bibliaridion” and occurs 4 times in verses 8-10, but nowhere else in the New Testament. It means a small book or booklet (scroll).

“Biblos,” which signifies the inner bark of the papyrus plant and means by implication a sheet or scroll of writing, occurs 5 times in Revelation, and always refers to the book of life.

“Biblion” occurs 20 times in Revelation. It refers to the book John was told to write, recording all that he saw and heard: (Rev. 1:11. 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19). It is also the word used in relation to the book in Rev. 5, held in God’s right hand, and it is used in relation to the book of life on 3 occasions.

Some think that the little open book in Rev. 10 is the same as the one sealed with 7 seals in Rev. 5 which the Lamb took out of God’s hand, but is now seen by John opened in the angel’s hand. But the term “bibliaridion” marks a distinction from that book as well as the book of life. It is separate and distinct from these.

Because the mighty angel raised his right hand to heaven when swearing an oath (Rev. 10:5), some have concluded that the little book must have been in his left hand. But, in view of the fact that Scripture almost always refers to the right hand being used to hold on to an object, and the fact that it was the right hand of the One sitting on the throne that held the other book (Rev. 5), it could just as easily be concluded that the mighty angel in Rev. 10 held the little book in his right hand. This would mean that the book would be lifted up when he raised his right hand to swear the oath.

If so, this would be significant of something; it could indicate that the oath: “that there should be time no longer” related to the contents of the scroll. It could also mean that the “time” for which there will be no more delay for its fulfilment, is recorded in the open scroll. If so, this would suggest that a particular time period is involved.

Specific reference to the little book in the angel’s hand being “open,” could also be intended to imply that it was at some stage closed or sealed. The New Living Bible conveys this by rendering it: “a small scroll which he had unrolled.” This is a very free translation but could very well express the truth.

As already mentioned, this “little book” (bibliaridion) is separate and distinct from the one in Rev. 5 which was in God’s hand and sealed, then

unsealed by the Lamb. There is no reference to that book being a “little book” which you would expect if it was the same book.

We do read however in Dan. 12:4 of a book which was closed and sealed till a certain time: “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words (i.e. roll up the scroll) and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro (investigate) and knowledge shall be increased.”

Prior to the angel imparting the information that Daniel wrote down in this scroll before being asked to roll it up and seal it, the angel told him that this information was already “inscribed in the Scripture of truth” (Dan. 10:21). It seems from this that the angel was telling Daniel that the original prophecy (Dan. 11 to 12) already existed in heaven’s archives or “library.” If so, this suggests that a written record is kept in heaven of God’s purposes with the earth from the beginning to the end, which even the angels desire to look into (1 Pet. 1:12).

After all, where did the book sealed with 7 seals come from? It was in heaven! And what about the book of life and other “books” referred to in Rev. 3:5. 20:12. Dan. 12:1. Mal. 3:16 etc.

Books are in heaven including the original of the prophecy recorded in Dan. 11 and 12, a copy of which the prophet Daniel was told to roll up and seal until the time of the end! It would indeed be a “little book.”

Since this little scroll was only to be closed until the time of the end, it follows that at the time of the end the book would be opened. And, as the closing of this scroll is mentioned in the Word of prophecy, it would not be surprising if its opening was mentioned as well.

Significantly enough, there is no “book” spoken of in Scripture as being closed and sealed until the time of the end except Daniel’s prophecy. And there is no account of the opening of that book in prophecy, unless it is here in the tenth chapter of Revelation. It could very well be that it is the prophecy in Dan. 11 and 12 that the little scroll in the angel’s hand represents. There are a number of factors that point in this direction.

Of particular significance is the fact that the prophecy Daniel was told to close up and seal, had reference to prophetic times and seasons. In Dan. 12:6 the question was put to the angel: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” In response to this, the angel held up his right hand to heaven and swore an oath “by him who lives for ever and ever” saying: “It shall be for a time, times and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to shatter the power of the holy people (by invasion of the enemy), all these things shall be finished.”

The subject of time is also the issue in the angel’s oath in Rev. 10. He

“lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives for ever and ever ... that there should be time no longer.” There is an interesting connection between these 2 passages of Scripture which contain obvious parallels.

THAT THERE SHOULD BE TIME NO LONGER

The words: “that there should be time no longer” in the A.V. are rendered: “That there should be no more delay” in the R.S.V. or “that the time shall no longer be delayed” in the Emphatic Diaglott.

The Greek word “chronos” basically means “time” and has been so translated 30 times in the New Testament. It only occurs on 3 other occasions in Revelation and is translated “season” and “space” in the A.V. (2:21. 6:11. 20:3). It is not translated “delay,” but Strong says it can by implication mean delay. The Greek word “chronizo” which is derived from chronos, occurs 5 times in the New Testament and is translated “delayeth” twice (Mat. 24:48. Lk. 12:45), and “tarry” or “tarried” 3 times (Mat. 25:5. Lk. 1:21. Heb. 10:37). Most of these references relate to Jesus not tarrying or delaying his coming: “The vision is for an appointed time and will not tarry.”

The question is therefore: what is meant by: “there shall be time no longer” or “there shall be no more delay” in Rev. 10?

One thing is certain: it cannot mean that the precise moment in time has arrived for Christ to return and set up his kingdom, because the angel goes on to say that the holy city shall be trodden under foot 42 months, and power shall be given to 2 witnesses to prophesy 1260 days, at the end of which they will be killed by the beast. It is not until after these events take place that the seventh and last trumpet sounds, resulting in the coming of the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:1-15).

It is evident from this that after stating there would be no more delay, reference is then made to a special and significant period of 3½ years which culminates in the return of Christ. As it stands, it seems that the statement: “there shall be no more delay,” means there will be no more delay for the commencement of this 3½ year period, which has been a long-awaited and anticipated epoch of end time events - the last lap of human history that must run its course before the return of Christ.

The angel seems to be saying there shall no longer be any interval or respite before that period commences. There has been an apparent long delay, but not any longer, now that the sixth trumpet has been sounded. There is a divinely appointed time for this 3½ year period, and many have

waited for it, knowing that Jesus will not come until it runs its course. The angel now declares that there will be no more delay for the prophecies of Daniel recorded in the little book held up in his hand, to be fulfilled.

As pointed out, there seems to be good reasons to believe that the angel in Dan. 10 who told Daniel to close the book which contained the prophecies he gave to him, is one and the same angel who came to John with the book open. In Dan. 12:7 he raised his hands and swore by God that “it shall be for a time, times and an half” before all things would be accomplished and finished. And in Rev. 10 he raised his hand again and swore by God that there would be time no longer i.e. no more delay.

In view of the parallels between these 2 sections of Scripture, it is therefore tempting to connect the reference to “time” in Rev. 10:6 with the “time, times and an half” in Dan. 12:7. This would mean that the statement: “There will be time no longer” would signify that there will be no further delay for the period represented by the time, times and an half to commence, at the end of which all things will be finished and accomplished. Rev. 11:2-3 reveals that this period involves 1260 days, i.e. 42 months.

HOW LONG SHALL IT BE?

In Dan. 12:7 the answer that “it shall be for a time, times and an half” is given in response to the question: “how long shall it be?” The same question “how long?” as we have seen, is also asked in Rev. 6:10. And, the answer in Dan. 12:7: “it shall be for a time, times and an half” could be quite relevant to that question as well.

Ever since Daniel received the revelation of the time, times and an half, (referred to in Dan. 7:25 as well as 12:7), the people of God have known that it represents a specific countdown period which culminates in the second coming of Christ. Until this “time” arrives, Messiah’s coming cannot take place or be expected to take place. Because of this, it has been anticipated with almost as much anticipation as the second coming itself. It is a very crucial factor in relation to the second coming and occupies a vital position - a key position in the prophetic programme of end time events. It is so important and significant, that an angel is sent from heaven on 2 separate occasions to swear an oath concerning it. There are still many today whose interpretation of end time prophecy has no place for the 1260 days due to believing it has already been fulfilled during a 1260 year period in the past. The solemn oath of an angel seems to be required to convince and assure us that it will not be fulfilled until the sixth

trumpet has sounded.

According to some, the statement: “there shall be time no longer” means “the time shall not be yet,” meaning the time has not yet come for Christ’s return. If so, this would be quite consistent with the view already put forward that there shall be no delay for the 1260 days to commence, which implies the time has not come for Christ’s return.

However, if the statement simply and only means the time has not yet arrived for the second coming, it is hard to understand why an angel would be sent from heaven to engage in such a solemn transaction involving the swearing of an oath, simply to declare this. Such a negative announcement would seem to be out of proportion with the serious and solemn procedure involved in the declaration of it. It is evident from the ensuing message in Rev. 11 that various events have to take place before the seventh trumpet which heralds the second coming.

Others have concluded that the words: “there shall be time no longer” mean the time for the kingdom has arrived. But this is not stated in the text, and as has already been emphasized, the ensuing comments of the angel in Rev. 11 make it clear that various events have to take place before the kingdom arrives. It therefore makes more sense to interpret the angel’s words to mean the time, times and an half has arrived, which precedes and leads up to the second coming, and will be delayed no longer.

Compare the message in Ezk. 12:28: “...the time has come for every prophecy to be fulfilled! ... There will be no more delays... I will do everything I have threatened! I, the sovereign Lord, have spoken!”

The “time, times and an half” in Dan. 12:7 during which Israel’s power will be broken, clearly relates to the “time of the end” referred to in Dan. 11:40, during which the nation of Israel will be invaded, conquered and occupied by the “king of the north” - the locusts or “northern army” in Joel’s prophecy. During this period, the holy city will be trodden down (Rev. 11:2). “There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation till that time...” (Dan. 12:1).

FEET UPON THE SEA AND EARTH

We read in Rev. 10:2 that the angel with the little book in his hand “set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth.” The sea represents all islands and the earth represents all continents. The message of the little book is for the benefit of Christians in all nations and concerns “many peoples and nations” as is indicated in v11. Standing on

the earth and sea with his feet like pillars of fire while holding the little book in his hand, probably signifies that the little book related to, and would involve all nations, and that the message would be taken to them all by feet that were energized by the Spirit. Had the message concerned one country only, the angel's feet would have only been on land. But one foot on the sea indicates the message and ministry crosses the oceans and extends to nations overseas. Compare the language in Josh. 1:3: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given to you." Also Josh. 3:13. 14:9. In Ps. 89:25, Messiah's ultimate control of the sea and rivers, i.e. his dominion from one side of the earth to the other, is expressed in terms of his left hand being set (established) on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. As Ps. 72:8 puts it: "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

A LOUD VOICE LIKE A LION'S ROAR

We learn from Rev. 10:3 that the mighty angel "cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars." (The Greek word "mukaomai" translated "roars," only occurs here in the New Testament and relates to the mooing, lowing or bellowing of horned cattle such as cows and oxen).

The roar of a lion is sometimes used in Scripture as a metaphor for anger e.g. Pr. 19:12: "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion." To stand astride the nations with an open book in his hand and roar with a loud voice like a lion, would suggest that events recorded in the book arouse God's anger towards the nations. This is understandable if it can be accepted that the little book contains the prophecies in Dan. 11 and 12 which speak about the invasion of Israel and the time of trouble that the nations will cause for both Jews and Christians.

It seems that when the angel cried with a loud voice he did not utter a word or sentence. No message is given. He just gave a loud roar like a lion. It may signify a forthcoming call to the nations to come to God in repentance, like the lowing or bellowing of cows to their calves (1 Sam. 16:12). It is more likely however, to signify an outburst or expression of anger; a warning, due to the contents of the book he was holding. Crying with a loud voice indicates also of course that he wanted all to hear. Compare Isa. 58:1: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their transgressions..."

SEVEN THUNDERS

Rev. 10:3 further informs us that when the angel cried, “the 7 thunders uttered their voices.” As we know, a lion’s voice can sound like thunder (Rev. 6:1) and sometimes in Scripture the two are used synonymously (see pages 49 to 50). The thunderous roar of the mighty angel was therefore followed by 7 voices of thunder, which suggests another cycle of visions like the seals, trumpets and vials.

As the 7 trumpets were blown by 7 angels, and the 7 vials were poured out by 7 angels, the 7 thunders were also uttered by 7 angels. The fact that it says the 7 thunders “uttered their voices,” indicates they spoke and uttered a message. This is confirmed by the fact that John was told not to write down what the thunders uttered. Other references to angels having voices like thunder are in Isa. 6:3-4. Jn. 12:29. Also see Ps. 29. John had previously heard thunders coming from the throne of God (4:5).

John says in Rev. 10:4: “And when the 7 thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, seal up those things which the 7 thunders uttered, and do not write them.” This clearly reveals that John had not as yet recorded anything uttered by the 7 thunders.

Regarding the words “seal up”: Strong says that in the Greek it means “keep secret,” and this is the sense of it here. Some modern translations render it this way. Because John had to keep secret what he heard, he was not allowed to write it down. Twelve times in the book of Revelation we read that John was told to “write,” but only once on this occasion is he told to “write not.”

As we have seen, the prophet Daniel was also told to “shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end” (12:4, 9), i.e. close the book (roll up the scroll) and put a seal on it to keep the message a secret till the time of the end. But, unlike John, Daniel was permitted to write down what he had seen and heard, and was not prevented from doing so. But the message would not be understood or fulfilled till the time of the end and would remain a secret till then. This is what is symbolized by rolling up the scroll and sealing it. It was clearly a symbolic gesture and did not mean that the scroll could never be unrolled and read till the time of the end. The contents of what Daniel recorded clearly became part of the canon of Old Testament Scripture, and has been read and studied by many over a period of many centuries, long before the time of the end. Dan. 12:4 in fact, indicated that this would be the case: “Many shall run to and fro (i.e. search and investigate), and knowledge shall be increased. Even Jesus encouraged people to read Daniel’s prophecies and seek to

understand them (Matt. 24:15). However, the full import and significance of the prophecies would elude all and be kept a secret till the time of the end. Rolling up the scroll and sealing it signified this.

Fortunately, in all that John saw and heard, he was only prevented from recording the utterances of the 7 thunders. Everything else he was allowed to record and leave open for all to read. Constantly he is reminded and encouraged to “write,” and was told to “seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10).

Rev. 10:4 indicates that before the seventh and last trumpet sounds, the 7 thunders will roar, and we shall know that the Lord is at the door. All sorts of suggestions have been made regarding the significance of the 7 thunders. Because of the association of thunder with war in some Scriptures (1 Sam. 2:10. 7:10. Isa. 29:6), some see the 7 thunders as signifying 7 wars involving Israel. Five of the 7 wars are seen as those involving Israel and Arab nations in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. The sixth is regarded as the one with the dragon in Rev. 12, and the seventh with the beast. Only time will tell if this is a valid application. Many ridiculous guesses and wild speculations have been proposed, but in view of the fact that John was commanded to not record the utterances of the 7 thunders, it is futile to conjecture.

It is natural to wonder why the 7 thunders are mentioned at all if we are not allowed to know what John heard them utter. It seems that the revelation was given for John’s own personal illumination, but he was not allowed to digress to record it, in view of the importance of the vision of the mighty angel with the little book, which was unfolding before him at the time. There is at least one other case in Scripture of a man receiving revelation from God and hearing words that were for him alone which he was not allowed to share. See 2 Cor. 12.

LIFTED UP HIS HAND

The A.V. does not say which hand the angel raised when he swore the oath, but the Greek text says it was his right hand. Being above the right foot which was on the sea (v2), the right hand would be held up over and above the sea. The little book would therefore be held above the sea if, as suggested earlier, it was held in the angel’s right hand. This may or may not be significant.

The raising of the hand (or hands) when swearing an oath, added to the solemnity of the occasion and was a symbolic gesture signifying an oath. The hand lifted up to heaven pointed in the direction of, and drew

attention to the One in whose name the oath was being declared, namely: “Him who lives for ever and ever.” Having the little book in his hand while swearing the oath, would give the raising of the hand a double significance. Other examples of raising a hand or hands when swearing an oath are: Gen. 14:22. Deu. 32:39-40. Ps. 106:26. Ezk. 20:5, 15, 23. 36:7. Dan. 12:7. In some places, the Hebrew word translated “lifted up” in relation to raising the hands when swearing an oath, is actually translated “swear” e.g: Ex. 6:8. Num. 14:30. Isa. 3:7.

In view of the fact that angels implicitly obey God and would never lie to His servants, it may seem strange to some that the mighty angel in Rev. 10 would resort to swearing an oath, making a solemn appeal in God’s name that what he is about to say is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. However, we read in Heb. 6:13-18 that God Himself swore an oath to Abraham. Why? Because He wanted to stress the importance of what He was promising, and make it absolutely clear beyond all doubt that He treated it very seriously and would fulfil it. It should be evident from this that the angel wanted God’s people to be fully assured and confident that without any shadow of a doubt “there shall be no more delay.” When the time comes for Daniel’s end time prophecies to be fulfilled, nothing in heaven or earth will prevent or delay it, and it will be a very solemn occasion!

Although the angel swearing the oath is in contact with the air, sea and land, due to his right foot being on the sea, his left foot on the land and his hand reaching up into heaven, he does not swear by any of the regions of the earth and heaven. He swears by Him who made and created them all, as He did in Dan. 12:7. There is nothing and no one greater than God; so the angel, in order to show how serious and sure the oath is, swore by Him. For this reason, God swore by Himself when swearing the oath to Abraham.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD FINISHED

Moving on to v7 we read: “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound (his trumpet) the mystery of God should be finished, as He has declared to His servants the prophets.”

The words “in the days” and “begin to sound,” indicate that a period of time is involved in the sounding of the seventh trumpet. It is not a short, sharp blow of a trumpet. The period of the seventh trumpet is referred to in Rev. 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded, and there were

great voices in heaven saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” This clearly refers to the time of Christ’s return, which involves manifesting his wrath to the nations at the battle of Armageddon, resurrecting and judging the dead (v18). “Days” will be required to fulfil all these events pertaining to the seventh trumpet.

Regarding the statement: “the mystery of God should be finished”: The Greek word “musterion,” translated “mystery” does not mean something mysterious, unintelligible and unknown. It rather means something that was once a secret and unable to be known and understood by natural human means, but is now known as a result of revelation by the Holy Spirit. The basic significance of the word is a secret revealed, not a secret withheld. For this reason the terms associated with it are “made known,” “manifested,” “revealed,” “understand” etc. This is illustrated by the following passage in Col. 1:26: “The mystery which has been hid from all ages and generations but now it has been manifested to the saints.” There are various aspects to the mystery of God in the New Testament, all pertaining to the gospel, which itself is also referred to as a mystery in Rom. 16:25-26. Eph. 6:19. The various aspects may be listed as follows:

1. The kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11. 1 Cor. 4:1).
2. Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:7).
3. The fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ (Eph. 1:9. Col. 2:2. 4:3).
4. God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).
5. The church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:32).
6. The church as one body composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:1-11. 6:19. Rom. 16:25. Col. 1:26-27).
7. Salvation by faith (1 Tim. 3:9).
8. Saints changed in the blinking of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51).
9. Israel’s blindness until fullness of Gentiles (Rom. 11:25).

The statement therefore, in Rev. 10:7 that when the seventh trumpet begins to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished; could be taken to mean the secret plans and purposes of God which have been revealed to the church by the Spirit in the gospel, shall be fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven will be established on earth; the saints will be saved from mortality and death and be changed in the blinking of an eye; all believing Jews and Gentiles of the one true faith will be gathered together in one body to the marriage of the Lamb and officially become his Bride. Israel’s blindness will cease (Rom. 11:26-27).

Dan. 12:7 says that at the end of the time, times and an half, “all

these things shall be finished.” The words: “the mystery of God shall be finished” in Rev. 10:7 could even allude to this. The LXX renders Dan. 12:7 as: “they shall know all things.” Our knowledge of Daniel’s prophecies in the little book will certainly be greater then, having been fulfilled and finished! In fact, the words: “as He has declared to His servants the prophets” which follow the statement about the mystery of God, could very well imply that the “mystery” particularly relates to the word of prophecy, which of course, not only involves end time events, but also the gospel.

In view of this, is it significant that the words “has declared” come from the Greek “euaggelizo” which means evangelize - announce good news, especially the gospel? It is translated “have the gospel preached” (Matt. 11:5); “shew (declare) glad tidings” (Lk. 1:19); “preach the gospel” (Lk. 4:18) etc. Rev. 10:7 is therefore translated by some as follows: “as He declared in the good news (gospel) to His servants the prophets.” But it must be kept in mind that the preaching of the gospel incorporated the Word of prophecy.

THE VOICE SPOKE AGAIN

John continues in Rev. 10:8 saying: “And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands upon the sea and upon the earth.”

The voice that he heard from heaven is the voice referred to in v4 which told him to seal up what the 7 thunders uttered and not record it. In this chapter, there are actually 10 different voices: there is the voice like a lion’s roar of the mighty angel who came down from heaven with the book in his hand; the 7 voices like thunder; the voice from heaven which told John not to write what the 7 said and also told him to take the book out of the hand of the mighty angel; and there is the voice of John himself who says to the angel: “Give me the little book.”

As the Lamb in Rev. 5 had to approach the throne of God and take the closed book out of the right hand of God, so John now has to approach the angel who has come from before God’s throne, to take the open book out of his hand. The book is not forced on John; the angel does not approach him and thrust it or force it into his hand. John willingly approaches the angel to take it in response to the request from heaven to do so.

Up until this time, John had been writing a book, recording all that he

saw and heard, as he was asked to do from the beginning (1:11), except of course the utterances of the 7 thunders due to being told not to write them. It is quite a change, therefore, to now be told to take hold of a book in which something is already written and open waiting to be read! However, as we shall see, John did not join this book to the one he was writing, or copy it, but ate it instead! Instead of being commanded to write, he was commanded to eat.

In response to the voice from heaven telling him to go and take the book in the angel's hand, John "went to the angel and said to him, give me the little book." Had the angel been sitting down with the book sitting on his open palm, as in the case of the book on God's hand in Rev. 5; John may have just gone over and taken it without asking for it, as the Lamb did. However, the angel was standing, and if the little book was grasped in his upraised hand, he would have to lower it for John to take it. This is probably why John, in spite of being told by a voice from heaven to take the book, asked the angel to give it to him.

SWEET IN THE MOUTH AND BITTER IN THE BELLY

In response to John's request for the book, the mighty angel said: "Take it and eat it up; and it shall make your belly bitter, but it shall be in your mouth sweet as honey."

The little book obviously represents the Word of God, and eating it represents assimilating its message in order to "digest" it. Bullinger points out that: "eat up" is a hebraism for receiving knowledge." Examples of this can be seen in a number of Scriptures:

Jer. 15:16: "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, for I am called by Thy Name O Lord God of hosts."

Jer. 1:9: "Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, behold I have put My words in thy mouth."

Ps. 40:8: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is in the midst of my bowels."

Ps. 119:103: "How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."

Ps. 19:10: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

These statements speak of the attitude of a true servant of God towards the Word of God. Such a person places more value on it than money and finds it sweeter and more pleasant to receive than honey.

But, although the little book tasted sweeter than honey in John's mouth, it became bitter in his belly, causing a feeling of unpleasantness and possibly pain. This prophecy was not, to coin a phrase: "a piece of cake!" The prophet Ezekiel had a similar experience and it would not be surprising if the significance is similar in both cases. It is generally believed that Ezekiel's experience forms the foundation for John's.

We read in Ezk. 2 and 3 that God told the prophet that He was going to send him to speak to the nation of Israel which had become rebellious, defiant and stubborn; transgressing against God every day. Ezekiel was then told to open his mouth and eat what God was about to give him. A hand then came towards him holding an open book (an unrolled scroll) written on both sides with prophetic messages involving "lamentations, mourning and woe." The prophet was told to eat the scroll and fill his belly with it, and then go and speak to the house of Israel. So he opened his mouth and ate the scroll which was as sweet as honey in his mouth. He was then told to go and speak the words he had assimilated, to the house of Israel, but was warned that they would not listen or hearken due to being so stubborn and obstinate. Verse 14 then goes on to say that Ezekiel was feeling bitter and angry.

The parallels between the experience of Ezekiel and John are plain enough. Both prophets came in contact with an angel's hand holding a scroll, and in both cases the scroll was open or unrolled, and they were both told to eat it and then go and speak (prophecy). Both also found the taste in their mouth was as sweet as honey, but caused a bitterness in the belly.

The only difference between the two experiences is that Ezekiel was to speak the message of the scroll only to Israel, whereas John was to speak (prophecy v11) not only concerning the nation of Israel, but "many nations, peoples, tongues and kings." Ezekiel's message contained "lamentations, mourning and woe," because it related to the judgements of God that were impending, which would cause death and destruction, pain and misery, if the people did not listen, humble themselves and repent.

Such a message is also very much the theme of the prophecy in Revelation and consistent with the context. Prior to the fifth trumpet sounding, a message of "woe, woe, woe" is depicted as going forth to the inhabitants of the earth, warning them of impending judgements (8:13). But we read in Rev. 9:20-21 that even when some of those judgements fall, repentance is not forthcoming.

In Rev. 11, which is a continuation of the mighty angel's

conversation with John, after giving him the book to eat and telling him to prophesy again concerning nations; John is informed of the moral and spiritual wickedness of Jerusalem (Jews); the desecration of the altar (which will involve stopping sacrifices), and the down-treading of the city of Jerusalem by the Gentiles for 42 months, as well as an earthquake which kills 7,000 of the Jewish inhabitants. John is also told about the rise to power of the beast who invades Israel, conquers Jerusalem and the Jews and persecutes the saints. Most of these events of course were prophesied in Daniel chapters 11 and 12, represented by the little book in Rev. 10.

Later, in Rev. 14:6-7, reference is made to the gospel being preached to every nation, kindred, tongue and people on earth in a loud voice saying: "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement is come..." We learn from this that preaching the good news of the gospel also involves speaking about judgement, which involves death, destruction, mourning and woe, weeping and gnashing of teeth for those who refuse to respond and repent. The gospel is only good news to those who repent!

In Ezekiel's case, the "bitterness" he experienced was either because he was bitter about having to deliver a judgmental message (as in the case of Jeremiah); or because of the people's negative response to it, refusing to respond to it with repentance, and hating him for preaching it. Compare Daniel, whose "thoughts troubled him" when he had to warn the king of Babylon about his sins, and exhort him to renounce them to avoid judgement; knowing that he would not conform, and possibly expecting an evil reaction.

Receiving knowledge from the word of prophecy can be a sweet and enjoyable experience, but when it is digested and properly understood, it can become a bitter experience; especially if it reveals a time of persecution and tribulation for ourselves or people we love, that we did not expect or anticipate. Knowledge can also be a bitter experience if it reveals that our interpretations and applications of time prophecies are incorrect, revealing that Jesus will not be returning as soon as we hoped.

When Daniel received a prophetic vision of a fierce king destroying the holy people, he "fainted and was sick certain days" (Dan. 8). Every revelation of God's purposes, even though it be but a fragment, is "bitter sweet," disclosing judgement as well as mercy. In John's case, it didn't take long after eating the book for it to become bitter in his belly. He says: "As soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter." Initially he would not have known why, unless he recalled Ezekiel's experience.

YOU MUST PROPHECY AGAIN

The mighty angel then said to John: “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.” The fact that as soon as John had eaten the book resulting in a bitterness in his belly, he was told he must prophesy concerning many nations; indicates that eating the scroll signified the receiving of knowledge of end time prophecy concerning many nations (including Israel, as the sequel in Rev. 11 reveals); and the bitterness in the belly signified that the prophecies concerning the nations would be unpleasant and disagreeable to John, and make him feel uncomfortable. The sequel in Rev. 11 reveals why: nations (Gentiles) were going to persecute the Jews and the saints.

Eating the scroll also teaches us that before anyone can become a spokesperson for God, they have to eat and digest the Word of God. One of the reasons for so much sterility and stagnation in Christendom today is people are not feeding on the Word of God. Many read what man says about the Bible more than what the Bible itself says. Before one can be in the position to disseminate the Word of God, he must assimilate it!

According to the A.V. John was told that he must prophesy again “before” many nations. On this basis it might be thought that he was to embark upon a world-wide preaching campaign. This is not very likely; he was an old man, probably in his nineties, and a prisoner on the island of Patmos.

In order to get around this, some have suggested that John will fulfil this commission when raised from the dead at Christ’s return. But as already pointed out, the time slot in which Rev. 10 is placed will not allow this. The commission to prophesy relates to the period between the sixth and seventh trumpet, which is prior to the second coming. 1 Thes. 4:16 informs us that Jesus will not descend from heaven until the trumpet sounds, and in view of the fact that the dead will be raised at that time, makes it the “last trump” referred to in 1 Cor. 15:52, i.e. the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15-18.

Joel 2:28-31 says those who “prophesy” when the Spirit is poured forth, will do so “before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come” - the same period when Elijah comes (Mal. 4:5). This is consistent with the period between the sixth and seventh trumpet.

It should be pointed out that the Greek word “epi” translated “before” in the statement: “you must prophesy again before many peoples and nations...”; is in the dative case, and very few modern translations give it this meaning. Most give it as “about” or “over” or “against.” The Diaglott gives “concerning.” In view of this, it would seem that John was not told

that he would prophesy “before” many nations, but “about” or “concerning” them. This would not necessitate John personally visiting the nations. Many prophets prophesied concerning the nations without ever setting foot in their country, but the nations eventually received the message by other means, either in written form or by a messenger acquainted with the message.

Significantly enough, the chapters which follow the statement in Rev. 10 that John must prophesy concerning nations, relate to nations signified by a woman with 12 stars, a dragon with 10 horns, beasts and a harlot etc. As mentioned before, these prophecies relate to, and elucidate Daniel’s prophecies, represented by the little book that John is told to eat.

There is however a certain sense in which it could be said that John prophesies “before” the nations. It is as a result of John writing down and recording what he saw and heard, that the nations of the world have received and will receive the revelation. It is a case of “he being dead still speaks.” We read in 2 Chr. 21:12 that a message written by Elijah before his death, was delivered after his death to the king of Israel. It was as good as Elijah himself speaking it. The same has also happened in relation to John’s prophecies concerning many nations. So then, in view of the fact that the prophecies given to John have come (and will come) before nations as a result of him writing them, it could be said that in this sense, John prophesies “before” many nations.

Or, in the same way that sending the prophet Elijah to prophesy before the second coming of Christ does not necessarily mean the prophet will come personally himself, but involves others endowed with the same spirit (as in the case of John the Baptist: Lk. 1:17); so also the reference to John prophesying could signify that he represents those in the end time, between the sixth and seventh trumpet, who are empowered to prophesy. In view of the fact that after John was told he must prophesy, we read only a few verses later that the end time witnesses prophesy (Rev. 11:3), it is possible that this is intended to convey that John’s prophesying is represented in their ministry.

If so, this would suggest that the message that goes out to the nations will incorporate warning messages concerning the signs of the times based on Daniel’s prophecies, telling the nations where they are heading, warning them of judgement and destruction if they do not repent. This basically is what could be signified by the mighty angel standing on the sea with one foot and on the earth with the other, with the little book in his hand, crying out in a loud voice as when a lion roars. The mighty angel represents the Holy Spirit; the little book represents the message inspired

by the Holy Spirit; the sea and earth where the feet like pillars of fire stood, represents the many nations where the feet of those empowered by God will go to “prophesy.” And the loud voice like a lion’s roar could also be seen as representing the bold and fearless delivery of the message, as in Act. 4:31 where we read that as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit, “they spake the Word of God with boldness.” The reference in Rev. 14:6-7 to the gospel being preached to every nation “with a loud voice” also implies a bold and confident testimony.

In concluding this chapter it is significant to note that it is repeated and emphasized 4 times that it was a “little”book held in the angel’s hand - little enough for John to put in his mouth and eat. And it was in relation to this little book that John was told he must prophesy.

The whole Bible with its 66 “books” and average of 1,500 pages could hardly be described as a little book or booklet. When the end time epoch arrives and the world is teetering on the edge of judgement day, and the special last-ditch effort is made by the Holy Spirit to warn the nations, and call people to repentance; gone will be the days of comprehensive Bible study programmes and verse by verse, word by word studies of the various books of the Bible at Bible schools and seminars. A simple and brief but powerful message will go forth with this challenge: “Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of His judgement is come: and worship Him who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7).

In the meantime, let us redeem the time to gain as much knowledge as possible of all Scripture so that we might be fully equipped for any special work to which we might be called in the last days.



CHAPTER EIGHT

REVELATION CHAPTER ELEVEN

Because the mighty angel in chapter 10 continues to speak to John in chapter 11, the chapter division (which does not exist in the original Greek text) should be ignored. Rev. 11 is a continuation of this angel's conversation with the apostle. He told John that he must prophesy concerning many nations, and prophecies concerning nations are now presented in chapter 11 and the ensuing chapters. As is to be expected, the nation of Israel is very much at the centre of these. Rev. 11 is an integral part of the parenthesis which began in chapter 10:1 and continues to 11:14.

A REED

Rev. 11:1 in the A.V. commences with these words: "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying ..." But the Greek text literally reads: "And there was given me a reed like a rod saying ..." As it stands, it sounds as if the reed were the speaker, but in actual fact, the angel in the previous verse (10:11) is the speaker. For this reason the A.V. and other translations supply the ellipsis.

The word "reed" comes from the Greek "kalamos" and simply means a reed (the plant or its stem). The plant grew in the Nile and was common throughout Palestine. It grew to at least 3 metres high and its long, straight, and light stems could be made into fishing rods, arrows, fences, poles for vines etc. A reed stalk was also used as a measuring rod. Reference is made to one in Ezk. 40:5 and 41:8 being 6 great cubits long i.e. about 3½ metres. Rev. 21:15-16 refers to a golden reed being used to measure the city of God.

It was a reed that the Roman soldiers thrust into the hand of Jesus for a sceptre, and with which they afterwards struck him on the head (Matt. 27:29-30). It was also to a reed that a sponge was attached, dipped in vinegar, and put to the lips of Jesus when he was nailed to the cross (Matt. 27:48).

The same Greek word translated "reed" is also translated "pen" in 3 Jn. v13, because pens were made out of reeds. However, the reed handed to John by the angel was not a pen for writing. (John already had his own writing materials). Rev. 11:1 therefore does not say: "And there was given to me a reed like a pen," but "a reed like a rod."

LIKE A ROD

In view of the fact that after giving John the reed like a rod, the angel then told him to measure the temple of God and the altar; it would be easy to conclude that the reed was a measuring rod to measure the size and dimensions of the temple and altar. But the fact that John was also told to measure those who worshipped in the temple, indicates that the rod was not for measuring size and dimensions! (One could hardly imagine John going around all the worshippers getting their height, chest or waist measurements!) The reed like a rod was clearly not for measuring the size and dimension of anything. The significance of it is indicated by the word “rod.”

The Greek word for rod is “rhabdos” which, according to Strong means “a stick or wand (as a cudgel, a cane or a baton of royalty).” The word is used as follows in the New Testament:

Matt. 10:10: “Provide neither gold ... nor staves” i.e. sticks to lean on for support.

Mk. 6:8: “Take nothing except a staff only.”

1 Cor. 4:21: “Shall I come to you with a rod” i.e. a stick for administering discipline.

Heb. 1:8: “A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre ...”

Heb. 9:4: “Aaron’s rod that budded” i.e. an almond branch.

Heb. 11:21: “Leaning upon the top of his staff.”

Rev. 2:27: “Rule them with a rod of iron.”

Rev. 12:5: “To rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

Rev. 19:15: “Shall rule them with a rod of iron.”

(Ruling with a rod of iron indicates a very strict and severe rule).

The Greek word “rhabdos” is derived from “rhapizo” which occurs 5 times in the New Testament, always in connection with smiting with the fist or slapping with the palm of the hands (Matt. 5:39. 26:67. Mk. 14:65. Jn. 18:22. 19:3). And a similar word “rhabdizo” which is derived from rhabdos, means to strike with a stick, or beat with rods. It is translated “beat” in Act. 16:22, and “beaten with rods” in 2 Cor. 11:25.

There is no doubt as we have seen, that references are made in Scripture to a reed or a line being used to make physical measurements to determine the size and extent of a building (Ezk. 40:3-. Rev. 21:15-16. Jer. 31:38-40. Zech. 1:16. 2:1). But the measuring line is not only used in Scripture for the purpose of building and construction; it is also used to signify measuring for the purpose of destruction and down-treading. For example, 2 Kng. 21:13 refers to God punishing Jerusalem as He did Samaria where king Ahab reigned, and it is expressed like this: “I will stretch over Jerusalem the same measuring line as over Samaria; the same

plumb-rule as for the house of Ahab; I will scour Jerusalem as a man scours a dish, and having scoured it, turns it upside down” (Jerusalem Bible). It is evident here that the measuring of Jerusalem signifies preparation for punishment and destruction. As measurement precedes construction on a site, here it precedes destruction.

Measuring also has the same significance in Lam. 2:7-8: “The Lord has grown weary of His altar, and has come to loathe His sanctuary (temple), and handed her palace walls over to the enemy; triumphant shouts of the enemy are made in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast. The Lord has resolved to destroy the city wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out a line (to measure it for destruction); He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying ...”

Because no structural or physical measurements are given in Rev. 11:1 as a result of John measuring; and the fact that the measuring reed is likened to a “rod” which relates to smiting and beating, indicates the measuring relates to divine displeasure and chastisement - divine judgement causing trouble and tribulation.

This is confirmed in the next verse where reference is made to Gentiles treading the holy city under foot.

No mention is made of John actually doing any measuring by passing the rod over the temple, altar and worshippers. It would be natural for him to wonder how long the affliction represented by the rod would continue.

The period of time involved is declared by the angel, possibly while John was measuring with the rod. The period is 42 months, and the reason for this, as in the past, is sin. Verse 8 reveals that the Jewish nation will be as morally and spiritually degenerate as Sodom. For this reason there will be a period of divine chastisement.

Other Scriptures where the rod signifies discipline and chastisement are: 1 Cor. 4:21. Pr. 10:13. 22:15.

In order to do the measuring, John is told to “rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship there.” The Greek word “egeiro,” translated “rise” is used in the New Testament in connection with resurrection, and on this basis, some have tried to give it a resurrection application in Rev. 11:1. But the word has no relevance to resurrection from the dead in this verse. John is not in a prostrate position from which he needs to be raised.

When he heard the 7 thunders utter their voices, he was about to write what they said (10:4) which indicates he was sitting down, and not in a fallen prostrate position. In response to an angel’s command, he then arose to take the little book out of the hand of the mighty angel and ate it

up (10:8-10). After doing this, he more than likely sat down again in order to continue writing everything that would be shown and spoken to him, as he was commanded to do at the beginning. But the mighty angel wanted him to do some measuring, so he said to him: “Rise, and measure the temple of God ..” According to Strong, “egeiro” can simply signify to rouse oneself from inactivity. For example, Joseph was told to “arise” from his bed in Matt. 2:13. The word would have equal application to John if he was sitting down.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

Regarding the temple of God that John was told to measure: Rev. 11:2 says the court outside the temple is given to the Gentiles, and they shall tread under foot the holy city for 42 months. This is clearly not the temple of God referred to in Rev. 11:19 which is “in heaven.” It would be impossible for Gentiles to tread this city under foot. When John was told to measure the temple, he was not in heaven at the time, but on earth. This is evident in Rev. 10:1 which refers to him seeing the mighty angel descend from heaven. To see him come down to earth, would require John to be on the earth, whether he be “in the body” or “out of the body.”

Reference to the temple in connection with “the holy city” (Jerusalem), and the court of the Gentiles, indicates that a Jewish temple and altar are involved, which means “those who worship there” are Jewish worshippers. The court of the Gentiles was a design feature of the Jewish temple, designed to segregate Jewish worshippers from Gentile worshippers. No such design feature exists in the city-temple of God in which Jews and Gentiles will worship together in one body throughout eternity united in Christ.

It is therefore clearly implied in Rev. 11:1-2 that a Jewish temple and altar will exist on the temple Mount at Jerusalem in the end-time, where Jewish worshippers will gather for worship.

Many of course, believe the temple of God must be taken spiritually, not literally, and apply it to the church as in 1 Cor. 3:16-17. 6:19. 2 Cor. 6:16. Eph. 2:21. Act. 17:24. 1 Tim. 3:15. 1 Pet. 2:5. However, while it is true, and well attested to in Scripture, that the church is a spiritual temple of God; the temple in Rev. 11:1 cannot be given that application. The fact that reference is made not only to “the temple of God” but also to those who worship “in it,” indicates that the temple is a building; and if a building, a Jewish temple in view of reference to an “altar” and a court of the Gentiles. Those who believe that the temple of God is the church, say

that those who worship in it are also the church. But how could the church be worshipping in the church?! Why measure the temple “and” those who worship in it if the temple is those who worship?

Rev. 11:2 records the angel saying to John: “But the court outside the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given to the Gentiles ...” In the temple built by Herod for the Jews, was an outer court called: “The court of the Gentiles.” It was marked off from the inner one where Israel was permitted to go, and it was separated by a “middle wall of partition.” Beyond this no Gentile could go (Act. 21:28). The apostle Paul was almost killed by the Jews when they thought he had broken this rule by taking a Gentile Christian beyond this court. This was the court that John was to “leave out and measure it not.”

The words: “leave out” come from the Greek “ekballo.” “Ballo” means cast, throw, thrust, drive, send, put; “ek” means out. Ekballo occurs many times in the Greek New Testament and is used in relation to sending or driving out in either a violent, semi-violent or non-violent way. In view of this, in Rev. 11:2 it could mean expel, eject or reject aggressively and vehemently, or it could simply mean, as the A.V. puts it: “leave out” i.e. omit - ignore. Whatever view we take does not alter the main significance which is explained in the words that follow: “measure it not.” This indicates that the words “leave out” mean the court outside the temple was not to be included in the measuring; it was to be excluded.

The court represented the Gentiles and it was not to be measured because the Gentiles were not going to be trodden under foot. They were in fact going to do the treading down. In so doing, they were to become the “rod” of God’s wrath upon Israel, as in the past when the Assyrians and Babylonians were the rod of His anger (Isa. 10:5). Receiving the reed like a rod from the angel of God, and stretching it out over the temple, altar and people, was symbolic of this. Being a prophet, John enacted the divine measuring process as God’s representative. Compare Jer. 1:9-10 and Hos. 6:5 where prophets are referred to as throwing down and destroying nations due to prophesying God’s judgement upon them.

TRODDEN DOWN BY THE GENTILES

Regarding the word “Gentiles”: the Greek word “ethnos” according to Vine “denotes firstly, a multitude or company; then a multitude of people of the same nature or genus, a nation, people.” “Ethnos” is translated “nation” and “nations” 64 times in the New Testament: “nation” mostly in relation to the Jews, and “nations” always in relation to non-

Jews. It is translated “Gentiles” 93 times, “heathen” 5 times, and “people” twice.

As far as the book of Revelation is concerned, “ethnos” is only translated “Gentiles” once, in the verse under consideration. But it is translated “nation” twice and “nations” 19 times. In most cases in the New Testament, references to “Gentiles” and “nations” are in contradistinction to the Jews, and refer to non-Jewish races. This is certainly the case in Rev. 11:2, giving credence to the view that the “holy city” trodden under foot by the Gentiles is the Jewish city of Jerusalem, and “the temple of God” is the Jewish temple in that city.

“Tread under foot” is a significant description. It is beasts which trample underfoot, and within a few verses, reference is made to the beast (Rev. 11:7). This same beast is appropriately referred to by the “feet” in the image in Dan. 2. The reference in Dan. 7:7, 23 to a beast stamping and treading down with his feet can be compared with this. And in Dan. 8:13 the prototype of the end time beast is also referred to as stamping and trampling with his feet.

“Tread” or “trample” underfoot is quite a common metaphor in Scripture signifying victory over the enemy, bringing into submission the foe and taking possession of his land. Sometimes it relates to a nation or nations conquering and ruling God’s people Israel due to sin; and sometimes it refers to God or God’s people gaining victory and ruling over their foe. See Deu. 34:29. Josh. 1:3. Ps. 44:5. 60:12. 91:13. Isa. 10:6. 25:10. 28:3, 18. 63:18. Jer. 12:10. Lam. 1:15. Ezk. 26:11. Zech. 10:5. Mal. 4:3.

At the battle of Armageddon, the beast will ultimately be trodden down in the winepress of the wrath of God. (Rev. 14:20. 19:15. Isa. 14:25. 63:3, 6. Micah 5:5).

The fact that the events in Rev. 11 lead up to the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet, indicates that the treading under foot of the holy city by the Gentiles occurs in the end time prior to the second coming and kingdom of Christ.

FORTY TWO MONTHS

To those who compare Scripture with Scripture in order to let it interpret itself, there can be no doubt that in Rev. 11:2 the Spirit of prophecy is quoting a statement made by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy recorded in Lk. 21:24. It says: “Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The statement in Rev.

11:2 says the holy city (Jerusalem) shall be “trodden underfoot by the Gentiles 42 months.” These are obviously parallel statements and are practically identical in the Greek. Both teach that Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles. The only difference is that Lk. 21:24 does not give a specific time period during which the treading down takes place, but Rev. 11:2 does.

Lk. 21:24 says the period would be “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,” whereas Rev. 11:2 says it would be “42 months.” This period was, as we shall see, originally expressed as “a time, times and a dividing of time” in Daniel’s prophecy. Herein lies the revelation; demonstrating the true nature of the book which has appropriately been entitled “Revelation.” Rev. 11:2 reveals that “the times of the Gentiles” is the “time, times and dividing of time,” which is a period of “forty two months.”

Significantly enough, although there are 8 different Greek words translated “times” in the New Testament, the one from which “times” has been translated in Lk. 21:24 is the same as in the phrase “time, times and half a time” which occurs in the book of Revelation (12:14). It is also significant that the word “times” used by Jesus in relation to the “times of the Gentiles” is the same in the phrase “time, times ...” in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7 in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

42 months in prophetic reckoning is 3½ years, and this is the first time that this particular time period occurs in the book of Revelation. The second and third references are in Rev. 11:3 and 12:5 where it is defined as “1260 days.” It is evident from this that the prophetic time periods work on a 30 day month. The fourth reference to the time period is in Rev. 12:14 where it is referred to as a “time, times and half a time.” And it is referred to again as “42 months” on the fifth and last occasion in Rev. 13:5.

This time period originated in the “time, times and the dividing of time” in Dan. 7:25, which is later expressed as “a time, times and an half” in Dan. 12:7. These periods in Daniel’s prophecies along with the 1260 days and 42 months in the book of Revelation are clearly identical periods of time, but not necessarily synchronous. We learn from these references that a “time” in prophetic reckoning is 12 months or 360 days; “times” is 24 months or 720 days, and “half a time” is 6 months or 180 days, making a total of 42 months or 1260 days. A careful study of the details in all of these references reveals that some of the periods have common factors and correspond, but we will not dwell on that now.

The actual period of “3½ years” is not stated in any of these

prophecies but is clearly implied. For example, it is implied in the reference to the two witnesses having power “to shut heaven that it rain not” during the 1260 days that they prophesy (Rev. 11:6); because a parallel exists here between the witnesses and Elijah, and it is specifically stated in Scripture that Elijah stopped the rain for 3½ years (1 Kng. 17:1. 18:1. Lk. 4:25. Jam. 5:17).

Another sign of this 3½ year period can be seen in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king who ruled Syria in the second century B.C. He is referred to as a “little horn” in Dan. 8 and was a prototype of the little horn in Dan. 7 who becomes the beast. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, book one, chapter one and verse one of the section dealing with the wars of the Jews; Antiochus “spoiled the temple and put a stop to the constant practice of offering a daily sacrifice of expiation for three years and six months.” As we shall see, history will repeat itself in the end time. Antiochus was a foreshadow of things to come in the end time, involving the desecration of a Jewish temple and altar, and the taking away of the daily sacrifice. The temple and altar in Rev. 11 relate to this.

1260 DAYS OR 1260 YEARS?

Expositors of the continuous historic view of Revelation have applied a day for a year principle to the time prophecies, converting the 1260 days into 1260 years. They have appointed the rise of the Papacy back in the seventh century A.D. as the starting period and regard the following 1260 years history as the fulfilment of the 1260 days’ prophecies. But, it is clearly taught in Dan. 12 that the starting date of the prophetic time periods of 1260, 1290, and 1335 days is when the Jewish daily sacrifice is stopped from being offered on the altar at the temple in Jerusalem, when the abomination of desolation is set up. More about this later!

Advocates of the continuous historic view have chosen 608-610 A.D. as the start of their 1260 years period, causing it to finish in 1868-1870. The reason behind this is that it is believed the Pope was established as universal bishop by the decree of the Emperor Phocas in 608-610. Then in 1868-70 the temporal or secular power of the Papacy came to an end, making a period of 1260 years. This led many early nineteenth century students of Bible prophecy to expect the second coming in 1868-70. They were quite right to expect the second coming at the end of the 1260 period, because that is what Scripture teaches. But Jesus did not come then, and still hasn’t over 130 years later. So the fact has to be faced that

the interpretation was wrong, the reason being that 4 of the 5 major points which govern it were wrong.

Daniel's prophecies clearly say nothing about the setting up of a Pope in Rome being the starting date, or of his demotion being the finishing date. The setting up and putting down of Jewish sacrifices in Jerusalem is what we should be looking for. When the Pope was supposed to have been established as universal Bishop in 608-610, the Jews were not back in their land by a long shot. They were still not back in their land in 1868-70 when the Pope was demoted. This means that when it was thought the 1260 time prophecy was fulfilled, it had not in fact even started and was many years away from starting, let alone being fulfilled.

MANY DIFFERENT APPLICATIONS

Converting 1260 days into years has resulted in many different interpretations of the prophecy. The most popular one, as already mentioned, is that the decree of the Emperor Phocas in 608-610 was the starting point, making 1868-70 the finishing date.

Due to failure of fulfilment, adjustments were made. Some said the Papacy did not attain complete power and independence until 726-727 A.D. and dated the 1260 years from this period, making 1986-87 the fulfilment period. Another popular view was that the building of the mosque on the temple mount at Jerusalem in 687-688 was the starting date, making the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1947-48 the finishing point.

Construction of the mosque took 30 years and commenced in 657 A.D. Some have taken this as the commencement of Daniel's time period, with the result that 1260 years leads to 1917 (the end of the first world war and Turkish occupation of Palestine). 1290 years leads to 1947 when the Jewish state was established. 1335 years leads to 1992.

The extremes to which some have been forced in the past to try and make a day for a year apply, can be seen in separating the "taking away of the daily sacrifice" from "the setting up of the abomination of desolation" by over 600 years. They applied the taking away of the daily sacrifice to 70 A.D. and the setting up of the abomination to 691 A.D. - the epoch of Mohammedan ascendancy in Palestine.

This separation of over 600 years is unreasonable, firstly because Jesus related the abomination to the great tribulation period which makes it an end time event. Secondly, Jesus only refers to the abomination, and warns that when it appears, those in Judea should flee to the mountains.

The warning of Jesus to flee when the abomination was set up in 691 A.D. would have been 621 years too late for those living in A.D. 70!

Adding the 1260 or 1290 years to 691 A.D. doesn't help either. Neither of the dates arrived at (1951 and 1981), witnessed the return of Christ.

The ascension to the throne of Pepin, king of the Franks, around 752 A.D. which is seen as a vital step in the rise to power of the Papacy, has also been regarded in more recent times as the starting point of the 1260 years, making the finishing date 2012. Others have dated 1260 years from Pepin's son Charlemagne in 774 which takes us to the year 2034.

When the 1260 years dated from the decree of Phocas in 606 A.D. did not witness the second coming, the 1290 period in Dan. 12 was applied, resulting in pushing the date forward another 30 years to 1896, which was the period when political Zionism was emerging, leading up to the first Zionist congress in Basle Switzerland. Prior to that application, some had used the decree of Justinian, Roman emperor of the east, as the starting date for the 1290 years. The starting date was regarded as 533 A.D. making the finishing date 1823 when Greece was liberated, and the Ottoman empire was declining, leading eventually to the birth of the state of Israel.

Others have advocated that Islam began to attack Jews in their land in 627 A.D. and 1290 years later in 1917 the Islamic Turks were driven out of Palestine, resulting in the Balfour declaration, paving the way for Palestine becoming the homeland of the Jews.

The building of the mosque in Jerusalem in 687-688 has also been used as the starting date for the 1290 and 1335 years, resulting in 1977 and 2022 being the fulfilment dates. And 1290 years dated from the decree of Phocas in 608-610 A.D. ends in 1898-1900, when Theodor Herzl convened the first Zionist congress in Basle, with a view to establishing a homeland in Palestine for the Jews.

1335 years dated from Phocas' decree ends in 1943-45, the period during which the second world war and its holocaust of the Jews was ending, resulting in the exodus of Jews to Palestine and the birth of the nation of Israel.

SUBTLE DECEPTION

And so we could go on! When expositors feel at liberty to pick out significant events in an arbitrary fashion relating to Roman emperors, Popes and Islamic nations, and use them as starting or finishing

dates for Daniel's time prophecies; there are so many to choose from that there will be an endless stream of projected dates to be found for the future when the previous ones fail. And this unfortunately results in less and less credibility, attention and interest being given to the Word of prophecy as they all fail to fulfil it.

The suggested starting and finishing dates were no doubt significant events in history; be it Roman, Papal, Islamic or Jewish, and herein lies a deception. When a date is fixed for the fulfilment of a certain time prophecy, and the actual event required by the prophecy fails to take place, but some other significant event occurs instead; disappointment or unwillingness to admit the interpretation was wrong, can result in making too much of the event, in not accepting or admitting that it has not in fact met the demands of the prophecy.

History is full of "significant" events, but if they do not meet the demands of the Word of prophecy, they are irrelevant and a distraction and should not be allowed to take up valuable space on paper or clutter and cloud our minds.

The 1260 time prophecies in Dan. 7 and 12:7 make it quite clear that Christ returns at the end of this period, at which time the power of the Jewish nation will be broken and ready for restitution, and the invader from the north will be destroyed not demoted! We are still waiting for these events to unfold and be fulfilled. It is painfully obvious that none of the day for a year interpretations and applications made so far have met the demands of the prophecy.

This is not surprising because Dan. 12:9 says the prophecies would be closed up and sealed until the time of the end i.e. they will not be fully understood until then. According to Dan. 11:40, the time of the end pertains to the era in which the king of the north invades Israel, which will be at least the twenty first century. It should be evident therefore, that if Daniel's prophecies will not be fulfilled and fully understood until then, that the day for a year interpretations made in the nineteenth century, which originated some centuries earlier, are not likely to be correct.

There is obviously a vast difference between 1260 days and 1260 years - a difference of 1256½ years. Obviously the view that the days are literal and the view that the days represent years cannot both be right. One of them must be wrong - very wrong. So it is clearly important to reach right conclusions as to what is signified by "days" in the prophetic time periods.

EXAMPLES OF DAYS REPRESENTING YEARS

As far as Scripture is concerned, the 1260 period is always in days, not years. So why have some converted the days into years and how do they justify it? The main reason for doing this is because there are some places in the Bible where a day represents a year. However, it should be pointed out at the outset that firstly, there are very few places where this is the case. It is the exception, not the general rule. And secondly, when the principle of a day for a year applies, it is plainly and specifically stated and the reader is not expected to assume it. Moreover, none of these passages of Scripture, nor any other, say that we must apply the same day for a year principle to other time prophecies.

Thirdly, the Scriptures where the day for a year applies, explain in each particular case the reason why, and there is a practical reason for it. For example: in Num. 14:33-34 we read that Israel was told that “according to the number of the days in which you searched the land, even 40 days, each day for a year shall you bear your iniquities, even 40 years.” Each day’s unbelief resulted in one year’s punishment. There is clearly a correspondence between the 2 time periods of 40 days and 40 years, but there is no evidence that the phrase “40 days” is to be interpreted to mean “40 years.” Obviously, one day wandering in the wilderness for one day’s sin, would not be much of a punishment, so the principle of one year’s punishment for one day’s sin took effect. The Spirit plainly stated that this principle applied on this occasion, but did not say it must be regarded as a precedent and be applied on all future occasions in relation to time prophecies. It is presumptuous to make such an assumption, and has led to many faulty interpretations and conclusions.

Another place where the day for a year principle applies is in Ezk. 4. As a sign to Israel, the prophet Ezekiel had to lie on his side in a prostrate position before the people for 430 days. The days during which he had to do this represented the years of the iniquity of the nation for which punishment would be inflicted, resulting in being prostrated before their enemy. Here, as before, “days” mean days, not years, and “years” mean years.

Ezekiel obviously couldn’t lie on his side for 430 years, so the Lord had to make one day represent a year. A practical purpose was clearly behind it, and once again no hint or suggestion is made to the effect that this same principle should be applied to all time prophecies.

Sometimes the “70 weeks” prophecy in Dan. 9 is regarded as involving a day for a year principle, and is used to justify the application of the same principle to the rest of Daniel’s time prophecies. But in actual

fact, neither days, weeks, months or years are mentioned in the original Hebrew text of Dan. 9.

The phrase “70 weeks” in the Hebrew text is literally “seventy sevens” i.e. 70 heptads - 70 groups of 7 things. But it is not stated in the original Hebrew text if the “sevens” are days, weeks, months or years. In most cases in the Old Testament the “sevens” refer to 7 days, so the translators have taken the liberty to translate it as “week” or “weeks.” But as pointed out, the original Hebrew word simply means “sevens” without stating if it is days, weeks, months or years. However, history has revealed that Dan. 9:24 refers to 70, 7 year periods, totalling 490 years.

One other place where it is thought the day for a year principle is taught is Lk. 13:32-33, where Jesus said: “Behold I cast out devils and do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk today and tomorrow, and the day following for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.”

There are several problems with regarding Jesus’ words here as a prophecy that his ministry would last 3 years. First, his ministry lasted longer than 3 years, and second, these verses were spoken in the fourth year of his ministry, making them too late to be prophetic of a 3 year ministry. Whatever Jesus meant, he clearly did not mean a year when he said “today.”

These are the only verses in the Bible that can be quoted to support the view that days mean years in prophetic time periods. They are clearly the exception, not the general rule and do not, in reality teach that days mean years. Unfortunately, some have turned the exception into the rule!

“DAYS” MEAN DAYS

The general rule in Bible prophecy is that “days” mean literal days and “years” mean literal years, and there are many examples of this.

1. In Gen. 6:3 God stated His intention to judge the earth by a flood in 120 years time. Why didn’t he say 120 days?

2. God told Abraham, as recorded in Gen. 15:13 that his offspring would be a stranger in a land that was not theirs and serve them and be afflicted by them 430 years. Why didn’t He say 430 days?

3. Through dreams involving cows and ears of corn, God revealed to Joseph that there was going to be 7 years prosperity followed by 7 years famine (Gen. 41:25-27). Once again we ask: why didn’t He say 7 days if it is so obvious that days in prophetic time periods always mean years?

4. In Isa. 16:14 we read that Isaiah was told by God that within 3

years, the glory of Moab would be brought into contempt. Why not 3 days?

5. King Hezekiah was told by God through the prophet Isaiah that his life would be extended 15 years, and it was literally fulfilled (Isa. 38:5).

6. God inspired Jeremiah the prophet to predict 70 years captivity for the Jews in Babylon (Jer. 25:11. 29:10).

In later years Daniel read this and accepted it literally and was able to determine when the captivity would cease (Dan. 9:2). Had he applied a day for a year, he would have ended up with 252, 000 years - hopelessly astray from the truth.

7. Jonah's prophecy that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days meant literal days and was not expected to be taken to mean 40 years. Jonah would hardly sit under a shelter waiting to see what would become of the city if he had 40 years to wait!

8. Even in the book of Revelation which contains so much symbol and metaphor, the period of Christ's reign is referred to in literal terms as 1,000 years. Why is it not stated as 1,000 days if the 1,260 days in other chapters really signify 1,260 years? If it is so obvious that days in prophetic time periods have to be converted into years, and that the Spirit prefers to state them in days, then why not state the millennium as 1,000 days? Applying the day for a year principle, 1,000 years would be 360,000 years.

“Revelation” means disclosure of information hitherto unknown. If the book means what it says, it could be expected that it would reveal that the “time, times and half a time” in Daniel's prophecies means 1,260 years, and not further obscure it by stating it as 1,260 days. It does however, as we have seen, clearly state it as 1,260 days. And to make sure we know that they are literal days, it defines the period as 42 months, which is 3½ years not 1,260 years. If the 1,260 days means 1,260 years, which is 15,120 months, it is exceedingly difficult to believe the Spirit would say it is 42 months. God is not the author of confusion, but unfortunately, human tradition often is.

The literal nature of the “days” in prophetic time periods is particularly apparent in Dan. 8. The prophecy in this chapter refers to a little horn on a goat casting down stars (Israelites) and treading them and their temple at Jerusalem underfoot, as well as taking away the daily sacrifice from the altar. The question is asked in v13 how long this state of affairs would continue, and the reply given is: “for 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

The Hebrew word translated “days” comes from 2 Hebrew words:

“ereb” which means “evening,” and “boqer” which means “morning.” The same 2 words occur again in Dan. 8:26 and are correctly translated “evening and morning.” Many of the modern translations of the Bible translate v14 in this way, rendering it as “2,300 evenings and mornings.”

The word “evening” in Dan. 9:21 also comes from “ereb” and relates to the Jewish evening sacrifice. “Evenings and mornings” were when the daily sacrifice was offered, and the prophecy in Dan. 8 relates to these sacrifices and the temple. But the continuous historic interpretation has no place for them. The whole context of Dan. 8:14 makes it clear that the 2,300 “days” are to be measured in terms of the evening and morning periods of the daily evening and morning Jewish sacrifices.

Contenders for the continuous historic interpretation of Revelation have changed the 2,300 days into 2,300 years, and robbed the prophecy of its Israelitish context and connections. Not surprisingly, as in the case of the 1,260 years, many different applications have been given as a result of shifting the starting date because of previous completion dates failing to fulfil the prophecy. A long list of failed dates could be given.

Even though Daniel was captive in Babylon and the temple and altar in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the daily sacrifices had not been offered for many years; God still measured His prophetic periods by them because His intention was for the sacrifices to be restored.

In view of this, there is no way in which the “days” can be converted into years without fundamentally violating the basic times and seasons of the divine appointments. It is like trying to change each day of creation week in Gen. 1 into 1,000 years or more when they are clearly defined as “evening and morning” periods.

Lack of faith in God’s ability to achieve creation in 6 literal days is often the reason for making the change. And a lack of faith in His ability to create a situation in Israel that results in them building a temple, setting up an altar and reinstating the daily sacrifice is often the reason for tampering with the prophetic time periods.

Dan. 8:26 constitutes the divine interpretation of the 2,300 days and it says: “The vision of the evenings and mornings which is told is true.” “Days” are clearly defined here by the Spirit to mean evening and morning periods. It is quite presumptuous therefore, for anyone to reinterpret the divine interpretation and change the days into years.

TIMES OF THE GENTILES

One of the main reasons why the continuous historic view has rejected the obvious parallel between the references in Rev. 11:2, and Lk. 21:24 to Jerusalem being trodden down by the Gentiles; is because Rev. 11:2 says the treading down will be for 42 months, (1,260 days) which they interpret to be 1,260 years; whereas Lk. 21:24 says it will be until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled, which they believe to be 2,520 years. Instead of seeing the 1,260 days in Rev. 11 as the Spirit's revelation of the length of time involved in "the times of the Gentiles" in Lk. 21:24, they ignore the revelation and create another time period of their own twice the length of the 1,260.

"SEVEN TIMES"

The reason for regarding "the times of the Gentiles" as being 2,520 years is based on a statement in Dan. 4, and due to the widespread acceptance of it, attention should be given to it. This chapter records that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had a vision of a tree in the midst of the earth, and this tree was very great. The tree grew and was strong and the height of it reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the earth. The leaves of it were attractive and it had a copious supply of fruit, providing food for all. All the beasts of the field sheltered under it and the fowls of the air dwelt in its branches.

In the vision the king saw an angel come down from heaven and command that the tree be cut down: "Nevertheless, leave the stump of his roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and brass amid the tender grass of the field, and let him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given to him; and let 7 times pass over him." The purpose behind this was: "That the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will and sets up over it the basest of men."

Now Daniel interpreted the dream for the king. He informed him that he was represented by the tree because he had grown and become strong: "Thy greatness is grown and reaches to heaven and thy dominion to the end of the earth."

The interpretation of the cutting down of the tree and the leaving of the stumps of its roots in the earth till the 7 times passed over it, was that the king would be driven away from men and his dwelling would be with the beasts of the field, and he would eat grass as an ox, and be wet with

the dew of heaven till 7 times passed over him: “till thou know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will.”

The leaving of the stump of the tree roots signifies that the king’s kingdom would be sure to him. Verse 28 says: “All this came upon king Nebuchadnezzar.” Verse 33 also says: “The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: he was driven from men and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.”

When the allotted period had run its course the king’s reason returned to him and the honour and splendour of his kingdom was restored to him: “I was established in my kingdom and excellent majesty was added unto me.”

This dream concerning the experience of Nebuchadnezzar has been regarded as a prophecy of the “times” of Gentile rule by continuous historic expositors, and has been related to the “times of the Gentiles” in Lk. 21:24 during which Jerusalem would be trodden down. The hewing down of the tree and banding the stump of its roots with a band of iron and brass is taken to signify the overthrow of Babylon, which, although destroyed as a nation, its “kingdom of men” policies and practices were carried on by succeeding empires including the Greek and Roman, signified by the iron and brass band around the trunk.

The “7 times” on the basis of what has been said concerning a “time” representing one year of 360 days, is taken to mean 7 years, or 2,520 days, which, if converted into years, is 2,520 years.

VARIOUS APPLICATIONS OF THE 2,520 YEARS

As in the case of the 1,260, 1,290, 1,335 and 2,300 prophecies, many different and conflicting applications have also emerged as a result of converting 7 times into 2,520 years. Here are some examples:

1. Nebuchadnezzar started his reign around 606-605 B.C. Using this as a starting date takes us forward to the 1914-17 era of the first world war which resulted in the Turks being driven out of Palestine, and the Balfour declaration paving the way for Palestine to become a Jewish homeland. Because 2,520 years consists of 2 periods of 1,260 years, some have dated the first 1,260 years from 603-604 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar had established his reign, which takes us to 657 A.D. which was the year the Moslem mosque started to be built upon the temple mount at Jerusalem. The second 1,260 years ended in 1917.

Knowing that the “times of the Gentiles” would finish with the return of Christ, the Jehovah Witnesses were so convinced of the 1914-17 date, that even though Jesus did not return then, they refused to acknowledge that they got it wrong. Instead, they maintained that he did come but his coming was secret and invisible, and they twisted and misapplied many Scriptures in order to create a new and unbiblical doctrine to uphold this view. In so doing, they fell into the condemnation of those Jesus warned his followers about who would claim he had returned when in fact he hadn’t (Matt. 24:23-27). Such people are false witnesses, not Jehovah’s witnesses!

2. In 587 B.C. the kingdom of Judah was finally destroyed by the Babylonians. 2,520 years from that year takes us to 1933, the year that Adolf Hitler rose to power and turned against the Jews. At the time, many thought he was the “little horn” in Daniel’s prophecies, i.e. the “man of sin” or “beast.”

3. Another view of the 2 periods of 1,260 years which make up the 2,520 years, is that the first is dated from Nebuchadnezzar’s illness in Dan. 4 which was 572 B.C. and ends in 688 A.D. when the building of the mosque at Jerusalem was completed. The second 1,260 years is applied from 688 to 1948 which was the year Israel was officially declared to be an independent state or nation.

Others have arrived at the same date by using as a starting date the same year of 572 B.C. which also happened to be the year that Ezekiel was given the vision of the millennial temple, and the restoration of Israel in her own land during the kingdom age (Ezk. 40 to 48).

4. Nebuchadnezzar’s death in 562 B.C. has been used as a starting date for the 2,520 years making 1958 the fulfilment date. Nothing significant happened that year.

5. 2,520 years reckoned from 553 B.C. which was the third year of Belshazzar’s reign when Daniel received the prophecy of the 2,300 days, takes us to 1967, the year that Israel repossessed Jerusalem.

6. 1981 was once anticipated as a fulfilment date as a result of using the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. as a starting date.

7. 2,520 years dated from 537 B.C. when Cyrus king of Persia issued his decree allowing the Jews to return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple results in 1983 being the fulfilment date.

8. 520 B.C., the year that the prophet Haggai urged the Jewish exiles who had returned from Babylon to resume work on rebuilding the temple, has also been used as a starting date for 2,520 years, making the year 2000 A.D. the fulfilment date.

PROBLEMS WITH THE 2,520 YEARS

In this selection of applications of 2,520 years we have 8 different starting dates, ranging from 606 B.C. to 520 B.C., and 8 different fulfilment dates ranging from 1914 to 2000 A.D.

The fact that the “7 times” related to Nebuchadnezzar, the starting date would surely have to be in his time, or during the time of the Babylonian empire. In view of this, it is rather sad that when all the applications of 2,520 years dated from the Babylonian era ran out, that expositors still determined to make something of the 2,520 years, started using events during the Persian empire as starting dates, and the further they go down history, the further they get away from the original context of the “7 times,” and the more irrelevant they become.

If the “7 times” means 2,520 years and relates to “the times of the Gentiles,” there are 2 fundamental facts that govern the application:

1. It must have its starting date in Nebuchadnezzar’s time.
2. The fulfilment date must witness the return of Christ, from which time Jerusalem will never again be trodden down by Gentile invaders. These 2 facts immediately disqualify the foregoing 8 applications, because all of them have run their course without the second coming taking place. Jerusalem still continued to be occupied and controlled by the Gentiles when some of those 8 applications were fulfilled and, although the Jews took possession of the city in 1967, the Gentiles have continued to occupy and control the most holy area of the temple mount where Moslem mosques still stand, not to mention other areas of the promised land occupied by Arabs.

Even though Israel now possesses the city of Jerusalem, it is yet to be “trodden down by the Gentiles” in the end time for 1,260 days before Christ returns. In this respect, “the times of the Gentiles” have not only not been fulfilled - they have not in fact started!

The teaching of Jesus concerning the times of the Gentiles, implies that the whole period from start to finish, will be a time during which Gentiles will occupy and control the city of Jerusalem while the Jews suffer “great distress” (Lk. 21:23). This has not been the case in relation to the various applications of the 2,520 years. For the most part of this period the nation of Israel was not in her land or anywhere near Jerusalem. And there were many periods during those years when the Jews, even in dispersion, were not in distress. When they were in their land under the Persian rule, they enjoyed long periods of peace and prosperity as a

nation, and during the Maccabean era they won total freedom and independence for a period. Such however, will not be the case when the “times of the Gentiles” arrive, when Jerusalem is trodden underfoot for 42 months prior to Christ’s return.

In Dan. 4 the starting date of the “7 times” was to be when king Nebuchadnezzar, represented by a tree, was “cut down.” This involved the loss of power. But the “times of the Gentiles” referred to by Jesus, starts when the Gentiles gain power over Jerusalem and are on top and dominate. And the fact that Jesus said Jerusalem “shall be” trodden down..., indicates he had in mind a future period, not a period that had started 600 years prior to making the statement.

The “7 times” in Dan. 4 were to pass over the tree while it was in a cut down and fallen state, i.e. while the king of Babylon was abased and powerless. To be consistent, if this was prophetic of the “times of the Gentiles,” the Gentiles would have to be abased and powerless during this period, not prevailing over the Jews and Jerusalem.

After the “7 times” had expired, the king of Babylon “was established” in his kingdom, and his “honour and brightness returned” to him. He resumed his position as king of Babylon, and continued to have control over the Jews and Jerusalem. For a type to be consistent with this would require the “times of the Gentiles” to be fulfilled by the Gentiles being established in power, and continuing to exercise control over the Jews and Jerusalem. But this is the opposite to what Scripture teaches.

If the metallic bands of iron and brass around the stump of the tree represented the powers that succeeded Babylon; we would have expected, to be consistent with the metallic image in Dan. 2, to find the Medo-Persian also represented by a silver band around the stump. After all, it was the Medo-Persian power that cut down the Babylonian tree! And if the bands of iron and brass were intended to represent the power of Rome and Greece, it seems strange that the iron band (Rome) should be mentioned before the brass (Greece), considering that the empire of Greece preceded the Roman empire.

If we are to take the “7 times” in Dan. 4 to mean 2,520 years, what about the 7 times in Lev. 26:18 during which God said He would punish Israel for her sins? The following verses say that if Israel still persisted in her sins (which she did), God would punish her another 7 times. Does this mean an additional 2,520 years, making a total of 5,040 years? But it doesn’t stop there. God warns them about another 2 periods of 7 times, making a grand total of 10,080 years. Obviously, “7 times” does not mean 2,520 years.

The account in Dan. 4 specifically states that “all this came upon Nebuchadnezzar. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar.” It was clearly a personal prophecy relating specifically to him, not the Jews or Jerusalem. There is no hint or suggestion in the chapter that the “7 times” were to be given a long term prophetic application involving the Jews or Jerusalem.

The “7 times” during which Nebuchadnezzar was to be abased, may have been 7 months or years - long enough for his hair to grow like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws (Dan. 4:33).

There are also examples in Scripture of God subjecting Israel to punishment for a 7 year period (Judg. 6:1. 2 Sam. 24:13. 2 Kng. 8:1. Gen. 41:27). A 7 year end time period (2 sets of 1,260 days) is also traceable in Rev. chapters 11 to 13, which fits in with the patterns of sevens which make up the whole book.

It should be clear from all this that it is difficult to link the “7 times” in Dan. 4 with the “times of the Gentiles.” The starting date for the 7 times was when Nebuchadnezzar was “cut down” or abased. If this was a type of a long term prophecy of 2,520 years, it would have to start when Nebuchadnezzar was cut down in 572 B.C. or when Babylon fell in 539 B.C. 2,520 years from these dates brings us to 1948 and 1981.

These dates have come and gone along with many others without fulfilling the prophecy uttered by Jesus concerning the times of the Gentiles. The long term application is clearly wrong, and has been a distraction from the true times of the Gentiles, which is “a time, times and half a time” i.e. 42 months. Significantly enough, the word “times” used by Jesus in relation to the “times of the Gentiles,” is the same word translated “times” in the phrase “time, times...” in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7 in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

MANY DIFFERENT “TIMES OF THE GENTILES”

During Israel’s history there have been many “times of the Gentiles,” i.e. periods during which various foreign nations invaded and occupied the land. Apart from major powers such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome, there have been lesser powers such as Turkey, Syria, the Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites, Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites and Amonites etc that have invaded, conquered and subdued Israel for a time and occupied the land.

But when Jesus referred to the times of the Gentiles, he was not referring to a long term period during which many different Gentile

nations take their turn occupying Israel. He was referring to a period that would be cut short - the last and greatest of all, involving a time of trouble greater than them all, which would precipitate his second coming and the battle of Armageddon, resulting in the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

The full text of Lk. 21:20-28 is: "And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let not those who are out in the country enter in. For these be the days of vengeance (punishment) that all things which are written may be fulfilled." (70 A.D. did not fulfil all things). "How terrible it will be in those days for women who are pregnant and for mothers with little babies." (The enemy will have no regard or respect for "the desire of women" i.e. their babies Dan. 11:37). "Terrible distress will come upon this land, and God's punishment will fall on this people. Some will be killed by the sword, and others will be led away captive into all nations." (Rev. 13:10 and other passages also refer to the enemy killing with the sword and taking captives away). "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, as they anticipate what is coming upon the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to happen, look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption is near." Even so come Lord Jesus!

PSALM 79

Psalm 79 has several features in common with Rev. 11. The first 3 verses read as follows: "O God, the heathen (Gentiles) are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps (trodden down). The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat to the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of Thy saints to the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them."

The down-treading of Jerusalem by the Gentiles; the defiling of the temple; the slaying of God's servants and leaving their dead bodies lying exposed out in the open, are all features of Rev. 11. The question asked in Ps. 79:5 and 10: "How long Lord?" in relation to avenging the blood of His servants shed by the enemy, is similar to the cry in Rev. 6:10. And the

appeal of God's servants in Ps. 79:6 for divine wrath to be poured out on the enemy, invites comparison with the pouring out of the vials in Rev. 16.

If there is a valid connection between Ps. 79 and Rev. 11 (as the compilers of the marginal references of the A.V. and other translations believe to be the case), it would reinforce the conclusion that the setting of the prophecy of Rev. 11 is Jerusalem and that the literal city is going to be trodden under foot once again by the Gentiles for a period of 42 months.

THE MAN OF SIN - GOG - THE BEAST

The context of the 1,260 days prophecies in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7-12 teaches that the period commences when the "little horn" or "king of the north" invades Israel, makes war with the holy people and takes away the daily sacrifice. There are no Scriptures which teach that the 1,260 days commences with the rise of the Papacy.

Contenders for the 1,260 days being 1,260 years claim that the "man of sin" in 2 Thes. 2:3 refers to the Pope. But reference in verse 4 to him opposing and exalting himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and sitting in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, indicates that the man of sin is anti-theistic (an atheist), aggressively opposed to all religions. The Pope however, in spite of being apostate, has a theistic philosophy of life; he believes in God and therefore cannot be the man of sin. The anti-theistic description of the man of sin is drawn from Dan. 11:36-38 which relates to the king of the north, referred to as "Gog" in Ezk. 38 and "the beast" in Revelation.

Many Popes have come and gone over a 1,260 year period, but 2 Thes. 2 clearly refers to one particular man: "The man of sin," not men of sin. Paul's usage of personal singular pronouns such as "he" and "himself" in relation to the man of sin, certainly indicates that he had in mind a specific individual living at a specific epoch of time, not a long succession of men living over a period of 1,260 years. Such a succession of men spread out over such a long period of time could not be the specific end time sign of Christ's coming that Paul says the man of sin will be. The same applies to the "little horn" in Dan. 7:8, which is related to a "man" not men. If it referred to a succession of men it would say "horns."

So then, not only is the man of sin a specific individual, but he also comes on the scene at a specific epoch in time, namely: immediately prior to the second coming of Christ. This is evident from the fact that Paul says he shall be destroyed "with the brightness of his coming." The man of sin

clearly lives contemporary with Christ's return and his appearance is among the last signs to take place before the return of Christ.

The revelation of the man of sin is not a long drawn out process, but a climactic event. It should not therefore, be confused with the protracted decline of Christianity which started in the latter part of the first century and developed into the "harlot" in Rev. 17.

As we shall see in later chapters, the Pope and the Roman catholic church are represented by the harlot, but the man of sin ("little horn") is represented by the beast. The harlot is depicted riding the beast for a period, signifying Roman catholic influence over the nations that the beast represents, but the beast hates the harlot and ends up destroying her nerve centre, Rome and the Vatican, with fire (Rev. 17:16-18).

So then, the man of sin (the beast) is destroyed by Christ at his second coming, but the harlot is destroyed by the beast before the second coming! Scripture makes a clear distinction between the harlot and the beast. And it is in relation to the beast, not the harlot, that reference is made to the "42 months" in Rev. 13:5. This same beast is encompassed in "the Gentiles" in Rev. 11:2 who tread under foot Jerusalem for 42 months.

The fact that the judgement of Gog in Ezk. 39:17-20 is quoted by the Spirit and applied to the judgement of the beast in Rev. 19:17-21, reveals that the end time beast will be Gog and his anti-Israel confederates mentioned in Ezk. 38, who invade Israel in the latter days, resulting in the second coming and battle of Armageddon. Other prophecies refer to this and are interesting in the light of the reference in Rev. 11:1-3 to the rod passing over the temple and altar; of the holy city being trodden under foot for 42 months, and of power being given to God's witnesses to prophesy 1,260 days and perform wonders. Brief mention has already been made to some of these, but another look in the present context will not go amiss.

Dan. 11:40 - 12:3 refers of course to the king of the north invading Israel at the time of the end, causing a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, resulting in the second coming, resurrection and judgement.

The purpose of the time of trouble is stated in Dan. 12:7, namely: to break or shatter the power of the holy people. The "rod" in Rev. 11:1 signifies this and is consistent with it. Both Dan. 12:7 and Rev. 11:1 state that "a time, times and an half" or "42 months" will be involved in the accomplishing of this.

The "holy people" are clearly secular Jews, not Christians, for the Christian's "power" is God and does not need breaking, and cannot be

broken. The power that needs breaking, in which the Jewish nation trusts and boasts, is the arm of the flesh - their own power, resources and ability. It was made clear to Daniel at the very beginning of the section to which Dan. 12:7 belongs, that it was prophetic of “what shall befall thy people in the latter days,” and it is certainly made clear in Dan. 11 that Daniel’s “people” refers particularly to the Jews.

Today the Jews are for the most part Godless in attitude. Many in the nation do not believe in God or acknowledge His power and control of events that led to their return to the land and restoration of it. Instead they arrogantly attribute all success to their own power and glorify their own achievements. They reject the Word of God and have no respect for its commandments, resulting in many sins being committed. The nation for the most part, is morally and spiritually degenerate, as is indicated in Rev. 11:8 where Jerusalem is likened to Sodom and Egypt.

So it is not difficult to understand why God would want to use the rod to “beat” and break the power of such people. Scripture makes it clear that He will only dwell with those who are of a broken and contrite spirit, who trust in Him and tremble at His Word.

All Jewish trust, confidence and pride in self-achievement will therefore have to be beaten and broken. Desolation and dispersion at the hands of an invader will be used by God to achieve this, as in the past when the Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans invaded Israel.

Dan. 7:21-25 also teaches by implication that the 1,260 days commences when the little horn (beast) starts to make war against God’s people. This puts the starting date at the beginning of the invasion of Israel.

DAILY SACRIFICE TAKEN AWAY

But Dan. 12:11 is even more explicit. It reads: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.” Verse 12 then goes on to say: “Blessed is he who waits and comes to the 1,335 days.”

We see here that v7 refers to 1,260 days; v11 refers to 1,290 days; and v12 to 1,335 days. The starting date of the 1,290 and 1,335 days is the same, namely, when the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set up. Because the 1,260 days is part of the developing sequence of these time periods, there can hardly be any doubt that it shares the same starting date.

The “daily sacrifice” refers to animal sacrifices (lambs) that were

offered each day upon the altar at Jerusalem on the temple mount, in the precincts of the temple. One lamb was offered every morning and evening (Ex. 29:38-42). God's law required this to be a continuing ritual that should not cease. But Dan. 12:11 says it shall be "taken away" and it is evident from the context (and a similar passage in 11:31), that the northern invader will stop the sacrifice by force.

If the end time countdown of 1,260 days starts when the daily sacrifice is stopped, it is clearly implied that the sacrifice must recommence prior to the invasion. The implications of this are:

1. The Jews will have returned to their land.
2. They will be a free independent nation.
3. They will repossess Jerusalem and make it their capital as in Biblical times.
4. They will reclaim mount Moriah in Jerusalem, the temple mount.
5. Priests will be known, recognized and appointed.
6. An altar will be set up upon which sacrifices will be offered each day.
7. A temple will be built.

We are not told how long the sacrifices will continue from the time they start until the time they are taken away, but it is clear that the enemy will invade, stop the sacrifices, put an end to the temple service and priests' ministry, and desecrate the temple. This was done in the past when Antiochus Epiphanes entered the sacred sanctuary, terminated the Jewish sacrifices for 3½ years, offered up swine on the altar instead, and erected idols and images which were an abomination to God.

History is going to repeat itself in the end time. Israel's past was a precursor or preview of the future. When the temple is built, the prophetic time clock will have done a complete revolution. The nation of Israel will be in much the same position that it was during New Testament times prior to the Roman invasion of 70 A.D.

The following 3 major points therefore govern the interpretation of the 1,260 days' prophecy:

1. Its geographical centre is the land and people of Israel.
2. It starts with stopping the daily sacrifice from being offered on the altar at Jerusalem, and setting up an abomination in the temple.
3. It finishes at the second coming - the coming of the Ancient of days (Dan. 7:21-27).

Joel's prophecy also refers to the end time "northern army" invading Israel, causing a time of trouble such as never was: "There hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it" (Joel 2:2). And "the years"

referred to in Joel 2:25 which refers to the period of enemy occupation, can be related to the 3½ years signified by the 1,260 days.

Because it is emphasized in Joel's prophecy that after this invasion, Israel will "no more" i.e. never again suffer invasion and reproach by the enemy, it is evident that it will be the final invasion (Joel 3:17, 20). It could not therefore refer to the Assyrian, Babylonian, Roman, or any other invasion in the past. None of those armies suffered the fate described in Joel 2:20: "I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the Eastern sea (Dead sea) and those in the rear into the Western sea (Mediterranean) and its stench will go up; its smell will arise."

Neither has a fountain come forth from the house of the Lord to water the valley of Shittim in the past, as a result of God intervening to destroy the invader (3:18). Every direction in which we turn in the book of Joel, we are projected into the time of the end. This means that even the reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2:28-32, resulting in those empowered being able to prophesy, also has an end time application. It is not difficult to connect this with the reference in Rev. 11:2 to power being given to God's witnesses to prophesy. (More about that shortly).

But of particular significance is the fact that Joel's prophecy refers to a "house of the Lord" (temple) and "altar" at Jerusalem upon which sacrifices are offered by priests (1:13-16. 2:14, 17). Moreover, Joel declares that as a result of the invasion, the offerings are "cut off from the house (temple) of the Lord" (1:9). This confirms the conclusion reached on the basis of Dan. 12:11, that there will be a temple, altar, sacrifices and priests in Israel in the end time. Naturally, it is believed that reference to "the temple of God" and "altar" in Rev. 11:1 relates to this.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

As we have seen, it is taught in 2 Thes. 2:3-4 that one of the last signs of Christ's coming will be the man of sin sitting in the temple of God. The "temple of God" is a Biblical expression and must be defined and understood in Biblical terms. It cannot therefore be St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Under no stretch of the imagination could the apostate harlot's place of worship be referred to as God's temple in the Word of God. "Temple" maybe, but not "the temple of God." The expression "temple of God" is used in 3 different ways in Scripture. It is used in relation to God's abode in heaven. It is also given a spiritual application to the true

church. And it is used in reference to Israel's literal, physical temple on Mount Moriah, Jerusalem. (There are also several verses in which the temple or "house of God" refers to the temple site on Mount Moriah, not the building. Ezra 2:68. 3:8. Jer. 41:5. Dan. 9:17-20. Hag. 1:4, 9).

Looking at these choices, we apply the process of elimination. We can immediately eliminate God's abode in heaven for it is impossible to conceive of a man of sin being able to sit there. We can also eliminate Christ's church, because those who "sit" there are spiritual believers in heavenly places, and it is impossible for an atheistic man of sin to sit there (Eph. 2:6).

From a Biblical point of view, we are only left with 2 other choices: a Jewish temple on Mount Moriah, or Mount Moriah itself.

The fact that Paul says the man of sin will sit "in" the temple of God, not "on," indicates that he sits in the temple building, not on an empty temple site. If so, this implies a Jewish temple, as in Biblical times, will be built on the temple mount in Jerusalem prior to the coming of Christ. And, for a Gentile "man of sin" to sit in it, clearly implies the invasion and occupation of Israel.

When Paul wrote about the man of sin sitting in the temple of God and being destroyed at Christ's coming, he probably had in mind the prophecy in Dan. 11:45. This prophecy teaches that one of the last events to take place before the second coming will be the king of the north stationing himself "between the seas (i.e. between the Dead Sea and Mediterranean) in the glorious holy mountain." This describes the position of the temple mount at Jerusalem.

The total area of the temple mount within the enclosure walls of Herod's temple, is 14 hectares (35 acres). The "palatial tents" of the king of the north referred to in Dan. 11:45 that will be pitched there, will be for the man of sin and probably the officers and personnel of his army. As can be imagined, many tents could be pitched in an area of 14 hectares. Zech. 14:15 also refers to tent camps being pitched around Jerusalem at that time.

Joel 3 also mentions that multitudes of the army will be spread throughout the valley of Jehoshaphat, which is generally regarded as the valley of Kidron; which runs between the temple mount and the Mount of Olives, upon which the feet of Jesus will stand at the brightness of his coming, when he returns in flaming fire to destroy the man of sin and his armies at the battle of Armageddon.

The valley of Kidron runs south into the valley of Hinnom which is Gehenna - hell fire - Jerusalem's rubbish tip where fires continually

burned - an appropriate place for anti-forces to meet with the fiery judgements of God! See Isa. 30:30-33.

Joel 2:20 says God will drive the northern army into a barren and desolate land (Dead Sea area); their front ranks will be driven into the Dead Sea, their rear ranks into the Mediterranean, and their dead bodies will stink because of their arrogance. It seems that the armies will spread throughout the land between the Dead Sea and Mediterranean. Corpses will lay strewn everywhere, resulting in birds of prey having a feast (Ezk. 39:17-20. Rev. 19:17-21). Seven months will be required to bury the bones in a valley on the east side of the Dead Sea (Ezk. 39:11-16)

Someone may want to split straws by pointing out that Dan. 11:45 makes no reference to a temple being on the mount or of the king of the north sitting in it. It simply says he pitches his tents there. This is true, but as Bible students should know, very rarely does one verse in Scripture give all the details on a subject. Scripture has to be compared with Scripture to gain all the details to see the big picture. 2 Thes. 2 tells us there will be a temple in the end time and that the man of sin will “sit” in it and be destroyed. But 2 Thes. 2 does not tell us that the man of sin will set up house in the temple to eat and sleep there. Dan. 11:45 provides information to that effect by telling us that he pitches palatial tents on the mount, possibly alongside the temple.

Reference to the taking away of the daily sacrifice in Dan. 12 certainly implies that an altar will be on the mount at the time of the end; and an altar implies a temple, because the rituals pertaining to the sacrifices required a temple in order to be fully functional.

THE TURKISH APPLICATION

Some hold to the belief that Dan. 11:40-45 was fulfilled during the era of the Turkish empire. The Turkish power is regarded as the “king of the north” due to conquering Syria. The Turks came against Egypt “with many ships” and had power over all the treasures of Egypt. Edom, Moab and Amon (Jordan today) also escaped out of their hands. And, in the first World War, the Turks planted their headquarters in Palestine, using the mosque of Omar on the temple mount as their military headquarters, after which they came to an end as a power in that area with no one to help them, due to being defeated and driven out by the British.

To regard these events as a fulfilment of Dan. 11:40-45 creates a number of problems:

Firstly, Dan. 11:40 says the prophecy pertains to “the time of the end”

which means the last lap of history, immediately prior to the second coming of Christ. It relates to the events which precipitate the second coming. It could hardly be said that events pertaining to the Turkish empire, dating back as far as the sixteenth century fit into this category.

Secondly, it was made clear to Daniel at the beginning of the prophecy, that the purpose of it was to inform him of “what shall befall thy people (Jews) in the latter days” (Dan. 10:14). But the Jews were not in their land when the Turks invaded, and neither did the nation of Israel exist in the land when the British drove the Turks out. To affirm that the Turks fulfilled the prophecy means nothing befell the Jews at all, and that nothing is said about the great final battle of Armageddon, while a much lesser happening at the hands of the Turks is given in considerable detail.

The return of the Jews to their land and re-establishment of the nation of Israel in the latter half of the twentieth century, ranks among the greatest fulfilments of Bible prophecy, and is one of the surest signs of the second coming. For this reason, these events form an integral part of many end time prophecies. Any interpretation therefore, of the end time prophecy in Dan. 11:40-45 which omits these events, and incorporates less important events that do not directly relate to the second coming and battle of Armageddon, is suspect to say the least.

The whole purpose of Dan. 11:40-45 is to reveal the events that lead up to the return of Christ. But the application to the Turks results in the prophecy only leading up to 1917 when they were driven out of Palestine by the British. This results in a big gap between 1917 and the second coming - a gap during which the most significant events of Bible prophecy pertaining to the second coming have occurred!

As it stands, the Turkish application of Dan. 11:40-45 compels the conclusion that Christ’s return would have to take place when the Turks were driven out of Palestine. But it is over 80 years since that happened and the return of Christ has still not taken place. Not only that, but the language used in Dan. 11:45 and 12:1 in relation to the defeat and destruction of the invader, speaks of divine intervention, as will be the case with the return of Jesus accompanied by his angels and archangels. The defeat of the Turkish invader by the British and being driven back to Turkey, fails to meet the requirement of the prophecy in this respect.

The interpretation of the Turkish power being the king of the north, was invented back in the days of Turkish occupation of Palestine, before the Jews returned and became a nation. Some Bible students, desperate to believe they were about to witness the second coming, gave this application. Time has proved the interpretation to be wrong, but

unfortunately some still hold on to it, preventing them from moving on with the signs of the times.

Dan. 11:41 describes the land of Israel at the time of invasion as a “glorious land” i.e. a goodly land; a land of delight or ornament. The same expression is used in Dan. 11:16 and relates to the land cultivated and carefully kept by the Jews who occupied it at the time. The same Hebrew words translated “glorious land” are translated “pleasant land” in Dan. 8:9, and also relate to the land farmed and occupied by the Jews. When the Turks invaded and occupied the land, it was not glorious or pleasant. It had been abused, misused and neglected for centuries due to the Jews being in exile.

But, as Joel 2:3 predicted, the land would be restored “as the garden of Eden” prior to the end time invasion. Ezk. 38:8, 12 makes the same point, informing us that as a result of the Jews returning, the land which had been waste and desolate for so long, would become attractive to the enemy. Such is the position today, but not back in the days of the Turkish empire!

The reference in Dan. 11:41 to many in the glorious land being overthrown when the king of the north invades, is clearly to the Jewish population. This could not have been fulfilled when the Turks took possession of Palestine because the nation of Israel did not exist at the time.

A DANGEROUS VIEW?

Some who believe that the Popes are the man of sin feel that the present view being put forward is dangerous because it means a Jewish temple has to be built in Jerusalem before Jesus returns, and this could result in people neglecting the things of God until the rebuilding takes place.

But the same argument could be applied to the view that the man of sin refers to the Popes. This also could have had a negative effect for several critical centuries after New Testament times, because it would mean Christ could not come until St Peter’s Basilica was built in Rome and a Pope sat in it! The first Pope did not sit in St Peter’s Basilica until several centuries after 2 Thes. 2 was written!

AN INAPPROPRIATE SIGN

In view of the fact that the man of sin sitting in the temple of God is presented by the apostle Paul as a specific sign that will occur immediately before the second coming; think how inappropriate it would be if the man of sin referred to a succession of Popes stretching back over 1,600 years. How could such a long drawn out succession be a specific sign of the end?

The purpose for Paul mentioning this sign is because false teachers were claiming that Christ had already returned (2 Thes. 2:1-2). Paul makes it clear that one of the last signs of Christ's return will be the man of sin sitting in the temple, in order to provide protection and a safeguard against being deceived by anyone who claims he has already returned. But if each Pope constitutes the man of sin, this would mean that Paul's warning ceased to be a safeguard since the first Pope sat in St Peter's centuries ago.

In the event of it not being possible to contend that the man of sin has yet to sit in the temple of God before the return of Christ, it would make it more difficult to refute those who claim that Christ has already returned. In other words, Paul's argument concerning the man of sin, which was designed to offset premature predictions and false claims concerning Christ's second coming, became outdated and irrelevant centuries before the second coming even came to pass!

Surely it is unlikely that as the second coming draws near, at which time false teachers will abound, some of whom will claim Jesus has returned (Matt. 24:23-26); that Paul's argument which is designed to combat and refute their false claims, will be invalid, powerless and ineffective. This would be the position if the prophecy of the man of sin sitting in the temple of God has been fulfilled ever since a Pope sat in St Peter's in Rome.

THE APOSTASY

The other sign given by Paul in 2 Thes. 2 of the second coming of Christ is "a falling away." These words in the Greek are "apostasia" and mean "apostasy" i.e. a defection from, or forsaking of the Christian faith. A similar Greek word "apostasion" has been translated "divorcement" several times in the New Testament, and forsaking the faith is like this. It is a termination of a relationship with Christ; a cutting off and separation.

According to Paul, the second coming will not take place "except

there come a falling away first.” After this he went on to mention that the man of sin will sit in the temple. Jesus put it this way: “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many (for the true faith in Christ) shall grow cold” (Matt. 24:12). After this he went on to mention that the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet shall “stand in the holy place” (the temple).

In view of another statement made by Jesus in Lk. 18:8: “When the son of man comes, shall he find the faith on the earth?” it seems the “falling away” from the faith referred to in 2 Thes. 2 will involve the defection of many believers.

Those who forsake the faith do not necessarily do so in order to embrace a false religious faith. As in the case of divorce, the parties involved do not necessarily terminate the relationship in order to enter into another with someone else. Sometimes the relationship is terminated due to other pressures and problems which the commitment cannot handle.

The word of prophecy makes it clear that there will be many pressures brought to bear upon the end time church prior to the second coming. Due to sin and iniquity abounding and running rampant, reaching a climax in a “man of sin” gaining great power over Israel and the nations; many will buckle under the pressure exerted against them by this anti-God “beast” and fall away from the faith.

So a distinction would need to be made between this kind of situation which will happen prior to the second coming, and the situation referred to by Paul in 1 Tim. 4:1 and 2 Tim. 4:3-4 involving believers turning away from the true Christian faith in order to embrace a counterfeit Christianity, which started happening in New Testament times, and gathered momentum during the following centuries.

“The mystery of iniquity” in 2 Thes. 2:7 is translated: “that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority” in the Amplified Bible. Paul says it “doth already work,” and he describes it in Eph. 2:2 as “the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.” It relates to the anti-God spirit in man which Paul knew would ultimately lead in the end time to widespread atheism and humanism, causing iniquity to abound (Matt. 24:12). According to Dan. 11:36 the man of sin (king of the north) “shall do according to his will (a dictator); and he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing (outrageous) things against the God of gods ...”

NOT ONE STONE LEFT UPON ANOTHER

Another objection to the rebuilding of a Jewish temple is based on a statement made by Jesus concerning the temple that “there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:1-2). Jesus was referring to the temple that Herod built for the Jews at Jerusalem, and his reference to one stone not being left upon another is taken to mean, that when it was demolished by the Romans in 70 A.D. it could not be rebuilt. But this is not necessarily the case. Even if it was totally demolished, there is nothing in what Jesus said that suggests another temple could not be built at a later date. Take the city of Jerusalem for example. Jesus is recorded in Lk. 19:41-44 as saying the city would be levelled to the ground, not leaving one stone upon another. But that did not mean the city could never be rebuilt again. It has been rebuilt a number of times!

TWO ASPECTS TO THE TEMPLE

In passing, attention should be drawn to the fact that, in a certain sense, Jesus’ prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple has not been completely fulfilled, and will not be fulfilled until the end time.

There were two aspects to the temple. There was the temple proper; a building consisting of a holy and most holy room. Herod started building this in 19 B.C. and finished it in 18 months. But in addition to this, there were massive extensive enclosure walls that ran around it on all four sides. These took much longer to build and were not finished until 62-64 A.D. They were still under construction during the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 2:20). These enclosure walls contained many elaborate building complexes, consisting of hallways, priests’ quarters, royal stoa, store rooms and other rooms used to serve the temple.

The temple proper, i.e. the central sanctuary, was completely destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 and not a trace remains today. A mosque now sits on the site. But the lower sections of the enclosure wall, consisting of over 10,000 of the original Herodian stones, still remain today.

As far as the Bible is concerned, the expression “temple of God” can refer to either the central sanctuary or the building complex surrounding it, or both. For example, Jn. 2:20 says: “46 years this temple has been under construction.” The word “temple” here clearly does not merely refer to the central sanctuary, because it only took 18 months to build. By using the word “temple,” the Jews obviously included the building complexes in

the enclosure wall which ran around the temple mount.

This is further illustrated in Jn. 2:14 where reference is made to oxen, sheep and doves being sold in the temple to money changers sitting there. For obvious reasons they were not in the central sanctuary, for not even Gentiles were allowed in there, let alone animals. They were in the outer courts within the enclosure walls, and Jesus referred to this area as being part of “my Father’s house” (Jn. 2:16).

With these thoughts in mind, we come back to Jesus’ statement that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another. If by “temple,” he meant only the central sanctuary, then his prediction has been fulfilled, because not a trace of that building remains today (above ground level).

If however, Jesus included the buildings in the complex surrounding the sanctuary, then the prediction has not been fulfilled, because many of the original stones still stand there.

So the question is, what did Jesus mean? The answer is indicated in Matt. 24:1: “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him to point out the buildings of the temple.”

Two points in this verse need to be noted. Firstly, they were on their way out of the temple, and secondly, their attention was directed to the buildings of the temple. This hardly refers to the central sanctuary which was a single building. It must surely refer to the buildings in the enclosure wall complex, which they would be walking towards on their way out.

This seems to be confirmed by the fact that there are 2 different Greek words translated “temple” in the New Testament. One of them is “hieron” which generally refers to the entire precincts of the temple. The other word is “naos” which generally denotes the sacred sanctuary into which only the priests could lawfully enter.

Significantly enough, the word “temple” in Matt. 24:1 is “hieron,” which usually relates to the entire precincts and not merely the central sanctuary. This indicates what the apostles had in mind when they directed the attention of Jesus to the “buildings” of the temple.

Some massive and impressive stones can still be seen in what is left of the enclosure walls today. The largest one, seen in the tunnel dug alongside the western wall, is 9 courses above bedrock and is over 14 metres long, 3 metres high and 3 metres deep. It weighs over 450 tons and is considerably longer and heavier than any of the monoliths found in the pyramids, Stonehenge or on Easter island. No wonder the apostles were impressed, causing them to exclaim: “See what manner of stones and what buildings are here” (Mk. 13:1). Jesus replied: “See these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be

thrown down” (Mk. 13:2).

Because many of those stones still remain on top of one another, indicates the temple prophecy has not been completely fulfilled yet. There is therefore no reason why a Jewish temple cannot stand again before the end comes at Christ’s return. The partial destruction in A.D. 70 was a token fulfilment - a type of a greater fulfilment to come.

As Henry Sulley puts it on page 300 of his book on the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy, when referring to the great earthquake that occurs at Christ’s return: “In this earthquake all ancient temple foundation masonry will be overthrown, thus completing the prophecy of Christ already partly fulfilled.”

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

In view of the way Paul’s reference to the man of sin sitting in the temple of God parallels with the statement made by Jesus about the abomination of desolation that will stand in the holy place; it seems reasonable to conclude that the man of sin is the abomination of desolation.

He is an “abomination” because, being a “man of sin” he is the full sum of sin, and his rejection of God and deification of himself, demanding to be worshipped as God, is idolatry, which is an abomination to God.

He is an “abomination” to the Jews because he desecrates their temple by standing and sitting in it, and he is a “desolation” because his invasion of Israel causes tremendous devastation, destruction and loss of life (Dan. 11:41. Joel 2:3).

Dan. 11:31 and 12:11 say the abomination “makes desolate.” The Hebrew word translated “desolate” can also be translated “astonishment,” but the Greek word chosen by Jesus to refer to the desolation means exactly that - to lay waste, as is particularly evident in Lk. 21:20 where it is used in reference to the desolation of Jerusalem.

In Israel’s past history, Gentile invaders such as Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler of Syria during the second century B.C. deliberately desecrated the temple at Jerusalem by entering it, sacrificing a pig on the altar, and erecting a pagan statue in the holy of holies.

Even Manasseh, a wicked king of Judah in Old Testament times, set up a carved image or idol in the temple, which was an abomination (2 Kng. 21:2, 7. Jer. 7:30). The man of sin may do a similar thing by setting up an image of himself in the temple. Rev. 13 refers to people being compelled to worship his image, which is reminiscent of people being

compelled to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image (Dan. 3).

There can be no doubt that the reference in Matt. 24 to the abomination of desolation standing in the temple relates to the end time immediately prior to the second coming, and not to events that took place in A.D. 70. The prophecy clearly links it with the time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" spoken of by Daniel the prophet. The context of Daniel's prophecy unmistakably puts the period immediately before the second coming, resurrection and judgement (Dan. 12:1-3).

NOT THE MOSQUE

Some hold to the belief that the abomination of desolation is the Moslem mosque which "stands" or "sits" on the holy mount, and which is an abomination to the religious Jews who see it as a trespasser or usurper of the site where their temple should be.

However, the presence of the mosque has preserved the site and prevented the city from expanding over it. Were it not for the mosque, the whole area of mount Moriah would have been built upon by previous Gentile occupants and would be covered today. Surely the providence of God can be seen in allowing the mosque to be erected there; firstly to prevent the Jews from building the temple before God's time, and secondly to keep the site relatively empty and uncluttered.

However, the mosque falls far short of meeting the requirements of the prophecy of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. The reasons for this are as follows:

Firstly, because while it is true that the mosque might be an "abomination" in a certain sense, as far as the Jews are concerned, it is not a "desolation." The mosque was built around 680 A.D. over 600 years after the Jews and their temple suffered destruction and desolation by the Romans. The mosque did not desolate or cause desolation; the Romans did it long before! Some have even contended that the abomination of desolation refers to the Popes, but what has been said in relation to the mosque also applies. The desolation occurred long before the first Pope ever sat in St Peter's Basilica or any other so-called "holy place."

Secondly, in Matt. 24 Jesus warned his Jewish followers, and any other Jews in Judea who understood the Word of prophecy, to flee to the mountains when they saw the abomination of desolation stationed in the holy place.

But there was no Jewish community or true Christian community in

Judea to flee when the first Pope sat in St Peter's, or in 680 A. D. when the mosque was built. They had been scattered and dispersed from the land centuries before by the Romans. The warning of Jesus to flee when the mosque is built in 680 A.D. would be 600 years too late for those living in A.D. 70!

Anyway, why flee to the mountains of Judea just because a Pope sits in St Peter's in Rome, or because of a mosque being built on the temple mount? The Pope still sits in St Peter's and the mosque still sits on the temple mount, but nobody is fleeing. Quite the opposite: tourists, including Jews and Christians, flock there to see the sights.

Thirdly, Matt. 24:15-21 says the great tribulation occurs when the abomination of desolation stands in the holy place, after which Jesus returns. This great tribulation did not occur when the first Pope sat in St Peter's or when the mosque was built on the holy mount, and still hasn't. It is therefore not surprising that Jesus has not yet returned!

THE OLD WINE IS NOT BETTER

When all the pros and cons are weighed up regarding an end time Jewish temple at Jerusalem, evidence in favour of such a temple is very strong. Many Scriptures relating to this have been quoted and there are others that could have been added in support. For example, the reference in Mal. 3:1 to Christ coming suddenly to his temple to execute judgement, and to purify the sons of Levi so that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. As indicated in 2 Thes. 2 Jesus will come suddenly to the temple in flaming fire to destroy the man of sin.

Reference in Rev. 13:6 to the beast blaspheming against God's "tabernacle" could also relate to the temple at Jerusalem.

Due to the obvious time it would take Israel to lay claim to the temple mount, remove the mosque and build a temple; the prospect of this happening was not very popular with students of Bible prophecy in the past, and still isn't in some circles today. Events that appear to require considerable time to be fulfilled are never popular with those who are impatient for the end, and who have convinced themselves that it will happen in their lifetime. Converting the 1,260 days into 1,260 years therefore, and arriving at earlier fulfilment dates, and spiritualizing away the references to the altar, daily sacrifice and temple; has been a much more appealing approach to the prophecies by many.

However, the failure of the dates reached by the long term application of the prophecies in the past, and the artificiality of the new dates that are

being constantly set by changing and shifting the starting date, makes it painfully obvious that the continuous historic approach needs overhauling. It is unfortunately true however, that: “No man having drunk old wine desires new, for he says the old is better.”

To the unprejudiced, it should be clear that the existence of a temple, altar and daily sacrifice on the temple mount at Jerusalem, forms an integral part of end time prophecy. All of Daniel’s time prophecies in fact, depend on this. It is a key factor that has been missed or overlooked by too many for too long.

Such a prospect, in view of the present political situation in Israel may appear impossible, as did the prospect of the Jews returning to their land, becoming an independent state and repossessing Jerusalem. But if the prophetic word requires Israel to have a temple, nothing in heaven or earth will prevent it. Mountains of obstruction and difficulty will be removed, “not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.” Hopefully we will witness this in the not too far distant future, and thus see the foundation laid, upon which the last lap of end time prophecy will unfold!

AND I WILL GIVE POWER

Rev. 11:3 reads: “And I will give power to my 2 witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.”

The word “power” is not in the Greek text of this verse but it is in v6. As it stands, v3 simply says “I will give to my 2 witnesses and they shall prophesy.”

What would God need to give to His witnesses in order that they might prophesy? According to Scripture, the answer is: the power of the Holy Spirit. Compare Act. 1:8: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me ...” Neh. 9:30 also refers to God witnessing by His Spirit in the prophets. God’s prophets can only prophesy as they are moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

The A.V. therefore correctly supplies the ellipsis in Rev. 11:3 saying: “I will give power to my 2 witnesses, and they shall prophesy.”

As pointed out earlier, the “I” who gives power to the 2 witnesses is the mighty angel in chapter 10, who can be identified with the Comforter who was previously sent to empower the first century church, as a precursive fulfilment of Joel 2:28. The fact that the effect of the power given to the 2 witnesses is the ability to prophesy, indicates that divine

power - the power of the Holy Spirit is involved.

Prophecy is one of the effects mentioned in Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."

It is not surprising therefore that those who prophesy in Rev. 11:3 are referred to as "prophets" in v10, 16. Other references to prophets in the Revelation prophecies can be seen in 16:6, 18:20, 24, 22:9.

The word "prophets" used in Rev. 11 etc is the same word used in Rev. 10:7 and 22:6 in relation to the Old Testament prophets, who were unquestionably empowered by the Holy Spirit. The same word is also used many times in the rest of the New Testament, in relation to both Old and New Testament prophets empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Those who do not believe that there will be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the return of Christ, cannot of course accept that the prophets in Rev. 11 are empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are forced to step outside of Scripture and give the words "prophets" and "prophecy" unscriptural meanings. They claim that the words are to be understood simply in terms of preachers preaching without the aid or infilling of the Holy Spirit.

In support of this, 1 Cor. 14:3 is often quoted: "He who prophesies speaks to men for their edification, exhortation and comfort." It is imagined that reference here to speaking to men does not involve the Holy Spirit, but such a conclusion is contrary to the context. The very next statement in v4 for example: "He who speaks in a tongue ..." certainly involved the Holy Spirit, for tongues was one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Both prophecy and tongues are listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12:4-11; and 1 Cor. 14:1 makes it clear that those in v3 who prophesy, possess the gift of the Holy Spirit: "Follow after charity and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy ... for he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification ..."

Except for false prophets and false prophecy, the words "prophets" and "prophecy" in Scripture always relate to the divine empowering of the Holy Spirit. To rob these words of the Holy Spirit is to twist and distort Scripture. In this particular case such twisting could have serious consequences; because it could lead to committing the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Let's face it: those who have convinced themselves that there will not be an empowering by the Holy Spirit before Christ's return, are not likely to accept the empowered witnesses as God's prophets; and if so, will

attribute their prophecies and miracles to some other power or influence, as did those who rejected Christ as God's anointed prophet.

It is therefore a very dangerous doctrine which declares that there will be no empowering by the Holy Spirit before Christ's return. Not only does it prevent people from seeing the prophets in Rev. 11 as true prophets, but could also lead to rejecting them when they finally appear.

Failure to accept the 2 witnesses as prophets of God can lead to unsatisfactory alternatives. One continuous historic view maintains that the 2 witnesses represent 2 groups of people, namely:

1. The true saints who resisted the Roman Catholic apostasy, not physically, but with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

2. The aggressive militant "protestant allies" who had no scruples about physical resistance and who killed with metal swords, in the name of Christ.

This view also changes the 1,260 days in Rev. 11:3 into 1,260 years, starting it at the time of Constantine in A.D. 312, and ending it at the massacre of St Bartholomew in A.D. 1572. The 42 months in Rev. 11:2 during which the holy city is trodden under foot by the Gentiles is regarded as a different 1,260 year period, starting with the establishment of Papal headship by a decree of the eastern Roman emperor Phocas in A.D. 606-610; and ending with the Pope's loss of temporal power in 1866-70.

However, in view of the fact that both of the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 are referred to as prophets; and as we shall see, are modelled on the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and are drawn after the pattern of Moses and Elijah; it is not conceivable that one of them could refer to people such as the aggressive militant "protestants" who did not know or believe the truth, and who had no scruples about acting contrary to the Word of God by killing with the sword in the name of Christ.

Not only is the changing of the 1,260 days into 1,260 years untenable, so also is the selection of the A.D. 312 to 1572, and the 606 to 1866 periods. For treatment on this, see *Apocalypse For Everyman* by Alfred Norris Pages 190 to 193.

There are also other views on the 2 witnesses. One sees them as representing the Jewish nation due to being referred to as God's witnesses in Isa. 43:8-12. 44:8. But these passages of Scripture do not refer to the Jews as being God's witnesses in the sense of being holy prophets, but in the sense of fulfilling prophecies concerning dispersion and persecution due to being unholy!

There will however, be Jews - Jewish Christians among those who

will be empowered by the Holy Spirit in the end time. After all, Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was initially addressed to the nation of Israel, and its precursive fulfilment in New Testament times took effect on Jews first and then Gentiles. Joel 2:28 is explicit: The Spirit will fall upon "all flesh" i.e. individuals from all nations. And the statement in the same verse that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" certainly indicates that the 2 prophets referred to in Rev. 11 will not be the only ones who will be empowered to prophesy when the Holy Spirit is poured out.

Another view concerning the 2 witnesses is that they represent the Old and New Testament Scriptures. But Rev. 11 makes reference to these witnesses wearing sackcloth and to their dead bodies lying in the street. This surely shows that they are people, not pages in the Bible!

The lengths to which some are prepared to go in order to avoid the conclusion that there will be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before Christ's return are truly amazing! In relation to this, the words of Jesus are relevant: "How ingeniously you neutralise the Word of God by your traditions" (Jerusalem Bible).

MORTALS OR IMMORTALS EMPOWERED?

The Lord declares in Joel 2:28-32: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ... before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." We learn from this that "afterward" relates to a period "before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." The outpouring of the Spirit must therefore take place before the coming of Christ.

The apostle Peter quoted this section in Joel 2:28-32 when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first century church. Instead of saying "afterward" he said "in the last days," which referred to the period before the Roman invasion in A.D. 70. Peter could hardly have done this if as some believe, the prophecy of the Spirit referred to the immortalization of the saints after Christ's return.

If Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, could interpret "afterward" to mean "in the last days" and apply the outpouring of the Spirit to a period before Christ's return; the end time fulfilment can surely be given the same application!

Peter said: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Act. 2:16-21). In view of the end time context of Joel's statement, Peter could hardly mean: "This is (a fulfilment of) that spoken of by Joel."

He is more likely to have meant: “This is (the same Spirit as) that spoken of by Joel.”

Many Bible students accept, on the basis of the context of Joel’s prophecy, that it applies to the end time and therefore could not have been completely fulfilled during the first century. The outpouring of the Spirit prior to judgement upon Israel in A.D. 70, was a foreshadow.

Those not wanting to believe that there will be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit prior to the second coming, have regarded Joel’s prophecy as referring to the immortalization of the saints at the second coming. Objections to this view may be stated as follows:

1. It is plainly stated that the outpouring takes place “before” the great and terrible day of the Lord, not after. The same applies to the coming of Elijah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). As the Elijah ministry in John the Baptist took place before the first coming of Christ, the end time ministry will take place before the second coming.

2. Peter clearly applied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to mortals and made no reference to it having the effect of conferring immortality. Joel 2:28 says the Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh,” but says nothing about changing flesh into Spirit nature.

3. Joel says the effect of the Spirit will be: “Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men will dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.” This hardly sounds like the immortal state. There will not be “old” and “young” immortals, for all being immortal, will live eternally and be ageless. Those who are immortal will not get tired or weary and will not need to sleep and therefore will not “dream dreams.”

That the power given to the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 is divine power, and that they are prophets in the true Biblical sense; is further indicated by reference to them having power to devour their enemies with fire; power to hold back the rain; power to turn water into blood, and smite the earth with plagues. The prophets Moses and Elijah performed these signs in their day and the 2 witnesses fit into that league or category.

To affirm that the 2 witnesses are not real prophets in the Biblical sense, and that the power given to them by the mighty angel from heaven is not the Holy Spirit, borders on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Some of the continuous historic applications of Rev. 11 come dangerously close to doing this. Because they and those they have influenced believe the prophecy concerning the 2 witnesses has been fulfilled in past history, it will make it harder for them to accept the ministry of the power of the Holy Spirit in the end time. Like the Jews, who rejected Jesus and the

miracles he performed because he did not fit the mould of their interpretation of Messianic prophecy, they may reject his witnesses in the end time!

TWO WITNESSES

Reference in Rev. 11:3 to “two witnesses” reminds us that during his earthly ministry, Christ sent forth his disciples in the power of the Spirit in pairs (Mk. 6:7). After his resurrection he said to his disciples: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me ...” Those to whom this post resurrection commission applied were probably sent forth in pairs also. Act. 15:39-40 for example refers to Paul and Silas witnessing together. Barnabas and Mark also formed a pair in the ministry. Several pairs of witnesses have played important roles in God’s purposes: Moses and Aaron, Haggai and Zechariah etc. “Two are better than one” (Ecc. 4:9-12).

Because Rev. 11:3 specifically refers to “two” witnesses, and the wonders they perform are the same as those performed by Moses and Elijah, strongly suggests that they are 2 specific men as in the case of Moses and Elijah. As we shall see, this is confirmed by the reference to “2 olive trees” and “2 lampstands” in v4.

Is it significant that it was Moses and Elijah who appeared to Jesus during his transfiguration to speak about his decease? On the Mount of transfiguration these 2 prophets prepared Jesus for his death in Jerusalem, but in Rev. 11 Jesus prepares us for the death of those who represent him in the same city.

Moses is also put in company with Elijah in Mal. 4:4-5. Verse 4 says: “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant ...” and v5 says: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet ...”

Some believe it will be the literal Moses and Elijah who appear in the end time, both of whom were secretly buried by God (Deu. 34:6. 2 Kng. 2:9-12). But it would surely be wrong for these men, who suffered so much in their lifetime, to be brought back from the dead to be killed by the beast (Rev. 11:7). It needs to be kept in mind that if John the Baptist could be regarded as Elijah because he came in the same Spirit and power (Lk. 1:17. Matt. 17:10-13), the same could apply to someone else in the end time.

WITNESSES

The Greek word for “witnesses” is “martus” (plural of “martur,” translated “martyr” in Act. 22:22. Rev. 2:13. 17:6. However, it is normally translated “witness”).

“Witness” is a key word in the book of Revelation, though unfortunately this fact has been somewhat obscured by translation. In the A.V. words like “bear record,” “testify,” “witness,” “martyr,” “testimony,” are all translations of the same little family of Greek words which can all be recognized by the letters “martu.” The table below demonstrates the importance of witnessing in Revelation:

Greek word	A. V. translation	Reference in Rev.
martus	witness martyr	1:5. 3:14. 11:3 2:13. 17:6
marturia	testimony	1:2, 9. 6:9. 11:7. 12:11, 17. 19:10
martureo	witness bear record testify	20:4 1:2 22:16, 20

Basically, martur or martus means one who testifies or gives testimony to what has been seen or heard; one who gives evidence. Sometimes bearing witness resulted in death, and for this reason the Greek word “martur” was turned into the English word “martyr,” signifying one who undergoes suffering or death for the faith. But the original Greek word does not signify this.

The apostles in particular are referred to as “witnesses” because they were witnesses of the resurrection of Christ and gave evidence of it (Lk. 24:46-48. Act. 1:8, 22 etc).

The reference to “apostles” in Rev. 18:20 could imply that when the Holy Spirit is active again in the end time, Christ may appear to some as he did to Paul, constituting them apostolic witnesses as in New Testament times. Or, the appearance of the mighty angel in Rev. 10 who looks like Christ, and who gives power to the 2 witnesses in chapter 11, may have the same effect.

All the passages in the book of Revelation where martus and the other related words are used, relate to the witnessing of the servants of

Christ. For example, Rev. 11:8 says concerning the 2 witnesses, that Jesus is “their Lord.” Rev. 12:11, 17 and 19:10 refers to them having the testimony of Jesus and overcoming by the blood of the Lamb; and Rev. 20:4 says they are beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God. A comparison between the 2 parallel passages in Rev. 11:7-9 and 13:7-8 reveals an equation between the witnesses and the saints. Some continuous historic expositors have tried to distinguish between the witnesses and saints, claiming that they represent 2 different classes of people, but all the evidence is against this.

There are however, indications that the witnesses witness to 2 classes of people - Jews and Gentiles; and therefore could themselves be drawn from Jewish and Gentile sections of humanity. But these possibilities do not contradict the fact that the witnesses are united in their work, serving the same Lord and working as a team.

There could be a link between the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 and those in chapter 6 who are “slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held.” The word “testimony” is “marturia” in Greek, and tells us that these people are witnesses i.e. saints who suffered and died for their witness. In response to their cry: “how long?” comes the answer that they must wait “until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” More saints were to be killed before God would intervene to avenge their blood. The waiting period comes to an end after the death of the later witnesses in chapter 11, at the end of the sixth trumpet period. The seventh trumpet announces the intervention of God and the vindication of His people. The 2 witnesses of chapter 11 are therefore among the fellow-servants and brethren of the earlier witnesses.

In view of all this, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The 2 witnesses are 2 specific saints, as in the case of Moses and Elijah, and like them, will be Hebrews.
2. They will not be the only witnesses in the end time. There will be others from all nations.
3. Their witness will be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
4. The divine empowering will take place during a 3½ year period in the time of the end.

A THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND THREESCORE DAYS

As Moses and Elijah represented the law and the prophets, which testified of Messiah's first coming and decease; it is to be expected that the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 will also testify of Messiah's second coming and glory, and as mentioned before, this will no doubt form the main thrust of the end time prophetic testimony. It was certainly the main thrust of Daniel's prophecy of the time of the end, represented by the little scroll in Rev. 10.

Rev. 11:3 says the 2 witnesses will prophesy "a thousand two hundred and threescore days," which is the same length of time as the 42 months referred to in v2, during which Jerusalem is trodden down by the Gentiles; referred to in Lk. 21:24 as "the times of the Gentiles," and "a time, times and half a time" in Rev. 12:14. Dan. 12:7. 7:25.

However, as pointed out earlier, although all the references in Scripture to this time period involve the same length of time, they are not necessarily synchronous. They do not all necessarily refer to one and the same 3½ year period.

A careful study of the various Scriptures that relate to this subject, indicate that 2 separate 3½ year periods are involved, giving us 7 years. This of course would be consistent with the many patterns of sevens that are so characteristic of the book of Revelation, and should not surprise us. In a sense, it was to be expected!

For example: Rev. 12 refers to a "dragon" who prevails for 3½ years. But when the dragon is defeated, he transfers what is left of his power to the beast, who also exercises power for 3½ years (Rev. 13:2, 4-5). As we shall see, the dragon and beast are two quite separate and distinct end time power blocs, and involve 2 separate and distinct periods of 3½ years, making a total of 7.

However, seeing that Jesus returns at the end of the times of the Gentiles, i.e. at the end of the 42 months during which Jerusalem is trodden underfoot; and seeing that the beast reigns and makes war with the witnesses during this period (Dan. 7:21-27. Rev. 11:7), it is evident that the 42 months and 1,260 days in Rev. 11:2-3 refer to one and the same 3½ year period - the last 3½ years of human rule.

It almost seems that the 2 witnesses re-enact in their day the experiences of their Lord, and if so, they would be men of sign to those of their time. Like Jesus, they minister for 3½ years; like him they suffer death; their bodies lie in the place "where also their Lord was crucified." Like him they are resurrected after 3 days, and like him they ascend into heaven in a cloud while others watch. What a sign and witness to the

people in Jerusalem of the Lord Jesus Christ whose coming at that stage is literally at hand!

CLOTHED IN SACKCLOTH

Rev. 11:3 makes the point that the 2 witnesses are “clothed in sackcloth” during the 1,260 days that they prophesy.

Sackcloth was a coarse cloth, usually made of goat’s hair, and was dark in colour: “The sun became black as sackcloth of hair” (Rev. 6:12). It was called in Hebrew “sak” from which the English word “sack” is derived. The garment of sackcloth probably resembled a sack, with openings made for the neck and arms, and slit down the front. It was cast about the loins (Gen. 37:34. 1 Kng. 20:31) and girded on (2 Sam. 3:31. Ezk. 7:18. Joel 1:8). Sometimes it was worn over other raiment (Jonah 3:6. cp. 2 Sam. 21:10), and sometimes also next to the skin (1 Kng. 21:27. 2 Kng. 6:30. Job 16:15. Isa. 32:11).

Sackcloth was worn as a sign of sorrow, grief and mourning for the dead (Gen. 37:34. 2 Sam. 3:31. Joel 1:8), or of mourning for personal or national disaster (Job 16:15. Lam. 2:10. Est. 4:1), or of penitence for sins (1 Kng. 21:27. Neh. 9:1. Isa. 22:12. Jonah 3:5. Matt. 11:21).

Prophets sometimes wore sackcloth during special intercessory prayer, involving the confession of the sins of the nation and pleading for forgiveness and deliverance (Dan. 9:3. 2 Kng. 19:1-). Sometimes the prophets wore sackcloth as a symbol of the repentance which they preached (Isa. 20:2). They also called upon the people who needed to humble themselves and repent to put on sackcloth, in view of the doom and gloom of the day of judgement that was impending: (Jer. 4:7-8. 6:26. Joel 1:8, 13).

As we know, Joel’s prophecy relates to an end time invasion of Israel, involving Gentile nations treading upon the land and cities, (particularly “the city” i.e. Jerusalem: Joel 2:9), causing suffering and tribulation: “They shall leap upon the city, run upon the walls, climb into the houses and enter the windows like a thief.”

In view of such a prospect, the prophet Joel calls upon the people to repent and clothe themselves in sackcloth (Joel 1:8, 13). Although it is not stated, it would not be surprising if Joel himself also wore sackcloth, as was the custom for prophets on such occasions. True prophets practised what they preached!

Because the reference in Rev. 11:3 to the prophets being clothed in sackcloth follows the reference to the holy city being trodden underfoot

by the Gentiles; it is not difficult to see the same connection as in Joel's prophecy. The "holy city" is Jerusalem, so it is natural to conclude that the witnesses who prophesy in sackcloth are Jewish prophets. The reference made to their dead bodies lying in the street of the city of Jerusalem in v8, certainly indicates that their witnessing takes place in the land of Israel. Seeing that both Moses and Elijah were Israelites, and the 2 witnesses represent them, it is natural to expect that they also come from, and minister to, the same nation.

The prophet Elijah is described in 2 Kng. 1:8 as "an hairy man." Considering that John the Baptist came in the Spirit and power of Elijah, and wore "camel's hair" (Matt. 3:4), it is believed that the reference to Elijah being a hairy man means he wore a garment made of animal's hair. Some translations render it this way. For example, the R.S.V.: "He wore a garment of haircloth."

Although Elijah's and John the Baptist's garments are not specifically described as "sackcloth," this is possibly what they represented. Both of these prophets preached repentance, and as we have seen, it was customary for such prophets to wear sackcloth.

Seeing that Elijah is one of the prophets represented by the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11, it is surely significant that they wear sackcloth. Such attire would be a sign that the end time Elijah ministry prophesied in Mal. 4:5 had arrived. It would also be a sign of the repentance they preached due to the judgement impending.

During both Old and New Testament times, false prophets lived contemporary with the true prophets, and this will also be the case in the end time: "Many false prophets shall arise and deceive many" (Matt. 24:11, 24). There will even be those who attempt to imitate Elijah: "And it shall come to pass in that day (at Christ's return) that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he has prophesied; neither shall they wear a hairy mantle to deceive" (Zech 13:4).

THE TWO OLIVE TREES AND TWO LAMPSTANDS

Rev. 11:4 goes on to say concerning the 2 witnesses that "these are the 2 olive trees, and the 2 lampstands which stand before the God of the earth."

The symbolism of olive trees and lampstands is taken from Zech. 4. The only essential difference is that there are 2 lampstands in Rev. 11 and only one in Zech. 4.

Zech 4 refers to a solid gold lampstand consisting of 7 lamps with 7

wicks. Above the lampstand was a bowl or reservoir for the olive oil that fed the lamps, and 7 golden pipes or tubes connecting the bowl with the lamps, through which the oil flowed to feed the lamps. An olive tree was on each side of the lampstand and a branch from each tree emptied oil through a golden pipe into the reservoir.

When the prophet Zechariah asked what this all signified, the answer given was: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

Considering that olive oil is a symbol of the Spirit of God in Scripture, it is not surprising that the vision concerning olive trees and olive oil had something to do with the work and operation of God’s Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13. Ps. 89:20. Jam. 5:14).

The particular work or operation involving God’s Spirit is indicated in Zech. 4:7, which refers to a great mountain being turned into a plain, and the headstone of the temple being placed in position with great shouts of joy, crying out: “Grace, grace unto it.”

The significance of this is revealed in v9 where we read that the work of rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, which started with the laying of the foundation stone, would reach a successful completion and be finished. (The headstone, being the last stone to be laid, put the finishing touch to the structure).

At the time that this vision was given, the Jews had returned from 70 years captivity in Babylon to rebuild the temple of God at Jerusalem. They no sooner laid the foundation stone when they received much opposition from the local Samaritans. This opposition loomed large like a mountain and so obstructed the work, that the Jews were discouraged from building and stopped (Ezra 2 to 4).

They were unable to accomplish the work in their own human might and power. They were, so to speak, “burnt out.” The flame of enthusiasm was extinguished. As a lampstand needs a good supply of oil to sustain its light and keep it burning, they needed the Spirit of God to support and sustain them.

God therefore ministered His Spirit to them by anointing and giving power to the 2 prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the people, inspiring them with encouraging and challenging words, inducing them to resume work on the temple. As a result, the lampstand burst into life and was on fire for God again (Ez. 5. Hag. 1).

Around the same time, the Spirit of God also worked providentially in the court of the Persian king, resulting in him writing to the Samaritans, commanding them to stop opposing and molesting the Jews, and

threatening them with serious repercussions if they did not obey. Moreover, he commanded them to assist the Jews by supplying them with funds out of the royal treasury for the building of the temple, as well as animals for offerings on the altar (Ez. 6). “Satan” (the adversary) was truly rebuked! (Zech. 3:1-2).

The “mountain” was moved, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts,” allowing the temple to be finished with the laying of the headstone. Under such circumstances, what shout of joy could be more appropriate than “grace, grace?” The sovereign moving of God’s Spirit to help His people rebuild His temple manifested His grace! It was only because of His grace that they gained victory over the enemy, not by their own might, power and works.

Zechariah would no doubt understand that the olive oil feeding the lampstand represented the Spirit of God. But, if God is One, why were there 2 olive trees supplying the oil? So he asked the question: “What is the significance of the 2 olive trees on each side of the lampstand?” (Zech. 4:11). The angel answered saying: “Do you not know what they signify?” as if to say: “Fancy you not knowing what they signify,” or, “You of all people ought to know what they signify.” The angel then said: “These are the 2 anointed ones who stand (serve) before the Lord of the whole earth.”

“Anointed ones” is literally “sons of oil” in the Hebrew text and refers to those anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. All the prophets inspired and empowered by God were anointed with the Holy Spirit, particularly Jesus who received it without measure, and who referred to himself as a “green tree” (Lk. 23:31). The Psalmist David was also anointed with the Holy Spirit and refers to himself as being “like a green olive tree” (Ps. 52:8).

The 2 anointed ones referred to in Zech. 4:14 were the 2 prophets Haggai and Zechariah who lived contemporary with each other. This is why the angel expressed surprise at Zechariah not knowing who they were. As a result of both Haggai and Zechariah being anointed with the Holy Spirit, the Jews were stirred back into action, inspired and motivated to finish building the temple.

Some have thought that the 2 anointed ones were Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the son of Josedech the high priest. But there is no evidence of them being anointed with the Holy Spirit. Under their leadership, work on the temple stopped, and neither of them were able to stir the Jews back to work. Both of them in fact, had to be stirred into action by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

The fact that the passage concerning the 2 olive trees (anointed ones)

in Rev. 11 is taken from Zech. 4, indicates firstly that the 2 witnesses are literally 2 individuals as in the case of Haggai and Zechariah; and secondly they must also like them, be prophets in the true sense of the word, i.e. anointed with the Holy Spirit. They are certainly referred to as “prophets” in Rev. 11:10 and are clearly given power by the mighty angel from heaven to “prophesy.” Because “lampstands” in Rev. 1:12 signify Christian communities, it is reasonable to assume that reference to the 2 witnesses as “2 lampstands,” signifies they are Christ’s witnesses.

It is natural to enquire as to why there is only one lampstand in Zech. 4 and two in Rev. 11. The lampstand in Zech 4 had 7 lamps and represented the Old Testament church, in the same way that the 7 lampstands in Rev. 1:12 represented the New Testament church. The 7 lamps represented different localities of the church each of which consisted of many members.

But there is also a sense in which an individual member of the church, especially a prophet, can be a lamp. For example, John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, is referred to as a lamp in Jn. 5:35. Two prophets would be “two lamps” or “lampstands” as we read in Rev. 11:4.

Seeing that the nation of Israel is no longer the church and therefore no longer the lampstand in that sense as in Old Testament times, the two end time witnesses who prophesy to the nation could not therefore be depicted as ministering oil to a lampstand as in the case of Zech. 4. Nevertheless their ministry, as in the case of Moses and Elijah, not to mention John the Baptist and Jesus, will particularly pertain to Israel.

Of course it goes without saying that although the Jewish nation is not the “church” it still functions as a “witness” to the truth of the Word of God by fulfilling its prophecies (Isa. 43:8-12 etc). The witness of the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 however, is not so much by fulfilling Bible prophecy, but by prophesying through the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. It would clearly be a mistake to confuse them with, and regard them as signifying the Jewish nation. But it is as good as certain that the end time Elijah, like the original historical Elijah and John the Baptist, will be an Israelite, sent to minister to Israelites in the land of Israel, and not a Gentile ministering in Gentile lands. Mal. 4:5-6 indicates this.

So then, in the same way that the church as a body is a lampstand, yet individual members can be “lamps” or “lampstands”; so also can an olive tree represent not only the whole church body (Rom. 11), but an individual as well.

It is natural to wonder why the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 have been

linked and compared with the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Why are they not linked with Isaiah and Jeremiah, or Ezekiel and Daniel etc? Why, in fact, link them with any previous prophets at all? Why not simply refer to them as being “anointed” or “prophets” and leave it at that?

To link them with Haggai and Zechariah surely means there was something in particular about the life or times or ministry of Haggai and Zechariah that the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 will have in common; which they would not have in common to the same degree with other prophets.

In what way then, was the life and times and ministry of Haggai and Zechariah distinctive or different from other prophets? There were two ways in particular: Firstly the Jewish nation to whom they ministered had returned to their land from exile, and secondly the temple lay in ruins and needed to be rebuilt. These 2 aspects are the main distinguishing marks between the time of Haggai and Zechariah and all other prophets.

This could be designed to intimate that the 2 witnesses in Rev. 11 come on the scene at a time in Jewish history when the Jews have returned to their land from exile, repossessed Jerusalem, and when the end time temple has been desecrated and lies in ruins. If so, this would confirm that the prophecy could not have been fulfilled before the middle of the twentieth century when the Exodus to the land of Israel took place.

Surely the allusion to Haggai and Zechariah in Rev. 11 in the context of measuring the temple of God and altar and giving power to prophesy, conveys to us that in the end time there will be real prophets, inspired and empowered by the real power of God, and a real literal temple at Jerusalem.

Being Christian Jews, it would probably be going too far to suggest that the 2 witnesses will inspire and encourage the Judaistic Jews to rebuild the temple. The temple that is of chief concern to Christians is not the one made with hands, but a spiritual temple, namely: the church or body of Jesus Christ. If the Jewish temple has been desecrated and the daily sacrifice taken away when the 2 witnesses come on the scene; one could well imagine their ministry being designed to build the spiritual temple, by converting Jews to Christ in preparation for his coming, as did John the Baptist during the Roman occupation.

FIRE PROCEEDS OUT OF THEIR MOUTH

Rev. 11:5 says: “And if anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.”

The reference to fire proceeding out of the mouth of the 2 witnesses

is metaphorical not literal, as in the case of the references to a sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Christ (Rev. 1:16. 2:12. 19:15); a flood of water issuing forth from the mouth of the dragon (Rev. 12:15), and frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, beast and false prophet (Rev. 16:13).

Regarding the sharp sword proceeding out of the mouth of Christ: Isa. 49:2 refers to it in these words: “He has made my mouth like a sharp sword,” and in Rev. 19:15 we read that at the battle of Armageddon, Christ will smite the nations with the sharp sword that goes out of his mouth.

This simply signifies that at the command of his mouth, his enemies will be executed by the sword.

Because the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12), it is also fitting that Jesus, who is the Word (Rev. 19:13), and who therefore speaks the Word, is referred to in terms of having a mouth like a sword, and having a sword proceeding from his mouth.

Reference to fire proceeding out of the mouth of the 2 witnesses likewise simply signifies that at the command of their mouth, their enemies will be devoured by fire.

In relation to this, compare the Lord’s message to the prophet Jeremiah: “I will make my words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jer. 5:14).

The sequel reveals that the words in the prophet’s mouth related to prophecies concerning the Babylonians who God was going to send upon the Jews as a destroying fire, and who literally destroyed cities by fire.

In Jer. 20:9 the prophet likens the Word of God to a burning fire shut up in his bones, waiting to be released. It would be quite appropriate therefore for the release of the word from the mouth, especially when it related to the fiery judgement of God, to be referred to in terms of fire proceeding out of the mouth.

Being able to command fire to devour enemies, is particularly reminiscent of Elijah calling down fire from heaven to devour those who came to arrest him. With the words of his mouth he said: “Let fire descend” and it did (2 Kng. 1:9-). He also called fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar when he had his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kng. 18).

In the event of the 2 witnesses calling down fire upon their enemies, it would be a very significant sign to the Jews that Elijah the prophet had come and was in their midst as promised in Mal. 4. Many in Israel will turn to the Lord as a result, as they did in Elijah’s day.

The language of fire coming out of the mouth and devouring enemies can also be compared with Jer. 1:9-10: “And the Lord said to me, behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day given you authority over the nations and over kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down ...”

By the words of the prophet’s mouth, nations were to be destroyed, because his words were the inspired prophetic Word of God predicting their destruction. Fire was involved in the destruction of the nations, so by a figure of speech it could be said that fire came out of the prophet’s mouth, due to it being inflicted as a result of the declaration of his mouth.

Similar language can also be seen in Hos. 6:5 where God says He has slain men by the words of His mouth spoken by the prophets.

During the ministry of Jesus, the Apostles wanted to command fire to come down upon the Samaritans because they refused to show hospitality towards him, but he rebuked them for wanting to do this (Lk. 9:51-56).

Times and circumstances have clearly changed by the time we reach the era of the 2 witnesses, as in the case of the souls under the altar who cry out for judgement and revenge upon those who attacked them (6:10). It seems that the era of the 2 witnesses, being shortly before the seventh and last trumpet; is so close to the day of judgement, that the Spirit will start to release and manifest some destructive power as a sign that the prophet Elijah has arrived, and as a warning that the day of judgement is knocking on the door. The purpose behind this will be to induce people to heed the gospel message and repent. Hearts will be so hard that the heavy hand of God will be required to break through. Even in New Testament times God took some extreme measures to inculcate fear and respect and to make hearts humble and receptive. Elymas was inflicted with blindness and Ananias and Sapphira were struck down dead. Others also died and many became weak and sick (1 Cor. 11:29-32).

Rev. 11:5 ends by saying: “If anyone hurts them, he must in this manner be killed.” As fire fell from heaven and killed all who rose against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:35), (not to mention Elijah), so fire will kill all; be they Jews or Gentiles, who hurt or try to hurt the 2 witnesses. The witnesses have a God-appointed ministry, and as in the case of Jesus himself, they will be protected and preserved until it is accomplished. Even the beast himself will be killed by fire as a result of hurting the witnesses. He is ultimately cast into the lake of fire! (Rev. 19:20).

POWER TO SHUT HEAVEN THAT IT RAIN NOT

Rev. 11:6 continues by saying the 2 witnesses will also “have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy.” This also points to the ministry of Elijah, during which the rain ceased and could not fall again unless he commanded it (1 Kng. 17:1).

While it is true that men need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to prophesy, the power of God does not need to come upon them in order to stop the rain or cause fire to fall from heaven. God can control the rain and all the other elements without involving man at all. However, He sometimes gives men, especially prophets, the authority to request or command certain functions of the elements. For example, in the case of Elijah, it was the power of prayer that caused the rain to cease and then be released after 3½ years famine. The same will apply to the 2 witnesses in the end time, again demonstrating the truth that: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man has powerful effects” (Jam. 5:16-18).

God obviously would not withhold the rain, turn water into blood and send plagues upon the earth in response to the prayers of men; unless it was His will to do so, as in the days of Moses and Elijah. Being prophets, it is more than likely in fact, that the prayers are inspired by the Spirit. We should therefore not trouble ourselves with questions as to whether it is the “Christian” thing to do for the 2 witnesses to cause fire to devour their enemies etc. If it was not the right thing to do, God would not respond by sending the fire, famine, blood and plagues. It is clearly His will for these events to take place; He therefore, not the prophets, is responsible for them.

Sometimes the Greek word “exousia” which is translated “power” in Rev. 11:6, is translated “authority” in the New Testament. In the case of the 2 witnesses, they are so favoured by God, that they have the authority to command heaven to be shut so that it rain not, knowing that God will respond accordingly. Such authority is only possible for those who are led by the Spirit and who therefore can be trusted to command according to the will of God.

It is interesting to consider that when the 2 witnesses finally come on the scene, they will know the Word of God and be acquainted with what is written concerning them in Rev. 11; as Jesus was acquainted with what was written concerning him in the Scriptures. The statement in v6 that they have the authority to stop the rain, would therefore be sufficient for them to command it without having to receive a direct command from God!

It is stated in Rev. 11:6 that they have power to stop the rain “in the

days of their prophecy,” which is 1,260 days (v3). Significantly enough, Elijah stopped the rain for exactly the same period i.e. 3½ years (Lk. 4:25. Jam. 5:17). The famine in Elijah’s day occurred in, and affected the land of Israel, due to the moral and spiritual degeneration of the people. The moral and spiritual degeneration of the nation of Israel in the days of the 2 witnesses, as already mentioned, is indicated in Rev. 11:8, where it is compared with Sodom and Egypt.

There can be no doubt that the 2 witnesses perform their ministry in Israel and that there will be a 3½ year famine in that land in the end time. This is certainly indicated in the reference in Joel 1:20 to the rivers drying up and the beasts of the field crying due to pastures drying up. It is also implied by the reference in Joel 2:23-26 to the former and latter rain being restored at the end of the tribulation, when Jesus returns. Rev. 6:5-6. 7:16-17. Matt. 24:7 could all be related to the same famine.

POWER TO TURN WATERS INTO BLOOD

Not only will the 2 witnesses have power to stop the rain, but will also “have power over waters to turn them into blood.” This immediately reminds us of Moses who turned “the waters of Egypt” into blood. “The waters” involved the river Nile, the streams, ponds, pools and vessels of wood and stone that contained water (Ex. 7:17-21). All the fish in the river died.

The 2 witnesses also have power to “smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.” This also points to Moses. “All” plagues means every plague. The plagues that smote Egypt in Moses’ day involved frogs, lice, flies, disease of all livestock, boils upon man and beast, hail, lightning, locusts, darkness, and death of the first born. Including the turning of waters into blood, there were 10 plagues (disasters) altogether in Egypt.

Other references to plagues in the book of Revelation are: 9:20. 15:1, 6, 8. 16:9, 21. 18:4, 8. 21:9. 22:18.

So then, Rev. 11:5-6 refers to 4 wonders or judgements that the 2 witnesses have the authority to initiate:

1. They can cause fire to kill their enemies.
2. They can cause the rain to cease.
3. They can turn waters into blood.
4. They can smite the earth with plagues.

Elijah performed the first two in the land of Israel, affecting Israelites living in the land. They were God’s judgements on that nation. The last 2

were performed by Moses in Egypt, affecting the Egyptians living in the land. They were God's judgements on that nation. Could this suggest that the judgements performed by the 2 witnesses will affect both Israel and Gentile nations? Do the first two apply to Israel and the last two to Gentiles? "The earth" referred to as being smitten by the plagues is defined in verses 9-10 as "the people and kindreds and tongues and nations" who have been "tormented" by the 2 prophets. This certainly indicates that the plagues are not confined to Israel, but affect many nations. Reference to the tormenting effect of the plagues, causing animosity towards the 2 prophets, reminds us of the tormenting effect the plagues in Moses' day had upon the Egyptians, and the animosity that Pharaoh showed towards him as a result.

Although the 2 prophets are resident or based in the land of Israel, their word of command will be able to call down plagues on other nations, and those nations will obviously know that the plagues are attributable to them.

Another point for consideration: In Egypt, magicians duplicated the miracles in order to try and discredit Moses. Reference is made in Rev. 13 to a "false prophet" who is in league with the beast, who makes fire come down from heaven on the earth. Why? Probably to duplicate the two prophets' control of fire in order to deceive people into thinking that he has just as much power as them!

THE BEAST

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them” (v7).

This is our first and formal introduction to the beast, but he will continue to come before us throughout the rest of the book until almost the end, and we will learn more about him, due to detailed descriptions of him. The prominent part that this beast plays in these prophecies is indicated by the number of references to him: (Rev. 13:1-. 14:9, 11. 15:2. 16:2, 10, 13. 17:3-. 19:19-20. 20:4, 10).

The Greek word for "beast" is "theiron" and means a wild dangerous animal, not a tame domestic animal. In the Old Testament, the term "beast" is used to signify vicious and violent nations that were untouched and uninfluenced by the Word of God; unsympathetic towards the people of God; in fact, hostile towards God's people. In the book of Revelation the beast is presented as the principal enemy of both natural and spiritual

Israel, and will not be destroyed until Christ returns.

Regarding the reference to “the bottomless pit” out of which the beast ascends: the significance of this has already been considered when dealing with Rev. 9:1-2 (see p 317-). It basically signifies a state of political or national death. To ascend out of it signifies a political or national revival - the coming to power of a nation or nations that had lost power. In Rev. 13:1 the beast is depicted coming up out of the sea, and in v3 reference is made to him having a deadly wound and being healed of the wound and living again (v14). Rev. 17:3 refers to the beast in the “wilderness” controlled by a “woman,” but the following verses depict him coming to power and political independence. Coming out of the bottomless pit, the sea, the wilderness and recovering from a deadly wound may all relate to the same thing.

Reference to the beast, who ascends out of the bottomless pit making war against the two witnesses, and killing them when they have finished their testimony; does not have to be read to mean that the beast comes to power at the end of the 1,260 days’ testimony. The words: “who ascends” can be read to mean “who was destined to ascend.” The beast has ascended when the two witnesses come on the scene and rules during the 1,260 days that they prophesy, but does not kill them until the period of their prophetic testimony has run its course.

It is evident from Dan. 7:21-27 that the beast will make war with the saints and prevail against them for 1,260 days, but according to Rev. 11:7 he will not prevail against the two prophets until the end of the 1,260 days, which will be on the threshold of the second coming of Christ.

A distinction therefore needs to be made between the two prophets and the saints. This distinction is actually made in Rev. 11:18 where reference is made to “the prophets and the saints.”

All prophets of God are saints of course, but not all saints are prophets. All saints are also witnesses, but not all witnesses are prophets. For this reason the distinction is made between prophets and saints.

The two prophets are two individuals of Hebrew nationality, who will prophesy in the land of Israel, but the “saints” involve many individuals, including Gentiles living in Gentile countries, against whom the beast will wage war.

In view of the fact that nations will be involved in the power of the beast, it may seem strange that he would “make war” against two men. Generally, you would expect the phrase to be used when many are involved, as will be the case with the saints. The reference therefore to the beast making war against the two prophets may appear to be an

inappropriate expression if only two individuals are involved.

However, king Ahab mobilized his whole army to track down Elijah, and Saul did the same to find David. Moses took on the whole power of Egypt. In more recent times, the U.S. A. army deployed many of its troops to find Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan.

As in the case with his war against the saints, the beast will, from a human standpoint, also be successful when he wages war against the two prophets. He “shall overcome them and kill them.” As mentioned earlier, the death of the prophets and saints can be linked with Rev. 6:11 where those under the altar who were slain for the Word of God, were told that they would rest for a little season until their fellow-servants and their brethren should be killed as they were.

Rev. 13:10 also mentions that the beast will kill with the sword, and therefore must be killed with the sword. The words are then added: “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” In keeping with the commandments of Christ, the saints will not physically resist the beast, and will refuse to take up the sword against him to engage in carnal warfare. The only sword they wield is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, which saves not destroys. The 2 witnesses certainly do not kill by thrusting a sword into their enemy. The fire by which their enemies are devoured is sent by God in response to their request, so it is really God Himself who is responsible.

So then, during the 3½ years that the witnesses prophesy and perform wonders, resulting in people being killed, they themselves are protected and preserved. This can be compared with the 3½ year ministry of Christ (the anointed one), during which he was protected and upon whom no one could lay their hands for “his hour was not yet come” (Jn. 7:30. 8:20. 12:23, 27. 13:1. 17:1).

DEAD BODIES LIE IN THE STREET

Rev. 11:8 says that when the beast kills the 2 prophets, “their dead bodies shall lie on the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” (Some translations give the singular word “body” or “corpse” in the first part of v9, but “bodies” in the second part of v9. The Greek “ptoma” is translated “carcass” in Matt. 24:28, “corpse” in Mk. 6:29, and “dead bodies” three times in the A.V. in Rev. 11:8-9).

Usage of the singular word “street” instead of the plural “streets” indicates a particular street. This verse seems to make a deliberate

comparison between Jesus and his 2 witnesses: the city of Jerusalem is the place of execution for both. The “street” upon which the dead bodies shall lie may even be the street along which Jesus walked to be crucified. Or, in the modern enlarged city of Jerusalem in which the walls have been extended, the street where the dead bodies will lie, may be the very place where Jesus was crucified! The words of Jesus that “it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (Lk. 13:33), applies to the end time prophets.

The fact that the beast kills the 2 prophets and leaves their bodies lying upon a street in Jerusalem, implies that he invades Israel and treads the streets of the holy city. (Connect Rev. 11:2).

THE GREAT CITY

From time to time, deciphering the prophecies in the book of Revelation is made easy for us due to the Spirit providing the interpretation. For example, as we have seen, the “time, times and half a time” is explained to be 1,260 days or 42 months. Likewise, the city where the dead bodies of the 2 prophets will lie, is explained to be “where their Lord was crucified.”

Ask a child the name of the city where Jesus was crucified and he will tell you it was Jerusalem, and so it was! It is hard to believe that anyone would deny the obvious and give a private interpretation that contradicts the interpretation of the Holy Spirit. But the continuous historic interpretation does precisely that, and by so doing reveals how fundamentally astray it is. It is a classic example of one error leading to another, resulting in basically calling white black. As a result of rejecting the explanation of the Spirit that the time, times and an half is 1,260 days; they have, as we have seen, changed it into 1,260 years. And because Rome, not Jerusalem, was the enemy of the saints during the period of history to which the 1,260 years is applied, they have been forced to make Rome the “city” in Rev. 11:8 where Jesus was crucified; and France the “street” where the dead bodies of the witnesses lay! This ingenious neutralization of a plain and simple statement in the Word of God is based on the statement of a Roman emperor who claimed that the city of Rome reached to the very limits and borders of its conquered lands. On this basis it is therefore concluded that Judea was in fact Rome, and was the city referred to in Rev. 11 where Jesus was crucified! And, it is further claimed that the Greek word “plateia,” translated “street,” means roadway - a chief thoroughfare, and is applied to France because she was the first and

chief Catholic country; and because saints were killed there.

It is truly a sad day when the assertion of a pagan Roman emperor is used as a basis for interpreting the Word of God instead of the Word of God itself. In connection with this, the prayer of Jesus recorded in Lk. 10:21 is relevant: "I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes: yes, Father, for this was well pleasing in your sight."

Another reason why some believe that Rome is the great city referred to in Rev. 11 is because Babylon (Rome) is referred to as "that great city" in Rev. 17:18. So were the cities in Canaan (Deu. 6:10. 9:1). Gibeon was a "great city" (Josh. 10:2). In the book of Jonah it is stated 4 times that Nineveh was a "great city" (1:2. 3:2, 3. 4:2). Jerusalem is referred to as a "great city" in Jer. 22:8 etc etc.

The reason why Jerusalem is referred to as a great city in Rev. 11 seems to be explained by the following statement that it is the city where Jesus was crucified. In view of the fact that the death of Jesus on the cross at Jerusalem, made atonement for the sins of the world, resulting in salvation and eternal life; certainly makes it a great city, not to mention the fact that it is destined to be the city of the "great king" from which he will rule the world when he returns. Today, Jerusalem is regarded as the spiritual centre of the Jewish, Christian and Moslem faiths. It is the spiritual factors that make it great and which cause it to be a "burdensome stone" to all nations in the end time.

Some say the great city cannot be Jerusalem, because Jesus was not crucified in a street but outside the walls. However, Rev. 11:8 does not say that Jesus was crucified in a street but in the great city. The city of Jerusalem included areas outside the walls as is the case with all cities. The words of Jesus settle it once and for all: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (Lk. 13:33).

SPIRITUALLY CALLED SODOM AND EGYPT

The word "spiritually" means "figuratively," "non-physically" according to Strong. This means that in calling Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt, it is to be understood figuratively in the sense that the moral and spiritual character and condition of Jerusalem is the same as Sodom and Egypt.

Some have suggested that "spiritually" could also be taken to mean: "as described by the Holy Spirit in Scripture." What other city in Scripture is called Sodom where it could be said Jesus was crucified? Jerusalem

alone qualifies! This indictment is made against the Jews a number of times in Scripture: (Isa. 1:7-10. 3:9. Jer. 23:14. Ezk. 23:3, 4, 8, 19. Lam. 4:6).

Sodom was notorious for gross immorality and sexual perversion; particularly homosexuality, and Egypt was known for idolatry and materialism. (The worship of the golden calf, which proved to be a snare to Israel, originated in Egypt).

Today, the coveting of gold and preoccupation with money and material things is the spirit of idolatry (Col. 3:5). Modern Israel is as caught up in this as much as other Gentile nations. The love of money and greedy ambition for riches and wealth is by no means only the god of the Gentile world!

Regarding homosexuality: The Israeli parliament has legalised homosexual acts between men over the age of 18, despite a Biblical ban on sodomy. This law was passed by the Knesset on the eve of Israel's 40th year of nationhood in 1988. Jewish society today is equally as loose and immoral as any other decadent western society in the world. Prostitution, pornography, drugs, drunkenness, fornication, adultery etc. are just as prevalent in Jewish cities as in other cities in the world. When Jesus warned that it would be "as it was in the days of Lot" prior to his return, he was not confining his statement to the Gentile nations and excluding the nation of Israel!

Low moral and spiritual standards was the main reason for God allowing nations to invade Israel in the past. In spite of warnings from the prophets, the people persisted in their sinful lifestyle, so God sent invading forces as a rod to punish and discipline them. For the same reason, in the end time, He will allow the rod to come upon the temple, altar and all hypocritical worshippers, by allowing the beast to invade and tread the holy city underfoot. In the words of Dan. 8:23, this takes place "when the transgressors have come to the full," and will prevail "till the indignation (of God) be accomplished" (Dan. 11:36). As Jesus put it: "There shall be great wrath upon this people" (Lk. 21:23).

NATIONS SHALL SEE THE DEAD BODIES

“People of all nations, tribes, languages, and races will see their dead bodies for three and a half days and will not allow their dead bodies to be put in graves” (v9).

In bygone ages when satellite T.V. could not be conceived by the greatest imagination, this statement that nations all around the world

would be able to see corpses lying in the streets of Jerusalem was not able to be taken literally. To suggest a literal application would have seemed bizarre and ludicrous. Naturally, expositors spiritualized it away and gave it all sorts of highly symbolical and metaphorical applications. Today, however, it is quite common to see on T.V. dead bodies lying in the streets of various cities around the world, including Jerusalem.

The events in Rev. 11:9 take place on the eve of the seventh trumpet, immediately before the second coming. The time slot into which this prophecy fits is unmistakably the end time in which the science and technology of man will have reached its peak of development, and the beast will no doubt use it to serve his own ends, and promote his own ego.

The word “see” i.e. “see their dead bodies” is translated “gaze on” and “stare at” by some translations. If T.V. cameras are involved, this would indicate that a quick, casual, passing glance will not be given, but that the cameras will zoom in on the bodies, and give lengthy coverage, enabling people to stare at, gaze upon and gloat over the corpses, adding to their indignity.

In view of the Jewish nationality of the 2 prophets, this will be very gratifying to many people in view of the universal anti-Israel (and anti-Christian) spirit at the time.

Of course, in view of the fact that many nations will be involved in the invasion of Israel, confederate under the beast; the reference to those of many nations looking at the dead bodies could refer to their occupying forces. But it is remarkable that due to satellite T.V. we can now apply the prophecy to people actually living in other countries, and this could very well be what is meant. Reference to “those who dwell upon the earth” in v10 suggests this.

THREE DAYS AND AN HALF

It is stated in Rev. 11:9 that the bodies of the witnesses will be left lying on the street for 3½ days. It would not be a pretty sight, due to the wounds caused by the sword of the executioner (possibly involving beheading: Rev. 20:4. Matt. 14:10), and the flies and creatures of prey that would be attracted (Gen. 15:11. 2 Sam. 21:8-10). As we will see in Rev. 11:11, it is only because of divine intervention that the bodies do not remain lying on the street for more than 3½ days. Were it not for this intervention, the bodies would no doubt be left exposed longer, to the point of corruption and disintegration. Ultimately the beast and his confederates will suffer this indignity, and the birds and animals of prey

will devour their dead bodies (Ezk. 39:11-17. Rev. 19:17-21. Joel 2:20. Jer. 25:33).

The word “graves” in Rev. 11:9 in relation to the beast not permitting the dead bodies to be put in graves, comes from the Greek word “mnema” and means a tomb. It is translated “tombs” twice (Mk. 5:5. Lk. 8:27) and “sepulchre” 4 times (Lk. 25:53. 24:1. Act. 2:29. 7:16). Rev. 11:9 is the only time it is translated graves.

A tomb or sepulchre as a place of burial is consistent with the city of Jerusalem, especially at the time the revelation was given to John. Jesus was granted burial in a tomb by the Gentiles who put him to death, as a result of his friends taking the initiative to request Pilate’s permission. But his two end time witnesses are not granted a burial and there are reasons for this. The word of prophecy required Jesus to be entombed, but not the 2 witnesses (Ps. 16:10. Isa. 53:9. Ps. 79).

What a contrast between the death of the original Moses and Elijah and their end time counterparts! God graciously and painlessly took their life and personally (by an angel) arranged their internment. They were buried with dignity and respect. Deliberately leaving the dead bodies of the 2 witnesses lying exposed on the street of Jerusalem will be an act of contempt by the beast. To a Jew it is the height of indignity and an insult to not allow a dead body to be buried, because God’s law is very explicit and strict about this.

DEATH BRINGS GREAT JOY

Verse 10 reads: “And those who dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these 2 prophets tormented those who dwelt upon the earth.”

The “earth” in this verse is the earth in v6 which the 2 witnesses have power to smite with plagues, affecting people of all nations, kindreds and tongues (v9). These people shall “rejoice” over the death of the prophets; they will be exceeding glad and happy that they are dead. There will be laughing and cheering - delirious excitement over what appears to be the victory of the beast. The same Greek word translated “rejoice” is used in Rev. 19:7 to describe the profound happiness and ecstatic joy of the church at the marriage of the Lamb. It is clearly exuberant joy. The world applauds the death of these men of God.

The words “make merry” are translated “celebrate” by some. The Greek word is “euphraino” from which the English word “euphoria” is derived. It is used in the New Testament in connection with eating and

drinking, feasting and partying, and may imply the declaration of a universal holiday.

They celebrate the event by sending gifts to one another, making it a Christmas-like celebration. This was the custom in days of public rejoicing (Est. 9:19, 22). There is nothing like the surge of emotional joy to loosen the purse strings and stimulate generosity to spend money on others!

These statements: “rejoice,” “make merry” and “send gifts,” due to the death of the 2 witnesses, indicate a huge relief at their death. It indicates what a major problem and huge source of concern they will be to the nations. The last statement in v10 reveals why: “Because these 2 prophets tormented those who dwelt on the earth.”

TORMENTED BY THE PROPHETS

The Greek word “basanizo” translated “tormented” means torture, cause pain, vex. It is the same word used by the demoniacs when they said to Jesus: “torment me not,” when they thought he might use current, primitive, painful methods, involving torture; to cast out the demons (Mk. 5:7). It is also the same word as “tormented” in Rev. 9:5 which refers to men being tormented by scorpion stings for 5 months, causing so much pain they wish they could die. It also occurs in Rev. 18:7, 10, 15.

The plagues inflicted by the 2 witnesses obviously cause very grievous pain and suffering.

Some suggest that the 7 vials (bowls) in Rev. 16, referred to as “plagues” in v9, which are poured out on the beast’s kingdom, causing pain and suffering (v10-11); are the same plagues inflicted by the 2 prophets. But Rev. 16 makes it clear that they are inflicted by 7 angels, not 2 prophets. It is also stated in Rev. 16:6 that the vial-judgements are poured forth because of the shedding of the blood of the saints and prophets. This indicates that they are poured out after the death of the prophets.

AFTER 3½ DAYS THEY STOOD ON THEIR FEET

“And after the 3 days and an half, the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those who saw them” (v11).

The continuous historic view of this is that the beast who kills the 2

witnesses is the Roman Catholic church. The 2 witnesses who prophesy for 1,260 days are regarded as the true church along with other protestant groups who spoke against, and opposed the Roman Catholic church for a 1,260 year period, starting in 312 A.D. when the apostate church was established by Constantine; and ending in 1572 with the massacre of St. Bartholomew. In that year Rome made a determined effort to still the voice of religious opposition, resulting in many martyrs. It brought to an end (“finished”) the effective testimony of the witnesses, and they were given over to political death. Efforts to crush all political and religious opposition continued until 1685. A period of 105 years elapsed between 1685 and the French Revolution in 1790 which ended the secular power of the Papacy. The “3 days and an half” in Rev. 11:11 is regarded as signifying this 105 year period.

Instead of keeping to the usual day for a year principle, the continuous historic adherents turn the 3½ days into 3½ months, which is 105 days, and then turn the 105 days into 105 years. This means that the last period of the sixth trumpet ends up taking up a period from 312 A.D. to 1790 i.e. 1478 years!

But there is no need to tamper with the 3½ days and spiritualize it away. As in the case of the 1,260 days, it can be taken quite literally. Jesus was dead for 3 days and Lazarus for 4 days before being brought back to life. Why should it be thought a thing incredible or impossible that Christ’s 2 witnesses be brought back to life after 3½ days? After all, it happens on the eve of the second coming at a time when the supernatural power of God has been operating!

Jesus was raised on the third day so that he should not see corruption. Lazarus was dead for 4 days and it was believed that “by this time he stinketh” (Jn. 11:39). The period of 3½ days is between these two.

At a time when people are convinced there is no hope for the 2 witnesses, something happens to vindicate them as God’s servants, and to act as a sign to the world that the day of resurrection and judgement has as good as arrived. Indeed it has! See Rev. 11:15-18. The witnesses are raised from the dead, probably as a sign, as in the case of those who were raised from the dead after an earthquake, before Jesus appeared after his death (Matt. 27:52-53). An earthquake also occurs at the same hour that the 2 witness are resurrected (Rev. 11:13). So the triumphing of the wicked over the witnesses is indeed short - only 3½ days!

No human hands are laid upon the dead bodies of the 2 witnesses to raise them. No prayer or petition is offered by anyone. “The Spirit of life from God entered them.” The direct personal intervention of God’s Spirit

is involved, as in Gen. 2:7 when God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils and when he raised Jesus from the dead. Whether there is any visible manifestation of God's power like tongues of fire or a dove, we are not told, but the effects are very clear and obvious: the two witnesses "stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those who saw them."

It is not hard to imagine the fearful effect of seeing dead, decomposing bodies, possibly stiff with rigor mortis and covered with flies, starting to stir and twitch and move and become supple; get up on their knees and finally stand up! It probably doesn't happen "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," because the reference to that in 1 Cor. 15:51-53 relates to immortality being bestowed at the 7th and last trumpet when Jesus returns. As we have seen, the resurrection of the 2 witnesses occurs at the end of the sixth trumpet.

The whole world will be watching as the witnesses stand on their feet. What an incredible witness this will be! In this respect, their witnessing does not cease at their death. Many who are celebrating their death; eating and drinking and making merry, will watch their T.Vs. or the internet each day, hoping to see the bodies continue to deteriorate and disintegrate and end up as bones. They will choke on their food when they see the first signs of life, especially if the bodies have been beheaded!

Remember the effect that the armless hand writing upon the wall had upon Belshazzar the king of Babylon as he was feasting in his palace, rejoicing over Babylon's victory over God's people. It took the colour out of his cheeks and took away his appetite for food. He went weak at the knees and probably loose in the bowels! Great fear and trembling fell upon him as it will upon those in Rev. 11:11.

Ezk. 37 refers to a valley of dry bones and breath from God entering them, resulting in them standing on their feet. But this does not relate to Rev. 11:11. Ezk. 37 relates to Israel's national resurrection, and does not involve literal or physical resurrection. Rev. 11 only relates to 2 men not a nation, and involves literal physical resurrection as in the case of Lazarus. The 2 witnesses are Christian Jews who have been serving Christ prior to his coming, but the majority in the nation of Israel continue in unbelief until he comes (Zech. 12:9-14. Rom. 11:25-27). The 2 witnesses are dead bodies, not dry disintegrated skeletons as in Ezk. 37.

THEY ASCENDED TO HEAVEN IN A CLOUD

“**A**nd they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, come up here. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies watched them” (v12). This “great voice from heaven” was no doubt a loud booming thunderous voice, like others referred to elsewhere in Revelation. Seeing bodies that have been dead for 3½ days come back to life and stand on their feet would be a fearful enough sight; but to hear a loud thunderous voice from heaven, calling out to them would be even more fearful. (Cp. Ex. 19:16. 20:19).

Because the 2 witnesses have been ministering in the spirit and power of Elijah, what could be a more appropriate sign and vindication of their ministry, than to be caught up to heaven as Elijah himself was!?! (2 Kng. 2:11). And if we have no difficulty accepting that this literally happened to Elijah, why should there be any difficulty accepting that it happens literally to the 2 witnesses? It is certainly going to happen to many either at the same time or shortly afterwards at the seventh trumpet when all belonging to Christ shall be “caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thes. 4:16-17). (N.B. In Rev. 11:12 the Greek text reads “in the cloud,” not “a cloud”).

Jesus also was taken up into heaven while men beheld him, and a cloud received him out of their sight (Act. 1:9). He was taken of course to the heaven of heavens, to the very throne of God, where no other man, including Elijah, had ascended (Jn. 3:13). The “heaven” Elijah was taken up into was the atmosphere, to be transported to an undisclosed place on earth for burial. This is indicated by the fact that men at the time set out to search for his body (2 Kng. 2:16-17).

God will truly “shew wonders (i.e. give signs and portents) in the heavens and in the earth” before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.

Imagine the consternation among the people as they watch the 2 witnesses rise from the ground into the air and disappear in the cloud! How else could such a phenomenon be explained other than in terms of supernatural power! What a shock to those who don’t believe in God or supernatural power, or who don’t believe that the God proclaimed by the 2 witnesses is the true God. What a shock also to those in the Christian community who have an aversion to anything supernatural happening in the end time and who almost cringe at the suggestion that there will be Holy Spirit activity.

When Enoch’s life was threatened, God “took him” and removed him to another location. Search was made for him, but he could not be found.

Being the “seventh from Adam” (Jude 14) he can be seen as a type of those who live in the seventh trumpet era.

A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

“**A**nd the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were 7,000 people killed, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” (v13).

The words: “the same hour” mean within the same hour that the dead bodies came back to life; and a loud voice from heaven called out to them, resulting in them ascending into the cloud. The earthquake is the fourth major fear-inspiring event to occur within the hour. Occurring at the time of the resurrection of the 2 witnesses, it is reminiscent of the earthquake that occurred when Jesus rose from the dead (Matt. 28:1-2). An even greater earthquake is going to occur when Jesus returns to resurrect his followers (Rev. 6:12. 11:19. 16:18).

The earthquakes in Rev. 8:5 and 11:13 are preludes to the big one, which will be the mother of all earthquakes. Jesus warned in his Olivet prophecy that there would be earthquakes in different places in the last days (Matt. 24:7. Mk. 13:8. Lk. 21:11).

THE TENTH PART OF THE CITY FELL

The city is Jerusalem, referred to in v8 as the city where Jesus was crucified, and “the holy city” in v2. Jerusalem will be the vortex of the last great climactic earthquake that shakes the whole earth, and splits the Mount of Olives in half (Zech. 14. Isa. 2). The earthquake that occurs in the city in Rev. 11:13 is a sign or warning of worse to come, like the rumbling of a volcano ready to erupt.

As the dead bodies of the 2 witnesses fell in the street, so one tenth of the city now collapses and falls into the streets as a result of the earthquake. Those with discernment will see the retributive judgement of God in this. Television cameras at the time could very well relay pictures around the world of the earthquake actually occurring as well as the aftermath.

Not only does one tenth of the city fall, but 7,000 people are killed as well. The 7,000 can be taken just as literally as the 7,000 in 1 Kng. 19:18. God can destroy exactly 7,000 just as easily as He preserved 7,000 in Elijah’s day. In view of the 2 witnesses performing an Elijah ministry; is the number of 7,000 a coincidence or arranged on purpose? As God

spared the 7,000 in Elijah's day for not bowing to idolatry, is He now punishing an equivalent number for the idolatry which caused Jerusalem to be likened to Egypt?

“The tenth part” is a tithe. Due to the city not responding to the witnesses' call for repentance and paying their dues to God, He exacts His tithe of the city to show that the whole belongs to Him, and so that those who survive will be warned. Failure on the part of the people to give their tithe to God results in Him taking “the tenth part” of their city. (Cp. Mal. 3:8-9). Reference to the one tenth is another of the many statements in this section of the book which gives the prophecy a Jewish flavour and focus, indicating that it is the city of Jerusalem in Israel where the earthquake occurs.

The words: “of men 7,000” in the A.V. are literally “7,000 names of men” in the Greek text. Does this phrase mean notable men - men who have made a name for themselves and whose names are well known? (Gen. 11:4. 2 Sam. 23:18. Cp. Isa. 2:17-21). Or, is “names” just an idiomatic expression indicating that God has a census or record of all human beings? It may be designed to convey that those who are killed were known to God and their death is not by chance i.e. they were selected for death. Or, it could signify that not only were the men destroyed, but their names, reputation and standing as well. Compare the usage of “names” in Rev. 3:4. Act. 1:15. Num. 1:2.

It goes without saying that just because 7,000 are killed as a result of one tenth of the city falling in the earthquake; does not mean that 7,000 will be one tenth of the population of the city! Percentages do not normally work like that in earthquakes.

In 1845 the population of Jerusalem was about 15,000; in 1912 80,000; in 1949 126,000, and in 1966 265,000. In 1993 the mayor Teddy Kollek said he expected the population of Jerusalem to expand to 750,000 over the following few years. Back in 1991 Ariel Sharon, who was the housing minister for the Israeli government, said the government planned to settle more than 1 million Jews in the greater Jerusalem area.

Of course, when the end time invasions of Israel take place, two thirds of the population will be killed and the remaining third will suffer a purging as well (Zech. 13:8-9). Half of the remaining population in Jerusalem will be exiled (Zech. 14:2), followed by 7,000 killed in the earthquake, and many more in the big one at Christ's return. All in all, there will be a considerable reduction in the population.

Reference in Rev. 11:13 to one tenth of “the city” falling in the earthquake, probably refers to the area of the old city of Jerusalem, not so

much the more modern outlying districts. But all will certainly be flattened when the earthquake of Zech. 14 occurs at the second coming.

THE REMNANT WERE TERRIFIED

It is not so much the earthquake by itself in Rev. 11:13 that causes the Remnant to be terrified, but the fact that it occurs at the same time that the 2 witnesses revive and ascend into the cloud at the command of a voice from heaven. They will know from the timing of this earthquake that it is not a normal, natural convulsion.

The same word translated “terrified” (“affrightened” A.V.) is used in Lk. 24:37 to describe the effect the risen Christ had upon his followers. The soldiers guarding the tomb were also terrified when the earthquake occurred at Christ’s resurrection: “There was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone ... and for fear of him the guards trembled and became as dead men” i.e. petrified with fear (Matt. 28:1-4). Again, it was not so much the earthquake that had this effect, but the accompanying supernatural manifestation.

GAVE GLORY TO GOD

Rev. 11:13 says those who were terrified “gave glory to the God of heaven.” In Rev. 16:9 we read that men (Gentiles) blasphemed the name of God who had power over the plagues that the 7 angels pour forth, “and they repented not to give him glory.” We also read in Rev. 14:7 that when the everlasting gospel is preached, the people are told to “fear God and give glory to Him.”

From these statements we learn that to give glory to God involves fearing Him, and this involves profoundly respecting Him and His Word, repenting of all sin with a desire to reform and conform to divine requirements. In Josh. 7:19 the words: “give glory to the Lord God of Israel” mean confess your sin; acknowledge the truth that you are guilty of sin. There are many examples of this in Scripture.

It is evident from Rev. 4:11 that God created man to give Him pleasure. This requires giving God glory, and this involves being humble before Him, respecting Him and His Word and conforming to His commandments. When man refuses to do this, God has His way of humbling him and bringing him to a place of fearing Him and submitting to Him. The dramatic awe-inspiring events in Rev. 11:11-13 are designed

to achieve this. They are not for entertainment, but are deadly serious business.

THE SECOND WOE IS PAST; THE THIRD COMES QUICKLY

“The second woe is past; and behold, the third woe comes quickly” (v14) i.e. the events of the sixth trumpet have finished and the seventh will quickly be sounded. This statement connects with the last verse of chapter 9 which says: “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth due to the remaining blasts of the trumpet by the (last) 3 angels.” The 3 woes therefore pertain to the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets. The first woe is in Rev. 9:12; the second in 9:13-21, and the third is in 11:15-19.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (v15).

The seventh trumpet is the last trumpet and it clearly pertains to the time of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection, referred to in v18 as “the time of the dead.” Long before the revelation was given to John, the apostle Paul referred to the resurrection as being “at the last trump” (1 Cor. 15:52). In view of this, and Paul’s reference in 2 Cor. 12 to receiving visions and revelations from the Lord which could not at that time be uttered, he may have been given insights into some of the revelation that was given later to John. After all, Paul, like John, was caught up into paradise, the city of God, but it was God’s will for John, not Paul, to give utterance to what he saw and heard.

As soon as the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, “there were great (loud and enthusiastic) voices in heaven, saying, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ ...” With the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet, the grand climax to world history and human government arrives, and the whole host of heaven responds instantly and spontaneously by bursting forth enthusiastically in a loud tumultuous exclamation to announce it and welcome it. Handel chose the words they uttered to form part of his famous “Hallelujah Chorus,” and the music can certainly inject into those words the emotion and passion that they deserve. It is assumed that the whole angelic host

sang the words. Will the saints sing it with them when the time of the seventh trumpet actually arrives? The announcement is certainly of major historic and universal importance, being the realization of a 6,000 year old plan and hope.

The A.V. says: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ ...” But a more correct rendering of the original text is: “The kingdom of the world has become our Lord’s and His Christ’s.” The singular “kingdom” occurs, not the plural “kingdoms.” At the time of the second coming, the world will not be divided up into separate independent kingdoms, but one world-wide kingdom under the power of the beast (Rev. 16:10). This kingdom will become Christ’s! (Dan. 2. 7:14, 27. Isa. 32:1. Obad. v21. Zech. 14:5. Matt. 6:10. 2 Tim. 4:1).

As the walls of Jericho fell as a result of Israel walking around the city 7 times on the seventh day and blowing 7 trumpets, so the cities of the nations will fall when the seventh trumpet is sounded, and the true Joshua (Jesus) will lead the true Israel forth in victory over the enemy and establish God’s kingdom!

When the Israelites marched around Jericho and the trumpets were blown, the ark of the covenant was present. Likewise in Rev. 11:19, “there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant” at the time of the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

In passing, it is also interesting to note that in Rev. 11:15 the angels address Father God as “our Lord” but not Christ. Instead of referring to Christ as “our Lord,” they refer to him as “His Christ” i.e. the Father’s Christ, meaning the one anointed by the Father.

So then, according to Rev. 11:14, the seventh trumpet is the third “woe.” However, the coming of Christ will be weal, not woe to the saints. It will only be woe to the world, i.e. the kingdom of the beast. This is indicated in Rev. 11:18: “Thy wrath is come.” The “lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake and great hail” in v19 indicate this wrath.

There is actually little said in Rev. 11 about the third woe; just an outline is given which is no more than a summary of what will be given in more detail later in the book, especially in chapters 16, 19 and 20. The book of Revelation is not quite ready to describe the final intervention in detail. It firstly takes a look at the political and religious powers dominating the world beforehand.

This is not surprising in view of the structural development of the book of Revelation. As we have seen, the breaking of the seventh seal in Rev. 8:1 introduced the 7 trumpets. In like manner, the sounding of the

seventh trumpet is followed by the 7 vials. But, before we are introduced to the vials, there is a lengthy parenthetical passage which extends from Rev. 12 to 15:4. This parenthetical passage, as in the case of the parenthesis in chapter 7 which follows the sixth seal; and the parenthesis in chapter 10 to 11:14 which follows the sixth trumpet; conveys details of events that take place during the period of the trumpets and seals. These events involve another heptad, namely: 7 communities represented by:

1. A woman clothed with the sun.
2. A great red dragon and his angels.
3. A man child or remnant of woman's seed.
4. 12 stars.
5. Michael and his angels.
6. The beast with 7 heads and 10 horns.
7. The beast with 2 horns.

Chapters 12 to 15:4 are therefore a recapitulation with many additional details. For example: the beast introduced with the barest or briefest mention in Rev. 11:7, is brought back into the spotlight in much more detail in chapter 13.

So then, the announcement in Rev. 11:15 that the kingdom of the world has become the Lord's, is an anticipatory statement - a summary of the outcome of events that will be involved in the seventh trumpet period. As in the case of the preceding 6 trumpets, each of which cover a period of time, the seventh trumpet also covers a period of time, the grand object of which is the establishment of the kingdom.

One writer has described it under the following analogy: "The heralds of William of Normandy announced as they landed on the sands of England, that the kingdom of that island had become the possession of the Duke of Normandy. An historian might begin his account with the words of the herald, and continue in a sentence saying that the land was now given to the followers of the Norman, and that the doom of those who resisted was sure. Then, after this panoramic view, the recital might turn to the battle of Hastings, and then at long length to the settling of the country, the division of the land, and the subsequent peace."

FELL UPON THEIR FACES AND WORSHIPPED

After the great voices in heaven declared that the kingdom of the world becomes the Lord's, "the four and twenty elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces (touched the ground with their foreheads) and worshipped God" (v16).

This is the fourth time we read about them doing this. The other 3 are: 4:10. 5:8-14. 7:11. The fifth and final time is in 19:4.

The worship offered by the 24 elders was not a silent worship involving only physical prostration. While prostrate before the Lord they made a declaration saying: “We give Thee thanks, O Lord God almighty, who art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned” (v17 A.V).

We learn from this that true worship involves giving thanks! This is the first and only time in the book of Revelation that the 24 elders use these actual words in their doxology; but “thanksgiving” is in the list of words used in Rev. 7:12. Reference is also made to the 4 living creatures giving thanks in 4:9.

In the words of worship in the verse under consideration, as in Rev. 1:8; are catalogued all the divine names and titles, which will find their fullness of meaning and application with the coming of the kingdom.

1. “Lord” = Adonai.
2. “God” = Elohim.
3. “Almighty” = Shaddai.
4. “Who art, and wast and art to come” = Yahweh.

But the final clause “art to come” is not in the best Greek texts, which is not surprising and to be expected. In view of the fact that the arrival of God’s kingdom has now been announced, it would be inappropriate to speak of Him as a God who “is to come.”

What are we to make of the words: “because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power and hast reigned?” According to Strong, the word “take” has many applications, and is used in the sense of “to get hold of” many times. Adam Clarke says it means: “exercised that power which Thou ever hast.” A new exercise of divine power such as the world has never seen before, and which has been restrained and limited up to this point in time, will commence at the seventh trumpet. The Jerusalem Bible renders it: “For using your great power and beginning your reign.” Compare Rev. 19: 6: “Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

Although the angels live in heaven and are not affected by things on earth, they are nevertheless obviously pleased at the prospect of heaven’s kingdom being extended to, and established upon earth. Their eagerness and desire to look into “the glory that should follow” Christ’s sufferings, mentioned in 1 Pet. 1:12, certainly indicates their personal interest in his kingdom on earth. One would like to think that they become personally attached to the saints to whom they minister, and look forward to the seventh trumpet and resurrection when they will be united with them in

immortality. This could very well be part of the reason for thanking God for exercising His power to bring about the kingdom, and this could be implied in v18.

Regarding the last words in Rev. 11:17 which, in the A.V. read: “and hast reigned:” most revised versions and modern translations agree that there should be a change of tense. It should read: “and have begun to reign.” It is clear from this at what point in time Christ begins his reign, and starts to bring the nations into subjection.

THE NATIONS WERE ANGRY

The 24 elders continue to give thanks to God in v18 because “the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, that you should give reward to your servants the prophets, and to the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great; and should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The Greek word for “angry” in the phrase: “the nations were angry,” is “orgizo.” It is derived from “orge,” which is translated “wrath” in the same verse in relation to God’s wrath. It means violent passion; enraged. Hence the expression: “orgy of violence.” Cp. Ps. 2:1: “why do the nations rage ...” The Jerusalem Bible renders it: “The nations were seething with rage, and now the time has come for your own anger.”

The nations, represented by the beast, will of course have manifested their anger against Israel, the 2 witnesses and the saints, as we saw earlier in this chapter. The same applies to the dragon who, as we read in Rev. 12:17: “was wroth (orgizo) with the woman (Israel), and went to make war with the remnant of her seed (the saints), which keep the commandments of God, and bear witness for Jesus.”

Jesus made it clear in his Olivet prophecy that in the end time there would be “wrath (orge) upon this people” (Israel) (Lk. 21:23).

The anger of the nations is obviously a destructive anger because it is stated in Rev. 11:18 that God will destroy “those who destroy the earth.” The reference in Joel 2:3 to Israel becoming a “desolate wilderness” as a result of invasion by the enemy certainly speaks of great destruction. Also compare the language in Isa. 14:17-20. “Abomination of desolation” is therefore a fitting description.

But reference to destroying the earth does not necessarily only refer to the land of Israel. It has wider applications. Egypt will also be invaded (Dan. 11:42-) and the city of Rome will be destroyed by fire within an hour by the beast (Rev. 17:17. 18:8, 10, 19). There is only one kind of fire

inflicted by man that could burn a city the size of Rome within an hour - nuclear! The reference in Rev. 11:18 to nations destroying the earth could therefore be referring to the effects of nuclear war heads. Current concern about the exploitation of earth's resources and pollution of land, sea and air; global warming, along with the possibility of nuclear accidents or war, have given a new dimension to the words "destroy the earth." Is this what Jesus had in mind when he said that were it not for his return, no living thing would survive? (Matt. 24:22).

The rage and orgy of violence of the nations will enrage God and stir Him into an orgy of violence! He says in Ezk. 38:18: "My fury shall come up in My face." His anger will reach its utmost bound and will be manifested at the battle of Armageddon to an extreme never seen before (Ezk. 38:19-23). He will shake terribly the earth (Isa. 2) and smash the kingdom of the world to pieces with violence (Dan. 2), and He shall laugh when He has them in derision and terrifies them with His fury (Ps. 2). The beast will be "slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11. Rev. 19:20). "For the great day of God's wrath will come, and who will be able to stand?"

Other references to God's wrath can be found in Rom. 2:5, 8. Eph. 5:6. Rev. 6:16, 17. 16:19. 19:15. 14:10 ("indignation").

The Greek word "thumos" is also used in the book of Revelation in relation to the wrath of God 14:10, 19. 15:1, 7. 16:1, 19 ("fierceness") and 19:15. There is quite a theme on the wrath of God in the book of Revelation, making it clear that His anger will be very hot, reaching boiling point in the end time. Significantly enough, "thermos" is derived from thumos, and is used of course for keeping things hot!

Reference in Rev. 11:18 to it being "the time of the dead, that they should be judged" and the time to reward the prophets and saints, makes it quite clear what period of history is referred to here. It is unquestionably the time of the second coming of Christ. "Behold, I come quickly: and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). "The Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). It will of course, be at this time that all who belong to him will be caught up together in clouds to meet him in the air (1 Thes. 4:17).

The "prophets" in Rev. 11:18 refer to the 2 prophets in v10 and others who also have a prophetic ministry in the end time as well as all the prophets in the past.

"The saints" refers to those who are sanctified or made holy through Christ. Saints are literally "holy ones." The Greek word is translated

“holy” in Rev. 22:11. All true believers are saints, including apostles and prophets. But, as pointed out earlier, not all saints are apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11). Other references to “saints” in the book of revelation are: 5:8. 8:3-4. 13:7, 10. (Dan. 7:18-27). 14:12. 15:3. 16:6. 17:6. 18:24. 19:8. 20:9. Also see Ps. 50:1-6.

After saying the prophets and saints will be rewarded, Rev. 11:18 then says: “And those who fear Thy name, small and great.” Does this simply describe all prophets and saints, or refer to a different class? Could it refer to people like Cornelius before he came to know Christ, who was “a devout man who feared God, and who gave alms to the people (Jews) and prayed to God constantly?” (Act. 10:1-2). Or does it relate to those referred to by Jesus in Matt. 10:41-42 who shall be rewarded for giving a cup of cold water to one of his disciples. Such people, if they have not made a commitment to Christ and have not been baptized into his name, are not likely to be rewarded with eternal life at the second coming; but grace may be extended to them as in the case of Cornelius, giving them the opportunity to make that commitment and qualify for the second resurrection and eternal life at the end of the millennium. The same could apply to the children of the saints.

The reference to “small and great” does not mean short and tall or lean and well proportioned! It refers to those who are significant and those who are insignificant in society; the well known and the not so well known; the poor and the rich. Cp. Rev. 13:16. People from all classes can and do fear God’s name.

THE TEMPLE WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN

“**A**nd the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” (v19).

The temple of God here is clearly not the temple in v1. This one in v19 is “in heaven” whereas the one in v1 is on earth in the city of Jerusalem. The reference to the temple of God being opened, resulting in lightnings etc., has a link with Rev. 15:5 which also refers to the temple in heaven being opened, out of which 7 angels come carrying the 7 last plagues. In Rev. 11 the temple is opened after the sounding of the seventh trumpet. In view of the fact that the 7 angels in Rev. 15 come out of the open temple, it is concluded that the 7 last plagues must come after the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The opening of the temple in Rev. 11:19

could therefore be seen as the signal for the angels carrying the 7 plagues to emerge. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, God's wrath comes (11:18), and the 7 last plagues poured out by the 7 angels are referred to as the wrath of God (15:7).

Notice also how lightnings, voices, thunderings, an earthquake and hail are features of the seventh trumpet (11:19) and the seventh vial (16:18, 21). The reference to "the ark of his testament" in connection with the temple of God in Rev. 11:19 also links with "the testimony" which is mentioned in connection with the temple in 15:5.

Consistent with the sequence of events being suggested here, are facts relating to the beast. The beast does not come to power until Rev. 11:7, 3½ years before the seventh trumpet. During this 3½ years he prevails over the saints, at the end of which the seventh trumpet sounds, the temple in heaven opens, and God's wrath is poured out on the beast worshipping world. This sequence is taught in both accounts. As in the case of the plagues poured out on Egypt, the series will be swift and devastating, and the people of God will not be affected by them.

THE ARK OF HIS COVENANT

The fact that reference is made in Rev. 4:5 to lightnings, thunderings and voices coming from the throne of God in heaven; and in Rev. 11:19 they are mentioned in connection with the ark of His covenant in heaven; suggests that the ark of the covenant is the throne of God. This is the only time that the phrase "ark of His covenant" occurs in the book of Revelation, and it certainly does not refer to the "lost ark" from Solomon's temple as some believe. The ark of the covenant in Solomon's temple and in the tabernacle beforehand, was a type of the throne in heaven and represented God's throne on earth. We must not therefore put the earthly copy or model in the place of the heavenly, and allow the type to usurp the place of the antitype.

The ark in the tabernacle, and Solomon's temple, was called the ark of the covenant because it contained the 2 tablets of stone upon which were inscribed 10 commandments which Israel agreed (covenanted) to keep. ("Covenant" involves solemn agreement). The legalistic context in which the law and commandments were given to Israel made them a "ministration of death" (1 Cor. 3), and they are referred to as an "old covenant." This covenant has of course, been replaced by a "new covenant," ratified not by the blood of animals, but the blood of Christ. This covenant also involves commandments, but the context of grace

instead of law, in which they are given, make it a ministration of life. God Himself is a covenant God, the source of both covenants; of law and grace, mercy and judgement; and it is therefore fitting that His throne should be referred to as “the ark of His covenant” in Rev. 11:19. To those who belong to Him, His throne is a source of grace and blessing; but to His enemies it is a source of judgement and cursing, as can be seen in Rev. 11:19 by the reference to lightnings, an earthquake, great hail etc. coming forth at the time that His wrath is poured out upon the nations.

In addition to Rev. 4:5 and 11:19, the same manifestation of lightning and thunderings etc. occurs in Rev. 8:5 and 16:18-21. On these occasions the manifestation also occurs in the context of judgement. It is as if a storm is brewing in heaven to fall in judgement upon the earth - the judgement of Armageddon. The reference to the lightnings etc. in Rev. 16:18 is certainly in the context of Armageddon (v16). In Ezk. 38:19-22 the “great shaking,” “fire” and “great hailstones” which God thrusts upon the enemy, can be linked with the earthquake, lightnings and great hail that proceed from God’s throne in Rev. 11:19.



CHAPTER NINE

REVELATION CHAPTER TWELVE

The previous chapter ended at the summit of Christian expectation. It concluded at the time when the dead are to be raised and judged, when the kingdom of God is to come, and when all Christian expectations are to be realized. The vision could, at this stage, have proceeded to describe the new Jerusalem but as it does not do so; we must conclude that chapter 12 takes us back in time to the period leading up to the second coming and kingdom of Christ.

The reason for this is because the Spirit has more detail to share concerning the communities that will be involved in end time prophecy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rev. 12 to 15:4 is a lengthy parenthetical passage and involves 7 communities that are represented by a woman clothed with the sun; a great red dragon and his angels; a man-child or woman's seed; 12 stars; Michael and his angels; the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns, and a beast with 2 horns.

As we shall see, chapter 12 onwards introduces us to some major religious struggles which will dominate the world stage in the last days. The conflict will involve 4 major monotheistic religions of the world: Christianity, Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Islam. It also involves atheism, which makes deadly assaults against the church and the Jews.

The first section of Rev. 12 reads as follows: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of 12 stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having 7 heads and 10 horns, and 7 crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth; and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up to God, and to His throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, who deceived the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of

our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before God day and night.”

This passage in Rev. 12:1-10 is often quoted to support Christendom’s doctrine of a fallen angel devil. It is generally argued that the dragon, referred to as “the serpent” refers to the serpent in Gen. 3 who deceived Eve and was used by the “devil” to bring about the fall of man. It is believed that the devil was originally a high ranking angel in heaven, who led one third of the angels in rebellion against God, and was cast out with these angels as a result of war with Michael and his angels. Since then, they have been seeking to undermine God’s authority and defeat His purposes by tempting the world into sin.

PROPHETICAL AND SYMBOLICAL

Relating Rev. 12 back to the period prior to the fall of man, immediately conflicts with a fundamental feature of the book of Revelation. The opening statement in the book states that the message is prophetic, not historical. Rev. 1:1 says: “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him, to show his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” This is repeated in the last chapter (22:6). Chapter 1:3 also states it is a “prophecy” and 4:1 says it relates to things which must be “hereafter” not “heretofore.” This means that the prophecies would take place after they were given, which would be after the first century A.D. This immediately disqualifies any interpretation which applies Rev. 12 to any period prior to New Testament times. Rev. 12 is at least 4,000 years too late to account for the origin of the traditional fallen-angel devil!

The traditional view also conflicts with another fundamental feature of the book of Revelation which is also conveyed in the opening passage in chapter one verse one. This verse not only states that the message of the book is prophetic, but also that it is “signified” i.e. conveyed by signs and symbols. As we have already seen, many aspects of the book are symbolic. Much of what John saw were not real or literal things, but signs or symbols of real things. For example: 7 stars in 1:20 signified 7 Asian churches. The lamb slain in 5:6 signified Jesus, and 7 horns and eyes signified the 7 Spirits of God. A beast with 7 heads and 10 horns in later chapters signifies a confederacy of anti-Israel nations, and a beast like a lamb with 2 horns who spoke like a dragon, signifies a false prophet.

LITERAL INTERPRETATION CREATES DIFFICULTIES

Consider the difficulties that are created if we take Rev. 12 literally and apply it to a fallen-angel devil:

Verse 1 speaks about a woman in heaven clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of 12 stars. It should be evident that a literal woman could not be suspended in literal heaven clothed with the literal sun, wearing a crown of 12 literal stars. The woman, sun, moon and stars are obviously symbolic, and the same applies to the “heaven” where the “wonder” is seen, involving the woman and the dragon.

Verse 3 refers to the great red dragon with 7 heads, 10 horns, 7 crowns upon his heads and a tail that cast down one third of the stars of heaven. Verse 9 says this dragon is “called the devil and Satan.” This is who Michael and his angels fight against and cast out of heaven. So if we take the description literally, the devil is not an angel, but a hideous animal-like monster - a red dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns, who has a long swishing tail that reaches light years into space to the stars, and casts one third of them down on to the earth. It is at this point that it is particularly obvious that the language is symbolic. Stars, being suns, are much larger than the earth. The earth would be totally destroyed if just one was cast upon it!

Realizing this, expositors of the traditional view agree that the stars cast on to the earth are not literal but symbolic, and link them with the angels in v9 which were cast down to the earth with the dragon by Michael. It is at this point that the unsatisfactory nature of this interpretation is particularly obvious.

A careful reading of the verses reveals that the stars in v4 belong to the woman not the dragon, and are cast down by the dragon. But the angels in v7-9 belong to the dragon and are cast down with the dragon by Michael.

The dragon is an enemy of both the woman and the 12 stars associated with her; for that reason he casts one third of them down. The dragon is likened to a crocodile which lashes out with its tail and sweeps its prey into its clutches.

It is quite clear that the stars are not friends or allies of the dragon-devil; they have not joined or supported the dragon in a rebellion against God, and are not cast out by God. The dragon himself casts the stars down from their “heaven” while he remains in his “heaven” with his “angels.” He holds his position of power until Michael wages war against him and casts him out.

Nowhere is it stated that the dragon's angels cast out were one third. The reference to one third is in relation to the stars belonging to the woman, which the dragon is against and casts down. Neither is there any reference in Rev. 12 to the angels being divine and belonging to God. They are specifically referred to as the dragon's angels, not God's. The belief that one third of God's angels were cast out of heaven has no basis whatever in Rev. 12 or any other verse in the Bible.

Rev. 12:4 says the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. Taken literally, this would mean the devil is a cannibal, eager to gobble up new born baby boys - so eager that he stands in front of a pregnant woman as she goes through the birth pangs of labour, waiting for her to give birth. Once again it is evident that this is symbolic language.

In view of the fact that all the different aspects that we have been looking at in Rev. 12 are symbolic; it is to be expected that the "heaven" in which the woman and dragon are at first seen, is symbolic also. Reference to "war in heaven" is proof positive that the heaven is not God's abode. God's heaven is the pinnacle of perfection and cannot be marred by sin, due to the untemptable nature of the divine immortal state. If wars, infighting and division can occur in this heaven, then it is reduced to the same level as the kingdoms of men on earth. The Christian hope of attaining immortality and equality with the angels would therefore be seriously undermined, and the merit of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven" would be questionable.

As a result of the dragon-devil being cast out, Rev. 12:10-11 says: "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ." Was this the result of tradition's devil being cast out of heaven prior to the fall of man? Did the kingdom of God and Christ come then or show signs of being on the horizon? No! Quite the opposite. Instead of the kingdom coming, paradise was lost!

Regarding the casting out of the dragon-devil; Rev. 12:10 goes on to say: "The accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death."

We are told here that prior to the dragon-devil being cast out of heaven, he was accusing the brethren of Christ and putting them to death. Will the traditional view allow this? Will it accept that prior to being cast out of heaven before the fall of man, the devil was persecuting and killing

members of Christ's church? No, it cannot, because Christ's church did not exist at the time. It was not formed until 4,000 years later! Once again this confirms that Rev. 12 is prophetic, not historical.

WHAT THEN?

If Rev. 12 is not speaking about fallen angels, what is it speaking about? In seeking an answer to this question, it is important to remember that much of the prophetic content of the book of Revelation is based on Old Testament Scriptures. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, it has been calculated that the book contains over 700 quotations from those Scriptures. Because so much of the metaphor and symbology has its roots there, we have a Scriptural basis on which it can be interpreted, comparing Scripture with Scripture instead of making guesses and assumptions.

Rev. 12:1 commences by saying: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven." The word "wonder" means a sign, token, indication. This is the first time the word occurs in the book of Revelation. It occurs again in v3 in relation to the dragon. It basically means an amazing sight or miraculous phenomenon, which is a sign or symbol of something. In Rev. 12:1 the sign was: "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of 12 stars."

The only other place in Scripture where the symbols of the sun, moon and 12 stars are combined is Joseph's dream in Gen. 37:9-11 where they relate to Israel. The sun signified Joseph's father Jacob; the moon signified his mother, and the 11 stars signified his brethren, making Joseph the 12th.

It was of course from the 12 "stars" that the 12 tribes of Israel developed and there is constant emphasis throughout Scripture on 12 tribes representing the nation. The number 12 is clearly and distinctly Israel's number.

If, as we shall see, the "woman" represents the nation of Israel, it may be wondered why the 12 stars are added. The reason is, as we shall see, because one third of Israel's population will be purged by the dragon and is signified by the casting down of one third of the stars. If the symbol of the woman by herself without the 12 stars was used to signify Israel, how could this purging be conveyed? It could hardly be conveyed by depicting her without some of her fingers or toes, or minus other body parts; such symbology lacks precedent in the Word of God and would not be understood. However, the Old testament Scriptures do use both the

figure of a woman and stars to signify Israel as we shall see, making the symbology easy to be understood.

The number 12 is not only associated with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, but also the New testament. One of the reasons for Jesus choosing 12 apostles was so that when the kingdom is restored to Israel and he sits on David's throne at Jerusalem, the 12 apostles will be able to sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). For this reason, it was so important for there to be 12 apostles, that when Judas dropped out, leaving 11, they were eager to replace him and make the number up to 12 again (Act. 1:15-26).

Act. 26:6-7 records the apostle Paul saying that in his day the 12 tribes were earnestly serving God day and night, hoping to attain to the hope of the promise made by God to their forefathers. And we read in Jam. 1:1 that James' epistle was addressed to "the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad."

We have also seen that the 12 tribes of the children of Israel in Rev. 7 refer to the nation of Israel in the end time, living in their land. The 12 stars in Rev. 12 relate to those same 12 tribes in Rev. 7 and to the same end time period.

Without the crown of 12 stars, the woman in Rev. 12 could represent a number of different things. But the 12 stars identify her with Israel. Some believe she represents the Christian church, but there are no Scriptures that associate 12 stars with Christ's church. Rev. 1:20 associates 7 stars with the Christian community but not 12.

Many suggestions have been offered to identify this woman clothed with the sun. The church of Rome has maintained that she represents Mary the mother of Jesus, and teaches that the vision of a "heavenly mother and child" refers to Mary's bodily assumption into heaven and justifies worship of her. In 1678 the Spanish artist Murillo created his famous painting "mystery of the immaculate conception"; a painting of a pregnant woman clothed with the glory of the sun about her, and the crescent moon under her feet, and the coronet of stars upon her head.

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, was conceited enough to blasphemously claim that she was represented by the woman in Rev. 12. She added that the "man child" she brought forth is Christian Science, and that the dragon is the mortal mind attempting to destroy her new religion.

A female preacher in California also toyed with the idea that she might be the woman mentioned in this chapter.

These and other applications of Rev. 12:1 all fail to observe the two

fundamental keys of interpretation provided in Rev. 1:1, namely: that the message is prophetic not historical, and symbolical not literal. The “woman” in Rev. 12 is not a literal woman and cannot therefore refer to Mary Baker Eddy or any other woman. Being prophetic, it certainly cannot refer to Joseph’s wife Mary being pregnant with Jesus. Mary gave birth to Jesus almost a century before the Revelation was given. Furthermore, not only is it difficult to conceive of Mary being “in heaven” before the resurrection; it is impossible to conceive of her giving birth to her child in heaven! The gospels are quite clear: Jesus was born on earth at Bethlehem.

In addition to the two fundamental keys of interpretation that the various applications of Rev. 12 fail to observe, there is of course a third, namely, that the nation of Israel is the focal centre of the prophetic testimony. The replacement theology which has removed the nation of Israel from the centre of the Word of prophecy, replacing her with the church, cannot of course, accept that the woman with the crown of 12 stars is Israel. It insists that it refers to the church, and the continuous historic interpretation adopts this approach to the prophecy, and there are several versions of it.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORIC INTERPRETATION

One of the most popular versions is that the woman represents the original New Testament church which was pure and “chaste” in doctrine. The “man child” that the woman gave birth to was the Roman emperor Constantine, who claimed to have espoused the Christian faith and was regarded as the first Christian emperor; but who, in fact, eventually superimposed pagan ideas on the faith and corrupted it. To a degree, Constantine championed the cause of Christianity and fought against paganism which was deeply embedded in the Roman empire. The dragon in Rev. 12 is therefore seen as representing paganism or the pagan Roman empire.

Constantine overthrew paganism as a state religion and he reigned supreme as a so-called Christian emperor. The woman being clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet and wearing a crown of 12 stars is related to this. The sun is seen as representing political and civil power with which the church was invested as a result of the emperor being a Christian. The moon under the woman’s feet is seen as the pagan priesthood and religion being subdued. The 12 stars are regarded as representing 12 “princes” i.e. Caesars who ruled Rome since the

establishment of the imperial system by Augustus (A.D. 18) through to Nerva (A.D. 98). It is contended that these 12 Caesars represented the authority of Rome at the time the Revelation was given, and that John saw them gracing the crown upon the head of the woman, indicating that she had attracted to herself the authority of the state.

The problem with this is that in relation to the book of Revelation, the 12 Caesars who reigned during 18 A.D. to 98 A.D. fit into the category of history not prophecy! The 12 stars are prophetic not historical.

It is said that there are 280 days from conception to birth and on the basis of a day for a year, it becomes 280 years. This period is then applied from the preaching at the day of Pentecost in Act. 2 when the church was established which is said to have been in 33 A.D. to 313 A.D. when the wars of Constantine brought him to supreme power and the church was state recognised. One writer summarizes the situation by saying: "The man-child had been born of the seeds of error implanted at the very beginning."

But how could the preaching at the day of Pentecost when the church was established, be seen as the implantation of the seeds of error?

Reference to the woman travailing in birth and being "pained to be delivered" is related to persecution of the Christian community, especially by the Roman emperor Diocletian prior to the time of Constantine.

As already mentioned, the great red dragon is regarded as pagan imperial Rome, and the one third of the stars that he casts down are said to represent one of the three provinces into which the Roman empire was divided. The three main provinces are said to be the west, the east and the Illyrian. Before coming to power, Constantine ruled in the west, but Galerius, the chief ruler and main authority in Rome, viewed Constantine with the greatest suspicion and made preparation to attack and invade the west. This is seen to be signified by the dragon standing before the woman who was about to give birth, to devour her child.

As a result of his triumphant march against Rome and the death of Galerius, Constantine ruled Rome, Maximin ruled the eastern division of the empire, and Licinius ruled Illyricum. Both Constantine and Licinius issued a decree of toleration for Christians, but not Maximin, leaving him as the contender for paganism. He boldly proclaimed his intention of overthrowing Christianity, and initiated a holy war by attacking Licinius. However, Maximin died shortly after this, and Licinius annexed his territory in the eastern division of the empire to his own. This drawing of the eastern third of the empire by Licinius to himself is regarded as the fulfilment of the dragon drawing with his tail one third of the stars of

heaven. Licinius then repudiated his previous decree of toleration for Christians, and assumed the mantle of the champion of paganism. Thus, the “dragon” again stood before the woman and her man-child to destroy it. In the ultimate overthrow of Licinius, however, as one writer puts it: “The third part of the stars that he had gathered to himself, were cast down to the earth.”

So then, the continuous historic view says in one breath that the 12 stars are 12 Caesars, then it says one third of them refers to one of the 3 divisions of the Roman empire. How can the stars be men in one verse then territory in the next? How can 4 stars (one third of 12) become one division of the Roman empire (one third of 3)? It is also quite unsatisfactory to relate the annexing of territory to the dragon to the drawing of stars with his tail. The drawing of the stars involves casting them down, which, as we shall see, involves destroying them, as is the case when crocodiles lash out with their tail at their victim. The application given by the continuous historic view to “drawing” is quite contrary to the destruction that it signifies.

Regarding the reference to the man-child being caught up to God and His throne: the view taken by continuous historic exponents is that it signifies Constantine’s ascension or elevation to the political and ecclesiastical heavens or high places where he ruled with a rod of iron.

In the days of Constantine, Christians were divided into two camps: there were those who believed it was acceptable to God for Christians to get involved in politics and conflicts for power and position in the world, and to take up the carnal sword to fight and kill for that purpose. Such so-called Christians supported Constantine in his battles against paganism and regarded him as a man of God, if not an angel sent by God. The other camp of Christians believed it was not acceptable to God to get involved in the politics of the world or to take up the sword to kill. There were other doctrinal issues as well that Constantine and his supporters believed, that the other group of Christians could not accept. They therefore did not support Constantine and ended up in conflict with him, and this resulted in them being denounced as heretics, excommunicated and exiled. The continuous historic advocates believe that this group of Christians, whose stand and beliefs were Scriptural, is the woman referred to in Rev. 12:6 who fled into the wilderness. They refused to have any part or lot with what they regarded as an apostate state that had developed into an apostate religion. One writer puts it like this: “Having given birth to her son, she fled from his influence, because, having grown to power he was prepared to destroy her.”

The “war in heaven” in v7 is taken to mean war in the political high places between Constantine and Licinius, in which the latter was defeated and slain. “Michael and his angels” is taken to refer to Constantine and his forces, who fought in the name of Christ, who, as the name Michael signifies, was one like God. Because Constantine fought in the name of Christ and claimed to be assisted by the Lord, it is claimed that he therefore assumed the status of Christ’s representative on earth, and therefore stands as the representative Michael.

The “dragon and his angels” against whom Michael and his angels fought are said to be the pagan ruler Licinius along with the pagan priests and supporters. Being cast out of heaven is seen as signifying expulsion from all authority. Many mistook Constantine’s victory over paganism to mean the kingdom of God had come, and the reference in v10 to a loud voice saying in heaven “Now is come salvation ... and the kingdom of our God” is interpreted in this light.

The last section of Rev. 12 refers to the dragon, after being cast out, pursuing and persecuting the woman who had fled into the wilderness. The continuous historic exponents at this point interpret the dragon to be the state sponsored church which had dethroned the old pagan dragon. The reason for this, they say, is because the state church had embraced many of the pagan doctrines and spirit, virtually superimposing paganism on Christianity; therefore it is referred to by the same symbol. Hence, the dragon is given two different applications. It is applied to pagan imperial Rome as well as the state church that overthrew it.

It should be clear to anyone who reads Rev. 12 without bias or prejudice, that it is the same dragon referred to throughout. Any interpretation which makes it mean basically different things in different parts of the chapter is unacceptable.

In the final analysis, the continuous historic view says the man-child, Michael and the dragon - all three of them, represented Constantine! The man-child casts the dragon out of heaven and then becomes the dragon himself! This is simply not good enough. Michael is a holy angel of very high standing in the sight of God - an archangel, specially appointed to oversee the affairs of the nation of Israel: (Dan. 10:13, 21. 12:1. Jude v9). To affirm that the reference to Michael in Rev. 12 relates to Constantine, an apostate Roman emperor, is quite an insult. The same applies to the man-child, who, as we shall see, refers to those who are spiritually regenerated in the nation of Israel in the end time and who become part of the body of Christ. To affirm that the man-child is the apostate Constantine, must be very grievous to the Holy Spirit.

Let us then look at Rev. 12 in the light of it being prophetic, symbolical and having the nation of Israel as the focal centre ...

A WOMAN IN HEAVEN

The first “wonder” that John saw in heaven was a woman. As mentioned earlier, the crown of 12 stars upon her head is the key to her identity. She signifies Israel. The feminine gender is often applied to the nation of Israel in Scripture. One of the many examples that could be quoted is Isa. 54:4-8 which refers to her as “a woman forsaken” but being called back by God. She is referred to as a wife wooed and won in youth, but cast off for a time by God due to sin and iniquity. But God goes on to say: “For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you.”

In Jer. 31:15 (quoted in Matt. 2:18), the nation is referred to as “Rachel,” and Isa. 50:1-2 uses the title “mother.”

The word “heaven” in which John saw the woman, is used in a number of different ways in Scripture. In the preceding verse (Rev. 11:19), and many other places, heaven refers to the place of God’s throne (Rev. 4:1-2). But, the fact that the dragon in Rev. 12:3 is also referred to as being in the same heaven as the woman, Israel; indicates that neither he nor she were literally or physically where God’s throne is situated.

The dragon certainly could not have been there at the time John received the vision, because this power will not physically exist until the end time as we shall see. However, the end time events involving the woman and dragon have been known to God and have existed in His mind from the beginning of time, and if he projected the vision to John while he was in heaven in the Spirit, it would be natural for him to describe it in terms of a great wonder appearing in heaven. If man can create live pictures in colour in the atmosphere by directing laser beams on to a spray of water, or by projecting pictures on to a screen; God could certainly create scenes for John to see. Everything that happens on earth in fulfilment of God’s purpose; both good and evil; exists in heaven in His mind beforehand.

The word heaven is also used in Scripture to signify the air or atmosphere above the earth in which birds fly, and into which trees tower and high walls reach (Gen. 1:6-8. 11:4. Jer. 4:25. 8:7. 15:3. 51:53. Matt. 11:23).

Ps. 107:25-26 even refers to the stormy wind whipping up the ocean,

causing waves to “mount up to heaven.”

Due to the Edomites living high up the mountains, they are referred to in Obadiah v3-4 as flying high as an eagle and setting their nests among the stars.

Also, in Isa. 34 the armies of the Edomites due to their high dwelling places, are referred to as “the host (army) of heaven.” But God pronounced judgement against them and expressed it in these words: “My sword shall be bathed in heaven; behold, it shall come down upon Edom ... their blood shall run down the mountains.”

Because the Medes lived far away in a mountainous country, they are referred to as coming “from the end of heaven” (Isa. 13:5).

There is also an interesting reference to heaven in connection with stars in Judg. 5:20: “From heaven fought the stars; in their courses they fought against Sisera.” In this verse the stars refer to Israelites who came down from the heights of Mount Tabor (Judg. 4:14) and fought against the Canaanites and their captain, Sisera.

METAPHORICAL APPLICATIONS

As the heaven (atmosphere) is over and above the earth, the word is also used in Scripture in a figurative sense, to describe the position of men and nations who have been elevated to positions of power and authority. A good example of this can be seen in Dan. 4 which relates to the king of Babylon.

In a dream inspired by God, he is depicted as a tree which was strong and grew to a great height, reaching to heaven. Daniel interpreted the dream to him saying: “It is you, O king, who have grown strong, for your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the end of the earth.”

In the dream, the tree was cut down and fell from heaven, signifying the fall of the king of Babylon from his position of power and prominence.

Isa. 14 also relates to this. Verse 4 of this chapter makes it clear that it refers to the king of Babylon and that it is a “proverb,” i.e. a discourse involving metaphorical speech. Verse 12 in the A.V. refers to the king as “Lucifer,” which is properly translated “morning star” or “day star” in most revised versions. It refers to the planet Venus which rises on the horizon in the morning, but falls away again before reaching its zenith. The fall of the king of Babylon from power is likened to this: “How art thou fallen from heaven O day star ...”

Verse 13 expresses the king's ambition for power over and above the nations in terms of wanting to "ascend into heaven." In attaining this, he hoped to "exalt his throne above the stars of God" and "sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north" and "be like the most High."

According to Ps. 48:1-2, "the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north" refers to the city of Jerusalem, which is described as being: "beautiful for elevation ... is mount Zion, on the sides of the north ..."

The temple of "the most High" was situated at Jerusalem and the king of Babylon cast his ambitious eyes in that direction, intending to take possession of it and so be "like the most High." In order to do this, he had to gain ascendancy over the Israelites who are referred to as "the stars of God." This is what is signified by the words: "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God."

At the time, Israel had her own throne at Jerusalem and her own king sat upon it. This throne, appointed by God in David's time, represented God's throne on earth and Israel was the kingdom of God (1 Chr. 28:5. 29:23). In this sense Zion was heaven on earth. The king of Babylon's intention was to ascend to that heaven, usurp God's throne and establish his own authority and sovereignty over the land, ruling the nation of Israel instead of their God.

Prior to this, especially when Solomon was king of Israel and the nation attained its peak of power and prosperity, Israel was, metaphorically speaking, "in heaven" - in high places nationally and politically; a very exalted nation, elevated above all others around her. It is not surprising therefore, to find that her fall from power and prominence as a result of being conquered by the Babylonians, is referred to in Lam. 2:1 in terms of being "cast down from heaven."

There is a saying that "pride comes before a fall," and pride was certainly a major factor in the fall of both Babylon and Israel due to being corrupted by power. Job 20:6 relates to this: "Though his (the proud man) pride mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds, yet he shall perish ..." In connection with this, it is interesting to note that "haughty people" in Isa. 24:4 in the A.V. is translated "heavens" in some revised versions. And in Isa. 24:21 in the A.V. reference is made to the Lord punishing on the day of judgement "the host of the high ones on high," which some translate as "the host of heaven that are in heaven."

POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL HEAVENS

The word “heaven” is used metaphorically in Scripture to signify power and position in both a political and ecclesiastical sense i.e. in a secular and religious sense. The world has its “heaven” and the church has its “heaven” also. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians mentions these.

In Eph. 1:3 and 2:6 he says Christians are “in heavenly places in Christ.” Although their feet are very much upon the ground; in heart and spirit they are with Christ in heaven. They are in a very privileged position, having power and authority in Christ over sin and death, ruling now in this life over the world’s lusts, being prospective rulers over the world itself in the age to come.

But Eph. 3:10 says that secular governments and authorities are also in heavenly places, and so they are in a political or secular sense. Paul says Christians must be subject to these “higher powers” because they are ordained by God (Rom. 13:1). He also says that it is the duty and responsibility of the church to make known to them the wisdom of God, which is Christ (Eph. 3:10).

The concept of heaven signifying power or rule is also borne out in Isa. 1:2 where we read about a message addressed to “the heavens” and the earth. Verse 10 explains that it refers to “rulers” and common people.

Even modern newspapers and magazines use these metaphorical expressions, especially when dealing with political events involving the setting up and deposing of rulers. We are reminded of an expression in Cicero’s well known speech to Mark Antony: “You have hurled your colleagues down from heaven.”

With these thoughts in mind, we come back to the woman in heaven in Rev. 12. That it does not mean she was literally and physically before God’s throne is confirmed by the fact that when her child is born, he is “caught up to God and His throne.” If the woman was already there when she gave birth, how could her child be caught up there when he was born? Also, although the woman was in heaven, we read in v6 that she fled into the wilderness. This indicates that “heaven” is a state she occupies while upon earth. There is no wilderness in God’s heaven!

In view of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the prophecy concerning the woman in heaven, refers to the nation of Israel ascending or coming up in the world among the nations to a place of political and national power and prominence. This of course, is Israel’s position today. As a result of the Exodus back to the land after the holocaust, the Jews have risen from their valley of bones and ashes, and have rebuilt and restored their land and nation in the Middle East, with world-wide effects.

The word of prophecy made it clear that the Jews would return to their land and become a nation again prior to the battle of Armageddon and second coming of Christ. Armageddon in fact, could never happen until the Jews returned to their land, because it involves the Lord doing battle with nations that invade the nation of Israel. The return of the Jews and rebirth of the nation of Israel is therefore a great “sign” or “wonder” in the political heavens. For nearly 1,900 years the nation was non-existent and had no political power or influence. But in one day the nation was reborn and attained powers of sovereignty and rulership. It was to be expected that this unique event in Israel’s history would occupy a place in the Revelation prophecies. How significant and appropriate that it is the first sign in the signs section of Revelation! Failure to mention it would be a fundamental omission and totally out of character with the spirit that characterises the prophetic Word.

ISRAEL IN THE PHYSICAL HEAVEN

Israel’s rise to power in the political heavens has coincided with man’s ability to conquer the force of gravity and literally rise into the physical heaven, firstly in aeroplanes but now in rockets. Israel today is not only in “heaven” in a political sense, but also in a literal physical sense. She has the most modern and efficient air force in the Middle East, consisting of highly sophisticated aircraft. Israel has in fact, for some time now, developed her own aeroplane industry.

Some may be surprised to be told that several prophecies intimate that Israel would be able to fly in the last days. For example, Isa. 60:8 says: “Who are these who fly as a cloud, like doves flying to their dovecote openings?” This prophecy refers to the Jews returning to their homeland through the air, flying like clouds and doves. As doves always fly back and return to their dovecote openings, so the Jews have returned to their land.

There have been some dramatic airlifts involved in Israel’s return to her land. Among the most dramatic were the airlifts of 50,000 Jews from Yemen, completed in 1950. Also the evacuation of more than 100,000 from Iraq, completed in July 1951. It was known as “Operation Flying Carpet,” and removed practically 100% of the Jews from those countries.

Many of the Jews involved had never even heard of an aeroplane before. They thought they were mounting a giant bird. Talk about the Lord carrying His people on eagle’s wings: what more fitting metaphor could be used to describe this operation?! Even the Zionist council of New York

saw the prophetic nature of these flights. It said: “The process of return from exile has taken on a swiftness of tempo, and a greatness of scale, that carries the mind back to the mighty soaring prophecies of the Bible.” Among the passages of Scripture quoted by the council was Isa. 60 which refers to Jews flying like a cloud, as doves returning to their dovecote openings.

Another prophecy which has been interpreted to refer to Israel flying is in Isa. 11:14 which says: “They will fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines.”

In Biblical times, the Philistines, from whom the name “Palestine” is derived, lived in the territory known as the Gaza strip, now occupied by people who call themselves “Palestinians.” Up until the 1967 war between Israel and the Arabs, the Gaza strip was occupied by the Egyptians, who used it as a base to attack and terrorize the Jews, as did the ancient Philistines when they lived there. Prophetically speaking, the Egyptians occupying that land became the modern Philistines, and during the 1967 war, the Jews literally flew upon their shoulders; they attacked from overhead in their fighter planes and defeated them. They have also done the same to the Palestinians due to the incursion of their terrorists.

But the prophecy in Isa. 11 has not been completely fulfilled, as events in the future will reveal.

Other prophecies have also been regarded as hinting that man will be in “heaven” in a literal physical sense in the last days. For example, the language of the prophecies relating to the invasion of Israel could be taken to mean the enemy will attack, not only from land and sea, but also from the air. Ezk. 38:9, 16 for instance, says he will “ascend and come against Israel like a storm, like a cloud to cover the land.” Clouds and storms travel through the air!

Verses which could never be taken literally in the past and were therefore regarded as metaphorical, can now be given a more literal application due to the advent of aviation. For example, Deu. 28:49 refers to the invader being “as swift as the eagle flies.” Hab. 1:8 says: “They shall fly like eagles attacking their prey.” Joel chapter 1 likens the invading forces to locusts descending upon the land with devastating results. Dan. 11:40 says the invader will “come like a whirlwind” i.e. like a tornado which sweeps across the sky with destructive force, smashing and destroying everything in its path.

Today, in our modern world, if someone was asked to give an opinion on what was meant by reference to a nation being cast out of heaven, they would more than likely suggest that it meant the destruction of the

nation's air force, or that its planes and missiles were prevented from having access to the skies. This actually happened to Iraq as a result of the Gulf war in 1991, with the result that no aerial resistance was made against the U.S.A. and Britain when they invaded in 2003. In saying this it is not intended to convey that this is what the reference in Rev. 12 to the dragon being cast out of heaven means, but it is an interesting thought. Although this may not be what is actually meant, it may nevertheless be involved in the fulfilment of the prophecy.

CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

Ps. 84:11 says: "The Lord God is a sun and a shield." Clothes are worn for protection from the elements and from the embarrassment and indignity of nudity. To be clothed with the sun could therefore signify being protected and defended by God. And who could deny the hand of God in the provisions and protection that have enabled Israel to survive the attacks of Arab nations who grossly outnumbered her! Even the secular press around the world openly hailed Israel's victory during the six-day war in June 1967 as a "miracle."

In Lam. 2:1-2, suffering the anger and displeasure of God is referred to as being clothed with a cloud: "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud." To be clothed with the sun is the opposite to being clothed with a cloud, and could very well signify God's face shining on Israel. Lam. 2:1-2 refers to the overthrow of Israel and Rev. 12:1 can be seen as the rebirth and restoration.

A person wearing bright clothing might be described as looking bright, and the same would apply to one clothed with the sun. As far as Israel is concerned, this would be in contrast to the dark and dismal times of deep despair experienced during centuries of exile, persecution and suffering. During that time the Jews were not clothed with the sun, but "covered with the shadow of death" (Ps. 44:19). It is quite common for Scripture to use darkness to signify sorrow, suffering and death (Ps. 88:6. 143:3. Isa. 5:30. 8:21-22. 17:4. 24:11. Jer. 13:16).

In Jer. 15:9 sorrow, sadness and the loss of hope is described symbolically in terms of the sun going down. Had God not been with Israel to preserve her, re-gather her to her land and restore her as a nation; protecting her against Arab attack, she would have been defeated and disappeared into the darkness of gloom. But, in the words of Ps. 107:14: "He (God) brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder."

Unfortunately, many of the Jews in the nation of Israel do not believe in God and therefore do not acknowledge the help and protection He has so graciously given. In the same sense that the end time invading forces in Ezk. 38:4 will “clothe themselves with all sorts of armour,” Israel has also clothed herself with the same, believing that her survival is entirely dependent upon her own weapons of warfare and her ability to use them. Her motto is not: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord,” but rather: “Not by God’s Spirit, but by my own might and power.”

Although Israel has not used nuclear weapons, it is common knowledge that she possesses them. They form part of the defence with which she has “clothed” herself to be used as a last resort to protect herself against any threat of extermination.

Because a hydrogen bomb is a miniature sun, reproducing the same fiery process as the sun, generating heat as intense as the centre of the sun; it is natural to wonder if this could be signified by Israel being clothed with the sun in Rev. 12:1. Could it be that this prophecy is revealing the extent to which Israel will be allowed to advance in harnessing the powers of the universe for her protection?

One thing is certain; being clothed with the sun does not signify worship of the sun. If worship of the sun were intended, the woman would be depicted bowing before it, not being clothed with it.

Regarding “THE MOON UNDER HER FEET”: In Scripture, being under the feet signifies being under control; i.e. a state of submission and subjection. (Cp. Josh. 10:24. 2 Sam. 22:39. 1 Kng. 5:3. Ps. 8:6. with 1 Cor. 15:23-28). Reference to the moon being under the feet of Israel can be given several applications. For example: the moon marks the seasons (Ps. 104:19), and the times and seasons governing the destiny of nations, as in the case of the boundaries of the nations (Deut. 32:8), are regulated by, and subject to Israel’s position.

In Biblical times, Israel’s calendar year was composed of lunar months, which began when the thin crescent of the new moon was first visible at sunset. The moon could therefore be seen as representing the Hebrew calendar upon which all holy days, religious observances and the rituals which revolved around the temple were based, and by which they were governed. But, when Israel’s temple was destroyed by the Romans and the Jews were expelled from their land and driven into dispersion among Gentile nations, Israel lost control of her calendar and could no longer keep its religious rituals and observances.

However, in the end time, Israel will rebuild the temple at Jerusalem enabling her to take control. This will be seen in the observance of the

various holy days and rituals required by the calendar. This is one view of what could be signified by the moon being under the feet of the woman.

A slight variation of this view regards the moon under the feet as representing a basis upon which the woman stands. This is seen to signify Israel taking a stand upon the religious observances of the law, much in the same way that Christians “stand fast and hold the traditions which they have been taught” (2 Thes. 2:15).

Another view is that because the flags of many Moslem countries have a crescent which resembles the moon in its first quarter, the moon under the woman’s feet could signify Israel’s victory over the various Arab nations that have attacked her in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973.

Up until the twentieth century, it was inconceivable that human feet would ever be able to literally stand on the moon. Early expositors therefore did not consider the possibility that the reference to the moon being under the feet would one day become a literal reality. It is not being suggested that this is what Rev. 12:1 signifies, but if Israel ever got involved in space travel and ended up on the moon, it might cause some to make this connection.

Ultimately, when Jesus returns, Israel’s “sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (Isa. 60:20).

BEING WITH CHILD, TRAVAILING

Rev. 12:2 says the woman “being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.” The woman that John saw was clearly at the last stage of pregnancy and about to give birth to a “man child.” We are not told how long she was in heaven, clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet before becoming pregnant and starting to travail; so we don’t know how long Israel will attain political power and victory over the Arabs before this takes place. Taking the formal official establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 as the beginning of political power; over 5 decades have so far run their course.

Regarding the reference to “travailing in birth and in pain to deliver”: “travail” is quite a common metaphor in Scripture to signify trouble and tribulation. It is used many times in the Old Testament in relation to Israel’s tribulation caused by the threats and attacks of hostile nations and the judgements of God. See: 2 Kng. 19:3. Isa. 26:16-18. Jer. 4:31. 6:24. 13:21. 30:4-7. Mic. 4:9-10. Hos. 13:12-13. (1 Thes. 5:3. Jn. 16:21).

The Greek word for “pained” means to torture, torment. It is translated “torment” in Matt. 8:29 in relation to a demoniac expressing fear that Jesus was going to torment him with the cruel torture used in those days by exorcists. The same word is also translated “tormented” in Rev. 9:5 to describe the effect of the sting of locusts which had tails like scorpions.

Obviously the process involved in the woman giving birth to the man-child is very painful. It is not an easy birth.

If, as shall be suggested, the “man-child” refers to the emergence in Israel of a strong community of Christian Jews, it is not difficult to imagine the internal struggle and conflict this will cause. The nation of Israel is very opposed to any movement or effort that teaches and preaches that Jesus is the Messiah and king; and have laws in place preventing evangelization.

But Rev. 12 does not limit the travailing to the internal struggle within the nation of Israel itself in giving birth to the man child. External forces in the form of anti-Israel and anti-Christian nations also come on the scene in the form of a dragon and cause travailing and tribulation. This should not surprise us because the Word of prophecy spoke about this travail occurring in Israel’s time of trouble. For example, Jer. 30:4-7: “These are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the Lord; we have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now and see whether a man travails with child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in travail, and all faces have turned pale? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; (“time of trouble such as never was” Dan. 12:1) it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” Again, Mic. 5:3: “Yahweh is therefore going to give them up (i.e. give Israel up to the enemy) until the time when she who travails has brought forth: Then the remnant of his brethren shall return to the children of Israel.”

A GREAT RED DRAGON

“**A**nd there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having 7 heads and 10 horns, and 7 crowns upon his heads.”

Whoever the dragon is; like the woman, he also is referred to as being “in heaven.” As in the case of the woman, this does not refer to the place of God’s throne, but political power. The fact that the dragon and the

woman are referred to as being “in heaven” at the same time indicates they are contemporary with each other and possibly attain their respective political power during the same or similar period in history.

As the following verses indicate, the dragon is anti-Israel and anti-Christian, and causes travail for both. He casts down one third of the woman’s stars (one third of Israel’s population), which implies invasion. Verse 17 says he is “angry” with the woman, and v13 says he persecutes her. He also seeks to devour and destroy her child.

The Greek word for dragon is drakon and it only occurs 13 times in the New Testament, all in the book of Revelation. As we shall see, the same word is also translated dragon in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Regarding the reference to the dragon being “red”: the Greek word for this is different from the one translated “scarlet” in Rev. 17:3 in relation to the beast. There are many Greek words to describe varying shades of red, from pink through scarlet and crimson. The particular word used in this passage is found only here and in the description of the red horse (6:4). The word comes from the Greek word for fire, and speaks of ferocity and cruelty.

During the second to the fifth centuries of the Christian era, next to the eagle, the dragon was the principal standard of the Roman legions and was painted red. For this reason, many identify pagan Rome with the dragon. But China is also represented by a dragon, not to mention other nations. However, the appropriation of the symbol of a dragon by a nation cannot by itself prove that such a nation is the dragon referred to in Revelation, especially in view of the fact that Scripture itself identifies the dragon, and it is neither pagan Rome nor China!

Earlier on in chapter 11:7, reference was made for the first time to the beast, and we meet up with him again in chapter 13:1 where he also, like the dragon, is described as having 7 heads and 10 horns. In view of this, it would be easy to identify the one with the other, and conclude that they are one and the same power. But the book of Revelation does not allow this conclusion. It makes a clear distinction between the dragon and the beast, and presents them as contemporary, but separate and distinct powers. See Rev. 13:2, 4. 16:13. 19:20-. 20:3, 10.

The 7 heads and 10 horns on both the dragon and beast have the same significance, but the animals themselves, being different, have a different significance.

SEVEN HEADS

Rev. 17:9-11 informs us that the 7 heads have a dual significance. They represent 7 mountains on which the “harlot” sits, and they also signify 7 kings. At this stage we will focus on the aspect of the 7 kings.

Concerning the kings, Rev. 17:10-11 says: “5 have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain a little while. The beast who once was and now is not, is an eighth king. He is of the 7 and is going to his destruction.”

Because kings rule over kingdoms, the 7 kings represent 7 kingdoms or empires, which are symbolized by “beasts” in Bible prophecy, and refer to Gentile nations that gain the ascendancy and rule over Israel.

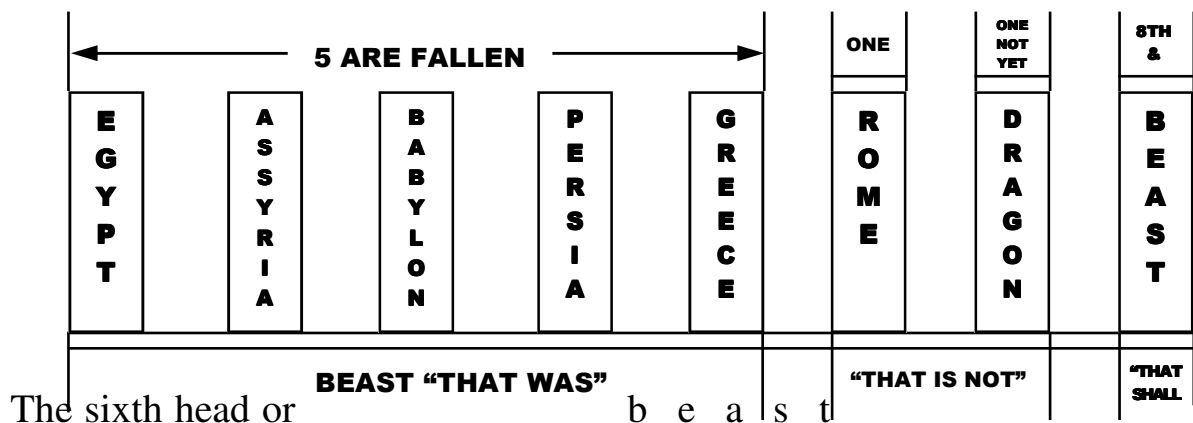
That the kings represent beasts is indicated in Rev. 17:11 where it is implied that the eighth king is the end time beast. It is the eighth and last phase of beast power in Israel’s and the Bible’s history.

Rev. 13:3, 12 confirm that the heads represent beasts. Verse 3 refers to one of the heads being wounded, and v12 says it was a beast that was wounded.

The reference to: “5 are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come,” reveals that the heads or beasts are successive powers, not contemporary, and that the first 5 relate to powers in past history prior to the time of John. The heads do not represent different leaders or different forms of government of the same beast power, but different beasts in history.

In reality, from an historical point of view, the heads only appear one at a time. All 7 of them can only be seen together from a panoramic perspective - over a long period of time by human reckoning.

So then, in John’s day, in the first century A.D. “5 are fallen,” i.e. 5 beast powers had come and gone prior to that period.



kingdom is referred to as being in existence in John's day in the words: "one is." This was clearly the Roman kingdom or empire. This indicates that major powers are involved. The 5 major powers prior to Rome which exercised control over Israel were: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece.

In Dan. 7:1-7 reference is made to 4 beasts which represent the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The beasts representing Babylon, Persia and Rome each had one head, and the beast representing Greece (a leopard) had 4 heads, making a total of 7 heads. Some have thought that these are, in fact, the 7 heads upon the dragon and beast in Revelation, because the beast has characteristics of those beasts in Dan. 7. But if this was the case, 6 heads should have fallen and not 5 when John received the revelation, and the sixth would be the last Grecian head, making the Roman head a future one. Not only that, but the 4 heads of the leopard represent the 4 contemporary kingdoms into which the Greek empire divided after the death of Alexander the Great. But, as has been pointed out, the 7 heads in Revelation are clearly described as being successive, not contemporary.

Regarding the 7th head or beast: Rev. 17:10 says he "is not yet come; and when he comes he must continue a short space." The eighth is the last beast who was, and is not, and is of the 7, and goes into perdition. Reference to the beast being "of" the 7 literally reads: "out of" the 7, or "from" the 7. It is different in the Greek from "one of" which occurs in Rev. 6:1. 7:13. 13:3. 15:7. 17:1. 21:9. This suggests that the beast either emerges from the 7, or is a revival of the 7, or a revival of one of the 7. This would explain how, although there are only 7 heads, the last beast is an eighth phase.

If the eighth beast is a revival or repetition of a previous beast, it could be narrowed down to a revival of one of the first 5, because, speaking in John's day when the sixth Roman phase of beast power was in existence, the Spirit says the eighth and last beast "was and is not," i.e. it is not the sixth (Rome) and therefore cannot be a revival of the sixth, but one of the 5 before that. Neither could it therefore be a revival of the seventh, because the word "was" in the phrase "was and is not" clearly confines it to the beasts that precede the sixth. It would therefore be of the first 5. If so, the end time beast could not be Rome. The territory of the Roman empire will be part of the beast's kingdom, but the "king" will not be a Roman. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the fact that the language concerning the Beast's destruction in Rev. 19:17-21 is taken from Ezk. 39:17-20 which refers to the destruction of Gog and his allies;

indicates that the end time beast is Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal (Ezk. 38:2). Because “Rosh” is the ancient name of Russia, it is believed Gog will come from Russia. He comes up among the 10 horns (Dan. 7:8), and his dominion will be very extensive, embracing the territory of the previous 7 kingdoms.

WHO IS THE SEVENTH HEAD?

It seems to be reasonably clear that the sixth head was the pagan Roman Empire, and that the eighth will be an empire ruled by Gog. Who then, is the seventh? Rev. 17:10 says “when he comes he must continue a short space.”

The fact that the dragon in Rev. 12 has 7 heads surely indicates that he is one of the 7 beast powers, and significantly enough, v12 says “he knows that he has but a short time.” Because the preceding 6 heads have been identified and are accounted for, surely means the dragon is the seventh beast phase.

Reference to the dragon having crowns on all 7 heads also indicates that he is the seventh head, and has embarked upon his career of beasthood during the time to which Rev. 12 pertains. As this red dragon has both horns and heads, it would be possible for crowns to be worn on either. The crowns are diadems, and as such indicate sovereign power, particularly over Israel. The positioning of them therefore, informs us whether the power is vested in the dragon as a seventh beast phase, or whether vested in the leaders of ten individual kingdoms which, as we shall see, the 10 horns represent. In Rev. 13:1 these 10 horns are depicted wearing crowns on the beast, not while they are on the dragon, because the seventh dragon phase has finished, and the beast has given them power to rule under him.

THE DRAGON IS A BEAST

Someone may say: “If the dragon is the seventh beast phase, why is he called a dragon instead of a beast?” There are several reasons for this and one of them is because the seventh and eighth phase of beast power exist contemporary with each other, and it would be confusing if they were both referred to by the same name “beast;” especially in view of the fact that they both have 7 heads and 10 horns.

For example, we read in Rev. 13:2, 4 that the dragon gave his power to the beast. If it read: “The beast with 7 heads and 10 horns gave his

power to the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns,” this would be very confusing and would seem contradictory.

The dragon having 7 heads is clearly one of the 7 beast phases, but is called “dragon” to separate and distinguish this phase from the eighth.

The name “dragon” is also given as a clue to his identity.

There can be no doubt that whoever the dragon is, he lives contemporary with the eighth end time beast, and therefore contemporary with Christ’s return. We are not dealing here with kingdoms or governments dating back centuries into the past, but end time anti-Israel and anti-Christian powers.

This is evident from the reference to the dragon transferring his power to the beast. This indicates that not only is the dragon a separate power from the beast, but also that he ends up entering into an alliance with the beast.

Reference in Rev. 16:13 to the “mouth of the dragon” and “the mouth of the beast” certainly indicates that they are not in essence one and the same power. And the fact that the “mouth” of both the beast and dragon (and false prophet) cause the nations to gather for the battle of Armageddon, resulting in the return of Christ; indicate that both the dragon and beast live contemporary with Christ’s return.

THE TEN HORNS

Because the dragon, being the seventh head, precedes the eighth and final beast phase; this indicates that the 10 horns are connected and associated with him before the beast. If not, i.e. if the 10 horns on the beast are separate and distinct from the 10 horns on the dragon, then you would expect the transfer of the dragon’s power to the beast to result in the beast ending up with 20 horns. But he doesn’t; he has 10 horns.

In view of this, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the dragon is represented by the 10 horns, and as a result of transferring his power and allegiance to the beast, the 10 horns then form part of the beast. This would mean that the reference in Rev. 13:2, 4 to “the dragon” giving his power to the beast, runs parallel with Rev. 17:3 which refers to “the 10 horns” (10 kings) giving their power to the beast. It would also mean that the reference in Rev. 19:19 to “the beast and the kings of the earth” relates to the beast and 10 horns. (Dan. 7:24 also equates the 10 horns with 10 kings).

A parallel could also be drawn between the reference in Rev. 17:10 to the seventh head who “must continue a short space,” and the reference in

v12 to the 10 horns who receive power as kings one hour (a short space) with the beast. As mentioned before: these statements can be connected with Rev. 12:12 which says the dragon knows his time is short. These parallels suggest that the seventh head, dragon and 10 horns are terms that all refer basically to the same power.

It is clear from all that is said about the 10 horns that they exist contemporary with each other in the end time when Christ returns. They are not successive powers like the 7 heads, spread out over centuries of history.

Some have advocated that the 10 horns represent kingdoms established on the territory of the Roman Empire by invading barbarians in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. But there are several problems with this view. Firstly, there were more than 10 Barbarian tribes involved. Secondly, they did not unite, i.e. “have one mind” as stated in Rev. 17:13. Thirdly, the horns are depicted as being on the beast, which means they belong to him and form part of his power structure.

A beast wears its horns; the horns do not wear the beast. A beast fights with its horns; the horns of a beast do not fight against the beast. For this reason it would be inappropriate for the 10 horns to represent powers that were antagonistic towards the beast, and which invaded his empire and forcefully planted themselves upon it, as did the Barbarians.

Rev. 17:12-13 teaches that the 10 horns become part of the beast by voluntarily submitting to him and giving their power to him; not by invasion, forcing themselves upon his territory and gaining power over him. They support him, not strike against him.

For example: in Dan. 8:5 reference is made to a goat with a notable horn. The goat represents the Greek empire and the horn represents the first great king of the empire, Alexander the Great. It does not represent a force that was against the empire and invaded it to take it over! The same applies to the 4 horns in v8 which came up after the first horn was broken! They represent 4 of Alexander’s generals who ruled the Greek empire after his death, not outside antagonistic powers that invaded the empire and divided it up among themselves.

When a horn or horns represent an outside antagonistic power which forces itself upon a beast by war, the Spirit specifically says so, as in the case of the “little horn” in Dan. 7:8 which came up among the 10 and plucked 3 of them up by the roots, and then became the last beast.

ISRAEL THE FOCAL CENTRE

The fourth problem is that the first 4 beasts in Dan. 7 which correspond with the first 4 sections of the metallic image in Dan. 2, i.e. the head, chest and arms, belly and thighs, and legs; all represent powers that gained the ascendancy over the nation of Israel. This is the purpose of the prophecy. The nation of Israel is the focal centre. But the nation of Israel was non-existent when the Barbarians invaded the Roman empire, so it was impossible for them to gain ascendancy over the nation. To apply the toes of the image to the Barbarians is to fundamentally change and alter the whole focus and purpose of the prophecy, and set the final feet phase at variance with the preceding 4 phases.

The fifth problem is that the 10 horns along with the 10 toes clearly exist contemporary with Christ's return. This is evident from the fact that in Dan. 2 the stone that comes hurtling down from heaven and smashes the metallic image on the feet, represents the return of Christ. Consistent with this are the references in Rev. 19 and 17:12-14 to the beast and 10 kings (horns) being destroyed at the second coming. The Barbarian invasions of the Roman empire during the fourth and fifth century took place at least 15 centuries before these prophecies will be fulfilled.

It should be evident that if the nation of Israel is the focal centre of the prophecy in Dan. 2 where the 10 horns have their origin in the 10 toes, that the nation would have to be in existence before the prophecies concerning the 10 horns could be fulfilled.

As we know, the nation of Israel was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, and the Jews were forced into world-wide exile until the twentieth century, when they returned and became established as a nation again. In view of the fact that there was a gap of nearly 2,000 years during which the nation of Israel was non-existent, it was to be expected that there would be a gap between the phase represented by the legs of the metallic image in Dan. 2 and the phase represented by the feet and toes. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to deduce this. It is a natural and logical conclusion compelled by common sense.

This means that the feet and toes phase of the prophecy must relate to nations who conquer Israel after she returns to the land and becomes a nation again. Considering that Israel did not formally and officially become a nation again until May 1948, means the prophecies concerning the dragon and 10 horns and the beast and 10 horns, could not be fulfilled until after that period.

BEAST AND TEN HORNS - FEET AND TEN TOES

The relationship or connection between the 10 horns and the beast (the seventh and eighth beast phases), can be seen in the feet stage of the image. Normally by definition, feet are the termination of the legs on which a person stands and includes the toes. Very rarely would a person refer to his feet and not include the toes. To refer to “feet and toes,” making a distinction between the two, is not normal. So why does Dan. 2:41 make this distinction? It is the only place in Scripture where this is done.

On the basis of the beast and 10 horns being two distinct power blocs, yet becoming united, could account for this. In this light, “feet and toes” represent the beast and the dragon’s 10 horns.

So then, taking into account Egypt and Assyria, who pre-dated the metallic image prophecy, and then adding those signified by the image, i.e. the head of gold (Babylon), chest and arms of silver (Persia), belly and thighs of brass (Greece), legs of iron (Rome), feet and toes of iron mixed with clay (dragon and beast), we have a total of 8 phases as required by Rev. 17:11.

In view of the short period of time that the dragon and beast will be in power, it is fitting and appropriate that the feet and toes which represent them, are shorter in height than any other section of the image. The period during which they exercise power over Israel will be much shorter in duration than all the preceding beast phases represented by the legs, belly and thighs, chest and arms etc.

The height of the feet compared to the height of the legs would be out of proportion if the feet were applied to the period of the divided kingdoms of Europe caused by the Barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire. Because the legs of iron represent a period of approximately 600 years, we would be faced with quite an anomaly if the feet, which are much shorter or lower than the legs, represented the much greater period of at least 1,500 years of the divided kingdoms of Europe.

It is significant that in view of the fact that it will be the beast and 10 horns who fulfil the most significant “times of the Gentiles” in history, during which Jerusalem will be “trodden down;” that they should be represented by the feet of the image. It would certainly be inappropriate to regard the Barbarians as the feet and toes, considering they never set foot in Jerusalem while the nation of Israel was there.

As we have seen, all of the 6 beast phases in the past have involved Gentile nations exercising control over the nation of Israel. It is therefore

natural to expect the seventh dragon phase will do the same and be no different in this respect. This indicates that we are on the right track in interpreting the woman in Rev. 12 with a crown of 12 stars as being the nation of Israel.

HIS TAIL DREW SOME STARS

This is further indicated in Rev. 12:4 which says the dragon's "tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth." The Greek "drakon" and the Hebrew "tannin," rendered "dragon" in the English Bible, signifies a crocodile, the great scaly serpent-fish of the Nile (Ezk. 29:3. Isa. 27:1). In Rev. 12 the dragon is depicted as a crocodile which lashes out with its tail in order to draw its victim to be devoured.

The word "draw" comes from the Greek "suro" and means to drag by force against the person's will. It is used in relation to "dragging" a net containing fish (Jn. 21:8); it is translated "haling" in Act. 8:3 in relation to violently seizing and dragging men and women to prison. It is also translated "drew" in Act. 14:19 and 17:6 in relation to dragging Paul's body out of the city after stoning him, thinking he was dead, and in relation to Jason and his brethren being dragged before the pagan rulers to be accused.

Rev. 12:4 also says the dragon "cast" one third of the stars upon the earth. The Greek word "ballo" translated "cast" means to throw. The same word occurs in Rev. 12:9, 13, 15, 16. 2:10 etc.

The "third part of the stars of heaven" which the dragon casts to the earth are one third of the 12 stars belonging to the woman, and represent one third of the Jewish population in the land of Israel at the time.

The language in Rev. 12:4 is very similar to Dan. 8:10 where reference is made to an anti-Israel power (Antiochus Epiphanes) casting down some of the stars of heaven to the ground and stamping upon them. Verse 24 interprets the stars to be "the holy people" and refers to Israelites. Significantly enough, as mentioned earlier, Josephus refers to a specific 3½ year period during which Antiochus desecrated the Jewish temple. The same period of time is mentioned twice in Revelation chapter 12 in verses 6 and 14.

The reference to one third of the stars being cast down reminds us of "the third part" so often referred to in the trumpet series (Rev. 8:7-12. 9:15, 18). One third is a large proportion, but less than half - a significant number but not preponderant: it is the greatest simple fraction one could think of which still represents a minority.

But according to Zech. 13:8-9, two thirds of the Jewish population will ultimately be cut off in the end time holocaust, and the remaining one third will be put through the fire of affliction and tribulation, resulting in a further purging of the population. Out of the “remnant” will emerge those who call upon the name of the Lord and they shall be delivered. The “third part” in Rev. 12:4 could refer to the beginning of this end time refining process.

WHO IS THE DRAGON?

Who then is the dragon who causes this? In seeking an answer, we turn not to the commentaries of men or traditional expositions based on forcing Bible prophecy into the mould of history. We turn instead to the more sure Word of prophecy itself, whereunto we do well to take heed as to a light that shines in a dark place.

The reference to the dragon in Rev. 12 is not the first or only time that reference is made to the dragon in Scripture. The metaphor has its roots in Old Testament prophecy. For example: Jer. 51:34: “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me (Israel); he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like a dragon; he has filled his belly with my delicate flesh; he has cast me out.” Here, the dragon refers to the power of Babylon, the third head of the beast, who conquered the Jews and caused much death, destruction and distress. The dragon therefore speaks of draconic rule - rigorous, harsh and cruel rule which causes travail and tribulation.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, known as the Septuagint or LXX, the Greek word for dragon is the same as in the book of Revelation. It is reasonable therefore to consider that there may be some connection between them, especially in view of the fact that so much of the language of the prophecies in the book of Revelation is drawn from, and based upon the Old testament prophecies.

Jer. 51:53 also refers to Babylon mounting up to heaven, and Lam. 2:1 refers to Babylon casting Israel’s glory down from heaven to earth. Who could fail to see the similarity of language here with Rev. 12:3-4? Rev. 12 is clearly an echo of the symbology of Old Testament prophecy!

Egypt in particular, an historic enemy of Israel, the first head of the beast, was the first to be referred to as a dragon. See Isa. 51:9. Isa. 27:1.

The passage in Isa. 27:1 refers to “...leviathan the fleeing serpent, even leviathan that twisting serpent ... the dragon ...” In this statement the words serpent and dragon are synonymous. This is even more apparent in

the Septuagint translation: “ ... the dragon, even the serpent that flees ... the dragon the crooked serpent ...” The reason for the dragon being called a serpent is because those in ancient times saw the crocodile as a scaly serpent-fish due to its long swishing tail. This is why Rev. 12:9 refers to the dragon as a serpent. As in Isa. 27:1, the words are used synonymously.

But of particular interest and significance is the fact that Rev. 12:9 refers to the dragon as “that old serpent.” Many regard this statement as referring back to the serpent in Gen. 3, especially those who do not understand the wider applications of the words “devil and satan.” But, as mentioned earlier, the serpent in Gen. 3 did not have 7 heads and 10 horns!

Isa. 51:9 sheds some light on the subject. This verse refers to God wounding the dragon and it relates to the divine judgement that fell upon Egypt back in Moses’ time. Isaiah refers to this happening in “ancient times,” in the generations of “old.”

From this we learn that even in Isaiah’s time, 700 years before the book of Revelation was written, Egypt was regarded as the “old” dragon, and therefore old serpent. The word “old” also relates to the time of ancient Egypt in Ps. 77:5-. Isa. 43:16-19. 63:11 in the A.V.

THE DEVIL AND SATAN

Rev. 12:9 also says that the dragon is “called the devil and satan.” The Greek word “diabolos,” translated “devil” means false accuser, slanderer; and “satan” simply means adversary or opponent. These are appropriate titles for the dragon who is referred to as a deceiver, accuser, persecutor and war monger in v9, 10, 13, 17.

For anyone who has difficulty accepting that a nation or nations against God’s people could be referred to as satan; several examples might help. The Hebrew word “satan” is translated “adversary” in 1 Kng. 5:4 and literally reads: “There was no satan” when Solomon ascended the throne, due to his father David having conquered and subdued the nations surrounding Israel. Satan in this verse refers to nations that were Israel’s neighbours at enmity with her.

We read in 1 Kng. 11:14 that towards the end of Solomon’s reign, an adversary (satan) was stirred up against him. The reference is to the Edomites who were a nation hostile towards Israel on the south east border of her land.

1 Kng. 11:23-25 goes on to say that another adversary (satan) was stirred up against Israel. This reference is to the nation of Syria north of

Israel. The only link that the dragon-serpent in Rev. 12 has with the serpent in Gen. 3, is that the serpent in the garden of Eden, due to his lie and deception, became a symbol of individuals and nations who, through lies, deceit and false accusation seek the downfall of God's people. For examples of this see Ps. 58:1-5. 140:1-3. Matt. 23:33. In this sense it would be true to say that the conflict in Rev. 12 between the dragon and the woman, has its roots in Gen. 3 in the conflict between the serpent and the first woman Eve. Rev. 12 could therefore, in this light, be seen as an enactment of the drama of Eden involving nations (the serpent's seed) hostile to God's nation (the woman). It certainly has nothing to do with fallen angels!

As we shall see, the dragon can be related to Moslem nations whose deception about Mohammed being a prophet of God, will lead to attacking Christians in the end time; and whose lies and false accusations about Palestine belonging to them not Israel, results in stirring nations into invading and attacking Israel.

As far as Scripture is concerned, Egypt and Babylon are called "dragon" due to their hostile attitude towards Israel, and this is the clue or key to the identity of the dragon in Rev. 12. Babylon now belongs to, and is represented by Iraq, and both Egypt and Iraq are Moslem countries. If one of these is the dragon in Rev. 12, the question is: which one?

In answer to this, Isa. 27:1 is helpful. If it is read in its context, taking into account the previous chapter leading up to it, it will be seen that it relates to the end time epoch of history. It says: "In that day the Lord with His fierce and great strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."

In this prophecy, Egypt is clearly identified as the end time dragon. There is no Scriptural basis upon which it can be affirmed that the pagan Roman empire, or any part of that empire in the past is referred to by the dragon. If Scripture is to be our guide, whether we like it or not and whether we can make sense of it or not, the dragon signifies Egypt!

Some may argue that if the dragon is applied to both Egypt and Babylon in Scripture, then surely there can be no objection to applying it to Rome as well. But why stop at Rome? Why not include Greece or some other nation? The obvious answer is because Scripture never gives those applications and to do so is to step outside of Scripture and end up indulging in private interpretations, where one man's speculation is as good as another's.

In view of a prophecy in Ezk. 29:13-15 which says Egypt would be a

“base kingdom ... the basest of kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations” nor “rule over the nations:” some might feel that she cannot be the dragon who will rule over the nation of Israel. However, it should be pointed out that the prophecy says Egypt will not rule over “nations” (plural). This means she will never be a world super power again as in ancient times. The prophecy does not say she will not be able to rule over a single neighbouring nation such as Israel.

It should also be pointed out that Egypt will not be able to invade and conquer Israel by herself, and Rev. 12 does not say that she will do it by herself. The dragon has 10 horns which, as we shall see, represent another 10 nations that will be confederate with Egypt.

Iraq will more than likely be one of those 10. This is suggested in various end time prophecies which refer to Assyria being involved in the invasion of Israel (Mic. 5. Isa. 19:23-25. 30:27-33 etc). Assyria is of course signified by the second head on the dragon and beast. She invaded and conquered Israel in Old Testament times and occupied the country now occupied by Iraq. The end time prophecies that refer to Assyria can therefore be applied to Iraq.

In view of this, it is not surprising that both Egypt and Iraq are signified in Scripture by the dragon, because in the end time, both will be encompassed in the dragon. As Isa. 7:18 puts it: “It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall whistle for the fly that is in ... Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.”

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AHEAD

It is evident that if the dragon in Rev. 12 signifies Egypt, some big changes will need to take place in the future with regard to her attitude towards Israel. At the time of writing there is a peace accord between Israel and Egypt and that would obviously have to be broken. Islamic fundamentalism which is extremely hostile towards Israel could eventually cause this to happen, and stir up other Moslem countries, forming a confederacy of 10 nations under the leadership of Egypt, that will successfully invade and occupy Israel for 1,260 days.

A confederation of 10, interestingly enough, is referred to in Ps. 83, and their goal and ambition is: “Come, let us cut them (Israel) off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may never be remembered again.” The prophecy says they take crafty counsel together against Israel and are all unanimous in their plot. (The word “crafty” relates to subtility and calls to mind the serpent).

Joel 3:19 refers to Egypt in particular being violent towards the Jews, shedding their blood in the land. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, a careful study of the book of Joel reveals that the prophecy pertains to the end time. The violence of Egypt towards Israel, referred to in Joel, could be related to the dragon casting down the stars in Rev. 12.

Rev. 12 makes it clear that the dragon will be defeated and it is probably at that point of time that he transfers his power to the beast (Gog). This would represent the end of the seventh beast phase (7th head) and the beginning of the eighth: Gog's confederacy.

A DOUBLE RING OF HOSTILITY

Moslem nations are certainly involved in Gog's army, and some of them are mentioned by name in Ezk. 38. Verses 5-6 mention Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, Togarmah (Turkey), and some of the other names in this chapter have been identified with Islamic nations in southern Russia in the region of the Black and Caspian seas (Magog area). These Islamic nations could very well form part of the 10 horns, among which Gog arises.

The historical king of the north referred to in the earlier verses in Dan. 11 ruled over the territories of Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan; so it is to be expected that these nations will be involved when the end time king of the north invades Israel.

Dan. 11:41 indicates that "Edom, Moab and Ammon" (Jordan today) will support the invasion of Israel, and v43 confirms that the Libyans and Ethiopians will also be involved.

Joel 3:4 mentions "Tyre and Zidon" which is Lebanon today, as well as "all the coasts of Palestine" which was the territory of the ancient Philistines, now occupied by the Palestinians.

So a double ring of hostility is presented in the Word of prophecy, surrounding Israel, involving her close and distant Moslem neighbours. These will all eventually form a confederacy and make an all-out concerted attack against Israel with a view to destroying her as a nation, in order to turn the land into a Moslem state or kingdom.

It is evident from the words in Joel 3:9: "Declare a holy war," that a "jihad" will be proclaimed against Israel, and it would not be surprising if it is triggered off by the removal of the Moslem mosque at Jerusalem in preparation for a Jewish temple on the site. Reference is made in Joel 3:5 to the invaders taking God's silver, gold and precious treasures, and carrying them away. What else could God's silver and gold and precious treasures be than those which belong to His temple?

During the twentieth century, Moslem nations incited by Egypt, formed a confederacy to invade and attack Israel, but failed to gain victory and were decisively defeated. However, Rev. 12 reveals that there will ultimately be a successful attack by these forces resulting in Israel's defeat initially, followed later by the defeat of the dragon as a result of intervention by Michael the archangel.

This will make the dragon very angry and it would come as no surprise therefore, if he ended up accepting the opportunity to be supported by the beast, and transferred his power to him and encouraged his invasion of Israel.

In connection with this it is interesting to note that Ezk. 38:7 refers to Gog being a "guard" to them. This speaks of Gog providing cover, defence and support, exercising a vigilant watch over all the military movements of the confederacy to make sure it is well organized and efficient, avoiding major blunders.

Unlike previous invasions, when Arab armies were thrown into disarray, broke rank and fled for their lives or surrendered to Israel; this end time army will be more disciplined and determined. Joel 2:3-9 says this about them:

"A fire devours ahead of them (flame throwers or napalm bombs?) ... As with the rumbling of chariots (tanks?) they leap over the tops of the hills; like the crackling of fire that devours the stubble (gun fire?), as a powerful army set in battle array. Before them the people (Jews) are in anguish; all faces grow pale. Like warriors they charge; they climb the walls like men of war; and they march, each in his own path, not swerving from their course or breaking rank. They do not jostle one another; each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city (Jerusalem); they shall run upon the walls; they shall climb up into the houses; they shall enter in at windows like a thief. The earth shakes before them (caused by the rumbling of tanks and heavy artillery); the heavens shall tremble" (rumble and vibrate through fighter planes, rockets and missiles, causing "wonders in the heavens" and "columns of smoke" v30).

Dan. 11:40 describes it in terms of the enemy advancing "like a whirlwind" (tornado) with chariots, resulting in many of the Jews in "the glorious land" being "overthrown" v41. Joel's prophecy also refers to the great destruction that will take place, and Zech. 14:1-2 says this: "The city (Jerusalem) shall be taken, the houses looted and the women raped and half of the city will be sent into exile."

A DIFFERENT INVASION?

It is not difficult to see from Dan. 11:40-45, Joel's prophecy and Zech. 14:1-2 that the northern invader will not be destroyed the moment he sets foot in the land of Israel. These prophecies clearly teach that Israel will be defeated and looted and suffer much death, destruction and desolation. The king of the north will move on south to invade and occupy Egypt, and at a later date he will be drawn back to Israel and be gathered to Jerusalem for the battle of Armageddon at which he will be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming.

But Ezk. 38 does not refer to the invasion being successful. No reference is made to Israel being defeated or of the invading forces moving further south to conquer Egypt. Reading this chapter by itself, gives the impression that God intervenes when the invader enters the land and destroys him before he can destroy Israel.

This has resulted in some concluding that this invasion is different from the one mentioned in the other prophecies, and cannot be paralleled with them. One school of thought is that when the invasion of Ezk. 38 takes place, Jesus will have returned and be enthroned at Jerusalem. For this reason, the invader will be destroyed before he can conquer Israel and occupy the land.

Before having a closer look at this, it should be pointed out that care needs to be exercised in relation to forming conclusions on the basis of one account failing to supply the same details that are supplied in other accounts. If all the accounts involved have enough details in common to suggest they run parallel with each other, then too much should not be made about the omission of some details by any one of them.

Otherwise one could go through the four gospels and end up with different accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, because there are many quite major details mentioned by some but omitted by others. But the truth of the matter is that they are all parallel accounts, and the details are supplementary and complementary to each other. When put together, they form a fully detailed picture.

EZEKIEL CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

If we move on to Ezk. 39 we come across some statements which refer back to the invasion recorded in chapter 38, some of which are significant time markers which indicate that the invasion will be successful and that the invader will not be destroyed until some later

period.

For example, Ezk. 39:10 tells us that after the invader has been destroyed, the Jews will burn his weapons with fire “and spoil (plunder) those who spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them.” It is taught here that the invader’s “evil thought” to “take a spoil” as predicted in 38:12, does take place and is not prevented by Divine intervention. This plundering of Israel by the end time enemy, as already pointed out, is also referred to in Joel 3:5 and Zech. 14:2.

Ezekiel 38:13 mentions that Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish will say to Gog: “Have you come to take spoil? Have you gathered your hordes to carry off plunder? To take away silver and gold, cattle and goods?” If Jesus has returned in great power and glory and is enthroned in Jerusalem, having demonstrated that he can defend his people and land; the diplomatic interrogation and expression of concern and anxiety by Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish concerning Israel being invaded, seems to be out of place. According to various Scriptures, these nations will have acknowledged Christ and submitted to his rule (Ps. 72:10, 15. Isa. 60:6, 9. 66:19). In view of this, why should they be concerned about what invading forces might do to Israel?

Some have also had difficulty with “cattle” being one of the motives for the invasion. In times of famine, food is a top priority, and Jesus warned that famines would precede his return.

Further confirmation of the invasion being pre-adventual can be seen in Ezk. 39:22. We are told here that after the destruction of the invader, “the house of Israel shall know from that day forward that I am the Lord their God.” This implies that up until the destruction of Gog and his armies, the house of Israel does not know or acknowledge their God. But if the return of Christ and battle of Armageddon and repentance of Israel (Zech 13), and establishment of the kingdom had taken place prior to this; they would surely know and acknowledge the Lord!

Moreover, Ezk. 39:23 goes on to say that after the destruction of Gog it shall be understood that Israel went into captivity due to their iniquity, and that it was because of their sinfulness that God hid His face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies and allowed them to fall by the sword.

It is evident from this that prior to the destruction of Gog, God will have hid His face from Israel, allowing them to fall by the sword of the enemy, and suffer a period of “captivity.” But how could these words apply if, prior to the destruction of Gog, Christ has returned and delivered Israel from a previous invasion and occupation of the enemy? Quite the

opposite would be the case!

The “captivity” according to Ezk. 39:27 will involve Jews being taken prisoner to their enemies’ lands, and more will be said about this in another chapter.

The “captivity” is also referred to in Zech. 14:2: “... the city (Jerusalem) shall go forth into captivity” (i.e. exile). And the reference to falling by the sword in Ezk. 39:23 connects with 38:4 which speaks of Gog’s army “handling swords.” They obviously use them against Israel, causing many Israelites to fall in battle. Dan. 11:41 says many in the glorious land shall be overthrown (the word “countries” in the A.V. is in italics, indicating it is not in the original text and has been added by the translators. It is omitted by many modern versions). The R.S.V. reads: “He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall.” Zec. 13 says two thirds of the Jewish population will perish and the final third shall be put through the fire (of tribulation caused by the occupation of the enemy).

Ezk. 39:25 says: “Now will I (God) bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name.” And v 28 says It will not be till “then” that they shall know the Lord.

The words “now” and “then” are very specific time markers. They refer to when Gog and his armies have been destroyed and clearly imply that up until that time, Israel has been captive to the enemy and under the judgement of God, not His mercy. This would not be possible if Jesus had returned and set up his kingdom before hand.

AT REST DWELLING SAFELY

Ezk. 39:26 says that it was when they “dwelt safely in their land and none made them afraid” that they sinned against God and suffered shame as a result. This is a direct reference back to Ezk. 38:11 which describes Israel’s position prior to Gog’s invasion as being at rest, dwelling safely, without walls, bars or gates.

The expression “dwell safely” is also used in Ezk 34:28 to describe Israel’s position in the kingdom of Christ, and it is because of this that some have concluded the kingdom must be established when Gog’s invasion takes place. But Ezk. 39:26 makes it clear that this is not the case. Israel would hardly be committing sins of such a serious nature as to warrant an invasion of enemy forces and the shame of defeat, if she has been spiritually regenerated by Christ’s return.

The phrase “dwell safely” is clearly used in two ways in Scripture - a good and bad way. In Ezk. 34:23-28 it describes the sense of confidence Israel will experience as a result of sheltering under and trusting in the safety of Divine power. But Ezk. 38:11 refers to the sense of confidence Israel will have as a result of trusting in her own might and power. The pride and arrogance and sense of self-sufficiency that is behind this; leaving God out of the equation, will be the reason and motive for God sending the enemy into the land to break their power, shatter their ill-founded confidence, and humble them in preparation for the coming of their Messiah. The invasion would obviously have to be successful to achieve this!

An example of the same phrase being used for both a pre-adventual and post adventual event is “like the garden of Eden.” It occurs in Joel 2:3 in relation to the land of Israel restored by the Jews prior to the second coming and it occurs in Ezk. 36:35 in relation to the land being restored by Christ after his second coming.

BIG CHANGES AHEAD

The reference to Israel being at rest, dwelling safely or confidently without walls, bars and gates prior to the invasion; suggests the nation will not feel under threat of invasion or war. In order for this situation to arise and for Israel to confidently build a temple in the place of a holy mosque, will require some big changes from the present situation at the time of writing.

For a start, it would require the religious party of Orthodox Jews who want a temple, to gain more political power and a much more dominant position in government. It could also require another major war with the neighbouring Arabs and Palestinians in which victory for Israel was so decisive and overwhelming, as a result of Michael’s intervention, that Israel could rest confidently in peace, not fearing attack from the enemy and confidently build a temple.

Or it may simply be a case of persuasive “prophets” convincing the right number of people in power that it is God’s will for a temple to be built, assuring them that if they are obedient to His will, no matter what problems and dangers it will create, He will bless and protect them. Scripture provides many precedents of this kind of scenario in Bible history.

Impossible as such developments may appear to be on the basis of the present situation, we need to guard against making the same mistake

as those who lived before the Jews returned to their land. Such a return looked so impossible from a human point of view, that many found it impossible to believe. This resulted in spiritualizing away the prophecies which taught it and giving them false applications.

It would be a tragedy if time proved that those today who can see the return of the Jews with their own eyes, and who say they would have believed it had they lived in the days of their fathers when there was no sign of it taking place, failed to see and believe the final future events pertaining to God's end time programme for Israel. How easy to be wise after the event. But the whole point of Bible prophecy is to be wise before the events take place, and not use seemingly impossible situations as an excuse for not believing. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord."

A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

Another point to consider is that among the judgements listed in Ezk. 38:19-23 that God will pour out on Gog and his armies, is "a great shaking in the land of Israel ... the mountains shall be thrown down and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground."

This reference to mountains being torn asunder by earthquake, calls to mind the prophecy in Zech. 14:4 which refers to the mount of Olives splitting apart as a result of the mighty earthquake which occurs at the second coming of Christ. Joel 3:16 likewise says "the heavens and the earth shall shake." And the Armageddon chapter (Rev. 16), declares that there shall be "a great earthquake such as has never been since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great." It will cause the cities of the nations to collapse and fall (v 19) and islands and mountains will disappear (v 20).

Now if Jesus has returned before Gog's invasion, and is enthroned in Jerusalem reigning over the restored nation of Israel, then the earthquake sent as a judgement upon Gog which convulses the land so violently that it causes mountains to be thrown down and "every wall" of every building to fall to the ground, would surely wreck and destroy the restoration work.

It would also seem strange that if Jesus had already returned in power and glory, every eye having seen him and profound geographical changes having taken place, that it will not be until later when another invasion of Israel takes place and Gog is destroyed, that God will be magnified and sanctified and known in the eyes of many nations. Is it not the consistent testimony of Scripture that it will be the second coming of Christ that will

have this effect?

Finally, if Jesus returns prior to the invasion mentioned in Ezk. 38-39 and has established his kingdom, would this not mean that the millennial temple would be built and in service? Why then are all the details of its construction given after Ezk. 38-39 instead of before?

IRON MIXED WITH CLAY

Due to their mutual hatred of Israel, it is not difficult to imagine religious Moslem nations being prepared to link up with the irreligious and anti-religious beast to gain their own ends. Political expediency has a history of sinking major religious and ideological differences to be united in a mutual cause! Russia, for example, has already done business with some of the Moslem nations mentioned in Bible prophecy, supplying them with military hardware and giving them economic aid and technological support.

It is therefore understandable why a confederacy between the irreligious beast and the religious Islamic dragon would be described in the metallic image in Dan. 2 as something that lacked coherence, like “iron mixed with clay” (v41-43).

In connection with this, is it significant that the word “mixed” which relates to iron mixed with clay, comes from the Hebrew word “Arab,” and is translated “Arabia” a number of times? It is translated “mixed” in Neh. 13:3 and relates to the Ammonites and Moabites in v1. It is also translated “mingled” in Jer. 25:24 in relation to many mixed Arab tribes.

These are the people of mixed ancestry, descended variously from Ishmael, Esau, Lot, the Philistines and others. They have never remained united and cohesive, always quarrelling and falling out with themselves and others, except in one particular case: they are almost always solidly united in their hatred of Israel and their ambition to seize her land.

A confederation of 10 of these is signified by the 10 horns on the dragon, and they will play their part in the end time tribulation of Israel which leads to the return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon.

Rev. 12 then, seems to represent an attempt made by the dragon and 10 horns to conquer Israel and become permanently established in the land, and so complete the age-old dream of turning the whole Middle East into their “kingdom” - an Arab kingdom - a united Moslem power block.

But, as Rev. 12 reveals, the dragon, after a short-lived victory, is defeated by Michael and cast down from his position of power.

Decisive as the defeat of the dragon is, the language used to describe

it is not as decisive as the language that describes the defeat of the beast. Rev. 12:7-17 reveals that the dragon survives the war with Michael and is still able to persecute the woman and her seed for a time. But, according to Rev. 19:17-21, the beast is cast into the lake of fire. Two different invasions are suggested by this.

It is probably the dragon's defeat by Michael, followed by the beast plucking up 3 of the dragon's 10 horns (Dan. 7:8), that causes the dragon to yield his power to the beast. Sheer political necessity and expediency, not to mention "great anger" (Rev. 12:12) at being defeated, forces this fanatically religious group of Moslem nations to transfer allegiance to, and seek the support of a totally irreligious and humanistic (godless) power. In so doing, the seventh beast phase ends.

Rev. 13:1 presents the eighth and last phase of beast power at its peak of power, united with the 10 horns, which, significantly enough, are depicted wearing crowns. The reason for this is surely because they have at this stage become disconnected from Egypt, lost power to function as an independent unit or "beast," but have received power from "the beast" to rule with and under him as "kings." By making the power of their "kingdom" available to the beast to achieve his goals, as we read in Rev. 17:17, the beast grants them the "kingdom" they desire, as implied in Rev. 17:12. The "kingdom" they desire would no doubt be the one that embraces the land of Israel.

EGYPT NOT PART OF THE BEAST

Reference was made earlier to Joel 3:19 which refers to Egypt being violent towards Israel in the end time, causing Jewish blood to be shed. It was suggested that the reference to violence could relate to the first invasion of Israel in the end time by a Moslem confederacy led by Egypt, in fulfilment of the dragon prophecy in Rev. 12.

However, when the second and final invasion of Israel takes place by the beast, Egypt will not at that late stage form part of his confederacy. This is evident from Dan. 11:40-43 which reveals that "the king of the south" (Egypt) will provoke "the king of the north" (Gog - the beast), resulting in the king of the north invading not only Israel, but Egypt as well, inflicting desolation on her. This indicates a fall-out between Egypt and the nations involved with the beast.

The reference in Isa. 27:1 to the dragon being punished with a strong sword could very well refer to this invasion by the king of the north. Also Isa. 19:4: "And the Egyptians will be given over into the hand of a cruel

master; and a fierce king shall rule over them, says the Lord, the Lord of hosts.”

Someone may argue that if Egypt is not part of the beast’s confederacy that invades Israel, then the beast should only have 9 horns not 10. This would only be the case if Egypt was represented by one of the 10 horns on the dragon. But this is not the case. The dragon itself represents Egypt, and the 10 horns represent 10 other nations confederate with her, making a total of 11 nations. In the event of Egypt falling out, 10 still remain! Without the 10 horns, the dragon will have no power!

QUITE A REMARKABLE PROPHECY

If the woman in heaven and the 10 horned dragon in heaven can be accepted as signifying Israel and the Moslem nations surrounding her, attaining political power, it would truly be an amazing prophecy. Hardly a century ago, there was no sign of this and it would have been hard to believe that it could happen. The nation of Israel did not exist due to the Jews being scattered throughout the earth, and the Arabs had no political power or influence until the discovery of oil. Both the nation of Israel and the Arab nations have virtually come into political power and prominence in the same era of history, and it is not difficult to see this being signified by the woman and dragon in “heaven” together at the same time.

A statement made by Jesus in his Olivet prophecy could relate to this. He gave a parable of a fig tree, saying: “When its branches become green and tender and it starts putting out its leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things, you will know that he (the Messiah) is near, even at the doors. Truly I say to you, this generation shall not pass way till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:32-35). Because the fig tree is used as a symbol of Israel in Scripture, it is believed that this parable teaches that the revival and rise to power of the nation of Israel is a sign of the coming of Christ.

But Jesus did not only refer to the fig tree. According to Lk. 21:29 he said: “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they shoot forth ...” Could this refer to all the nations surrounding the nation of Israel which have risen to power side by side with her? If so, it could be related to the prophecy in Rev. 12.

A MAN CHILD

We move on now to Rev. 12:5 which says the woman “brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up to God, and to His throne.”

As a result of her “travail” or tribulation, Israel produces a “man child” i.e. literally in the Greek: “a son, a male,” referred to in v13 simply as “man.”

Some say that lack of reference to a husband makes the woman a harlot, and relate her to the harlot in Rev. 17. This is a wrong deduction. Israel’s husband is her maker or creator, and it is through him and the power of his Spirit that this man child will be produced (Isa. 54. Jer. 31:32. Ezk. 16:45. Hos. 2:7).

In view of the fact that Rev. 12 is prophetic, referring to future events, not past events; the man child, as mentioned earlier, cannot refer to Christ, neither can the woman refer to Mary. Mary was dead and Jesus had long since ascended to heaven when the book of Revelation was written. As for Constantine being the man child: those who believe this would find it difficult to explain how the woman, who they regard as the church could attain to political power before she gave birth to the child, and lose that power shortly afterwards!

The expression “child” or “man child” has its roots in the Old Testament. For example; Jer. 4:31: “For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish of her that brings forth her first child. It is Zion ...” Also Isa. 66:6-8: “Listen, an uproar from the temple! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, rendering recompense to His enemies. Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a man child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the land (of Israel) be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation (Israel) be born in one moment? For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth children.”

As in the case of Rev. 12, this passage in Isa. 66 also refers to a woman travailing and in pain to be delivered, and giving birth to a man child. The woman in Isa. 66 is said to be “Zion,” and the man child produced by her travail is explained to be a “nation” consisting of “children.” The “man child” is clearly not a single individual, but a body of people from the nation of Israel.

It is quite common for Scripture to speak this way. For example, the newly born nation of Israel is referred to in terms of a man child in Hos. 11:1: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of

Egypt.” Ps. 80:15-17 also refers to Israel as “the son” and “the man.”

Ez. 3:1 refers to the people of Israel gathering together at Jerusalem “as one man.”

The same applies to Christ’s church. Although consisting of many members, it is referred to in its perfected state, not as “perfect men” but “perfect man” (Eph. 4:13).

The Greek word “teknon” translated “child” in Rev. 12:4 and in the second part of v5 is mostly translated “children” and “sons” elsewhere in the New Testament. For example: Rev. 2:3. 1 Jn. 3:1. As we shall see, the plural word “brethren” in Rev. 12:10 and the “seed” of the woman in v17 refer to the man child. The fact that it says “the remnant of her seed” indicates plurality - a community.

The context of the reference to the man child in Isa. 66 is spiritual revival. Rev. 12 relates to the remnant of Israel which responds to the call of God in the end time, and who qualify for deliverance and salvation. Being Christians, they will belong to the new nation of Israel - a truly “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9); true Jews (Rom. 2:29); the true Israel of God (Eph. 6:15-16). They will be the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3) and therefore the true children of God.

It is clear in the reference to the remnant of the woman’s seed in Rev. 12:17 that a Christian community is signified, because it is stated that her seed keeps the commandments of God and bears witness for Jesus. If so, it would be quite outrageous to argue that the man child is Constantine, an apostate Roman ruler.

The “woman” therefore, represents the nation of Israel; the “12 stars” represent the tribes of which the nation is composed, and the “man child” represents a Christian community - Hebrew Christians, that will emerge in the land in the end time. The fact that the dragon casts down one third of the woman’s stars and seeks to devour the man child, indicates he is both anti-Israel and anti-Christian. This would not be hard to believe in relation to an extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism.

RULE ALL NATIONS WITH A ROD OF IRON

Rev. 12:5 says the man child “was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

The fact that Rev. 19:15 (which quotes Ps. 2:9), says Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron, has caused some to conclude that he must be the man child. However, Jesus himself said that every Christian who overcomes and keeps his works to the end will be given power over the

nations and shall rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27).

There is of course, no contradiction here; the saints will rule all nations with a rod of iron as well as Christ, because they will reign with him (Rev. 5:10. 20:6. 2 Tim. 2:12). The context of Ps. 2:9 makes it clear that Zion in Jerusalem is the power centre of this reign (see v6. Ps. 110:2). Zion is also the focus in the reference to the man child in Isa. 66:7-8. Reference in v7 to a woman travailing and giving birth to a man child, runs parallel with the reference in v8 to Zion travailing and giving birth to children.

Mount Zion is going to be heaved up to a great height, reaching up into heaven (the sky), when the mighty earthquake occurs (Zech. 14). It was from this highly elevated mountain that John saw the city of God descending from heaven (Rev. 21:10). He also saw the throne of God in the city (22:1-2). The city is coming to Zion (Heb. 12:22. 13:14) where it will “hover” over the land creating a “canopy” (Isa. 4:5-6). For this reason, the whole of the area on the top of the mountain shall be “most holy” (Ezk. 43:12). This expression is used elsewhere to describe the most holy place in the temple which represented heaven, and in which the ark of the covenant was situated, which represented the throne of God. The 144,000 are seen on Mount Zion in Rev. 14:1 and a voice from heaven from God’s throne is heard above them (v2-3). Because the city and throne of God will extend high above the land, it is obvious that in order for the saints to ascend there they will either have to walk up or be “caught up.”

CAUGHT UP TO GOD AND TO HIS THRONE

After stating that the man child was to rule all nations with a rod of iron, Rev. 12:5 goes on to refer to the man child being caught up to God and His throne. It is evident that the reference is to the saints of Christ, not to the ascension of Christ after his resurrection. It has already been emphasized that Rev. 12:5 is prophetic of things to come, not of things that have happened in the past. At the time the revelation was given, Jesus had long since been caught up to heaven, the city of God and place of His throne, making it evident that he is not the man child.

The reference to the man child being caught up to God and His throne is a summary statement of events that do not happen immediately, but pertain to the future outcome. This is indicated in the same verse in the reference to the man child who “was to rule all nations.” The word “was” means “destined.” The words “was caught up ...” can also be taken

to refer to future destiny.

It is quite common in prophetic discourse for the Spirit to jump ahead out of chronological sequence, projecting the mind forward to the ultimate end of a matter, then return to the process of events that lead up to it. Rev. 15:2-4 is a good example of this reversed sequence principle. Before anything is said about the 7 last plagues, referred to in v1, a parenthesis is introduced giving a vision of the glorified saints rejoicing together in God's great salvation.

Anyone who studies the Word of prophecy, especially books like Isaiah and Zechariah, soon discovers that the prophets frequently speak generally of the final results of an event, and afterwards proceed to give details of events that lead up to the grand finale. Any attempt to regard all the statements of the prophets as necessarily succeeding one another in strict chronological order, would reduce many of these prophecies to a mass of confusion.

While it is true, as we read in Eph. 2:6, that those in Christ are raised up to sit in heavenly places, the ultimate destiny of the whole church is to be literally and physically caught up to God and to His throne. We have already seen visions of this in the book of Revelation, where the saints are depicted as being in heaven, the city-temple of God, praising and worshipping before the throne in company with the angels.

1 Thes. 4:16-17 teaches that in order to be with Jesus when he returns, the saints will be "caught up" to meet him in the air when he descends from heaven to earth. The words: "caught up" in 1 Thes. 4:17 and Rev. 12:5 come from the same Greek word "harpazo." This word is also translated "caught away" in Act. 8:39 in relation to Philip being physically transported through the air from one place to another by the Spirit. As we have seen, the reference in Rev. 11:12 to the 2 witnesses ascending to heaven has a similar application, as in the case of Elijah who was caught up into the air. Enoch was also physically removed to another place, not to mention Ezekiel (Ezk. 8:3).

In these cases the men were more than likely transported by angels, which calls to mind a statement of Jesus relating to his second coming, recorded in Matt. 24:31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the 4 winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Other Scriptures relating to this gathering are: 2 Thes. 2:1-3. Ps. 50:1-5. Jn. 14:3.

The word "meet" in 1 Thes. 4:17 comes from the Greek "apanteesis" which is used of a welcome party going forth out of their town or city to welcome a special person who is coming to stay with them. The word is

used, for example, in Act. 28:15 in connection with Christians from Rome going forth from the city to a market town by the name of Appii Forum, about 70 kilometres from the city of Rome, to “meet” Paul and his companions who were coming to stay with them in Rome.

Apanteesis is also translated “meet” in Matt. 25:1, 6 in relation to the virgins going forth to meet the bridegroom, in order to accompany him to the marriage.

It should be evident that if Jesus is returning to Zion to reign over the earth and wants his saints to reign with him, that they will have to be gathered up from all over the earth to be united with him. It is believed that the reference to the man child being caught up, can be viewed in this light.

THE WOMAN FLED INTO THE WILDERNESS

“**A**nd the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Rev. 12:6).

In Scripture, the wilderness can signify a state of seclusion, testing, purging and probation. It can also imply political extinction, i.e. loss of political power. Moses for example, fled into the wilderness from Pharaoh and was there in a state of seclusion for 40 years. The nation of Israel likewise left Egypt and went into the wilderness for a 40 year probation period, and Jesus was driven into the wilderness for 40 days to be tested.

In Jer. 31:2 the “wilderness” refers to the land or lands of exile and captivity. This is confirmed in v8- where reference is made to the Lord bringing them back to their land from dispersion. “He who scattered Israel will gather him ...” (v10).

Ezk. 20:35 refers to “the wilderness of the people” into which God will cause Israel to go, referring to dispersion into other countries. In verses 36 to 38 God says: “Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, says the Lord. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and those who transgress against me.” Verse 38 then concludes by saying that God will not allow the rebels to return to their land when He regathers those in dispersion.

This is reminiscent of Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness after fleeing from Egypt. None of the rebels were allowed to enter the promised land. They all perished in the wilderness. Ezk. 20:36-38 implies that one of the

reasons for the wilderness experience is rebellion and transgression, and the purpose is to deal with the rebels and transgressors and purge them out.

When a nation is invaded by other nations whose intention is to destroy and devour, it is common for people to flee for their lives, especially into other countries if possible. Even Jesus urged the Jewish Christians living in Judea in the end time, when the armies of the enemy invade; to “flee to the mountains.” The land of Judea contains remote, rugged, wilderness areas; especially to the south and east.

References are made in various prophecies to a brief dispersion of the Jews in the end time as a result of invasion and occupation by the enemy, and Rev. 12:6 seems to be referring to this kind of situation. The dispersion will take effect, not only by Jews voluntarily fleeing, but also by being forced into exile as a result of conquest by the enemy. See Zech. 14:2. Joel 3:2-3. Ezk. 34:12-13. 36:10-12, 19-20. 37:21-28. 39:23-29. Dan. 12:7. The ultimate return from the end time exile is referred to in Isa. 11:11-12. ch.60.

Rev. 12:14 says the woman is given “two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness.” This, coupled with the fact that v14 and v6 say that a place has been prepared by God in the wilderness for the woman to be fed and nourished for 3½ years; implies that her escape and survival are arranged by God, as in the case of the exodus from Egypt.

INTERESTING PARALLELS

Some interesting parallels can be drawn between Rev. 12 and Israel’s early history with Egypt. The events of the Exodus seem to form a broad outline on which Rev. 12 is based.

1. Pharaoh set out to destroy Israel, God’s first born son (Ex. 4:22. Hos. 11:1), by commanding all first born sons to be thrown into the river. The dragon in Rev. 12 likewise attempts to destroy the man child. He also tries to destroy the woman by engulfing her in a river of water.

2. Rev. 12:5 says the man child was caught up to God and His throne. Israel was delivered from Egypt and carried on wings to Sinai to meet with God “Himself” (Ex. 19:4), to witness His power and glory and hear His voice. The throne of God was at Sinai with its accompanying lightnings, thunderings, voices and earthquake (Ex. 19:16-19. Rev. 4:5). Moses and Aaron and the elders ascended the mount and “they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet, as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, clear blue as the very heavens” (Ex. 24:11).

3. Reference is made in Rev. 12:11 to the dragon being overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Israel was also, in a sense, delivered from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb.

4. In fleeing from Egypt, Israel was led out into the wilderness for 40 years where God sustained her with manna and protected her. The woman in Rev. 12 likewise flees from the dragon into the wilderness for 40 and 2 months to a place prepared by God where she is to be sustained with food.

5. When describing Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the protection and provisions that sustained her, God said: "I bore you on eagle's wings" (Ex. 19:4. Deu. 32:11). Rev. 12:14 likewise says: "And to the woman were given 2 wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where she is nourished ..."

6. Even though God's judgements had fallen heavily on Egypt and humbled her, Pharaoh and his army nevertheless pursued the Israelites to make war with them after they had fled the country. The dragon in Rev. 12 likewise pursues the woman to make war with her and seeks to persecute her seed after being humbled by the angel of God (v13, 15, 17).

7. Pharaoh and his army were swallowed up as they pursued Israel across the bed of the Red Sea, and Rev. 12:16 says the earth opens her mouth and swallows up the dragon's attempt to overwhelm the woman. It is interesting to note that instead of saying "the sea swallowed them," Ex. 15:12 says: "The earth swallowed them" - exactly the same words as Rev. 12:16.

8. The rebels among the Israelites who fled to the wilderness died there and did not enter the promised land. The same will apply in the end time: "As I live says the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule (be king) over you. And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries in which you are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people and there will I plead with you face to face. Like I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, says the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and those who transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall enter the land of Israel: and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezk. 20:33-38).

In view of the links between the dragon in Rev. 12 and Israel's past experience with the Egyptian dragon in Old Testament times, it is natural

to consider the very real possibility that Egypt (and 10 nations confederate with her) will be the end time dragon power.

A PLACE PREPARED TO BE FED

Reference in Rev. 12:6 and in v14 to a “place” that has been “prepared by God” in the wilderness for the woman; gives the impression that a specific place has been selected by God to which the woman can flee to be fed and nourished. It is not impossible that this “wilderness” could be a literal wilderness area in Judea or around Sinai in Arabia where Israel was led by God when they fled from Egypt (Gal. 4:25). But if the wilderness represents countries outside Israel, this would mean that a specific country will be used by God to act as a sanctuary for Jewish fugitives and refugees.

Rev. 12:6 does not say that “He” (God) shall feed the woman in the wilderness, but “they.” This could refer to the angels who also fed Israel in the wilderness in the days of Moses, causing the food to be called “angel’s food” (Ps. 78:25). Or, “they” could refer to those living in “the place” to which Israel flees. Rev. 12:16 says: “The earth helped the woman.” What part of the earth? Probably the part where the “place” is situated to which the woman flees. If so, this would suggest that the people who live there are sympathetic towards the Jewish fugitives and make an effort to help them and defend them against the dragon’s attacks. This is in fulfilment of God’s promise to preserve Israel (Jer. 30:11).

WAR IN HEAVEN

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:7-9).

In an age when aerial combat is the order of the day in warfare, it is not impossible that the “war in heaven” could involve fighter planes of the enemy being cast down from the sky. However, as pointed out before; the word “heaven” in Scripture not only means the air or atmosphere, but can also signify political power - those in high places, referred to as “the higher powers” in Rom. 13:1. God has waged war with such powers through His angels many times in the past; and will do so with the dragon,

stripping him of his power, as he stripped the woman of her power. Attention was directed earlier, for example, to Dan. 4 where reference is made to an angel cutting down a tree whose top reached up to heaven. This signified the casting down of the power of Babylon which had mounted up to heaven (Jer. 51:53). Jesus warned Capernaum that the same fate awaited her: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell” (Matt. 11:23).

MICHAEL AND HIS ANGELS

Regarding Michael and his angels who fight against the dragon: According to Jude v9 Michael is an archangel, or, as Dan. 10:13 puts it: “one of the chief princes.” Being a high ranking angel, he has other angels under him, referred to as “his angels” in Rev. 12:7.

According to Dan. 12:1 Michael has been entrusted with, and is in charge of the nation of Israel, referred to as Daniel’s people. For this reason Daniel was told that Michael is “your prince” (Dan. 10:21).

The context of Dan. 10:21 in which Michael is referred to as Israel’s great prince involves an invasion of Israel by enemy forces in the time of the end (Dan. 11:40-45). When the time comes for judgement to be executed upon the invader, Dan. 12:1 says: “Michael shall stand up”; i.e. Michael will take action and deal with the enemy, terminating his occupation of the land, delivering the remnant of Israel from his clutches.

Michael’s involvement in Israel’s affairs can also be seen in Zech. 3:1-2 and Jude v9, where reference is made to him saying: “The Lord rebuke you” to Israel’s enemy who was opposing the Jewish effort to rebuild and restore the temple at Jerusalem. The way in which the enemy was rebuked and humbled can be seen in Ezra 6.

In view of the fact that Scripture specifically states that Michael’s mission is to have the oversight of Israel’s affairs, there can hardly be any doubt that the woman with 12 stars in Rev. 12 to whom Michael is sent to avenge; by warring with, and casting out her enemy; is Israel.

Because of the clear teaching of Scripture that Michael is an archangel, it is, as said before, outrageous to identify him with Constantine, an apostate Roman emperor.

Michael’s involvement in battles with human forces can also be seen in Dan. 10:13 where we read about him assisting another angel in a battle against the Persian armies, whose prince (king) obviously had other intentions contrary to the divine purpose.

Other testimonies of the ability of angels to deal with human forces

are given from time to time in Scripture. For example, we read in 2 Kng. 19:35 that one angel (Michael?) destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night in order to prevent the Jewish people from being destroyed.

In view of this; if the dragon involves a coalition of powerful Moslem nations, they will be no match for Michael and his angels.

The words: “And the dragon fought and his angels,” indicate that Egypt and her allies, as in the case of the Persian armies in Dan. 10:13, will resist the divine purpose and fight to maintain power over Jerusalem and the land, but will be cast out.

Regarding the reference to the dragon and “his angels”: as mentioned earlier, the Greek word *angelos*, translated angel; simply means messenger. The messenger can be human or divine; the same word is applied equally to both in Scripture. There is nothing in the word itself that indicates whether the messenger is human or divine.

Realizing this, some translations of the Bible have tried to help make a distinction between the two by giving us “messenger” when they believed the reference is to a human, and “angel” when they believed it referred to a divine messenger. The word “messenger” is the correct translation of *angelos*, but “angel” is basically a transliteration. By removing the “os” and carrying the remaining letters over into the English, “angel” is the result.

The translators no doubt meant well when they gave us these two different words from one and the same Greek word, but did they get it right every time? They certainly got it right when they gave us “angels” in relation to Michael because it is clear that he is a divine messenger and so are those who support him. However, they gave the wrong sense when they gave us “angels” in relation to the dragon, because he is clearly not a divine messenger. Doctrinal prejudice in relation to the teaching about a fallen angel devil caused the translators to do this. Michael’s messengers are fellow immortal beings who support him, and the dragon’s messengers are fellow mortal powers who support him, and are represented by his 10 horns.

Resistance to Michael and his angels will be futile and the dragon’s attempt to stay in power (heaven) will fail. Rev. 12:8 puts it like this: He “prevailed not, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” These words are similar to those in Dan. 2:35: “No place was found for them,” which describes the position of the nations after they have been dealt with by divine judgement.

THE DRAGON WAS CAST OUT

Rev. 12:9 says: “And the great dragon was cast out. The words: “cast out” come from the Greek word “ballo” which is also translated “cast” in v4 in relation to the dragon casting one third of the woman’s stars to the earth. Reference to the woman fleeing into the wilderness indicates that the dragon causes her to lose her place in “heaven.” Divine retribution therefore falls upon the dragon. He cast the woman out of her place in heaven so he is now cast out of his!

Verse 9 says the dragon is cast “out,” and v10 says he is cast “down,” i.e. from heaven to the earth, as the latter part of v9 says: “he was cast into the earth.”

Because Israel’s expulsion from Jerusalem and her land is referred to in Lam. 2:1 in terms of being “cast down from heaven to the earth,” this could suggest that the same language in Rev. 12:9 be interpreted to mean expulsion of the dragon from Jerusalem and the land of Israel. (Jerusalem is regarded as heaven’s sanctuary in Scripture). The “earth” into which the dragon is cast could therefore refer to countries outside the land of Israel - Moslem countries from which the dragon and 10 horns came and to which they belong.

If those who were against God’s people in New Testament times were called “devil” and “satan” as we read in 1 Pet. 5:8 and Rev. 1:10; it is not surprising that the dragon, who is not only anti-Israel, but also anti-Christian, is also called devil and satan. The 4 names: dragon, serpent, devil and satan convey 4 aspects. A dragon devours; a serpent deceives; a devil falsely accuses and satan is an opponent and adversary. All 4 are of the flesh and motivated by sin.

It is stated in v9 that the dragon-serpent “deceives the whole world.” In Rev. 20:1-3, 7-9 we learn that the deception of the dragon involves deceiving nations to invade the land of Israel and attack Jerusalem. As a result of Armageddon the dragon is restrained for a thousand years so he cannot deceive nations to do this again. But at the end of the 1,000 years he is released and deceives the nations again to invade Israel in an attempt to take possession of Jerusalem which the Moslem world thinks is theirs.

In Rev. 16:13-14 anti-Israel propaganda is depicted as leaping in all directions like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, as well as the beast and false prophet; causing the armies of the nations to invade the land of Israel, resulting in the battle of Armageddon.

It is also evident in Rev. 12:10 that the deception of the dragon involves false accusation against the Christian community, which of

course is pro-Israel. The dragon will no doubt falsely assert that Jerusalem belongs to Islam and that Israel is a usurper and trespasser, and the true Christian community will disagree with this. As mentioned earlier; Moslem influence will deceive the nations into taking up arms and declaring a Jihad against Israel; and the removal of the mosque on the temple mount at Jerusalem could be the catalyst that causes the conflict.

A LOUD VOICE IN HEAVEN

We now come to verse 10 which is the central verse in the book of Revelation. It says: “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night.”

There are several views on this, and two in particular are worth mentioning. The first one is that due to the fact that both the woman and the dragon have been cast out of heaven and the man-child has been caught up to heaven, the loud voice in heaven declaring that the kingdom of God is now come is the voice of the man-child, i.e. the end-time community of Hebrew Christians who the man-child represents. Reference to “our brethren” is regarded as supporting this view. If so, this would teach that when the dragon is defeated by Michael and expelled from Jerusalem and the land of Israel, the Christian community will think the time has come for the kingdom of God to be established. If so, as the sequel shows, they are mistaken. It is not quite the time for Christ’s return.

The other view is that the loud voice comes from the angels in heaven, who, like the Christians, are also “sons of God” and therefore “brethren,” having the same Father. This is why the angel in Rev. 19:10 and 22:9 would not allow John to fall at his feet and worship him. He told John not to do it because he was a fellow-servant of his and of his brethren of all those who hold to the truth that Jesus revealed.

“NOW IS COME ... THE KINGDOM”

John also heard “great voices in heaven” in Rev. 11:15 when the seventh trumpet sounded, saying: “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord ...” However, as we have seen: in spite of these voices saying the kingdom of the world “has” become the kingdom of our Lord, the kingdom had not in fact come at that stage. According to Rev. 11:14, the seventh trumpet is “the third woe” and

relates to God's wrath which is to come upon the nations (v18) as part of the process involved in establishing his power, authority and kingdom on earth. The statement that the kingdom "has become" is therefore an anticipatory statement. Like the preceding 6 trumpets, the seventh also involves a period of time, at the end of which; and the grand object of which; is the kingdom of God.

The expression "has become" can be compared with God's statement to Abraham, saying: "I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). At the time, Abraham did not have a child, let alone a nation, but God's promise was so sure and certain that He spoke as if it was already fulfilled. It was an anticipatory statement to give full assurance and confidence to Abraham that his hope would be realized. Commenting on this, the apostle says: "God speaks of the non-existent things that He has foretold and promised, as if they already exist" (Rom. 4:17 Amplified Bible).

The same applies to the statement: "Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ" in Rev. 12:10. We are forced to come to this conclusion in view of the statements in the following verses which speak of the dragon still having power to persecute the woman and make war with her seed. This would be impossible if the kingdom of God was established on earth the moment the dragon was cast out of the land of Israel.

However, the defeat of the dragon's armies in the land of Israel and their expulsion, is a major step towards, and sign of the coming of God's kingdom and the power of His Christ. After all, it represents the end of the seventh head of the beast! Speaking prospectively therefore, the Spirit says: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ."

This could be compared with a statement made by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist in Lk. 1:68: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people." In reality, God had not redeemed His people. The Romans still occupied the land of Israel and the redeemer, Jesus Christ, was not even born. However, Mary had conceived him, and John the Baptist, who had to precede him, had just been born. The signs of Christ's first coming were in place, showing that his coming was sure and certain. It was as good as done and so the Spirit spoke as if it was done!

THE ACCUSER OF OUR BRETHREN

Regarding the reference in Rev. 12:10 to the dragon being “the accuser of our brethren”: the Greek word for accuser is “kategoros” and means accused in a law court and is translated “accusers” on 6 other occasions in the New testament. All but one of these (Jn. 8:10) refer to those who are opposed to the Christians and make false accusations against them (Act. 23:30, 35. 24:8. 25:16, 18).

The dragon likewise is a false accuser and for this reason he is called “devil.” “False accuser” is the basic meaning of the Greek word diabolos from which “devil” has been translated. It is actually translated “false accusers” in 2 Tim. 3:3. Titus 2:3, and “slanderers” in 1 Tim. 3:11 in the A.V.

During the time of the Islamic dragon, the Christians will no doubt be proclaiming the prophetic message of Rev. 12, publicly testifying that the Moslem nations which invade Israel are the dragon, and will be judged by God. Those who are the true spiritual Israel are endeared to, and sympathetic towards natural Israel, and unashamedly testify that the land of Israel and Jerusalem belongs to them, not Islam, and that God will restore it all to Israel in the time of restitution when Messiah comes. It will also be evident in their preaching and teaching that Mohammed is a false prophet, the Koran is an uninspired human, fallible book; and Mecca is not a holy place appointed by God.

In view of the Christian outlook of, and stand against Islam; it is to be expected that when the dragon comes to power, that he will be hostile towards them; and resort to all manner of false accusation in an attempt to undermine and silence their testimony, pursuing them to put them to death.

One could well imagine the Moslem communities regularly accusing the Christians to Allah and calling down judgement upon them during their regular times of prayer each day in the mosques. Rev. 12:10 could refer to this when it says they “accused them before our God day and night.” This doesn’t mean of course that Allah is the Christian’s God. There is only one God: Yahweh, the God of Israel, and everything said and done by the worshippers of other gods is done “before” Him, i.e. in His sight. Yahweh would obviously take offence at anti-Christian prayers and petitions being offered, no matter to whom they were being offered. It would be ignorance and presumption of the highest order to imagine that the God of the universe would identify with, and respond to prayers motivated by hate towards the Christians.

Reference to the brethren of Christ being accused before God “day and night” indicates how persistent, relentless, and full of anger and hate the dragon will be. It really speaks of religious fanaticism, and such a description fits Islamic fundamentalism.

THEY OVERCAME HIM

Rev. 12:11 says the brethren of Christ overcame the dragon “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

This teaches that the example of Jesus suffering false accusations and persecution; not allowing the shame and pain of the cross and the shedding of his blood, to intimidate him into relinquishing his faith and surrendering to the enemy; will inspire his end time brethren to do the same when persecution comes and death threatens.

The word “testimony” in the phrase “by the word of their testimony,” comes from the Greek “marturia,” translated “witness” in Rev. 20:4 which refers to the witnesses of Jesus who are beheaded for their faith and testimony. Beheading is a custom in some Moslem countries.

Staying alive during this mortal life is not so important to Christ’s witnesses that they renounce their faith or stop testifying to it, in order to be spared from death. This is conveyed in the statement: “They loved not their lives unto death.” They give heed to Christ’s exhortation in Rev. 2:10: “Fear none of those things that you shall suffer ... be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.”

The witnesses will be of the same spirit as the first century Christians who, even though they were commanded by the authorities to stop preaching, and were threatened with punishment, imprisonment, and were even put to death in some cases; still refused to stop witnessing.

REJOICE HEAVENS, WOE EARTH

“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knows he has but a short time” (v12).

Is it the loud voice in heaven referred to in v10 that speaks these words? If so, the “heavens” that are exhorted to rejoice because the dragon is cast out of heaven, would either be the angels in heaven, particularly Michael and his angels, or the Christian community in

“heavenly places,” particularly the Hebrew Christians in the land of Israel.

The expulsion of the dragon from Jerusalem and the land of Israel is a bitter-sweet event. His loss of power over Israel and departure from the land brings rejoicing to the Jews (Christian and non-Christian) left in the land, but it causes woe for those in other countries. “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and sea” (islands) can be understood in this light. This is indicated in v13 where we are told that as a result of the dragon being cast to the earth, he pursues and persecutes the woman. The dragon’s pride will be sorely hurt, causing great anger and hostility. Being forced to evacuate the land, he will seek to take his anger out on the Jews and Christians in other lands.

As a result of the Moslem armies being defeated and evicted from Israel; Jews in exile will be encouraged to return, as they did when the Nazi power was broken, resulting in the nation of Israel reviving again, which could happen very quickly. The dragon will, as Rev. 12:12 puts it: “know that he has but a short time” to prevent it from happening. So he will set out to kill as many Jews as possible to prevent them from returning to re-establish the nation. The situation will be very much like the attempt of the Nazis and Haman the Agagite who set out to exterminate the Jews living in countries outside of Israel. In the words of 1 Pet. 5:8, the dragon will be “the devil prowling about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”

WINGS OF A GREAT EAGLE

“**A**nd to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent” (v14). This is similar language to v6 which says the woman “fled” into the wilderness, but v14 says she “flew,” due to being “given” two wings of a great eagle.

Elsewhere in Scripture this kind of imagery is descriptive of divine deliverance, suggesting that the 2 wings were given by God, i.e. the woman’s escape and protection from the dragon is arranged and provided by God, as in the case of Israel’s flight from Egypt; as we read in Ex. 19:4: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you to myself.” Also see Deu. 32:11-12. Ps. 55:1-8. Ps. 91. Isa. 40:31.

It is significant to note that before the woman flies into the wilderness (v14), she is in “the earth” where the dragon was cast (v13), which, as we have seen, seems to refer to other countries outside the land

of Israel. This suggests that the woman flies from these countries to a specific location called “the wilderness.” Being “a place prepared by God” (v6) it is obviously a divinely chosen and ordained location suitable for the protection and preservation of the Jews.

It seems that Rev. 12:6 and 14 refer to two different flights into the wilderness. V6 refers to those living in the land of Israel fleeing when the dragon invades and occupies the land. This flight would therefore occur at the beginning of the 1,260 days, before Michael fights the dragon. But v14 seems to refer to the flight of those who live in countries outside the land of Israel, as a result of Michael fighting the dragon and evicting him from the land of Israel. If so, the 1,260 days in v14 would refer to a 3½ year period after the defeat of the dragon’s forces in Israel, unless of course, v6 is simply an anticipatory reference of v14. If not, two different 3½ year periods would seem to be referred to in these verses, and this would suggest that the dragon will only occupy the land of Israel for 3½ years but will still have power and influence in other countries for a time. As we shall see, Rev. 13 refers to the dragon continuing to exercise considerable power among nations under the beast, whose time in power will also be 3½ years.

If two different flights into the wilderness are signified, it would be natural to conclude that those in v14 fly to the same “wilderness” to which those in v6 fled earlier, and join them.

Rev. 12:6 says the place prepared by God is a place where “they should feed her.” The “they” more than likely refers to “the earth” in v16 which “helped the woman,” and which probably provided the nourishment mentioned in v14. This indicates that God will use a nation or nations to help Jews to escape and survive, implying that there will be people sympathetic towards their plight.

It may not be going too far to even suggest that the reference to wings of an eagle being given to the woman to “fly” into the “wilderness,” signifies airlifts in transport planes as in the case of Isa. 60:8 which has been applied to the airlifting of Jews back to their land in the mid 20th century. Remember also the airlift involved in the dramatic rescue of Jews from Entebbe airport in Uganda during the reign of Iddi Ammin.

The eagle signifies swiftness of flight, and it could be significant that it is the symbol of the U.S.A. At the moment it would certainly not be difficult to imagine the U.S.A. coming to the rescue of the Jews. In fact, it would not be difficult to imagine Michael and his angels strengthening and supporting the U.S.A. to evict the dragon from the land of Israel if the

present relationship between the two countries continues.

A FLOOD OF WATER

Rev. 12:15 goes on to say: “The serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.”

The Greek word “potamos,” translated “flood,” means current, brook, stream, river. It is translated “river,” “rivers,” and “stream” as well as “flood” in the New Testament.

The picture presented in Rev. 12:15 is that of a crocodile spuing out of his mouth water like a river, to sweep the woman away in the current and drown her. It calls to mind Egypt’s attempt to engulf and drown Israel in the days of Moses, by casting all the male children into the river Nile.

In v4 the dragon attacked the woman by lashing out with his tail, as crocodiles are capable of doing when in close combat with their victim in the water, and he swept one third of Israel’s population away. In v15 however, we read that he attempts to reach the woman who is now further away from his reach, by casting out a flood of water from his mouth, hoping to sweep her away and drown her.

The figure of a flood of water or a river in flood, sweeping away people in its current, is used a number of times in Scripture to signify the dispatching of forces to overflow, overwhelm and overthrow their prey. See Ps. 18:4. 32:6. 69:2. Ps. 93. Ps. 124. Isa. 8:7. 17:11-12. 28:2. 59:19. Jer. 46:7-8. 47:1-2. Dan. 9:26. 11:22.

A similar figure of speech is used in Isa. 30:28 in relation to the judgement of the nations at the battle of Armageddon at Christ’s return. It says: “His breath is like an overflowing stream (rushing torrent) that reaches up to the neck ...”

It is generally believed that the flood of water like a river, gushing forth from the dragon’s mouth, is symbolical as in the case of frogs issuing forth from his mouth in 16:13; fire proceeding out of the mouths of the two witnesses in 11:5; and the sword coming out of the mouth of Christ in 19:15.

As we have seen, the fire coming out of the mouths of the witnesses signified fire being sent upon their enemies as a result of a command from their mouth. The sword coming out of Christ’s mouth also signifies his command for his enemies to be slain. And, as we shall see, frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon signify the political propaganda he proclaims against Israel which “leap-frogs” among the nations, resulting

in the final invasion of the land, bringing about the battle of Armageddon.

The flood of water gushing out of the dragon-serpent's mouth could likewise represent a flood of poisonous words urging and inciting nations to swamp and engulf the Jews who might have fled into their country.

One commentator even goes so far as to suggest sluice gates of a dam could be opened to flood the area where the Jewish fugitives will be in hiding!

THE EARTH HELPED THE WOMAN

“**A**nd the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth” (v16).

This is a picture of a river losing itself in the parched absorbent sands of the wilderness. It is evident from this that there will be a nation or nations that will be sympathetic towards, and supportive of the Jews, as for example Holland during the Nazi holocaust. They will absorb the dragon's wrath and not allow it to spill over and reach the Jews.

In view of the word “flood” representing an army in some Scriptures (e.g. Isa. 59:19), some see the flood in Rev. 12 as representing an army sent by command of the dragon to pursue the fleeing Jews, as Pharaoh pursued Israel when they fled from Egypt.

In the days of the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16) out in the wilderness, the earth literally opened and swallowed the rebels, as the Red Sea literally opened up and swallowed Pharaoh and his armies. It is therefore believed by some that the reference in Rev. 12 to the earth opening up and swallowing the flood, could be taken literally, and refer to a supernatural act of God by which the armies of the enemy are swallowed up.

After all, it is the time of miracles when this occurs. It is the time when there is to be a renewal of wonders, “like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt” (Mic. 7:15). No one knowing the power of God would doubt His ability to cause a sudden and great rending of the earth to stop pursuing armies and bury them en-masse in a convulsion.

The reference in the next and final verse in chapter 12 to the dragon being “wroth” and “went to make war” certainly indicates he marshals his forces and goes forth on the rampage.

The word “wroth” comes from the Greek “orgizo” and is the same word translated “angry” in Rev. 11:18. It means violent passion, furious. It could very well be that the statement “the nations were angry” in Rev.

11:18 could refer to the widespread anti-Semitic spirit, as well as anti-Christian, in the end time; resulting in the wrath of God.

The anti-Christian spirit manifested by the dragon is conveyed in Rev. 12:17 by reference to him making war with the remnant of the woman's seed "who keep the commandments of God and bear witness for Jesus." The woman's seed is clearly defined here as the true Christian community which obeys God and witnesses to Christ. The word "remnant" means those who remain - the residue, implying some have died or been killed by the dragon.

In Rom. 9:27 and 11:5 the word "remnant" has a different application; it refers to all who will be saved out of the nation of Israel - an election from within the election!

STARS AND SEED NOT THE SAME

Some have thought that the remnant of the woman's seed refers to the remaining two thirds of her stars that were not cast down by the dragon. But to affirm that the stars and the woman's seed refer to the same thing is to mix the metaphors. The stars are nowhere referred to as the woman's seed. As pointed out earlier; the woman represents the nation of Israel and the 12 stars signify the 12 tribes into which the nation is divided.

The Greek word "sperma" translated "seed" means offspring. In Rev. 12 the woman's offspring is the "man child" with whom she travailed to give birth. Reference to his ultimate destiny of ruling all nations with a rod of iron, clearly identifies him with Christ and his brethren as we have seen, and v17 confirms it. Verse 17 also confirms that the man-child represents a community, not an individual. (The word "remnant" conveys plurality).

It is also confirmed in v17 that the man child is not caught up to God's throne to rule the moment he is born. Prior to ruling, the man child goes through tribulation during which some are killed, leaving a "remnant" surviving, against whom the dragon makes war.

Nowhere is it stated that the woman keeps God's commandments and bears witness to Jesus. She clearly represents the secular and Orthodox Jews in Israel, and the man child represents the Christians. The dragon is hostile to both, and the fact that the woman's seed bears witness to Jesus, indicates that Christians will not be hiding in the wilderness during the dragon era.

The dragon's hostility towards anyone who identifies with Christ is

seen in Rev. 17:16, which refers to the 10 horns hating the harlot and burning her with fire. As we shall see, the harlot represents an apostate form of Christianity which has its power base in Rome, and the language in Rev. 18 describing the destruction of Rome by fire within the space of an hour, sounds like a nuclear war-head.

Islamic extremists who were angry enough to fly passenger planes into New York's twin towers, will eventually have no compunction about dropping a nuclear war-head on a city!

Upon the earth there will be, as Jesus warned, "distress of nations as they stand helpless in a state of quandary ... men's hearts failing them for fear at the thought of all that is coming upon the world ... When all this begins to happen, look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption is near."



CHAPTER TEN REVELATION CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Revelation chapter 13 in the A.V. commences with the words: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea.” But other translations maintain that this opening clause really belongs to the close of the preceding chapter, and instead of saying “I stood” they say “he stood,” referring to the dragon, not John. (The dividing of the Bible into chapters and verses is a man-made convenience to make it easier to find passages of Scripture, but they should never be considered as being inspired. The original narrative runs along in great paragraphs, which in their earliest forms were not separated by any punctuation).

The whole of the previous verse in Rev. 12:17 would therefore read: “And the dragon became enraged because of the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed who keep the commandments of God and bear witness for Jesus; and he (the dragon) stood upon the sand of the sea.”

Chapter 13:1 would then read: “And I (John) saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having 7 heads and 10 horns, and upon his horns 10 crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.”

We were briefly introduced to the beast in Rev. 11:7 where reference is made to him ascending out of the bottomless pit or abyss. Here, in chapter 13:1 we are told that he rises up out of the sea, and in 17:3 he is seen coming out of the wilderness. Furthermore, Rev. 13:3 and 14 say the beast received a fatal wound and recovered, and Rev. 17:11 states that he once “was” but “is not,” but will appear again.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, all these expressions may relate to the same thing, signifying that the beast formerly had power but lost it and went into the political abyss or “wilderness.” But although submerged among the nations, he emerges from the turbulent powers and politics and restless strife of the nations, represented by the sea, (Isa. 57:20) finally attaining super-power status.

The word for beast, as was also pointed out in a previous chapter, is therion in Greek, and relates to a wild dangerous animal, not a tame domestic animal. The word is used of literal beasts in Mk. 1:13. Act. 10:12. 11:6. 28:5. Heb. 12:20. Jam. 3:7, and it is used contemptuously to describe the Cretans in Titus 1:12.

In Bible prophecy, a beast represents a great political power. It can refer to an empire, a country and a confederacy of nations. In the book of Revelation, the beast symbolizes nations that attack and seek to devour

God's people, both natural and spiritual Israel. Such nations, being likened to a wild beast, are savage, vicious, cruel and unscrupulous; preying upon those who offer no resistance, showing them no mercy. As could be expected, they are ignorant of God and His Word, and have no discernment, understanding or appreciation of spiritual matters. For this reason, Ps. 49:20 says that no matter how honourable a man may be regarded; if he has no understanding, he is like the beasts that perish. And in 2 Pet. 2:10-12 and Jude v10 we read that men driven by their own lusts who are presumptuous, self-willed, despise authority and speak evil of things they know nothing about, and against those who are holy, are "as natural brute beasts." When Paul encountered such men at Ephesus he wrote: "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32).

SEVEN HEADS AND TEN HORNS

The first introduction to the beast in Rev. 11:7 was a very brief passing reference with no details added, but we are given more information in chapter 13. We are told that he has 7 heads and 10 horns. 10 crowns are upon his horns, and the names of blasphemy are upon his heads. We are not told how the 10 horns were distributed on the 7 heads. Perhaps 4 heads each had 1 horn, and the other 3 heads each had 2 horns.

As we have seen in chapter 12, the dragon is also described as having 7 heads and 10 horns. But, as has been pointed out, other references in Revelation to the dragon and beast, make it clear that they are not one and the same beast; they represent two separate and distinct powers.

We have also seen, on the basis of Rev. 17:10, that the 7 heads represent seven successive stages in history during which Israel has been in subjection to a Gentile power. Because the dragon is the seventh in that succession and shares a position among the 7 heads, he is depicted with the 7 heads in Rev. 12:3. The 7 heads represent Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and an end time Moslem confederacy led or incited by Egypt.

Regarding the fact that both the dragon and beast have 10 horns: this does not mean, as has been mentioned, that they both have 10 horns, making a total of 20; in the same way that reference to them both having 7 heads, does not mean that 14 heads are involved.

Because the dragon precedes the beast, the 10 horns are connected and associated with him before the beast. But, as we read in Rev. 17:12-13, the 10 horns later give their power to the beast. In view of the fact that prior to this transfer of the 10 horns to the beast, the 10 horns belonged to

the dragon; it should be evident that this means the dragon transfers his power and allegiance to the beast. The reference in Rev. 13:2, 4 to the dragon giving his power to the beast can therefore be paralleled with the reference to the 10 horns giving their power to the beast in Rev. 17:12-13.

According to Rev. 17:11, the beast is an eighth phase in the succession of Gentile powers that gain ascendancy over Israel. However, because he is a revival of one of the previous 7, he is depicted with 7 heads not 8, one of which received a deadly wound but revived. His revival makes him an eighth phase in the history of the nation of Israel, which means he comes on the scene after the dragon, who is the seventh.

Regarding the identity of the beast: it has been pointed out that the Spirit connects the destruction of the beast and 10 horns in Rev. 19:17-21 with the destruction of Gog and his confederates in Ezk. 39:17-20, indicating that Gog and his confederates are the beast and 10 horns.

“Gog” is generally regarded as a symbolical name for the leader of the invasion force which invades Israel, and can be equated with the man of sin in 2 Thes. 2:3-4, the king of the north in Dan. 11:40- and the little horn in Dan. 7.

Ezk. 38:2 associates Gog with the land of Magog (southern Russia) and says he is “prince of Rosh.” Most authorities agree that Rosh was the ancient name of Russia. In the following verses some of the confederates are named, such as Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, Togarmah (Turkey), which are Moslem countries today.

In view of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the beast is Russia and Moslem nations will be among his confederates.

Regarding the beast being a revival of one of the 7 heads: we have seen in the previous chapter that we can narrow it down to a revival of one of the first 5, because Rev. 17:10-11 implies he “is not” the sixth (Rome). And, in view of the statement that the beast “was,” this means he could not be the seventh who was “yet to come.” (It has already become evident that the seventh head, being the dragon, is separate and distinct from the beast, and therefore cannot be the eighth beast phase).

The end time beast must therefore be a revival of one of the first 5 heads which are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece.

It cannot be Egypt because the dragon is Egypt and is the seventh head. In the time of the end, the king of the north (the beast) invades Egypt (Dan. 11:40-43).

Neither is it likely to be Assyria or Babylon, firstly because both of these peoples have become extinct and have disappeared as a race. Secondly, because Babylon is identified with the dragon in Scripture and

is represented by Iraq today. She will no doubt be among the nations that support the beast. (Iraq occupies the territory originally occupied by Assyria).

Neither can it be Persia (Iran today) because Persia is referred to as a confederate of the beast, not the beast itself (Ezk. 38:5).

GREECE

By this process of elimination we are left with Greece, which is interesting in the light of Daniel chapter eleven. Throughout this chapter, reference is made to “the king of the north” and refers to the Greek Selucidae kingdom north of Israel, which occupied the territories now known as Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. Out of this kingdom, around 175 B.C. arose a particularly evil and vile anti-Israel king by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. He invaded Israel resulting in many Israelites being slain, and the survivors were subjected to a time of tribulation. The daily sacrifice was stopped for 3½ years; the temple was desecrated and an abomination was set up. Copies of the law were burned, priests were massacred and infants who were circumcised were slaughtered and hung around their mother’s necks. It was a terrible time for the Jews and a very dark and dismal period in their history.

It was such a significant period in Israel’s history that a specific prophecy was given relating to it, recorded in Daniel chapter 8. In this chapter reference is made to a he-goat which signifies Greece, and the goat had a notable horn which represented the first king, Alexander the Great. The great horn was broken and in its place came up 4 notable ones towards the 4 points of the compass. These 4 horns represented 4 of Alexander’s generals who took over his empire after his death. Out of one of these 4 came forth a “little horn” who became powerful, expanding to the south and east and toward Palestine. He grew strong enough to attack the army of heaven (Israel’s army), and cast some of the stars (Israelites) to the ground and trampled upon them, treading them under foot. He even magnified himself against the God of Israel and stopped the daily sacrifice being offered to God on the altar at Jerusalem and cast his temple down.

The little horn that did all this was Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a descendant of Seleucus Nicator, the Greek general who ruled over the area of Alexander’s empire north of Israel; known as the Selueucidae kingdom. It was clearly part of the Greek kingdom originally established by Alexander the Great, and the prophecy in Dan. 8 concerning the Greek empire leads up to this point. It is the main objective.

Significantly enough, the man of sin - Gog - the eighth beast phase, is also referred to as a “little horn” in Dan. 7 and “king of the north” in Dan. 11:40-. In fact, what is said about the end time little horn and king of the north is so similar to what is said about the little horn in Dan. 8, some have concluded that they refer to one and the same power. This would not be surprising if one was a revival of the other! It is to be expected that a power that is a revival of the past, will closely resemble it.

For this reason the section in Dan. 11 which refers to Antiochus as the king of the north flows straight into the time of the end and refers to the leader of the end time invasion forces by the same title. This surely implies that the end time invasion of Israel and the tribulation it causes, will be a repetition or revival of the history that took place during the period of the Greek empire, represented by the fifth head on the beast.

For this reason it is stated in Rev. 13:2 that the beast “looked like a leopard,” i.e. the dominant characteristic was that of a leopard. In Dan. 7:6 the leopard is the beast chosen by the Spirit to represent the Greek empire, and it was in a section of this empire that the little horn in Dan. 8 emerged. From what we have seen in these studies, it is clear that the end time beast, like Antiochus Epiphanes, will be “king of the north.” He will have jurisdiction over the same territories of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan and much more, and will invade Israel causing much death, destruction and tribulation. He will, as did Antiochus, take away the daily sacrifice, set up an abomination, desecrate the temple and tread Jerusalem underfoot for 3½ years.

In every respect the end time king of the north will be a revival and repetition of Antiochus Epiphanes. Even the numerical value of the name “Epiphanes” is a “shadow” (not the very image) of the numerical value of the name of the leader of the end time beast.

According to Rev. 13:18, the number of the man responsible for the beast, is 666. The numerical value of “Epiphanes” is 660:

ENGLISH	GREEK	VALUE
E	EPSILON	5
P	PI	80
I	IOTA	10
PH	PHI	500
A	ALPHA	1
N	NU	50
E	ETA	8
S	FINAL SIGMA	6
		660

Some have claimed that the name Epiphanes can be spelt “Epipheneia,” and by treating the letter “e” as “epsilon” on all three times that it occurs, results in a numerical value of 666:

ENGLISH	GREEK	VALUE
E	EPSILON	5
P	PI	80
I	IOTA	10
PH	PHI	500
E	EPSILON	5
N	NU	50
E	EPSILON	5
I	IOTA	10
A	ALPHA	1
		666

It is claimed that Antiochus took for himself the title “Epipheneia” which means “God manifest,” and that in Greek, the phrase: “I am God on earth” totals 666. If so, this would be significant because the man of sin will claim to be God (2 Thes. 2:4).

OTHER PARALLELS

Various words and expressions used in relation to the Epiphanes’ era in Dan. 11:31 - are picked up by the Spirit and applied to the era of the end time king of the north, indicating that the former was a prototype or forerunner of the latter.

For example, Dan. 12:1 refers to the end time being “a time of trouble, such as never was” Jesus quoted this in relation to the period that immediately precedes his second coming (Matt. 24:21), and said many Jews “shall fall by the sword and be led away captive” (Lk. 21:24). These words are taken from Dan. 11:33: “they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, and by captivity” This indicates that Jesus believed the history in the time of Antiochus and the Maccabees was going to repeat itself, and that it was a type or foreshadow of the end time.

Dan. 12:3 says “those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars for

ever and ever.” Jesus also quoted these words and applied them to the end time (Matt. 13:43). These “wise” ones are also referred to in Dan. 12:10 as those who “shall understand,” which recalls Dan. 11:33: “those who understand among the people shall instruct many.” Also v 35: “And some of them of understanding ...” (The Hebrew word translated “wise” in Dan. 12:3, 10 is the same as that translated “understand” and “understanding” in 11:33, 35).

It is also significant that the same Hebrew word translated “wonders” in the question: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” (Dan. 12:6), is translated “marvellous things” in 11:36 in relation to the anti-God activities of Antiochus. If there is a connection between them, this would again indicate that the anti-God, anti-Israel activities of the end time king of the north will be a re-enactment or revival of the historical king of the north. And, significantly enough, the answer to the question: “it shall be for a time, times, and an half,” also had an historical fulfilment as we have seen in the 3½ year period that Antiochus stopped the daily sacrifice.

Dan. 11:36 says the king of the north will only prosper until God’s indignation is “accomplished” i.e. God will only allow the northern power to prevail until His wrath against Israel is finished. This same point is made in 12:7: “... all these things shall be finished.” (The Hebrew word translated “finished” and “accomplished” is the same).

Dan. 12:10 also refers to the wicked who shall not understand, which could allude to those who “do wickedly against the covenant” in 11:32. There will be traitors in Israel in the time of the end who curry favour with the enemy, and betray friends and family as there were in the time of the Maccabees (Matt. 24:10).

The reference to the “daily sacrifice” being “taken away” and the “abomination that makes desolate” being “set up” in Dan. 12:11 also unmistakably links up with 11:31. The taking away of the daily sacrifice and desecration of the temple by Antiochus clearly pointed forward to end time events.

This leads us to expect the reinstatement of the daily sacrifice and the rebuilding of a Jewish temple, and the re-appearance of a vile and diabolical “king of the north” in the end time; worse than Antiochus. Like Antiochus, his policy will be to cause craft and deceit to prosper, and by peace he will destroy many (Dan. 8:25). 2 Thes. 2:9-10 says he will be energised by satan (sin in the flesh, hence “man of sin”), performing lying wonders with wicked deception.

His attack on Israel while they are at rest, with all their defences down due to not fearing or anticipating invasion or war, will come like a

bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky. It will be totally unexpected. “By peace he shall destroy many” suggests he will enter into a peace treaty with Israel, eliminating all threat of war to the extent that Israel will virtually scrub her defence policy and programme. But it will all be a deception (“crafty counsel” Ps. 83:3. Also see Jer. 4:10). War is in his heart and he will take advantage of Israel being at rest, dwelling without bars and gates.

“When they shall say, peace and safety, sudden destruction will come upon them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thes. 5:3).

A type can also be seen in Dan. 8:25 where reference is made to the little horn opposing and defying the prince of princes and being broken and destroyed without the use of human hand or power. Antiochus certainly defied God and was eventually struck down by Him with a sickness and died. The end time little horn will also defy God and be struck down at Armageddon by His son, who is also “prince of princes.”

When the tribulation period caused by Antiochus had run its course, Judas Maccabeas rose up with his Jewish brothers, and with God’s help, fought against Antiochus and defeated him. Having delivered the land and people from the enemy, Israel became a free and independent state, no longer trodden underfoot by the Gentiles.

The temple was cleansed, involving some rebuilding and restoration, and the daily sacrifice was reinstated. It was such a momentous and significant occasion in Israel’s history that the Jews have commemorated it every year since. Reference is made to it in Jn. 10:22 as “the feast of dedication.”

Judas Maccabeus can be seen as a type of Christ who is the ultimate deliverer from the tribe of Judah, who will also go forth and fight at the battle of Armageddon against the king of the north and deliver Israel. In that day a new sanctuary will be set up for the nation of Israel and all other nations, in the land of Israel, and it is referred to in detail in Ezk. 40 to 48.

According to Dan. 8:13-14: from the time that the invader enters the land, takes away the daily sacrifice and treads underfoot Israel’s army and the temple; to the time he is destroyed and the sanctuary is ready for service, will be 2,300 days. Because the beast will be in power for 1,260 days, this means the millennial temple will be built during a period of 1,040 days (almost 3 years) after Christ’s return.

Once it is accepted that the end time king of the north will be a revival or re-enactment of Antiochus Epiphanes, it can be appreciated why

the section in Dan. 11 pertaining to Antiochus leaps straight into the section pertaining to the end time king of the north, giving the impression that it is speaking about the same person. This merging of the one into the other is designed to suggest a close similarity between the two.

UPON HIS HORNS TEN CROWNS

The point was made in the previous chapter that the beast has both horns and heads, and it would be possible for crowns to be on either. In Rev. 13:1 they are on the 10 horns of the beast, but back in Rev. 12:3 they are on the 7 heads of the dragon. As we have seen, the positioning of the crowns on the 7 heads of the dragon indicates that he is the seventh phase of beast power in Israel's history. But being positioned on the 10 horns of the beast indicates that the dragon has been superseded by the beast and the 10 horns now derive their power from him, having been invested with power by him.

Rev. 17:3 makes no reference to crowns being on the 10 horns of the beast, and v12 says the 10 horns have received no kingdom as yet i.e. at that stage, they have not invaded Israel with the beast to take possession of the land and reign over it. However, Rev. 17:12 says they will receive power to reign for a short period with the beast, and the crowns in Rev. 13:1 signify that.

Dan. 11:39 says the king of the north "shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price" (cp. Joel 3:2: "parted my land.") The "price" the ten horns pay to possess and rule Israel is giving their power and allegiance and "kingdom" (Rev. 17:17) to the beast, to help him achieve his goals and ambitions.

UPON HIS HEADS NAMES OF BLASPHEMY

Rev. 13:1 in the A.V. says: "the name of blasphemy" was upon the heads of the beast i.e. written upon. Most modern versions agree that it should read: "the names of blasphemy." We would not of course expect to read that blasphemy was coming out of all the mouths, because they represent powers in the past that have come and gone. The beast speaks with one mouth: the mouth of a lion (v2). Verses 5-6 go on to say: "There was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies ... and he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven." Dan. 7:8 also refers to this bragging mouth.

All the world powers represented by the heads were ruled by kings who assumed divine titles and who were worshipped as gods, which is blasphemy to the One and only true God of Israel. According to Ezk. 35:12 it is even regarded as blasphemy by God to speak against Israel and to hope and plan to devour the nation.

LIKE A LEOPARD, BEAR AND LION

Rev. 13:2 informs us that the beast “was like a leopard; his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion ...”

It seems from this description that the beast had the body of a leopard, feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion. Although the main body or bulk of the beast was leopard, it was not all leopard, and neither was it all lion or bear. Only various features of it resembled those beasts.

The beast in Revelation is a composite beast, containing characteristics of the beasts in Dan. 7; and it would be unlikely if we were not expected to make a comparison and draw parallels.

In Dan. 7, the characteristics of leopard, lion and bear were shared out among three empires. The leopard represented Greece, including the Selucidæ kingdom; the lion represented Babylon (Iraq), and the bear represented Persia (Iran). In Rev. 13 these and others are all combined in one terrifying unity of power. This confirms that the territory over which the beast will have jurisdiction will be at least the area ruled by Antiochus Epiphanes. Rev. 13:7-8 states that “power was given to him over all kindreds, tongues and nations, and all who dwell upon the earth shall worship him.”

Rolling and incorporating the different beasts into one reminds us of the metals in the metallic image in Dan. 2 which, although different, and representative of beast phases i.e. successive empires in the past, will nevertheless all be destroyed “together” at Armageddon (Dan. 2:35). This also indicates, as in the case of the different beasts which are formed together into one beast in Rev. 13, that the territories represented by the metals will all be confederated under one head in the latter days, forming the most powerful empire in world history.

Israel will clearly be no match for such a force and the nation will be destroyed and the land devastated. In the light of the beast being composed of lion, leopard and bear; the prophecy in Hos. 13:7-9 is intriguing. It states that because Israel became proud and forgot God, she was warned that He would “attack them like a lion. Like a leopard I will lie in wait along your path. I will attack you like a bear that has lost her

cubs, and I will tear you open. Like a lion I will devour you on the spot, and will tear you to pieces like a wild animal. O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; who can help you?”

THE DRAGON GAVE HIM HIS POWER

After stating that the beast was like a leopard, having the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, Rev. 13:2 then says: “And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.”

The Greek word “dunamis” translated “power” is used in the New Testament in relation to the miraculous power of God. In view of this, verses 14 and 15 are sometimes linked because they refer to the beast having power to perform miracles. However, the beast who does this is neither the dragon nor the beast referred to in v2, but “another beast” referred to in v11 who had 2 horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And the “wonders” he performs are not genuine miracles performed by divine power, but lying wonders i.e. pseudo miracles.

Dunamis is not always and only used to signify miraculous power. It is translated “ability” in Matt. 25:15; “strength” in 2 Cor. 1:8, Rev. 3:8. It is translated “power” or “powers” in relation to human power in 2 Cor. 8:3. Rom. 8:38. 1 Cor. 15:24. 1 Pet. 3:22. In Heb. 11:34 dunamis is translated “violence” in relation to fire, meaning the power of fire.

Reference therefore to the dragon giving his “power” to the beast has nothing to do with miraculous power, as is believed by those who regard the dragon as a supernatural dragon-serpent, i.e. a fallen angel devil. The “power” refers to the dragon’s political influence among nations as well as his military power, involving armies and weapons.

Regarding “his seat” which the dragon gives to the beast: the Greek word for seat is “thronos” and is better translated “throne.” A throne is the power-base of a kingdom from which edicts and commands proceed to control and govern the people. During the reign of the dragon, prior to the rise of the beast, it is to be expected that Egypt will be the power base from which directives will come to the 10 horns. But the dragon will abdicate his throne as it were, and forfeit his power to govern and control the 10 horns, and allow the beast to do so from his own power base instead.

Rev. 13:2 says the dragon will give the beast “great authority.” The beast will be given the right to exercise authority and jurisdiction over all that had been under the dragon’s authority and command. If this involves authority over 10 Islamic nations, it would certainly be “great authority.”

There is a difference between power and authority, and it could be illustrated as follows: A policeman has the authority to keep law and order, and his badge and uniform is a sign of that. But if attacked by a gang, he does not have the power to resist his attackers and enforce his authority. The beast will have both the authority to command his will and the power to enforce it! “He shall do according to his will” (Dan. 11:36).

The reference to the dragon giving his power, throne and authority to the beast; confirms that his defeat by Michael and expulsion from the holy land does not strip him of all his power and authority. However, he lacks confidence by himself to make a reprisal attack on Israel to re-establish himself in the land. He therefore seeks to enlist the support of the beast to fulfil his evil ambition, and is willing to pay the price by handing over to him his power and authority to achieve this. Rev. 16:13-14 clearly indicates that the dragon in conjunction with the beast and false prophet, incite the nations to gather for the battle of Armageddon, and this involves the invasion of Israel.

ONE OF HIS HEADS WOUNDED TO DEATH

“**O**ne of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder” (Rev. 13:3).

Because v2 refers to the beast having a mouth like a lion, it could imply the wounded head was a lion’s head. This head is one of the 7 referred to in v1. Because v3 says the wound was healed and the whole earth followed “the beast,” this shows that the wounded head represents the beast. Reference in v3 to the head being wounded, followed by the reference in v12 to the beast being wounded, confirms that the head represents a beast - the end time beast phase.

The words “wounded to death” and “deadly wound” are taken by some to mean a wound that actually causes death, and others take them to mean a very serious wound that would normally be fatal, causing death, but does not do so due to being healed.

There are also 2 opinions on how to interpret the beast who is inflicted with the wound. Some see it as referring to the political power of the beast and others see it as referring to the leader - the man of sin. Rev. 13:18 for example identifies “a man” with “the beast,” by referring to “the number of the beast” and then saying “it is the number of a man.” And v14 says the wound is inflicted “by a sword,” which, if applied to a man, would suggest an assassination attempt, which either killed him or should

have killed him, but he seemingly miraculously revived or survived.

If applied to the political power of the beast, it would either mean political death through war and an amazing recovery and revival of power, or a war that should have caused political death and permanent loss of power but doesn't.

To give an example: Russia suffered a serious and severe wound during war with Germany. Millions were killed and the land and people became terribly impoverished. But within a short space of time, historically speaking, Russia had an amazing recovery and became a super-power, having a dominant influence on world politics.

In more recent times, the communist government in Russia suffered serious loss of power and influence. The U.S.S.R. broke up and disintegrated, resulting in civil war in parts. If Russia is the beast, something like this may be signified by the wound he receives, and the rise to power of communism may be what the healing signifies. One thing is certain: in accordance with the philosophy of communism, the king of the north is an avowed atheist (Dan. 11:36-38. 2 Thes. 2:4. Rev. 13:5-6).

The fact that it is repeated three times in Rev. 13 (v3, 12, 14) that the beast's deadly wound healed, causing the world to be amazed to the point of worshipping him and his image, indicates that whatever the recovery involves, it is regarded as miraculous - supernatural, resulting in him being deified.

According to 2 Thes. 2:9-11, the man of sin is going to deceive all who do not know and love the truth, into believing a lie. He is going to do this by a profession of power and signs and lying wonders. The Greek word for "lying" is pseudos, from which the English word pseudo is derived, indicating that his so-called "power," signs and wonders are not real and genuine but a counterfeit; a clever con that deceives many into thinking they are genuine. It could very well be that he will arrange for a situation in which he appears to be killed by an assassin and miraculously recovers.

As Jesus is served and worshipped by people in all nations as a result of being "wounded" for our transgressions and being made alive again, so the beast may stage a revival to rival him and gain a world-wide following. In the event of this happening, the words of Jesus recorded in Jn. 5:43 would be relevant: "I am come in my Father's Name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive."

ALL THE WORLD WONDERED AND WORSHIPPED

Rev. 13:3 says that as a result of the deadly wound being healed: “All the world wondered after the beast.” The word “wondered” means to marvel and admire. It carries with it the idea of being amazed, astounded and impressed. The same word is translated “wondered” and “marvelled” in the gospels to describe the reaction of the people to the teaching and miracles of Jesus (Matt. 8:27. 9:8, 33. 15:31. Lk. 4:22). It also occurs in Rev. 17:6-8 in relation to John being greatly astonished at the harlot who was drunk with the blood of the saints.

The New Living Bible captures the sense of Rev. 13:3: “All the world marvelled at this miracle and followed the beast with awe.” The nations are obviously going to be very impressed with the beast’s recovery from his fatal wound - so impressed that they end up worshipping him. As suggested before, they may see it as resurrection from the dead. This may be the kind of thing to which Jesus referred when he warned that great signs and wonders would be performed, inasmuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect (Mat. 24:24).

Sometimes it is overlooked that not only is the beast worshipped by the world but also the dragon. Rev. 13:4 says: “And they worshipped the dragon who gave power to the beast: and they worshipped the beast saying, who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”

The word “worship” means to prostrate in homage; give reverence and respect. This is the only reference to the dragon being worshipped. It is evident that although the dragon is defeated by Michael and evicted from the land of Israel, and gives his power, throne and authority to the beast; that he still exerts an influence in the world and has respect. See 16:13. 20:2-3.

Because the dragon is anti-Israel, yet worshipped by the world; this implies widespread anti-Semitism. Also, the fact that the statement about the world worshipping the dragon is followed by the words: “who gave power to the beast,” could be taken to mean that it is the dragon’s willingness to support the beast that wins him respect from the world.

In view of the beast’s anti-Israel and anti-Christian attitude, it is again evident that this spirit will be wide-spread in the world in the end time. The saints will be hated by all nations (Matt. 24:9).

There is considerable emphasis in the book of Revelation on worship of the beast, as the following references indicate: (Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15. 14:9, 11. 16:2. 19:20. 20:4). Paul’s reference to the man of sin in 2 Thes. 2:4 also relates to this: “Who opposes himself and exalts himself above all

that is called God, or object of worship; so that he sits in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” These words are based on Dan. 11:36-38 relating to the king of the north: “The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak outrageous things against the God of gods ...”

Men prefer to worship what they can see. This is reflected in the adoration and idolization of film stars, pop stars, sports’ stars, fast cars, and the widespread use of idols and holy relics in conjunction with the worship of various religions of the world. Nationalism and patriotism is also a form of worship, i.e. worship of one’s own country and the power of the country, as was the case with the Nazis.

Dan. 11:36-38 makes the point that the king of the north will have no regard for the God of his fathers, but will honour the god of forces instead. This indicates that he will be an absolute militarist whose philosophy will be: “my might is right.”

The beast will be a visible object of worship, and multitudes will sing his praise. Since man is incurably religious, wanting to have someone or something to look up to and admire and boast about, a powerful world dictator who promises to be the Messiah so many are looking for, will provide man with an outlet for his religious inclination.

Worshipping the beast may not necessarily involve falling prostrate on the ground. Rev. 13:4 says: “They worshipped the beast saying: who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” The word “saying” could explain how the beast is worshipped, i.e. by singing his praise, exalting and extolling him, declaring how great he is.

The Nazis’ adulation of Hitler and the Iraqis’ adulation of Saddam Hussein, are examples of this. Also compare young people who are said to worship a pop star, due to jumping up and down, calling out and throwing their hands into the air at their concerts. Even Christians can “worship” God without prostrating themselves on the ground.

However, worship can involve kneeling or prostration. Some Christians do this, and it may be that worship of the beast will also involve this, as in the case of people bowing down before Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Dan. 3). Bowing, especially before monarchs, has been common from time immemorial and is still practised today. It was certainly common in John’s day at which time emperor worship was prevalent.

Regarding the words: “who is like unto the beast:” Is a deliberate contrast being made here with the words of worship offered to God in Ps. 35:10 etc: “Lord, who is like unto Thee?” The Lord’s response to such a

comparison would be: “To whom then will you liken me, or set up as my equal?” (Isa. 40:25).

The words: “who is able to make war with him?” in their context seem to be based on the fact that the beast has recovered from a fatal sword wound, and the dragon has transferred his power to him.

Reference in Dan. 7:8 to the beast plucking up 3 of the 10 horns by the roots indicates that a war takes place between the beast and dragon, probably after the dragon’s encounter with Michael.

It is possible that the beast takes advantage of the dragon’s defeat by Michael and attacks him, resulting in the saying: “Who is able to make war with him?” After defeating 3 of the 10 horns the dragon surrenders to the beast and gives him his power, throne and authority; hoping, as pointed out before; that such a confederation of forces will be able to invade Israel and successfully take permanent possession of the land.

A MOUTH SPEAKING GREAT THINGS

Rev. 13:5 says: “There was given” to the beast “a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given to him to continue 42 months.”

The reference to being “given” a mouth speaking great things means it was granted or permitted by God. God did not make him do it, but allowed him to do it.

Dan. 11:36 puts it like this: He “shall prosper till the indignation (of God) be accomplished (i.e. after 42 months): for that which has been determined (by God) shall be done.”

The word “given” is repeatedly used in the book of Revelation to mean it has been permitted by God. See 6:4, 8. 7:2. 9:1, 3, 5. 11:2, 3. 12:14. 13:7. These verses demonstrate the truth of Dan. 4:17 that God rules over the kingdoms of men and “gives” them to whomsoever He will. “There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). Although the dragon gives the beast his power and authority, the real permission to exercise power comes from God! The sovereignty of God is never more apparent than during this period when anti-forces rule the world and persecute the saints and the Jews. A supernatural fallen-angel devil has nothing to do with it.

Reference to the beast speaking great things is a verbatim quote from Dan. 7:6, 11, 20. The Living Bible renders it “a bragging mouth.” The man of sin is obviously going to be an egotistical braggart; full of pride and very arrogant, boasting about himself and attributing his power and

success to himself, not God, as did his ancient counterpart, the king of Assyria (Isa. 10:8-. 14:13-14).

Dan. 7:20 says: “His look was more stout than his fellows.” This doesn’t mean that he needs to join “weight watchers,” although it is not impossible that he may be physically stout like Mussolini and other dictators.

The Hebrew word “rab,” translated “stout” has elsewhere been translated “great,” “chief,” “captain,” which convey the basic significance of the word. Reference to the man of sin looking more stout than his fellows would therefore mean he had the appearance of looking greater and superior. He stands out as looking more important and of higher status, and this may include a proud look, which the Lord hates (Pr. 6:17).

Not only does the big mouth of the beast speak great things about himself, but in particular against God. This is indicated by the word “blasphemies” in v6. As we have seen in v1, names of blasphemy are on the heads of the beast. Reference is also made in Rev. 17:3 to the beast being full of names of blasphemy. It is not surprising therefore that those who worship the beast blaspheme when God’s judgements start making life uncomfortable for them, as we read in Rev. 16:9, 11, 21.

The word “blaspheme” simply means to speak against - to speak in derogatory and insulting terms. And it is made clear in Rev. 13:6 that it is against God that the beast speaks these things. Dan. 7:25 puts it like this: “He shall speak great words against the Most High.” Again we read in Dan. 11:36: “He shall speak outrageous things against the God of gods.” 2 Thes. 2:4 says: “He opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God.” He will be the ultimate example of the saying that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

When the language used in relation to the beast in Dan. 7:25, 11:36-37, 2 Thes. 2:4 and Rev. 13:5-6 is compared, there can be no doubt that the beast, king of the north, little horn and man of sin all relate to the same power; and pertain to the end time immediately prior to the second coming. The reference to the same period of 42 months in connection with these prophecies confirm this (Dan. 7:25. 12:7. Rev. 13:5).

It is not difficult to see how such a power as the beast could arise in the earth. The scientific materialism of our age provides the necessary philosophical background for an all-out attack on religion. The communist countries have already shown us what can happen when atheism dominates the government. One can imagine what will happen when an atheistic unscrupulous dictator gains control of the world.

The present generation is preparing for the rule of the man of sin by

its insistent and contagious desire for iniquity and lawlessness. One of the plaguing problems of the present generation is that of rebellion against law and order and a desire to reject all religious restraint. Sin and self-indulgence is the watchword of life today. The “mystery of iniquity” is working overtime!

In Rev. 13:6 the reference to blaspheming against “God” runs parallel with blaspheming His “name.” Likewise, the word “tabernacle” runs parallel with “heaven” in the second part of the verse which says the beast will blaspheme God’s “tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven.” Heaven is referred to in a number of different ways, including tabernacle, temple, sanctuary, city (Rev. 11:19. 13:6. 15:5. 21:2-3).

“Those who dwell in heaven” at the moment, besides the Father and son, are the angels (Rev. 15:5-6). Although the beast, being an atheist, does not believe in heaven, the Father, son or angels; he will nevertheless say insulting and derogatory things about them, as atheists do; in response to the faith and testimony of God’s witnesses. In so doing they fit into the category of those referred to in 2 Pet. 2:10-12 and Jude v8-9: “They walk after the flesh and despise authority. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of the glorious ones” (angels).

WAR WITH THE SAINTS

Read on to Rev. 13:7 we are told that “it was given” to the beast, i.e. he was permitted by God “to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, tongues and nations.”

The reference in Rev. 11:7 to the beast making war against God’s two witnesses, overcoming them and killing them, obviously relates to the same period as Rev. 13:7. Both passages in Rev. 11:7-9 and 13:7-8 refer to the beast making war against God’s people; both refer to the kindreds, tongues and nations involved in the beast’s kingdom, and both refer to “all who dwell on the earth” who worship the beast and who shall rejoice over the death of God’s servants. It is evident that both passages refer to the same end time period.

The two witnesses in Rev. 11 are in the land of Israel, as is evident from the fact that their dead bodies are left lying in a street in Jerusalem (v8). The “saints” referred to in Rev. 13:7 could refer to other Christians in Israel, but the fact that the verse goes on to say that not only does the beast overcome them, but also has power over all nations; indicates that the saints against whom he makes war are in all nations, not just Israel.

We saw in Rev. 12:17 that the dragon made war against the saints after being defeated by Michael, and we can be sure he will continue to do so when he gives his power to the beast. Dan. 7:21-22 also refers to the war: “I beheld and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, until the ancient of days came ...” Also v25: “And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change (Jewish) times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times and the dividing of time ...”

Being carnal, the beast will naturally engage in carnal warfare, attacking the flesh of the saints with the sword (Rev. 13:10), shedding their blood. But the saints “wrestle not against flesh and blood,” i.e. they do not engage in physical, carnal struggles, seeking to maim the flesh and spill blood. The weapons of their warfare are not carnal. Their fight is spiritual and they seek to captivate men’s hearts, including principalities and powers (governments and authorities), to bring them into subjection to the will of God; and they do this by the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.

While the beast attacks the saints with metal swords, the saints will attack with the sword of the Spirit! This results in the saints suffering temporary death, then resurrection to eternal life; while the beast has temporary life, then eternal damnation. The beast has power to make war on the saints and kill them, but he does not have the power to force them to obey him and renounce their faith.

Not only does the beast ruthlessly wage war against the saints, but he ends up making war against Christ (Rev. 17:14. 19:19). This results in the beast being cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20. Dan. 7:11).

Being able to put the saints to death will make the beast feel that he has “overcome them” (Rev. 13:7. 11:7) and “prevailed against them” (Dan. 7:21). He will believe he has won the victory, had the last say and expect that the saints will never see the light of day again. Those who put Jesus to death thought the same, but he rose victorious from death more powerful than ever, “having disarmed governments and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them” (Col 2:15). So will the saints!

The truth of the matter is that the saints, by refusing to be intimidated by the beast into renouncing their faith; overcome him, making themselves the overcomers, not the beast! There is a strong emphasis in the book of Revelation on overcoming, especially in the messages to the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 26. 3:5, 12, 21. 12:11. 15:2. 21:7. 1 Jn. 5:4).

The universal sway exercised by the beast over all nations on the

earth is certainly made clear in the statement in Rev. 13:7-8 that “power was given him over all kindreds, tongues and nations, and all who dwell upon the earth shall worship him.”

As if in anticipation of the question: “Does this really mean the whole world?,” the comment is then added: “All whose names are not written in the book of life ...”

As always, the world in the end time will be divided into two camps: those whose names are in the book of life and those whose are not. Those whose names are in the book will not worship the beast and those whose names are not in the book will worship him. It will be evident in that day to which camp people belong. There will not be any fence sitters.

THE LAMB’S BOOK OF LIFE

Rev. 13:8 in the A.V. says: “whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” But modern translations agree that it should be translated: “whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.” The A.V. translation says the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, but the others say it is names that have not been in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

It is true that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. He was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” for this purpose (1 Pet. 1:20), and his sacrifice was foreshadowed from the beginning in all animal sacrifices. However, this is not the point that is being made in Rev. 13:8; but rather that the names of all who worship the beast, have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

The Lamb’s book of life refers to the divine record of the names of all throughout history, from the very beginning, who qualify for eternal life. It is called the “Lamb’s book” because it is only through his sacrifice that eternal life has been made possible, and he is the one who has been ordained by God to open it on the last day and proclaim salvation to those whose names are written in it. The names have been there from the foundation of the world; because God, being omniscient knows the end from the beginning. His foreknowledge does not override or overrule free will of course. All whose names are in the book have to make their own decision as to whether they will serve God or not. Because God knows from the beginning who these people are, even before they are born, He is able to have their name in the book of life. Those in the end time beast era will manifest whether their name is in the book or not, by their response

to the demand of the beast to be worshipped. True worshippers can only worship God!

There is quite a theme in the Scriptures on the book of life, as can be seen in the following verses: Ex. 32:31-32. Ps. 69:28. Isa. 4:3. Dan. 7:10. 12:1. Mal. 3:16. Lk. 10:20. Plp. 4:3. Heb. 12:23. Rev. 3:5. 13:8. 17:8. 20:12, 15. 21:27.

IF ANY MAN HAVE AN EAR

Rev. 13:9 is the shortest verse in the chapter, consisting of an exhortation in one sentence: "If any man have an ear, let him hear." Familiar words! Jesus used them during his earthly ministry (Matt. 11:15 etc), and he concluded each of the messages to the 7 churches with these words (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29. 3:6, 13, 22).

Besides the messages to the churches, Rev. 13:9 is the only other place in the book of Revelation that this exhortation is given. It is the eighth and last time that it occurs. It should be evident from this that the message in this part of Revelation is very important to grasp and understand. A more authoritative appeal could not be made to us to comprehend the message in this section of the prophecy which is: (1). Don't let the beast force you into worshipping him. (2). Don't resort to physical violence in resisting the beast.

Number 2 is mentioned in the next verse: "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity: He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

As it stands in the A.V. it means that whoever takes others into captivity shall be taken into captivity themselves, and whoever kills with the sword will be killed by the same. This message is given to strengthen and sustain the faith of Christians who suffer persecution at the hands of the beast in the form of imprisonment, exile and death. Knowing that God will repay all acts of persecution by causing them to recoil on the heads of the persecutors, would be of great comfort to those being persecuted; and would encourage them not to try and repay and seek revenge themselves. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather leave it to the wrath of God: for it is written: vengeance is mine; I will repay says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21).

The certainty of God dealing with the enemy according to how he has dealt with God's people, is taught in a number of Scriptures: (Isa. 33:1.

Ob. v15. Joel 3:7-8).

However, having said all that, it should be pointed out that a more correct rendering of the first part of Rev. 13:10 according to most translations is: “If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes.” The Living Bible puts it like this: “The people of God who are destined for prison will be arrested and taken away.” That is: if it is God’s will for certain people to be taken captive or sent into exile by the beast, no one can prevent it; so don’t resist it, but rather humbly and trustingly be resigned to it.

The words in Rev. 13:10 are similar to Jer. 15:2: “Thus says the Lord; such as are (destined) for death, to death (they shall go); such as are for the sword, to the sword (they shall be delivered); such as are for the famine, to the famine (they shall be subjected); such as are for the captivity, to the captivity (they shall be sent).” In this verse Jeremiah urges the Jews not to resist Babylon physically, but to be subjects of it, so that they could survive for future generations. He was in effect saying that the best method of fighting Babylon was by not fighting it! The Jews would then survive and be a witness against Babylon in future generations.

Jer. 15:2 is a prophecy of Israel’s tribulation due to sin. But Rev. 13:10 relates to the saints not sinners. Their captivity is not a punishment for sin, but a trial and testing of faith and patience (Dan. 11:33-35).

ALL HANDLING SWORDS

Reference to the beast killing with the sword calls to mind Ezk. 38:4 and 39:23 which refer to all of Gog’s forces “handling swords.” Jesus also referred to Jews in the end time tribulation (when Gog invades the land), falling by the edge of the sword (Lk. 21:24). The same verse also refers to them being “led away captive into all nations.” Other prophecies confirm this end time captivity: Dan. 12:7. Joel 3:2-6. Zech. 14:2. Ezk. 34:12-13. 36:10-12, 19:20. 37:21-28. 39:23-28.

The references to the enemy in the end time killing with a sword, can be taken to mean a weapon of any kind, including guns. However, the reference to some saints being beheaded in Rev. 20:4 indicates that literal swords will also be used.

Reference to the saints not resorting to the use of the sword, calls to mind an incident that took place in the garden of Gethsemane, recorded in Matt. 26:51. As a result of Peter drawing a sword, striking a man and cutting his ear off in order to defend Jesus; Jesus said to him: “Put away your sword; for all who take up the sword shall perish with the sword.”

As a result of taking up the sword against God's people, the beast will certainly be killed by the sword "... with the sword of him who sits upon the white horse, which sword proceeds out of his mouth" (Rev. 19:21). In that day the high praises of God will be in the mouths of the saints, "and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments upon the people, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgement written: this honour have all the saints. Praise ye the Lord" (Ps. 149:6-9). Then, and only then, when Christ and the saints are in control, will the nations "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:1-5).

THE PATIENCE AND FAITH OF THE SAINTS

After saying that some saints will go into captivity and others will be killed with the sword, Rev. 13:10 then says: "Here is the patience and faith of the saints." Other versions put it like this: "This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people." Or: "Here is your opportunity for endurance and confidence."

Faith is one thing but patience is quite another. Faith without patience can be undone and destroyed. Faith believes in God's promises, but patience waits, in spite of trials and troubles, for the promises to be fulfilled. Failure to wait can shipwreck faith.

For example: Abraham believed in God's promise that he would have a son, but did not patiently wait for God to fulfil the promise. The result was that he ended up with "a wild ass of a man" through the Egyptian slave woman Hagar. No wonder there is such an emphasis on the need for patience and patient endurance in Scripture! Although Abraham's patience had a "hiccup," his life was, in the main, characterised by strong faith and enduring patience, causing him to be called a friend of God. "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:15).

In the end time when the beast comes to power and attacks the church, faith must believe that God will deal with him, and patience must wait for His time to do it. As Jesus said: "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Lk. 21:19) i.e. "by your patient endurance and steadfastness, you will win life for yourselves." "For the vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though he tarry, wait for him, because he will surely come and will not tarry" (Hab. 2:3. Heb. 10:37). "We are not like those who turn back and are lost, but hold on to faith and will

gain life” (Heb. 10:39).

Many will buckle under the strain and pressure of the beast’s persecution and will abandon their faith. This is what Paul is speaking about in 2 Thes. 2:3 when he refers to “a falling away” prior to Christ’s return. He teaches that this will be among the last signs to take place before the second coming.

In the parable of the sower taught by Jesus, it was the seed sown in shallow ground lacking depth that got scorched by the sun, causing it to wither and die. It represents Christians with shallow superficial faith who lack the depth to survive the heat of persecution. It is therefore incumbent upon all who profess to belong to Christ to be committed to regular prayer, reading of the Word and fellowship; in order to grow and develop spiritually; putting the roots of faith down deep in order that we might be trees of righteousness; too well anchored to be uprooted and blown over by any storm!

ANOTHER BEAST

Moving on to Rev. 13:11 we read that John saw “another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had 2 horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.” This is the third beast referred to in Revelation. The dragon in Rev. 12 is the first, and the beast in Rev. 13:1 is the second. The three of them are referred to together in Rev. 16:13 and they are presented as a fearsome threesome - an unholy trinity that ultimately causes the battle of Armageddon. It is evident from the reference in Rev. 16:13 that all 3 of them will be confederate and come on the scene in the end time.

According to Rev. 13:11, the third beast comes up out of the earth, whereas the other beast in v1 comes up out of the sea, or the abyss (11:7). A distinction between the sea and earth seems to be made here. There is no reference to the third beast coming out of the abyss. If therefore, as has been suggested, coming out of the abyss signifies the revival of a power that once existed on the earth; the third beast would not be the revival of a previous power.

The interpretation of this third beast with 2 horns like a lamb and who spoke like a dragon is difficult; because unlike the other 2 beasts, there appears to be no Old Testament connections. Rev. 13:13-14 refers to him performing miracles and deceiving people; and reference in Rev. 19:20 to the “false prophet” performing miracles and deceiving people reveals that this lamb-like beast and the false prophet are one and the same. For this reason this beast is referred to as the false prophet in Rev.

16:13.

Reference to this lamb-like beast speaking like a dragon has caused some to wonder if he is a development out of the dragon in chapter 12. But reference to the dragon, beast and false prophet in Rev. 16:13 reveals that the false prophet is a separate and distinct power from both the dragon and beast. He is, as Rev. 13:11 puts it: “another beast.”

SPEAKS LIKE A DRAGON

Reference to the false prophet speaking like a dragon naturally raises the question: “How does the dragon speak?” We are not told. There is no reference in Revelation to any words spoken by him. However, action speaks louder than words! In Rev. 12 the dragon casts down one third of the woman’s stars, and persecutes the woman, who represents Israel. He also casts forth a flood of water from his mouth to drown her, which could signify a tirade of abusive and destructive speech. In addition to this, he makes war with the woman’s seed, seeking to devour the man child, who represents Jewish Christians (Rev. 12:4). Reference in Rev. 12:10 to the dragon accusing Christ’s brethren day and night, implies incessant verbal attack and inflammatory speech. It is evident from this that the dragon’s speech is anti-Israel and anti-Christian (i.e. against the true Christian faith). His words will obviously be consistent with his actions, and will involve much anti-Israel propaganda and rhetoric.

This is probably what is signified in Rev. 16:13 where evil spirits are depicted coming out of his mouth as well as the mouths of the false prophet and beast. It is surely significant that the evil spirits coming out of the dragon’s mouth are also coming out of the false prophet’s mouth. This signifies that the false prophet speaks like the dragon (and beast).

The fact that the evil spirits emanating from their mouths result in a stirring and inducing of the nations to invade Israel, bringing about the battle of Armageddon; suggests they promulgate anti-Israel propaganda.

Evil spirits are associated with mental derangement and insanity in the New Testament, and anti-Israel propaganda certainly fits into that category. It puts those who advocate it off-side with God, and leads to their death and destruction along with anyone else who allows themselves to be influenced by it.

TWO HORNS LIKE A LAMB

The reference in Rev. 13:11 to “2 horns like a lamb” suggests this beast looked like a lamb. Lamb’s horns would hardly be depicted on a lion, leopard, bear or any other animal. Looking like a lamb but speaking like a dragon sounds like a dragon in sheep’s clothing - a variation of a wolf in sheep’s clothing, referred to by Jesus to describe false prophets (Matt. 7:15). So it is not surprising that the lamb-like beast is referred to in Revelation as a false prophet.

Because Jesus is symbolized by a lamb in Revelation (with 7 horns), reference to this beast having 2 horns like a lamb and probably having the appearance of a lamb, suggests he professes Christianity and acts under the pretence of the Christian religion, but is in reality opposed to the true Christian faith which is based on the hope of Israel and treats the Jews as friends not foe. Being anti-Israel makes the lamb-like beast a pseudo Christian power or movement. Speaking like a dragon means he will support the invasion and destruction of the nation of Israel. The combination of characteristics of “lamb” and “dragon” suggests a contradiction between profession and practise.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

Religious powers are not normally signified by a beast, but this one is because its profession of religion is false. It is more secular and political than religious. True prophets promote the risen Christ, but this false prophet promotes the risen beast who sets himself up as a rival to Christ. The fact that this beast is linked with the first beast which is atheistic; and the dragon, which is Islamic; indicates he will not oppose atheism or Mohammedism, due to political expediency; but he will oppose and promote persecution of the Jews and true Christians.

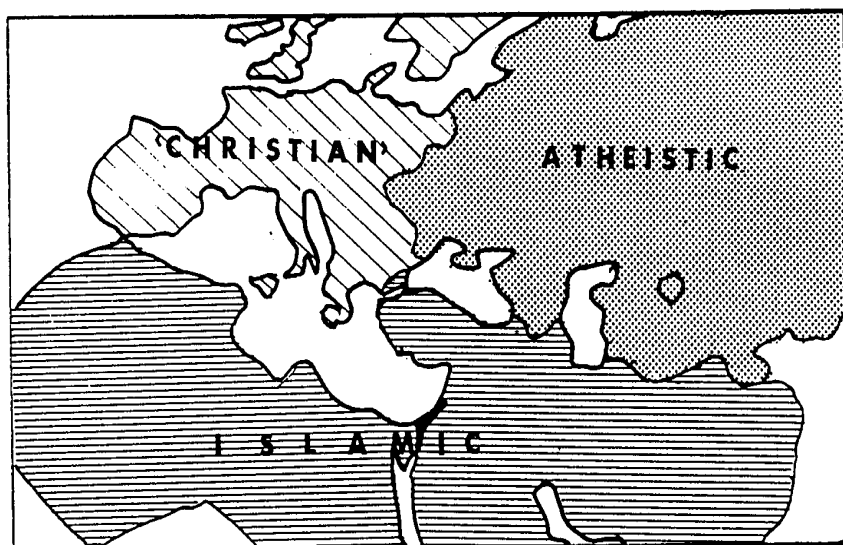
Could it refer to the ultimate development of the ecumenical movement occupying the countries of the European union (E.U.)? The ecumenical movement involves a compromised hotch potch organization which seems to be based upon discovering the lowest possible common denominator of doctrine upon which all parties can be agreed. It seeks the combination of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox church along with all the Protestant churches and makes overtures towards Moslems and other religions, saying: “we all worship the same God.”

After the destruction of Rome and the Vatican by the beast (Rev. 17:16-18), one could well imagine this movement patronizing the beast,

atheist though the beast might be, and supporting him in his war against Israel and against the true Christians who have refused to be a part of the ecumenical movement, and who are sympathetic towards Israel. This organization would be a nominal Christendom that becomes less than nominal - a pawn in the hands of the beast. It could be likened to the churches that became state institutions in Russia under atheistic communism. They were controlled by anti-God committees which were controlled by an anti-God government, and were like a handmaid to the state. The ministers were virtually told what to preach and were expected to promote and encourage support of the government. They lost their job and were imprisoned if they spoke against the state. The true church which insisted on teaching and preaching the Word of God without compromise, was driven underground - into the "wilderness."

In connection with all of this, an article in the Logos magazine, Feb. 1973, makes interesting reading. It says that the trademark of the European economic community for certain commodities, including footwear, is a circle containing the words: "The Common Market." Alongside is the number 666 accompanied by an inscription of a lamb with 2 horns. The mouth of the lamb is open as if speaking. I have never seen this myself and would welcome verification of it. If it is true or was true, it could be very significant.

If the so-called Christian countries in Europe where the ecumenical movement is exercising its influence, represent the lamb-like beast; a map depicting the fearsome threesome, i.e. the atheistic beast, the Islamic dragon and the "Christian" lamb-like beast, would look like this:



This would certainly be a powerful empire, involving many nations, kindreds and tongues. Significantly enough, the European union has tended to favour and support the Palestinians in their conflicts with Israel, and have been negative towards Israel.

As was mentioned earlier: the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns can refer either to nations or the man (man of sin) who rules over them (Rev. 13:18), and the same double application may also apply to the lamb-like beast. It is to be expected that this beast, as in the case of other beasts, would represent a nation or nations. But if a lamb with 7 horns can represent the one man Jesus, the lamb with 2 horns may also have an application to a man. Explicit reference to him in the singular as “the false prophet,” not the plural: “false prophets” seems to suggest this.

LIKE A LAMB

Rev. 13:11 specifically states that the 2 horns of this other beast were “like a lamb.” They were not like the horns of a ram or goat. Lamb’s horns are small by comparison and therefore not as strong or dangerous. Why are such horns depicted on this beast? In Dan. 8:3 reference is made to 2 horns on a ram and we are told in v20 that they represented the united powers of the Medes and Persians. Do the 2 horns of the lamb-like beast also represent 2 powers? Could they refer to western and eastern Europe united?

If the animal had the appearance of a lamb, why only mention the horns? Why not the face, eyes, nose, mouth or feet? Are the horns mentioned to convey to us that the power represented by this lamb is not meek, but assertive and aggressive, yet professes Christ?

Or, do the horns, being small like lamb’s horns, indicate that this beast will not have much military power by itself? If so, this may relate to the arrowless bow of the rider of the white horse in Rev. 6:2. The following verses indicate that this lamb-like beast has authority, but it is derived from the first beast, due to being subject to him.

Rev. 13:12 says the lamb-like beast “exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose mortal wound was healed” (R.S.V). The Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: “The second beast was servant to the first beast, and extended authority everywhere, making the world and all its people worship the first beast, which had the fatal wound and had been healed.”

The A.V. says the second beast exercises all the power of the first beast “before him,” which in v14 is explained to mean “in the sight of the

beast.” Or as the R.S.V. says: “in its presence.” The New International Version says: “on his behalf.”

In becoming subject or servant to the first beast, the second beast exercises and extends authority at the behest and on the behalf of the first beast whose fatal wound has been healed. He is the representative of the authority of the beast.

If power is given to the first beast over all nations, kindreds and tongues (v7); it is natural to wonder why he needs the second beast to make people worship him. Obviously the second beast is a powerful and influential religious force, having an influence over many people on earth, and agrees to use his influence to make all adherents to that religion worship the beast and bow to his dictates.

Rev. 17 refers to the great power and influence that will be exercised throughout the world by the Roman Catholic church prior to the beast coming to power, and the lamb-like beast could be that church restructured along with the Greek Orthodox church and all the others that the ecumenical movement rolls together into one world-wide super church, after the destruction of Rome by the beast and 10 horns.

Destroying Rome by fire within one hour by a nuclear war-head, and threatening to destroy other cities in the same way unless full submission and co-operation be given, could be one of the reasons why the lamb-like beast sets out to bring everyone into submission to the beast, and worship him. As Rev. 13:4 reveals: the attitude of the nations will be: “Who is able to make war with him?” So, as the saying goes: “If you can’t beat them, join them.”

It will be during this period when enormous pressure is placed upon all who have espoused the Christian faith, that a great falling away will take place.

So then, the proposition is that the first beast is Russia, and will involve a revival of atheistic communism; the second lamb-like beast is Christendom, particularly in the European countries; and the dragon is the Moslem world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. What a force to be reckoned with! Their attack against Israel will truly be a David-Goliath affair, but the stone from heaven will smash and destroy their forces in the land of Israel (Dan. 2).

The earlier decisive and spectacular defeat of the dragon and his forces in the land of Israel by Michael and his angelic forces, could account for the beast feeling the need to amass such massive support for his invasion. Fearing a repetition of the previous unexpected and inexplicable defeat of the dragon by “mysterious” forces, the beast will

gather to himself all nations for the invasion which leads to the battle of Armageddon.

The way in which Rev. 13:12 says it is the beast “whose deadly wound was healed” who the other beast causes all in the earth to worship, indicates that emphasis will be made on the amazing recovery to induce people to worship him. It may be proclaimed as a divine miracle. In view of the fact that 2 Thes. 2 says: “the man of sin proclaims himself to be God,” it would not be surprising if he appeals to his miraculous recovery as evidence for his divinity, much in the same way that some appeal to the resurrection of Christ as evidence for his divinity. Those who believe that Christ’s recovery from death makes him God, will be forced to draw the same conclusion in relation to the man of sin in the event of believing he has recovered.

HE DOES GREAT WONDERS

Rev. 13:13 says the lamb-like beast “does great wonders, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” As the following verses reveal, he performs these wonders to cause people to worship the beast.

Semeion is the Greek word translated “wonders” and means signs, wonders, miracles. It is translated “miracles” in Rev. 13:14. 16:14. 19:20. It is the same word translated sign, wonder and miracle in relation to Christ’s ministry, but the wonders performed by this beast fit into quite a different category, as mentioned earlier.

Christ’s miracles were real and genuine, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, but the miracles performed by the lamb-like beast are a deception. It is specifically stated in the next verse (Rev. 13:14) that he “deceives those who dwell on the earth by means of those miracles.” For this reason he is called a “false prophet” (Rev. 16:13. 19:20. 20:10). The Greek word for false is pseudo, meaning he is a pretender; a spurious prophet; a religious impostor.

This calls to mind the fact that 2 Thes. 2:9-11 says the man of sin comes (to power) “with signs and lying wonders, with all wicked deception” and “strong delusion,” causing those who don’t know and love the truth to believe a lie. The Greek word translated “lying” and “lie” is also pseudo, meaning something that seems on the surface to be real and genuine, but in reality is false - a con or counterfeit.

The Roman Catholics in particular have a history of this with their claims of Mary making appearances; of statues of Mary moving or of

tears coming out of her eyes; of blood coming from the nail wounds of images of Jesus, not to mention special healing power in certain springs, fountains and waterfalls. As we read in Rev. 18:23: “by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.”

Every tribal witch doctor, false religious teacher and false prophet has tried by magic, voodoo and trickery, to deceive by a seeming authentic display of supernaturalism, and have had success due to the ignorance, naivety, gullibility and superstitious nature of people. There is only one source of supernatural power in the universe - God! and He only gives His power to those who obey Him (Act. 5:32). The beast therefore does not qualify, but the 2 witnesses of God, who are true prophets, do. As we will see, the false prophet produces signs that resemble the genuine miracles of the 2 witnesses, just as the magicians of Egypt imitated the miracles of Moses and Aaron, in order to deceive the Egyptians into thinking they were equally as empowered. The false prophet is a rival of the witnesses. He promotes the beast and they promote Christ.

Jesus warned about this when he gave signs of his second coming: “For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets who shall show great signs (same Greek as Rev. 13:13) and wonders, so much so that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24).

These signs and wonders are obviously going to be quite impressive to pose a possible threat to the faith of the very elect of God! The world at large is going to be deceived by them and conned into worshipping the beast.

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

The wonders performed by the false prophet are so “great,” he will “even” make fire come down from heaven.

Fire from heaven was one of the signs or wonders performed by the prophet Elijah and the 2 prophets who witness during the reign of the beast will do the same. In this respect the false prophet sets out to give the impression of duplicating divine miracles, and does it so impressively that he convinces the world that what the 2 witnesses can do, he can do also. Such duplication of divine miracles would truly be reminiscent of Pharaoh’s magicians, who by sleight of hand and cunning craftiness, set out to duplicate the miracles instigated by Moses, in order to rival him and prevent people from following him.

In order that people worship the man of sin instead of God, it will be necessary to follow the same course of Pharaoh’s magicians, and this will

be done much more effectively in the end time due to the highly sophisticated and advanced science and technology available. The “miracles” of this false prophet must be going to appear very credible!

Today, fire can literally be called down from heaven in the form of a nuclear warhead by means of a missile launched from land, sea or air, and it is only a question of time before space stations will be used as a launching pad for laser beams and fire.

But what marvels will science and technology be producing when the time arrives for the prophecy in Rev. 13:13 to be fulfilled, which the false prophet can use to deceive the world into thinking that he can match the miracles of the 2 witnesses?

The words: “had power” in v14 in relation to the prophet having power to perform such miracles, come from the Greek word “didomi” which is translated “was given” in v5, 7 and many other places. Literally it should read: “these miracles which he was given to do.” The R.S.V. reads: “the signs which it is allowed to work” i.e. God grants or allows the signs to be performed, even though they are false and deceptive. 2 Thes. 2:11 is clear: “God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.” Other examples of God arranging or allowing deception are: Deu. 13:1-4. 1 Kng. 22:22. Ezk. 14:9.

AN IMAGE THAT LIVED

Rev. 13:14-15 says that the false prophet who deceives by means of the miracles he is allowed to do, “says to those who dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who had the wound by a sword, yet lived. And he had power (i.e. as in v14: “he was permitted”) to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.”

The image may refer to a statue resembling the man of sin. The false prophet does not make the image himself, but asks “those who dwell on the earth” to make it. If the false prophet is the restructured Roman Catholic church, combined with the Greek Orthodox church and the mainstream Protestant churches; with a collaborator of the beast acting as supreme pontiff, it could be that “those who dwell on the earth” refers to people of all nations, kindreds and tongues who belong or belonged to those ecclesiastical institutions. Those in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox church in particular, who number many millions, have a history of images - images of Jesus, Mary and the saints; but they will be forced

to put those aside and have only one image - the image of the beast, which they will be compelled to worship.

From time immemorial it has been common for man to raise up statues of men regarded as important and famous. The ancient Romans honoured and glorified their emperors in this way and their statues were worshipped and revered throughout the empire. A high ego is usually one of the characteristics of a dictator, and such men like their image to be seen and adored everywhere by everyone. Pictures, paintings and statues of Saddam Hussein for example, were on every street corner in Iraq prior to his overthrow. The man of sin will be the most extreme case of this form of cult worship ever seen in earth's history. Being a "man of sin" he will be the full embodiment and manifestation of sin, and all of its arrogant egotistical attributes. He will be the ultimate example of how exceedingly sinful sin can be.

It is written of the idols and images of the heathen that they "are silver and gold; ... they have mouths, but they speak not" (Ps. 135:15, 16). The false prophet however, seems to be able to give life to the image of the beast and cause it to speak. But, it is written in Hab. 2:19: "Woe unto him who says to the wood, awake; to the dumb stone, arise and speak." Making an image appear to have breath and speak is in defiance to the Word of God and ultimately incurs the wrath of God.

By causing the image to breathe and speak, the false prophet will seek to give the impression that he has supernatural power such as has never been possessed or manifested by man before. Men like Elijah, Elisha, Jesus and his apostles, have caused dead people to come alive, but not a dead inanimate image made of wood, stone or metal.

The false prophet does this, not so that the world will worship him, but so that it will worship the man of sin. As we read earlier in v12 and 14, he does this "before," "in the sight of" i.e. on behalf of the beast. For this reason one writer has referred to the false prophet as the beast's "publicity agent," for he promotes worship of the beast.

Causing the image to breathe and speak will, as in the case of calling fire down from heaven, be a deception - a "lying" (pseudo) wonder. But it is obviously going to be well done, impressive and convincing, in order to deceive so many people. But as pointed out before, it will not be the first time in history that people become convinced that a statue has shown signs of life. Many claims have been made in relation to statues of Jesus, Mary and the saints moving, blinking an eye, shedding tears and blood, and millions of people have believed and accepted these reports. In some of these cases, human tampering was discovered to be the cause, and the

same no doubt applied in all other cases. In the middle ages it was claimed that a stone image moved and acted like a living being and ventriloquists made statues of Roman emperors appear to speak.

When the naivety, gullibility and superstitious nature of so many people is considered, it is easy to imagine many believing the image of the beast has really come alive, resulting in worshipping it. But there will also no doubt be many who will not believe that it is alive and will know it is a clever deception, but will act as if they believe and worship it anyway. The threat of capital punishment will cause many unbelieving knees to bow in worship as they did to Nebuchadnezzar's image in Dan. 3.

ANOTHER VIEW

While it seems that the image of the beast refers to a statue, there is another possibility. If John saw Queen Elizabeth, the Pope or the president of America in colour on a giant screen at a movie theatre, and people standing up out of their seats in respect, how would he describe it? He might say: "I saw an image of the queen ... and it was alive and spoke, and many people gave their respect to it." You would not expect him to refer to a movie projector, celluloid film and fibre glass screen! Such an experience for John or anyone else living 2,000 years ago would not surprisingly be called a "wonder." It would defy all logic and understanding.

If the relevant text in Rev. 13 is carefully considered, it does not necessarily say that causing fire to come from above and causing an image to move and speak is regarded as a "wonder" by those who witness it in the end time, but by John, who lived in the first century. This would make sense if it related to something like living images on a movie or T.V. screen. As images of kings and the queen of England have in the past been circulated throughout many nations in the empire on film, and people by the millions have stood in respect before them in movie theatres, the man of sin may do a similar thing to force the attention and respect of the nations.

If the image refers to a single solitary statue, it does seem strange that it is made by many, i.e. "those who dwell on the earth" (v14, all nations v7-8). And, if causing such an image to move and speak is designed to give the impression that the false prophet has divine power, it seems strange that he is not the one who is worshipped. The image itself and the beast represented by it are worshipped instead. But if the image that each nation is commissioned to make relates to something like a movie for

public screening or T.V., which the false prophet authorizes on behalf of the man of sin, then some of those difficulties would be removed.

In the final analysis, the actual mechanics behind a breathing, talking image is not important to understand. Whatever it is and how it is achieved; it is certain that it will not require supernatural power to achieve it, and its purpose is to attract universal attention to the man of sin.

The reverence and respect of images, pictures and symbols has not just been a characteristic of Roman Catholicism. During the era of the communist government in Russia, huge pictures of Lenin were posted and paraded around Moscow and draped down buildings, not to mention statues. The same applied to Mao-Tse-Tung in China. Images of Buddha also abound in China and other countries before which millions of devotees bow.

The setting up of an image or images of the man of sin, in whatever form, will not therefore be a new or strange experience for many nations. Thousands of millions of people all around the world have grown up accustomed to this practice.

Ultimately, an image of the beast may be set up in the Jewish temple at Jerusalem. Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a type of the man of sin, erected an idol in the temple in his time, to desecrate it. Many believe that something like this is signified in the warning given by Jesus that “the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet” will “stand in the holy place” prior to his second coming (Matt. 24:15). Obviously the beast will have to invade and conquer Israel to achieve this.

There is quite an emphasis on the worship of the beast and his image in the book of Revelation as the following references indicate: 13:4, 8, 12, 15. 14:9, 11. 15:2. 16:2. 19:20. 20:4. Those who refuse to worship and comply with all the demands of the beast will suffer the severest penalty human power can inflict - temporary death. But those who do comply will suffer the severest penalty divine power can inflict - eternal death! The question of whether people will obey God or man will have to be decided.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Rev. 13:16-17 continues by saying the false prophet “causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, slave and free, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell except he who has the mark, or the name of the beast.”

This indicates that the beast will be a ruthless totalitarian power that exercises a tight economic control over the world, by imposing a system

of registration. However, it should be pointed out that the Greek text is different from what is conveyed in the English regarding the application of the mark. Some English versions give the impression that the mark is forced upon everyone, whether they are willing or not. But the original text is that the false prophet “causes all ... that they should give themselves a mark on their right hand or on their forehead.” The beast system only gives the mark in the sense of initiating and demanding it, and people who comply “receive” it. It will be the counterpart of the seal of God referred to in Rev. 7 which is sealed only on the foreheads, not the hand.

Rev. 13:16 is the first time that we meet the mark of the beast in the book of Revelation, but this sinister feature of the beast’s activities is mentioned 7 more times after this: (13:17. 14:9, 11. 15:2. 16:2. 19:20. 20:4).

The Greek word for “mark” is “charagma,” and the only other occurrence in the New Testament is in Act. 17:29 where it is translated “graven,” and relates to silver, gold and stone sculptured and engraved by man. Strong says charagma means a scratch or etching, i.e. stamp (as a badge of servitude). In Roman times, slaves were often branded with marks of ownership, much like cattle are today. Devotees of a god also labelled themselves with tattoos to designate their loyal devotion. The word “mark” was also used for seals attached to commercial documents and stamped with the name and date of the emperor.

According to Rev. 13:17, the mark involves either the name of the beast, i.e. the name of the man of sin, or the numerical value of his name which is 666. Those who are willing to receive the mark will evidently be able to have a choice between the two. They can also decide whether to have the mark on their forehead or right hand. Either way, it will involve allegiance of both body and brain to the beast. All thought and action will be devoted to the will of the beast. It would not be surprising if those who submit to the beast reluctantly, against their will, whose heart is not in the system; will prefer to have the mark in their hand rather than the more conspicuous position of the forehead.

One thing is certain: refusal to receive the mark results in a boycott, preventing buying and selling. This economic warfare will cause social ostracism and hard times. Failure to buy and sell will mean no income and therefore no money to buy food and clothes. It will involve forfeiture of all legal rights and privileges; exclusion from all offices and employment, and in some cases eviction due to not being able to pay the mortgage or rent, rates and power. The beast will have complete economic control over

the nations, and those who do not conform to his dictates, will do so at the peril of their lives. But those who do receive the mark, also do so at the peril of their lives, for they will come under the wrath and judgement of God (Rev. 14:9-10. 16:2).

The love of money and craving for wealth is the root of all evil, but many Christians who have loved money have also professed to love God. But it is impossible to serve God and money. A servant cannot have 2 masters. The reign of the beast therefore, will force people to love one or the other. Those who want to keep on buying and selling and making money, will choose the beast and be branded with his mark. It will truly be a testing time and a purging time during which the wheat will be separated from the chaff and the sheep from the goats.

There will be no opportunity for fence sitters in that time. It will be impossible to run with the hares and the hounds. Men will have to choose whom they will allow to make a permanent mark upon their life and whose name they will bear.

True Christians will say: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life ... nor powers ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39).

WHAT IS THE MARK?

Some think the mark will be invisible. For some time now it has been possible to put an invisible tattoo on the skin by laser, which shows up under infra-red scanners, which could be used at check-out counters of all places of business to accept or reject customers. Due to the problems caused by cash, cheques and credit cards being lost and stolen, the prospect of an invisible number being put on a body part has already been seriously considered. If such a system was available when the beast comes to power, some believe he would use it.

The other view is that the mark will be visible, consisting either of the beast's name or the number of his name, printed by each person with a pen on the skin of the right hand or forehead. By this it will be known that the person gives allegiance to the beast and qualifies to buy and sell. The authorities will know that no true servant of Christ would put such a mark

upon themselves, so they will not be afraid of misrepresentation, and will not therefore have to put the mark on people themselves or screen those who have it. The mark could be compared with the ration cards used during the second world war without which food could not be legally obtained, neither passports nor I.D. cards.

HERE IS WISDOM

The last verse in Rev. 13 says: “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding compute the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.”

The New English Bible puts it like this: “Here is the key; and anyone who has intelligence may work out the number of the beast. The number represents a man’s name, and the numerical value of its letters is 666.”

The words: “Here is wisdom” in the A.V. are a challenge. The New International Version conveys this by saying: “There is need for wisdom here.” The same challenge is given in Rev. 17:9 in relation to understanding the significance of the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns.

Wisdom can relate to many things, and the Spirit is telling us here that one of those things is understanding the symbolism in the prophecies in Revelation. It is not therefore wise to say that such prophecies are not important and that it doesn’t matter if we don’t study them and seek to understand them. To think or speak this way is not a sign of wisdom but foolishness. It is a direct and blatant contradiction of the Spirit which plainly says: “Here is wisdom.”

“Let him who has understanding compute the number of the beast ...” The Greek word for understanding is “nous” and it means mind, intellect; the ability to think and reason. Most people have this ability in varying degrees, and the challenge here is to use and exercise it in the Word of God, particularly the deeper more difficult areas such as the book of Revelation. Don’t settle for the milk of the Word; progress to the meat! (Heb. 5:11-14).

“How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” (Pr. 1:22). “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding” (Pr. 4:7). “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened ...” (Eph. 1:17-18). “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and will not scold you for asking” (Jam.

1:5).

Rev. 13:18 informs us that the number of the beast is the number of “a man,” not a fallen angel devil or demon! This man is certainly not the “woman” in Rev. 17 who is depicted sitting on the beast. It is as difficult to make a beast and its rider one and the same person as it is to make a man and a woman the same person! The man is the man of sin, Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, who leads the armies to invade Israel in the end time, resulting in Armageddon.

THE NUMBER IS 666

Regarding the number 666: the solutions suggested to explain this, almost amount to the same number! Some old manuscripts give 616, but most authorities agree that 666 is the correct reading.

It should be understood that in the ancient Hebrew, Greek and Roman languages, the letters of the alphabet were used for numbers. The use of numerals distinct from letters is a comparatively recent achievement in man’s progress. Every word and name therefore, containing letters that were used as numbers, would have a numerical value. This means therefore that the number 666, being the number of the name of the man of sin, (the beast) is the numerical value of his name.

So popular was the use of numbers for names, that youths scratched numbers on walls for girls they loved! A piece of graffiti found at Pompeii reads: “I love her whose name is 545.” The number stood for her name, being the numerical value of it.

It might be thought therefore, that if a name can be found of which the numerical value of the letters totals 666, that it would be proof positive that the identification of the man of sin has been established beyond all doubt. But such is not the case because many names have the numerical value of 666. For this reason many different names have been put forward such as: Nero and Teitan, which is a form of the name of the emperor Titus. It obviously can’t be these men because they have been and gone and the man of sin comes in the end time.

Many believe that “Lateinos” has a numerical value of 666 and therefore apply the beast to the Latin kingdom, i.e. the Roman empire. The Hebrews used the word Romiith for the Roman kingdom and it also adds up to 666. However, Rev. 13:18 clearly states that 666 is “the number of a man;” it is the numerical value of a man’s name, not a kingdom, be it the Latin kingdom or any other.

The Latin words inscribed on the Pope’s crown or mitre are:

“Vicarius Filii Dei” which mean “Vicar of the Son of God,” and it is claimed that they add up to 666. They are also inscribed over the door of the Vatican. However, these words are not the name of a man but a title - a title which many different men with different names have worn over the centuries. Rev. 13:18 does not say 666 is the number of men, but a man.

As pointed out previously, the Pope, being theistic, cannot be the man of sin because he is anti-theistic (an atheist). Also, the Roman Catholic church cannot be the beast, because in Rev. 17 this church is depicted as a woman sitting on the beast, and is later destroyed by the beast. The beast destroys Rome and the Vatican before the second coming, but the beast is destroyed by Christ at his coming!

There have been many other attempts to discover the identity of the man of sin, and some of them have been quite ridiculous, like Henry Kissinger, John F Kennedy, Ronald Reagan etc. Men have twisted the spelling of names and distorted grammar in order to get a result that suits their fancy or prejudice. One man discovered that the letters “ti” added to Napoleon, upon the basis of the Greek numerical values, would give 666, and concluded that he was the beast! The Roman Catholics, in order to offset claims that the title on the Pope’s crown added up to 666, claimed that Martin Luther’s name “Ludercus” in the Alman tongue, added up to 666.

It is impossible to connect the number of the beast with any historical figure of the past. There can be no doubt that the man of sin comes on the scene during the last heptad of human history. When he arrives, even before he comes to power, and persecutes; those with discernment will know it is him and will be able to confirm his identity by calculating the numerical value of his name, and thus prepare themselves for what is to come. This is the reason and purpose for providing information concerning the number of his name.

A FEARFUL NUMBER

In view of the evil associated with the number 666, it has been avoided in relation to the numbering of seats in some public buildings and auditoriums. For example: in the new European parliament building in Strasbourg, 679 seats have been allocated to members of parliament. However, one seat remains unallocated, and that is number 666! It is not being reserved for the man of sin; many would not want to sit in it and run the risk of being branded as the “beast.”

In 2001 the Russian tax authorities agreed to a demand by the

Russian Orthodox church to give a new number to any who receive a 666 number combination within his tax number.

Due to movies and magazines highlighting and dramatising the 666 in connection with the beast and Armageddon, the number has an evil connotation, causing paranoia in relation to anything connected with that number.

The only other places in Scripture where reference is made to the number 666, are Ez. 2:13, 1 Kng. 10:14 and 2 Chr. 9:13. These verses refer to the number of descendants of Adonikam who returned from Babylon and to the number of talents of gold imported by king Solomon in one year. In Solomon's case, the number relates to financial, economic and commercial power, not a man's name, but it is certain that the beast will control the world's economy (Rev. 13:17-18).

Talking about world economy: it was once strongly contended in the 1970's by some, that the beast would be a computer - the giant computer that took up 3 floors at the administrative building of the Common Market headquarters at Brussels. This "monster" was to be used to computerize all world trade and to involve a digital numbering system for every human on earth. The computer was to assign each citizen of the world a 3 - 6 digital unit or an 18 digit number to use for all buying and selling to avoid the problems of ordinary credit cards. It was claimed that the number would be invisibly tattooed by laser on each person and would provide a walking credit card system. No one would be able to buy or sell without the mark.

Rev. 13 of course, does not say the beast is a machine, but a man. However, the man will no doubt use machines such as computers to control the world and to keep a tab on those who have and have not received his mark.

Market directors are convinced that world order depends not only on an international programme of peace and politics, but also a new world trade and numbering system. One man could have at his finger-tips the number of every person on earth.

Henry Spaak, early planter of the European Common Market, and secretary general of NATO, said in one of his speeches: "We do not want another committee - we have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking. Send us such a man, and be he God or devil, we will receive him."

Little did he know it, but his request will be fulfilled! When the man of sin is manifested, his coming will be "after the working of satan" (2

Thes. 2:9), and he will be treated like a god as were kings and emperors in the past (2 Thes. 2:4). He will be hailed as a Messiah, Saviour of the world.

That we have entered an era when man's political concept of government is one world in scope, cannot be doubted. The leaders of many nations are of the opinion that the only solution to the problem of continuous war is a one world government. This of course, is God's ultimate intention and it will be fulfilled when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom. However, because man does not believe in, or want that, he will set up his own kingdom, headed by the man of sin, and it will inevitably be destroyed when Christ comes.

PLAYING THE NUMBERS GAME

It is clearly the divine intention for the numerical value of the man of sin to be 666, and divine providence will see to it that the name of the man who occupies this position adds up to that. This being the case, it is natural to wonder why; why not 555 or 888 etc?

Some have got a bit carried away and ended up playing the numbers game by pointing out, for example, that the verse in Rev. 13 which gives the number 666 is verse 18 which involves 3 sixes. The word "beast" occurs 36 times (6x6) in the book of Revelation in the evil sense. Power is given to the beast for 42 months (7x6), i.e. 1,260 days (210x6).

One strange quality about the digit 6 comes from its square: $6 \times 6 = 36$. If you add together all the numbers up to 36, i.e. $1+2+3 \dots +34+35+36$, you arrive at a total of 666. All the numerals smaller than 666 of the original Latin language (including the now defunct "D") also add up to 666. I = 1. V = 5. X = 10. L = 50. C = 100. D = 500 = 666.

Attention may also be drawn to the fact that bank cards have a logo of what appears to be 3 sixes grouped together inside each other. Sometimes they are vertical and sometimes horizontal. It is rather intriguing that such a logo is connected with a buying and selling commodity such as a bank card. Every bar code on every packet or tin that is purchased includes this resemblance of 666. The 2 thin lines that precede the code, the 2 that are in the middle of the code and the 2 that conclude it, give the appearance of being symbols of 6.

In Scripture, 7 is the number of perfection, so 666 puts a triple emphasis on falling short of perfection. However, the gematria of "Jesus" in Greek is 888, which puts a triple emphasis on the fact that he is risen from the dead on the eighth day, a new beginning, the first born of God's

new creation.

Since creation, the number 6 has been associated with man and regarded as the number of man. Man was created on the sixth day and 6 days per week were appointed for his labour, which some see as pointing to 6 millenniums of human history that precedes the seventh - the millennial reign of Christ. (No one knows when the sixth millennium expires because no one knows how old Adam and Eve were when sin entered the world).

Noah was in his 600th year when he entered the ark and global judgement was poured upon a sinful world.

Ex. 14:7 refers to 600 of Pharaoh's chariots which ended up coming under God's judgement due to attacking Israel.

Goliath was also against Israel and was 6 cubits and a span tall and had 6 pieces of armour:

1. A helmet of brass.
2. A coat of mail.
3. Leggings of brass.
4. Bronze javelin.
5. A spear.
6. One bearing a shield (1 Sam. 17:4-7).

The iron head of his spear weighed 600 shekels, and his brothers had 6 fingers on each hand and 6 toes on each foot (2 Sam. 21:20).

The image of a man erected by the king of Babylon in opposition to the worship of God, was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits broad and was to be worshipped when music was heard from 6 specific instruments:

1. Cornet.
 2. Flute.
 3. Harp.
 4. Sackbut.
 5. Psaltery.
 6. Dulcimer.
- (Dan. 3:10). Further analysis shows that the numerical value of all the words describing the image in Dan. 3 is 4,662 which is 7x666.

As mentioned earlier, the annual income of gold during Solomon's reign was 666 talents (1 Kng. 10;14).

There are 6 words used for "man" in the Bible. 6 is also stamped in time calculations governing the life of man. One minute consists of 60 seconds; one hour consists of 60 minutes; and one day consists of 24 hours (4x6). The months of each year average 30 days (5x6); and each year consists of 12 months (2x6).



CHAPTER ELEVEN REVELATION CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Revelation chapter 14 forms part of the great parenthesis that covers Rev. 11:16 to 15:4. On the surface, this chapter may appear to be shapeless and disorganized, but it presents several introductory themes or quick sketches which are a preview of events given later in greater detail. Though seemingly shapeless as a picture, there is in fact an accurate sequence of events.

Just as a vision of the 144,000 in chapter 7 took place prior to the sounding of the 7 trumpets, another vision is now given of the 144,000 prior to the pouring forth of the 7 vials of God's wrath. The sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7 took place prior to the tribulation period while the winds of affliction and adversity were held back. But the vision in Rev. 14 is given during the tribulation period while the beast is rampant (v9. 13:14-18).

The vision in chapter 14:1-5 reveals that the outcome of the trials of the tribulation and the vials will be the establishment of God's kingdom. But before the tribulation ends and before the final judgements (vials) are poured out, the Lord stops to reassure His servants that everything is in control; His kingdom is inevitable, and their future is sure.

THE LAMB STOOD ON MOUNT ZION

John says: "And I looked, and lo, a lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1. A.V.).

Most revised versions agree that this should read: "the lamb" not "a lamb," and that the lamb's name as well as the Father's name was written on the foreheads of the 144,000. In the chapter prior to this, reference was made to "a lamb": a lamb-like beast that spoke like a dragon, signifying a false prophet. Reference was also made to the beast. But chapter 14 introduces us to "the lamb," the true lamb and true prophet of God, Jesus Christ, and the 4 beasts before the throne of God.

It is a pleasing feature of the Word of prophecy that it never takes the people of God down into scenes of trial and tribulation, and then leave them there in doubt and despair to guess their fate and the final result. Instead, it takes them through to the end of the matter and shows them the result of every conflict.

The first 5 verses of Rev. 14 are a good example of this. The 13th

chapter closed with the people of God in deadly conflict with persecuting powers; not able to buy or sell, living under threat of death if they refuse to worship the image of the beast. What can they do in such a conflict and in such an extremity? What will become of them? The answer to this is given as we move forward to the next scene in Rev. 14:1-5, where some of them are seen standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, and the rest of them are above the Mount in the city of God (heaven) before the throne of God; a victorious company, celebrating their victory and triumph over the enemy, in company with all the other saints.

The beast's reign of terror will involve pain, sorrow and suffering for the saints, and the key to their victory will be the same as Christ's, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). The key to overcoming suffering is having and holding a vision of hope and glory. Where there is no vision, the people perish (Pr. 29:18).

In the midst of his ignominy and humiliation as he died on the cross, Jesus saw himself resurrected in power and glory, seated at the right hand of God, and coming back to earth to reign over the nations from Mount Zion. As he stood before the Jewish court to be condemned to death, he indicated where his thoughts were when he declared: "Hereafter shall you see the son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).

Even the thief crucified alongside Christ had a vision quickened to him, causing him to encourage Jesus in his hope saying: "Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom." Jesus replied: "I assure you this day that you will be with me in paradise."

The introduction therefore, of Christ standing on Mount Zion, surrounded by the saints; is no doubt designed to reassure them in time of tribulation, that the kingdom is in sight and their triumph and victory is sure if they remain faithful to their Lord. Rev. 14:1-5 represents their vision which will inspire them with faith, patience and courage to endure to the end.

The contrast between chapters 13 and 14 is remarkable. We are lifted from the deep dark pit of the beast's kingdom to the lofty heights of God's kingdom where He, not man, is the central figure before whom all bow, and to whom all voices are raised in adoration. Earth's groanings are drowned by the song of the redeemed in this opening vision in Rev. 14. It looks through the misery to see Christ enthroned and the beast dethroned.

MOUNT ZION

Rev. 14:1 is the first and only reference to Mount Zion by name in the book of Revelation, and there are only 6 other references in the New Testament: (Matt. 21:5. Jn. 12:15. Rom. 9:33. 11:26. Heb. 12:22. 1 Pet. 2:6). However there are about 157 references in the Old Testament to Zion.

Originally, “Mount Zion” was a mountain ridge on which a Jebusite town was situated, south of Mount Moriah on which the temple was built in the days of Solomon. When David conquered Mount Zion and settled there, it became known as “the city of David,” and the highest part of it became the place of his palace and throne from which he ruled Israel. Later, “Zion” came to signify the whole of Jerusalem and the 2 names were used synonymously.

Many Scriptures teach that when God’s kingdom comes to earth, Zion (Jerusalem) will be the centre from which Jesus will reign, and the throne on which he sits will constitute David’s throne restored. This is a major theme in Scripture. Rev. 14:1 may be the only verse in the book of Revelation that refers to Zion, but it opens the door to this major theme. Many Scriptures relate to it and the following is just a selection: 2 Sam. 7:12-14 with Heb. 1:5. Ps. 2. Ps. 48:1-2 with Matt. 5:34-35. Ps. 102:13. 110:1-2 with Matt. 25:31. Ps. 132:13-18. Isa. 2:1-5. 9:6-7. Isa. 22:20-22 with Rev. 3:7. Jer. 3:16-18. 23:5-8. 33:15-17. Zech. Ch. 12 and 14. Lk. 1:32 with Rev. 3:21. Act. 15:16 with Amos 9:11.

It will not be of course, the present Mount Zion or city of Jerusalem that will be the centre stage and power centre of God’s kingdom on earth. There is to be a “new Jerusalem” and a new and different Zion. The old will pass away, due to some tremendous land transformations that are going to take place.

Ps. 102:13-16 says the Lord will appear in His glory when He builds up Zion. He will arise and have mercy on Zion when the set time to favour her comes. The fact that Jesus appears on Mount Zion in Rev. 14:1 reveals that the promise to build up Zion has been fulfilled in this vision.

In view of other prophecies, the reference to building up Zion can be related to the elevation of the site, raising it up to a much higher level. (The Hebrew word “banah,” translated “build up” occurs frequently in the Old Testament and is often used in relation to building up high walls etc).

Ps. 48:1-2 is a Messianic psalm relating to the future when Christ as a great king will reign from Zion, and it states that at that time the mountain will be “beautiful in elevation.”

At the moment, Mt Hermon is the highest mountain in that area of the Middle East. But the reference in Ps. 68:15-16 to the “Mount of Bashan” (Mt. Hermon) looking enviously at the Mount (Zion) which God desires for His abode and where He will dwell for ever, can be taken to imply that Zion will be elevated to a higher position.

According to Zech. 14, the whole site of Jerusalem is going to be heaved up to a much higher position by the mighty earthquake that occurs at the second coming of Christ. At the same time, this earthquake is going to level all the surrounding hills and cause the cities of the nations to collapse. The height of mountains all around the earth will be reduced, causing them to roll down into, and fill valleys, and even disappear altogether in some cases (Isa. 2:12-15. 40:4. Ezk. 38:20. Rev. 16:20).

In view of this it is quite possible that Mount Zion could end up being the highest mountain in the world! The prophecy concerning Mount Zion in Isa. 2 says: “And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall tower above the top of the mountains.”

A VERY HIGH MOUNTAIN

We read in Ezk. 40:2 that the prophet was taken in vision to the land of Israel and placed upon “a very high mountain” on the south side of which was a structure of such a size that he thought it was a city. Further reading of the narrative reveals the structure was not a city but a temple for the mortal worshippers during the millennial reign of Christ. The city in which these worshippers will be accommodated will not be on Zion or at Jerusalem. Instead, it will be a city called “Yahweh Shammah,” about 25 kilometres south of Zion in the area of Hebron (Ezk. 48). It is generally believed and accepted that the high mountain to which the prophet Ezekiel was taken, was Mount Zion in its future elevated position.

We also read in Rev. 21:10 that John was carried away in the spirit to a “great and high mountain.” The language is almost identical to Ezk. 40:2 and it is reasonable to conclude that it was the same mountain to which Ezekiel was taken. However, unlike Ezekiel, John was not shown the temple and city that will be used by the mortal worshippers, but the temple city of the immortal worshippers. He saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending from heaven (Rev. 21). The fact that John saw the city descend while standing on the top of Zion, indicates the city was descending to the geographical area of Zion; to the country where the mountain belongs, causing it to become a “heavenly country.”

As mentioned in the first chapter of this book, and as will be covered

in more detail when consideration is given to Rev. 21, the holy city, new Jerusalem, seen by John descending to Zion, is the mobile city of God i.e. heaven itself - the eternal home of the angels and all who will be made equal with them. This is the city that Abraham looked for, “a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Heb. 11:15-16 informs us that Abraham and his family had the opportunity to return to the country from which they had migrated, but didn't because “they desired a better country, that is, an heavenly. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city.” That this city is going to come, is emphasized in Heb. 13:14: “For here (the present Jerusalem) we have no continuing (unshakeable) city, but we seek one to come.” This is the city that John saw descending from above while he was standing on Mount Zion.

Heb. 12:22 actually connects the city with Mount Zion. In this verse the writer says the hope that the Christian faith has before it is the prospect of: “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels in joyful festal gathering (in high festival) and the church ...” The city is clearly intimately connected with Zion in this verse, and is referred to as the dwelling place of both the angels and the church. For this reason, in order to see the glorified church, the angel took John and showed him the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9-10).

As we have seen in Rev. 5:11, there are 100 million angels and there will be millions of saints. They are all seen together in Rev. 7:9... in the temple city of God worshipping Him before His throne. (Reference is also made in Rev. 22:1-2 to the throne being in the city). The temple in Ezekiel's prophecy, being about one mile square, and the city (Yahweh Shammah) being about 1½ miles square, are both far too small to accommodate millions of worshippers. As pointed out before: they are for mortal worshippers, not immortal, as is evident in the chapters concerned in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Ps. 48:1-2 also associates the city of the great king with Mount Zion. In view of the fact that the city in Ezk. 48 (Yahweh Shammah) is 25 kilometres south of Zion, it cannot possibly be the city of the great king referred to in Ps. 48 and Heb. 12:22 etc.

In view of all this, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the city in which the immortal saints will dwell is the city of God, heaven itself which John saw descending in Rev. 21, beautifully adorned by its builder and maker, and compared with a bride adorned for her husband. It would obviously have to be a huge city to accommodate the innumerable

company of angels and saints who will worship there, and it certainly is!

HOVERING ABOVE MOUNT ZION

Because the city is linked with Zion, it is natural to wonder where it will be placed in relation to the Mount. Reference in Rev. 14:1 to Jesus standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 indicates that the elevated Mount in the age to come will not be a narrow peaked mountain but a table mountain. And, although there is no specific reference in this verse to a temple-city, reference is made in v2 to a multitude above Mount Zion before the throne in heaven singing a song and playing harps. Do we imagine that this multitude is floating on clouds or suspended in the air? No! Rev. 15:2 refers to them standing on the sea of glass playing harps and singing a song before the throne in the city-temple of God. The same applies in Rev. 5:8.

It is therefore concluded that the city of God is “hovering” above Mount Zion in Rev. 14:1, above Jesus and the 144,000, yet connected to the mountain in some way, “resting” upon it, so to speak, making it a “footstool”: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Ps. 132:13-14).

No wonder the top of the mountain will be “most holy” (Ezk. 43:12). Elsewhere in the Scriptures the words “most holy” are used to describe the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple, which represented heaven. Because heaven itself is coming to Zion, it is not surprising that the top of the mountain will be most holy!

Being mobile, the city and throne of God are able to hover, and some believe that a similar occurrence took place when the Lord came down to Sinai. Isa. 31:5 says the Lord will hover over Jerusalem as a bird hovers around its nest. Ps. 48:4 says that the “kings” who gather against Jerusalem will see the city and be astounded; they will be filled with panic and flee; trembling takes hold of them and anguish as of a woman in travail. It is obviously a very awesome and awe-inspiring city!

Another Scripture that could relate to the hovering effect of the city is Isa. 4:5-6: “The Lord will create over every dwelling place of Mount Zion and over her assemblies, a cloud by day and smoke, and the shining of flaming fire by night: for over all the glory shall be a canopy ...” In more ways than one, the city would be “Jerusalem above” - “heavenly Jerusalem” (Gal. 4:26. Heb. 12:22).

In the event of this city coming to Mount Zion, access would be

gained to it by ascending the Mount. Ps. 24:3 says: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord or who shall stand in His holy place?” This can easily be read to mean that standing in the holy city requires ascending the holy hill of Zion. For this reason, reference to dwelling in the tabernacle of God runs parallel with dwelling in the holy hill in Ps. 15:1. (The city of God is referred to as “the tabernacle of God” in Rev. 21:3).

So then, coming back to Rev. 14:1: Although this is the only reference to Mount Zion by name in the book of Revelation, “the great and high mountain” referred to in Rev. 21:10, although not named, is also Mount Zion. The vision in Rev. 14:1 looks forward in anticipation to the time when “the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob ...” (Rom. 11:25-27). In that day the law shall go forth from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem and nations shall not learn war anymore (Isa. 2).

But, before this takes place there is firstly work to be done in preaching (Rev. 14:6-7); persecution and threats have to be resisted (v9-11); patience has to be shown, and death must occur (v12-13). The vision in Rev. 14:1-5 is clearly anticipative. The end is put first and then the steps are traced that lead up to it.

Rev. 14:1 says the Lamb “stood” on Mount Zion with the 144,000. He is standing, not sitting. When the Lamb completed the sacrificial work involved in his first coming, he “sat down at the right hand of God.” This was in contrast to the Jewish priests whose sacrificial work involving animals was never finished due to them not being able to permanently atone for sin, and who therefore “stood daily ministering and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11-12).

When the second coming of Christ takes place he will have work to do among both Jews and Gentiles before the millennial rest can take effect. Reference in Rev. 14:4 to the 144,000 following the Lamb wherever he goes implies he is going somewhere. They obviously could not follow him anywhere if he was sitting down! Standing on Mount Zion seems to signify therefore that Jesus is about to launch forth on a mission, possibly to gather the Jews from the 4 corners of the earth (Isa. 11:10-11).

THE 144,000

Rev. 14:1 is the second reference to the 144,000, the first being in chapter 7. Some say this is a second group of 144,000, but the Spirit

would hardly use such a number to represent 2 separate and distinct groups of people.

Rev. 7 informs us that the 144,000 consists of 12,000 from each of 12 tribes of Israel, and we have seen that there are good reasons for believing they refer to literal Israelites (see p245-). In Rev. 14:1 John sees the 144,000 standing with Christ as a group, but in Rev. 7 he did not see them as a separate distinct group; they were part of a great multitude that could not be numbered, consisting of all nations and tribes of the earth.

However, Rev. 14:2-3 refers to the great multitude before the throne, before the 4 living creatures and 24 elders, in the temple-city of God which towers above Mount Zion. For some reason, the 144,000 have been separated from the multitude in this vision, to be seen standing with Christ on Mount Zion. The reason is not given so we can only conjecture. Verse 4 refers to them being “the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” As has been pointed out when dealing with Rev. 7 (see p255), “firstfruits” signifies that they are the first group of Israelites to be converted from the nation of Israel during the end time outpouring of the Holy Spirit and tribulation period. (It is evident in Rev. 7:14 that the 144,000 are involved in the great tribulation era).

The conversion of the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel is a sign that the time of Israel’s blindness has as good as run its course, and the fullness of the Gentiles has virtually come in. “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom. 11:25-27).

It would seem from this that one of the first missions of Jesus when he returns is to convert all that remain of the nation of Israel. According to Mic. 4:8, “the daughter of Zion” will be the “first dominion” in the kingdom. The statement that “there shall come out of Zion the deliverer” would require him to be standing on Zion which is what he is depicted doing in Rev. 14:1. And if the 144,000 “follow him” on this mission, it would imply that they are part of the ministry involving the teaching and converting of their fellow Jews, with whom they had lived contemporary. If so, it would be fitting and appropriate for the 144,000 and not Gentile converts, to be seen on Mount Zion with Jesus in this particular vision.

Although the position of the 144,000, being both the natural and spiritual seed of Abraham, doesn’t make them exclusive, it does make them unique, and this uniqueness is conveyed in Rev. 14:1, probably for more reasons than the one that has been suggested.

NAME WRITTEN ON THEIR FOREHEADS

As already mentioned, most modern versions agree that the original text of Rev. 14:1 says the 144,000 had both the Lamb's and the Father's name written on their foreheads, and this explains the nature of the seal in chapter 7. This was considered when dealing with the seal of God in Rev. 7. (See p238-245).

A contrast can be seen between the Father and Lamb's name on the saints' foreheads in chapter 14 and the names of blasphemy on the beast's heads in chapter 13. A contrast is also made between those who receive the mark of the beast (13:16-17) and those who have the mark of God. The 2 marks seem to be set in juxtaposition to advertise the contrast.

As those during the reign of the beast cannot have access to city comforts and goods if they do not have his mark on them, so also those who do not have the seal of God cannot have access to His city and its comforts.

Adam Clarke says different sects of idolaters have a peculiar mark of their god on their foreheads, and it is still practised in the east. The mark is called the "sectarial mark." Between 80 and 90 different figures are found on the foreheads of different Hindu deities and their followers.

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

Rev. 14:2-3 according to the revised versions of the Bible, reads like this: "And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the 4 living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth."

According to this translation, the thundering voice like the sound of many waters and loud thunder, was the sound of harpers playing on their harps. Now, as we know from Rev. 5:8-9 the 24 elders around the throne of God sung a new song while they played harps. But the harps in Rev. 14:2-3 are played by those who sing a new song "before ... the elders," so it is clearly not the elders who are playing here. More than 24 harps would need to be played to make a sound like loud thunder!

Someone might suggest that it was the multitude of angels surrounding the elders, referred to in Rev. 5:11, who were playing the harps and singing. But this could not be the case because Rev. 14:3

indicates that the song can only be sung by those who are redeemed from the earth. Such redemption comes through the blood of the Lamb. Angels can sing about this salvation being granted to men (Rev. 5:9), but not of it being granted to themselves for they were not redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Those who play the harps and sing in Rev. 14:2-3 before the throne of God must therefore be a multitude of saints - the multitude from all nations and tribes of which the 144,000 from 12 tribes of Israel formed a part in Rev. 7. While they play harps and sing, the angels have to remain quiet and listen, but no doubt rejoice in their heart with those who sing, due to the fact that they played a big part as ministering spirits, helping them to become heirs of the salvation about which they are singing.

The redeemed include those who gain victory over the beast, referred to in Rev. 15 standing on the sea of glass before the throne of God, "having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses ..." The song of Moses which they sing is the "new song" sung in Rev. 14.

Harps are generally used for expressions of joyful praise, especially when celebrating salvation and redemption. Certainly, when the original song of Moses was sung as a result of getting victory over Egypt the old serpent-dragon, there was great joy. They celebrated with timbrels and dancing, as well as singing (Ex. 15).

Harps were also very much part of the temple service at Jerusalem and were played by the priests. They were a foreshadow of greater things to come in the greater temple, the city-temple of God, where the immortal saints, the kings and priests of the millennial age, will play harps while they sing praise to God. (1 Kng. 10:12. 2 Chr. 5:12. 9:11. 1 Chr. 13:8. 15:16, 21, 28).

The scene then, presented in Rev. 14:1-3, involves the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion with Christ, while multitudes of the redeemed play harps and sing a new song in the city of God, before the throne and before the 4 living creatures and 24 elders. So when it says in v3 that "no man could learn that song (i.e. the song being sung by the redeemed in the city) but the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth," it probably means that no one standing on the earth (as were the 144,000 at that time, being on Mount Zion), could learn the song except the 144,000.

When it says no one "could" learn the song, it does not necessarily mean that the words or tune are too difficult for others to learn. Angels, for example, could learn it if those made equal with them were capable of learning it. But it would be inappropriate for them to do so if, as is probably the case, the song celebrated deliverance from the beast and

salvation through the blood of Christ. The same applies to those in the human race living on earth who were not redeemed by Christ at his return. The words “no man could learn that song” could therefore mean that they were not permitted to do so.

A comparison could be made with the situation concerning the incense prescribed under the law. The ingredients are revealed and anyone could put them together, but only the priests were permitted to do so; it could only be offered by them to God in His sanctuary.

Another example: Rev. 1:17 refers to each saint receiving a white stone on which a new name is written which no man knows except the person who receives it i.e. no one else is informed of the new name prior to it being received. But, once it is received, others will become aware of it, but will not be permitted to appropriate it to themselves.

One more point in v3: the phrase “no man” is significant in view of the contrast between those who have the mark of God and those who have the mark of the beast. In the kingdom of the beast “no man” is permitted to buy or sell if he does not have the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:17). But no man on earth in Rev. 14:3 besides those who have God’s mark is able to celebrate divine deliverance in song.

THEY ARE VIRGINS

Rev. 14:4 says the 144,000 “are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits to God and to the Lamb.”

A virgin in the normal sense of the word is one who has had no sexual relations, but kept himself or herself pure and chaste. The word can be applied to both the male and female sex. God has made it clear in His Word that He expects both men and women to remain virgins until they are married, not sharing their bodies or having sexual intercourse with anyone other than the one they marry. Intercourse outside marriage is branded as fornication or adultery in the Bible.

However, in Rev. 14:4 “virgins” has nothing to do with whether or not the 144,000 have been married. While it is true that abstinence from marriage on the part of those who want to serve the Lord without other commitments such as marriage, is commended, it is never commanded (1 Cor. 7:1, 7-9, 25-40. Matt. 19:12).

In the Middle Ages the Roman Catholics took Rev. 14:4 to be a condemnation of marriage and sex, and a recommendation of celibacy.

But nowhere is it taught in Scripture that the unmarried are more virtuous than the married. Marriage is an ordinance instituted and sanctified by God. It would be a mockery to suggest that those who obey His command to be fruitful and multiply are not as pleasing to Him as those who don't.

The apostle Paul condemned those who disallowed marriage and insisted on celibacy, and said it was a sign of departing from the true Christian faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3. Heb. 13:4). Peter and other apostles were married (Mk. 1:30. 1 Cor. 9:5).

The term "virgin" is used symbolically in Scripture to signify spiritual purity and chastity. 2 Cor. 11:2 records Paul saying to the church: "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you ("promised you in marriage." G.N.) to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

The reason for Paul writing this is given in the following verses: "I am afraid that your minds will be corrupted and that you will abandon your full and pure devotion to Christ in the same way that Eve was deceived by the serpent's subtle lies. For you gladly tolerate anyone who comes to you and preaches a different Jesus, not the one we preached; and you accept a spirit and gospel completely different from the Spirit and gospel you received from us."

From this we learn that all who commit themselves to Christ become "virgins" in a spiritual sense, as they wait for him to come and receive them to himself. When he returns they will be joined with him for eternity and this union is symbolically depicted as a marriage (Rev. 19:5-9). For this reason Jesus is referred to as a "husband" in 2 Cor. 11:2 and "bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1-6. Mk. 2:19-20. Jn. 3:29).

As a virgin was expected to "make herself ready" (Rev. 19:7), by remaining pure and chaste for the marriage, and not flirt and fraternize, entertain and embrace other men; Christians likewise are expected to remain faithful and loyal to Christ and his teaching, and not flirt and fraternize with the world or false teachers and teaching. They are called upon to be unspotted by the world and to hold the truth and keep the doctrine pure and uncontaminated by vain human tradition. Failure to do so results in losing spiritual virginity and chastity, and becoming a spiritual fornicator or adulterer, as we read in Jam. 4:4: "You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

For this reason, the apostate church is referred to as a "harlot" who has committed "fornication" (Rev. 17). She has been unfaithful and

disloyal to the doctrines of the bridegroom, having adopted and embraced false doctrines which have created another Christ, contrary to the true Christ. She has corrupted and defiled many minds, turning them from truth to falsehood. This is what was happening in the Corinthian church, for which reason Paul penned those words already quoted from 2 Cor. 11.

It is a sad reflection on human nature down the ages that it is easily seduced and deceived by false teaching. It happened to Israel in Old Testament times and it was happening in the first century among some Christian communities, and warnings were given by the apostles that it would continue through to the last days (1 Tim. 4:1-. 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

The 144,000 in Rev. 14 however, being referred to as “virgins,” have not been seduced and deceived by false teachers and teaching; they have not committed spiritual fornication by embracing false doctrines and mixing them with the true. Rev. 14:4 says: “These are they who were not defiled with women.”

The reference to “women” here is interesting in view of the fact that the “harlot” in Rev. 17, which refers to the apostate Roman Catholic church, is referred to as being the “mother of harlots” (v5), indicating that there are other “harlots” (spiritual fornicators) who are her daughters. This signifies that there are other churches who are the spiritual progeny of the Roman Catholic system of teaching.

The Roman Catholic church has originated many false doctrines and dominated the thinking of Christendom for hundreds of years. And in spite of the reformation, many of the main-line churches today still embrace many of those doctrines. Chief among these is the doctrine of the Trinity which creates another Christ, making him co-equal and co-eternal with God. This doctrine gives us 3 persons in the God-head: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy spirit.

How 3 Gods can be one God, and a father be his own son; how a son can be his own father and sit on his own right hand, is indeed a “mystery.” And those who believe this doctrine are happy and proud to call it a “blessed mystery.” It is not surprising therefore to find that upon the forehead (the mind) of the harlot in Rev. 17 is written the name “mystery Babylon” (Babylon means confusion).

The doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental violation and contradiction of the strictly monotheistic concept of God which was a first principle in the creed given by God to the tribes of Israel, and reaffirmed by Jesus and the apostles: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deu. 6:4. Mk. 12:29). In view of this it is sad to hear of Jews being deceived and defiled by the harlot’s doctrine of the Trinity and other

equally unscriptural doctrines.

However, the reference to the 144,000 being “virgins,” i.e. not defiled, indicates that in the end time the truth will be taught in Israel, and although it will cause travail, it will prevail. Many will respond to it and faithfully hold fast to it. It will obviously require a very special work of God’s Spirit to accomplish this, and as we have seen, references are made elsewhere in the revelation to this work in the end time.

THE FIRST FRUITS

Regarding the reference in Rev. 14:4 to the 144,000 being “the first fruits to God and to the Lamb”: it has been previously explained to signify that they are the first wave of Jewish converts in the end time when the fullness of the Gentiles is coming to completion. In the same way that Jam. 1:18 refers to the early first century Christians as “a kind of first fruits,” so the 144,000 will be a kind of “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23) which will be poured out in the last days. The harvest will follow when the deliverer comes out of Zion and turns away ungodliness from Jacob, resulting in all Israel being saved.

In Rom. 16:15 the earliest converts in the Corinthian church are also described as the “first fruits.” They were not the first to be converted to Christ in the world, but the first in their particular country, during the apostolic age. Likewise, the 144,000; even if they are not the first in the world to be affected by the end time ministry and witness of the Holy Spirit, they will be the first in their country.

As in nature, from which the term has been borrowed, “firstfruits” are not limited to the first crop of fruit ever to be yielded by a tree. As a result of the fruiting season running its course and the tree becoming bare for a period; when the next fruit season arrives, the first to come to fruition are again called “firstfruits.” And so it is with Israel. The first century witnessed an abundance of first fruits and a bountiful harvest. Thousands of Jews were converted as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then the tree became bare. The nation was destroyed and the tribes went into exile. But they have come back; the tree has revived and put forth its leaves, and is ready to produce its first fruits again.

NO GUILF IN THEIR MOUTH

Because the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he goes, it is not surprising to read in Rev. 14:5 that “in their mouth was found no

guile: for they are without fault,” because Jesus himself “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22). 1 Pet. 2:23 elaborates: “who, when he was reviled (insulted), reviled not again.”

“Guile” means to trick, to be crafty and deceitful. It relates to cunning craftiness in a bad sense; involving lies, deceit and dishonesty, such as we read in 2 Thes. 2:9-10. The Greek word is “dolos” and it is translated “subtlety” in Matt. 26:4 and “craft” in Mk. 14:1 in the A.V. in relation to the religious authorities who were seeking a way to seize Jesus and put him to death.

The apostle Paul was falsely accused by his adversaries of catching the Corinthian converts by guile; i.e. by being dishonest and deceitful (2 Cor. 12:16). They imagined him to be a con-artist, (like Elymas the sorcerer Act. 13:10), using false pretences to serve his own ends. Paul naturally defended himself against such accusations!

Dolos is translated “deceit” in Mk. 7:22 where it is referred to as one of a number of evil things that can come from an unregenerate human heart. Christians who are truly converted “lay aside all guile” (1 Pet. 2:1), along with all malice, hypocrisies, envies and all evil speakings. Nathanael was such a person: “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (Jn. 1:47. Ps. 32:2). The 144,000 from the tribes of Israel will be of the same spirit!

During the tribulation period when the beast wages war against the saints, reviling them and preventing them from buying and selling; they will not rail against him or be devious, deceitful or dishonest to get around his censures and red tape. Those who have no guile and are without fault are not vindictive and revengeful, neither do they compromise their faith and principles for personal comfort. Jesus certainly didn’t! “The remnant of Israel shall do no iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth ...” (Zeph. 3:13). “He who wants to enjoy life and see good times, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet. 3:10-12).

WITHOUT FAULT

The words: “without fault” come from the Greek word “amomos” which is translated: “without blame” (Eph. 1:4), “without blemish” (Eph. 5:27. 1 Pet. 1:19), “unblameable” (Col. 1:22), “without

spot” (Heb. 9:14), “faultless” (Jude v24).

“Amomeetos” is translated “without rebuke” (Plp. 2:15), and “blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14).

In the Greek Old Testament, amomos is used in relation to sacrifices which had to be without blemish. The word is also used in relation to blamelessness in character and conduct (1 Sam. 29:3. Dan. 6:4. Lk. 23:4).

Everyone of course has faults, as the saying goes: “Christians aren’t perfect but they are forgiven.” Hence: “Confess your faults to one another” (Jam. 5:16). “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual must restore him in the spirit of meekness, keeping an eye on yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Christians are required to be as faultless as possible in the world to avoid giving occasion for criticism of the Christian way and causing reproach against Christ. We read in 1 Pet. 2:20 that there is nothing to be proud about for being buffeted by the world for our faults. But there is merit in being buffeted when we are doing no wrong! (Ps. 59:4). However, no matter how well we might be able to live without fault while in the presence of the world and not give occasion for criticism and condemnation, the fact remains that we all do have faults and God knows about them, and our prayer to Him should be: “Cleanse me from my secret faults” (Ps. 19:12).

But there are faults and faults, and there is a difference between being faultless and blameless. The following story is a good illustration: A young boy who had just started to learn how to write, wrote a letter to his father while he was overseas on business. There were many spelling mistakes, punctuation errors and wrong choices of words. It was full of faults, but it was the very best the boy could do. He put his whole heart and soul into it; it was motivated by 100% love and sincerity and was therefore blameless! No blame was levelled against the boy by his father. Instead of receiving criticism he received commendation. His father said: “well done.”

Rev. 7:14 says the 144,000 and all other Gentile saints “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Their robes are without spot and blemish - without fault because there is cleansing and forgiveness in Christ’s redemptive blood (1 Jn. 1:7-9).

BACK TO THE BEAST ERA

Rev. 14:5 is the end of the special vision of glory that awaits those who hold on to their faith and overcome the beast. We now come

back to end time events that lead up to the Lamb's enthronement on Zion. Barnhouse is worth quoting here. He says: "The vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion was but a momentary glimpse of the coming triumph of God's government on earth. The whole of the fourteenth chapter might be likened to a moment in the midst of bitter warfare. The troops reach a summit after heavy fighting. From that summit they survey the valley that now lies before them, before they dash down into the forests which cover the scene of the great battle which they are about to undertake. First of all, they see the towers of Mount Zion, their goal and objective in the battle. The flag of victory waves there and they know that strong forces are about to proceed from its gates to attack the enemy which lies between them and it. The victory is assuredly theirs, but the steps by which they must proceed are clearly shown to them from the summit before they go down into the valley to fight through to the end of the warfare and sure triumph. Soldiers might see before them a wood to be passed, a river to cross, ... Down in the valley, Babylon the great is already tumbling ... Some of the army of the righteous will fall; but their blessedness is foreseen; and finally, the hand to hand struggle of Armageddon at the very gates of Mount Zion is seen as a triumph for the forces of the Lord of hosts, though the details will not be seen until the twentieth chapter."

ANOTHER ANGEL

Rev. 14:6-7 reads: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having an everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell upon the earth, and to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, saying with a loud voice: fear God and give glory to Him; for the hour of his judgement is come: and worship him who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

Reference is made to 3 angels in Rev. 14:6-9 and the first one in v6 is referred to as "another angel" who John saw "fly in the midst of heaven." The word "another" was used in Rev. 10:1 to distinguish the mighty angel seen coming down from heaven from the trumpet angels. Reference to another angel in Rev. 14:6 could be regarded as distinguishing him from the one in chapter 10. But in view of the fact that reference is made in Rev. 8:13 to an angel (eagle) flying in the midst of heaven, the reference to "another angel" in 14:6 also flying in the midst of heaven, could be making a distinction between these two, to indicate that although they are both depicted flying in the midst of heaven, they are not one and the same angel.

The angel seen by John in Rev. 8:13 was flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice: “Woe woe woe to the inhabitants of the earth,” because of the last 3 trumpets that were about to be sounded. We have seen that this represents a message proclaimed to earth’s inhabitants after the fourth trumpet which causes the sunlight to be reduced by one third. The message warns that worse is to come as a result of 3 more trumpets or “woes.” The fact that after the sixth trumpet has been blown, Rev. 9:21 says no repentance has taken place, indicates that it was the purpose of the woes to bring about repentance, and the message proclaimed by the angel flying in mid-heaven would have called for this.

Seeing that the trumpet judgements relate particularly to “the third part” of the earth, the message of the angel flying in mid-heaven in Rev. 8:13 probably signifies a message delivered to that region of the earth. But the judgements in Rev. 14 affect Babylon, then the beast’s kingdom which embraces the whole earth: “all kindreds, tongues and nations” (Rev. 13:7). The gospel message of the angel flying in mid-heaven in 14:6 would therefore be delivered to the whole earth before the outpouring of these judgements. The verse actually states that the gospel will be preached “to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.” If so, this indicates that 2 specific preaching efforts, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will be conducted in the end time.

IN THE MIDST OF HEAVEN

The significance of an angel flying in mid-heaven proclaiming the message in a loud voice has already been explained when dealing with Rev. 8:13 (see P. 310-312). As pointed out, angels in the sense of supernatural messengers, do not preach the gospel to the world; it is the mission of human messengers to do this. The Greek word *angelos*, translated angel, simply means messenger and can refer to either human or divine messengers. It is translated “messenger” in relation to those who preached the gospel, such as John the Baptist as well as his disciples and the apostles of Christ: (Lk. 7:24, 27. 9:52). Such preachers are evangelists and it is interesting that the word “angel” is found in “evangel.”

In classical Greek, an angel was anyone who brought a message, and the word “evangel” applied to any type of good news. Even as far as the New Testament is concerned, there are other matters or items of good news besides the gospel defined by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:1-4, which are also called “gospel.” The noun or the verb is used in all of the following instances: the message of Gabriel announcing the birth of John the Baptist

(Lk. 1:19); the announcement of Christ's birth by the angelic hosts to the shepherds (Lk. 2:10); the news of the spiritual growth of the Thessalonian church (1 Thes. 3:6).

Although the preaching of the gospel has not been entrusted to supernatural angels from heaven, they are nevertheless intensely interested in the work among men, being sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. And as there is order in all the movements and appointments of the heavenly host, it may not be fanciful to suppose that a literal angel has charge of the work of each of the end time messages. Such an angel would represent those who do the work.

In these symbols we see the sharp contrast the Bible draws between earthly and heavenly things. Whenever earthly governments are to be represented, even the best of them, the most appropriate symbol that can be found is a cruel and ravenous wild beast; but when the work of God is to be set forth, an angel, clad in beauty and girt with power, is taken to symbolize it!

Because each angel is a holy spirit, and the Comforter sent to empower the church for the proclamation of the gospel in New Testament times was an angel, the reference to the angel preaching the gospel in Rev. 14:6 could very well signify a message empowered by the Holy Spirit. Flying in the midst of heaven (like a bird or aeroplane!) could also signify a rapid preaching work. (Radio waves or signals also travel through the midst of heaven at tremendous speed - the speed of an angel, and can be used for preaching)! Just one person's voice can reach millions of people.

Rev. 11:3 also comes to mind in relation to all of this. It refers to the 2 witnesses being given power to prophesy. Being an end time Elijah ministry, it would not be surprising if they were transported from place to place by the Spirit through the air as Elijah (1 Kng. 18:12) and Philip were (Act. 8:39-40). The reference in Isa. 40:31 to those who wait upon the Lord renewing their strength and mounting up like eagles could have a very literal application in the end time! It is significant that John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, is called "angelos" (an angel Matt. 11:10). On this basis the end time Elijah (and his fellow witnesses) would be the same.

Adam Clarke applies the preaching of the gospel to the effort of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Others apply it to the printing of the Bible and the Reformation. The Seventh Day Adventists apply it to the 1840s, and the Jehovah Witnesses to the 1914 era onwards.

However, considering that the time slot in Revelation into which this gospel proclamation takes place, is immediately prior to the judgement of

Babylon and the beast, indicates that the preaching occurs on the threshold of the second coming of Christ. In the words of Jesus: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). The beast will be in power when the final preaching takes place.

AN EVERLASTING GOSPEL

The original Greek text says it is an everlasting gospel that is preached. The gospel was first preached when Adam and Eve were told the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent on the head (Gen. 3:15). Noah was a preacher of righteousness and he preached the gospel in his day (1 Pet. 2:5. 1 Pet. 3:20. 4:6). The gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and to the Israelites who came out of Egypt under Moses (Heb. 3:17 to 4:2). The Old Testament prophets also preached the gospel (Rom. 1:1-2).

When John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles preached the gospel, telling the people that the kingdom of God was at hand, the first thing they said was: “repent” (Matt. 3:2. 4:17. Act. 2:37-38). Without repentance, no one can enter the kingdom, so the preaching of repentance was a top priority and an integral part of preaching the gospel.

It is not surprising therefore, to find that the angel in Rev. 14:6 who preaches the everlasting gospel says: “Fear God and give glory to Him: for the hour of His judgement is come, and worship Him who made heaven ...” This is a call to repentance - to turn from a self-centred, selfish life giving glory to man, to a God-centred life in which God receives all the glory. This is “good news” (gospel) because it results in avoiding God’s judgement and gaining eternal life. It will certainly be good news to those who put on the righteousness and holiness of Christ, to know that all human unrighteousness and unholiness is about to be judged. See Ps. 96.

In view of the anti-god blasphemous and violent spirit of the beast, it will require fearless men to proclaim in a loud confident voice: “Fear God and give glory to Him and worship him.” As we have seen, the beast will demand to be the only recipient of worship. This proclamation will be in direct opposition to his will and policy and will provoke and antagonize him.

To a world worshipping the beast, the message would be a commandment and challenge to stop doing that - stop fearing man which brings a snare, and worship God who sets free from the snare of sin and death. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. To fear God is to have

a healthy reverential respect which avoids offending Him and delights in doing His will and obeying His Word (Ecc. 12:13). Failure or refusal to do this results in coming under His judgement, and it is a terrible thing to fall into His hands. He is a consuming fire. The judgement of God is often presented in the Scriptures as an inducement to fear Him and give Him glory.

A FIRST PRINCIPLE

Judgement is one of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ (Heb. 6:1-2). During his ministry on earth, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (Jn. 16:8). The apostle Paul certainly included judgement in his gospel messages to great effect, causing men to tremble at the prospect (Act. 24:24-25). Jesus in particular frequently warned about judgement when he preached the gospel.

Ultimately, when God's judgements have all been poured out upon the earth, the people will be forced to learn righteousness (Isa. 26:9). The judgements will be so awesome and overpowering that proud hearts will be humbled and every knee will bow to the Lord: "Who shall not fear Thee O Lord, and glorify (give glory to) Thy name? For Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship (bow) before Thee; for Thy judgements were made manifest" (Rev. 15:4. Isa. 2).

But many hearts will be so hard and stubborn that, as in the case of Pharaoh, repentance will not come quickly or easily. Judgements are represented in Rev. 15 to 16 as 7 bowls containing the wrath of God which will be poured out upon the nations who worship the beast. During the fourth bowl, God's name continues to be blasphemed and people refuse to repent and give glory to God (16:9). When the fifth bowl is poured forth, people still continue to blaspheme God and refuse to repent (16:11). It is evident from this that the gospel message will fall on deaf ears and fail to elicit a positive response, making the grand slam of Armageddon inevitable and unavoidable. This judgement ("krisis" in the Greek) will be the climax to a series of judgements.

Rev. 14:7 teaches that giving glory to God involves worship: "Worship Him who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." This means acknowledging God as Creator as in the case of those in heaven who stand before His throne and say: "Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 5:11).

In the series of trumpets, partial but severe judgements were inflicted upon the earth, sea, fresh waters and heavenly bodies (8:7-12). In the series of vials, complete judgements are inflicted on the earth, sea, fresh waters and sun (16:1-9). Although the order of spheres affected by the judgements differ, the parallels are evident. The gospel message therefore in Rev. 14 to worship God who made heaven, earth, sea and fountains of waters, is a warning to heed the message and repent, for the God who created those spheres is still in control of them and can reverse His creative order in them and turn them into chaos. This warning is clearly intended to prepare for the judgements of heaven, earth, sea and rivers described in chapter 16 in the vial series. A glance at this chapter soon reveals that these regions are dramatically affected.

BABYLON IS FALLEN

Rev. 14:8 reads as follows in the Revised Versions: “Another angel, a second, followed saying, fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” The A.V. refers to Babylon “that great city” but the word city is not in the original text in this verse, possibly to avoid confusing it with the city (Jerusalem) in v20. However, the word “city” occurs in relation to Babylon in Rev. 17:18 and chapter 18. As we shall see, Babylon is the city built on 7 hills, namely: Rome, the rival of Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1) where the city of God will dwell. Rome will be flattened and Zion will be elevated and exalted!

In the same way that the beast first makes his appearance in a brief, almost incidental mention in Rev. 11:7, the fall of Babylon is given its first brief, almost incidental mention here. Rev. 14:8 is an abridged version of chapter 18. It is an anticipatory announcement - a fore-glimpse of her destruction of which a detailed description is given in chapters 17 and 18.

In view of the fact that only Babylon’s fall through the judgement of God is referred to as taking place in an hour in the book of Revelation (18:10, 17, 19), it is possible that the “hour of judgement” in 14:7 may relate specifically to this. The fact that the first angel says: “The hour of his judgement is come” then the next angel says “Babylon is fallen,” would seem to indicate that the judgement pertains to Babylon. Reference in the next verse to the beast being worshipped would confirm this, because it is not until Babylon is destroyed by the beast (17:3, 16) that the beast will be worshipped.

According to Rev. 18:4, a voice from heaven says to God's people in Babylon prior to its hour of judgement: "Come out of her my people." This voice from heaven warning that Babylon's destruction is impending, could be linked with or related to the warning in 14:7 that the hour of judgement is come.

The words: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" are quoted from Isa. 21:9 and will be considered in more detail when we come to chapters 17 and 18. The word "fallen" is probably repeated twice to indicate the certainty of destruction. Compare the doubling of Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's explanation (Gen. 41:32); and also the double "verily verily" that Jesus put before some of his great promises to emphasize their certainty.

ALL NATIONS DRINK GOD'S WRATH

The reason given for Babylon's fall is: "Because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Cp Rev. 17:2. 18:3. Jer. 51:7). The "wrath" is divine wrath, referred to as "the wrath of God" in v10, to which Babylon has exposed all nations by causing them to imbibe her "wine" - "the wine of her fornication" (17:2). Babylon's "wine" signifies the false teaching which befuddles minds and leads people astray from the truth of God's Word, resulting in embracing lies, which is spiritual fornication.

Adam Clarke says: "The wine of the wrath of her fornication is an allusion to a custom of impure women, who give philtres or love potions to those whom they wish to seduce and bind to their will; and these potions are generally of an intoxicating nature, greatly inflaming the blood, and disturbing the intellect. Fornication and adultery are frequently used in Scripture as emblems of idolatry and false worship. No nation of the earth spread their idolatries so far as the ancient Romans; they were as extensive as their conquests. And Papal Rome has been not less active in disseminating her superstitions. She has given her rituals, but not the everlasting gospel, to most nations of the earth."

Reference in Rev. 14:9 to a third angel following the previous two with an announcement, indicates that these announcements are in chronological sequence. Some suggest that they represent a three-fold message, i.e. 3 messages that will be preached simultaneously. If so, one would have expected all 3 announcements to be made by one and the same angel at the same time. The fact that the announcements come from separate angels who are said to "follow" each other, implies 3 separate announcements, each one being separated by a period of time.

Reference in Rev. 14:9 to worshipping the beast after the fall of Babylon, confirms that the beast is a power separate and distinct from Babylon, and clearly implies that he is in power after the fall of Babylon. It is therefore impossible to imagine the gospel message in verses 6-7 being given after the destruction of the beast, i.e. after Christ's return. Reference to "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" in v13 confirms that the events from v6- take place before the kingdom.

Verse 10 says those who worship the beast "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out undiluted into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." (Verse 19 and 16:19 also refer to "the winepress of the wrath of God" and "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath").

God's wrath is likened to wine in a cup which will be poured out at full strength - undiluted with water (Isa. 1:22), and which those who worship the beast will be forced to drink in great quantity. As strong wine drunk to excess makes people reel, totter, and fall over; and causes headaches and vomiting, so God's wrath will be so terrifying that people will stagger, vomit and fall. Cp. Jer. 25:15-17, 27-. Isa. 51:17, 22-23. Ezk. 23:32-35. Ob. v16. Ps. 60:3. 75:8. Rev. 15:7 and Ch. 16.

So then, those who drink from Babylon's cup and imbibe her false religious teaching will be forced to drink from God's cup of wrath. Likewise, those who worship the non-religious atheistic beast will have to drink of the same. This teaches us that pseudo Christians will come under the same judgement as anti Christians! The world which has listened with fear to threats of death if they do not worship the beast, will be informed that if they do worship the beast, God will inflict death.

TORMENTED WITH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

The fact that those who worship the beast will be tormented with fire and brimstone "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb," indicates that this judgement takes place at the second coming. Rev. 19:19-20 refers to the beast and false prophet gathered together to make war with Christ at the battle of Armageddon, resulting in them being "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." Ultimately, at the end of the millennium, the dragon will be cast there too (Rev. 20:10). According to Rev. 21:8, the lake burning with fire and brimstone, "is the second death."

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the return of Christ will be

accompanied by a great conflagration of fire. For example, we read in 2 Thes. 1:7-8 that Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. The heavens will be on fire and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3).

Ezk. 38:22 makes reference to God entering into judgement with the invader of Israel with “fire and brimstone,” and Dan. 7:11 says: “The beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.”

Isa. 30:27-33 is interesting in relation to the subject. Verse 27 refers to the coming of Christ: “Behold, the name of the Lord comes from far, burning with his anger ...” The following verses relate to Christ doing battle with the invader of Israel and destroying him. The invader is referred to as “the Assyrian,” firstly because the ancient Assyrians were a type of the end time invader, and secondly because Iraq, who now occupies the territory of ancient Assyria, will be part of the end time army that invades Israel (Mic. 5:5).

Isa. 30:30-31 says: “And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the descending blow of His arm, with the fury of His anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, a cloudburst, thunder and hailstones. The Assyrian will be terror-stricken at the voice of the Lord when He smites with His rod.” Verse 33 then refers to a place called “Tophet” which was ordained by God long ago for the cremation of the king of the north. It is likened to a fire-pit which God has made deep and wide, and piled high with wood, and “the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, will set fire to it.” This “fire-pit” is referred to as a “lake of fire” in Revelation.

“Tophet” was a place in the valley of Hinnom which ran along the south west of Jerusalem, where rubbish from the city was burned, resulting in fire continually burning and smoke rising there. “Worms” or maggots were always there too in rotting rubbish and carcasses that were left lying beyond the fire.

In Hebrew, “valley of Hinnom” is “Ge-Hinnom,” and the Greek equivalent is “Gehenna.” The A.V. version translates it “hell fire.” It simply refers to Jerusalem’s rubbish dump and Jesus used it as an example of the ultimate destiny of the wicked. Because the fires were always burning, he referred to it as “everlasting fire.” The same applies in Isa. 30:33. The beast will ultimately be consigned to the fire as a worthless piece of garbage, and God has ordained a “fire-pit” or “lake of fire” for

him, where smoke will ascend forever (Rev. 14:11).

The references to “fire and brimstone” in the prophecies relating to the beast’s destruction, may also be an allusion to the holocaust suffered by Sodom and Gomorrah. “The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone (sulphur) and fire ... and the smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace” (Gen. 19:24, 28).

It is generally believed that the Lord caused a volcanic explosion, resulting in fire, red hot coals, streams of lava and sulphur spewing out of the mountain. The area around the Dead Sea where Sodom and Gomorrah used to be, certainly bears witness to volcanic convulsion. Because the fire and smoke continued in the area after the eruption, Sodom and Gomorrah are referred to in Jude v7 as suffering “the vengeance of eternal fire.” The original inhabitants of Sodom are obviously not still alive suffering torment in the fire! However, the fire and smoke that would have caused suffering and torment of mind as it engulfed, scorched and suffocated them; continued for ages afterwards as is often the case with a volcanic eruption. It could therefore be fittingly and graphically expressed as “the smoke of their torment.”

In view of all this, it is not impossible that the references to the lake burning with fire and brimstone; the fire pit, and the fire and brimstone raining down from heaven, by which the beast will be destroyed, could all refer to a volcanic explosion and a lake of lava. It could happen near the city of Jerusalem itself where the beast and his army will be gathered for the battle of Armageddon, or it could happen in the Dead Sea area where the invading forces will be driven. One thing is certain: huge convulsions will take place in the land of Israel that could easily trigger off volcanic activity.

Joel 2:20 says that God will remove the northern army from Jerusalem and drive him into a land barren and desolate, his front facing the Dead Sea and his rear to the Mediterranean Sea, and his foul smell shall ascend, because he has done evil things. If the army is facing the Dead Sea and is driven by the Lord, it would head east in the direction of the Dead Sea area. Reference to the stench of dead bodies in that area is interesting in the light of Ezk. 39:11, 15 which refers to a place of graves east of the Dead Sea for those of the northern army who die there.

In conjunction with this, Isa. 34:8-10 could be relevant. It refers to “the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of revenge for the controversy of Zion. The streams (of Edom, east of the Dead Sea) shall be turned into tar, and her soil into brimstone, and the land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke from it

shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.” This certainly sounds like the effect of volcanic upheaval, and it is generally believed and accepted that the reference in Rev. 14:10-11 to the fire and brimstone and smoke ascending up for ever and ever is taken from the passage in Isa. 34:8-10.

If so, it would seem that when Jesus returns in flaming fire and unleashes his fury on the invading forces of the beast gathered around Jerusalem; violently shaking the land, raining down fire, great hailstones and deafening peals of thunder that cause tremendous vibrations; the armies will panic and flee in the night in an easterly direction toward the Dead Sea, trying to escape what they will then know is divine intervention. Many will die along the way. Mutual slaughter caused by the panic will be one of the causes of this (Ezk. 38:21).

As the army reaches the “fire pit” or “lake of fire” area, - their “Gehenna” or “hellfire,” ordained long ago for the beast; the whole of hell will be let loose by God as morning breaks, in a mighty volcanic explosion. Tremendous torment of mind will take place as fire and brimstone rains down upon them and as the suffocating “smoke” smothers them, as it did to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. As the beast inflicted Rome with fire causing the smoke of her burning to rise up forever and ever, (Rev. 17:16. 18:8-9, 18. 19:3) so shall it be done to him!

As is often the case with volcanic eruptions, the smoke will continue to go up after the eruption, “for ever” (Isa. 34:10). (According to Rev. 20:7-10 the lake of fire is still burning 1,000 years later). Because of the torment it caused to those who were overtaken by it, it is referred to as “the smoke of their torment” in Rev. 14:11, “which ascends up for ever and ever.” It does not say “the cry of their torment” ascends for ever.

The smoke rising from that area will be seen from the top of Mt. Zion and will be an everlasting memorial to the fact that the beast, who caused so much torment and death among God’s people, was himself tormented and killed by God in a spectacular fiery judgement. “The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; they will vanish in smoke” (Ps. 37:20). “Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered: let those who hate Him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God” (Ps. 68:1-2).

CAST INTO A FURNACE OF FIRE

Matt. 13:40-42 records Jesus teaching that “as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the age. The son of man shall send his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and those who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Also v49-50). (Compare the reference to “furnace” in relation to Sodom: Gen. 19:28).

“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Lk. 13:28).

The weeping and gnashing of teeth indicates mental anguish and torment of mind for those who are rejected by Christ and consigned to the fire for destruction. The mental torment takes place at the realization of their rejection and the sight of the flames and smoke and the prospect of being cast into the fire. Being tormented with fire doesn't mean sitting in the fire and suffering endless pain. Fire is quite capable of tormenting a person before being cast into it, especially when he knows he is going to be consigned to the flames, and perish forever.

The doctrine of eternal torment is not taught in Scripture. (The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable and cannot be taken literally). It is the fire itself into which the wicked are cast that is eternal and unquenchable, but those cast into it are destroyed with “everlasting destruction” (2 Thes. 1:9). They suffer everlasting “punishment” (Matt. 25:46) not punishing.

Rev. 21:8 clearly states that the lake which burns with fire and brimstone into which all the wicked will be cast, represents death, and according to the Bible, death is the cessation of life - an unconscious state. (Ps. 6:5. 49:12-20. 146:4. Ecc. 3:18-20. 9:1-10). Therefore, when the dragon is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone 1,000 years after the beast, Rev. 20:10 does not say the dragon is cast in where the beast and false prophet “are” but “were.”

It is quite remarkable how many sincere believers in the Bible are so eager to prove that God is a cruel, sadistic, fiendish and vindictive God who consigns millions to torture, not just for hundreds of years, but forever. That He is not like this is evident from the fact that the pagan custom of roasting children alive in sacrifice, having to beat drums to drown out their cries, was absolutely abhorrent and repugnant to God (Jer. 19:5).

It must be acknowledged however that the Greek word “basanizo”

which is translated “tormented,” can relate to physical torture, as for example the torture inflicted on the mentally deranged in order to drive out demons (Matt. 8:29. Mk. 5:7). It is also translated “pained” in Rev. 12:2 in relation to the travail of child birth, and “toiling” in Mk. 6:48 in relation to rowing a boat. However, the word is also used to relate to mental anguish and torment of mind. This is seen in 2 Pet. 2:8 where it is translated “vexed” in relation to Lot’s righteous soul agonizing over the filthy conversation and conduct taking place in Sodom.

So then, although there will not be eternal torment for the wicked, there will be torment at the sight of the fire and the prospect of being engulfed by it. This is the “shock weapon” used by the Spirit to rouse people out of their apathy and indifference towards God and His commandments, and to stir them into repentance. “For behold, the day is coming that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all who do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal. 4:1).

HAVING NO REST DAY AND NIGHT

The reference in Rev. 14:11 to those who worship the beast and receive his mark, having no rest day nor night, is not explaining the result of being cast into the fire. If it did, it would read in the past tense and refer to those who “worshipped” the beast and “received” the mark. Instead, it speaks in the present tense of those who “worship” the beast and “receive” the mark. It is clearly during the period that the beast is worshipped and his mark received, that the worshippers have no rest day nor night. Why? Because of the wine of the wrath of God poured out upon them (v10). This refers to the series of torments recorded in Rev. 16 that will be poured out upon the beast’s kingdom before the fire and brimstone consumes and destroys him at Armageddon.

The statement: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12), is a repeat of 13:10 which is also made in the context of the reign of the beast. It is a call for patient endurance on the part of the saints. Not only will they have to endure persecution from the beast, but also some of the discomfits that result from God’s wrath falling on the beast’s kingdom, as did the prophets in Biblical times during famines and sieges.

It will require patience and endurance to keep the commandments, because they require the saints to refuse to worship the beast and receive

his mark, resulting in not being able to buy or sell; causing denials, deprivations and hard times. The reference to “Jesus” in Rev. 14:12 is the first of 5 occurrences in the book of Revelation to the name without the title “Lord” or “Christ.” Those who think it is wrong to use the name of Jesus by itself should take note of this, not to mention Plp. 2:10 etc!

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD

In Rev. 14:13 John says: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth: yea, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

This message is obviously a solemn and important declaration in view of the fact that a voice from heaven gives specific instruction to John to write it down. The reign of the beast, involving the saints being hated, persecuted, exiled and killed; is obviously going to be a time of terrible trouble, for the Spirit to pronounce a blessing on those who don’t live to experience it! (Cp. Plp. 1:21. Isa. 57:1-2). The blessing will of course only apply to those who “die in the Lord” i.e. those who belong to Jesus (1 Cor. 15:18. 1 Thes. 4:14-16). This message would be of considerable comfort to all in all ages who do not remain alive until the return of Christ. It basically declares that it is a blessing to die before the second coming! Notice also that the voice from heaven declares death to be a “rest” as in 6:11. Many voices on earth in Christendom would disagree with this!

Putting it into modern terms, the words: “yea, says the Spirit” might be expressed as: “that’s for sure, says the Spirit.” The Good News Bible says: “yes indeed answers the Spirit.” Because those who die in the Lord “rest from their labours” this shows that they have not been idle up to the time of their death, but actively involved in witnessing and testifying to Jesus.

The phrase: “and their works do follow them” is more correctly translated: “for their works ...” What they accomplished prior to their death will not be lost or forgotten, and therefore will not have been done in vain. Those they converted, taught, encouraged and strengthened will carry on with the work, building upon what they have done, benefiting others. In the words of Jesus: “Other men laboured, and you have entered into their labours.”

THE SON OF MAN UPON A WHITE CLOUD

Rev. 14:14 says John then “looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”

Reference to the “cloud” and “son of man” immediately suggests a connection with the Olivet prophecy: “And they shall see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk. 21:27). Because Rev. 14:14 says “one like unto the son of man” some have concluded that it does not refer to Christ himself, but one like him. However, the same description occurs in Rev. 1:13 and there can be no doubt that the reference is to Jesus.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, “a cloud received him out of sight,” and the angels declared that he would return in the same manner as he departed (Act. 1:9). If his departure involved disappearing in the clouds, it is natural to expect that he will reappear by emerging from the clouds.

However, the “white cloud” upon which he is seen sitting in Rev. 14:14 does not necessarily refer to ordinary rain clouds. Because millions of angels will accompany him when he returns from heaven, all clothed in dazzling white garments; at a distance they would look like a luminous white cloud. If so, sitting on top of the cloud with a crown on his head, would signify that he is above all angels: King of kings and Lord of lords.

Other references to a cloud signifying angelic or divine presence are: Ex. 13:21-22. 16:10. 19:9, 16. 24:15-18. 34:5. 40:35. Num. 9:16-22. 11:25. 1 Kng. 8:10-11. Ezk. 1:4. 9:3. 10:4, 18-19. 11:22-23. 43:2. Matt. 17:5 with 2 Pet. 1:17-19. Matt. 24:30. 26:64. Rev. 1:7. 10:1.

The saints themselves could be, or at least could form part of the cloud, because they will be caught up “in clouds” to meet the Lord in the air and accompany him on his glorious descent to Zion (1 Thes. 4:15-17).

Regarding the “golden crown” on his head: the Greek word here for crown is “stephanos,” the emblem of victory and signifies victory over sin. In Rev. 19:12 Jesus is depicted wearing many crowns because he is king of kings (v16). The Greek word for crowns here however, is “diadema,” and signifies victory over the nations.

Zedekiah was the last king to reign from Zion, and due to being a wicked king, God told him to “remove the diadem and take off the crown ... until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him” (Ezk. 21:25-27). Jesus of course, is the one whose right it is, being born king of the Jews (Jn. 18:33-37), and he is depicted wearing the crown in the book of Revelation.

The golden crown is quite a contrast to the previous crown he wore on earth - the crown of thorns (Matt. 27:29). According to Rev. 1:7, those who pierced him and put the crown of thorns on his head, will see him come in great glory wearing a golden crown. Ironically enough, it was Jesus' reference to coming in the clouds of heaven that caused the Jews to pronounce the death sentence (Matt. 26:64-).

THRUST IN THY SICKLE AND REAP

Rev. 14:15 refers to "another angel" i.e. the fourth in this chapter. This angel calls out in a loud voice to Jesus who is holding in his hand, not a sceptre, but a sickle; and tells him to thrust in the sickle and reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

It may appear strange that an angel should tell Jesus that it is time to execute judgement. However, the fact that the angel comes out from the "temple" to tell Jesus, indicates that the message comes from Father God. The angel simply conveys it. In connection with this, we read in 1 Thes. 4:16 that Jesus will descend from heaven in response to a shout (loud voice) of an archangel, and the trump of God i.e. the last trump which is the seventh, blown by an archangel.

It should be pointed out that reference is made to two harvests in Rev. 14:15-20, and sickles are used in both. The second harvest is a grape harvest reaped by a fifth angel at the command of a sixth angel. This harvest is quite separate from the first, which could be a wheat harvest. Some regard the first harvest as representing the judgement of the church, and the second harvest the judgement of the world at the battle of Armageddon. These 2 judgements are referred to in 1 Pet. 4:17: "Judgement must begin at the house of God (the church): and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (i.e. the world: "the ungodly and sinner" v18). Dan. 7:9-11 also refers to these 2 judgements.

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-42 refers to the first judgement in terms of a wheat harvest, and Joel 3:12-14 refers to the second as a grape harvest. A "harvest" involves both a cutting down and a gathering in, and the word is used in Scripture to signify the cutting down of the wicked and the gathering in of the saints. There is no reference to blood in the first harvest, but there is in the second (v20). For this reason the second harvest is related to grapes not wheat.

We have therefore in this section of Rev. 14 a prophetic foreglimpse of what comes afterwards, especially in relation to the second harvest - the

judgement of the beast (16:12-16. 19:11-20).

Rev. 14:17 refers to “another angel” (the fifth in this chapter), who, like the fourth angel in v15 also “came out of the temple which is in heaven.” This fifth angel, like Jesus in v14, was also carrying a sickle.

Verse 18 goes on to say that “another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.”

This is the sixth and final reference to an angel in this chapter. There are therefore 2 groups of 3 angels involved. The first group makes certain pronouncements regarding divine judgements in the earth, and the second group puts judgements into effect.

(If the “voice from heaven” in v13 is regarded as the voice of another angel, we would have 7 angels.)

There are then, consistent with the pattern of sevens in the book of Revelation, 7 events in Rev. 14:

1. The Lamb on Mount Zion with the 144,000 (v1-5).
2. The angel with the everlasting gospel (v6-7).
3. The second angel announcing the doom of Babylon (v8).
4. The third angel with the announcement of the fury of God upon the worshippers of the beast (v9-12).
5. The voice from heaven announcing the blessedness of those who die in the Lord (v13).
6. The first harvest (v14-16).
7. The second harvest (v17-20).

It is evident once again in Rev. 14 that the Lord administers much of His government by means of angelic powers. Daniel tells us that the angel of God who superintends the affairs of Israel, is Michael the archangel (Dan. 12:1). This passage even goes so far to state that Michael, the great prince who stands for the children of Israel, shall “stand up” for Israel in the time of the end when the king of the north (the beast) invades and occupies the land of Israel and Egypt (Dan. 11:40-45). It is not inconceivable therefore, that the angel with the sickle in Rev. 14:17-20 is Michael!

Seeing that the first sickle is held by one “like unto the son of man,” and the second sickle is held by an “angel,” it is unlikely that the one like unto the son of man is an angel. Because the word “angel” is used on all 6 occasions where angels are involved in this chapter, it is natural to expect that v14 would also refer to “another angel” instead of “one like unto the son of man” if an angel was involved. It is therefore reasonable to

conclude that the one like unto the son of man is not an angel, but the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to Rev. 14:18, the angel who called out to the angel with the sickle, “came out from the altar,” is described as the angel “who had power over fire.” The previous angels are said to have come “out of the temple” i.e. heaven, where the altar is situated before the throne of God, but only this angel is referred to as coming specifically from the altar itself.

It is natural to link him with the angel in Rev. 8:3-5 who came and stood at the altar and offered incense with the prayers of the saints, and then took fire (coals of fire) from the altar and cast it into the earth. This is what could be meant by having power over fire. This signified judgements of God being cast upon the earth in response to the prayers and petitions of both the saints and the angels. The prayer of the martyrs under the altar in Rev. 6:9-10 was: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” The prayers of the saints referred to in Rev. 8:3 in connection with the angel at the altar, were probably the same, calling for the return of Christ, judgement of the enemy and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.

It would therefore be fitting and appropriate if the angel in Rev. 14:18 who calls for the sickle to be thrust forth in judgement upon those who have shed the blood of the saints, was the same angel in Rev. 8:3 who offered up incense with the prayers of those saints. In Rev. 8:5, the angel’s action of casting fire from the altar upon earth, initiated the partial judgements of God upon one third of the earth. The angel in Rev. 14:18 initiates judgement of the whole earth by calling for the sharp sickle to be used.

Some who believe 7 angels are involved in Rev. 14, also believe that they could be the same 7 angels referred to in Rev. 15 and 16 who pour out the 7 vials of the wrath of God. As one writer puts it: “The angels (i.e. those in Rev. 14) are assembling to get ready for work yet to be done, and going through motions suggestive of what will happen as they do so. The actual doing of it is quickly to follow, but this is an interlude scene.” However, as we shall see, Rev. 14:17-20 seems to refer to Armageddon, whereas the vials lead up to Armageddon.

CUT, GATHER AND CRUSH

In response to the call to “thrust in thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe,” we read in verses 19-20 that “the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horses’ bridles, for a distance of one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

During a grape harvest, the bunches of grapes are cut off the vines, gathered up and cast into the winepress where they are trodden down (squashed) to squeeze out the juice. Scripture uses this process as a figure for the judgement of the nations by God, especially at the battle of Armageddon. The severity of this judgement is indicated in Rev. 14:19 by the fact that it does not refer to bunches of grapes being carefully cut off the vines with scissors or secateurs. Instead, it refers to the whole vine being cut down with a sickle! Nothing will be left to produce more grapes.

As we know, the Lord is going to gather the nations to Jerusalem, cut them down and tread them down, causing much blood to be shed. This is what the cutting, gathering and crushing of the vine signifies in Rev. 14. For other examples of this figure relating to Armageddon see: Rev. 19:15. Isa. 63:1-6. Joel 3:12-14.

Because the battle of Armageddon occurs as a result of the nations being gathered against the city of Jerusalem, the “city” referred to in Rev. 14:20 outside of which the enemy will be trodden down, is obviously that city. As the Lord declares in Zech. 14:2: “For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle.” Also see Zech. 12. Joel 2:9. 3:16-20. Dan. 11:45.

Because the Gentiles tread underfoot the city of Jerusalem and the people of God (Rev. 11:2. Mic. 5:5), they shall be “trodden outside the city” (Rev. 14:20. Isa. 14:25). Reference to the words “gather” and “gathered” in Rev. 14:18 and 19 obviously connect with the Scriptures that refer to God gathering the nations for the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14-16. Zech. 14:2. Joel 3:2).

Seeing that the gathering of the vine to be cast into the winepress relates to nations being gathered to Jerusalem to be trodden down; the city of Jerusalem is depicted as a winepress. All who come against her will be crushed! Zech. 14:3 says the battle will be “as when the Lord fought in the day of battle.” All previous battles involving God’s judgement upon the enemy, have been introductory battles - samples or rehearsals of

Armageddon. Armageddon will be the battle - the mother of all battles - the war that will end all wars.

BLOOD UP TO HORSE BRIDLES

The R.S.V. translates Rev. 14:20 as follows: “ ... and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.” The footnote says 1,600 stadia is about 200 miles. The Good News Bible says 300 kilometres.

As we have seen, the “winepress” is said to be “outside the city” in Rev. 14:20, where there are valleys. Joel 3 informs us that multitudes will be gathered in the valley of Jehoshaphat which will become a valley of threshing. The valley of Jehoshaphat is generally regarded as the Kidron valley, including the valley of Hinnom which ran around the east and south side of Jerusalem.

The bridle of a horse of 16 hands would be up to 1.7 metres or 5½ feet, but before we consider that, we need to consider to whom the horses belong. There are 2 views. One view is that they are the horses of the enemy, referred to in Ezk. 38:4, 15. 39:20. Dan. 11:40. Zech. 12:4. 14:15. Rev. 9:16. (In the event of earth’s oil reserves being depleted or too costly, literal horses may be used in the end time).

The other view is that the horses belong to the armies of heaven - the white horses referred to in Rev. 19:11-15 which follow Christ to make war against the beast, and “tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” Trampling upon the multitudes in the valley could cause blood to spurt up as far as the horses’ bridles, as in the case of Jezebel’s blood which spattered on the wall and on the horses when Jehu’s horse trod her underfoot (2 Kng. 9:33). Significantly enough, Rev. 19:13 says the garment of the rider of the white horse was drenched with blood, and the following verses relate to the destruction of Gog.

In view of the reference to blood on the bridles of the horses, one cannot help but wonder if a contrast is being made with the reference to “holiness unto the Lord” being inscribed on the bridles of the horses in Jerusalem in Zech. 14:20, after the battle.

There is another possibility regarding the blood being up to the horses’ bridles other than it spurting there as a result of trampling. Various prophecies refer to torrential rain and hail being involved in the judgement of the invading armies (Isa. 30:30. Ezk. 38:22. Rev. 16:21). In a cloud burst and hailstorm, millions of litres of water can be dumped very quickly in any given area, causing a river of water especially in narrow

valleys (cp. Isa. 15:9). If that water reached horses' bridles and was stained red with blood, it could be described as blood up to the bridles of horses. However, because blood touches the bridles over a distance of 300 kilometres, it is more likely to mean that the horses trample on men over that distance.

The enemy will not be confined to Jerusalem. The largest concentration of the army will be there, but there will be forces like a cloud covering the land (Ezk. 38:9). According to the N.I.V. footnote, it is 1,600 furlongs, about 300 kilometres from northern to southern Israel. If the 200 million horsemen in Rev. 9:16 are involved in the battle of Armageddon, they would certainly cover a wide area.

Adam Clarke says the reference to blood up to the horses' bridles is a hyperbolic expression to denote a great effusion of blood. He quotes a Jewish statement that Hadrian slew so many men that the horses waded in blood up to their mouths. This language could be compared with Ezk. 32:6 which refers to the land being drenched with blood even to the mountain tops, and the rivers being full. Isa. 34:3, 7 refers to mountains flowing with the blood of the slain and of the land being soaked in blood. Isa. 8:8 uses quite descriptive language in relation to the invasion of the Assyrians, saying they will sweep through Judah in a flood, rising shoulder high (the height of bridles) and covering everything. In view of such hyperbolic and metaphorical language which abounds in Scripture, the reference to blood up to the horses' bridles in Rev. 14 may, in the final analysis, simply fit into the same category.

Because 40 is the number of probation in Scripture and often involves affliction, humiliation and humbling, and because 1,600 is 40 x 40, some see the 1,600 furlongs as representing compounded affliction and humiliation in revenge for the 40 months affliction the beast inflicted upon the saints. Some also see a contrast between the "river" of blood or death that starts in Jerusalem and the river of life in Rev. 21 which flows from the new Jerusalem.



CHAPTER TWELVE REVELATION CHAPTER FIFTEEN

This is the shortest chapter in the book of Revelation, but its size should not be taken as an indication of its importance, for it makes a valuable contribution in the unfolding revelation of God concerning things shortly to come to pass; especially in relation to the final act of God's judgement upon earth. Chapter 15 is a prologue - a solemn introduction and preparation for the 7 vials in chapter 16, that are poured out upon the beast's kingdom.

The last vision in chapter 14 reached the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon. The vials therefore, in chapters 15 and 16 which lead up to the second coming and battle of Armageddon, cannot take place after the last events of chapter 14, but precede them. This demonstrates once again that the prophetic visions in Revelation are not always presented in strict chronological order.

Rev. 15:1 commences by saying John "saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous; 7 angels having the 7 last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." This is the third "sign" or "wonder" seen by John. The first and second are in chapter 12 verse 1 and 3 and relate to symbolical scenes involving a woman and dragon. The 7 vials of the wrath of God carried by the 7 angels also involve symbology. The wrath of God is not literally carried in bowls! The bowls are a "sign" or symbol of His wrath, but His wrath is very real, and the reality of it will be seen and felt!

John says this sign was "great and marvellous" i.e. awesome and astonishing, causing him to marvel and be full of wonder. It was not so much the sight of the angels carrying the bowls that was great and marvellous, but the effects of pouring out the contents of the bowls. This is what is referred to in v3: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty."

Reference is made to the 7 angels with the 7 bowls, 7 times in Revelation: (15:1, 6, 7, 8. 16:1. 17:1. 21:9). These 7 angels were in heaven and John saw them coming out carrying the bowls. (One of them later spoke to John: 21:9).

The contents of the bowls are referred to as plagues - "the 7 last plagues." Elsewhere the Greek word translated plagues is rendered "stripes" (Lk. 12:48. Act. 16:23, 33. 2 Cor. 6:5. 11:23). The word relates to the inflicting of wounds and pain. In fact, it is translated "wounded" in Lk. 10:30, and "wound" in Rev. 13:3, 12, 14. It certainly becomes evident

in Rev. 16 that the 7 plagues cause wounds and pain (16:2, 8, 10-11) as did the plagues upon Egypt in the days of Moses.

The same word “plagues” is used in relation to the judgements of the sixth trumpet, during which many are killed (9:20). Between the sixth and seventh trumpet, reference is also made to the 2 witnesses being given power to “smite the earth with all plagues” (11:6). These plagues do not however have any link with the ones now under consideration but one thing is certain, the 7 plagues in Rev. 15:1 are the “last” - a culmination of others that preceded them: “for in them is filled up the wrath of God.” They are, as the N.I.V. puts it: “Last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.” The idea of finality is stressed here. The 7 plagues represent the “grand slam” of God’s judgements upon the beast and all in the earth who worship him.

Hence, when the seventh and last angel pours out his bowl, a great voice comes from the throne in heaven saying: “It is done” (16:17). The Greek word “teleo,” translated “done,” means ended, completed, concluded, exhausted. It is translated “finished” in Jn. 19:30 and “fulfilled” in Rev. 15:8. The 7 plagues will therefore be the last judgements to be poured out prior to the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.

Before any details are given about the 7 last judgements, a parenthesis is introduced in Rev. 15:2-4 giving a vision of the glorified saints rejoicing together in God’s salvation. As we have seen, especially in Rev. 14:1-5, it is quite common in prophetic discourse for the Spirit to jump ahead out of chronological sequence, projecting the mind forward to the ultimate end of a matter; then return to the process of events that lead up to it. Chapter 15:2-4 is another example of this kind of reversed sequence. Just as the 7 seals and 7 trumpets had a prelude involving a vision of divine glory, so also the 7 vials. The I.V.F. commentary puts it like this: “The vision exults in the effects of the 7 last plagues rather than heralds their coming; it is proleptic (anticipatory) and serves to underline the statement of v1: “with them the wrath of God is ended.”

A SEA OF GLASS

“**A**nd I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands and they sing ...” (Rev. 15:2).

This refers back to the sea of glass like crystal before the throne of

God in Rev. 4:6. It isn't a literal sea or body of water, neither is it literal glass or crystal. It is "as it were" a sea of glass, "like unto" crystal i.e. it looks like or resembles the sea and has the appearance of crystal. Because the saints are depicted standing on it and not sinking into it, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is not a liquid or vapour. Elsewhere, it is described as a "pavement."

It is a large blue expanse, like the sea, shining and sparkling like crystal, stretching out and beyond the throne. Some see it as the counterpart to the molten sea of Solomon's temple (1 Kng. 7:23) where priests washed themselves. Those seen standing on the sea of glass in Rev. 15 are certainly priests (5:10), washed in the blood of the Lamb, sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word (Eph. 5:26).

The sea of glass is described in Ex. 24:10 as a "pavement of sapphire stone, clear blue as the very heavens" on which the God of Israel was seen standing. It is referred to in Ezk. 1:22-26 as "an expanse shining like crystal," below which were the cherubim, and above which the throne of God could be seen like a sapphire stone. The expanse and throne are mobile and are seen accompanying the cherubim on their mission in Ezk. chapter 1. The cherubim appear to be the bearers of the throne of God (see p57-).

The expanse beneath the heavenly throne seems to be a special pavement upon which, or over which the throne of God is situated, and upon which those who come into the presence of God stand. According to Rev. 15, John saw the saints standing on it with harps in their hands.

MINGLED WITH FIRE

John says the sea of glass was "mingled with fire." The word "mingled" simply means "mixed" cp "fire mingled with hail" (Ex. 9:24). It is translated "shot with fire" by the New English Bible; "blended with fire" (Amplified Bible); "suffused with fire" (Jerusalem Bible).

Because Isa. 57:20 says the wicked are like the troubled sea, the reference to a sea of glass is taken by some to signify nations in a calm, tranquil state. Seeing this can only come about through the judgements of God, they see the fire as signifying His fiery judgements that will bring the beast's kingdom into subjection to Christ and the saints, placing them under their feet, and under the rule of the throne of God.

Some see the fire as representing the fiery trials of faith endured by the saints during the beast's reign. Others see the fire as representing the vials about to go forth, while the saints enjoy peace and security in the

presence of God. Some therefore think that instead of the expanse before the throne being pure blue, it becomes “red and lowering,” indicating “foul weather” - an impending storm - the last and worst of all storms!

However, Rev. 15:2 is a post-resurrection scene; it takes place after the second coming and resurrection, not before, as these views require. The reasons for believing this are as follows:

1. The sea of glass is in heaven, the city of God, before the throne of God, not on the earth where the fiery judgements of God will consume the beast.

2. The fact that the saints are depicted standing on the sea of glass, holding the harps of God, reveals that they are in the temple-city of God. This is only possible after the return of Christ and the glorification of the saints, when they are made equal with the angels.

3. Those who are seen standing on the sea of glass have got victory over the beast. This indicates that the 3½ year reign of the beast is finished. The return of Christ and battle of Armageddon must have taken place for this to be the case.

4. The fact that the song of Moses was originally sung after God’s plagues fell on Egypt, resulting in Israel’s deliverance, would indicate that reference to those standing on the sea of glass singing that song relates to the period after God’s plagues have fallen on the beast.

5. The “works” of Lord God Almighty which the saints extol in their song as being “great and marvellous, just and true,” are the 7 last plagues, referred to in v1 as “great and marvellous.” The saints could hardly extol the Lord for such works unless they had been executed.

6. The song ends with the declaration that God’s judgements “were made manifest.” The past tense of this statement indicates that the judgement of the beast is over and done (16:17) at the time the saints stand upon the sea of glass mingled with fire.

7. According to Rev. 15:8, “no man” (i.e. not one of the “redeemed men” from earth referred to in Rev. 5:9), was able to enter the temple-city of God until the 7 plagues were fulfilled. The fact that the saints are in the temple in Rev. 15:2-4 on the sea of glass mingled with fire, again confirms that the 7 vials have been poured out, and that these verses are a parenthesis, as in the case of Rev. 14:1-5.

PARALLEL VISIONS

The 2 visions in Rev. 14:1-5 and 15:2-4 of the glorified saints rejoicing in God’s salvation clearly run parallel with each other. In

Rev. 14 the Lamb is seen on Mount Zion with the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel, and the voice of the great multitude redeemed from all the other tribes and nations on earth is heard coming “from heaven ... before the throne;” i.e. from the temple-city of God which has descended to Zion. This multitude is “harping with their harps” and “they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the 4 beasts and elders.”

In Rev. 15 the great multitude which gets the victory over the beast is again seen in the temple of God, before His throne on the sea of glass, playing harps and singing a song. This is the same multitude referred to in Rev. 7:9- who “come through the great tribulation” (caused by the beast), seen standing before the throne of God, serving Him (in song and music) day and night in His temple, in company with the angels.

As in the case of most parallels in Scripture, each one often supplements and complements the other. One account frequently emphasizes an aspect or aspects not emphasized by another, and details supplied in one account may be left out in another. Such is the case in Rev. 14 and 15.

For example, in Rev. 14 John sees the 144,000 on Mount Zion but only hears the multitude from other tribes and nations in heaven. However, in Rev. 15 John sees the multitude in heaven but makes no specific reference to the 144,000 on Mount Zion.

In Rev. 14 John only hears the sound of the harps and singing of the multitude coming from “before the throne,” but in Rev. 15 John actually sees them before the throne in the temple, before the 4 living creatures and 24 elders, on the sea of glass mingled with fire. In view of this, there can be no doubt that the temple-city of God has come to Zion in Rev. 14:1-5.

Rev. 14 says the multitude sung “a new song before the throne.” No information is given in Rev. 14 on the nature of the song, but this is supplied in Rev. 15: “They sing the song of Moses,” which was a song of redemption and can only be sung by the “redeemed” (Rev. 14:3).

Rev. 14 mentions the 4 living creatures and 24 elders before the throne of God, but they are not mentioned in Rev. 15. However, Rev. 15 mentions the sea of glass mingled with fire before the throne, but Rev. 14 doesn't.

Coming back then to the sea of glass mingled with fire: it clearly relates to a scene in the heavenly temple of God after the destruction of the beast - after the return of Christ and the glorification of his saints. We are not told what the fire signifies, but it surely must relate to the glory of God or glorification of the saints (or both) and not the judgement and

destruction of the beast.

We read in Rev. 4 that the glory of God that shone forth from the throne was like a sardius stone, which is a fiery, sparkly red stone. In more ways than one, “God is a consuming fire.” The 7 lamps of fire also burned before the throne and pulsating lightning darted forth. Each angel is “a flame of fire” and there are millions of them around the throne on the sea of glass, and the saints who are made equal with them will also be flames of fire. Could it be that it is the reflection of the fiery manifestations of divine power from the sea of glass that causes it to be “mingled with fire?” Was it sparkling and glistening with the glory of God?

When God “glorified” the church on the day of Pentecost by bestowing the Holy Spirit, (Jn. 17:22. Rom. 8:30. 1 Pet. 5:1), it was manifested by the mingling of fire (Act. 2:1-4). The mingling of fire among the saints on the sea of glass in Rev. 15:2 as they stand before the throne of God, may relate to the manifestation of the power of God at their ultimate glorification when they mingle with, and are made equal with the angels and endowed with “the tongues of angels.”

When Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel ascended Mount Sinai and saw the God of Israel and the pavement like sapphire (Ex. 24:10); the scene was no doubt mingled with fire. Verses 16 and 17 say the glory of the Lord rested upon Mount Sinai and it looked like fire burning on the top of the mountain. Also see Ezk. 1:4, 13, 27.

Those who stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, are those who have gained victory over the beast, by refusing to bow before him or his image, and who have refused to be branded with the number of his name. Those who worship the beast and receive the number of his name, will also have an experience with fire - not the fire of divine power and glory in heaven before the throne of God, but the lake of fire on earth. They will be “tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev. 14:10-11). In contrast to this, the saints will worship the Lord before His throne, singing joyfully and triumphantly while they play their harps.

The sea of glass that spreads out beyond the throne of God, sparkling with the glory of God like an ocean reflecting the sun, will resound with the triumphant and joyful sound of music and singing, extolling and magnifying God for His great and marvellous works, especially His righteous judgements upon the beast who had caused so much trial, tribulation, pain and sorrow.

THE SONG OF MOSES

“**T**hey sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou king of nations (or ages). Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgements were made manifest” (Rev. 15:3-4).

We can easily understand why the song sung by the redeemed in Christ should be designated “the song of the Lamb,” but why is it also designated “the song of Moses?” The name of Moses is conjoined with that of Jesus because a similar, though greater deliverance has been wrought from a similar, though greater foe. Moses and the deliverance of Israel effected by God through him, were a type or foreshadow of greater things to come in relation to Christ and his church. Significantly enough, the dragon referred to in the book of Revelation who is the enemy of Israel and the saints, and who becomes confederate with the beast, involves Egypt - the same nation that was the enemy and persecutor of God’s people in the time of Moses.

Moses himself declared that God would ultimately raise up a prophet like himself from the midst of Israel (Deu. 18:15), and the New Testament informs us that his words were prophetic of Christ (Act. 3:20-26. 7:37).

As true Christians are baptized into Christ, Israel was baptized unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:1-2). As those baptized into Christ become the “body of Christ,” those baptized unto Moses became the “body of Moses” (Jude v9). Israel was saved by the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the door posts. Jesus is “the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3) - the true Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), and by the blood of his sprinkling on the door of our heart we are delivered (Heb. 12:24. 1 Pet. 1:2). Those baptized unto Moses received bread from heaven (manna) and water out of the rock after it was struck. Those baptized into Christ also receive “bread” from heaven and life-imparting “water” from “the rock,” as a result of him being “smitten” for our sins (1 Cor. 10:3-4. Jn. 6:31-35, 48-51. 7:37-39).

The song of Moses is recorded in Ex. 15 and was sung as a result of Israel being delivered by God from Egypt by the outpouring of His plagues, and the demonstration of His power in opening up the Red Sea; allowing them to pass through safely to the other side. The Pharaoh ruling Egypt at the time was a very proud and stubborn man and he oppressed and persecuted the people of God. He was a “beast” (the first head of the beast in Revelation) and a type of the end time beast, who will also be

humbled and destroyed by the plagues of God.

As we shall see, some of the plagues in Rev. 16 are reminiscent of those that destroyed ancient Egypt. And, as in the case of ancient Egypt, so it will be in the end time beast-worshipping world: hearts will be hardened and the power of God will be resisted. However, Pharaoh and his army were ultimately engulfed and destroyed in the Red Sea, and the beast will be destroyed in a lake of fire.

It is fitting and appropriate therefore, in view of the way the plagues that fell upon the kingdom of Egypt in Moses' day correspond with the plagues that will be poured out on the beast's kingdom in the day of Christ; to incorporate or couple the song of Moses with the song of the Lamb.

God's judgement upon Pharaoh and his host brought great joy and rejoicing for Israel, and the singing of the song of Moses was an expression of that. There was not only singing, but the playing of musical instruments and dancing as well. Miriam, the sister of Moses, and the other women played timbrels and danced as they sang (Ex. 15:20-21). The counterpart to this is seen in the saints playing harps and singing in Rev. 15. It was after the Red Sea crashed upon Pharaoh and his army and became calm, that the song of Moses was sung. Is the scene of the saints singing and playing their harps while standing on the sea of glass intended to be an antitype of this? The comparison of final redemption with the exodus is common in the prophets cp. Isa. 51:9-11.

Unfortunately, Israel's joy and thanksgiving was short lived. Exactly one month after leaving Egypt, a mere 3 days after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the whole congregation murmured and complained, and continued to do so during the ensuing years (Ex. 15:22-). There will be no such murmuring or complaining however, among the saints after their deliverance at Christ's return. They will live forever in the presence of the Lamb and continue in the praise of the glory of God.

It is natural to wonder if reference to the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb implies that 2 different songs are involved. If so, is the song of the Lamb the "new song" referred to in Rev. 14:3? Is it an adaptation of the song of Moses? Or, are the sentiments of the song of Moses seen as applying to God's deliverance through Christ, and therefore the same song is also called the song of the Lamb? Even if the song was exactly the same as the song of Moses, it would be "new" to the saints who had never sung it before, and to those who had never related its sentiments in song to Christ.

Seeing "the song of Moses" would also have been sung by Moses, it

seems reasonable to conclude that “the song of the Lamb” will also be sung by Christ. Moses and the people of Israel sang the song to God, praising and extolling Him for His deliverance and salvation. Christ and his people will also sing the song to God for the same reason. Rev. 15:3 makes it clear that the song is addressed to “Lord God Almighty,” i.e. Father God (Rev. 4:8-11. 21:22). In that day when Christ praises Father God with his brethren, Ps. 22:22 will be fulfilled: “In the midst of the congregation I will praise Thee.” This is quoted in Heb. 2:12 and applied to Jesus praising the Father in company with the saints.

GREAT AND MARVELLOUS ARE THY WORKS ...

After stating that the redeemed will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, Rev. 15:3 goes on to say that they will be saying: “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou king of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgements are made manifest.”

These words are not taken from the song of Moses recorded in Ex. 15. Does this mean that they are the song of the Lamb, or do they epitomise the song of Moses and the Lamb, or are they words that will be sung at the end as a complement of the song of Moses and the Lamb?

There is another possibility: The song of Moses may not only relate to the song recorded in Ex. 15. Another song of Moses is recorded in Deu. 31:30 through to chapter 32, and some of the sentiments in this song bear close resemblance to some of the sentiments expressed in Rev. 15:3-4. For example, compare: “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways ...” (Rev. 15:3), with: “ ... Ascribe greatness to our God: ... His work is perfect: for all His ways are just: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” (Deu. 32:3-4).

Every line of the song given in Rev. 15 is also reminiscent of, and drawn from, sentiments frequently expressed in the Psalms and prophets. For example:

“Great and marvellous are Thy works.” (See Ps. 92:5. 98:1. 112:2. 139:14. Deu. 32:3).

“Just and true are Thy ways” (Ps. 145:17. Deu. 32:4).

“Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord ...” (Jer. 10:7. Ps. 99).

“All nations shall come and worship before Thee” (Ps. 86:9. Isa. 66:15-16, 23. Zeph. 2:11. Zech. 14:16).

“For Thy judgements are made manifest” (Ps. 98:2. Isa. 26:9).

The “works” referred to in Rev. 15:3 which are “great and marvellous,” are the plagues poured out on the beast’s kingdom (v1). They are awesome and astonishing, causing the saints to marvel. Terrible and painful as they are, causing misery and death, the “ways” of God involving such plagues are “just and true” i.e. they are fair, equitable and righteous; they are according to justice because the wickedness of the beast’s regime deserves them. It would be a violation of justice if such severe plagues were not meted out.

It is fundamental to our faith that God is righteous. All of His decisions and actions, including judgement, condemnation and curses, are always a true and fair expression of justice. Jesus addressed his Father as “O righteous Father” (Jn. 17:25), and the commandments of God are referred to as being “holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12). 2 Thes. 1:5 refers to “the righteous judgement of God,” and 2 Tim. 4:8 affirms that the Lord is “the righteous judge.” In spite of Jerusalem and the city being destroyed in Daniel’s day, resulting in thousands of Jews being killed and thousands taken prisoner into exile, Daniel affirmed in his prayer: “O Lord, righteousness belongs to Thee.” Daniel knew how wicked the Jews had been and that it was right and proper for God to send the Babylonian plague as a punishment.

When Abraham realized that the Lord was going to destroy Sodom and knew that his nephew Lot and his family were living there, he said to the Lord: “Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Shall not the judge of the earth do right?” What Abraham seems to have not known was the Lord’s intention to remove Lot and those of his family who were willing to be removed, before the fire and brimstone fell upon the city. Being a righteous judge, God does not engage in indiscriminate judgement. Those who are on the receiving end of judgement always deserve it, and it rarely comes without repeated warnings first, and much longsuffering on God’s part. This will certainly be the case as far as the judgement of the beast is concerned.

During the outpouring of the plagues in Rev. 16, it is twice affirmed that God is righteous in allowing such judgements to be executed (v5, 7). The same applies to His judgement of the great harlot, as we read in Rev. 19:2: “True and righteous are His judgements, for He has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and has avenged the blood of His servants at her hand.” All true servants of God will say “amen.”

In view of the cry of the souls under the altar in Rev. 6:10 saying: “How long O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our

blood on those who dwell on the earth?” One could imagine them in particular on the sea of glass singing the song of Moses with great pleasure and enthusiasm, saying: “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways O king of saints ...”

The A.V. gives “king of saints” but some texts have “king of the ages” and others give “king of the nations.” All three of them are true in principle. If “king of the saints,” it could be taken as an expression of pride and gratitude on the part of the saints, that the one who does great and marvellous works is their king! If “king of the ages” or “king of the nations,” the innuendo could be that God, who has ruled in the kingdoms of men and caused His will to prevail in all ages; has proved to be no different in the last age or era of the history of human government. The end time judgement will be the crown and culmination of judgements upon nations in past ages. The sovereignty of God over the nations will certainly be manifested when the plagues are poured out upon the beast.

In view of the awesome power of God that will be displayed in His great and marvellous judgements throughout the world upon the kingdom of the beast, those singing the song of Moses declare: “Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?”

As we have seen in Rev. 14:7, prior to the 7 plagues being poured forth, a message goes forth into all the earth saying with a loud voice: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement is come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth ...” This warning relates initially to the judgement of the city of Babylon (Rome) but is a warning of a universal judgement to follow in which the cities in all nations will be destroyed. Had the nations responded and repented, the plagues could have been averted. After the outpouring of the plagues and their devastating effects, the saints who appealed to the nations to repent; warning them of the dire consequences of failure to do so, therefore say: “Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?” The deepest and profoundest fear will be instilled into the hearts of all who survive the terrible judgements. “When Thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isa. 26:9).

THE TEMPLE IN HEAVEN WAS OPENED

After seeing the redeemed and glorified saints standing on the sea of glass singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, John says: “After that I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, and the 7 angels came out of the temple, having the 7

plagues ...” (Rev. 15:5-6).

This obviously does not mean that the 7 angels come out of the temple to pour out the plagues upon the beast after the saints have been in the temple upon the sea of glass celebrating God’s judgement upon the beast! As has been pointed out, v1 refers to John seeing the 7 angels in heaven with the 7 last plagues, but before telling us about them, a vision of the saints in glory is given first, in verses 2 to 4. The threads from v1 are then picked up in v5 and from this verse through into chapter 16, details are given concerning the 7 plagues.

The heavenly temple is a continuing vision in Revelation. It is the backcloth against which most of the action takes place. As we have seen in Rev. 11:15, 19, the temple is opened after the sounding of the seventh trumpet. So the fact that the angels with the 7 vials come out of an “opened” temple (15:5-6) shows that the 7 vials follow the sounding of the seventh trumpet. This is confirmed by the fact that after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, it is stated that “the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come.” How does God’s wrath come? By the 7 angels pouring out the 7 vials which are referred to in Rev. 15:1, 7 and 16:1 as representing His wrath. The seventh trumpet therefore, which announces that the kingdom of the world is to become the kingdom of our Lord, inaugurates the last great outpouring of divine wrath, contained in the 7 vials, which brings about the kingdom of God.

Considering that the most holy place in both the tabernacle built in Moses’ day, and the temple built in Solomon’s day represented heaven, it is not surprising that heaven is referred to as both a tabernacle and temple in the book of Revelation. It is a “tabernacle” (tent) because it is mobile, and is a “temple” because it is a solid structure with a foundation. It is referred to as a “tabernacle” in Rev. 13:6. 15:5. 21:3, and is referred to as a “temple” in Rev. 7:15. 11:19. 14:15, 17. 15:5, 6, 8. 16:1, 17.

The reference in Rev. 13:6 to God’s “tabernacle and them that dwell in heaven” explains that heaven is God’s tabernacle. The words tabernacle and heaven are synonymous here. And Rev. 21:2-3 explains that “the tabernacle of God” is “the holy city, new Jerusalem” which will ultimately descend to earth, to Zion.

Rev. 11:19 says “the ark of His (God’s) testament” is situated in the temple, and the fact that reference is made to lightnings etc in connection with it as in the case of the throne (4:5), suggests the ark represents the throne. The ark of the covenant in Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple certainly represented God’s throne on earth. Rev. 21:2-5 and 22:1-2 make it clear that the throne is in the city of God, and as we have seen,

there are a number of scenes in the book of Revelation of the glorified saints mingling with the angels, worshipping before that throne in the temple city.

So then, reference to “the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” in Rev. 15:5 does not mean that the temple and tabernacle are 2 different dwelling places of God. Some translate “the temple of the tabernacle” as “the temple, the tabernacle.” The N.I.V. says: “the temple, that is the tabernacle,” and the I.V.F. says: “the temple, namely the tabernacle.” Rev. 15:6 just gives “the temple,” as does 16:1, 17. Scripture often uses the words temple and tabernacle synonymously. For example see Ezk. 41:1.

Rev. 15:5 refers to it as “the tabernacle of the testimony.” The Greek word “marturion,” translated “testimony,” means witness or evidence. It is translated “witness” in Act. 7:44 in the phrase: “the tabernacle of witness,” and is an identical phrase to the one in Rev. 15:5. The witness or testimony in Act. 7:44 refers to the 2 tablets of stone engraved with the 10 commandments, along with Aaron’s rod that budded and a pot of manna; all of which were inside the ark of the covenant, and testified to the truth of God and His miraculous interventions for His people.

The 2 tablets of stone bearing the commandments of God and representing the covenant He made with Israel, are particularly referred to as “the testimony” (Ex. 25:16, 21-22. 31:18 etc). “Tabernacle of the testimony” more often than not meant the tabernacle which contained the testimony of the commandments. But, because the testimony was in the ark, it was also referred to as “the ark of the testimony,” or “the ark of the covenant” (Heb. 9:4).

In view of the fact that the ark represented the throne of God: placing the covenant inside it may have been intended to signify that the covenant is the very heart of His throne, or that His throne is the source of the covenant and every other inspired utterance recorded in the scrolls and tablets. In executing judgement upon the beast’s kingdom by the 7 vials, in order to establish His kingdom and fulfil His covenants of promise and prophetic Word; God proves that He is indeed a God who keeps His covenants of promise! He never forgets or loses sight of them. They are ever with Him at the throne.

Jesus is also with the Father at the throne, and the pot of manna and rod that budded etc that were inside the ark, pointed to him. He is “the faithful and true witness” (marturia). Because of this, some see “the tabernacle of the testimony” (witness) as meaning the tabernacle where Christ dwells with the Father.

Before moving on from Rev. 15:5, it may be wondered how the

temple could be referred to as being “in heaven” if it is heaven itself. The answer is that the temple is a mobile city that can traverse space. When John saw it in Rev. 15:5 it had not descended to earth. It was in “heaven” in the sense of being somewhere above and beyond the earth. Heaven was in heaven! One thing is certain: the city of God does not have a separate area for a temple like the old city of Jerusalem. The city is all temple; it is a temple city, the ultimate holy of holies. For this reason, Rev. 21:22 says John “saw no temple therein.”

CLOTHED IN PURE AND WHITE LINEN

Rev. 15:6 says the 7 angels who came out of the temple with the 7 plagues, were “clothed in pure and white linen.” The R.V. says the angels were “arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright.” The difference in translation is explained by the fact that the Greek words for “linen” (linon) and “precious stone” (lithon) are similar, and might be easily exchanged. Authorities differ in their preference for one or other of the 2 readings. But it is not easy to believe that an angel, let alone 7, would be clothed with one stone. Ezk. 28:13 refers to the proud, conceited, grossly materialistic king of Tyre adorning himself with many precious stones, not just one stone. But would a holy angel be clothed with a stone?

BREASTS GIRDED WITH GOLDEN GIRDLES

After stating that the 7 angels were clothed in pure and white linen, Rev. 15:6 says their breasts were girded with golden girdles. They were similarly attired to Jesus who is referred to in Rev. 1:13 as being “clothed with a garment down to the foot and with a golden girdle around his breast.” The Greek word for “breast” in relation to Jesus is “mastos,” and generally relates to the female breast and signifies nourishment and sustenance (Lk. 11:27. 23:29). In relation to the 7 angels, the word for breast is “steethos” and generally signifies the male chest, including Christ’s (Lk. 18:13. 23:48. Jn. 13:25. 21:20). The angel who appeared to Daniel was also clothed in a linen garment and girded with a golden girdle. His girdle however was not around his chest but his “loins” (waist) (Dan. 10:5), possibly to hold a sheath for a sword, because he was engaged in a military mission (v13, 20).

A girdle is basically a belt. Long robes without a girdle would be loose flowing, impeding the action of the limbs. People at work

commonly tucked up their clothes into their girdle; before walking or running anywhere, one would “gird up his loins” (Ex. 12:11. 1 Kng. 18:46. 2 Kng. 4:29. Act. 12:8). Being “girded” therefore, signifies preparation for active exertion or service, involving walking, running, working or warfare. Girdles were only removed while resting.

The connection between girdles and service can be seen in Lk. 12:35: “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning.” The Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: “See that you are dressed for action” i.e. be ready and prepared to work for the Lord; be on duty at all times. In the verses that follow (Lk. 12:36-) Jesus explains that being girded means being on the alert, actively watching and waiting, busily involved in his service, ready for his return. Then when he comes, he will “gird himself and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them.” The words “gird” and “serve” also run parallel in Lk. 17:8.

In view of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the golden girdles with which the 7 angels were girded as they came forth from the temple carrying the 7 vials, signified service to God. They were dressed for action, involving the pouring out of judgement upon the beast. The pouring out was merely symbolic of actions they would exert to bring about the plagues. The girdles were “golden” because their service was precious, involving the avenging and vindicating of the saints in answer to their prayers, and preparing the way for Christ’s return, the glorification of the saints and the establishment of the kingdom of God. They are dressed for the occasion! Although they execute the fierce wrath of God, they are not rambo-type men in appearance with bare chests, scowly faces and walking like apes! They are dressed in a pure, holy and dignified manner. God’s anger does not take away dignity and majesty from those who execute it.

Being similarly attired to Christ in Rev. 1:13, who is depicted standing in the midst of the churches; also indicates that the 7 angels are of very high station (archangels). They represent Christ in a special way, acting on his behalf and having the same care and concern for the church as he does.

ONE OF THE 4 BEASTS DELIVERED THE VIALS

“**A**nd one of the 4 beasts gave to the 7 angels 7 golden vials full of the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever” (Rev. 15:7).

Because the 4 living creatures play a major role in the judgements of God as seen in an earlier chapter, it is not surprising that one of them gave

the 7 vials to the 7 angels, but we are not told which one of the 4 it was. It was probably one of the 4 living creatures who gave the 7 trumpets to the angels in Rev. 8:2, and it may have been the same one who gave the 7 vials. Jesus is the only person referred to in the book of Revelation who received something direct from the hand of God (5:7).

Regarding the “vials” (A.V.): the Greek word “phiale,” according to Strong, means a broad shallow cup. Berkley renders it “a deep saucer”; others say a flat bowl. A wide open brim on a broad bowl would allow the contents to be poured out quickly and easily, not as a slow trickle. The Greek word “poterion,” translated “cup,” referring to a drinking vessel, is also used in Rev. 14:10 in relation to the judgement of the beast.

In Rev. 5:8 we read that each of the 4 living creatures and 24 elders had “golden vials,” making a total of 28 vials, and they were full of incense, representing the prayers of the saints. In view of the fact that the prayers of the saints requested judgement of the enemy (Rev. 6:10), it would be fitting if the 7 golden vials used to pour out the judgements, represented those that held their prayers, much in the same way that the prayers of the saints in Rev. 8:3-5 were offered on the same golden altar from which coals of fire were cast upon the earth in judgement.

Rev. 15:7 is the only reference to the 7 vials being “golden,” but it is interesting to note the various references to other golden items in the book of Revelation: golden lampstands (1:12, 20. 2:1); girdle (1:13. 15:6); crowns (4:4. 14:14); incense bowls (5:8); censer (8:3); altar (8:3. 9:13); reed (21:15); city (21:18); street (21:21). Because Solomon’s temple was a pattern of things in the heavens, and involved much gold, it is not surprising to find these references to golden things in heaven’s temple city.

THE TEMPLE WAS FILLED WITH SMOKE

Having stated that the 7 angels came out of the temple with the 7 vials, the last verse in chapter 15 says: “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the 7 plagues of the 7 angels were fulfilled.”

There is a saying that “where there is smoke there is fire,” and it is stated in this verse that the smoke came from the glory of God and His power. Scripture refers to God as a “consuming fire” (Deu. 4:24. Heb. 12:29), and this is a particularly appropriate designation in relation to His anger and wrath (Deu. 9:3. Heb. 12:25-29).

We read in Deu. 29:20 that “the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke ...” 2 Sam. 22:8-9 and Ps. 18:8 say: “... because He was wroth, there went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured ...” Ps. 74:1 also refers to the smoke of God’s anger.

Reference in Rev. 15 to the temple being filled with smoke in the context of the wrath of God about to be poured out by the 7 angels, suggests God’s anger is boiling over - He is fuming! As He declares in Ezk. 38:18 “My fury shall come up in My face.”

The 7 angels were given the 7 vials in the temple by one of the 4 living creatures, no doubt at God’s command. As the 7 angels leave God’s presence and come out of the temple to empty out their vials, nothing is said concerning the countenance of God, whether He looked displeased, grim, angry, furious; or pleased, happy and joyful. However, the smoke from His glory and power (i.e. from His presence) tells it all. He is angry and furious and the 7 angels give expression to it and manifest it in the plagues that they pour out on the kingdom of the beast, which is full of blasphemy and wickedness and persecution of God’s people.

Reference is also made in Isa. 6:4 to the temple of God being filled with smoke, and this occurred at a time when God was about to execute judgement (v11-12).

However, the manifestation of smoke from the presence of the Lord does not always mean anger and judgement. Sometimes it can be just a visible demonstration of His presence and power. (See Gen. 15:17. Ex. 19:18. Isa. 4:5. Ezk. 10:4. 44:4).

Another view put forward by some is that the smoke that filled the temple was the smoke of the incense in Rev. 8:3-4 which came with the prayers of the saints from the golden altar and ascended up before God. But it is clearly stated in Rev. 15:8 that the smoke came “from the glory of God and His power” (i.e. from His own person or presence), not from the altar before His throne.

Some have also tried to make Rev. 15:8 an antitype of the smoke from the incense offered by the high priest of Israel on the day of atonement which filled the holy of holies. No man besides the high priest was able to enter the temple at that time. But once again, the smoke did not come from God’s presence in the most holy place, but from the incense.

When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, we read in Ex. 40:34-35 that “a cloud (like smoke?) covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon,

and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

A similar thing happened when Solomon dedicated the temple, as we read in 1 Kng. 8:10-11: “And it came to pass when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.”

On these occasions the “cloud” that filled the tabernacle and temple was not due to anger and judgement, but mercy and blessing. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the power and glory of God can be manifested in either judgement or mercy, goodness or severity.

We cannot be sure if the temple was filled with smoke in Rev. 15 while the 7 angels were in there receiving the 7 vials, or if it filled up with smoke as they went out to pour forth the vials. One thing seems certain: only the 7 angels came out, leaving the 4 living creatures, 24 elders and the other 100 million angels in the temple before the throne in the smoke.

Reference therefore to “no man” being able to enter into the temple until the 7 plagues of the 7 angels were fulfilled, cannot refer to angels. It must refer to the “men” in Rev. 5:9 redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, who are also seen in Rev. 7:9-17. 15:2-4, and heard in Rev. 14:2-3 before the throne of God in His temple after the judgement of the beast.

Rev. 15:8 simply teaches that the redeemed from among men cannot enter the temple until the judgement of the 7 plagues has been executed against the beast. This means that Jesus does not return to immortalize and glorify his church until the seventh vial. Only those who are made immortal and equal with the angels can enter the temple city into the presence of God and see His face.

This is confirmed by the fact that the words of Jesus: “Behold I come as a thief,” which are uttered during the sixth vial (Rev. 16:15), indicate that he has not returned at the time of the sixth vial and will not return until the seventh. This suggests that the saints will still be part of the world scene, witnessing to the end. Reference to people refusing to repent during the outpouring of the vials (Rev. 16:9, 11), implies repentance is still being preached.

This does not mean of course, that the saints will suffer because of the plagues poured out on the beast. During the outpouring of plagues upon Egypt, God granted Israel immunity, and He is able to protect the end time saints in the same way. It would be inappropriate for God’s judgement of the wicked to fall upon the righteous.

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest

through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame consume thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the holy One of Israel, thy Saviour ..." (Isa. 43:2-3). "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of night's hidden terrors ..." (Ps. 91).



CHAPTER THIRTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER SIXTEEN

No introduction is needed for this chapter since Revelation chapter 15 has already prefaced it. God's longsuffering has waited long enough. As in Noah's day, the anger of God is released upon the earth and overwhelms it with a deluge of judgement.

The entire sixteenth chapter describes a devastating series of catastrophes from God which are reminiscent of the plagues poured out on Egypt, virtually destroying the nation.

In the opening verse of Rev. 16:1 John says: "And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the 7 angels, go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth."

In Rev. 15 we saw that one of the 4 living creatures gave the vials to the 7 angels, and they came out of the temple carrying them. The vials were not to be emptied out in the temple. This is no temple ritual! The 7 angels evidently stopped outside waiting for instruction to proceed and pour them out, and it came in a loud voice out of the temple. The loud voice could have been that of the living creature who gave the 7 angels the vials. As we have seen in Rev. 6:1, a loud voice like thunder is characteristic of the 4 living creatures, and it would be appropriate in view of the judgmental nature of the mission of the 7 angels.

According to Strong, the Greek word "ekcheo," translated "pour out;" means to gush out. It is translated "runneth out" in Matt. 9:17 to describe the effect of a wineskin breaking. It is also translated "poured out" in Jn. 2:15 in relation to the changer's money when Jesus pushed their table over. "Pour out" in Act. 2:17-18 also comes from the same word and relates to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

It is evident therefore that the contents of the vials do not come out as a slow, soft, gentle trickle; but suddenly, forcefully and violently like water from a burst dam. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the shape of the vials, being broad bowls, signifies the ease and rapidity with which the contents can be poured out. (The word "pour" is used frequently in Scripture to describe the unleashing of God's judgements. See Ps. 79:6. Ezk. 7:8. Jer. 1:13-14).

The contents of the bowls is not broth but wrath - "the wrath of God." The word "wrath" signifies hot anger; fierce indignation. Verse 19 refers to it in terms of "the fierceness of His wrath." The Greek word for wrath is "thumos," from which "thermos" is derived, which has to do with

keeping things hot. Various Scriptures describe God's anger in terms of being "hot" or "heated" (Ex. 22:24. Deu. 29:24. Judg. 2:14. Ps. 6:1). Other occurrences of thumos in the book of Revelation are: 14:10, 19. 15:1, 7.

The wrath of God is also described by another Greek word "orge," from which "orgy" is derived, and means violent passion. In the book of Revelation it occurs in 6:16, 17. 11:18. 16:19. 19:15.

Unlike the trumpet judgements, which were confined to one third of the earth, the vials of the wrath of God are poured upon "the earth" (Rev. 16:1), i.e. upon those who have the mark of the beast and have worshipped his image (v2); upon the sea, rivers and fountains of waters (v3-4); upon the sun (v8); upon the seat of the beast and his kingdom (v10); upon the river Euphrates (v12); upon the kings of the whole world (v14); upon the cities of the nations, every island and mountain (v19-20).

The vials are an all-embracing universal judgement affecting the whole earth. Why? Because of refusal to give God glory and for blaspheming His name and shedding the blood of the saints and the prophets (v6-9).

PARALLELS BETWEEN THE VIALS AND EGYPT'S PLAGUES

It was pointed out in an earlier chapter (p. 289) that there are parallels between the 7 trumpets and the 7 vials. They have a common plan: in the first four judgements the spheres of operations are the same, namely: the earth, salt sea, fresh waters and heavenly bodies. In the fifth judgement of each series there is torment and darkness. The river Euphrates and the assembly of armies are found in the sixth, and the portents of thunder, voices and an earthquake introduce the resurrection, judgement and kingdom in the seventh.

During the trumpet judgements, only one third of the earth, sea, fresh waters and heavenly bodies were affected. But the judgements of the vials are far more intense and extensive, and have a devastating impact upon the whole of the earth, sea, fresh waters and heavenly bodies. The fractional feature of the trumpets does not apply to the vials.

In view of the fact that the sixth seal also relates to the great day of God's wrath (Rev. 6:17), it is not surprising that it shares common features with the 7 vials of God's wrath.

<u>Sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17)</u>	<u>7 vials (Rev. 16)</u>
Great earthquake (v12)	Great earthquake (v18)
Sun black (v12)	Darkness (v10)
Islands moved (v14)	Every island fled away (v20)
Mountains moved (v14)	Mountains not found (v20)
Great day of wrath (v17)	Vials of wrath (v1)

Parallels can also be drawn between some of the 7 plagues of the 7 vials and some of the 10 plagues that fell upon Egypt in the days of Moses:

Plagues in Egypt	Plagues in Rev. 16
1st. River turned into blood (Ex. 7:14-25)	Sea, rivers and fountains turned into blood (v3-4)
2nd. Frogs (Ex. 8:1-15)	Unclean spirits like frogs (v13)
4th. Swarms of flies (Ex. 8:20-32)	Vial poured into air (v17)
6th. Festering boils (Ex. 9:8-12)	Painful sores (v11)
7th. Thunder, lightning, and destructive hail (Ex. 9:13-35)	Thunder and lightning (v18) destructive hail (v21)
8th. Locust invasion (Ex. 10:1-20)	Invasion of nations (v14, 16) like locusts (Rev. 9:3. Joel 1).
9th. Dense darkness (Ex. 10:21-23)	Full of darkness (v10)
10th. Death of firstborn (Ex. 11)	Death at Armageddon (v16-21)
Red Sea dried up (Ex. 14)	River Euphrates dried up (v12)
Pharaoh killed and unable to sit on his throne.	Vial poured on throne of the beast.

Many have regarded the plagues in Rev. 16 as being symbolical, not literal, and have spiritualized them all away into the realms of metaphor and hyperbole. The continuous historic interpretation applies them to events covering a long period of history, from the French revolution to the second coming, involving many generations.

But it should be noted that the judgements of the vials overlap. They come with such swiftness, one upon the heels of the other, that the effects of the first vial (sores: v2), are still present at the time of the judgement of the fifth vial (v11), which refers to people still suffering from their sores! This shows that these plagues all fall upon one and the same generation,

as did the plagues that fell upon Egypt. Some people may be killed by each vial, but the majority will survive through the terrible scenes of them all, up until the final “grand slam” of Armageddon. This fact clearly refutes the view that the vials commenced several centuries ago and occupy many generations in their fulfilment; for how could those who experience the first plague be alive during the fifth?

Seeing that some of the same kind of judgements as the vials literally occurred in Egypt over a short period of time in the days of Moses; it is not unreasonable to believe that the same will apply to the end time vials. Surely the singing of the song of Moses after the 7 vials have been poured out intimates this (Rev. 15:1-4). This could also be intimated in Mic. 7:15 which states that the wonders performed by God when He delivered Israel from Egypt will be performed again. For this reason it is believed by the Jewish Rabbis that “whatever plagues God inflicted on the Egyptians in former times, he will inflict on the enemies of His people in later times.”

The 10 plagues were poured out upon Egypt in chronological order, and the same probably applies to the 7 vials. Certainly, the 7 angels pour out their vials one after each other, and not at the same time, which suggests they form a sequence. However, the effects run concurrently, and collectively represent the judgement of the end time. As we have seen, the sores inflicted by the first vial have not run their course and disappeared when the second vial is poured out, and are still causing pain at the time of the fifth vial. Likewise, the sea, rivers and fountains which are turned into blood during the second and third vials, do not necessarily return to normal and cease from being polluted when the fourth vial is poured out.

As the plagues in the days of Moses were the divine wrath leading up to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, followed by the singing of the song of Moses; so also the 7 vials are a prelude to the greatest of all deliverances by the prophet like unto Moses.

THE FIRST VIAL

“**A**nd the first (angel) went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image” (Rev. 16:2. A.V.).

Without delay, starting with the first, the 7 angels obey the command to go their ways and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. Because the kingdom of the beast will embrace all nations, and the fact that all who have the mark of the beast will be affected by the sores; this

indicates that the “earth” upon which the vials are poured, involves all nations.

As in the case of the trumpets, the 4 spheres of earth, sea, rivers (including fountains), and sun are affected by the first 4 vials. The sores themselves in the first vial have no counterpart in the trumpet series, but were the sixth plague that fell upon Egypt - the middle of the series. (The first trumpet judgement was hail, which was the seventh plague in Egypt).

The statement in the A.V. that a noisome and grievous sore “fell” upon men, does not necessarily mean that sores literally dropped from the sky, although the angel could have done that with a bowl full of viruses if God so desired! The Greek word “ginomai,” translated “fell,” is rendered “came” by most modern translations i.e. the sores came upon men.

“Noisome” comes from the Greek “kakos” and means bad, evil, harmful, injurious. It is mostly translated “evil” in the New Testament, and “harm” several times e.g. Act. 16:28. 28:5.

The word “grievous” (Greek “poneros,” derived from “ponos”) means pain and anguish. As in the case of kakos, poneros is also translated “evil” and “wicked” in the New testament. Strong says poneros means evil in the sense of hurtful. Poneros is evil in effect or influence, whereas kakos refers to the nature and character.

The description of “a noisome and grievous sore” in the A.V. is rendered in other modern translations as follows: “foul and evil sores” (R.S.V.); “evil and malignant ulcer” (Diaglott); “terrible and painful sores” (Good News); “ugly and painful sores” (N.I.V.). Others say “horrible, loathsome and malignant sores broke out on everyone.” According to Rev. 16:11, the pain is so bad, it causes people to gnaw their tongues.

According to Strong, the Greek word “helkos,” translated “sore” in the A.V. means ulcer. It could include boils. The word only occurs here and in v11, as well as Lk. 16:21. The same word is used in the Greek Old Testament for the boils inflicted on Egypt. The festering boils that broke out among the Egyptians (Ex. 9:8-10) could very well be the same plague that is caused by the first of the 7 angels in Rev. 16. Ex. 9:11 says the magicians of Egypt could not stand before Moses (to rival him by imitating and duplicating this plague), because the boils were so painful and uncomfortable. But Moses and Israel were given a divine immunity, and so shall the saints during the period of the 7 vials. The plagues are selective in their effect. They distinguish between the beast worshippers and others.

In the same way that the painful pus-filled boils suddenly and

unexpectedly broke out on everyone in Egypt; so they will break out on everyone in the end time who worships the beast and his image. It is appropriate that people who have marked themselves with the anti-god mark of the beast, and worshipped his image (idolatry) instead of God, should be marked and scarred by God with incurable sores.

Other examples of God inflicting sores can be seen in Deu. 28:22, 27, 35, 60. 1 Sam. 5:9. 2 Kng. 20:7. Job 2:7. (Zech. 14:12?). Job in particular suffered terrible pain and discomfort from his sores, and daily scraped the pus out of them with a broken piece of pottery (Job. 2:7-8). Hezekiah, on the other hand, was dying as a result of the poisoning effect of his “boil,” and would have died had God not intervened as a result of his prayer (2 Kng. 20:1-7).

When God struck the Philistines with boils for seizing the ark of the covenant in the days of Samuel, they repented and sought to make amends. Their attitude was: “Don’t be stubborn and rebellious as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were ...” (1 Sam. 6:6). There was no need therefore for God to send any more plagues upon them. Such, however, will not be the case in the end time beast era. No repentance results from the first plague of sores, so the second is poured out.

THE SECOND VIAL

“**A**nd the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living creature died in the sea” (V3).

Under the second trumpet, a third part of the sea became blood (red) as a result of a great mountain burning with fire being cast into it, causing one third of the sea creatures to die (Rev. 8:8-9). The second vial however, causes the entire ocean to become blood, resulting in every living creature dying.

Some texts omit the word “man” in the phrase “as the blood of a dead man,” and render it “the blood as of one dead” i.e. “like the blood from a corpse” (New English Bible). It is not literal blood from dead men but “as” or “like” it. The appearance is similar.

The blood of a dead man is not red and fluid, but black and congealed, or coagulated. It looks like crude oil, which calls to mind the Gulf War when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait and sabotaged their oil installations, releasing a river of oil out into the Persian Gulf, causing an ecological nightmare. The sight of the layer of oil over the sea may have been similar to what John saw when the second vial took effect. Did he

see the contents of the vial come out? If so, it was probably black and coagulated, to signify its effect.

It is possible that God may cause a mighty earthquake to fracture the ocean floor in various places, releasing a huge and vast subterranean supply of crude oil into the ocean which would float on the surface and look like the blood of a dead man! Not that we should trouble ourselves trying to work out how He will do it. With supernatural power at His disposal, there is no limit to the ways in which He could achieve this. One thing is certain: although man has been gradually polluting the sea for some decades now, it would take many more decades for him to cause the entire ocean to look like what John saw as a result of the second vial. As already pointed out: the vials, like the plagues in Egypt, take place over a relatively short period of time.

Some have objected to regarding “every living soul,” or, as it is in the Greek, “every soul of life,” as fish, and maintain “soul” signifies humans. The “sea” is therefore regarded as being symbolic of nations. But “nephesh,” the Hebrew word for soul, is translated “creature” in relation to fish in Gen. 1:20-21, and it is actually translated “fish” in Isa. 19:10. “The creatures in the sea” in Rev. 8:9 are certainly fish.

Dead fish would all float to the top of the ocean and their decaying bodies would discharge a stench, adding to the misery of the vial judgements.

THE THIRD VIAL

“**A**nd the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers, and fountains of waters; and they became blood” (v4).

Not only will the Salt Sea be turned into blood, but all fresh drinking water, as in the days of Moses when not only the Nile was turned into blood, but all the rivers and streams, ponds and pools became blood, causing the fish to die resulting in a stench (Ex. 7:14-21).

Under the third trumpet, the third part of the rivers and fountains of waters became bitter as wormwood, due to a great star burning like a torch, falling upon them (8:10-11). But the third vial causes all rivers and fountains (springs) to become blood. In this particular case it does not say “as the blood of a dead man,” but simply “blood.” It may imply of course the blood of a dead man, as in the case of the sea.

In the event of the sea, rivers and springs becoming polluted, the earth’s sources of drinking water will be destroyed. What a disaster! What fear and panic it will cause. This will no doubt contribute towards the

state of things described by Jesus in Lk. 21:25: “Upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity (no solution; at wit’s end), ... men’s hearts failing them for fear as they wait for what is coming over the whole earth.”

After seeing the third angel pour out his vial upon the rivers and springs, we read in v5 that John “heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus.”

There are 2 views concerning “the angel of the waters.” The first is that he is the third angel who was commissioned to pour out his vial upon the waters. The second view is that the reference is to another angel whose function is to supervise the waters of the earth. It is rendered “the angel in charge of the waters” by the New International Bible. The Jewish Rabbis believe that every part of the physical creation is under the control of some angel delegated by God.

In response to the pollution of the waters, the angel in charge of them does not express disappointment, annoyance or anger. Instead, he praises and justifies God saying: “Thou art righteous ... in these Thy judgements.” Although 7 vials are poured out, this affirmation that God’s judgements are righteous is only given during the third, which is as good as the half-way stage. The cutting off of the water supply is probably the most severe and serious judgement, and might appear to some to be too extreme a measure to be taken. But the angel vindicates it by proclaiming that God is fully justified. Justice is served by it because those who suffer as a result “have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink for they are worthy” (v6).

Because they thirsted for death and the blood of God’s people and made it flow, God makes their drinking water flow with “the blood of a dead man.” Such is the just recompense of God. Regarding the “saints and prophets” whose blood is shed, it is evident from this that there will be prophets in the end time beast era. See comments on Rev. 11:3, 10, 18.

In Rev. 16:7 John goes on to say: “And I heard a response from the altar say, even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgements.”

The Greek word “nai” translated “even so” in the A.V. means yes, surely, verily, true Cp. Rev. 1:7. It is translated “yea” in Rev. 14:13; “surely” (Rev. 22:20); “truth” (Matt. 15:27). The voice from the altar agrees with, and supports the angel of the waters, that the judgements of God are well and truly justified in view of the shedding of the saints’ blood.

It seems that the reference to the shed blood of the saints in particular

struck a chord, eliciting the response of a hearty amen from the altar. The words: “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgements,” are very similar to those in 15:3 which were uttered by the saints. And when it is remembered that the voice of the saints whose blood had been shed came forth from the altar in 6:10 saying: “How long O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth,” it is not difficult to see the voice from the altar in 16:7 as representing their voice. If so, this would mean that they are still “under the altar,” in the “rest” state of death during the third vial. This is to be expected in view of the fact that reference is not made to the return of Christ until the last vials (v15-).

Before moving on to the fourth vial, it should be pointed out that the words “and shall be” in the phrase: “O Lord, which art, and wast, and shall be” are not in the original text. However, they are in Rev. 1:4, 8. One reason that has been given for the omission is that the seventh trumpet at this stage has been sounded, proclaiming “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord ...” (11:15), so the kingdom is no longer seen as a distant future purpose. It is as good as come! The 7 vials are bringing it. God’s wrath finishes with the vials (15:1). The time of consummation has therefore virtually come and there is no need to speak of a future coming.

THE FOURTH VIAL

“**A**nd the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, who has power over these plagues: and they repented not to give Him glory” (v8-9).

The fourth trumpet resulted in the third part of the sun, moon and stars being smitten and darkened (8:12), but the fourth vial only affects the sun and causes it, not to go dark, but to increase in heat. Because the judgements of the vials come after the judgements of the trumpets, it would appear to those on earth that after threatening to go out, when one third was darkened, the sun temporarily revives in one huge flare-up, scorching people with its heat, then completely goes out, plunging the earth into darkness, as a result of the fifth vial (v10).

Taking the words as they stand in the A.V. the “him” to whom power is given to scorch is the fourth angel, and John may have seen fire pouring out of his vial upon the sun. Some modern translations say it was the sun

that was given power to scorch. For example, the New International reads: “The sun was given power to scorch people with fire.” Both are correct. the heat of the sun does the scorching, but the angel causes it to do so.

For some time now, excessive emissions of carbon dioxide have been causing depletion of the ozone layer, resulting in large “holes” which allow the full force of the unfiltered ultra-violet rays to penetrate the earth. This is causing global warming and an increase of skin cancer and cancerous sores. However, this is not a fulfilment of the fourth vial but could be a sign of worse to come. As mentioned earlier, all the vials are acts of divine power like the plagues in Egypt, and happen quickly over a relatively short space of time. (The depletion of the ozone layer has been gradually taking place over a period of several decades).

The heat is obviously going to be intense. It is described as “great (megas) heat.” (Megas occurs 11 times in this chapter). The Living Bible says: “everyone was burned by this blast of heat.” Although the word “blast” has been added, there may be some truth in it. Our sun frequently sends out bursts of ionised gas known as solar flares, the largest being referred to as coronal mass ejections. About once or twice a decade they are powerful enough to affect the earth’s upper atmosphere, disrupting power grids and communications satellites. In 1989, for example, a particularly vigorous flare knocked out the entire power grid in northern Quebec, and in 1997 another destroyed an American satellite, Telstar 401.

Astronomers over the past century have observed that stars in our galaxy with roughly the same brightness, size and composition as our sun, have produced enormous “superflares,” (in one case an increase of 3 magnitudes), which made them dramatically brighter for minutes, and in some cases, days.

Such a superflare on our sun would be 10,000 times as powerful as the flare which caused the Canadian blackout, and would cause enough energy to melt the ice caps, and even melt the ice on Jupiter’s moons which are over 5 times the distance from the sun than planet earth. Such a flare would cause our atmosphere to glow, destroy much of the earth’s ozone layer and disable the entire satellite fleet upon which the world’s communications increasingly depend.

It would not be difficult for the power of God to cause a solar flare of the right magnitude to have the effect of scorching men, as mentioned in the fourth vial, and this may be what is signified by the angel pouring out his vial upon the sun. Does Isa. 24:6 relate to this? “Therefore (because of sin) has the curse devoured the earth, and those who dwell therein suffer for their guilt: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned

(“scorched” R.S.V.), and few men are left.” This will be a prelude to the return of Jesus “in flaming fire” in the day that “shall burn as an oven ...” “wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Thes. 1:7-8. Mal. 4:1. 2 Pet. 3).

In spite of the 4 vials causing the painful sores, the sea and all drinking water to be turned into blood, and the scorching effect of the sun; v9 says that men blaspheme the name of God, who has power over these plagues; and they repent not to give Him glory. And verses 11 and 21 inform us that they continue to blaspheme and refuse to repent after the fifth and seventh vials. Like Pharaoh of old they will stubbornly resist God, giving Him more excuse and scope to demonstrate His power. The phrase: “they repented not to give Him glory” incorporates the phraseology of the everlasting gospel in Rev. 14:7, suggesting that the preaching of the gospel is still in progress at the time of the vials.

The beast of course does not start to blaspheme as a result of the vials being poured out. He is a blasphemer by nature, being an anti-God atheist. He blasphemes God from the very beginning when he first comes to power (Dan. 11:36. 2 Thes. 2:4. Rev. 13:6). “Blasphemy” means to speak against, and includes using the Lord’s name in a profane way. One does not have to believe in God to use His name in this way. Most who speak this way do so because they don’t believe.

So, reference to people blaspheming God because of the plagues that inflict them, does not have to mean that they believe in Him and know that He is responsible for the plagues. It is common for blasphemers, when expressing anger and looking for someone to blame, to use the Lord’s name in a profane way, even when they know that they caused the problem themselves, or that it is due to natural causes. The beast, being an atheist, will probably attribute the plagues to natural causes, and his anger will be expressed in blasphemy. This response will also no doubt be provoked by God’s witnesses who will be proclaiming that the plagues have been sent by God as a punishment for sin, and will not stop until people fear God, repent and give Him glory. Ultimately, all nations will do this (Rev. 15:3-4). As we have seen in Rev. 11:13, some come to repentance and give glory to God before the seventh trumpet, but the majority will not submit themselves until the seventh has run its course.

Having said all that, it is not intended to give the impression that only unbelievers and atheists can blaspheme. It is not impossible for one who believes in the existence of God to give vent to anger and blaspheme and curse God in times of misfortune, calamity, pain or suffering. The wife of Job suggested that he should do this due to his boils which covered him

from head to foot (Job 2:7-9), and reference is made to Israelites doing it in Isa. 8:21. However, those in the kingdom of the beast who blaspheme will mostly be unbelievers of the God of Israel like Pharaoh and the Egyptians of old.

THE FIFTH VIAL

“**A**nd the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (v10-11).

During the reign of the beast, it was thought that he was invincible. People said: “Who is like the beast? Who can make war with him?” The answer now starts to be given; God strikes at his power base and kingdom, plunging it into darkness.

The word “seat” comes from the Greek “thronos” and means throne. It occurs almost 40 times in Revelation in relation to the throne of God; once in relation to “satan’s seat” (2:13); twice in relation to the 24 elders’ “seats” (4:4. 11:16); once in relation to the dragon’s “seat” (13:2); and once in relation to “the seat of the beast.” In view of the fact that the dragon gives his throne to the beast (13:2), the throne of the beast may be the same place where the nerve centre of the dragon was situated.

During the fifth trumpet, the sun and air were darkened by smoke out of the bottomless pit. The fifth vial causes the kingdom of the beast to be plunged into darkness. Seeing that the beast’s kingdom is world-wide, embracing all nations (13:4, 7), universal darkness will be involved. His kingdom will be “full of darkness.”

There is quite a contrast between the fourth and fifth vial, going from one extreme to another - from increased brightness and heat of the sun, to no light or heat. Astronomers have observed phenomena in star-suns outside our solar system, where, within a few days time, a star has increased from the fifteenth magnitude. Then, after this great flare-up, the star has been dimmed far beneath its earlier brightness. So it may well be that God touches our sun and causes it to flare forth with an intensity that sears, and then dims it until there is gross darkness upon the earth, as the diminishing of the sun would cause a thickening of the clouds of our atmosphere until little light could come through.

We are not told how long the darkness lasts. We do know however that the “thick darkness” sent upon Egypt in the days of Moses, lasted 3 days (Ex. 10:22-23). During this period, Israel had light in Goshen, but all

the Egyptians stayed indoors; no one left their house. If the rivers are still turned into blood like the coagulated blood of a dead man, they will not be fluid enough to produce hydro electricity, neither will they be able to cool the nuclear reactors in nuclear power plants, resulting in no electricity.

There are a number of end time prophecies that speak about an unnatural darkness that will occur on earth prior to the return of Christ, and there is no reason to believe that they will be any less literal than the darkness that occurred in Egypt and also in Israel when Jesus died on the cross. See: Matt. 24:29. Rev. 6:12. Isa. 60:2. Joel 2:31. 3:15. Zech. 14:6-7. (Am. 5:18. Nah. 1:6, 8. Zeph. 1:15).

The darkening of the third part of the sun, moon and stars during the fourth trumpet can be seen as a precursor - a warning of worse to come. Partial blackout will lead to a "full" blackout, which, if prolonged, would result in freezing cold temperatures. Such darkness and cold will be fitting and appropriate for those who have preferred the darkness of sin instead of the light of Christ, and whose hearts are cold and frigid towards the things of God.

Rev. 16:10 says: "and they gnawed their tongues for pain." The word "gnawed" only occurs here and means to squeeze or chew, and the Greek "ponos," translated "pain" only occurs here and in v11 and 21:4. They do not, at this stage, gnash their teeth, just gnaw their tongue, which is appropriate in view of having used the tongue to blaspheme God!

Verse 11 makes it clear that the pain is not caused by freezing cold temperatures, but by their "sores," which were inflicted by the first vial (v2). They are clearly very painful to cause gnawing of the tongue! As pointed out before: the judgements of the bowls clearly overlap. They come with such swiftness, one upon the heels of the other, that the effects of the first vial are still present at the time of the fifth. It is evident from this that these judgements are not spread over centuries, but are fulfilled in one and the same generation, and during a short period of that generation.

In spite of gnawing their tongue for pain, they still use their tongues to blaspheme. They blaspheme God when the heat of the sun is increased, and they blaspheme when the heat is decreased, and "repent not of their deeds." The "deeds" relate to shedding the blood of the saints and prophets, mentioned in verse 6.

THE SIXTH VIAL

“**A**nd the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw 3 unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And they gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon” (v12-16).

The concept of the great river Euphrates literally and physically drying up seemed so impossible to earlier Bible students, that they treated it as being symbolic. Because the river has its principal source in Turkey, the prophecy has been interpreted in the past to mean that the power of Turkey would evaporate. At the height of its power, the Turkish empire extended deep into Europe, occupied part of Southern Russia, dominated the whole of the Middle East, including Egypt and Arabia, and extended as far as North Africa. But gradually the empire dried up as nation after nation revolted and gained its independence, starting with Greece in 1820 through to the first World War in 1914-18 when Turkey lost Arabia, Palestine, Syria etc, and had her European territory further reduced to Constantinople. So the drying up of the river Euphrates is seen as at least a hundred year event.

Those who advocated this view believed that when the drying up process took place, Jesus would return. Reference to the preparing of the way of the kings of the east was regarded as referring to this. The fact that nearly 100 years have passed since the Turkish empire dried up and Jesus has not returned, indicates that this is not a satisfactory interpretation.

Seeing that a pathway in the Red Sea, the river Jordan and a section of the river Euphrates have all literally dried up in the past in fulfilment of the word of prophecy, surely suggests that serious consideration should be given to the possibility of Rev. 16:12 being literal also. God divided the Red Sea to deliver Israel from the armies of Egypt and to give access to Sinai, and dried up the river Jordan to give Israel access to the promised land.

Regarding the past drying up of a section of the river Euphrates: this was prophesied in Isa. 44:26 to 45:4: “who (God) says to the deep, be dry,

and I will dry up the rivers.” It refers to the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus the great, who is mentioned by name in Isa. 44:28 and 45:1. This was achieved by diverting the course of the river Euphrates which flowed through grill-type iron gates and then down through the city. Confident that the city could withstand any attack, the people were taken off guard and were, in fact, engaged in revelry and feasting as Cyrus led his armies along the dry river bed, through the gates that supporters inside opened for him, and into the city (Dan. 5). Although the river Euphrates was dried up by means of human agency, the prophecy in Isaiah speaks in terms of it being accomplished by God, because it was His will and His providential power that arranged it.

As far as the end time fulfilment of the drying up of the river is concerned, recent events could be relevant. Turkey has built the giant Ataturk dam on the Euphrates, filling a reservoir which can hold 10 times the volume of the Sea of Galilee.

Turkey has plans for 22 dams and 19 power stations in the Tigris-Euphrates basin. This is all of great concern to Syria and Iraq, who are heavily dependant on the Euphrates for water and power.

The Ataturk dam system is able to stem the waters of the Euphrates and literally “dry up” the great river. A National Geographic report referred to it as “a giant plug.” When Turkey held back the river to begin filling the Ataturk reservoir, the downstream flow of the river was reduced to a trickle, causing Syria and Iraq to become irate and they bitterly complained. With a single turn of the tap, Turkey can now literally stop the flow of the river, and the fulfilment of Rev. 16:12 may involve something as simple as that.

Someone may object by pointing out that the prophecy says the river dries up as a result of the angel pouring his vial upon it, so it must involve a divine operation, not the turning off of a tap by human hands. However, the prophecy in Isa. 44:27 declared that God would speak to the river and dry it up, but, as pointed out, this was not achieved by a direct divine supernatural operation, but by Cyrus who “performed all of God’s pleasure.”

If the human effort of diverting a river can fulfil a divine prophecy relating to the drying up of the river Euphrates, then why not the building of a dam and turning off the tap?

Evidently a dam had been constructed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, connected to the river by a channel. This had been used to draw off the water of the river when he had the banks of it within the city lined with bricks. Cyrus knew about this and sent men under cover of darkness

to the site with instructions to open the dam at an appointed time. This had the effect of immediately drawing the river of Babylon into the lake, and leaving its bed which ran through the city, relatively dry. The same effect on a much bigger scale can now be achieved by the Ataturk dam.

As Cyrus caused the river to dry up so the way could be prepared for his armies to invade Babylon, so it will be dried up to prepare the way for the kings, in the time of the end. But this will not be the only purpose served by drying it up. We read in Isa. 11:15 that “The Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt (gulf of Suez); and will wave His hand over the river (Euphrates) with His mighty hand, and smite it into 7 channels that men may cross dry-shod.” The following verse reveals that as a result of this, Israelites in exile beyond the river will be able to walk over the dry river bed on their journey back to their land, as in the day when they came up out of Egypt and walked through the dry bed of the Red Sea and later across the bed of the Jordan river.

THE KINGS OF THE EAST

Reference in Rev. 16:12 to the river Euphrates being dried up so that the way can be prepared or provided for the kings of the east, is generally understood to mean that the kings come with their armies from the east, i.e. east in relation to Israel. (The river Euphrates is the eastern border of the land promised to Abraham: Gen. 15:18. It was also the eastern border of the Roman empire).

As mentioned before, some have held to the view that the kings of the east refers to Christ and his saints, who, they say, will march from the east to Jerusalem for the battle of Armageddon. But there are no Scriptures which teach that Jesus will come from the direction of the Euphrates, north east of Israel. Isa. 63:1 refers to him coming from the direction of Edom, which is south east of Israel, and Zech. 14:4 refers to his feet standing on the Mount of Olives which is directly east of Jerusalem.

In the Scriptures, “the children of the east” invariably refers to Arabs. (Judg. 6:2-3. 1 Kng. 4:30. Jer. 49:28. Job 1:3). The areas referred to in these Scriptures are east of the river Jordan and involve Moslems today. But the “kings of the east” in Rev. 16 come from beyond the river Euphrates, indicating that their territories are north east of Israel. This points to Moslem countries like Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Moslem states between the Black and Caspian seas. (Is there any significance to the verbal similarity between the Greek word “anatole”

translated “east” and the region in eastern Turkey called “Anatolia”?)

The “kings of the east” could be equated with the 10 horns (kings) of the dragon which transfer to the beast. As was suggested in an earlier chapter, the 10 horns of the dragon could represent a Moslem confederacy which involves Turkey, Iraq, Iran etc. In the end time they will be confederate with the beast (Russia) and invade Israel, resulting in the battle of Armageddon. This in fact, seems to be the purpose and outcome of preparing the way for the kings of the east by drying up the river Euphrates during the sixth vial (v16).

Reference is also made, as we have seen, to a great army of 200 million men waiting to cross the river Euphrates to invade, at the time of the sixth trumpet (9:14-). In view of such a large number, it is natural to wonder if China or India or Pakistan, or all three of them might also be involved.

Since the dawn of history, the 3,000 km long river Euphrates has stood as a natural barrier between east and west. It was scarcely fordable anywhere or at any time, and history refers to it as a great hindrance to military movements. The drying up of the river would make it quick and easy for large numbers of soldiers to cross, avoiding congestion on bridges.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS LIKE FROGS

After seeing the great river Euphrates dry up to prepare the way for the kings of the east, John “saw 3 unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” They are said to signify: “The spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Some have thought that there might be a connection between the drying up of the river Euphrates and the coming forth of the frogs, due to the fact that frogs emerge from the mud of a drying river bed. However, the frogs do not come out of the river, but out of the mouth of the dragon, beast and false prophet. Rev. 16:13 is the only place in the New Testament where the word “frogs” occurs, and in the Greek Old Testament it only occurs in relation to the plague of frogs in Egypt. The continuous historic interpretation connects the frogs with France, and links the 3 frogs with the threefold cry of liberty, equality, fraternity of the French revolution. It is argued that the socialist and humanistic teachings which sprung from this threefold cry will be the basic cause of the invasion of Israel and the

battle of Armageddon. But linking the frogs with France has as little Scriptural support as the view that the dragon is China. The dragon, beast and false prophet represent 3 distinct power blocs in the world in the end time. If the triple cry of the French revolution relates to the cry of each of these 3 powers, then 3 frogs would surely be depicted coming out of each mouth. Why would one frog be depicted coming out of each mouth if all 3 powers are promulgators of the threefold cry?

According to Rev. 16:12-13, the 3 frogs come forth after the river Euphrates has dried up, not during the drying up process. It is therefore surprising that the continuous historic interpretation, which is so dogmatic about the prophecies being in strict chronological order, applies the 3 frogs to the French Revolution in 1789 and the drying up of the river Euphrates to the evaporation of the Turkish empire which started in 1820 and ended in 1914-18. According to history, the French revolution came before the Turkish empire dried up.

It should be noted that although the river Euphrates has its source in Turkey, Scripture identifies it with Mesopotamia (Iraq today) not Turkey. Likewise, although the source of the river Nile is not in Egypt, Scripture identifies the river with Egypt. It should also be noted that Rev. 16:13 does not actually say that John saw 3 frogs. He saw “3 unclean spirits” which he likened to frogs. He did not necessarily say they were “like frogs” because they had the same or similar physical shape and form, but because their action and movement, as they came out of the mouths of the dragon, beast and false prophet, and out into the world, was a leaping action like frogs, not a dribbling or darting action.

This could be compared with the reference in Matt. 3:16 to “the Spirit of God descending like a dove.” The Holy Spirit clearly descended in a bodily shape, and the action of descent was like the flight action of a dove. It does not necessarily mean that the Spirit of God actually turned into a dove, or the shape of a dove. It was the action of descent that was like a dove, not the bodily shape.

The frog is a clever little chap. He can hop from pond to pond with ease, and change colour to match his environment. He can ooze a protective slime when threatened, multiply rapidly and has a voracious appetite for lesser fry around him. Frogs cluster for support of their kind.

It is not difficult to relate this to the movements and actions of the anti-Semitic spirit which is signified by the unclean spirits. Once it starts, it hops from point to point with ease, gaining support and multiplying rapidly, and has a voracious appetite. It devoured 6 million Jews in a few years during the second world war alone!

INSANE PROPAGANDA

After the river Nile was turned into blood, Moses brought forth frogs by the power of God, and the magicians did so too with their enchantments, purporting to perform the same miracle. In Rev. 16:13-14 however, the frog-like spirits themselves perform the “miracles.” They go forth into the whole world after coming out of the mouth of the dragon etc. In Exodus, the miracle involved the frogs coming out of the river into the houses of the Egyptians.

Regarding the reference to “unclean spirits:” In the New Testament, unclean spirits are synonymous with demons and usually relate to mental derangement, madness, insanity (Mk. 5:2, 15 etc). In Rev. 16, the frogs are symbolic and a personification of this, as in Matt. 12:43 where an evil spirit is depicted going out of a man and walking about. (Under the law, frogs were unclean and unholy).

(The word “spirit” can also signify teaching: Jn. 6:63. 2 Cor. 11:4. 2 Thes. 2:2. 1 Tim. 4:1. 2 Tim. 1:7. 1 Jn. 4:1).

The fact that the frog-like-spirits come out of the “mouth” of the dragon, beast and false prophet, indicates that they signify speech, utterances, messages - insane, unholy propaganda. For other examples of an emanation from the mouth being symbolic, see Rev. 1:16 and 19:15 where a sword is depicted coming out of Christ’s mouth. Rev. 9:17-19 refers to fire coming out of horses’ mouths. In Rev. 11:5 fire comes out of the mouths of the 2 witnesses. Rev. 12:15-16 says a flood of water comes out of the dragon’s mouth. Rev. 13:2- refers to the mouth of a lion speaking great things and blasphemies.

That the unclean spirits represent mad or insane propaganda, is indicated in Rev. 16:14- where it is revealed that they go out simultaneously into the whole world and incite the nations to invade Israel, resulting in conflict with the Lord at the battle of Armageddon. Nothing could be madder than that!

In the nuclear age, world peace has been maintained mainly by the threat of “mutual assured destruction” i.e. “m.a.d.” as it is abbreviated. It will truly be madness to invade and attack Israel in view of her being a nuclear power, but madder still in view of God’s promise in the Word of prophecy to intervene and destroy the enemy with terrible judgements at the battle of Armageddon.

The rantings and ragings of Hitler’s war propaganda and his anti-Semitic policy could be compared with the croakings of the frog-like spirits. It has been said that Hitler was insane, possessed by a demon

which emanated from his mouth when he breathed out his racial hatred and incited the nations into war. It is incredible that in spite of the pain inflicted by the first 5 vials, that the beast and his cohorts still resist God and plan to attack His people Israel. Such madness was also manifested by Pharaoh who, in spite of Egypt being devastated by the plagues and all the first born killed; called his troops together and mobilized his army to attack Israel.

Frogs of course, are known for jumping in unpredictable directions! Propaganda for war is like that, as war-mongers hop and jump from nation to nation seeking confederates and croaking for support. Jer. 25:32 speaks of “evil going forth from nation to nation” and this seems to be what the frog-like spirits signify. “Declare a holy war” (jihad) they proclaim among the nations. “Arouse the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near; let them come up (to Jerusalem). Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves and come all you nations and gather yourselves there ... to the valley of Jehoshaphat ...” (Joel 3:9-).

Because one unclean spirit is assigned to each of the 3 beasts, and all 3 go out simultaneously into the world for the same purpose; this indicates that the beasts are contemporary end time powers, and although an incompatible trio, they are united in their cause, which is to invade and destroy Israel. The anti-Semitic “spirit” which motivates them does not need to be attributed to the French revolution. Many nations have been anti-Israel and have invaded Israel long before the French revolution!

THE SPIRITS OF DEMONS

Rev. 16:14 says the frogs signify “the spirits of demons.” The word “of” means “out of” or “from.” The spirits therefore come out of demons. But, if demons themselves are evil spirits, how could unclean spirits come out of them? Are evil spirits possessed by evil spirits? Do demons possess demons?

The fact that verse 13 says the frog-like spirits come out of the dragon, beast and false prophet; and then states in v14 that they come out of demons; implies that the dragon, beast and false prophet are the demons! Elsewhere the dragon is called devil and satan (Rev. 12:9), so it is not surprising that he and those who share his anti-Israel policy and speak like him, are called demons.

In the New Testament, the word “demon” is not only applied to whatever causes insanity, but is also applied to those who become insane.

An example of this can be seen in Mk. 3:11 where we read about “unclean spirits” (demons) when they saw Jesus, fell down before him, and cried, saying: “thou art the son of God.” Here, the “unclean spirits” clearly refer to the people themselves who were possessed. How else could it be explained that they “fell down” and “cried out”?

Another example can be seen in Jam. 2:19 where it is said: “The demons also believe and tremble.” The word “tremble” means to quiver or shake physically. It is a physical phenomenon and the experience requires a body. If demons are disembodied, immaterial and invisible, i.e. entities that have no body and cannot be seen, then how can they tremble or be seen to be trembling? James is obviously referring to the people themselves who were possessed by demons, such as we read in Mk. 3:11 where reference is made to demons falling down in front of Jesus, crying out to him, confessing him to be the son of God, no doubt trembling as they did so.

Mk. 5:7 also records how a demoniac flung himself down at the feet of Jesus, and cried with a loud voice (probably trembling as he did so), saying: “What do you want with me, Jesus, thou son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” This demoniac, and others, believed in God, and this is what James refers to when he says: “The demons believe and tremble.”

The close association between a demoniac and demon can also be seen in some modern translations of Matt. 17:18 which, instead of saying Jesus rebuked the demon, say instead that he rebuked the demoniac himself.

Also consider Lk. 11:14: “And Jesus was casting out a demon, and it was dumb.” Or, as Mk. 9:17 puts it: “And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought to you my son who has a dumb spirit.” The passage in Lk. 11 continues, saying: “And it came to pass, when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke.” In these verses, both the demoniac and demon are referred to as being “dumb,” i.e. unable to speak, usually due to being born deaf.

It was clearly the demoniac himself who was dumb. The principle of metonymy is involved in the reference to a dumb demon.

A similar principle is illustrated in 1 Jn. 4:1-3 which reads: “Beloved, believe not every spirit ... because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Here, “spirit” refers to the false prophet. It then goes on to say: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” This refers to the true Christian confession. Such a confession requires a mouth, tongue, throat and voice. It is the Christian himself, of

course, who makes the confession.

The same connection between “false prophets” and “spirit” can also be seen in Ezk. 13:1-3. These verses refer to the foolish false prophets who prophesy out of their own heart and “follow their own spirit.” Their false teaching and lying propaganda could very well be expressed in terms of an unclean spirit coming out of their mouth. This is particularly relevant to the unclean spirit coming out of the mouth of the false prophet in Rev. 16.

WORKING MIRACLES TO GATHER

Rev. 16:14 refers to the spirits of demons “working miracles,” going forth to the kings of the whole world to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. As we have seen in Rev. 13:11-, reference is made in particular to the false prophet performing great wonders, to promote worship of the beast. (Also Rev. 19:20). The wonders or miracles are not of course genuine, but “lying (pseudo) wonders,” as we read in 2 Thes. 2:9, designed to deceive and lead astray, if possible, the very elect (Matt. 24:24). The kings (leaders) of the whole world will be conned by both the propaganda and the performance of the so-called miracles that accompanies it. The “kings” can be linked with those referred to in Rev. 6:15. 17:2, 12, 18. 18:3, 9. 19:18-19. 21:24.

These kings will be conned into gathering their armies “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” (“The great day of His wrath” - Rev. 6:17). The reference in Rev. 16:16 to them gathering together to a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon, reveals that the battle of that great day of God Almighty in v14 is the battle of Armageddon. The aspect of nations being “gathered” for this battle is emphasized in a number of Scriptures. See Rev. 14:18-19. 19:17-19. Isa. 66:18. Joel 3:2, 11. Mic. 4:11-. Zech. 14:1. (Ezk. 38:4). Reference is also made in Rev. 20 to the dragon manifesting madness at the end of the millennium by going out to deceive the nations into gathering themselves for battle in the land of Israel.

BEHOLD, I COME AS A THIEF

We now come to Rev. 16:15 which reads: “Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” We have here a sudden but timely warning to put all on their guard. It is one of the 318 verses in the New

Testament which proclaims the second coming of Christ.

It is clear from the context of the statement that the drying up of the river Euphrates and the going forth of the 3 unclean spirits is a prelude to the second coming and Armageddon. The New English Bible captures this by saying: "That is the day when I come like a thief." Placing this statement in the midst of the prophecy of the gathering of the nations for the battle of Armageddon, indicates that the going forth of the 3 unclean spirits to bring about this gathering is an end time event, and not something that started happening over 200 years before as a result of the French revolution.

Jesus says he comes "as a thief," but this will only apply to those like the dragon, beast and false prophet who will not be expecting him. The church at Sardis was therefore warned: "If you do not stay awake and alert, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I come upon you" (Rev. 3:3). Again in Matt. 24:42-44 Jesus is recorded as saying: "Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord will come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh." Also see 2 Pet. 3:1-10.

When writing to the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 5), Paul reminded the church that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night to those who will be rejected. However, as far as those who are living in the light of the Lord are concerned, who remain spiritually alert and active; Paul says: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." He explains why in the first verse: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you."

Those who live in the light and are enlightened by the prophetic word which is "like a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19), will be familiar with the signs of the return of Christ and will be ready and waiting for him. They will recognize the rise of the dragon, beast and false prophet, and will discern the fulfilment of the 3 unclean spirits going forth to gather the nations for the battle of Armageddon. The second coming will therefore not overtake them like a thief in the night, and neither will false teachers be able to con them into believing that Jesus has returned before the time! This is why the apostle Paul told the Christians at Thessalonica that Jesus would not return until the man of sin (the beast) is revealed (2 Thes. 2). Although his coming will not be as a thief to those ready and waiting for him, he will nevertheless "steal" them away! (1 Thes. 4:17).

No mention is actually made of the judgement of the saints in Rev. 16:15, but it is mentioned in Rev. 11:18-19, and alluded to in Rev. 14:14-16. (Rev. 14:17-20 refers to the judgements of the seventh vial).

BLESSED IS HE WHO WATCHES AND KEEPS HIS GARMENTS

The words: “blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments” is one of 7 benedictions in the book of Revelation. The other 6 are: Rev. 1:3. 14:13. 19:9. 20:6. 22:7, 14. The benediction under consideration in Rev. 16:15 calls to mind the words of the angel to Daniel: “Blessed is he who waits and watches and comes to the 1,335 days” (Dan. 12:12).

The reference to him who “keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame,” seems to be an allusion to a temple practise in New Testament times. According to the Talmud, it was the custom of the superintending priest of the temple to do the rounds each night, visiting the post of each guard who was acting as a watchman. Torches were carried before him and if he found a priest asleep instead of watching, he was beaten with a stick, stripped of his priestly garment, made naked and bare, and his garment was burnt. He was left to get home as best he could, exposing his shame. This Jewish custom seems to be the basis of the figure in Rev. 16:15.

Those who belong to Christ have “put on Christ,” being clothed with his righteousness and the garments of his salvation (Ps. 132:9. Isa. 61:10). When Adam and Eve sinned, they felt naked and ashamed, and blood had to be shed in order for them to be covered with garments made out of animals’ skins. By this means their sins were forgiven and they were reconciled to God, being restored to peace and fellowship with him.

Likewise, those who sin by ceasing to keep a watchful eye out for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who discard their garment of righteousness by turning back to the unrighteousness and darkness of the world; become “naked,” and the shame of this is seen by those with spiritual discernment. For this reason, Jesus referred to the worldly materialistic Christians in the church at Laodicea as being “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.” He said: “I counsel you to buy from me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness cannot be seen ...” (Rev. 3:17-18).

Those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ are expected to live righteously and perform righteous deeds. For this reason the “fine

linen, clean and white” with which John saw the bride of Christ clothed in Rev. 19:8, is explained to signify “the righteous deeds of the saints.” Such righteous living requires being ever watchful, vigilant and alert to sin that easily besets us, and the ungodly forces and influences in the world which challenge and attack us; seeking to knock down our walls of defence in order to invade our life, occupy our hearts and minds, and conform us to its carnal worldly ways. Failure to keep the coming of the Lord in view, results in a failure to remain sensitive towards the anti-forces. This leads to becoming apathetic, complacent and compromising; resulting in falling into a spiritual slumber and sleep which is the position of those to whom the coming of the Lord will be like a thief in the night.

The words of exhortation in Rev. 16:15 are unmistakably linked with the words of exhortation and admonition quoted before, which were addressed to the church at Sardis and Laodicea. The first part of Rev. 16:15: “Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments,” links up with the message given to Sardis which reads: “Be watchful ... if you shall not watch, I will come on you like a thief ... thou hast a few names ... which have not defiled their garments” (3:2-4).

The second part of Rev. 16:15 says: “lest he walk naked, and they see his shame,” and this links up with the message given to Laodicea which reads: “I counsel you to buy of me ... white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear” (3:18).

In these two passages there is an obvious overlap; the theme of the garments ties the 2 together. But the similarities between them go deeper than this. Of the 7 churches addressed, Sardis and Laodicea stand out as 2 of a kind. Both were characterized as hypocritical and apathetic. Of Sardis the Lord says: “You have a name that you live, and are dead.” And of Laodicea the Lord says: “You say I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”

These churches had degenerated into apathy and self-satisfaction. They were grossly materialistic, over preoccupied with money, going through the motions and acting out spirituality; but their heart was not in it. It was all just a hypocritical facade.

This naturally raises the question: why did Jesus draw upon the messages to Sardis and Laodicea for his exhortation to the end time church? Was it because he knew that prior to the second coming of Christ, the church would be in a similar state?

PARALLELS WITH THE EXODUS

In view of the parallels that can be drawn between the plagues that fell upon Egypt and the plagues in Rev. 16, the exhortation in Rev. 16:15 prior to the seventh and last plague, to “watch” and “keep your garments” surely parallels with the account in Exodus. During the night of the Passover, prior to the last plague that fell upon Egypt, God’s people were required to be clothed with their garments and to be watching. Ex. 12:42 in the R.S.V. says: “ ... this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel.” The reference to being clothed is in Ex. 12:11. Those who refused to comply with these requirements of the Lord would have failed to be part of the company that was delivered from Egypt and headed for the promised land. They would have been left behind, as will all who refuse to heed the warning in Rev. 16:15. Therefore, unlike exhortations elsewhere to keep the garments “clean” and “unspotted,” the exhortation here is to keep the garments “on.” In a parable recorded in Matt. 22:11-14 Jesus warned of the fate of those who “have not on a wedding garment” when he returns: he will say to his servants: “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Their fate will be similar to the harlot in Rev. 17:16 who will be “made desolate and naked” and whose flesh will be burned with fire.

ARMAGEDDON

Rev. 16:14 refers to the nations being gathered “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” Verse 16 refers to the place where they will be gathered to battle: “A place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” And the battle itself is referred to in Rev. 19:19-21.

In Rev. 16:16 the A.V. says “He gathered them ..,” but it should read “they gathered them.” “They” refers to the unclean spirits that leap like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, beast and false prophet (v14). They are the instruments used by God to draw all nations to the battle of Armageddon.

Rev. 16 is the only place in the Bible where the word Armageddon occurs, and there are several points to notice about it. This passage of Scripture tells us where, why and when it occurs.

Verse 14 tells us why it takes place. The purpose is for battle; not the usual battle between nations, but a battle in which God Himself will be directly involved and engaged: “The battle of the great day of God

Almighty.” It is a war in which God fights against nations - a day of reckoning for nations - a day of judgement. It will be the mother of all battles - the war that will end all wars!

Verse 15 tells us when Armageddon takes place: at the time when Jesus will “come as a thief,” which is the time of his second coming.

Verse 15 also indicates where Armageddon takes place: in the land where the Hebrew language is spoken.

Hebrew is the language spoken by Israel, the language in which the Scriptures were originally written. Israel, the land of the Bible, is without a doubt the geographical location of the battle of God Almighty. This is the land to which the nations will ultimately be gathered for an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Many prophecies refer to this. Some of the major ones are: Ezk. 38. Dan. 11:40-. Joel. Zech. 12 to 14. Mic. 4:11-13. Although the name “Armageddon” does not occur in these chapters, they relate to the same battle and have the same points in common with the passage in Rev. 16. They all teach that the battle takes place in the land of Israel, at the time of the coming of Messiah, involving divine intervention and judgement.

Many authorities say Armageddon (“Har-megiddon” in Hebrew), means mountain of Megiddo, which has a commanding view of the long and fertile valley of Jezreel. The mountain at Megiddo is a mound or hill, which is what is often signified by the word mountain in the Bible.

Some have linked Armageddon with “the valley of Megiddon” in 1 Chr. 35:22, Zech. 12:11, which is a large plain known as the plain of Esdraelon, near the mound of Megiddo in northern Israel. It is south west of the Sea of Galilee, about 25 kilometres inland from the Mediterranean Sea, and about 90 kilometres north of Jerusalem. Many notable battles have taken place there in the past. It has been one of God’s great battle grounds for the judging of the armies of the wicked. There Barak defeated the Canaanite armies of Jabin with their 900 chariots of iron. There the Midianites and Amalekites and children of the east were routed before Gideon and his 300 men. There Saul and Josiah both met their deaths. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Christian crusaders, Egyptians, Persians, Turks and Arabs, have pitched their tents in the valley of Megiddo. Napoleon Bonaparte is said to have stated after his first sight of this valley: “This is the ideal battleground for all the armies of the world.”

Zech. 12:11 compares the mourning of grief and sorrow over king Josiah who was killed in battle at Megiddo with the mourning of repentance that will take place as a result of the victory gained in the battle of Armageddon by king Jesus!

Connecting Armageddon with Megiddo has led many to the conclusion that the area of Megiddo will be the location and scene of the great battle of Armageddon, and much attention has been focussed on this geographical area. But this view creates some problems. Firstly, it is impossible to conceive of “the kings of the whole world” (16:14) being able to fit into the limited area of Megiddo with their armies to engage in battle. Ezk. 38:9 says the invading forces will be like a cloud to cover the land. Joel 3:14 says there shall be “multitudes, multitudes,” and it seems that the army of two hundred million referred to in Rev. 9:16 reveals the number that will be involved.

The second problem is that the general consensus of the teaching of the prophecies concerning the end time invasion of Israel, is that Jerusalem is the geographical centre of the battle, due to the invasion forces being gathered there, for which reason this area is also the focal centre of Christ’s return. (Ezk. 39:11. Dan. 11:45. Joel 2:9, 20, 32. 3:2, 12, 16-17. Zech. 12. and 14).

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ON ARMAGEDDON

In view of this, several suggestions can be offered. For example: Armageddon is not to be understood in a geographical sense but symbolical. Conjectural derivations from the Hebrew word such as “har migdo” have been suggested by some, which is said to mean “his fruitful mountain” and is applied to Jerusalem. But Armageddon is “har-megiddon” not “har-migdo.”

Others see Armageddon as designating not so much a place but an occasion - an occasion involving destruction. This is affirmed on the basis that the Hebrew word “harma” means destruction. However, as already pointed out, Armageddon in Hebrew is “har-megiddon” not “harma-.”

Another popular view is that the word Armageddon is compounded of 3 Hebrew words: “arma” which is derived from “arema” signifying “a heap of sheaves;” “ge” from “gai” a valley; and “don” from “dun” - judgement. On this basis it is said that Armageddon signifies “a heap of sheaves in a valley of judgement,” and describes the scene in Joel 3:12-14 which likens the judgement to a harvest. This is the passage which refers to the invading forces as “multitudes, multitudes in the valley of threshing” i.e. “the valley of Jehoshaphat.”

“Jehoshaphat” means “judgement of Yah,” and the valley is believed to be the valley of Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem. Joel 3:12 says it is there that the Lord will sit to judge all the nations. Hence, the command

will be given to “swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” (v13). As we have seen, the same scene is presented in Rev. 14:17-20.

So then, in the same way that “Sodom” in Rev. 11:8 is used symbolically to describe the moral and spiritual state of Jerusalem, not the geographical location of the original Sodom down in the Dead Sea area, some believe that Armageddon describes the end time battle at Jerusalem, not the geographical location of Megiddo in northern Israel which was notorious for battles in the past.

However, in reply to this, it should be pointed out that Rev. 16:16 does quite specifically state that Armageddon is “a place.” The Greek word for “place” is “topos” and means a location. “Topography” is derived from it and relates to the physical features of a region. The word has very much to do with physical geographical location.

Viewed in this light, there are several ways of looking at Rev. 16:14-16.

1. The reference in v14 to the nations being gathered to “the battle of that great day of God Almighty,” refers to the battle at Jerusalem. But the gathering to “Armageddon” in v16 refers to a gathering of forces to the area of Megiddo prior to, and in preparation for the battle at Jerusalem. Rev. 16:16 does not actually say that the battle takes place at Armageddon (Megiddo). It is verse 14 which refers to the battle and it has been assumed that it occurs at the place called Armageddon in v16.

Megiddo could therefore simply be the staging area for the armies. Or, because Rev. 16:14 only refers to the kings of the world being gathered, and makes no mention of their armies, perhaps Megiddo will be the “staging ground” from which they control and direct their troops in their attack against Jerusalem.

2. According to Ezk. 38:9, the invading forces will cover the land of Israel and it is not difficult to imagine this if there are two hundred million of them. According to Rev. 14:20, the judgement of God against the enemy will cause the blood shed to extend from the city of Jerusalem for a distance of 330 kilometres, which would encompass northern Israel, including the area of Megiddo. Jerusalem will be the vortex of the judgement, but the forces of the enemy will be spread out well beyond the city throughout the land.

Even Joel 2:20 implies that there will be forces stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea. The fact that Isa. 63:1- teaches that the Lord will be attacking and destroying the enemy on the other side of the Dead Sea as He heads to Jerusalem, indicates that the forces will extend that far. The divine judgement will clearly not be confined to the

area of Jerusalem. Wherever the forces of the enemy are, including the northern area of Megiddo, the wrath of God will fall as He goes into battle.

THE SEVENTH VIAL

“**A**nd the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, it is done ...” (Rev. 16:17).

As a result of this last vial being poured out into the air, there were voices, thunders, lightnings, a great earthquake and great hail, the weight of a talent” (v18-21). It is not difficult to see a connection between the “air” into which the vial is poured, and the thunders, lightnings and hail. But what connection could there be between the air and an earthquake? Earthquakes are generally caused by the earth itself - by the movement of its platelets. Could it be that this particular earthquake will be caused by an asteroid hurtling down through the air upon the earth?

Verse 18 says: “There was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.” These words: “great ... mighty ... great ... such as was not since men were upon the earth,” make it obvious that it will be a massive earthquake of titanic proportions, unprecedented and unparalleled in magnitude in world history. It will cause cities of the nations throughout the world to fall, islands to sink and disappear, and mountains to crumble and tumble into valleys.

The A.V. says: “And every island fled.” The same Greek word translated “fled” also occurs in Rev. 9:6. 12:6. 20:11. It means vanished, disappeared. The islands do this either as a result of sinking into the sea or as a result of the sea rising up over them (which it could do in the event of an asteroid plunging into the ocean). This calls to mind Rev. 6:14: “Every mountain and island were moved out of their place.” Also see Ezk. 38:20. Isa. 2:14. 40:4. Nah. 1:5-6.

Other references to earthquakes in the book of Revelation are 8:5. 11:13, 19. Also see: Isa. 2:10-22. 24:1, 19 to 21. Ezk. 38:19-20. Joel 3:16. Hag. 2:6-7. (Heb. 12:26-27). Zech. 14.

This prophecy in Rev. 16 which refers to the cities of the nations falling; covers London, New York, Paris etc, and represents the end of the present civilization and all it stands for in all parts of the world. This is all part of the process that leads to the renovation and renewal of the earth. Like old wineskins or garments, the cities have to be discarded in

preparation for the new order of God's kingdom. In view of the reinforcing steel that goes into buildings today, the earthquake will obviously be exceedingly violent to cause them to fall all around the world. The needle on the Richter scale will probably jump off the paper!

Other Scriptures that could be relevant to the destruction of the cities are: Isa. 25:2. 26:5. 30:25. 54:3.

The earthquake predicted in Rev. 16 and the other end time prophecies is hardly the slip of a geological fault. It is either the effect of a "grand slam" collision with, and impact of an asteroid; or a mighty phenomenon which engages the very bowels of the earth and causes the whole surface of the globe to slip around on its foundations. By His mighty power, God could employ any of these methods to cause the great shake-up, not to mention others, causing the whole topography of the planet to be changed. It will no doubt be during this upheaval that Zion will be heaved up, the Mount of Olives split in half, and the surrounding country of Judea levelled into a plain, as prophesied in Zech. 14.

Back in 1883, as a result of volcanic eruptions and a sebaceous earthquake at Java; a tract of country 83 kilometres square, containing a range of mountains 108 kilometres in length; sunk below the level of the ocean, whose waters rushed in and covered all that space. Islands also in the adjacent straits of Sunda disappeared. Such events provide a glimpse of the effects of the end time earthquake.

GREAT HAILSTONES

Because the sixth vial brought about the gathering of the nations to the land of Israel for the battle of Armageddon, it seems reasonable to conclude that the nations will be in Israel when the judgements of the seventh vial are poured out. The reference in Ezk. 38:19-23 to "a great shaking in the land of Israel ... the mountains shall be thrown down," and "great hailstones" etc, confirms this.

Amazingly enough, the actual weight of the "great hail" that will fall during the seventh vial is given: "Every stone is about the weight of a talent." Authorities differ regarding the weight of a talent. Estimates range from 90 to 135 pounds, but even 90 pounds would eclipse all descriptions of hail in the past. This is hail of terrifying proportions that would have devastating effects. It is hard to conceive of hailstones that large and heavy.

Hail is caused by rising convection currents of air, caused by some instability in the atmosphere. Heavy clouds result and the raindrops are

carried upward by the currents, freezing in the cooling air. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that 2 or more such stones may be cemented together until they assume large properties and may reach 75 or 100 cms (3 or 4 inches) in diameter and a ½ kg (1 lb) or more in weight, and states that such masses are capable of inflicting considerable damage.

It should be kept in mind, even if we wish to explain these without any recourse to the special, creative power of God, that the verses in Rev. 16 which precede the reference to hail, refer to disturbances which could readily account for such a phenomenon. With islands drifting or disappearing; with mountain ranges sinking into the earth; there would be released, most probably, currents of rising air which would bear such masses of condensing clouds aloft, that stones of the size mentioned in Rev. 16 could easily become possible.

But we do not have to stop to consider the natural possibilities of the judgement phenomena. The power of the Creator by which the creation was made, and by which it is upheld, is sufficient explanation for all of these wonders. And it is He who says: "Have you seen the storehouse of the hail which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?" (Job. 38:22-23).

Other references to hail in the book of Revelation are: 8:7. 11:19; and references to God using hail as an agent of judgement can be seen in: Ex. 9:18-. Josh. 10:11. Ps. 18:12-13. (Isa. 28:2, 17). 30:30. 32:18-19. Ezk. 38:22.

IT IS DONE

When the seventh angel poured out his vial, a great voice came out of the temple "from the throne."

Throughout the book of Revelation, there are references to a voice or voices coming "from heaven," "out of the temple," "in the midst of the 4 living creatures," "from the 4 horns of the altar," "round about the throne," "before the throne." Rev. 16:17 however, is the first reference to a voice coming from the throne. In spite of the many references to voices in Revelation, only on 2 occasions is reference made to a voice coming from the throne. The second occasion is in 19:5.

It would be easy to conclude that it must refer to the voice of God Himself. Not necessarily. Rev. 19:5 reads like this: "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." This is clearly not the voice of God speaking, but the voice of one who praises God. It is probably the voice of one of

the 4 living creatures, who have loud voices like thunder, and who are “in the midst of the throne” (Rev. 4:6). Their voice would therefore come from the throne.

In Rev. 16:17 the voice says: “It is done.” This is generally taken to mean that the seventh vial finishes and brings to a completion the wrath and judgements of God. It was stated back in Rev. 15:1, 8 that the 7 vials are the “last plagues” and that God’s wrath is fulfilled and completed by them. They clearly signal the consummation of His judgements, at the end of which His divine fury will be satisfied.

It is said in Rev. 10:7 that in the days of the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God will be finished. The fact that we find it completed with the seventh vial confirms that the 7 vials pertain to the seventh trumpet period. As mentioned earlier: the 7 vials are God’s “wrath” that “is come” at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-18).

Of course, all the judgements of the seventh vial are not immediately fulfilled the moment the angel pours out the vial. The words “it is done” in reality mean “it is as good as done.” The outcome was so sure and inevitable, it was spoken of in terms of already being accomplished. The same word is translated “be done,” i.e. “shortly be done” in Rev. 22:6. Also see 21:6.

Can we sense relief and satisfaction in the words “it is done,” as in the case of Jesus, who, having executed judgement upon sin, the prince of the world, exclaimed “It is finished?” (Jn. 19:30). The whole of heaven will surely be pleased to see the last vial poured out, and the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ!

After saying “It is done,” “there were voices, thunders and lightnings ...” These now familiar words have marked the end of 4 sequences in the book of Revelation and now once more indicate the conclusion of a series. They are typical of every seventh statement of intent given in heaven; each time the statement is made, the judgements increase in severity.

1. The seventh letter. At the conclusion of the 7 letters to the churches, reference is made to voices, thunderings and lightnings (4:5).

2. The seventh seal. Voices, thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake (8:5).

3. The seventh trumpet. Voices, thunderings, lightnings, an earthquake and great hail (11:19).

4. The seventh vial. Voices, thunderings, lightnings, a mighty earthquake and great hail (16:18).

THE GREAT CITY DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS

As a result of the great and mighty earthquake such as was not since men were upon the earth, “the great city was divided into 3 parts, and the cities of the nations fell.”

It will be recalled that the trumpets are characterized by the frequent repetition of the phrase “one third of ...” or “the third part of ...” In the vials however, nothing corresponds to this, with the possible exception of this reference to the great city being divided into 3 parts. But even here it is evident that all 3 parts are involved in judgement.

Regarding the reference to “the great city” which is divided into 3 parts: Bible students are divided as to whether it refers to Jerusalem or Rome (Babylon). Jerusalem is referred to as “the great city” in Rev. 11:8, and those who believe that this is the city referred to in Rev. 16:19, argue that although it is not mentioned by name here, it is so clearly distinguished from “the cities of the nations” that there can be no doubt that it is Jerusalem.

Being divided into 3 parts is seen as the moment of the fulfilment of several prophecies concerning geographical changes in Jerusalem. The earthquake in Rev. 11:13 which caused the tenth part of the city to fall, and killed 7,000 is seen as a precursor to the great and mighty earthquake in Rev. 16.

It is believed that this last earthquake which splits the Mount of Olives in half, and elevates Zion; also at the same time divides the city into 3 parts. The shock waves that go out from the vortex of this earthquake, level the cities of the nations.

However, Babylon (Rome) is also referred to as “the great city” in Rev. 14:8 (A.V.), 17:18, and the fact that after referring to “the great city,” Rev. 16:19 then goes on to refer to “great Babylon,” has caused some to conclude that the reference is to Babylon.

As we shall see in Rev. 17, the beast destroys Rome (including the Vatican) with fire when he gets her off his back and comes to power. Because the vials in Rev. 16 are God’s judgements on the beast, the city of Rome must have been destroyed before hand. If so, how do we explain the judgement upon the city during the seventh vial? It can be seen as God Himself personally putting His seal on Rome’s destruction by convulsing the ground of the ruined city and breaking it apart, resulting in volcanic smoke billowing up forever and ever (Rev. 19:1-3), making it desolate and uninhabitable. This could be likened to an army destroying a city with fire, then later ploughing up the site, such as the Romans did to Jerusalem

(Mic. 3:12). Significantly enough, there is no reference to people being killed in Rev. 16:19 when the earthquake divides the great city into 3 parts. This would make sense if it applied to Rome because the beast had already killed them with fire.

Regarding the 3 parts into which the city is to be divided, an article written by Henry Islip is interesting:

“It seems to me to be not without significance that God has put 3 volcanoes - Stromboli, Etna and Vesuvius - in Italy. Could the eruption of these 3 mountains bring about the dividing of the city into 3 parts? In effect it means the thorough destruction of the Vatican and Italy, and of course the Pope ...”

“It is an accepted fact that there is an earth fault completely encircling the globe, and I believe this will be opened up, triggered off by the eruption in Italy, and will cause the cities of the nations to fall, as also mentioned in Rev. 16:19.

“I recently went to an open day at the university where my daughter was attending, and in the geology room there was a working model of a volcano, and a relief map of the world tracing this fault. Significantly, it goes right under the Mount of Olives. I asked the professor in charge, “What would happen if the Mount of Olives split in two?” He dismissed the prospect as an impossibility, but when pressed, said: “There wouldn’t be a two-story building standing anywhere in the world. Coupled with this there would be tidal waves of immeasurable intensity and, what would be even more devastating, the 50 known active volcanoes which are placed on the fault would erupt, and there would be 50 Krakatoas going off at one time. The whole concept is too fantastic to contemplate.”

MEN BLASPHEMED

Talking about concepts too fantastic to contemplate: the last verse in Rev. 16 concludes with a statement that fits into this category. It informs us that despite the great hail that fell out of heaven, not to mention the great earthquake; men still blasphemed God and refused to repent. It is hard to believe that men could be so stubbornly and incorrigibly rebellious and continue to defy God in the face of such disaster. Under the law, blasphemers were stoned to death. How appropriate that hailstones are cast upon them. God is seen upholding His law!



CHAPTER FOURTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In v19 of the preceding chapter and v8 of chapter 14, brief mention was made of Babylon and her judgement. The Spirit now picks up on this subject and gives much more detail.

The chapter commences with these words: “And there came one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, come hither, and I will show you the judgement of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.”

Some say the words “who had” are to be understood in the past tense, while others say they are to be understood in the present tense; meaning the angel still had the vial in his hand. Reference is also made in Rev. 21:9 to “one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials full of the 7 last plagues,” coming and talking to John saying: “Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

We are not told which one of the 7 vial-bearing angels it was who appeared to John on these occasions, but it would not be surprising if it was the same one. Certainly, the words: “Come hither, I will show you” are the same on both occasions.

It is not likely that the angel would take John to see the bride of Christ while carrying a vial full of the wrath of God. It seems reasonable to assume the vial would be empty. If so, why is the angel still carrying it? Probably to identify him with the angel in Rev. 17 who showed John the great whore. As we shall see, “the great whore” (harlot) is the apostate church, and “the bride” is the true church. It would be appropriate if it was the same angel who took John away in the Spirit in prophetic vision to see these 2 contrasting communities and their ultimate destiny.

The inseparable link between each community and their respective cities is also significant. As we shall see, the “great whore” is “a woman” and refers to a community of people, but in Rev. 17:18 we are told that “the woman ... is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” The great city is Rome, the power-base of the apostate church - the place of the throne of its “anointed one,” the “holy father” - the Pope.

Likewise, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” refers to a community of people. But after telling John that he would take him and show him this community, we read that the angel showed him “that great city, the holy Jerusalem,” which is the power-base of the true church -the place of the throne of Father God and His anointed one, Christ Jesus (Rev 22:1-3).

To conclude as many do, on this basis, that the city and the church

are one and the same thing, and that the city is not a literal city or separate and distinct entity; would be as unjustified as concluding that the city of Rome and the Roman Catholic church are one and the same thing, and that the city is not a separate and distinct entity.

Reference is made to 3 women in the book of Revelation, and they relate to 3 different communities. The woman in Rev. 12 refers to the Jewish community, the nation of Israel. The woman in Rev. 17 is the apostate church, and in Rev. 19:7 and 21:9 the “wife” is the true church.

In Rev. 17:1 the angel tells John that he is going to show him “the judgement” of the great whore. This states the main purpose of the vision. But before doing this, John has to be shown the great whore and be supplied with information about her to appreciate the need for her judgement. Most of chapter 17 is therefore taken up with a description of her. Specific reference to her judgement and the nature of it is not given until the last 2 verses, and most of chapter 18 is devoted to this theme.

THE GREAT WHORE

The woman in Rev. 17 is not merely referred to as a “whore,” but a “great whore,” which is a denigrating designation signifying excessive depravity. (The word “great” occurs repeatedly throughout Rev. 17 and 18, in relation to “great city,” “Babylon the great,” “great power,” “great riches” etc.)

The word “whore” is used 4 times in the book of Revelation in relation to this particular power or system (17:1, 15, 16, 19:2). Ten details delineate this woman:

1. “The great harlot.”
2. “That sitteth upon many waters.”
3. “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication.”
4. “And the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”
5. “A woman (in the wilderness) sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast.”
6. “Arrayed in purple and scarlet.”
7. “Bedecked with gold and precious stones.”
8. “Having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.”
9. “Upon her forehead was a name written, mystery, Babylon the great, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”
10. “Drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the

martyrs of Jesus.”

Even before we come to the angel’s interpretation of this vision, it is clear that we are not dealing with a literal female, for no one woman could commit fornication with the kings of the earth, nor could a single woman be “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs.”

The Greek word for “whore” is “porne,” and is translated “harlot” and “harlots” elsewhere in the New Testament: (Matt. 21:31-32. Lk. 15:30. 1 Cor. 6:15-16. Heb. 11:31. Jam. 2:25). It is also translated “harlots” in Rev. 17:5 where the great whore is referred to as “the mother of harlots.”

Other Greek words related to porne such as porneia, porneuo, pornos, have been translated “fornicator,” “fornication,” “whoremonger” in the New Testament, including Rev. 17:2, 4. Also see Rev. 18:3, 9. 19:2. 21:8. 22:15.

Most modern translations give “harlot” instead of “whore.” By definition a harlot is a once-pure woman who has fallen from her purity and become a prostitute. In the case of a married woman, she is unfaithful and disloyal to her husband by embracing other men. As such a harlot is offensive and repugnant to her husband; so is the great harlot to God.

SPIRITUAL FORNICATION

The word “whore” or “harlot” is used both literally and metaphorically in the Bible. In the Old Testament it is often used metaphorically of Israel to describe her apostasy. Harlotry is the standing symbol in the Word of God for false worship and devotion, particularly idolatry.

When people give their love, worship, energy and service for God to what is not God; or give their hearts and devotion to idols, systems, doctrines, rites, activities or administrations that have taken the place of what God has revealed and appointed; the Scriptures call it whoredom, adultery, fornication. The very essence of the Divine law is, that we love the Lord our God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength. Hence, the bestowal of worshipful affection on any other object, or the putting of anything whatever in the place of the true God, is, in the very nature of the case, a great spiritual harlotry; for it is the turning of the soul from the only legitimate object of its adoration, to take into its embrace that which has no right to such room and place in our lives. And as this woman in Rev. 17 is “the great harlot,” and the “mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth,” she must be the great embodiment, source, and representative of all idolatry, false doctrine and worship, and

perversion of the Word and ordinances of God. This helps to determine her character as the rival and antagonist of the true bride of Christ who she persecutes.

In a spiritual sense, Israel was God's "bride" or "wife," and God was her "husband." Israel was therefore expected to be faithful, loyal and true to God, by worshipping and adoring him alone, and not idols or other gods of the heathen nations surrounding her. She was expected to live by the revealed Word of God and obey its teachings, and not embrace the false doctrines and philosophies of the heathen that were contrary to, and astray from divine truth. As said before, let it be said again: to worship and adore idols and other gods instead of the One true God, and to embrace false doctrines and ordinances, is to commit spiritual fornication or adultery. (In Old Testament times, literal fornication was also involved and associated with the pagan fertility cults. They all had temple prostitutes; male and female, with whom the worshippers could copulate).

Not only did bowing before false gods and embracing teaching that was contrary to the Word of God constitute spiritual fornication and adultery, but so also did the entering into political union with nations and people of the world who were carnal and not in covenant relationship with God (and who usually worshipped other gods). Such political alliances ("marriages") were a violation of Israel's "marriage" to God, and made Israel a "harlot." To seek and embrace the support of other godless nations in time of need, instead of seeking God's support and trusting in Him, was also spiritual adultery. A truly spiritual church cannot enter into an alliance with a secular state or power. It would be like a believer marrying an unbeliever. To do this is to be "unequally yoked together" (2 Cor. 6:14). "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4).

The metaphorical use of the words "whore," "harlot," "fornication," "adultery," for the reasons given, is quite common in Scripture. See Ex. 34:12-17. Lev. 20:5. Deu. 31:16. Judg. 2:17. 2 Chr. 21:11. Isa. 1:21. 57:3-. Jer. 3:1-9. 9:1-2. 13:27. 23:10. Ezk. 16:15-16, 26 to 35. 20:27-32. Ch. 23. Hos. 1:2. 2:5. 4:10, 15. Mic. 1:7.

These Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the words are used in relation to the backsliding and apostacy of Israel, the Old Testament church. There are only 2 exceptions where this language is applied to Tyre and Nineveh in Isa. 23:17. and Nah. 3:4. On these occasions the reference to "fornication" and "whoredom" has an economic significance not religious, and relates to commercial intercourse - doing business with

worldly nations, motivated by a desire to get rich. Both Tyre and Nineveh were, at one stage, converted (1 Kng. 5. Jonah 3), but became corrupted by trade and power, and reverted to idolatry and an anti-Israel attitude (Ezk. 28:11-18. 26:1-2).

The church of the old covenant consisted almost entirely of the natural seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But the church of the new covenant consists of the spiritual seed of Abraham, i.e. people from all nations who have the same spirit of faith and obedience as Abraham, and have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Such are “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). And, in the same way that the old covenant Israel was God’s bride or wife, and God was her husband, so also is the new covenant Israel the bride, or prospective bride of Christ; and he is her prospective bridegroom or husband. See Jn. 3:29. 9:15. 25:1-. 2 Cor. 11:2. Eph. 5:31-32. Rev. 19:7-9. 21:9. 22:17.

It goes without saying that if the old covenant bride could be seduced, corrupted, apostatize, and become a “harlot;” so could the new covenant bride. The apostles were certainly aware of this and the Holy Spirit inspired them, not only to issue warnings about it, but also to actually predict that it would happen. See Act. 20:28-30. 2 Cor. 11:3-4. Gal. 3:1. 1 Tim. 4:1-2. 2 Tim. 3:1-8. 2 Pet. 2:1-. 1 Jn. 4:1. (Lk. 13:21?).

It should not come as a surprise therefore if the same metaphors used in Scripture to describe the apostacy of the old covenant church are also used to describe apostate Christianity. Such is the case in Rev. 17.

THE HARLOT’S IDENTITY

Regarding the identity of the harlot, 3 specific clues are given in Rev. 17.

Firstly, the power-base where the woman sits is described as “seven mountains” (v9).

Secondly, John was told that the woman signifies “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (v18).

Thirdly, the city is called “Babylon” (v5. 14:8. 16:19. 18:10, 21).

The “great city” that reigned over the kings of the earth in John’s day was none other than Rome, and the link between the 7 mountains and Rome is obvious and universally accepted. The name “Babylon” was also used in New Testament times to symbolize Rome, due to the fact that the Jews were in bondage to her as they had been to Babylon. For example, reference in 1 Pet. 5:13 to “the church that is at Babylon” is generally accepted as referring to Rome.

Eusebius, who lived from 260A.D. to 340 A.D. refers to this statement and says Peter refers to the city of Rome metaphorically as Babylon. (Vol. 1 pages 143-145). The plain references in Peter's epistle to persecution make it almost certain that it was written during the time of the emperor Nero. The reference to persecution in Rev. 17:6: "drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," along with the references in Rev. 18:20, 24 to shedding the blood of the holy apostles and prophets, although prophetic, were nevertheless appropriate at the time when revelation was first given, for Rome had been and was still persecuting the Christians.

The fact that the beast in Revelation relates to the end time, and the harlot is depicted sitting on him in Rev. 17:3, and is ultimately destroyed by him (v16), reveals that she does not represent the pagan or imperial Rome of the first century, but the Rome of the last century. Pagan Rome is represented as a beast - the fourth beast in Dan. 7:7, and the sixth head of the beast in Revelation, and as was pointed out in an earlier chapter, Rev. 17:10-11 teaches that the end time beast will be "an eighth head" - a revival, not of the sixth Roman head, but a revival of one of the 5 heads before it. It is evident from this that the beast in Rev. 17 upon which the harlot sits, cannot represent Rome. The harlot represents Rome. If she represented pagan Rome, she would be depicted as a beast, as in Dan. 7:7, not as a woman sitting on a beast and being destroyed by it.

Wild beasts in the Word of prophecy generally represent secular powers, not spiritual or ecclesiastical powers. (The beast in Rev. 13:11 is the only exception, but being lamb-like, it is not a wild beast in the normal sense of the word). As we have already seen, Scripture generally uses women to symbolize ecclesiastical powers. Therefore, when all the facts and details in Rev. 17 are taken into account, the identification of the harlot with Papal Rome seems as complete as a mathematical demonstration.

Rev. 17 is simply telling us that an apostate form of Christianity with its power-base in Rome, will rise to power; and it does not require a rocket scientist to work out the identity of this church. It is clearly the Roman Catholic church, but not this church alone in the end time; for we are told in Rev. 17:5 that she is the "mother of harlots." We are taught here that this "mother" has daughters who, like their mother, are also harlots. This refers to other church organizations in Christendom which have embraced many of the false doctrines and practises of the Roman Catholic church, who will become united with her in the end time, possibly due to the ecumenical movement, forming a world-wide super-

church that will be intolerant of, and will end up persecuting the true church which opposes it and refuses to join it.

Another pointer to Roman Catholicism as the apostate church is the reference to “forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats,” which are given as signs in 1 Tim. 4:1-3 of departure from the true Christian faith. “Forbidding to marry” is seen in the celibacy of priests and nuns which is demanded by the Roman Catholic system. “Commanding to abstain from meats” is seen in various abstinences imposed by the church upon the people, such as not eating meat on Fridays.

“Doctrines of devils” (demons) is also mentioned in 1 Tim. 4:1 as another sign of departure from the faith. This can be related to Roman Catholic doctrines of the devil and demons which they borrowed from the superstitious pagans and superimposed upon the Scriptures, involving grotesque and bizarre concepts that are totally foreign to the Word of God. They fit into the category of the “fables” referred to in 2 Tim. 4:3-4 that Paul said would be adopted by those who turn away from the truth.

THE ANTICHRIST

Another pointer to Roman Catholicism as the apostate church are the references to the “antichrist” in Scripture.

There has been a tendency in some circles to confuse the “man of sin” i.e. the “beast” with the antichrist. While it is true that the man of sin will be “antichrist” in the sense that he will not believe in Christ and will be opposed to those who claim allegiance to him; this is not the sense in which the title “antichrist” is used in the Bible.

The title occurs 5 times, all in the New Testament in the first and second epistles of John. The title does not occur in the book of Revelation.

A careful reading of these passages in John’s epistles reveals that “antichrist” refers to a body of people, not a specific individual. For example, 2 Jn. v7 says that “many deceivers are entered into the world ... this is an antichrist.” Many deceivers are involved in antichrist! “Now are there many antichrists” (1 Jn. 2:18).

1 Jn. 2:18-19 reveals that those who were antichrist once belonged to the New Testament church, but left. And the reason for leaving was due to adopting false doctrines concerning Christ. We are told in 1 Jn. 4:2-3 and 2 Jn. v7 that the false doctrine involved denying that Jesus came in “the flesh.” This does not mean they denied that Christ had come or that he had skin and was the son of God and Saviour of the world. No! They believed

all this, but denied that he came in “the flesh” in the Scriptural sense of partaking of the same mortal human nature of man that can be tempted and sin.

To deny he came in the flesh in this sense was to deny he was Abraham’s and David’s seed according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3. Gal. 3:16). This meant in principle, denying he was the Messiah (Christ), and to deny this was in effect to deny the Father who claimed to have sent him in the flesh (1 Jn. 2:22).

So their denial was not like Judaism’s denial which flatly denied that Jesus was the Messiah. No; they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but unwittingly denied him in principle by their failure to accept that he had the same mortal flesh as all other humans, which contains propensities towards sin, which tempt into sin, those who surrender and succumb to them.

Such a denial made a mockery of Christ’s mission which was to conquer sin in the flesh and nail it up on the cross in his own body of flesh (Rom. 8:3), for which reason he had to be “in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). For this reason he had to be conceived by a woman, so that he would be impregnated with human genes, and as a result experience the same desires.

But some so-called Christians started to find such a view of Christ dishonouring and degrading. They wanted to put him on a higher plane and exalt him above the human level. Ultimately, this led to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity which makes Jesus co-equal and co-eternal with his Father. And once Jesus was regarded as being equal with Father God, it had to be denied that he came in the same flesh as all other humans and was tempted with the same temptations, because God cannot be tempted (Jam. 1:13).

But this created a problem. It could not be denied that Jesus was conceived by Mary, and that in conception a woman with a flesh nature that has the potential to sin, will impregnate her child with the same nature. So, to overcome this, the Roman Catholic church invented the new and unbiblical doctrine of the immaculate conception, which is a gross misconception! This doctrine teaches that Mary was miraculously born immaculate and was therefore devoid of a flesh nature and all of its propensities towards sin. This enabled her to conceive and give birth to a son who did not inherit the same flesh and propensities as the fallen human race.

This put the capping stone on the antichrist movement and clearly identifies as antichrist the Roman Catholic church and all her “daughters”

throughout Christendom who have adopted from her the same doctrine.

It is “antichrist” because it creates a Christ who is different from the true Christ portrayed in the Scriptures. It results in preaching “another Jesus” (cp. 2 Cor. 11:1-4). This doctrine is antichrist because it makes a mockery of the Messiahship of Jesus. If Jesus did not partake of “sinful flesh,” he could not have overcome and defeated sin and nailed it upon the cross in his body of flesh. This would make a farce of his righteous sinless life, because anyone could live a sinless life if they had a nature like God that cannot be tempted or sin. Such a view undermines the virtue and merit of his obedient sinless life, and robs him of his moral glory as an overcomer. It turns the cross into an empty and hollow victory, making it a very artificial affair.

ASTRAY ON BASIC DOCTRINES

Basically then, “antichrist” represents a pseudo and corrupt form of Christianity that has gone astray on some very basic and fundamental doctrines of the Bible. No wonder the antichrist system is referred to in Rev. 17 as a harlot who blasphemes. A “harlot” in the case of a woman who is unfaithful to her husband, is the position of the pseudo church in relation to Christ, who is the bridegroom of the true church. To “blaspheme” is to “speak against,” and the pseudo church certainly does that in relation to the true doctrine of Christ. It is antagonistic towards all who do not subscribe to its Trinity doctrine.

As we shall see, Rev. 17 depicts the harlot causing people all over the earth to become drunk with her wine, which signifies befuddling people’s minds with her false teaching. Verse 5 says that upon her forehead is written the name, “Mystery, Babylon ...” The forehead represents the mind, and how true it is that there is a lot of “mystery” that cannot be explained or made sense of, in the teaching of that system, such as the doctrine of the Trinity which they openly confess to be a “blessed mystery,” and the doctrine of transubstantiation which claims the bread and wine literally and physically becomes the body and blood of Christ.

“Babylon” means confusion. What an apt description for such doctrines as the immaculate conception, infallibility of the Pope, the worship of Mary, saints and angels, not to mention the Trinity. It is totally confusing trying to make sense of a Father who is His own son and a son who is his own Father, who are supposed to be one and the same person. How could the son sit on the right hand of his Father, or pray to his Father if they are one and the same person? Confusion indeed!

Quite clearly then, “antichrist” refers to a pseudo form of Christianity, whereas the man of sin or beast is anti-Christianity. They refer to entirely different and mutually antagonistic systems. For this reason the beast destroys the harlot when he comes to power.

As the following list indicates, there are at least 35 areas of doctrine and practice in which Roman Catholicism has gone astray, indicating the extent of the apostacy:

1. Negative attitude towards personal study of the Scriptures.
2. The trinity.
3. The pre-existence of Christ.
4. The immaculate conception.
5. The immortality of the soul.
6. The fallen angel devil.
7. Hell.
8. .Purgatory.
9. The second coming of Christ
10. The millennium.
11. Infant sprinkling (Christening).
12. Clergy-laity distinction (a distinction between priests and people)
13. Confessional box.
14. Long robes and distinctive attire.
15. The Mass in Latin in non-Latin speaking countries.
16. The Eucharist. (Only the priests have the wine).
17. Transubstantiation.
18. Canonisation. (Only those selected by the church can be “saints”)
19. Celibacy.
20. Abstention from foods.
21. Observance of “holy days.”
22. Shaved heads of nuns.
23. Pope and priests addressed as “Father.”
24. Preference for Peter.
25. Papal infallibility.
26. Mariolatry (worship of Mary).
27. Mary’s perpetual virginity.
28. Monasticism and asceticism.
29. Indulgences.
30. Relics.
31. Images.
32. History of persecution.
33. History of anti-Semitism.

34. Involvement in war.
35. Involvement in politics.
(A book expounding these 35 points is available).

SITS UPON MANY WATERS

It is stated in Rev. 17:1 that the harlot “sits upon many waters.” This is one of a number of different descriptions given concerning the harlot. In v3 she is seen sitting upon a beast; in v9 she is referred to as sitting on 7 mountains, and she is also referred to in v3 as being in the wilderness.

All these descriptions are of course symbolic. Ancient Babylon however, literally dwelt on waters. The city spanned the river Euphrates and it contained many canals (Jer. 51:13). Rev. 17:15 explains that “the waters” upon which the modern Babylon sits signify “peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues.”

The word “sit” signifies a posture or position of authority (Matt. 23:2) and is often used in relation to sitting on a throne (Matt. 22:44). In Rev. 18:7 the harlot is referred to as saying to herself: “I sit a queen,” indicating that she occupies a position of some power and authority over nations. Regarding herself as she does, as the bride of Christ who is the king of kings, she sees herself as the queen, and imagines her power and influence over nations proves it.

As we have seen in Rev. 13, when the beast comes to power, he rules over all kindreds, tongues and nations. It seems a reasonable assumption that he will not attain this power until after he has destroyed the harlot. Until then, the harlot sits on him and over all nations.

Is it not significant that the Pope, the spiritual head of the Roman Catholic church, has a throne-like seat upon which he is often seen sitting, and people from all nations, kindreds and tongues give him reverence, shout his praise, and even kneel before him and kiss his ring or feet? What a contrast to the apostle Peter who rebuked Cornelius for falling down at his feet, saying to him: “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Act. 10:25-26). Peter was no celibate either! He was married: (Matt. 8:14. 1 Cor. 9:5).

Rev. 17:2 goes on to say concerning the harlot: “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.”

Countless kings, princes and presidents have embraced the Pope and his cardinals and fraternized with them for political and religious purposes, and still do. Many kings, especially in Europe and Russia, have embraced the Roman Catholic faith with all of its false doctrines, sharing

with the harlot in her apostasy. As we have seen, it is spiritual fornication to depart from the truth taught by the bridegroom.

WINE OF HER FORNICATION

The phrase “wine of her fornication” means wine that causes apostasy. In Scripture wine can signify doctrine or teaching. See Pr. 9:1-6. Isa. 55:1-. Matt. 9:17. Lk. 5:39. Jn. 2:1-10 (parable in action).

As wine in the natural can cause moral standards to be lowered and compromised, resulting in a woman being unfaithful to her husband by embracing another man; so the wine or teaching of the harlot can befuddle peoples’ minds, causing them to turn from the doctrine of Christ and embrace false doctrine. Cp. Isa. 29:9-10.

Lenin was not speaking an original thought when he said that religion was the opiate of the people. The thought we have before us now is exactly that thought. An opiate puts people to sleep; wine puts them into a stupor, befuddling and confusing the mind, blurring the boundaries between true and false teaching. Such is the effect of the Roman Catholic religion.

We read in Rev. 18:23 that all nations are deceived by the harlot’s “sorceries.” The Greek word for “sorceries” is “pharmakia” from which the English word “pharmacy” is derived, and relates to both medication and magic, and can be related to drugs and druggists. Drugs of course, like wine, can befuddle, confuse and deceive the mind; putting it into an unreal and imaginary world of fantasy and fiction. Like magic, it creates illusion and delusion. Drugs can create a world in which things that are seen and believed are not in reality what they seem to be. This sums up in a nutshell the befuddling and deceiving effect of the false teaching represented by the harlot’s wine.

In Rev. 14:10 the wine is referred to as “the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” This is simply saying that her teaching which leads to committing spiritual fornication, incurs God’s wrath. To drink her wine is tantamount to drinking God’s wrath, because that will be the result.

We read in Rev. 17:6 that the harlot is drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus. She attacks and kills the true church of Christ. This is where her wine (teaching) leads, revealing how false and corrupt it is. Being astray from the truth, she cannot recognize the true church. The kings and inhabitants of the earth who become drunk with her wine will obviously support her persecution of the true Christian community.

No wonder the nations will ultimately stand before the Lord and confess: “Surely our fathers have inherited lies and worthless things in which there is no profit” (Jer. 16:19).

WOMAN IN THE WILDERNESS

We have seen in Rev. 17:1 that the angel invited John to “come hither; I will show you the judgement of the great whore who sits upon many waters.” John did not see the harlot at that stage; the angel was yet to take him away in prophetic vision to show him. This is what is meant by the words in v3: “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 7 heads and 10 horns.” (This is the second of 3 occasions on which John was taken away by the Spirit in prophetic vision. The other 2 occasions are in 4:2 and 21:10. Also compare Ezk. 3:12, 14, 8:3, 11:24, 43:5).

Because the woman in Rev. 12, who represents Israel, “fled into the wilderness” (v6, 14), some have concluded that the woman seen in the wilderness in Rev. 17 sitting on a beast, is also Israel. This would mean that she is chased into the wilderness by the dragon and returns riding the beast who, as we have seen, becomes confederate with the dragon.

But the wilderness in Rev. 12 to which Israel flees is a “place prepared by God” where she is nourished by God for 1,260 days. If she is under God’s supervision and care, she is not likely to sit on an anti-God blasphemous beast who is confederate with an anti-Israel dragon! She is only in the wilderness for 3½ years, which is hardly enough time to go from the position of a fugitive in exile to exercising power over all nations.

The “woman” in Rev. 17 is identified as “the harlot” and “the mother of harlots.” She is clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls, and holds a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications.

The “woman” in Rev. 12 is clothed with the sun; the moon is under her feet and a crown of 12 stars is upon her head. They are 2 quite different women; separate and distinct from each other, and the same applies to the wilderness in which they are depicted.

The woman in Rev. 17 is clearly explained in v18 to represent “that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Being in the present tense, the word “reigneth” indicates that it relates to a city in the first century, and can only apply to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

Although Jerusalem is also referred to as “the great city” in Rev. 11:8, the fact that she did not reign over the kings of the earth at the time John was given the revelation (or at any other time in history); is proof positive that she is not the harlot in Rev. 17. Also, the fate of the great city: “thrown down and never seen again” (Rev. 18:21), cannot be applied to Jerusalem.

If therefore, the harlot is the Roman Catholic church which was to have its seat of power in Rome; what are we to make of the “wilderness” where John saw her sitting on a beast?

One of the first thoughts that springs to mind in relation to the word wilderness, is “testing.” For example, Israel’s time out in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt was a testing time, as was the 40 days spent in the wilderness by Jesus.

Reference to the woman in the wilderness in Rev. 17 could also signify a testing and trying time for the Papacy prior to coming to power in the end time. A possible application of this will be given shortly.

Strong’s Concordance says the Greek word “eremos” which is translated “wilderness,” can signify “lonesome,” “a solitary place,” “desert,” “desolate.” For example, Pr. 21:19: “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a nagging and irritable woman.”

The Concise Oxford Dictionary points out that the word in modern usage can be used of a political party out of office. “Political wilderness” is a term used to describe a political party that has lost its way and gone off track, i.e. lost direction and therefore lost power.

“Wilderness” in modern usage can also signify a state of disorder. For example; when a garden is referred to as a “wilderness,” it means a tangle-up of weeds, thorns and thistles. And, in view of thorns and thistles representing the deceitfulness of money and material wealth which can choke to death the Word of God; “wilderness” would be a very fitting description of the position of any religious institution in which God’s truth was choked by greed and ambition for riches (Matt. 13:22. Rev. 3:14-17).

All these thoughts concerning “wilderness” have an application to the Papacy and the Roman Catholic church:

1. This religious system went off the track and lost its way spiritually, ending up in a tangle-up of thorns and thistles due to lust for power and wealth, resulting in choking to death the truth of the Word of God.

2. After a long time in power, this religious system went into a political wilderness, losing power, ending up in a solitary place - lonesome.

3. The political wilderness was a testing and trying time.

Reference to the harlot being in the wilderness sitting upon the beast

could simply be summed up as signifying the power and influence exercised by the Roman Catholic church over the nations, in spite of her spiritually barren condition and position.

However, there may be more to it than that. When John saw the harlot sitting upon the beast, was the beast stationary, or was he bringing the harlot out of the wilderness? If the harlot was on her way out of the wilderness this would be significant in view of developments that will now be summarized:

THE HISTORY OF THE HARLOT

For 1,000 years, (a counterfeit millennium) from 800AD to 1805AD, the Pope had spiritual and secular authority over all rulers and religious systems in Europe, reaching a high point in medieval times. Papal control imposed a relentless tyranny upon all European nations and was known as “The Holy Roman Empire.” It was a law to itself to which all bowed, and which none could resist or gainsay.

But from 1517 to 1572, dramatic changes started to occur which were the beginning of the loss of power. Due to the Reformation, Roman Catholicism started to lose its iron grip on much of Europe. People were set free from the shackles of the apostate system as a result of fearless and courageous men exposing the unbiblical nature of its teaching and practise. As the Reformation gathered momentum and grew, opposition to Rome became more and more vocal, and the spiritual and political power of the Pope gradually declined.

Later, as a result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars which devastated the Catholic countries of Europe, causing a spirit of revolution to sweep through them to the detriment of Catholic interests and power; the so-called Holy Roman Empire was abolished in 1805. The Pope was left only reigning over “the Papal states” - a term that refers to several provinces and cities, including Rome, which covered the broadlands of central Italy.

However, these Papal states provided the Papacy with legitimate national representation and temporal (civil) power in the international counsels of the nations. They comprised a nation among nations and permitted the Papacy to militarily defend itself against any who challenged the political authority of the Pope.

But in 1860 the Papal states became subject to Victor Emmanuel 11, who became king of Italy. This further reduced the political power of the Pope because he lost control of the Papal states and only the land

immediately around Rome remained under his control.

Then, in September 1870, 2 months after the Pope was declared to be infallible, Victor Emmanuel took Rome by force and asked its citizens to vote on whether or not the city should become the capital of a united Italy. The people voted to accept the Italian monarchy. And so not only were the Papal states annexed by the Italian government, so also was the city of Rome, resulting in the Pope (Pius IX) having no political power at all.

THE PRISONER POPE

Being stripped of all power and confined to the Vatican, the Pope shut himself up there and regarded himself as a prisoner, and so styled himself. During the rest of the nineteenth century he was referred to as “the prisoner Pope.” He was a mere figure-head with no political power. Politically speaking, he was in a “wilderness.” He had no political or diplomatic representation outside the limits of the church buildings.

The Popes after him followed the same “prisoner” policy for nearly 60 years. Then an independent Papal state was created in February 1929 through an agreement between Pope Pius XI and the Italian government. The agreement or concordat was called the Treaty of Lateran, and was signed between Pope Pius XI and the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. It recognized the full sovereignty of the Holy See and was later incorporated into the Italian constitution.

The treaty affirmed that the “Catholic apostolic Roman religion “ is the only state religion in Italy. It also recognized that the Holy See had exclusive dominion and sovereign jurisdiction over the full property of the Vatican, and that no interference by the Italian government would be possible. There would be no authority but the authority of the Holy See.

As a settlement of all its financial relations with Italy as a result of the fall of temporal power, the Holy See accepts about 40 million American dollars in cash and about 50 million in Italian state consols (bonds) at the rate of 5%.

Mussolini’s concordat gave great impetus to the Roman Catholic church. The Papal state was resuscitated and the Papacy was given diplomatic representation in many parts of the world. It enabled the Pope to intrigue in international politics, and paved the way for the international excursions and political influence of the Popes who were to follow. In short, the harlot was on her way out of the wilderness.

The mission of the Roman Catholic church has always been supremacy, both in politics and religion, and this has not changed up to

this present day. As a result of replacing the vision of the kingdom of God being set up on earth by Jesus when he returns, with the vision that it is the mission of the church to set up the kingdom before the second coming; the Papacy ended up getting involved in the politics of the world. The kingdom that results from this is inevitably earthly, carnal and worldly.

When the Papacy therefore lost power, the question became: “How do we regain it?” One thing is certain: like the tricks of the trade of a harlot (Pr. 5:6), the church of Rome has never been slow to change her appearance, approach and strategy when necessary; to make herself more attractive and appealing to those she seeks to seduce into her bed of fornication. She has proved to be completely flexible within the rigid confines of a relentless pursuit of domination.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: “At the very moment when the disappearance of the Papal states removed it from the field of European diplomacy, the Papacy was about to emerge as a world power with which every politician would have to reckon. This was the result partly of the missionary activity which kept abreast of the colonial expansion of Europe overseas, and partly because of the large scale migration of Catholics to Canada, Australia and the United States. Expanding in numbers, the church was yet closing its ranks more firmly around the person of the Holy Father.”

As a result of the loss of power, the Popes in the twentieth century were characterised by a new spirit. Firstly, they were anxious to put a stop to the belief that the church was necessarily opposed to modern aspirations, and secondly, they stimulated Catholic initiative with regard to social work.

In the past the church had sought to prevail by the ruthless control of strong, autocratic Catholic monarchs, and the church had no sympathy for the populations which groaned under the tyranny of their exploitive rulers. However, the French Revolution changed all that by putting proud monarchs in the dust, with the foot of the peasants and downtrodden firmly planted on their necks.

A series of Popes in the twentieth century carefully fostered a new policy of social justice, declaring themselves to be the champion of the oppressed working class. The acceptance of the socialist outlook (Socialism) became the key to the revival of the Roman Catholic church in the twentieth century. This new image of the church was projected so that people would forget her oppressive, exploitive and tyrannical past. However, the change didn't all happen at once, but in a slow patient

manner, so that the faithful would not be too sensitive to the fact that the winds of change were blowing.

So gradual has it been, that the casual observer could be excused for thinking that it has always been this way. But if the Catholic king Louis XVI of France could get his head back from the revolutionaries and catch up on modern news, he would truly be amazed at the transformed attitude of the modern Popes! They bear no resemblance to the Popes of his day!

A TURNING POINT

A turning point in the rise of Papal power and influence took place as a result of the visit of the Polish Pope John Paul 2nd to Poland in 1979, where he met with the leader of the Polish solidarity, Lech Welesa. The solidarity movement opposed communism because it had moved far from the original ideals. The people were no longer able to determine what were their best interests as they were decided for them by their non-elected leaders who were political tyrants.

The Pope's visit to Poland in 1979 created a sensational impression on world opinion. The huge crowds, said at times to number over a million people, joining in singing Catholic hymns, but also Polish national songs; delivered a distinct slap in the face for the Communist regime. The government put on a bold face of welcome, even though the Pope did not hesitate to make outspoken comments critical of political tyranny, bolder than uttered before in a communist-dominated European country. The authorities dared not intervene or comment unfavourably, for fear of provoking a popular demonstration which they would not be able to control.

The significance of this episode was that the huge and enthusiastic crowds which gathered to welcome the Pope made headline news for days in the world's press and on their T.V. screens. To a world feeling the lack of "spiritual leadership," the Pope emerged as the undoubted head of the "Christian church" in the world, eclipsing completely the heads of the other communities in Christendom such as the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Pope's personal presence conveyed a sense of sympathy and power which impressed millions - to the benefit of the Roman Catholic church. There can be no doubt that the Pope emerged as a world leader in more than a purely religious sense.

The policy which has brought about the change of strategy in the church's pursuit of power and influence is the policy of ultramontanism.

Newsweek (November 1981) said: “The Pope’s strategy has been to place himself in the middle to call on all sides in Poland and Moscow to develop a stronger sense of common purpose. He uses his traditional Papal announcements to send signals to Poland. In his third encyclical - ‘On Human Work’ - he defended labour unions as ‘indispensable ... for the struggle for social justice.’”

The article continued: “Stalin once dismissed the influence of the Vatican with a derisive question: ‘How many divisions has the Pope?’ But as one U.S. official says: ‘There are 36 million Poles and 90% of them would join the Pope’s divisions.’ Pope John Paul 2nd, in political terms, became the most powerful hope of modern times, and no one appreciated this more than the Russians.”

In March 1983 Newsweek wrote of the Pope’s visit to Central America:

“Of course, the Pope’s personal diplomacy was not aimed primarily at governments. He came to identify the church with the regions’ impoverished masses. By one estimate he was seen or heard by nearly half the area’s 22 million inhabitants ... time and again he insisted that traditional Catholic faith and action are the only sure grounds for advancing social solidarity, human liberty and personal dignity.”

The world became accustomed to the door of the Alitalia jet opening, and the jet-setting Pope emerging to kiss the ground as he travelled to countries all around the world, moving among the masses and even addressing the United Nations.

Everywhere the Pope has gone he has received a rapturous welcome, being treated like a Messiah. The foreign minister of the Soviet Union and president of U.S.A. have had audience with him at the Vatican, and many other leaders and dignitaries from other nations have been received by him as well.

By becoming a world statesman, championing the cause of unity, peace and human rights for the oppressed and underprivileged; and making full and effective use of the neutral status of his church and its care for all peoples; the Pope has become highly esteemed and respected. Formal diplomatic relations have been established with many nations, forging ties all over the world, including east European countries. The Vatican is clearly becoming a force to be reckoned with in international politics, and as mentioned in an earlier chapter, could be identified with the white horse in Rev. 6 whose rider had a bow and a crown, and went forth conquering and to conquer.

HIGH PROFILE

The Pope is the spiritual head of over 1 billion (1,000 million) people, and to assist him in his work he has 4,000 bishops, 400,000 priests and nearly 1 million nuns. He lives in the Vatican palace which has 11,000 rooms in what is known as the Vatican city in Rome. Today, the Vatican city is represented at the United Nations and has consulates all around the world. Regular broadcasts in 35 languages are made from the Vatican, and it can organize live television transmissions to 16 nations in 5 languages, reaching over a billion people. While the Anglicans and other churches are declining in numbers, the Roman Catholics are increasing. They numbered 757 million in 1978 and 1.1 billion in 2001. This was an overall increase of 40.2%.

In the Pope's extensive travels, he has brought the Papacy out of the seclusion of the Vatican into the modern world, and without a doubt it is his social gospel - the concern he has expressed for humanity that has attracted the interest of millions of people. His condemnation of oppressive regimes which take away individual liberty has shown that he is acutely aware of the social injustices in modern society.

He condemns violence and war, and proclaims the need for peace and love. He declares that modern materialist society everywhere is destroying the spirit of man, whose only hope is a return to God in the spirit of Christ.

In these days of world-wide disillusion, dissatisfaction and fear, this all has a tremendous popular appeal, especially as he is the only prominent figure, religious or political, who is proclaiming such a relevant message. More and more are seeing him as "high priest for the planet."

As a result of the Pope's activities and increasing profile on the world scene, it seems certain that the influence of the Roman Catholic church will grow, and that other religious communities will diminish.

As a sign of the times, the revival of Papal power and influence is almost as significant as the revival of Israel and the rise of Russia and the Arabs.

There is certainly much to admire in the Pope's humanity and there is no gainsaying his popularity. But his appeal is largely due to personal charisma and his willingness to relate to the present needs of mankind and the condition of the world. He has been called "the man with the world in his hands," but unfortunately he does not come forward with an open Bible in his hands to preach and teach the true blessed Christian hope of the second coming of Christ and his kingdom on earth centred at Zion.

CHURCH UNITY

The Pope's message has not only been "justice for the workers." He has also been making calls and overtures for unity in Christendom. A charitable attitude toward other Christian denominations has been adopted, calling them "separated brethren" whom they long to receive into fellowship. In January 2001, the Pope stated that the Roman Catholic church was irreversibly committed to the search for church unity.

Historic moves are in train which could ultimately lead to the healing of rifts that have existed for centuries between Catholic and Protestant churches.

The importance attached by the Catholic church to its mission to achieve unity can be seen by the fact that in 1965 it annulled an excommunication pronounced in 1054 A.D. against the Orthodox church.

In October 1989, Dr. Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, visited Rome and signed a common declaration in the Vatican with the Pope, which committed both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches to "visible unity." In an interview with an Italian newspaper before he left Rome, the Archbishop said: "Anglicans are beginning to recognize and welcome a petrine, universal, primacy in the Bishop of Rome" - in other words, the church of England could accept the possibility of reunion with Rome and also the central, supreme position of the Pope as head of a universal church. By implication, the Archbishop expressed a willingness to abdicate his position as spiritual head of the Anglican church in favour of the Pope.

Not all Anglicans would go so far, but many, in order to achieve church unity, would be prepared to accept Papal authority over the Anglican communion. The fact that the Archbishop could say as much as he did is remarkable enough, and the fact that he embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome, is a strong indication of official Anglican enthusiasm for a united church.

While the discussions between Anglicans and Roman Catholics do not appear to have had any conclusive outcome as yet, negotiations between the Vatican and the Lutheran world federation led to agreement in 1999 on a "common statement" regarding the doctrine of justification - the principle issue at the heart of the reformation. The signing of the statement on October 31 in Augsburg, Germany, was the first time the Vatican has signed any such agreement with a reformed church.

According to a report in *The Daily Telegraph*, "the statement will have repercussions across all Protestant areas including the Anglican,

Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and United Reformed churches. The agreement was “highly significant” to inter-church relations.”

The combined forces of Catholicism and Protestantism would be likely to pose a real threat to smaller non-conformist groups who would come under pressure from a large and united Christendom. This ultimate unity could very well be implied in Rev. 17:5 where the Roman Catholic church is not only referred to as a “harlot,” but the mother of “harlots.”

REVERSAL OF REFORMATION ANTICIPATED

If “harlot” refers to one particular church, then “harlots” could refer to other churches whose false doctrines come from the “mother,” and who unite with her. If so, this would mean that the prophecy in Rev. 17 takes into account the result of the Reformation, which involved the Protestants separating from the Roman Catholic church and forming into other churches. Until then, there was only a “harlot,” not “harlots.” And, if the title “mother of harlots” means the other churches will be united with the Roman Catholic church, the prophecy would have to relate to the period beyond the Reformation, to the time when the Reformation goes into reverse gear and the churches drift back to “mother.” Protestant churches, which still incorporate much of Catholicism in their doctrines, will have to be reconciled to the Roman Catholic church to fulfil this prophecy, and this process is already taking place as we have seen, and is a sign of the times.

After referring to “the mother of harlots,” Rev. 17:6 goes on to refer to this system being “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” In its context it indicates that this system will persecute the saints and even put some to death in the end time. However, although the prophecy relates particularly to the end time, it would be quite relevant to the saints in past centuries who were persecuted by the Roman Catholic church, and they would be able, on the basis of Rev. 17 to identify this system as being the “mother” of harlots.

REASONS FOR REVERSAL

One of the reasons for the reformation going into reverse gear is because it never went far enough in the removal of false Roman Catholic doctrine. Too many common denominators were left that could act as a basis for reconciliation and unity, such as the Trinity; pre-existence of Christ; immortality of the soul and its accompanying

doctrines of the righteous departing to heaven immediately at death, and the wicked to eternal torments in hell; the doctrine of infant sprinkling (Christening), and the doctrine of a supernatural fallen-angel devil and demons.

Another reason why the process of unity is now able to take place is because of the weak compromising attitude of the ecumenical spirit which seems to be based upon discovering the lowest possible common denominator of doctrine upon which all parties can be agreed.

Truths which were once rigidly and tenaciously held and which people died for, are now being compromised for church union. But union that lacks unity of the One true faith is a sham, and the consolidation of all conflicting creeds under one organization will involve that.

The ecumenical movement along with the World Council of Churches, has been negotiating for reunification and amalgamation with increasing success. The playing down of many reformation concepts by the Protestant churches, along with the apparently conciliatory attitude of the Roman Catholic church, has the potential to create a “Christian” confederation which could formally acknowledge Papal primacy without necessarily agreeing with all points of Catholic theology.

It is not difficult to see in present trends a confederate church in Christendom - an immense ecclesiastical power with enormous political power, having its nerve centre or power base at Rome. Such ecclesiastical power would be tantamount to the revival and restoration of the holy Roman empire. The future European and world developments, especially the E.U. and ecumenical movement will more than likely lead to this.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

There is a saying: “All roads lead to Rome,” and this has a very real application when it comes to church unity and a united Christendom. An Anglican church official is reported as saying: “The new Pope’s attitude towards reunion is quite simply that everyone else must return to Rome.”

In the event of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches uniting, along with the mainline Protestant churches; well over 1 billion people would be involved, constituting a world-wide super-church with tremendous political and spiritual power and influence.

The unity movement however, will not necessarily be limited to apostate Christianity. Reference in Rev. 17:1, 15 to the harlot exercising influence over all “peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues,” may mean

that other religions of the world will be amalgamated in some form or other with Rome.

Some have suggested a one-world religion may eventuate, but that could be taking it too far. For example, it is most unlikely that the strictly monotheistic faith of Islam would unite with the Trinitarian faith of the Roman Catholics which they regard as polytheism. Rev. 17:16 says the 10 horns hate the harlot (Rome) and destroy her. As pointed out earlier, the 10 horns are from the dragon and represent Moslem powers confederate with the beast.

There are however several major areas of doctrine and practice that the Roman Catholics have in common with other non-Christian religions, namely: the immortality of the soul; the worship of images; the quest for justice to the poor and downtrodden; and peace on earth. To embrace other non-Christian religions would involve illicit relationship from a true Christian's perspective and would involve the same kind of spiritual fornication that the nation of Israel committed in Old Testament times when she fraternized and entered into alliances with non-Israelite nations.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Running parallel with the development of Papal power and influence and church unity has been the growth of the European Community, which is linked under "The Treaty Of Rome," and the Pope has been involved in its development. On the occasion of the signing of the treaty which established the European Community, the Pope played a prominent part, as the Catholic times reported:

"The Pope on Monday urged the nations of Europe to create a real federation ... The 78 members of the assembly drove from Rome to Castel Gandolfo to be received in audience by the Holy Father before beginning their session ... He said the 6 nations of "little Europe" ... were embarking on a salutary road "from which can emerge for themselves and for Europe a new road in all domains; an enrichment not only of economic and cultural but also spiritual and religious."

The Rome correspondent of the news magazine "Torch" expressed the Vatican's interest in these words:

"Not since the end of the Roman empire has the Holy See been offered a rallying point like the Common Market. Small wonder that the Roman church is smiling benignly over what one Vatican official called "the greatest Catholic super state the world has ever known." The Holy See has set aside one day in the year in honour of Madonna of the

Common Market, when prayers are said and candles lit in all churches for the intervention and protection of the Virgin Mary, in what is after all the greatest Catholic business deal in history.”

The European community now has its own parliament, currency, flag and an army consisting of multinational military units outside the control of the American-dominated N.A.T.O. Since the collapse of communism, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the winding-up of the Warsaw Pact, Russia's president, Putin, has asked why N.A.T.O. still exists. He has said that Russia “for the next decades” will be focussing on its domestic problems and will not pose a danger to anyone. In the absence of a Russian threat, “there is no need to expand military alliances.” N.A.T.O.’s response was that it is merely a political organization. Putin therefore asked for Russia to be included in the organization which is extending into eastern European countries.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Putin has been clearly calling for a new relationship with Europe. He has called for Russia to abandon its imperial ambitions, saying: “We scared the world so badly in Soviet times that this led to the creation of military blocs from which no one benefited.” A senior Kremlin source stated that the Russian government wants to “dock” its defence doctrine with that of the European Union, i.e. co-ordinate the defence concepts so that security will be ensured in Europe, adding that “we appeal to Europe not to forget that Russia is part of the all-European space.”

The Kremlin is busily pulling together the “Commonwealth of Independent states” (C.I.S.), to form a greater Europe by uniting all these states with the European Union. The C.I.S. came into being following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Moscow is willing to sacrifice some of its control (for the time being) over former Soviet States, which will make this proposed union with the E.U. possible. Combining with Berlin and Paris and the rest of the E.U. countries, this would result in a European superpower which would negate U.S. influence and standing within the European sphere.

After concluding a visit to Ukraine on May 4, 2003, Putin said that he would devote a “significant portion” of the May 31 Russia-E.U. summit to the forming of a common European market place to include both the E.U. and the C.I.S. He is clearly keen to bring the former Soviet States into an alignment with Europe.

The former communist states of eastern Europe who want to upgrade

and modernise their economies, are ready to conclude trade agreements with the E.U. and to obtain full membership status. Ultimately, this growth could incorporate all those predominantly Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in eastern Europe.

The spiritually reunited state churches of Christendom would welcome the addition of huge potential markets by the expansion and uniting of “greater Europe.” A grand union such as this would make Europe the dominant economic power and would reduce the north American and Japanese economies to second-rate status.

It is surely significant that the E.U. has to do with trade, and the trading agreement it is based upon is called after the city of Rome (the Treaty of Rome) - the same city referred to in Rev. 17 and 18 which is depicted as the centre of rich and powerful trade in the end time. During the period of the Holy Roman Empire, trade was controlled and dominated by Rome, and Rev. 18 indicates that history will repeat itself to some degree. As we have seen, such preoccupation with trade for the revenue it creates in order to abound in material riches rather than spiritual riches, is referred to as spiritual fornication in Scripture.

ROME - RUSSIA CONNECTION

Now, if as we believe, the end time beast involves Russia; reference in Rev. 17:3 to the harlot sitting on the beast indicates that there will ultimately be some connection or association between the Roman Catholic church and Russia before the beast comes to power and destroys Rome. It could be that the uniting of Europe by the E.U. and the uniting of the churches by the ecumenical movement will bring about these connections.

We cannot overlook the fact that not only is the harlot seen in the wilderness prior to her rise to power, but so also is the beast. And if the wilderness signifies loss of political power in relation to the harlot, the same could apply to the beast, and this may be able to be related to some degree to him coming out of the abyss (Rev. 17:8. 11:7), and recovering from a “deadly wound” (13:3, 12, 14). Russia was sorely wounded by the Nazis during the second world war, but had a remarkable recovery under communism, rising from a third rate power to a super power. But the collapse of communism, the break-up of the Soviet Union and wind-up of the Warsaw Pact, crippled Russia and put her into the political wilderness; during which period the harlot has been gaining in power and influence over the nations that the beast will ultimately rule. Before the time arrives for the beast to attain the power to rule, the harlot is appropriately

depicted sitting on his back. Ultimately, she will be crushed under his feet!

Up until the last few decades there was little tangible evidence of collusion between the Soviet Union and the Roman church. Rather, for many years we witnessed the total rejection of religion by the Marxist ideology. Religion was regarded as “the opium of the masses” and was suppressed, if not outlawed by the Soviet Union. Leaders of communist Russia assured themselves that, as a result of communist enlightenment, religion would gradually die out.

That expectation was not realized. Belief and worship continued, often “underground.” Not only did the eastern Orthodox church and the Roman Catholic church survive, they thrived. The communist party, officially atheist, consisted of around 10 million, but there were nominally over 125 million members of the Orthodox church in the U.S.S.R. who continued their religion unchanged, and by and large these are now allowed to practise unmolested.

In 2001 Mr Putin publicly involved himself in Easter services which combined both Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox - the Orthodox coinciding their Easter with the Catholics for the first time. Mr Putin was even seen making the sign of the cross over his heart before an audience of millions of people world-wide, and he has been reported making positive statements regarding the church and Christian values.

During the communist regime, Bibles were outlawed in Russia but they are now no longer forbidden, and official permission has been granted to print them. This has all resulted from Mikail Gorbachev’s call for “glasnost” (openness), “demokratizatsiya” (democratization), and “perestroika” (reform-restructuring), not to mention “detente” (peace). Such policies resulted in loosening restrictions, more freedom of speech in the press and election of government.

Back in 1978 the Guardian Weekly had a complete page on “Religious life in the U.S.S.R.” and concluded by saying: “No one suspects the scale and intensity of religious life in the U.S.S.R. It is without any doubt the biggest volcano in Christendom.” Millions of Russians are very devout and fervent in their faith.

In the satellite countries there are many Roman Catholics: 95% in Poland, 62% in Hungary, 60% in Czechoslovakia, and the Roman Catholic church claimed that its members had been suppressed and persecuted by the communist state. This was so, largely because they were not loyal to the state, but rather to Rome.

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN KREMLIN AND VATICAN

But there has been a gradual improvement, both sides yielding somewhat. The state could not break the power of the church and has been compelled to come to terms with this for the good of the government of the nation. Both the Kremlin and the Vatican could see that it was to their mutual interest to co-operate rather than antagonise. Many visits have been made between Moscow and Rome - between the Kremlin and Vatican, by Russian officials seeking audience with the Pope, and it was believed that it was only a question of time before the Pope would visit Russia.

This path of co-operation is relevant to the beast carrying the harlot in Rev. 17:3. Not being able to suppress the church, it has been politically expedient for the Soviet Union to co-operate in order to achieve smooth government in the various satellite countries. But the old spirit of atheism remains dormant beneath the surface and in the end will break out again in an even more belligerent and aggressive manner through Gog, the man of sin, who will authorize the destruction of Rome.

Not many years ago, Russia was in ruins, a crippled superpower. Gradually, however, with massive injections of western aid, and especially thanks to a booming oil industry, Russia has been reviving. Links with the E.U. and partnership in N.A.T.O. will further assist Russia's recovery.

The clear alignment of the Vatican and Kremlin caused one correspondent to write: "The deadliest opponent of the Catholic church used to be communism. Today, the power elite of the same communist system have become her allies."

Sharing the same vision of freedom for the oppressed and downtrodden, and closing the gap between the rich and poor; makes Roman Catholicism and communism fellow-travellers along the same road, and enables them to work together in spite of conflicting ideologies. Rejection of the communist's atheistic philosophy does not necessarily have to mean rejection of communist economic, social, cultural or political programmes. The communists and the Pope have some very compatible philosophies of a fundamental nature which makes an alignment possible between them to some degree.

It is some time now since the Vatican has resumed relations with Moscow and all eastern European countries, and Roman Catholic bishops have been appointed there. The process of bringing the people in eastern Europe from the influence of an atheistic government to the influence of the Roman Catholic church has been under way for some time now, and

Europe is being reshaped as a result.

Western Europe is already well under the influence of the Catholic church, whose leaders play a big part in dictating the pace and reform and change within the E.U. There is scarcely a government-municipal, state, provincial or national - that does not have influential Roman Catholics in high places in counsel. Roman Catholicism will also no doubt incorporate the large Russian, Ukrainian and Greek Orthodox churches within a Papal-ruled ecumenical organization. Most of the Middle Eastern and Asian national churches are participants in the ecumenical movement, and many smaller organizations already accept Papal primacy.

A rejuvenated Roman Catholic church, reunited in a new religious confederation with her Protestant daughters, would naturally double her efforts to reconciling eastern Orthodoxy.

A HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

In the event of this reunion taking place, the Catholic spiritual empire would cover a territory stretching across Eurasia from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. With Rome as its spiritual power base, it would indeed be a Holy Roman Empire. It is not impossible that the European community's centre could be eventually shifted to Rome.

The associations and connections that the E.U. has with the Roman church are no coincidence in this development. The Pope's vision of a "common European home" no doubt has spiritual motives behind it and is inspired by them. Believing as he does, that it is the mission of his church to establish the kingdom of God on earth, which means all nations being united under the rule of the church with the Pope at the head; he would naturally see the coming together of the European nations in an economic union as a means to that end, and would naturally encourage political involvement on the part of his followers who occupy political positions in high places.

Economics has never been the sole motivating factor behind the E.U.; religion, that is, the Roman Catholic religion, has always been an important element. The Papal hierarchy wants to be a unifying power to bind Europe together, and is working to that end.

Shirley Williams, who was British Minister of Education, stated in a speech at a Roman Catholic socialist guild meeting, that: "We will be joined to a Europe in which the Catholic religion will be the dominant faith, and in which the application of Catholic social doctrine will be the major factor in everyday political and economic life."

In commenting upon this speech, one political commentator said that she “unambiguously associated the vision of Europe with Rome’s goal of assuming political and religious authority over the lives of all Europeans.”

One of the controversies within the E.U. and surrounding nations has been whether or not reference should be made to God in the proposed constitution. According to Catholic World News, Gianfranco Fini, the Italian deputy Prime Minister, has indicated that: “Italy will push the European Union to include a mention of Christianity among historical influences on the continent in its new constitution.”

In another article the Catholic World News made it clear that the Vatican is taking the lead in trying to get a reference to religion inserted.

In an article in the “Spectator,” Adrian Hilton stated that his view is that the Vatican’s efforts to get a reference to God in the constitution is simply to further its cause of dominating Europe: “The issue of European religious union is one that has been concealed even deeper than the plans for political union, but the ratchet towards a Catholic Europe is just as real. The Pope’s recent demand that “God” be featured in the emerging European constitution has been echoed by many leading Catholic politicians and bishops. While on the surface, such a reference may offend only Europe’s atheist and humanist contingent, it must be observed that when the Vatican refers to God, she sees herself as God’s infallible vice-regent upon earth, the leading organ of Divine expression.”

If the federation of Europe triumphs, the E.U. will be a mighty empire. Initially it will lack an emperor, but it will, as some political correspondents suggest, have the Pope. When this comes to pass, the prophecy in Rev. 17 concerning the harlot presiding over peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues, will take on a new light. But when the beast decides he does not want to carry her on his back any longer, and destroys Rome, and takes control of the empire; it will then have an “emperor” - the man of sin!

Because the woman represents a religious system and the beast a secular, political system; the woman sitting on the beast is generally accepted as signifying a religious system exercising some sort of influence or control over the political. To sit on something is to be in possession of it and in charge of it for as long as the sitting lasts, even if only for a short period of time. Reference to the woman sitting upon many waters in v1, which are explained to be nations in v15, means she has influence and control over them. The same applies in v9 where she is referred to as sitting on the 7 mountains, which can be related to Rome. Her influence over that city needs no comment.

The references to sitting on the waters, beast and 7 mountains does not mean the woman is a mere decoration, like a lifeless powerless statue. That the word “sit” signifies power and authority is indicated in Rev. 18:7 where the woman says: “I sit a queen ...”

Of course, the woman would not be able to sit on the beast unless he was willing to have her sit there and carry her, and the point is made in Rev. 17:7 that “the beast carries her.” Whether or not it is against his will, or merely for the sake of political expediency matters not; he carries her!

Normally, something is carried because it cannot get to its place or position by itself or in its own strength. This is certainly true of the Papacy. Without secular and political support, it would never have attained the power and influence that it has in the past and today. As we have seen: when the political support of secular power was withdrawn, the Pope was reduced to a prisoner in the Vatican.

The processes in the past that led to the religious system of the harlot exercising influence and control of the political, were long and subtle, and similar processes have been at work in more recent times. This prophecy in Rev. 17 concerning the woman and the beast clearly distinguishes between church and state, but indicates some kind of temporary union as in past history. It is quite unusual and unexpected to see a woman sitting on a wild beast. The fulfilment of the prophecy will be equally unexpected, involving a power that will ultimately manifest itself as being anti-religious, carrying a religious system.

A SCARLET COLOURED BEAST

The beast on which the woman sits is described in Rev. 17:3 as “a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having 7 heads and 10 horns.”

This is the same beast as the one in Rev. 13:1, with the added detail of being scarlet coloured. Rev. 17:3 says the beast is full of names of blasphemy, not the harlot, but she is no less of an abomination to God for getting involved with such a blasphemous political power. As mentioned before: this makes her a spiritual fornicator. Instead of God being her strength and support, she seeks and finds it in human secular power!

“Scarlet” comes from the Greek word “kokkinos” and means crimson coloured. It occurs on 3 other occasions in the book of Revelation, in 17:4, 18:12, 16 where it refers to the harlot herself being clothed in scarlet and of scarlet being among her merchandise. The vision that John saw of the harlot clothed in scarlet sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast would have

been quite a display of scarlet! On the basis of the statement in Isa. 1:18 about sins being like scarlet and red like crimson, it is believed that the reference to scarlet in Rev. 17 signifies the sinfulness of the harlot and the beast. To those with discernment they are a full and blatant display of sin. Being the colour of blood, it may also be intended to signify that they are both responsible for the shedding of the blood of the saints.

For the same reasons, the dragon is described as being “red” (Rev. 12:3). The Greek word for red is “purros” - quite a different word from the one translated “scarlet.” It means fire-like, specially flame-coloured. It only occurs twice in the New Testament, in Rev. 6:4 and 12:3.

It is important to note the distinction that is made in Rev. 17 between the harlot and the beast. In the same way that a woman riding a horse cannot be regarded as the horse, so the harlot and the beast must be regarded as 2 separate and distinct parties.

Reference in Rev. 17:16 to the beast hating the harlot, attacking and destroying her; makes it particularly clear that the harlot cannot be equated with the beast. It is evident in the Word of prophecy that the harlot is destroyed by the beast before Christ’s second coming, and the beast is destroyed by Christ at his coming.

As one writer puts it: “How the harlot and beast can both be identified with the apostacy of Rome deserves the name Mystery nearly as much as the woman in the vision!”

To equate the harlot with the beast results in the Papacy turning on itself and destroying itself with fire.

A beast cannot know God but a woman can, if she is prepared to be pure and faithful. The beast represents those who do not know God, and the harlot those who claim to know God but are astray and unfaithful. Nebuchadnezzar, for example, changed from a man to a beast-like-man due to pride of heart which denied and rejected God and attributed all power, fame and success to himself.

It is also significant to note that neither the heads nor the horns of the beast in Rev. 17:3 are depicted with crowns as in 13:1. “Crowns” signify being in power and exercising rule. The absence of crowns in Rev. 17 indicates the beast has not come to power at this particular stage while the harlot sits on him. As we read in v12: “The 10 horns ... have received no kingdom as yet.” Verse 16 implies that the harlot has to be destroyed before this “kingdom” can be attained.

LAVISHLY ATTIRED AND ADORNED

Rev. 17:4 says “the woman was dressed in purple and in scarlet, and covered (gilded or bespangled) with gold, precious stones and pearls.”

These same words are applied to “that great city” in Rev. 18:16: “... that great city that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and covered with gold, precious stones and pearls.” However, it would obviously be a mistake to conclude that the woman only signifies the material city of Rome and does not involve people. A city implies people; a city is useless without people. The woman who sheds the blood of the saints in Rev. 17:6 clearly involves human power. As pointed out earlier, it would also be a mistake to conclude that there is no real city involved and that it simply signifies a community. A real literal city is definitely involved and it is Rome, “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth,” and the woman is the apostate church whose centre is in the city in the Vatican. Reference to the woman being lavishly attired and adorned has an application to both the apostate church and the Vatican.

In view of the parable given by Jesus in Lk. 16:19- about “a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously everyday,” it could be concluded that the reference to the woman in Rev. 17 being clothed in purple and scarlet signifies wealth. It is revealed in chapter 18 that the rich clothing and jewellery comes from trade and commerce with other nations, emphasizing a very materialistic and commercialistic obsession and focus. The words of Jesus to the Laodicean church are relevant here: “Because you say, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing; and knowest not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ...” (Rev. 3:17). One is also reminded of Jezebel who seduced and led Israel astray into idolatry and superimposed other pagan doctrines and practises upon the church. Like a harlot, she “painted her face and adorned her hair” but was thrown down (2 Kng. 9:30-37). Babylon will suffer the same fate (Rev. 18:21).

The colour scheme of the woman’s garments in Rev. 17, involving purple and scarlet is quite significant. Purple and scarlet are the chief colours in the robes worn by the Pope, bishops and cardinals. Those familiar with pictures of the Vatican council will have observed this.

Purple dye in Biblical times was obtained from various kinds of shell fish (1 Macc. 4:23. War v.5, 4), and was yielded by a thin liquor, called the flower, secreted by a gland in the neck. The amount yielded by each

fish was very small; much labour was required to collect it in quantity, and the price was correspondingly great. Purple raiment was therefore costly, and consequently its use was the privilege of the rich exclusively. It was worn only by persons of wealth and high official position (Est. 8:15. Dan. 5:7. 1 Macc. 10:20, 62, 64. 2 Macc. 4:38; cp. 31. Lk. 16:19). Purple was especially worn by kings and was a sign of royalty (Judg. 8:26. 1 Macc. 8:14). For this reason a purple robe was put on Jesus by the Roman soldiers in mockery of his claim to be king (Jn. 19:1-3).

The fact that the woman in Rev. 17 is arrayed in garments the same colour as those worn by kings and princes and the emperors of Rome - the colour of rule - signifies the age-long desire of the ecclesiastical leaders of Rome to have imperial power and temporal (secular) authority.

The church of course was never meant to rule or reign here upon earth until Christ returns in power and glory. All true Christians who know the Scriptures understand this and therefore refuse to take part in the world's politics and governments which jostle for power. Nevertheless, we find in the course of church history, that one of the deadliest marks of ecclesiastical corruption and apostacy is the lust for worldly power and involvement in politics to gain it. Worse still, is the willingness to take up arms to fight carnal battles and kill to attain such power, of which the Roman Catholic church in particular has been guilty throughout history.

Regarding the reference to the woman in Rev. 17:4 being decked with gold, precious stones and pearls: The Pope's triple crown (or tiara) alone, which is worn during his enthronement, is decorated with 32 rubies, 19 emeralds, 11 sapphires, 529 diamonds and 252 pearls. This single item alone is enough to identify the Roman Catholic church with the harlot decked with precious stones and pearls in Rev. 17. What a contrast to Christ's crown of thorns!

No other organization claiming to be Christ's church has ever indulged so openly, blatantly and flauntingly in such a show of opulence and wealth. It is such a contrast with, and contradiction of Christ's teaching and example, that it is bizarre, to say the least. The spirit of Christ gives this instruction to the church: "Your adornment should not be that outward adornment that involves special hair arrangements, expensive clothes and the wearing of gold. Instead, be beautiful inside, in your hearts, with the imperishable and lasting jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit which is more precious to God" (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

THE VATICAN'S WEALTH

As we have seen, the woman in Rev. 17 refers to both the Roman Catholic church and the city of Rome, particularly the Vatican. "Vatican city" as it is called, is the administrative and spiritual centre of the Roman Catholic church. It is the smallest independent state in the world, covering only 108.7 acres (44 hectares), or about one sixth of a square mile (0.4 square kilometres).

The word "Vatican" is used to cover the government of the Roman Catholic church in all its aspects: religious, political, and commercial. The Vatican is the official residence of the Pope and the Papal government, taking its name from the Vatican hill on which the Papal palace and other buildings are built. The Vatican has the same connotation as Westminster, Washington, or the Kremlin.

The Vatican is essentially a religious rulership, but since the establishment of the Vatican state in 1929 by Mussolini, it has been able to have ambassadors in many countries and to receive ambassadors from those countries. This has enhanced its international status. Since then it has developed a world wide financial empire, by the control of banks, industrial assets and property throughout the world, and more particularly in Europe and the Americas.

The Vatican lost much of its wealth and lands in Europe when it went into the "wilderness," but this has been more than recouped in the vast financial empire she has since built up. The Vatican is one of the largest financial and business conglomerates ever to exist upon the face of the earth, largely through exploitation of the masses, motivated by a materialistic spirit. Countless stories could be told of the way Roman Catholic priests have exploited the poor and wrestled the last mite out of those who were already in abject poverty, not to mention the huge turnover of money made out of penances, indulgences, and so-called relics. This has been well documented by A. Manhattan, in his book "Vatican Billions."

The greed and corruption of the Roman Catholic church and its exploitation of the people was a large contributing factor to the rise of communism in Russia and its atheistic policy which outlawed religion. It was also the main contributing factor to Martin Luther's stand against the church which resulted in the Reformation. His main thrust was that salvation comes by faith, not by works involving monetary payments for penances and relics which were netting the church a vast fortune.

The Roman Catholic church has long realized that wealth brings

power: power to influence the affairs of nations and of individuals to suit its own ends. So, throughout history; by forgeries, fabrication, distortions, deceit, corruption, torture, murder and even the instigating of wars (all in the name of Christ!); the pursuit of wealth has characterized this church. And so it has accumulated land, buildings, rare statues, priceless paintings and icons, and other religious paraphernalia, amounting to fabulous wealth in the realm of billions upon billions of dollars. More costly surroundings can scarcely be found than in the Vatican city itself.

NO REFERENCE TO RELIGION IN REV. 17 OR 18

Although Rev. 17 and 18 give some detailed descriptions of the harlot woman, no specific reference is actually made to her representing a religious power. This has led some to conclude that she cannot represent the apostate church. However, as already pointed out, the religious nature and character is indicated by the very reference to her as a “woman,” and the reference to her being a “harlot” indicates she is apostate. The frequent usage of these terms elsewhere in Scripture in relation to an apostate church justifies this application.

The reason for no reference to religious aspects and an emphasis on material aspects is firstly because there is nothing worthwhile about the apostate religion that is worthy of mention. Secondly because the apostacy is a money-motivated, commercially and materialistically minded system. Israel was referred to in similar terms for the same reason, as we read in Jer. 4:30: “Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you deck yourself with ornaments of gold ...”

The deep involvement of the harlot in economics explains why the elaborate description in Rev. 18 of her mercantile interests reminds us so much of Tyre of the Old Testament; the mercantile power of the ancient world. Many of the phrases used in Rev. 18 to describe the splendour of Babylon are taken straight out of Ezekiel’s description of the commercial prosperity of Tyre (Ezk. 26 to 28).

During the reign of Solomon, Tyre entered into a covenant with Israel and showed reverence and respect to Yahweh their God. Tyre actually made a major contribution towards the temple at Jerusalem, providing materials and craftsmen for the building of it. But later in history, Tyre was corrupted by the wealth gained through trade and commerce and turned against Israel and her God.

In certain respects, Tyre’s religion became a corrupted form of the true, as in the case of Roman Catholicism later in history. For example,

the Phoenician sphinxes were a distortion or corruption of the divine cherubim in Jerusalem's temple. And the jewels placed over the sphinx's breasts are believed to be a corrupt replication of the breastplate worn by Israel's high priest.

(Some regard the purple and scarlet in the robes of the Pope, cardinals and bishops in the Roman Catholic church as a replication of the purple and scarlet in the curtains of the tabernacle and the ephod of the high priest Ex. 26:31. 28:5-6).

Tyre even called the site of her temple "The Holy Mountain of God" (Ezk. 28:14-16) - the same name of the site of the temple of God at Jerusalem (Dan. 11:45).

Tyre clearly had her own religion and in certain senses it was a corrupt form of the true. For more reasons than one she is therefore appropriately referred to as a "harlot" (Isa. 23:15-16). Because her love for money and the wealth gained through her trafficking corrupted her, the main emphasis in Ezk. 26 to 28, as in the case of the harlot in Rev. 18; is therefore upon her materialistic spirit and splendour, rather than the religious aspects of the apostasy.

A GOLDEN CUP FULL OF ABOMINATIONS

Consistent with being decked with gold, the harlot is depicted in Rev. 17:4 "having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications."

In v2 reference was made to "the wine of her fornication" which the inhabitants of the earth drink, and we have seen that wine signifies doctrine or teaching. Verse 4 therefore simply means that the golden cup in her hand from which people drink, involves the imbibing of teaching that is full of abomination to God and results in people becoming spiritual fornicators in His sight. Who would dare, after reading the Lord's assessment and verdict of the Roman Catholic church here, speak kind and flattering words about the system? The danger in not seeing the system as God sees it, is that we could be deceived by its great and impressive outward show of religiosity, and be sucked in by it. The figure of the Pope as a world celebrity, honoured and respected by kings, princes and presidents, and surrounded by millions of followers; the Vatican with all its material wealth; St Peter's Basilica with all of its impressive columns, arches, paintings, statues and rich ornamentation; the cardinals and bishops with their long flowing purple and scarlet robes and gold crosses and all the other trappings of gold, precious stones and pearls, are

very impressive to the carnal and materialistic mind, but are a deception. It is all a mere outward form and display of godliness, but has no power to save because it is a sham. It has no truth in it. Rev. 18:4 says: "Come out."

It is significant that the teaching of the church which is an abomination to God, is depicted as being in a "golden cup." A golden cup is expensive and attractive and appealing to the carnal materialistic mind. It speaks of the outward materialistic glory and splendour of the apostate church which appeals to carnal materialistic people, and which deceives them into drinking from it and swallowing the false teaching; hook, line and sinker!

But of course the golden cup does not contain anything precious. It certainly does not contain the ingredients required for a tried faith which is "much more precious than gold" (1 Pet. 1:7). It is truly the height of hypocrisy that abominations and filthiness should be poured from a golden cup! But there is nothing new under the sun. The Lord Jesus said these words to the religious hierarchy of his day: "Woe unto you ... for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but within they are full of extortion and greed" (Matt. 23:25). "Beware of the Scribes who desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the front seats in the assembly and the places of honour at feasts; who swallow the property of widows and give long prayers to make a good impression: they shall receive greater damnation" (Lk. 20:46-47).

The harlot holding the golden cup is called "Babylon" in Rev. 17:5, and because of this it is interesting to note that a prophecy in Jer. 51:7 concerning ancient Babylon says: "Babylon has been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunk: the nations of the earth have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad."

In this particular Scripture, Babylon is not depicted with a golden cup in her hand as in Rev. 17; she is depicted as a golden cup herself in the Lord's hand. As in the case of the golden bowls in Rev. 15:7 and 14:10 which were full of wine, signifying the wrath of God that is to be poured out on the nations, ancient Babylon was initially used by God to pour out His wrath on the nations, making them "drunk" and "mad" i.e. stagger in confusion and bewilderment - mad with fear and panic.

But in the end, Babylon herself was made to drink of the wine of the wrath of God and become "drunk" (Jer. 51:57). And so shall modern Babylon: "And great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (Rev. 16:19). All who receive the contents of her golden cup, shall suffer the fierce wrath of God that shall be poured out of His golden bowl!

Regarding the “abominations” with which the harlot’s cup is full: the word abominations is frequently used in Scripture in relation to idols and images which God strictly forbids and which He finds loathsome and detestable. It is offensive and insulting to Him, the great uncreate, the immortal, all-powerful, indestructible God; to be likened to, or rivalled by any shape or form created by man which is lifeless and destructible. The word “abomination” is virtually synonymous with “idol” or “idolatry” in the Scriptures. Examples of idols being referred to as abominations can be seen in 2 Kng. 23:13. Isa. 44:19 etc. Scriptures also abound in which bowing to idols is referred to as prostitution or whoredom. For example: “On every hill and under every green tree, you have prostituted yourselves by bowing down to idols” (Jer. 1:20 N.L.T.).

On this basis, the “abominations” in the harlot’s golden cup could relate to the idols and images which are very much part of the Roman Catholic system, and which are sometimes claimed to come alive. In the Vatican at Rome there are all manner of images which Roman Catholics venerate; not to mention the statues of Jesus, Mary, the apostles and various “saints” in all their churches throughout the world.

Roman Catholicism has adopted the heathen practise - the practise of ancient pagan Babylon, of using images; thinking it is justified in doing so by putting new and Christian names on them. Herein lies the deception for those who are ignorant of the Scriptures and who therefore lack knowledge and discernment in spiritual matters. In many respects, Roman Catholicism has superimposed paganism upon the Christian faith and a book illustrating this has been written by Alexander Hislop, entitled: “The Two Babylons.”

It is surely divine justice that Rome, the nerve centre and power base of this corrupt and apostate church, will ultimately be destroyed by the beast, and Roman Catholics world-wide will be forced to worship his image!

FILTHINESS OF HER FORNICATIONS

Regarding the “filthiness of her fornications” referred to in Rev. 17:4 as coming from the harlot’s golden cup: As has been pointed out; in Scripture, idolatry is referred to as spiritual fornication, but there may be more to it than this.

The fertility rites of the pagans practised at the idol shrines involved temple prostitutes and literal physical fornication took place between them and the idol worshippers as part of the fertility cult. According to

Herodotus, each maiden in Babylon was required to prostitute her virginity in temple worship. Sexual corruption took place under the guise or umbrella of religion.

It is no secret that accusations over a long period of time have been made that many Roman Catholic priests, denied sexuality due to the church's doctrine (wine) of celibacy, have been involved in fornication with nuns and other women in the church. If these accusations are true, the words "filthiness of her fornications" would be very relevant. Being "priests" does not exempt men (or women) from such behaviour. Eli's sons were priests, but they became apostate and committed fornication with the women who came to the tabernacle to serve and worship (1 Sam. 2:22). In Christ, all believers are priests, and being flesh and blood, all have the potential to be tempted into sin.

Celibacy of all priests is an unscriptural doctrine. It is one of the many false doctrines of the Roman Catholic church, and as pointed out before, "forbidding to marry" is mentioned in 1 Tim. 4:3 as one of the signs of deviating from the true Christian faith. It is unnatural and dangerous, because it results in stifling and suppressing God-given desires. The apostle says it is better to marry than burn with lust (1 Cor. 7:9). Refusal to allow marriage can result in lust breaking out and exploding in fornication and homosexuality. In the event of this happening due to the celibacy doctrine, it is fittingly referred to as coming out of the harlot's cup.

Years ago a book was written by an ex nun entitled: "The Nun's Story," in which she openly testified to the fornicating that takes place between priests and nuns. Other ex priests and nuns have confirmed this. Another book was written on the same subject in which it was stated that babies born to nuns through priests were killed at birth and disposed of.

In a book entitled "The Faith of Millions," written by O'Brien, the following statements are made:

"In 836 the council of Aix-La-Chapelle complained that many nunneries were brothels rather than houses of God, and it decreed that fornication was so prevalent among nuns that all nunneries built should have 'no dark corners in which scandals may be perpetrated out of view.'"

"During the famous Council of Trent, August Baumgartner told the assembled cardinals and bishops that 96% of all priests were either married or had concubines."

"Pope Gregory X, in dismissing the second Council of Lyons, told the cardinals and bishops that because of their immorality, 'they were the ruin of the world.'"

Adam Clarke mentions in his commentary that former priest, bishop Bale, said priests abominably corrupted men's wives, daughters, maid servants and children.

A more recent report on research by the Roman Catholic church in the U.S.A. said that over 50,000 children have been abused by priests since 1950 up to the year 2000 i.e. about 1,000 per year!

In April 2004, a T.V. documentary entitled: "The Flesh and the Devil," interviewed a priest who said he knows priests who are committed to each other in homosexual relationships.

The fact that Rome's destruction is described in terms like Sodom's overthrow (Rev. 18:9. 19:2-3), indicates that gross immorality is involved. Sodom of course was renowned for gross homosexuality, and where this exists, all other sexual perversions also exist including child abuse. In relation to this, consider the following selection of articles taken from the Wanganui Chronicle in 2002:

April 5: Church in crisis, say U.S. Catholics. "A majority of U.S. Catholics believe the paedophilia scandal in the Roman Catholic church is a crisis and many are angry at the way the church has handled the issue A survey of more than 1,000 adults found that among all Americans, 74% said church officials have tried to cover up the problem of priests who sexually abuse children. Two thirds of Catholic respondents expressed the same view ..."

April 27: Abuse Hidden. "An auxiliary bishop for the Roman Catholic church in El Salvador said yesterday the church keeps and periodically burns a secret archive of complaints against priests, including child abuse charges. Auxiliary bishop Gregorio Rosa made the accusation in a television interview as the central American nation, like many other predominately Catholic countries, reacted in alarm to a crisis that has hit the U.S. church over the shielding by high-level clergy of priests accused of abusing children."

May 4: Priest sex scandal spreads to Hong Kong. "Police in Hong Kong are investigating reports of child sexual abuse by 3 priests in the territory, the latest in a growing list of world-wide cases that have shaken the Catholic church ... Yesterday a priest ... Father Paul Shanley, was arrested in San Diego on suspicion of 3 counts of child rape in Boston."

May 8: "Help me find the priest who fathered my child." Los Angeles - "A woman claiming she had a baby after being seduced by 7 Catholic priests yesterday asked a U.S. cardinal to help find the father and explain why he helped him hide for 2 decades ... The latest salvo in a snowballing scandal over sexual abuse by U.S. Catholic priests came just

a week after 4 men, who say they were molested by a priest in the 1960s, sued the head of the United States' largest Catholic diocese, Los Angeles cardinal Roger Mahony, for allegedly covering up clerical sex abuse ... The U.S. branch of the Catholic Church has been besieged by an avalanche of allegations of predatory sexual behaviour by priests, prompting Pope John Paul 2 to convene an emergency meeting of his U.S. cardinals last month."

June 22: Priest indicted on rape charges. Cambridge, Massachusetts - "A Massachusetts grand jury yesterday indicted Father Paul Shanley, one of the priests at the centre of a sex abuse scandal rocking the Catholic church, on charges of raping and assaulting 4 young boys. Middlesex county district attorney Martha Coakley said Shanley, already facing some of the most shocking accusations in the scandal, had been indicted on multiple counts of rape and indecent assault and battery of 4 children under the age of 14. Coakley said all of the alleged incidents took place when Shanley, an advocate of sex between men and boys, worked from 1979 to 1989 at St John the Evangelist parish in the Boston suburb of Newton ..."

June 28: Retired priest to stand trial on 42 sex charges. Louisville, Kentucky. - "A retired Roman Catholic priest has been indicted on 42 counts of sexual misconduct after dozens of people came forward saying they were abused as children. The Rev. Lous Miller, 71, faces 6 counts of sexual abuse and 36 counts of indecent and immoral practices ..."

Even in the church of England, an off-shoot of the Roman Catholic church, in spite of the clergy being free to marry, sexual perversion has become a major problem. Large headlines in the London Daily Mail back in October 1987 declared: "One vicar in 3 gay ... campaign to drive out homosexuals would shut down the church of England." The reports quoted the "Reverend" general secretary of the lesbian and gay Christian movement as saying: "If this motion were accepted it would wreck the church, and the archbishop of Canterbury knows it. As a general figure, we believe between 30 and 40% of church of England clergymen are gay. And they are the most active people contributing to the ministry of the church."

An overwhelming majority of 388 members (95% of the clergy) voted in favour of a watered down version. Concerning this, the Economist reported: "The church of England is against homosexual practises, but not very much. The general synod, the church's parliament, with homosexual clergy in mind, this week decided that homosexual acts,

unlike fornication and adultery, are not a sin: they merely fall short of the ideal that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship.”

Such reasoning demonstrates how ignorant of the Word of God and how spiritually bankrupt this ecclesiastical system is. The Bible is unambiguously anti-adultery, anti-fornication and anti-homosexuality. All 3 are equally abhorrent to God - so abhorrent that they bar entrance into His kingdom. “Be not deceived” says the apostle Paul, “neither fornicators ... nor adulterers ... nor homosexuals ... shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Homosexuality used to be seen as a deviancy, but now merely a difference. In August 2003 the U.S. Episcopal church voted to approve the election of its first openly gay bishop, risking a major split in the denomination.

Some have also applied the “filthiness of fornications” to the trafficking in, and making merchandise out of the “relics,” involving skulls and bones which the Roman Catholics have a history of collecting and selling; attributing to them spiritual powers and influences. This virtually puts them into the same category as idols and images.

Under God’s law given to Israel, a dead body or any part of a dead body was unclean and anyone who came in contact with it was rendered unclean. In view of the fact that bones of the dead are “unclean,” and that regarding them as a source of divine blessing amounts to idolatry, which is spiritual fornication, “filthiness of fornication” would be an appropriate designation for such a practise.

Some time ago the results of an investigation by an Italian newspaper into the “relics” held by the Roman Catholic church revealed that: “There are 10 skulls of St John the Baptist around the globe. And the apostle Jacob left 9 heads and 18 arms by far-strewn disciples. But the English patron saint, St George, easily tops the list with enough bones to make up 30 skeletons.”

The selling of such relics for monetary gain has turned many a Catholic church into a trafficker of the dead, a house of merchandise and a den of thieves and deceit. Such relics and the various statues of Jesus that are supposed to have bled and the statues of Mary that are supposed to have shed tears etc, are all summed up in the word “sorceries” in Rev. 18:23.

UPON HER FOREHEAD A NAME WRITTEN: MYSTERY ...

The description of the harlot continues in Rev. 17:5: “And upon her forehead was a name written, mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (A.V.).

Some commentators say the exhibition of the name on the harlot’s forehead probably alludes to the custom of Roman harlots, who similarly displayed their names or pet names on their foreheads. However, the name on the harlot’s forehead in Rev. 17:5 is not the harlot’s assessment of herself and neither would she want to display such a name like “abominations of the earth.” The name is God’s assessment of her and because it is due to her carnal and corrupt mind, which is represented by the forehead (see p.242), it is depicted on the forehead.

In Jer. 3:3 “A harlot’s forehead” is explained to be a woman who refuses to be ashamed of her infidelity, disloyalty and unfaithfulness. This is certainly true of the harlot in Rev. 17. Part of the punishment for the name on her forehead described in Rev. 17:5, will involve being branded in the forehead with the name or number of the anti-god beast! (Rev. 13:16-18). But those who are sealed in the forehead with God’s name will be exempt.

Translators are divided as to whether the word “mystery” is part of the inscription or title on the harlot’s forehead or not. Some translate as follows: “And upon her forehead a name written, a mystery, Babylon the great ...” This sense is given by many modern translations. The Good News Bible puts it like this: “On her forehead was a name written that has a secret meaning: Babylon ...” Berkley says: “On her forehead a symbolic title was inscribed: Babylon ...”

However, other translations follow the A.V. and include the word “mystery” in the title on the harlot’s forehead. For example, the New International: “This title was written on her forehead: “Mystery, Babylon the great ...”

The Greek word “musterion” rendered “mystery” means a sacred secret with a hidden or symbolical meaning, revealed only to the initiated. It is derived from “mueo” which means to initiate or admit to secrets, and is used in Plp. 4:12 where Paul says “I am instructed,” lit: “have been initiated into the secret.”

On this basis, the word “mystery” in Rev. 17:5 would mean that the true identity of the harlot and the significance of her title is revealed only to those who are initiated into divine truths, i.e. those who are the true servants of God and friends of the Lord Jesus Christ. “The secret of

Yahweh is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (Pr. 25:14. cp. Pr. 3:32. Am. 3:7). “I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from my Father I have revealed to you” (Jn. 15:15).

The concept of “mystery” meaning a divine secret with a hidden symbolic meaning that requires revelation from God, is indicated in Rev. 17:7 where the angel says to John: “I will tell you the mystery of the woman” i.e. I will reveal the hidden secret or significance. (Compare 1 Cor. 15:51: “Behold, I show you a mystery” i.e. I will tell you something that has been a secret. Also see Rev. 1:20). The angel then goes on to explain to John that the woman represents a city situated on 7 mountains - a city that reigned over the kings of the earth.

BABYLON

The fact that the word “mystery” precedes the word “Babylon,” and means that the name Babylon has a secret symbolical significance, assures us that the name Babylon is not to be taken literally. There is something deeper to it than the literal letter of the word. The caution given in Rev. 17:9 that “this requires wisdom” also indicates that “Babylon” etc is not to be taken simply at face value. (Cp. Rev. 11:8 where Sodom and Egypt are to be understood spiritually not literally). It should be evident from this that the Babylon here in Rev. 17 is not the Babylon in Iraq which is on the banks of the river Euphrates, but Rome on the banks of the Tiber. Iraq’s Babylon is not near the sea (Rev. 18:17), or situated on 7 mountains (Rev. 17:9), and neither was it reigning over the kings of the earth in the first century A.D. when John received the revelation. This does not mean of course, that Iraq does not come within the scope of the prophecies in Revelation. As has been pointed out: ancient Babylon, along with Egypt, is referred to as a dragon in the Scriptures, and the anti-Israel Moslem confederacy represented by the dragon with 10 horns in Rev. 12 will no doubt involve Iraq.

On the basis of the prophecy in Isa. 13:19-22 which declares that ancient Babylon would be overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah and never be inhabited again, many in the past have affirmed that that city would never be rebuilt and therefore cannot be the great city of Babylon referred to in the book of Revelation.

But in 1978 Saddam Hussein, in defiance of this prophecy, brought in thousands of foreign workers to restore the Ishtar gate and Nebuchadnezzar’s palace. By February 1990 some 60 million bricks had

been laid. Nebuchadnezzar had his name on about 10% of his bricks; Saddam had his name on every one! A vast auditorium and hotel were built, and further hotels and recreation centres were planned to produce a sort of cultural Babylon Disneyland: symphony orchestras, ballet troupes, opera singers; and the ultimate tourist attraction: spectacular restored hanging gardens.

Because of this, a growing number of students of Bible prophecy started to urge with more and more confidence, that Babylon in Revelation was not Rome after all, but a revival of ancient Babylon. However, as a result of the Gulf War in 1991 the foreign workers fled back to their own countries, and as a result of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the American and British forces, Saddam Hussein lost power, bringing to an end his grand schemes. His 13 year rebuilding of Babylon was simply, as one writer has put it: “A hiccup when set against the centuries of desolation.”

Coming back to the word “mystery”: In the New Testament it is used in relation to truths that were actually taught in the Scriptures, but the significance of which was hidden and concealed until the proper time arrived for revelation and understanding.

Prior to the revelation being given to John, references were made in the Gospels and Epistles as we have seen, to a coming apostacy, but there was much more to be revealed concerning the nature and extent of it. For example: in one of his parables Jesus referred to a “woman” who put leaven in the meal until the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:33). Elsewhere Jesus used leaven to signify false doctrine which spreads and permeates like leaven (Mat. 16:6-11) and it can be applied to the false doctrine of the “woman” in Rev. 17, which has permeated the whole world like a cancer. In this respect, the word “mystery” in the sense of revealed secret is significant. The “woman” in Rev. 17 is a revelation of the woman in Matt. 13:33.

The woman in Rev. 17 is also a mystery in the sense of an enigma or riddle to those who have found her so hard to discern and identify, that they have taken her, harlot that she clearly is, to be the chaste spouse - the true virgin bride of Christ! But those who know the truth will soon detect her falsehood and those who are pure will soon perceive she is not.

What she conceives as God (the Trinity) is certainly a mystery, and significantly enough, both she and her daughters openly confess it to be a “blessed mystery.” Because the forehead upon which the name mystery is inscribed represents the mind, it is not difficult to also see it signifying confusion and befuddlement of thinking caused by the intoxicating wine

of her false doctrine.

Out of the concept of the Trinity comes another “mystery”: “Mary the mother of God,” not to mention her “immaculate conception.” To this can be added the doctrine of transubstantiation etc. Roman Catholic teaching is full of mystery in the sense of being illogical, incomprehensible human reasoning and philosophy.

Gibbon, in the fifty first chapter of the history on the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, referred to “the creed of mystery and superstition which in the seventh century disgraced the simplicity of the Gospel ...” One writer claims that the word “mystery” was originally engraved on the Pope’s tiara, but was removed by Julius 111 because of embarrassing Protestant comment.

BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS

The harlot is not merely called Babylon, but “Babylon the great.” She is “the great harlot” (v1) and “great city” (v18). She is greater in influence than ancient Babylon.

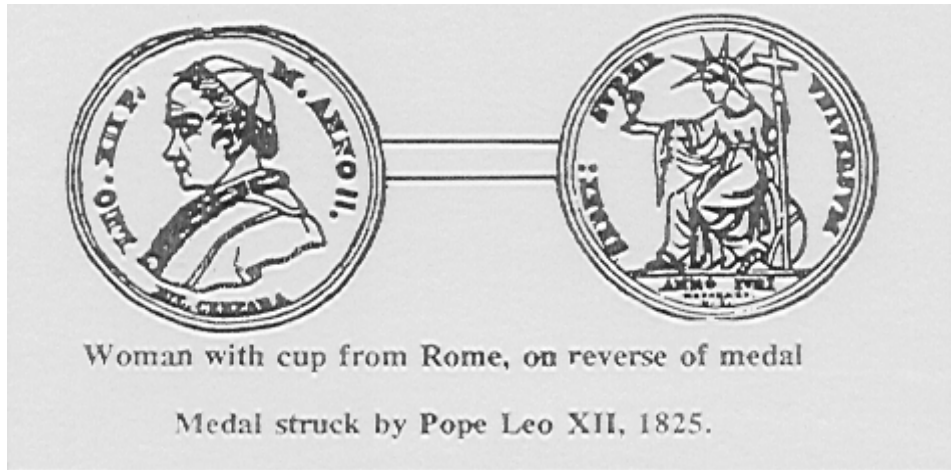
“Babel” and “Babylon” come from the same Hebrew word which means confusion. The name originated as a result of the Lord causing confusion among the builders of the tower of Babel in the plain of Shinar, by confounding their language, causing them to speak different dialects that could not be understood. This judgement was designed to thwart their plan to build a tower up to heaven and establish a renowned centre to make a name for themselves. Nimrod was the original builder and a rebel. He set up a rival kingdom and religion. It was the beginning of the kingdoms of men or the world, in opposition to the kingdom of God.

The city of Babylon became the capital of the Babylonian empire and was “the glory of the kingdoms” (Isa. 13:19). It was a beautiful city with hanging gardens that were one of the wonders of the world.

Due to the Babylonians conquering the people of God in Old Testament times, persecuting and taking them captive; Rome was also called Babylon because the Romans did the same to the people of God in New Testament times. They were the counterpart of the Babylonians. (Compare this principle as applied to “the Canaanite” in Zech. 14:21; “the Philistines” in Isa. 11:14; “Edom, Moab and Ammon” in Dan. 11:41).

When Papal Rome took up the mantel of pagan Rome, superimposing Pagan doctrines and practises upon the Christian faith and persecuting the true church, she was naturally given and made to wear the title “Babylon.”

Regarding the title “mother of harlots”: the council at Trent proclaimed that “the Roman church ... is the mother and mistress of all churches.” In 1825, a medal was struck commemorating her claimed status. On one side of the medal is the image of Pope Leo XII, and on the other side, a woman, symbolizing the Roman Catholic church.



The woman is seated on a globe, with rays of glory on her head, a cross in her left hand, and a cup, marked with a cross. This is held in her extended right hand, as if presenting it to be drunk. Beneath her is the date, and around her face the legend: “She sits upon the world of jubilee, 1825.” The 3 aspects of a woman, sitting down, holding a cup in her hand, naturally invite comparison with the woman in Rev. 17 who is also sitting down with a cup in her hand. Of course the woman in Rev. 17 is depicted sitting on a beast. In relation to this, is it significant that a stamp issued in Britain in 1984, produced a picture depicting the E.U. system as a woman sitting on a beast striding on the waters of the sea?



(The woman on the beast in Rev. 17 is also depicted upon many waters in v1, 15).

One of Pope John Paul II’s closest aides wrote to bishops world-wide declaring that the Roman Catholic church is “the mother” of other

Christian churches, and that it was incorrect to refer to Christian churches, ranging from Orthodox to Protestant, as “sister” churches to the Roman Catholic church. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has been quoted as saying: “It must be always clear that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic universal church is not the sister, but the mother of all the churches.”

The term “sister churches” is often used in dialogue aimed at fostering closer ties among Christians. John Paul has made steps toward unity with other Christians, a key goal of his papacy. But Ratzinger, the Vatican official in charge of ensuring doctrinal correctness, appeared to be putting the brakes on such expansive terminology. He has been quoted as saying: “It is evident that it would go against the faith to consider the church (Catholic) as “one” way of salvation alongside those represented by other religions.”

This claim caused concern among the Protestant communities, but it gave a clear indication of the political direction of the Roman Catholic church, and identifies her as “the mother” - “the mother of harlots.”

During the Reformation period, the Protestant commentators always identified the great harlot as the Roman church. But the “harlots” of which she is the mother, includes the Protestant churches. These started out on reform and ran well for a short season, but they fenced themselves in with their creeds and failed to keep pace with the advancing light of doctrinal and prophetic truth. And now the ecumenical spirit is watering down the little truth they had, putting the Reformation into reverse gear, leading them back to where they withdrew as dissenters, or reformers. Eventually, it will be “like mother, like daughter.” But God will always have His faithful and true witnesses in the world, where the wheat and tares grow together until the harvest.

A century or so ago, there would have been no difficulty on the part of Protestants to appreciate the meaning of the symbology of the harlot and Babylon the great, and the implicit indictment of the Roman Catholic church. The martyrdom of those whose only crime was that they opposed the teaching of this church was still remembered; the horror of the massacre of the Huguenots and the terrors of the Inquisition not completely forgotten.

Today, even those communities which were once most anti-Catholic have come under the influence of the ecumenical age, the spirit of tolerance, the social policy of the Pope and the continuous subtle propaganda of his church; in which it is made to appear to be a great peacemaker and its institutions full of virtue and truth. Even many of those who were once earnest Bible students are thinking that perhaps the

Roman Catholic church is not so bad after all, and is not the harlot of Rev. 17.

Those who love God's Word should beware; for although this church does not have the political power it held in the past; though it no longer seeks to destroy those who oppose it, it still remains a system of mysticism and spiritual darkness; full of idols and images which are an abomination to God, and very opposed to true Biblical doctrine and those who believe and teach it.

It is recognized that there are many individuals who belong to this church who are sincere, devout and zealous. But it must be remembered that sincerity and zeal are not a substitute for truth. The Jews were very zealous and they crucified Jesus! They had "a zeal toward God but not based on knowledge. Being ignorant of the right way of God, they set up their own way, and therefore failed to submit themselves to the right way of God" (Rom. 10:2-3). This also applies to the Roman Catholic system.

We are not called upon to judge people, but we are expected to judge the system by God's Word, and the judgement given by God is: "Abominations of the earth." The grossness of this language makes it clear that the system is offensive to, and disgusts God. It is loathsome and abhorrent to Him. Those who truly know God and have true spiritual discernment will see the system in the same light.

DRUNK WITH THE BLOOD OF SAINTS

John continues in Rev. 17:6 by saying: "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration" (A.V.). We also read in Rev. 18:24 that "in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

History testifies to the fact that no other power has persecuted and martyred the Christians more than the Roman Catholic church. To read accounts of the horrors committed by the Inquisition, the massacre of St Bartholomew's day, the massacre of the Huguenots, and all the other horrors committed in attempting to stop the Reformation, is enough to convince anyone of this.

Rome has never been noted for her toleration of those who oppose her. To my knowledge she has never publicly acknowledged her sin of putting Protestants to death. Calling them "separated brethren" is just an accommodation used to gain acceptance by Protestants. When she is established in power again, as Rev. 17 predicts, history will repeat itself:

she will persecute and put to death those who oppose her. Revelation therefore leads us to expect persecution of the saints from both the religious and secular powers: the dragon, the beasts and the harlot.

Reference to the harlot being drunk with the blood of prophets and saints reveals that the prophecy pertains particularly to the end time when there shall be prophets among the saints as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28). Also see pages 430-432.

It has to be recognized though, that the persecuting in the past was not one-sided. Protestants could be as harsh to Catholics as Catholics were to Protestants. Many so-called Protestants have taken up the sword and killed Catholics, and in so doing have acted contrary to the spirit and commandments of Christ, disqualifying themselves as the friends of God and heirs of His kingdom. Basically, they are of the same spirit as the harlot, and they are therefore called “harlots” and the Roman church is referred to as their “mother.” They are just as intolerant of all who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity and other false doctrines they inherited from their mother, and will support the persecution of all who oppose them when they link up with the Roman Catholic church in the end time. It is fitting therefore that they shall all ultimately come under the same judgement of God.

COMPLETE AMAZEMENT

In some respects it is a “mystery” as to how a church system which is acquainted with the teaching of Jesus and claims to be his follower and representative, could ever be able to commit the atrocities that have been and will be committed. When John saw it he said: “I wondered with great admiration” (A.V.). Modern translations express it in terms of: “I was greatly astonished;” “I stared in horror.”

John was probably amazed that an institution professing to be Christ’s “woman,” could be such a harlot and persecute and put to death true Christians. He may have also been amazed at how politically powerful a pseudo Christian movement could become in the world. In his own day in the first century A.D. even the thought of the church which was “the sect everywhere spoken against” (Act. 28:22), sitting on the beast of the day (the pagan Roman empire which persecuted the Christians), would have been inconceivable.

It will truly be amazing - something to marvel and be astonished at in the end time, to see the Pope emerge from being a prisoner in the “wilderness” to such world-wide power and influence. Such a revival of

power will be staggering in view of the revolutions and reformation that took this power away a few centuries ago. It will be incredible - almost unthinkable even to God's people, that the dark ages could come back in a modern age of religious freedom, resulting in Christians being put to death for their faith. To some today, it is as hard to believe that this could happen as it would have been for Jews to believe prior to the rise of Hitler and the holocaust, that within a few years, persecution and death would be raging. History testifies to many unexpected and unbelievable transitions taking place in a relatively short period of time.

Romish apologists have been forced by the evidence concerning the harlot in Rev. 17 to admit that it is Rome that is pictured here; but they say - and some Protestant interpreters have joined them in it - that the reference is to pagan Rome, not Papal Rome. But why would John be amazed to see pagan Rome persecuting Christians? Had he not seen and experienced persecution from this power, being himself in banishment under its cruel power at the time he wrote? Why then, should he be astonished, as he looked forward in time, to see Rome still persecuting the saints? It is hardly any cause for wonder that the ignorant heathen should persecute God's people! This is almost proof that the harlot is not the secular power of pagan Rome or any other secular power, but an ecclesiastical power - Papal Rome. Seeing a church, professedly Christian, persecuting the saints and drunk with their blood, is what astonished John.

In response to John's amazement at what he saw, the angel said to him: "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery (i.e. I will reveal the secret) of the woman and the beast that carries her, which has 7 heads and 10 horns" (v7).

Do the angel's words: "why did you marvel?" mean "why are you so surprised that the church could become so apostate and such a persecutor of the saints?" If so, the innuendo could be: "You shouldn't be surprised." In view of the way the Old Testament church went badly apostate and killed the prophets of God, and in view of the warnings of apostacy in the New Testament, especially the warnings given by John himself in his epistles concerning the anti-Christ; it is not surprising; it was predictable and to be expected.

THE BEAST

In the next verse, the angel gives more information of the beast upon which the harlot is seen sitting: "The beast that you saw 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 is to come” (v8).

Jesus “was” upon earth during his mortal ministry, and “was not” for a brief period due to a deadly wound inflicted on the cross, but his wound healed and he rose from the dead and “will come” again. The beast who “was and is not and is to come,” will be a rival and a very poor one at that!

The beast “was” in the sense that he previously existed as a power in the past, but was not in power when John received the revelation. It is evident from this that the beast upon which the woman was seen sitting, did not signify pagan Rome which was in power at the time.

Reference to this beast ascending out of the bottomless pit links him with the beast in Rev. 11:7 who also ascends out of the bottomless pit. And reference to him having 7 heads and 10 horns links him with the beast seen rising up out of the sea in Rev. 13:1 with 7 heads and 10 horns.

Rev. 17:11 implies he will be a revival of one of the 7 heads, making him an eighth phase in the history of beast powers. This is how it reads: “He was, and is not, and even he is the eighth, and is of the 7, and goes into perdition.”

Pagan Rome was the sixth head and was in power when John received the revelation. This is referred to in Rev. 17:10: “There are 7 kings: 5 have fallen and one (the sixth) is.” A distinction is clearly made between the Roman beast in John’s day and the end time beast. In John’s day the Roman beast “is” but the end time beast upon which the harlot sits, “was and is not.” The 10 horns of the beast likewise in John’s day “have received no kingdom as yet” (v12).

“Perdition” is the ultimate destiny of the beast. The Greek word is “apolia” and means destruction; perish. The same word occurs in 2 Thes. 2:3 where the man of sin is referred to as “the son of perdition.” This is not surprising because the man of sin equates with the beast. It is evident from this that the harlot (Roman Catholic church) is not the beast and the man of sin is not the Pope. The harlot is theistic and the beast is anti-theistic. If John understood this, it would add to his amazement considering that the harlot was riding the beast.

Seeing that the beast is so destructive of the things and people of God, it is fitting that he should end up in perdition (destruction). As pointed out in an earlier chapter, the Greek word for “apollyon” (Rev. 9:11) is derived from the same word from which “apolia” (perdition) is

derived. This would also be significant if the name “apollyon” related to the beast.

Apolia is translated “destruction” in Matt. 7:13. Rom. 9:22. Plp. 3:19. 2 Pet. 2:1. 3:16; “waste” Matt. 26:8; “perish” Act. 8:20; “die” Act. 25:16; “damnation” 2 Pet. 2:3.

John “wondered” at the harlot and the world “shall wonder” at the beast. The revival and rise of the beast is evidently unexpected and unpredictable, causing “them that dwell on the earth to wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” Rev. 13:3 makes the same point that “all the world wondered after the beast,” i.e. followed the beast with amazement and astonishment due to his revival and rise to power after being inflicted with a deadly wound. It is only those whose names are not written in the book of life who will be amazed at the beast’s rise to power. The saints, whose names are written in the book of life, are enlightened in the Word of prophecy and are familiar with the message in Revelation (or should be!), and will therefore be expecting and anticipating the rise of the beast and will not be taken by surprise when it happens.

THE MIND WHICH HAS WISDOM

Readings on into Rev. 17:9 the angel says: “And here is the mind that has wisdom. The 7 heads are 7 mountains on which the woman sits.”

Taking this statement as it stands in the A.V. it could be thought that it means the message that follows comes from the wise mind of God. However, most modern versions translate it to mean: “This calls for a mind with wisdom” i.e. wisdom is required on the part of the reader to discern the significance of the symbols. The Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: “Here there is need for cleverness, for a shrewd mind.” Berkley: “Here is something for the intelligent to ponder.”

It should be noted that the verses which this statement precedes (v10-11) have been called “one of the puzzles of the book.” The reference to the need for wisdom is evidently a warning, calling special attention to the need for spiritual discernment in explaining the passage.

The Greek word translated “mind” in Rev. 17:9 in the A.V. is “nous” and means the intellect, which of course is necessary for understanding. It is actually translated “understanding” in Rev. 13:18. Lk. 24:45. Passages of Scripture such as the one under consideration in Rev. 17 and the emphasis in Scripture on understanding, make it clear that Christianity is

not a mindless faith in which minds hang loose and emotions and feelings take control. God wants us to worship him with all our mind as well as our heart (Matt. 22:37). He takes delight in those who prayerfully exercise their intellect in order to understand His prophetic Word. See Dan. 9:1-2. 10:1-3, 12. 12:4. Pr. 2:1-5. 25:2. Heb. 5:11-14. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, but with all thy getting, get understanding" (Pr. 4:7).

In New Testament times, some who were endowed with the gift of tongues were content with, and settled for their "spirit" uttering foreign words that neither they nor their hearers could understand with their mind. Was this a good thing? No! The apostle Paul spoke against it and discouraged it. He said: "Let him who speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit (the sub-conscious non-reasoning part of the brain) prays, but my understanding ("nous" - mind - intellect - the reasoning part of the brain) is unfruitful (i.e. inactive and unproductive). So then, I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding (nous) also ..."

The importance of exercising the mind in the word of God is taught many times in the Scriptures. One only needs to look up the word "mind" in a Concordance to see the number of times it occurs, to appreciate the emphasis placed upon it. Failure to exercise our unique God-given intellect in the Word of God which raises us above the level of animals and makes us more like God, results in being barren and unfruitful in spiritual knowledge and understanding.

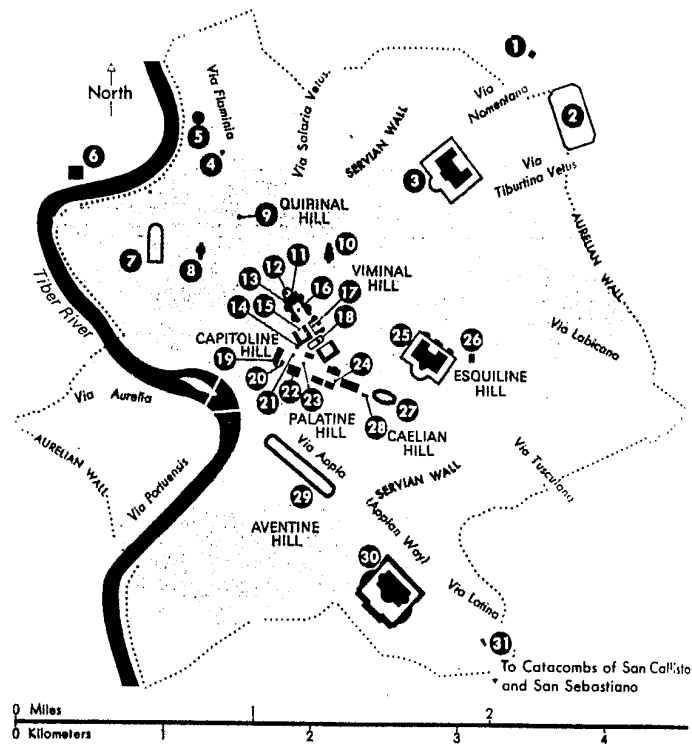
THE SEVEN MOUNTAINS

We are informed by the angel in Rev. 17:9 that the 7 heads of the beast represent "7 mountains on which the woman sits." Because of this, some artists depict the woman sitting on the 7 heads of the beast instead of his back.

Some claim that both Jerusalem and Constantinople (the headquarters of the Greek Catholic church up until 1453, which was given the name "new Rome"), were built upon 7 hills. But as already pointed out, the woman on the beast is that great city which reigned over the kings of the earth in John's day (v18), which was Rome. The picture presented to us here is an ecclesiastical power reigning from Rome. This would have been quite a prophecy when John received it in the first century A.D. when pagan Rome ruled.

That ancient Rome had the peculiarity of being built on 7 hills is

known to most schoolboys, and the hills are mentioned by name in most encyclopaedias: Capitoline, Palatine, Aventine, Quirinal, Viminal, Esquiline, Caelian. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia, modern Rome is on about 20 hills, but ancient Rome was on 7.



On page 2 of his introduction to “The Two Babylons,” Alexander Hislop writes: “No other city in the world has ever been celebrated as the city of Rome has, for its situation on 7 hills. Pagan poets and orators who had no thought of elucidating prophecy, have alike characterized it as “the seven hilled city.” Thus Virgil refers to it: “Rome has both become the most beautiful (city) in the world, and alone has surrounded for herself 7 heights with a wall!” Porpercius, in the same strain speaks of it (only by adding another trait, which completes the apocalyptic picture) as “the lofty city on 7 hills, which governs the whole world.” Its “governing the whole world” is just the counterpart of the divine statement - “which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18).

“To call Rome the “city of the 7 hills” was by its citizens held to be as descriptive as to call it by its own proper name. Hence Horace speaks of it by reference to its 7 hills alone, when he addresses, “the gods who have set their affections on the 7 hills.” ... When Symmachus ... the last

acting pagan Pontifex Maximus ... introduces by letter one friend of his to another, he calls him, “de septum montibus virim,” - a man from the 7 mountains, meaning by this, ... “a Roman citizen.”

Some have claimed that Jerusalem sits on 7 mountains and on that basis have concluded that she is the harlot in Rev. 17 not Rome. I have been unable to find any documentation to confirm this. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in describing Jerusalem in the first century A.D., says in book 5 chapter 4 that the city is built upon 2 hills. The International Bible Encyclopaedia agrees with this. Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Encyclopaedia on page 418 speaks of 3 hills in Jerusalem. There is however an abundance of documentation testifying that ancient Rome was built on 7 mountains.

In the days of the apostle John it was customary to represent the Roman state by a woman sitting upon 7 projections piled upon one another, to typify the 7 mountains. This can be seen upon a coin in the British museum, struck in the reign of Vespasian.



Sitting upon the 7 hills, the word “Roma” under the base line, indicated that the great city, as it really was in those days, was the capital of the state.

Of the 7 hills, the highest is only 46 metres (150 feet). Some have argued that they are too small to be termed “mountains,” and cannot therefore refer to Rome. But the Greek word “oros” translated “mountains” in Rev. 17:9 signifies any protrusion whether small or large, low or high, which rises or rears itself above the plain. It is translated “hill” in Matt. 5:14. Lk. 4:29. 9:37. The Romans themselves nevertheless call the land protrusions upon which the ancient city of Rome was built, “montes” - “mountains.”

SEVEN KINGS

After saying the 7 heads of the beast represent 7 mountains upon which the woman sits, Rev. 17:10 goes on to say: “and there are 7 kings” (A.V.). This is translated “and they are also 7 kings” by many of the modern translations. The verb form is such that we must translate it not as “there are 7 kings,” but “they are 7 kings.” That is to say, the 7 heads of the beast also represent 7 kings. For this reason modern translations insert the word “also” to convey the proper sense of the statement: “and they are also 7 kings.”

The statement reveals that the 7 heads of the beast have 2 meanings - a dual significance; one relates to the harlot and the other to the beast. Many a commentator has erred by limiting the 7 heads to the 7 mountains of Rome. If we stop at that idea, we shall fall short of the full explanation. They not only symbolize 7 mountains on which the harlot sits, but also 7 kings, 5 of whom have fallen (been overthrown), one is (the sixth), the other (seventh) is not yet come, and when he comes he must continue a short space of time. And the beast which was, and is not, he is both an eighth and is of (out of) the 7, and goes into perdition.

Now in order to understand this, it is important to remember that a beast sometimes represents a kingdom and at other times the king. (A mountain can also represent a kingdom: Jer. 51:25. Zech. 4:7). In view of the fact that kings usually rule over kingdoms, the 7 kings represent 7 kingdoms or empires, which are symbolized by beasts in Bible prophecy. For example: in Dan. 7:17 we read that 4 beasts are 4 kings, then in v23 we read that the fourth represents a kingdom.

That the “heads” in Rev. 17 represent “beasts” is indicated in v11 where it is stated that “the eighth” (i.e. one of the previous 7 heads revived) is a “beast.” It should be evident that if the eighth is a beast and is of the 7, that all 7 heads must represent beasts i.e. kingdoms or empires. This is also evident in Rev. 13 where reference is made in v3 to one of the heads being wounded, and v12 says it was the beast who was wounded.

Because the head dominates the beast, the head and the beast are treated as one. And the fact that “5 are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come;” reveals that the heads or beasts (kingdoms) are consecutive, not contemporaneous. The heads do not represent different leaders or different forms of government of one and the same beast, but different beasts - different phases of beast power in Israel’s history.

Instead of depicting 7 different beasts, the spirit presents one beast with 7 heads, due to the fact that all of the beasts have the same thing in

common: the subjugation of Israel. (Compare the image in Dan. 2. There was only one image but it consisted of a number of metals, representing successive world empires that ruled in turn over Israel).

In reality, from an historical point of view, the heads only appear one at a time. All 7 of them can only be seen together from a panoramic viewpoint - over a long period of time by human reckoning. It is evident from the angel's words: "5 are fallen, one is, and the other is yet to come," that the 7 are shown at one and the same time for the purpose of identification, not because they exist contemporary with each other. One writer has compared the situation to a very long photographic exposure that combines the details of several "instant" pictures. The image in Dan. 2 as mentioned before, is a particularly good example of this. Although there is only one image, (as in the case of one beast), different parts of it (as in the case of the different heads of the beast) represent different kingdoms in different phases of time.

NOT ROMAN EMPERORS OR GOVERNMENTS

The heads of the beast certainly cannot represent different Roman emperors because there were more than 8 and Christ did not return during the reign of the eighth. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia, Augustus was the first Roman emperor. Nero was the "fifth" emperor of imperial Rome and reigned from 54 to 68 A.D. Five emperors had "fallen" when he died in 68 A.D. After Nero, 3 emperors reigned for very short periods during 68 to 69 A.D. but never obtained full control of the empire. Then Vespasian ascended the throne and reigned from 69 to 79 A.D. followed by Titus who reigned as emperor from 79 to 81 A.D. Domitian came after him and reigned from 81 to 96 A.D. and it is generally believed that John received the revelation at the end of his reign. Domitian was the eleventh emperor of Rome and he was followed by another 54!

Those who regard the heads of the beast as representing the sequence of emperors of Rome obviously run into numerical difficulties. Those who adopt the 96 A.D. date of Revelation find that "5 are fallen and one is" cannot fit, for at that time 10 had fallen. Those who adopt the earlier date of 66 A.D. have similar difficulties. Nero, the fifth emperor was reigning at the time, which means only 4 had fallen, not 5, and the eighth, (Vitellius), was an insignificant emperor who only reigned for a short period in 69 A.D. He was certainly not a revival of one of the previous 7, and Christ certainly didn't return during his reign to do battle with him at

Armageddon!

Regarding the continuous historic view which relates the heads to the various forms of government tried by Rome throughout its history, Alfred Norris is worth quoting from p289-290 of his book: "Apocalypse For Every Man:

"It is already impossible to accept the interpretation offered by continuous historic interpreters. Adam Clarke supposes that John is telling us of seven systems of government in the Roman empire: kings (1181-753 B.C.); dictators (to 665 B.C.); decimvirs (to 336 B.C.); consuls (to 43 B.C.); triumvirs, and emperors: of which the last would be the one existing in John's time. The one to come on this view would be the "carlovingian patriciate," a system set up in Rome by Charlemagne, and said to have lasted a mere 45 years (Bible Commentary, Abingdon press reprint, V1, 1040-1041). This view arouses total incredulity in the present writer. To what purpose would John and ourselves be invited to look back more than a millennium before Christ to governments existing in Rome when even the Babylonian empire was in the remote future? Why would we be asked to interest ourselves in dictators and decimvirs who were reigning in Rome while the dominant powers in the world were still Babylon, Persia and Greece?

"The speaker's commentary offers (but not with approval) another list, ranging from kings to the Popes before the attainment of temporal power, while J. T. (John Thomas) lists the following: regal, consular, dictatorial, tribunitial, imperial (B.C. 31 to 76 A.D.), and gothic (76 to 554 A.D.). But all this seems far removed from the purpose of this chapter, which it is very hard to see concerning itself with the trivialities of the internal organisation of the Roman state. P.W. (Peter Watkins) is surely right thus far in asking us to direct our attention to the beasts of Daniel 7; but if the first beast is Babylon, with one head (7:4); the second Medo-Persia also with one (7:5); the third Greece with four (7:6), and the fourth Rome with one (7:7), making 7 heads in all, then the fifth fallen head would be the third of the Greek four, as he supposes, so that "one is" would be the fourth of these, with the Roman head yet to come! On every count the interpretation of this is difficult, and the solutions offered tortuous."

AN EIGHTH PHASE

We come back therefore to the earlier suggestion that the heads represent a succession of Gentile powers that ruled over Israel, as

in the case of the metals in the image of Dan. 2, except the heads start earlier than Babylon. Reference to “5 are fallen” would therefore mean that 5 beast powers - 5 kingdoms that had ruled over Israel had come and gone prior to John’s day in the first century A.D. The sixth head or beast kingdom is referred to as being in existence in John’s day, which was clearly the Roman kingdom or empire. This indicates that the heads signify major world powers.

The 5 major powers prior to Rome which exercised control over Israel were Egypt, Assyria (Isa. 52:4), Babylon, Persia and Greece. The seventh “is not yet come, and when he comes he must continue a short space.” And finally an eighth will be the last end time beast “who was, and is not, and is of (out of) the 7, and goes into perdition” i.e. he will be a revival of one of the 7. This explains how although there are only 7 heads, the end time beast is nevertheless “an” eighth phase, not “the” eighth. (The definite article is not in the Greek, therefore the revised versions say “an eighth” not “the eighth”).

As pointed out in a previous chapter, the end time beast can be narrowed down to one of the 5, because speaking in John’s day when the sixth Roman phase of beast power was in existence, the spirit says the eighth and last beast phase “was and is not” i.e. it is not the sixth and therefore cannot be a revival of the sixth. And if it “was” i.e. if it existed before the sixth, it could not be a revival of the seventh either. It can therefore only be a revival of one of the first 5. It should be evident from this that the end time beast or man of sin cannot be related to Rome. He destroys Rome! (Rev. 17:16).

As we have also seen before, the way in which the spirit has connected the destruction of Gog and his confederates in Ezk. 39:17-20 with the destruction of the beast and 10 horns in Rev. 19:17-21, reveals that the 2 are linked, i.e. the beast and 10 horns will incorporate Gog and his confederates. The sixth head was the Roman empire, and an eighth phase will be fulfilled by Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.

THE SEVENTH HEAD

The seventh head of course has been identified as the dragon, and related to an end time Moslem confederacy (see p494-). Having 7 heads (Rev. 12:3) indicates that the dragon is one of the 7 beast powers represented by the heads. And the fact that the preceding sixth and eighth phase have been identified and accounted for, surely means the dragon is the seventh phase.

Reference in Rev. 12:3 to crowns being on all 7 heads of the dragon also indicates he is the seventh head. “Crowns” represent being in power, particularly over Israel. The first 6 beasts up to and including John’s day had certainly attained this. So the fact that all 7 heads on the dragon are depicted with crowns, indicates that the seventh has embarked upon his career of beasthood at the time when the prophecy in Rev. 12 is fulfilled. If not, then only 6 of the heads would have crowns, not 7.

When dealing with Rev. 12, reasons were given for believing that a confederacy of Moslem nations will ultimately declare a Jihad against Israel and successfully invade and conquer the nation, killing one third of the population. They will take possession of the land and annex it to their own Moslem “kingdom” or “empire.” But divine intervention takes place involving Michael and his angels, and the dragon will be cast down from his position of power over Israel and evicted from the land.

It will probably be around this time that the dragon will give his power and seat to the beast, and become part of his confederacy which also later invades Israel. In so doing, the seventh beast phase ends.

Rev. 13:1 presents the eighth and last phase of beast power at the peak of its power united with the dragon’s 10 horns, which, significantly enough, as pointed out when dealing with that chapter, are wearing crowns. The reason for this is surely because the dragon has at this stage lost power to function as a separate independent beast, and therefore can no longer be represented as a beast (or head of the beast) wearing a crown. Instead, his horns have become part of the eighth beast and have received power from him to be “kings” under him. This is indicated in Rev. 17 where the absence of crowns on the 10 horns while the harlot dominates the scene (v3), seems to be explained in v12 to signify that the 10 horns have not received power as kings with the beast at that point of time. The statement in Rev. 17:12 that the 10 horns “receive power as kings one hour with the beast,” is signified by the crowns on the horns in 13:1.

By making the power of their “kingdom” (Moslem confederacy) available to the beast to achieve his goals, as we read in Rev. 17:17, the beast grants the 10 kings the “kingdom” they desire, as indicated in Rev. 17:12. The kingdom they desire is a Moslem Middle East minus Israel. Dan. 11:39 can be related to this. It refers to the king of the north (the beast) bestowing honour on those who acknowledge him, causing them to “rule” over many and among whom he shall divide the land. Joel 3:2 also refers to the land of Israel being divided up at that time.

ONE HOUR

With regard to the 10 horns receiving power as kings “one hour” with the beast (Rev. 17:12): Vine’s Expository Dictionary points out that the Greek word “hora,” translated “hour,” primarily denoted any time or period, especially a season. It is used in the New Testament to denote a literal hour, the twelfth part of a day or night. It is also used to denote duration of an unspecified length. For example: “hour of temptation” (Rev. 3:10). In the following verses, “hora” is translated “season” and signifies an unspecified period of time that would be longer than a literal hour: (Jn. 5:35. 2 Cor. 7:8. Phm. v15). The word “time” in the statement “it is the last time” in 1 Jn. 2:18 also comes from “hora” and signifies a “period” involving some years. Bullinger suggests that the reference to the 10 horns receiving power as kings “one hour” with the beast could mean “at one and the same hour.” This would imply that the horns receive power at the same time as the beast.

Although the beast will be atheistic and the 10 horns monotheistic, “these will have one mind” (v13). They will “agree” (v17) i.e. to destroy the harlot (v16). They will also agree and have the same mind and purpose to invade and conquer Israel. This is conveyed in Rev. 16:13-14 where the same unclean frog-like spirit is depicted coming out of their mouth, gathering the nations against Israel, resulting in the battle of Armageddon.

Although their philosophy of life is diametrically opposed to each other, their mutual hatred of Israel will unite them and make them confederate. Political expediency has a history of sinking major religious and ideological differences in order to be united in a common cause. Such a union is aptly described in Dan. 2:41 as “iron mixed with miry clay.” Such a mixture does not have a strong or lasting coherence and shall be shattered and separated when the stone from heaven smites it!

The statement in Rev. 17:13 that the 10 horns “shall give their power (dunamis) and strength (exousia) to the beast,” runs parallel with Rev. 13:2 which says the dragon “gave him (the beast) his power (dunamis) ... and great authority” (exousia). This parallel indicates that there is a connection between the dragon and the 10 horns. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the dragon represents Egypt and the 10 horns are 10 Moslem nations that form an anti-Israel confederacy with her.

It seems from Dan. 11:42-43 that when the final invasion of Israel takes place by the beast, Egypt will not be part of the confederacy that invades. She will in fact, due to some act of provocation against the king

of the north, (Dan. 11:40) be invaded herself at the same time. However, the 10 horns, being united with the beast, will be part of the invasion force that attacks Israel, and because they were originally united with the dragon and constituted, as “horns,” the strength and power of his force, the name “dragon” continues to be used to signify them, even though they are no longer confederate with Egypt. Unless of course, Egypt along with the 10 horns does initially confederate with the beast, but at the last minute falls out due to some provocation.

According to Dan. 7:8 the beast plucks up 3 of the 10 horns and this, combined with their defeat by Michael, is probably what leads to them handing their power and authority over to the beast. Their attitude could very well be described in the words of Rev. 13:4: “Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” As the saying goes: “If you can’t beat them, join them.” This certainly cannot be applied to the Barbarians’ invasion of the Roman empire. The Barbarians were not united in mind and purpose with Rome, and they did not voluntarily agree to submit to Rome and transfer their allegiance to her, let alone join her armies to invade Israel. Quite the opposite! The Barbarians invaded the Roman empire and fought against the Roman armies.

MAKE WAR WITH THE LAMB

The decision of the beast and 10 horns to make war with Israel, will in fact be to “make war with the Lamb” (Rev. 17:14), because, as we have seen in Rev. 16, Jesus returns at that time to do battle with the enemy and deliver Israel. It is described in more detail in Rev. 19. This demonstrates once again how events in Revelation are not always listed in strict chronological order. The final scene of Armageddon is mentioned before the destruction of the harlot (Rev. 17:14, 16).

The outcome of the war is therefore a foregone conclusion: “And the Lamb overcame them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.” The decision of the beast and 10 horns to engage in an un-winable war is a strong delusion; a mad and insane decision. No wonder demons are depicted coming out of their mouths in Rev. 16:13!

The “called, chosen and faithful” (Rev. 17:14) who are “with” the Lamb when he overcomes the beast and 10 horns, are the saints. This indicates that the saints will be resurrected and glorified before the battle of Armageddon and will be with Christ at the battle scene.

Rev. 17:15 jumps back to the scene in the very first verse of the great whore sitting upon many waters, and explains the significance: “The

waters which you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues.” The number of plural words used here indicate the extensiveness of the harlot’s power and influence. The Roman Catholic church boasts about the great number of her followers throughout the world, and regards it as proof of being the true church. In actual fact, according to Rev. 17, it proves the opposite!

Rev. 17:16 reveals that all the support in the world cannot prevent the destruction of the harlot: “And the 10 horns which you saw 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” (A.V.).

^ This reading from the A.V. gives the impression that it is the 10 horns, not the beast, who hate the whore and burn her. However, instead of reading “the 10 horns upon the beast,” the Greek text reads “the 10 horns and the beast.” Both the beast and the 10 horns hate the harlot and destroy her. The beast resents carrying her on his back and only does so because of political expedience. In his heart of hearts he is anti-religious and despises the church with its Pope, cardinals and bishops dressed in purple and scarlet.

For a time the beast will give tacit approval to the church, not because he believes in it, but because of its tremendous political overtones, and his aspiration to rule the world. The fact that the harlot is seen sitting on the beast, indicates she will limit or dominate many of the beast’s political and governmental ambitions and activities. But this will all be a subterfuge on his part until he can attain sufficient power and support to throw her off and destroy her. The tendencies of this type of hatred of religion has been manifested in the past in communist countries and will ultimately re-assert itself in greater power than ever.

Could the fact that the woman has to be removed before the beast comes to power, be related in some way to the restraint referred to in 2 Thes. 2:7 that has to be taken out of the way before the man of sin is manifested?

MAKE HER DESOLATE AND NAKED

Rev. 17:16 says the beast “shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.” The fact that v18 goes on to say that the woman “is that great city ...” indicates that the attack is upon the city of Rome in particular, where the Vatican city is situated. The “flesh” that will be eaten or burnt with fire will therefore be that of the inhabitants of Rome and the Vatican, and not every single member of the

Roman Catholic church throughout the world. For this reason, people are called out of the city prior to its destruction (Rev. 18:4).

According to Lev. 21:9, burning with fire was the penalty under God's law for a priest's daughter if she corrupted herself and became a harlot. It was fitting therefore that when the priestly nation of Israel corrupted herself and became a harlot, God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to strip her and burn her cities with fire. (Prisoners taken into exile were literally stripped of their clothes and made to walk naked).

In Ezk. 16:37-41 God warned His people that He would gather against them the nations with whom they had committed adultery by entering into alliances with them, and strip them naked. "They shall strip you of your clothes and take away your fair jewels and leave you naked and bare ... They shall burn your houses with fire ..." Also Ezk. 23:26-29).

During the Russian revolution, the eastern Orthodox church was stripped of all her properties, but this was only a foretaste of much worse to come in the end time when the Vatican will lose all her wealth and finery: the purple and scarlet, gold, precious stones and pearls (Rev. 17:4).

The so-called "eternal city" is scheduled for annihilation. As ancient Babylon was reduced to rubble, this is also the destiny of her modern counterpart. Rev. 18 also refers to Rome's destruction and elaborates on it and its effects: v8 says she shall be "utterly (completely) burned with fire," and v10, 17, 19 says it will happen within an hour. Furthermore, v9-10 says that kings from other parts of the earth who were intimately associated with the city, lament for her when they see the smoke of her burning, and they stand afar off for fear of it.

Some have thought that the fire that burns the city could be caused by volcanic eruption. But Rev. 17:16 clearly says the fire is inflicted by the beast and 10 horns not a volcano. The city of Rome, be it pagan or Papal, has never been utterly burned with fire. Alaric and Totilas burnt only some parts with fire. The fact that the city is completely burned within an hour indicates it will not be the kind of fire that was burning while Nero was playing his fiddle! There is only one kind of fire by which man could utterly consume a city the size of Rome within an hour, namely: nuclear! And if the "smoke of her burning" involves a radio-active mushroom cloud, it is no wonder that people would be afraid of it and keep their distance from it.

As pointed out before: while it is true that the word "hour" is sometimes used in Scripture to signify an indefinite period that exceeds a literal hour, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is also often used to mean a literal hour. Such seems to be the case in Rev. 18 because the

suddenness of Rome's destruction is further conveyed in Rev. 18:21 where it is likened to an angel casting a great millstone into the sea. Such a millstone would sink very quickly and disappear. "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more" (Rev. 18:21). Such a metaphor involving a millstone being cast into the sea would be inappropriate if a protracted period was involved in Rome's destruction.

Rome's destruction is obviously going to be sudden death and a permanent condition. In view of this it is impossible to apply "that great city" in Rev. 17 to Jerusalem. Ultimately, when God Himself adds the final touch to Rome's demise, when the great earthquake mentioned in Rev. 16:18-19 divides the barren and desolate area of the city into 3 parts, the whole site will become a perpetual lake of fire. "Her smoke rose up for ever and ever" (Rev. 19:1-3).

A NUCLEAR WAR-HEAD

Anyone who has watched a slow-motion film of a stone being cast into water, will have seen the rising crown effect. Aerial photographs of thermo-nuclear tests likewise show a noticeable crown effect in the mushroom cloud. This has caused some to consider that comparing Rome's destruction with a millstone being violently cast into the sea in the context of being burnt with fire, might signify that it will be by thermo-nuclear bomb that the city will be destroyed.

We know from Hiroshima and Nagasaki how effectively such bombs can "eat" or consume flesh. In some cases, the flesh was consumed while people were still standing on their feet. A reference to this kind of phenomenon is made in Zech. 14:12, causing some to conclude that it refers to the same kind of intense fire and fervent heat. Jezebel's flesh (and bones) were also eaten very quickly (within an hour?), not by fire but by dogs, and some see this judgement for her spiritual harlotry as a type of the judgement of the harlot in Rev. 17.

It is tempting to wonder if the reference in Rev. 13:13 to making fire come down from heaven to earth during the beast era, has any connection with the future holocaust of Rome. Modern man, with his thermo-nuclear devices which can be detonated in the heavens, or sent from space stations in heaven to earth, is now able to duplicate the same fiery process of the sun with hydrogen bombs.

The audacity and arrogance displayed, from a worldly point of view, in destroying Rome, will cause the whole world to be absolutely

astounded. The words: “And all the world wondered” (was amazed) can be understood in more ways than one! (Rev. 13:3).

“Nuking” a city like Rome; wiping out the Vatican, Pope, and millions of people; is almost too staggering to contemplate. No wonder some prefer to spiritualize it all away. It will create a moral dilemma for the nations, especially those who have nuclear weapons themselves but who would refuse to retaliate with them. Rather than retaliate and kill millions of innocent lives and start a nuclear war which would exterminate life on the planet, the nations will be forced to submit to the beast saying: “who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” Knowing he has the aggressive arrogance and madness to drop nuclear weapons at will and without compunction or fear, will bring about this submission. The beast will be the ultimate terrorist! He will have no fear of, or regard for God or man. Instead, he will honour the god of force (Dan. 11:38). His philosophy will be: “Might is right.”

Unlike other positions of authority and leadership, the office of the Pope has continued in an unbroken line throughout the years. During this time, every other European institution that existed when it began has fallen. Roman Catholics believe that this is an indication of the divine foundation of their church, enabling it to rise above the human weaknesses of its members.

What a crisis will therefore be caused in Christendom when Rome and the Vatican go up in smoke. Once and for all the so-called infallibility of the Pope will lose credibility. As the ancient Assyrian king boasted against the gods of the cities he conquered and destroyed with fire, and claimed to be more powerful than them, so the man of sin will do when he destroys the city regarded as the nerve centre of the world-wide church of Christ. “Where is their God?” he will say (Joel 2:17). Christendom will be in disarray. This will be the time when a great falling away will take place as the beast flexes his anti-god muscles.

He conquers Catholicism by destroying the Vatican city and St Peters; and he conquers Judaism by invading and destroying the nation of Israel and desecrating the temple at Jerusalem. But due to political expediency, he patronizes Islam due to their armies being confederate with him against Israel.

So then, the harlot will be rejected and desolated by the powers she thought she controlled, and the language relating to her desolation indicates total annihilation. It will be the most outrageous and catastrophic event in modern history, and a fearful fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

Rev. 17:17 says: “God has put in their hearts to fulfil His will.” The

words “has put” come from the Greek “didomi” and means to give or grant i.e. allow. It is translated “grant” in Rev. 3:21. 19:8, and “given” in Rev. 7:2. 11:2. 13:5, 7 etc. In this light, Rev. 17:17 could be read to mean that God allows the beast and 10 horns to fulfil what is in their heart. It could be seen in the same light as the references in Exodus to God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. Because this hardening of heart was the result of Pharaoh’s response to circumstances created and controlled by God, it is expressed in terms of God doing it.

The reference in the last verse in Rev. 17 to “the woman” being “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth,” has been covered, and refers to Rome, which, in John’s day ruled the world. It is inconceivable that the Italians could conquer the world in the end time, resulting in Rome becoming the capital as in the days of the Caesars. We have seen that the eighth head of the beast “is not” the Italian government. But it is conceivable that a reunited Christendom - a world super-church could be headed up by the Pope in Rome, prior to the beast coming to power.

The trading agreement on which the Common Market of Europe is based is called “the treaty of Rome” after the city of Rome and is based on trade. Significantly enough, the city in Rev. 17 and 18 heads a rich and powerful trading group. Rev. 18:12-13 lists 23 items of trade; as comprehensive a list as you could expect to find. The E.U. at the time of writing is not particularly Roman, and its headquarters are at Brussels in Belgium. But it is not impossible that Rome might end up the centre of the market with the Pope sitting astride as the spiritual leader until the incineration of the city by the beast!



CHAPTER FIFTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Brief reference was made to the destruction of the great harlot in Rev. 17:16 and it is now covered in greater detail in chapter 18. This chapter tells of the great void that her annihilation creates, and of the impact it has on other people and nations.

Some have contended that 2 different judgements are involved in chapters 17 and 18. Chapter 17:16 is regarded as the destruction of the woman i.e. the apostate religious system by the beast, and chapter 18 the destruction of the city of Rome by God. But the woman is clearly identified with the city in Rev. 17:18, and because God “puts it into the heart” of the beast to destroy, the destruction is referred to as a judgement of God. There are many examples of this principle in Scripture.

This chapter is modelled on the doom songs (dirges) of the Old Testament prophets over the hostile nations of their times. It is particularly reminiscent of prophetic oracles against the ancient ignorant pagan nations of Babylon and Tyre. This indicates that God regards the apostate church, which has superimposed pagan doctrines upon its creed, as fitting into the same category as those ignorant pagan nations.

Verse 1 commences with John saying: “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with His glory.”

Because this powerful angel announces the fall of Babylon, suggests his power could have something to do with the fall. If so, it would imply that he was behind the action of the beast’s destruction of Rome; i.e. behind the circumstances and events that lead to the beast destroying the city.

The language in v1 about the angel having great power and the earth lighting up with his glory, indicates that a very significant event is involved. Some movement and manifestation of mighty power is surely signified here. The language is similar to Ezk. 43:2 which refers to “the glory of God” which had forsaken Jerusalem before the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, returning from the east, causing the earth to “shine with his glory.” The glory had departed because of apostacy and returns after the judgement of the apostates, when it is time for Jerusalem to be restored. It is fitting therefore that Rev. 18:1 should refer to the manifestation of divine glory after the judgement of the end time apostacy, prior to the new Jerusalem being revealed.

The reference to “great power” and the earth being “lightened” could

also be significant if Rome is destroyed by a nuclear warhead, in view of the power and bright flash that is involved with such weapons. Although the beast causes the destruction it is a divine judgement, and the bright powerful angel could be seen as representing that.

Verse 2 says the angel “cried mightily with a strong voice saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen ...” Crying mightily with a strong voice indicates that the message is very loud and clear and intended to be heard. Because the message is declared by the angel when he comes down from heaven and lightens up the earth; this also indicates the announcement is not for the angels in heaven but for those on earth. Could it represent, as in the case of the message declared by an angel in Rev. 8:13 and 14:6-7, a Holy Spirit empowered message proclaimed by the saints to the world at the time of Babylon’s fall?

The same applies to the reference in v4 to “another voice from heaven saying, come out of her my people ...” It is evident from this that it will be known when the time for Babylon’s judgement has arrived, and warnings will be publicly pronounced.

As we have seen in Rev. 14, a message will be preached to all who dwell upon the earth, “saying with a loud voice, fear God and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgement is come ...” (v6-7). Because the next verse says: “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen ... ,” this reveals that “the hour of his judgement” refers particularly to the judgement of Babylon. “The hour” of this judgement is emphasized and repeated 3 times in Rev. 18. For example, v10: “Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgement come.” The other 2 references are in v17, 19.

If therefore the angels in Rev. 14 who are depicted preaching messages to those who dwell on earth, represent the end time divinely empowered saints, it should not be difficult to see the angel in Rev. 18:1 in the same light, especially in view of the fact that his message is the same as the one in Rev. 14:8. The same angel is probably involved on both of these occasions.

BABYLON IS FALLEN

In view of the reference in Rev. 18:4 to a message being proclaimed to people warning them to come out of Babylon before it is destroyed, the declaration in v2 that “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,” appears to be a declaration of impending judgement rather than a statement of judgement accomplished. The judgement is so inevitable and unavoidable,

it is as good as done! The details of the judgement are to follow, and are a more detailed description of the effects of the holocaust inflicted by the beast.

The word “fallen” - “Babylon is fallen, is fallen,” means what it says and is repeated for emphasis. It could be paraphrased as: “Babylon is fallen, truly fallen, and great is the fall of it.” The word “fallen” comes from the same Greek word translated “fell” in Rev. 16:19: “The cities of the nations fell.” As the cities of the nations will collapse into heaps of rubble due to the mighty earthquake that occurs on the day of the battle of Armageddon, so Rome will collapse when the beast burns her with fire and makes her desolate (Rev. 17:16).

The words “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” have been quoted from Isa. 21:9 in relation to the fall of ancient Babylon. Jer. 51:8 is similar: “Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed.” As in the case of modern Babylon, the fall of ancient Babylon was a judgement of God executed by other nations.

Rev. 18:2 goes on to say that as a result of her fall, Babylon becomes “the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

It is generally accepted that these words are taken from passages such as Jer. 50:39: “Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever (by humans); neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.” Also Isa. 13:21: “Wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their (ruined) houses shall be full of howling creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.”

THE HABITATION OF DEVILS

The Hebrew word “sair” from which “satyrs” has been translated means hairy or shaggy and is translated “wild goats” by the Good News Bible. In the A.V. translation of the Old Testament, the word is translated “hairy” twice, “rough” once, “kid” 28 times, “goat” 23 times, “satyr” twice. It is also translated “devils” twice (Lev. 17:7. 2 Chr. 11:15).

As can be seen, the word is mostly translated “kid” and “goat,” and the references are in connection with sacrifice. The same applies in Lev. 17:7 and 2 Chr. 11:15. Both of these verses refer to sacrifices and worship being offered to devils. In both cases, the reference is to the worship of false gods involving the setting up of idols of “devils and calves.” The “devils” were simply idols having the appearance of goats. Sacrifices

were made to these and calf idols.

So then, originally the word translated satyr referred to wild goats and the Good News Bible and others translate it accordingly. Later in history the satyr started to be regarded as a mythical creature, half man and half goat; a hairy creature with horns, tail and goats legs. This creature became the Greek god Pan, one of the woodland deities of Greece and Rome. In medieval times, satyrs were regarded as the incarnation of evil spirits, which supposedly haunted waste and desert places.

In the light of these pagan devils, it is not difficult to see how the idea of a hairy devil, complete with horns, cloven hooves and tail, was adopted by the apostate Roman Catholic church which had turned its ears away from the truth and turned to fables, giving heed to the seducing spirits of paganism and their doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1. 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

It is fitting that Rome, which was the centre and source of so many false doctrines of devils should end up becoming “the habitation of devils.” The reference in reality of course is to wild goats which along with other wild animals and birds, will haunt and roam the ruins of the city.

If it be thought that it is unlikely that the Greek word “daimon,” translated “devils” in Rev. 18:2, which normally relates to demons in the New Testament, would be used to relate to wild goats, or that it could have any connection with goat idols and the idolatry of the pagans, consider this: Deu. 32:16-17 says: “They provoked Him (God) to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils which were no Gods; to gods whom they had never known, to new gods that newly came up, whom your fathers feared not.”

In this passage the Hebrew word translated “devils” is “shed,” and it is quite clear from the context that it also relates to false gods involving idols. The same applies in Ps. 106:36-39 where “shed” is also translated “devils” and relates to idols: “They served their idols ... yea, they sacrificed to devils ... their own works ... their own inventions” i.e. a figment of the imagination.

Now, during the third century B.C. Ptolemy Philadelphus, a Greek king who ruled over Egypt at the time, commissioned the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, so that they could be read by the wider Greek-speaking world. This translation is known as the Septuagint or LXX because 70 translators were involved. In this translation, the Hebrew word “shed” in Deu. 32:17 has been translated into the Greek “daimonia,” which is derived from “daimon,” the Greek word for demon.

Those living in New Testament times had access to this translation and quoted from it. This is why the apostle Paul, when quoting Deu. 32:16-17 in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:20), uses the Greek word “daimonion,” translated “devils” in the A.V. and “demons” in the Revised versions.

It should be evident from this that if the Hebrew word “shed” translated “devils” which relates to idols and pagan worship in the Old Testament, can be represented by a Greek word which is derived from “daimon,” there is no reason why the Hebrew word “sair” translated “satyrs” and “devils” in the Old Testament in relation to goat idols and wild goats, cannot also be represented by the Greek “daimon.” Such is the case in Rev. 18:2.

THE PRISON OF UNCLEANNES

After stating that Babylon becomes the habitation of devils, Rev. 18:2 adds these words: “and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.” The words “hold” and “cage” come from the same Greek word which is translated “prison” elsewhere in the New Testament. Some translations give “haunt.”

The words “foul” and “unclean” also come from the same Greek word and is mostly translated “unclean” in the New Testament in relation to unclean spirits. For example, reference is made in Rev. 16:13 to “three unclean spirits like frogs” coming out of the mouth of the dragon, beast and false prophet. These unclean spirits have been related to false doctrine and insane propaganda which deceives the nations and leads them astray.

The same application could be given to “every foul spirit” in Rev. 18:2. It could refer to all the false doctrine and propaganda which emanated from the Vatican in Rome. Instead of Rome being the springboard for this, she shall become the “cage” or “prison” of it. A cage or prison is a place of confinement which prevents those inside from roaming freely at large and endangering society. When Rome is destroyed, all Papal authority and announcements will cease. The power and influence of the church along with all its false doctrine, will be shackled and restrained. The explanation in Rev. 18:3 that Rome becomes a cage of every foul spirit etc because she has made all nations drink her wine which results in spiritual fornication, (and which is “foul” to God), is particularly significant in view of the fact that the wine represents false (foul) doctrine.

Regarding the reference to “every unclean and hateful bird”: In the

law given by God to Israel, “unclean” birds were those forbidden for human consumption. A list of them is given in Lev. 11:13-20, and it particularly consists of vicious birds of prey such as the eagle, vulture and hawk. But it also includes the raven, owl, bat, swan, pelican and stork. The intrusion of such birds upon a city would be hated and detested. But according to the prophetic message in Rev. 18:2, Rome will be occupied by “every” one of them! Cp. Isa. 34:9-15.

Can you imagine the reaction of people in Rome today or any other city if it was publicly proclaimed that the so-called “eternal city” was going to fall and become a “cage” or haunt for wild goats and unclean birds?! The reaction of the world to such a message would be disbelief. People would mock, scoff and ridicule at it. However, according to Rev. 18, this message will be proclaimed in a mighty and strong voice prior to the fall.

“Cage” or “prison” would certainly not be a very endearing term to those who love the Vatican and Rome. But how fitting that this city which has imprisoned so many spirits in ignorance and superstition, should be called a prison!

Reference in Rev. 18:3 (and v9) to all nations having drunk of the wine of the wrath of Babylon’s fornication, and the kings of the earth having committed fornication with her, is a repeat of Rev. 14:8 and 17:2. (See notes on pages 688 and 689).

ABUNDANCE OF DELICACIES

Rev. 18:3 adds these words: “And the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.” (A.V). The word “abundance” comes from the Greek “dunamis” which means power, strength. And “delicacies” comes from “strenos” which means “luxury.” The words “lived deliciously” in v7, 9 are derived from the same word. The Emphatic Diaglott therefore renders it as “the power of her luxuries.” Thayer’s Lexicon says “excessive strength which longs to break forth.” Vine: “arrogant luxury.” It speaks of strong assertive lust for living in luxury. The New International says: “excessive luxuries.”

Indications have already been given in chapter 17 as we have seen, of preoccupation and obsession with material wealth and luxury. In v4 the harlot is “arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold, precious stones and pearls,” and this is repeated in chapter 18:16.

Attention has also been drawn to the fact that no reference is made to any religious aspects, causing some to conclude that Babylon represents a

secular commercial power, not an ecclesiastical power. Rome, however, is both, as was ancient Babylon.

The religious character is indicated firstly by the reference to her as a “woman” and secondly to her being called a “harlot.” These terms are frequently used in the Scriptures in relation to an apostate church. The reason for no specific reference to religious aspects and an emphasis on the material aspects is because the city of Rome and Vatican city are both money-motivated, materialistically minded systems. Behind the great facade and profession of religion, is a love for money, riches and luxury. This of course results in much effort and activity in trade and commerce and doing business with the world like Tyre and Babylon of old.

ANOTHER VOICE - “COME OUT.”

In addition to the mighty and strong voice of the angel from heaven in v2 proclaiming Babylon’s fall, we have in v4 “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.”

In both cases the voice coming from heaven or an angel from heaven denotes a message empowered by God. We now have 5 empowered messages that will be delivered by the saints in the end time. The first 3 are represented by the first, second and third angels of chapter 14; the fourth and fifth are represented by the angels in this chapter.

As in the case of the flood in Noah’s day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot’s day; only God knows the day of Rome’s destruction by fire. It will therefore require angelic visitation - the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to quicken the proclamation of the message to God’s people in Rome to “come out,” when that day is impending.

The call obviously comes earlier chronologically than the destruction of the city mentioned in 17:16. It is evident that urging people to leave Rome would have to be done before the city was annihilated.

The call to come out of Babylon is reminiscent of Israel’s call in Old Testament times to leave Babylon and return to their land to rebuild the temple. God did not want His temple in Babylon, and neither did He want His people worshipping in Babylon’s temples. Acceptable worship required coming out of Babylon. The call to depart from Babylon is first heard in Isaiah and repeated a number of times afterwards: Isa. 48:20. 52:11. Jer. 50:8-9. 51:6-9, 45. 52:42-45. Zech. 2:6-7.

The Jews of course were called out of Babylon after it had been invaded and conquered by the enemy, whereas God’s people in Rev. 18

are called out before the enemy strikes Rome. The nature of the destruction will necessitate this.

GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION

Many have given the call to come out of Babylon a universal application, regarding it as an appeal to people everywhere in the world in every age throughout Roman Catholic history, to disassociate themselves from the apostate system and all of its false doctrines and practices. Being part of God's family is not possible by being part of the Roman Catholic system, so those who want to belong to the true bride of Christ have to come out. In relation to this, 2 Cor. 6:17 is often quoted: "Therefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

To belong to the apostate system results in becoming guilty by association: a "partaker of her sins" and therefore liable to "receive her plagues." Anyone knowing the truth cannot join or share in the false Roman Catholic system and expect to be exempt from the judgement that will fall upon it, even if they don't go along with what the system teaches. 1 Cor. 6:15-17 in principle can be applied to this: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he who is joined to an harlot is one body with her ...?" Anyone who knows and believes the truth would feel uncomfortable being in the harlot system and would not want to be part of it.

However, true as all this is, and the principle of it can justifiably be extracted from Rev. 18:4; the call to come out of Babylon more particularly relates to God's people who are living, working or ministering in the actual city of Rome in the end time. This is evident from the fact that the call is in the context of the destruction of the city by the end time beast. The community of true saints living in Rome will be warned to vacate the city prior to its holocaust, much in the same way that Lot was told by angels to leave Sodom before it was destroyed by fire and brimstone. Also compare Lk. 21:21 which refers to Christians in Judea who are told to "flee to the mountains... and those in other countries must not go in, for these will be the days of punishment."

It is evident from all this that the saints will not have been caught away to meet the Lord in the air at this stage. But they will certainly know that they are living in the last lap of human history.

SINS REACH TO HEAVEN

Rev. 18:5 goes on to say that Babylon's sins which incur judgement "have reached unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." These words are very similar to those in Jer. 51:9 which relate to ancient Babylon: "For her judgement reaches to heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies." Reference to sins reaching to heaven is quite common in Scripture and signifies that they are staring God in the face and shouting in His ears, making Him very aware and conscious of them and the need for them to be punished. See Gen. 18:20. 2 Chr. 28:9. Ez. 9:6. Jer. 51:9. Jonah 1:2. Jam. 5:4.

The original sin of Babylon was pride, which is the mother of all sins, seen in wanting to build a tower reaching up to heaven, in order to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11:4). This same spirit can still be seen in modern Babylon's church spires aspiring to great heights, dotting the horizon throughout the earth.

But the sins mentioned in Rev. 17 and 18 which incur God's wrath are: spiritual apostasy, gross materialism, indulgence in the secular affairs of the world and politics, idolatry, immorality, injustice, oppression and murder of the saints. No wonder her sins come up in God's face and incur His judgement! "God has remembered her iniquities." He keeps them in mind with the intention of dealing with them. As we read in Rev. 16:19: "And great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."

Regarding ancient Babylon, Ps. 137:8 records the Jews saying: "O daughter of Babylon, you devastator, blessed is he who rewards you as you have dealt with us." Also see Jer. 50:15, 29. The voice from heaven likewise says in Rev. 18:6: "Reward her even as she rendered, and double to her double according to her deeds; mix her a double portion from her own cup: i.e. give her back her own medicine; repay her with twice as much and twice as strong as what she has given. Under Israel's law, those who stole had to pay back at least double in compensation (Ex. 22:1, 4, 7, 9). In the coming destruction of modern Babylon, a comparable standard of justice will apply. It will cost Babylon twice as much as she has taken.

A QUEEN

“How much she has glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her” (v7 A.V.) i.e. “give her as much suffering and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.” (Good News

Bible). The torment and sorrow, suffering and grief, is referred to in v10 and 15 and is caused by the holocaust.

The reason for glorifying herself and living in luxury is stated in v7: “For she says in her heart, I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” Ancient Babylon expressed similar sentiments (Isa. 47:4-9).

The title “queen” could imply the wife of the king. Because Christ is the king, the title of queen could convey the conviction of the Roman Catholic church that she is the true church, the bride of Christ. A “widow” is one without a husband. Christ of course is the husband or bridegroom of the true church, so the words “I am no widow” conveys the conviction that she has not lost Christ.

The title “queen,” like “king,” also describes a person who reigns over a kingdom. Significantly enough, the tenure of office of the Pope is called “his reign.” The term of office of the Archbishop of Canterbury or the president of the United States is not referred to in this way!

The Roman Catholic church of course regards itself as the kingdom of God on earth, and the Pope is regarded as God’s representative or viceroy reigning over it. Traditionally, the Pope is crowned with a triple crown. Normally, crowns belong to royalty! In addition, the ceremony investing the Pope with the triple crown is called a coronation. After the coronation is over, the Pope takes his seat and “sits” upon his royal throne in the “palace” at the Vatican. Normally, only kings and queens have a palace! The elaborate monarchical system does not stop there. The cardinals of the church are styled “princes” - a title normally given to a member of a royal family and possible successor to the throne.

NO WIDOW

The Greek word “chera,” translated “widow,” has a wider connotation involving not only bereavement, but also the concept of being bereft, or destitute. Strong says it conveys the idea of deficiency. Protestants of course believe that the Roman Catholic system is bereft of Christ and therefore husband less - a spiritual widow, deficient and destitute.

Some say that the words “am no widow” should be “am no longer a widow,” implying that there was a period when it looked or felt like she might be i.e. a period when it appeared that Christ was not with the church. As pointed out in the last chapter, there was a time when the Papacy went into a political wilderness, being bereft of political power and the support of the state. The Pope became a “prisoner” in the Vatican, lacking suitors and admirers, ambassadors and delegates coming from the

nations to bow before him and seek his favours.

According to “The Tablet” a Romanist newspaper, about one month after Pope Pius IX (the “prisoner Pope”) ascended the Papal throne, the Abbess of Minsk spent the whole night in prayer for the Catholic church, and claimed to have heard a voice saying: “Fear not, my daughter, I have not left my church a widow. I have chosen for her a Pontiff after my own heart.” These words certainly imply that it was felt that the church was a widow, bereft of Christ.

How times have changed! Kings and rulers of the earth now send ambassadors to Rome and receive Papal nuncios into their embassies. There is even a Papal delegate at the United Nations. There is no Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist or Mormon delegate, but there is a Papal delegate.

When a Pope is crowned or dies, “the kings of the earth” send their top dignitaries to attend the ceremony. This special attention given to the Roman Catholic church is unique in the protocol of the powers of the world. And why do presidents, princes, kings, queens and heads of state go to Papal functions or send representatives? Because of the power and influence it exercises over millions of people and international affairs! Even communist and Moslem countries make sure their representatives show up at important functions in the “eternal city” of Rome. Truly, she sits a queen and her power and influence, according to Rev. 17 and 18 will be very strong in the end time.

PLAGUES COME IN ONE DAY

To those without spiritual discernment, the Pope may appear to be a holy and dignified father-figure and his organization very respectable. But the Word of God sees the system in a different light. “Therefore,” we read in v8: “Her plagues shall come in one day, death and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: For strong is the Lord God who judges her.”

This is the second time in this chapter that the harlot’s judgement is referred to in terms of “plagues.” The other reference is in v4. In view of the fact that the judgement involves fire, it is evident that the word “plagues” is not limited to pestilence or disease. The Greek word “pleg” (pronounced “play-gay”) means a stroke, infliction, calamity, wound. It covers a whole range of things. Anything that God inflicts as a judgement constitutes a “plague.” For example: in Rev. 9:20 “plagues” refers to the fire, smoke and sulphur in v17 and 18. The 7 plagues in Rev.

15 to 16 involve sores; the sea, rivers and springs becoming blood; the sun scorching men with its heat; darkness; the river Euphrates drying up; a mighty earthquake and great hail. “Pleg” is actually translated “wound” and “wounded” in Lk. 10:30. Rev. 13:3, 12, 14, and “stripes” in Lk. 12:48. Act. 16:23, 33. 2 Cor. 6:5. 11:23.

Rev. 18:8 says Babylon’s plagues will “come in one day.” Verses 10, 17 and 19 say “one hour.” As in the case of ancient Babylon, which was conquered in one night, the judgement upon modern Babylon will be swift and sudden. A long drawn out and prolonged siege lasting weeks or months will not be involved.

The language relating to ancient Babylon’s fall is relevant: Isa. 47:11: “Therefore shall calamity come upon you, which you shall not be able to chant away and for which you cannot atone; disaster shall fall upon you which you will not be able to avert or expiate; and ruin shall come on you suddenly of which you had no expectation.” Jer. 51:8: “Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed ...” Also see Isa. 13. Jer. 50 and 51. Dan. 5.

The A.V. says Babylon will be “utterly burned with fire,” but the word “utterly” is not in the Greek text. However, the Greek word “katakaio,” translated “burned,” according to Strong, means to burn down (to the ground), i.e. consume wholly. This is evident by its usage elsewhere. See Matt. 3:12. 13:30, 40. Act. 19:19. Heb. 13:11. 2 Pet. 3:10. The same word is used in Rev. 17:16 which says the beast will “burn” the harlot with fire.

The point has already been made that the destruction of the city of Rome by fire within an hour would require a nuclear weapon. See comments on Rev. 17:16. The population of Rome is several million so it is obvious that huge loss of life will take place. As in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there will no doubt be survivors, some of whom will be badly burned and injured, and many of whom will not survive. This is indicated in Rev. 18:8 which not only refers to “death,” but also “mourning” and “famine.” Verse 7 also refers to “much torment and sorrow.” Torment of body and soul, sorrow and mourning is understandable and to be expected among the survivors of such a holocaust. Eventually, the remaining survivors will be evacuated, and the ruins will be solely inhabited by wild animals and birds (v2). Human population will cease in the city (v22-23).

Even though it is the beast who inflicts the fire, it is unmistakably a judgement of God, “for strong is the Lord God who judges her” (v8). Verses 5, 10 and 20 also make it clear that it is a judgement of God. The beast will be God’s agent of judgement as were the Assyrians and

Babylonians in the past.

THE KINGS OF THE EARTH LAMENT

“**A**nd the kings of the earth who have committed fornication and lived in luxury with her shall bewail her and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning” (v9).

The “kings of the earth” who bewail and lament, are those mentioned in chapter 17:2 who drink her wine and commit fornication with her. It could hardly refer to the 10 kings (horns) who are confederate with the beast. They are not likely to lament considering they cause her misery.

Those who lament had “lived in luxury with her.” They reaped material riches through trading with Rome, benefiting from her excessive luxuries (v3). As a result of Rome’s destruction, there is loss of revenue, because there is no one there anymore to purchase their goods (v11).

The secular city of Rome is the main focus here and it will clearly be a chief centre of trade in the end time. However, Vatican city is a wheel within a wheel and will be inseparably linked with the machinery of Rome’s materialism, and will benefit from it. Secular involvement motivated by a quest for wealth and luxury is un-Christ-like, and it is fitting that Vatican city will go up in flames with the city of Rome.

It is interesting to note that 4 different Greek words are used which cover every aspect and manifestation of grief and sorrow that Rome’s fall shall cause.

1. “Bewail” (v9): “klaio”: to sob i.e. wail aloud. The word is often used in relation to those who weep over the death of a loved one. It is translated “weep” and “weeping” in Rev. 18:11, 15, 19.

2. “Lament” (v9): “kopto”: to chop, specifically beat the breast in grief. “Bewail and lament” is translated “weep and wail” by the R.S.V.

3. “Mourn” (v11): “pentheo”: to grieve; groan in grief; deep, burdensome sorrow. It is translated “wailing” in Rev. 18:15, 19.

4. “Cried” (v18, 19): “krazo”: to scream, call aloud, shriek, exclaim. The same word occurs in Rev. 18:2.

Altogether, there are 10 references in Rev. 18 to the grief that will be experienced when Rome falls. The destruction of the city will obviously have a profound and wide-spread emotional effect throughout the world. Unfortunately the weeping and sorrow is over the punishment and the loss of revenue and riches, not the sins that caused it. But Godly sorrow not worldly sorrow is required to bring about repentance and reform. Those who are upset over the fate of Rome will obviously be furious at the beast,

but powerless to do anything about it.

The words of Ezk. 26:16 in relation to the effect of the fall of Tyre on the nations are appropriate: “Then all the princes of the sea shall step down from their thrones and remove their robes, and put off their brodered garments: They shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble continually, terrified at your fate” (and probably terrified that they might suffer a similar fate!)

A tremendous volume of smoke would arise from a city on fire the size of Rome and would be seen from a great distance. However, as mentioned in the last chapter, the reference in Rev. 18:9-10 to people being afraid of “the smoke of her burning” and keeping their distance from it, could also have something to do with the radio-active mushroom cloud that billows up as a result of a nuclear explosion. If so, one would not expect the apostle John in a pre-scientific age to describe it as a radio-active cloud. It would be natural to refer to it as smoke because it looks like smoke. People are not afraid of ordinary smoke, and fire-fighters are equipped to approach it, but not so with radio-active “smoke.”

As they stand afar off “for the fear of her torment,” they exclaim: “Alas, alas ... How terrible, how awful.” The words “alas, alas” are repeated 3 times in this chapter (v10, 16, 19). The word “woe” is the same in Greek.

THE MERCHANTS SHALL WEEP

Verse 11 continues by saying: “And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no one buys their merchandise any more.” Verse 15 is similar: “The merchants of these things, (i.e. the merchandise mentioned in the previous verses), who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.”

This is simply stating that those in the business of trade with Rome will weep and mourn because there will no longer be anyone there to buy their cargo, resulting in their source of wealth being cut off.

To those of us who have a more stoical, unemotional nature and temperament, it may be hard to imagine men weeping over the loss of trade and revenue, but it can and does happen. For example, scenes were seen on television in the late 1990s of the head of a large Japanese company weeping over the crash of his company - the largest company failure in Japan up to that time since the second world war.

It is not uncommon for men to weep when their business fails and they are declared bankrupt, or when the stock market crashes and they

lose everything. Some get so upset and depressed that they commit suicide.

It is interesting to note the union of “the merchants” (v11) and “the kings” (v9) in the wailing over the destruction of Babylon. In ancient times, government and business were not united as they are now. Kings ruled apart from the shop-keeping middle class (the bourgeois) who carried on the business of the world. Business began to move into government at the time of the French Revolution and the upheaval in industry that followed the invention of the steam engine. The growth of modern commerce put the merchants into the government as never before, where they stand today, alongside the politicians, and with common interests.

In Hebrew, the word for “merchant” is structurally similar to “Canaan.” The Canaanites were traders and conformed to corrupt religious beliefs and practices, and as a result of mixing, trading and doing business with them, Israel was led astray and became apostate. “Canaanite” would therefore be a fitting name or title for those who make buying, selling, business, and the quest for wealth their god. Ultimately, when Christ returns, “there shall no more be the Canaanite ...” (Zech. 14:21).

Rev. 18:12-13 presents an itemized list of the merchandise that flowed into the city before it was destroyed. It is a very comprehensive list, involving 27 items of trade: gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, scented wood, ivory, costly wood, brass, iron, marble, cinnamon, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, chariots and slaves.

No less than 17 of these items of merchandise are mentioned in Ezk. 27:12- in connection with trade with Tyre.

Solomon was also a great international trader, and the terms in which this trade is described in 1 Kng. 10 are very similar to those in Rev. 18. At the time, Solomon loved and served God with all his heart and did not allow his business of trading to take priority over this. Later in life, unfortunately, his foreign wives, many of whom he married as a result of his business dealings with the world, corrupted him and led him into apostasy.

It is interesting to note that many of the items in the list of merchandise in Rev. 18 over which men weep, are luxuries not necessities - things for show and personal adornment, presentation and satisfaction. The gold, precious stones, pearls, purple, scarlet and fine linen, can be linked with the things adorning the harlot and city in v16 and 17:4. And

the odours (incense), ointments, frankincense, wine and oil, are all used in various Roman Catholic religious services. “All kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble” are materials that are used for making statues, idols and images, as in the past when the Popes brought splendour to Rome. They hired great artists and sculptors who gave the city beautiful buildings, marble statues and priceless works of art. Today thousands of visitors come every year from all parts of the world to see these masterpieces.

Regarding the “chariots” in v13: the Greek word is “rheda” and only occurs here. It relates to a special kind of four wheeled coach or vehicle, often expensively decorated and a sign of luxury. They were used by the wealthy classes, including the Popes. In Rome today, it is not uncommon to see visitors riding in horse drawn carriages.

SLAVES AND SOULS OF MEN

Verse 13 in the A.V. refers to “slaves and souls of men” at the end of the list of merchandise that came to Babylon before her fall. The Greek word translated “slaves” is “soma” and means “body.” It is translated “body” 145 times, “bodies” 10 times and “bodily” 4 times in the New Testament. It is only translated “slaves” in Rev. 18:13 and should be “bodies.” The subject in Rev. 18:13 is clearly cargo, and because the bodies are part of that cargo, they are regarded as slaves, and therefore translated “slaves” in the A.V.

“Souls” comes from the Greek “psuche” and can relate to the life, breath or being (physical being) of a person. See Rev. 6:9. 20:4. Some modern translations translate “souls of men” as “human lives” or “human souls.” The sense of the whole phrase: “slaves, and souls of men” could therefore be “bodies, that is, human lives.” In the Old Testament “souls of men” is a Hebraism for “persons of men,” or simply “men.” (Gen. 36:6. 1 Chr. 5:21. Ezk. 27:13).

From time immemorial trading in human lives has taken place and slaves have been among the cargo of merchants. According to Joel 3:6 such trading will also take place in the end time. Reference is made here to Jews in particular who will be sent away from their land and sold to the Gentiles.

However, the literal text of Rev. 18:13: “bodies and human lives” seems to make a distinction between the two. Could this suggest trading in bodies in the sense of body parts for organ transplants which we know is already taking place in some parts of the world?

Or, could the bartering of bodies be related to prostitution and homosexuality as in Joel 3:3 which refers to bartering boys and selling girls. A television news item recently referred to problems with “people traffickers” who smuggle people from countries for the sex industry.

DEPARTURE OF THE DAINTY

After presenting the list of merchandise that stops coming to Babylon as a result of her destruction, verse 14 says: “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.”

The incoming merchandise is likened here to trees yielding fruit. As one waits with confidence and expectation for juicy tasty fruit each season and derives pleasure and enjoyment therefrom, so the city will receive merchandise that gives much pleasure. The word “lusted” indicates that the desire and quest for material possessions will be strong and obsessive. It will be gross materialism i.e. covetousness which is idolatry.

“Dainty” comes from the Greek word “liparos,” which signifies oily; from “lipos” which relates to grease and fat. It conveys a sumptuous style of living i.e. living off the fat of the earth - living “deliciously” (v7, 9).

“Goodly” comes from the Greek “lampros” which means magnificent or sumptuous, bright, clear, gorgeous. It occurs in relation to clothing and appearance in Jam. 2:2-3 where it is translated “goodly” and “gay,” i.e. “goodly apparel” and “gay clothing.” It is also translated “gorgeous” in Lk. 23:11, “bright” Act. 10:30. Rev. 22:16, “white” Rev. 15:6. 19:8.

So then, “dainty” applies to food and “goodly” applies to clothing. They ate well and they dressed well, but all these things that they lived for and lusted after, they “shall find no more at all.” They will never be recovered. The trade will never return. Never again will such prosperity and pleasure be experienced in the city.

Verses 15 to 19 again refer to the merchants weeping and wailing over the destruction of the city and the loss of revenue that results from it. The merchants sold their goods to Babylon and were made rich by this. Babylon is the buyer not the seller. Unlike Tyre, the harlot has not been sailing away selling to the nations. The nations have been coming to her to sell their goods. Money and wealth is clearly the motive behind their business trips to Rome, not spirituality!

Verse 17 says: “All the ship’s captains and passengers, the sailors and all others who earn their living on the sea, stood a long way off, and cried

when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, what city is like this great city?"

Rome lies on both banks of the Tiber river 27 kilometres (17 miles) east of the Tyrrhenian sea. The modern city is elevated on hills and in the event of it going up in flames, the smoke would be clearly seen from the sea by any merchant or cruise ships passing by in the area. The same could not be said of ancient Babylon which is about 500 kilometres (300 miles) from the Persian gulf. When Pompeii was engulfed in the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24 A.D. 79, spectators on ships anchored in the adjacent bay of Naples viewed with fear and horror the burning of the city. The language in Rev. 18:17-18 is reminiscent of that.

Other cities in the world are larger than Rome and have taller buildings, more spacious parks, wider rivers, a greater population, and ancient architecture, so why do those who watch the city burning say: "What city is like this city?" Surely it is because only Rome has the Vatican and centuries of relics that go with it. In this respect Rome is a unique city.

Regarding the reference in v19 to those in the ships casting dust on their heads as they weep and wail: Ezk. 27:29-32 refers to sailors coming ashore from their ships and standing upon the land, casting dust upon their heads and crying bitterly over the fall of Tyre, saying: "What city is like Tyre ...?" Rev. 18:17-18 clearly invites a comparison with this.

REJOICING OVER JUDGEMENT

In view of the fact that Babylon is guilty of shedding the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6), they will obviously not be upset when the city is destroyed. God certainly doesn't expect them to weep and wail. Quite the opposite. He says: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God has judged her for the way she treated you" (v20).

The word "holy" should be taken as a noun, meaning "holy ones." It is translated "saints" by most revised versions. The same applies in v24: "In her (Babylon) was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." Reference is also made to "the saints and prophets" in Rev. 16:6. 11:10, 18. All apostles and prophets are saints of course, but not all saints are apostles or prophets!

Because these apostles and prophets live contemporary with the harlot who did not exist in New Testament times, it is clear that they can not be the New Testament apostles and prophets. As we have seen, the harlot lives contemporary with the end time beast, which means there will

be apostles and prophets in the end time.

As has been previously pointed out, the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 refers to an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, resulting in prophets who will prophesy, dream dreams and see visions. This is the period referred to in Rev. 11:3 when the mighty angel (comforter) comes from heaven to “give power” to God’s witnesses, resulting in prophets (v10, 18).

Not only are the saints on earth told to rejoice over the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:20, but also “heaven,” i.e. the angels. Their response is given in Rev. 19:1-7. If there is joy and rejoicing in heaven among the angels when a sinner repents and becomes a saint (Lk. 15:7, 10), then it is not surprising that angels should rejoice when sinners who persecute the saints are judged.

Heaven also rejoiced over the fall of ancient Babylon: Jer. 51:47-49: “Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will execute judgement upon the graven images of Babylon: and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon: for the destroyers shall come to her from the north, says the Lord. As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the country.”

LIKE A GREAT MILLSTONE

After hearing a voice telling the angels in heaven and the saints on earth to rejoice over the fall of Babylon, John then saw an angel give a demonstration of what the fall would be like. We read in v21 that “a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying: with violence shall the great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

“A great (megas) millstone,” probably refers to a commercial one which was so big and heavy, it required an ass or ox to turn it. It would not refer to a hand-held domestic one. Such a heavy stone would sink very quickly and disappear. Rome’s destruction is clearly going to be sudden and violent, not slow and drawn out.

Reference is also made in Jer. 51:63-64 to ancient Babylon’s fall being likened to a stone being thrown into water. In this particular case it was a “stone” not a millstone, and it was tied to a scroll containing written warnings of Babylon’s impending doom; it was thrown by Jeremiah not an angel, into the river Euphrates not the sea. And the purpose in doing

this was not to signify that Babylon would be destroyed suddenly and violently, but that it would, like the stone thrown into the river, sink and not rise again. This is how it reads: “When you have finished reading the scroll, you shall tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates. And you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.”

It was mentioned earlier that the rising crown effect (seen better in slow motion), of the wave action when a large stone is dropped into water, also occurs when thermo-nuclear explosions take place. This could be significant if the fire that destroys Rome is caused by a nuclear bomb. The words: “thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down” would also be very appropriate if this was the case.

According to Thayer, the Greek word “hormema” translated “violence,” means “rush.” Bullinger gives it as “furious rush” which would be an apt description for a nuclear explosion. Air rushes in to fill the vacuum, causing hurricane force winds to roar with a great noise. This calls to mind a statement in 2 Pet. 3:10 which refers to “the heavens on fire and passing away with a great noise,” i.e. a “roar” or “a great rushing sound.”

Isa. 25:1-5 could also be relevant to the end time nuclear age: “Cities become ruinous heaps of rubble. But God will be a refuge to His people, a shade (protection) from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones comes as a storm.” The word “blast” comes from the Hebrew word for “wind.” A heated blasting wind with the ferocity of a storm is certainly descriptive of an atomic explosion. The reference in Isa. 25:6 to the second coming of Christ indicates that the prophecy relates to the end time.

Reference in Rev. 18:21 to the great city of Babylon being “thrown down” like a stone being thrown into the sea, indicates it will be levelled to the ground. And the words: “shall be found no more at all” are repeated 6 times in verses 21-23. They simply mean: “will never be seen again” i.e. never rebuilt. The same was said of Tyre: “I will bring you to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more: though you be sought for, you will never be found again, says the Lord God” (Ezk. 26:21).

Likening Rome’s destruction to the casting of a millstone into the sea is also significant in the light of a statement made by Jesus. He said that it would be better for a millstone to be hung around a person’s neck and be cast into the sea rather than be a stumbling block to those who believe in him (Mk. 9:42. Lk. 17:1-2).

The word “stumblingblock” means to be a hindrance or obstacle, causing offence and stumbling. In view of the obstacles and offences

caused by the befuddling wine of Rome's false doctrine and her persecution of the saints, it is fitting that her destruction should be likened to the casting of a millstone into the sea. In so doing, the spirit is saying that she is an offence to God and His people. As sins are cast into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19), so this great city, the source of so much sin, is plunged into a lake of fire, never to rise again.

ALL ACTIVITIES AND NOISES WILL CEASE

When ancient Babylon fell, all music, singing and joyful sounds ceased as we read in Isa. 14:11: "Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, with the music of your harps." The same happened when Tyre fell: "I will cause your noisy songs to cease, and the sound of your harps shall no longer be heard" (Ezk. 26:13). Isa. 24:8 refers to the same thing: "The gaiety of timbrels ceases; the noise of revelling ends; the joy of the harp stops." Also Jer. 25:10.

It will be no different when modern Babylon falls: "The sound of harpers and musicians, flute players and trumpeters shall be heard no more" (Rev. 18:22). Italian tenors and sopranos and the pipe organ in St Peter's Basilica will never be heard again in Rome! The stillness of death will be over everything.

Rev. 18:22 goes on to say that no workman in any trade will ever be seen in the city again. No industry of any kind will ever exist there. Because the city will never be rebuilt, there will never be any more building or construction of any kind.

"And the sound of a millstone (the mill) shall never again be heard." There will be no population there to eat, so there will be no more milling of grain to make flour for bread and other food items.

"And the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all." Whether generated by wood, coal, oil, gas or electricity, light will never be seen again in the city. Total darkness will reign every night, where once there used to be sparkling lights everywhere. The Living Bible puts it like this: "Dark, dark will be her nights; not even a lamp in a window will ever be seen again."

The Greek word translated "candle" in the A.V. means "lamp," but the word candle is appropriate in view of the widespread usage of them by the Roman Catholic church. Many of them flicker in the churches in Rome, but all will eventually be snuffed out forever.

In the Bible, weddings stand for the highest of all human joys on earth. Naturally, there will be no such joy in a city that has been levelled

to the ground. Rev. 18:23 says: “And the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be no more in thee at all.” “No more joyous wedding bells and happy voices of the bridegrooms and the brides” is how the Living Bible puts it.

What a terrible bleak picture is presented in these verses: no music, song or joy; no builders or the hum of industry; no food, light or life. However hard life may be, the young usually surmount troubles, marry and carry on life, but not so here! There is no continuance of life in this place.

NATIONS DECEIVED BY SORCERIES

The last statement in Rev. 18:23 says: “For thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.”

This seems to be saying that Babylon’s fall is due to being pre-occupied and obsessed with doing business and making money with the rich, powerful and influential men on earth. Instead of doing and meaning “business” with Christ, and letting him have the greatest influence in her life, making her rich and prosperous in spiritual treasures; Babylon has loved and conformed herself to the world and worldly ways instead, which are governed by pride and material ambition. Deceiving all nations by her sorceries is also mentioned as a cause of her downfall.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the Greek word for “sorceries” is “pharmakia” from which the English word “pharmacy” is derived. It relates to both medication and magic and can be related to drugs and druggists.

Like wine, drugs can befuddle and deceive the mind, putting it into an unreal and imaginary world of fantasy and fiction. Like magic, they can create illusion and delusion as in the case of the Egyptian magicians who created counterfeit miracles (Ex. 7:11). Also see Act. 8:9-11. 13:6-8.

Both drugs and magic can create a world in which things that are seen are not in reality what they seem to be. They can deceive the mind into believing something is true which in fact is a lie and false. This sums up in a nutshell the befuddling and deceiving effect of the false teaching of the harlot’s wine, and her false claims such as certain water being “holy” and able to heal; appearances of Mary, and of certain statues of Jesus and Mary bleeding or shedding tears. Fraud has been ascertained in many of these cases which amount to sleight of hand and cunning craftiness like a sorcerer or magician. They are all summed up in the word

“sorceries,” not to mention all the bones which are supposed to belong to John the Baptist etc, which are supposed to have “magical” powers, and which are sold for ridiculous sums of money! It is all spiritual quackery by which people are “bewitched” and deceived and conned into thinking it is a great church.

In Gal. 5:20 pharmakia is translated “witchcraft” and refers to spiritualism, which claims the dead live on outside their body. This belief is based on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which has its roots in the first lie recorded in the Bible told by the serpent: “Thou shalt not surely die.” The pagan doctrine of demons was also based on the immortality of the soul. It was believed that demons were the canonised or deified spirits that had departed from the dead, who became minor deities and acted as intermediaries or mediators between the supreme gods and men, and were used to distribute good or evil.

The Roman Catholics also hold to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and have adopted a similar doctrine as the pagans which involves canonising the departed spirits of certain people, elevating them to special ranks of sainthood. These “saints” (particularly Mary), are regarded as intermediaries or mediators between the supreme God and man, and are prayed to for help. It is believed that they have the power to protect or punish, to do good or harm, as in the case of the pagan demons.

But Mary and all who have died, are dead, awaiting resurrection, and there is only one mediator between man and God: Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). Roman Catholic doctrine fundamentally violates this. Mariolatry usurps Christ’s unique and exclusive role as mediator and intercessor.

The divine verdict on Roman Catholicism is that it is “sorcery” (witchcraft), and harlotry, and it has deceived millions, including “the great men of the earth” such as kings, queens, princes and presidents.

In view of all this, the exhortation in Pr. 7:1-5 to let the Word of God be our guiding light and keep us from fraternizing with the harlot, is quite appropriate in more ways than one: “My son, keep my words, and treasure my commandments. Keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye. Wear them like a ring upon your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, ‘you are my sister,’ and call understanding your intimate friend. That they might keep you from the strange woman, from the woman with seductive words.”



CHAPTER SIXTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER NINETEEN

Chapter 19 is a continuation of chapter 18, and provides an interval between the disappearance of the great city of the harlot, and the appearance of the greater city of God. John has had his gaze fixed on earth for some time, watching the terrible destruction of the city of the great whore. But a great voice of praise arrests his attention and turns his gaze towards heaven to behold a great vision:

“After this I heard the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, hallelujah; Salvation and glory and power to our God: For His judgements are true and righteous; for he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and has avenged on her the blood of His servants. And once again they cried, hallelujah. And the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever. And the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying, Amen. Hallelujah. And from the throne came a voice crying, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear Him, both small and great. Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of mighty thunders, crying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God the omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and give glory to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (v1-7).

This great sound of triumphant praise and joyful exclamation in heaven is in response to the call in Rev. 18:20 for all in heaven to rejoice over the fall of Babylon. “Heaven” is the heavenly sanctuary, the city of God, and it is clearly the angels who are referred to offering praise, involving the 4 living creatures, 24 elders and the multitudes surrounding them. The saints at this stage have not yet been united with Christ (19:7-9), and neither has the beast been destroyed (v11-), which means the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon has not taken place. The beast does not come to fullness of power until after the harlot is destroyed.

HALLELUJAH

It is interesting to note that in response to the call to rejoice, the angels say “hallelujah,” not once or twice, but 4 times. There are, unfortunately some Christians who would be reticent about doing this for fear of being regarded as “emotional” or “Pentecostal.” The angels are

clearly not hung up on such fears, and we are in good company when we respond with a few hallelujahs to the wonderful works of God. These occurrences of the word hallelujah in the first 6 verses of Rev. 19 are the only ones in the whole of the New Testament, but the word occurs many times in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, and is usually translated “praise ye the Lord.” The literal translation is: “Praise ye Yah.” (Yah is the abbreviated form of Yahweh, which is the name of God).

The A.V. gives “alleluia” instead of “hallelujah.” In Greek the “h” is normally indicated by a small mark over the first vowel, but the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament omitted such “trimmings.” This resulted in the “h” getting lost in alleluia, as well as other names such as Agar which should be Hagar, and Osee which should be Hosea. (The “i” and “j” in alleluia and hallelujah are interchangeable in pronunciation).

So then, the terrible holocaust of Rome elicits ecstatic praise from heaven’s host, but weeping and wailing among the nations on earth. The rejoicing of the angels in Rev. 19:1-6 contrasts with the dirge in 18:18-. Those who are in accord with the mind and purpose of God rejoice in the judgement of the wicked as well as the salvation of sinners. This song can be compared with the hallelujah songs in the Psalms which celebrate God’s judgement on the enemy and the triumph of the saints. For example: Ps. 146:7-9. 147. 149.

Even though it is the beast who destroys Babylon by fire, the angels attribute it to the power of God, saying: “Salvation and glory and power to our God.” This is because “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained by God” (Rom. 13:1). “The Most high God rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17). As we have seen in Rev. 17:17: God puts it into the heart of the beast to burn the harlot with fire. If the “fire” is nuclear, such power is only possible due to the elements created by God in the first place. It is simply the harnessing of power already provided by God, and it is divine providence that has allowed man to develop the technology to produce it.

The “salvation” ascribed to God by the angels is the result of the harlot’s destruction which puts an end to her persecution of the saints. The judgement of the harlot is a sign and token of the forthcoming and final judgement of the beast, at which time the eternal salvation of the saints will be secured. Anticipation of this ultimate salvation could be behind the angel’s words just as much as the salvation of the saints from Babylon. It is an undeniable truth that the harlot deserves to be punished and that such punishment is “just.” The angels therefore affirm that God’s judgements

are “true and righteous,” and justify His judgement of the harlot by referring to what she has done, namely: corrupted the earth with her fornication, and shed the blood of God’s servants. This is the third time in the book of Revelation that reference is made to God’s judgements being true and righteous. The other 2 are in 15:3 and 16:7. Also see 6:10. 16:5. “The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9).

HER SMOKE ROSE UP FOREVER

As the praise to God rises up before His throne in heaven, so also does the smoke of the burning of the city of Babylon: “Her smoke rose up for ever and ever.” One commentator suggests it would be fitting if each shout of hallelujah fanned the fire causing it to burn more fiercely! Reference has already been made of course to “the smoke of her burning” in Rev. 18:9, 18.

When a city burns, the smoke continues to ascend as long as there is something to burn and as long as the ashes stay hot. In a city the size of Rome, this would continue for a long time, signified by the words “for ever and ever.” The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, which were originally situated in the dead sea area, are referred to in Jude v7 as “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” The fire that destroyed these cities was eternal in the sense of unquenchable and burned for a long time until it consumed everything. It is not still burning today.

Reference is also made in Isa. 34 to Edom (a country south-east of the Dead Sea) suffering a burning which “shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke of it shall go up for ever, from generation to generation it shall lie waste; no humans shall pass through it for ever and ever. But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it ...” A similar reference is made in Rev. 18:2 to wild animals and birds making the (smouldering) ruins of Rome their habitation.

Similar language is also used in Jer. 17:27 in relation to the city of Jerusalem. God warned that he would “kindle a fire in the gates of the city which shall devour the palaces and shall not be quenched.” The Babylonians were used by God to inflict this fire which burned continually until it consumed the city.

However, reference in Rev. 19:3 to the smoke rising up forever from Rome may not only refer to the smoke from the city set on fire by the beast. As we have seen in Rev. 16:18-20, the great earthquake that occurs at the time of the battle of Armageddon, will severely fracture the site where the ruins of Rome lie, and divide it into 3 sections. Being a

volcanic area, this could release “smoke” literally “for ever and ever.” If so, it would be a perpetual sign and witness to the judgement of God. Even a powerful nuclear warhead could have a fracturing effect on the earth’s crust in the area, releasing volcanic smoke.

Regarding the volcanic nature of the area, Barnes quotes from a traveller in Italy in 1850 the following:

“I behold everywhere, in Rome, near Rome, and through the whole region from Rome to Naples, the most astounding proofs, not merely of the possibility, but the probability, that the whole region of central Italy will one day be destroyed by such a catastrophe. The soil of Rome is tufa, with a volcanic subterranean action going on. At Naples the boiling sulphur is to be seen bubbling near the surface of the earth. When I drew a stick along the ground, the sulphurous smoke followed the indentation ... The entire country and district is volcanic. It is saturated with beds of sulphur and the substrata of destruction. It seems as certainly prepared for the flames as the wood and coal on the hearth are prepared for the taper which shall kindle the fire to consume them.”

VOICES FROM THE THRONE

The reference in Rev. 19:4 to “the four and twenty elders and the four beasts” is the fifth and last reference to them in the book of Revelation. Here, as in the other references, they are referred to separately from the multitude of over 100 million angels that surround them and the throne of God. In this verse they add their approval to the hallelujah chorus offered by the multitude of angels by saying “amen,” then they join the chorus by saying “hallelujah” themselves.

After this, “a voice came out of the throne, saying, praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great.”

Because the voice from the throne says: “praise our God,” it is evident that the request does not come from God. It probably comes from one of the 4 living creatures. And the fact that the 24 elders, 4 living creatures and the multitude of angels in heaven surrounding them have already just praised God; the call here to praise God is not likely to be to them.

In Rev. 18:20 the call to rejoice over the destruction of Babylon was not just for the angels in heaven, but also the saints on earth, represented by the “saints, apostles and prophets,” and it seems that they are the ones who are told to praise God in Rev. 19:5. They are referred to as “both small and great” and this is qualified by “all ye His servants and ye who

fear Him.” Elsewhere in Revelation, “small and great” is applied to those on earth, never angels (11:18. 13:16. 19:18. 20:12. Also see Act. 26:22). It would seem therefore that the request in Rev. 19:5 is for all the saints on earth to rejoice with the angels and praise God for the judgement of the harlot. Verse 7 confirms this for they say: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.”

As a result of the beast destroying Rome and rising to power, apprehension will be in the hearts of the saints and they may not feel like rejoicing and giving praise, but a voice from heaven calls for it and commands it. One could well imagine the saints living at the time reading or remembering these words of command and responding to them as to an audible command from heaven! This in fact, may be how it will be fulfilled!

It is therefore the voice of the saints that John heard in Rev. 19:6 which sounded like “the voice of a great multitude, like the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings.” There will clearly be a large number of saints involved.

The opening words of their praise are: “Hallelujah, for our Lord God the omnipotent reigns.” God’s rule over the nations is demonstrated in the destruction of Babylon, and it is only a question of time before He will do the same to the beast. The words of praise are just as much in anticipation of what God will do as what He has done.

It is truly ironic that Christendom at large sings these words when performing Handel’s oratorio “The Messiah,” not realizing that the reasons for this praise of Yah is the destruction of its own system. Handel’s hallelujah chorus is considered the most sublime expression of praise in the field of music, but will be totally eclipsed by the magnificent hallelujah chorus sung by those in Rev. 19.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Verse 7 records the rest of the words of praise: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.”

To “be glad” will mean putting aside all sadness caused by the harlot, and not dwelling on the forthcoming persecution by the beast. The challenge is to forget the past, overlook the present and look to the ultimate future joy of the wedding! As Heb. 12:2 puts it: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set

before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In actual fact, Rev. 19 skips or glosses over the beast’s reign of terror and projects us from the judgement of the harlot to the last phase of the beast’s rule when the saints will be united with Christ. The fact that the saints accompany Christ when he destroys the beast (Rev. 17:14. 19:14), reveals that they are united with him beforehand, probably prior to the massive earthquake of the seventh vial. This would therefore be the time to which the words “the marriage of the Lamb is come,” apply. The destruction of the beast comes after this as we read in the following verses.

Verse 7 refers to being glad due to the “marriage,” and v9 refers to being blessed due to the “marriage supper.” The marriage of course signifies the joining together of Christ and his church in eternal union. How significant that the marriage of the true and pure bride of Christ should follow the destruction of the false and corrupt harlot!

There are a number of references in the New Testament to Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride, and the marriage and marriage supper was one of the themes Jesus loved to talk about in his parables. See: Matt. 9:15. 22:2-. 25:1-10. Jn. 3:29. Eph. 5:25-32. 2 Jn. verse 1. Rev. 19:7, 9. 22:17.

“Bride” is actually just one among quite a mixture of metaphors describing the church. “Children of the bride-chamber” is another (Mk. 2:19), as well as guests at a wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-10. Lk. 14:16-24. Rev. 19:9). The metaphor of virgins sent out to meet the bridegroom is used in Matt. 25, and Paul refers to Christians being “espoused” (betrothed - engaged) to Christ to be married.

There will be no marriage in the flesh for the immortal saints (Lk. 20:34-35). Such marriage is a temporary and transitional arrangement for the purpose of procreation and to act as a type of the greater marriage in the spirit that is to come, which will transcend and excel the former.

HIS WIFE HAS MADE HERSELF READY

In the statement: “his wife has made herself ready,” the word “wife” is used prospectively. She will not in reality be the wife until the marriage takes place. There is also an obvious contrast between the “wife” here and the “harlot” in the preceding chapter. The contrast is between the true, pure church and the false, corrupt and apostate church. These 2 symbolic women have access to exactly the same source of divine

revelation - the Bible, but only a small minority are prepared and determined to read and study it for themselves and put aside vain human tradition and doctrine and hold fast to the truth. This small minority is the true church and bride of Christ, who by due diligence to make her calling and election sure, studying to show herself approved of God, "hath made herself ready."

The words "hath made ready" come from the Greek word "hetoimazo" and mean "to prepare," and is so translated many times in the New Testament. For example: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Matt. 3:3). "And that servant, who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Lk. 12:47). "If a man purifies himself from what is ignoble, he shall be a vessel for noble use, sanctified and useful for the master's use, and prepared for every good work."

It is evident from these and many other verses that diligent effort and application is required on the part of those who want to be the bride of Christ, to be properly prepared for the wedding. Brides in Biblical times did not walk into a shop and purchase a ready-made wedding garment. With the help of family they made and prepared it themselves, ensuring that it was clean and white, having no dirty spots or creases. No bridegroom would be impressed if his bride met him wearing a dirty, spotted, wrinkled and creased wedding dress.

Likewise, the bride of Christ must be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word, that she might be presented to her bridegroom "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, ... to keep yourself unspotted from the world" (Jam. 1:27), "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude v23). To live according to the flesh, committing sin and conforming to the way of the world, puts dirty spots and ugly creases on the garment of salvation and robe of righteousness. All in Christ who want to be involved in the marriage with him, are required to love and pursue righteousness and holiness and hate sin and iniquity. They are expected to not just be hearers of the Word but doers - doers of good works and righteous deeds, manifesting the spirit of Christ and the name of God. This is why, as we shall see in Rev. 19:8, the garment they receive from Christ for the marriage, represents righteous deeds.

ARRAYED IN FINE LINEN

“**A**nd to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (v8).

It is natural to see a contrast between the attire of the bride of Christ and the harlot. In view of the fact that the fine linen garment represents righteous deeds and alone befits the true bride of Christ, it is presumptuous and outrageous that the harlot arrays herself in the same (Rev. 18:12, 16). However, it is gay and gaudy like a prostitute. It is purple and scarlet (the colour of sin), not white!

The priests under the old covenant wore linen, so it is fitting that the saints under the new covenant, who are made kings and priests in the kingdom of God, should also wear linen. Angels also wear linen, so it is to be expected that all who are made equal with them will wear the same.

“Fine linen” is made out of fine strands of flax, and in Biblical times was expensive and only worn by the rich (Gen. 41:42. Lk. 16:19). From this point of view, linen garments would also be appropriate for the saints because they seek the true riches and treasures of knowledge and wisdom in Christ (Col. 2:2-3).

Rev. 19:8 says the fine linen is “clean and white.” This signifies that the saints have been washed and cleansed by the water of the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). Other Scriptures which emphasize the washing and cleansing effect of the Word are: Jn. 15:3. 17:17. Ps. 119:9. 1 Pet. 1:23. The Word of God can obviously only have this effect on those who regularly and conscientiously read it and treat it with the utmost of respect. The knowledge and wisdom that this imparts gives spiritual discernment, and prevents people from being deceived and corrupted by the harlot and the world.

As in the case of Israel, the old covenant bride; those who constitute the new covenant bride, were also not originally called because of the loveliness of their garments. All were dead in their trespasses and sins; unclean, unholy, ignorant of the Word of God and alienated from God. But, in the words of the Lord in Ezk. 16:8-14: “When I passed by thee and looked upon thee ... I spread my skirt over thee and covered thy nakedness: yea, I gave you my solemn oath, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I washed you with water ... and I anointed you with oil. I also clothed you ... I girded you with fine linen ... and you were exceeding beautiful, and you did prosper into a kingdom ...”

Isa. 61:10 is also relevant: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord and my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.”

THE RIGHTEOUS DEEDS OF THE SAINTS

The A.V. says the fine linen is “the righteousness of saints,” but the correct translation is “the righteous deeds of the saints.” The fine linen represents the righteousness done by the saints themselves in holy righteous living, not the righteousness done for them by Christ’s atoning sacrifice. This is not teaching salvation by works, but showing that belonging to Christ and being atoned for by his sacrifice, demands a change in one’s life.

We cannot earn or deserve eternal life by our righteous deeds, because no matter how many righteous deeds we perform, we still sin and fall short of the glory of God. “The wages of sin is death” and it only requires one sin to bring about the condemnation of death. To escape from such condemnation required perfect obedience - a sinless life - 100% righteousness. Such a standard of course is beyond the ability of a humanly begotten man; only Jesus Christ, a man specially begotten by God, could achieve that. And the good news is that all who are prepared to believe in him, repent of their sins and learn of him, being willing to obey his commandments, can share in his righteousness. His righteousness is “imputed” or “reckoned” to them, and they are accounted as righteous by God. In the words of Job 29:14: “I put on righteousness and it clothed me ...” Again: “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let the saints shout for joy” (Ps. 132:9). Salvation is therefore a gift of God’s grace.

However, although salvation cannot be earned by our own work and effort of righteous deeds, we are expected to do good works and do our best to live righteously and to be holy. “Those who have believed in God must be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). Failure to do so is an abuse of the grace of God and will disqualify from eternal life. The man in Matt. 22:11 who “had not on a wedding garment” and was cast out and excluded from the wedding, can be seen as representing those who fail to live righteously. Jesus makes it clear in Rev. 2:23 that he will deal with us according to our works. Those who live in sin are clothed with filthy garments, and are forced to say: “We are all as an unclean thing, and all

our righteousness are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Eph. 2:8-10 puts it all in perspective: “For by grace are you saved through faith; it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God: not by works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Paul succinctly states here that we are not saved by works but we are saved for good works; i.e. as a result of the free gift of God’s salvation, we live the kind of life that pleases Him. We cannot be saved by works, but neither can we be saved without them!

So we do not do good works to try and earn and deserve salvation because that is impossible. We do them because we love God and His commandments, and want to show our appreciation. Such people are “overcomers” of the flesh which is rebellious, disobedient and ungrateful by nature. They are referred to by Jesus as those who “have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels” (Rev. 3:4-5).

On the other hand, to those like the harlot who say: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked,” Jesus says: “I counsel thee to buy from me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that you may see” (Rev. 3:17-18).

So then, the imputed righteousness of Christ is not the only righteousness that the saints possess. This alone cannot save. If we have no righteousness of our own - if we do not make an effort to live a righteous life and persist in sin instead, we have no hope of salvation. As Jesus said: “Except your righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). The Pharisees made a great outward show of religiosity; they were all talk but did not walk the talk! They were hypocrites.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO ARE INVITED

In Rev. 19:9 John says: “He said unto me, write.” The one who spoke to John here is probably the one whose voice came out of the throne in v5. He told John to write these words: “Blessed are they who are invited

to the marriage supper of the Lamb,” and then said: “These are the true sayings of God.”

Those who are invited to the marriage supper are of course the saints who are involved in the marriage of the Lamb. The marriage and marriage supper go together and are inseparable. It is always a foregone conclusion that a woman who is invited to be married, will be invited to the supper! Those who are invited to the marriage supper are therefore blessed because they have been chosen to be part of the bride of Christ.

“Blessed” means happy, happiness, involving gladness and rejoicing, as there always is at a marriage celebration, but especially this one! On that day the king will say: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 14:15). “Blessed and holy is he who hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him for 1,000 years” (Rev. 20:6). These and many more are the blessings promised by God when He said to Abraham: “In thee and thy seed (Christ) shall all nations of the earth be blessed.”

Marriage suppers are renowned for their rich, delicious, tasty food. Think what the marriage supper of the Lamb will be like. Not just food but also wine, because Jesus said: “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29).

If anyone has any doubts about the rich and tasty food and wine that shall be enjoyed in that day, read Isa. 25:6: “And in this mountain (Zion, the city of God) shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a banquet of rich food, a feast of well aged wine, of food rich and juicy, a feast of old wine well refined.”

Other references to the marriage supper are: Matt. 8:11. 22:1-. Lk. 12:37. 14:15-. No wonder there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth by those who see others going in to the marriage supper and kingdom and themselves rejected!

TRUE SAYINGS

To some, the concept and prospect of a marriage and marriage supper might be a mind-boggling revelation - difficult to accept literally - too good to be true. If so, the divine assurance that follows could be timely: “These are the true sayings of God.” These words imply that there is a profound solemnity in the words that have just been spoken about the

marriage and marriage supper. The fact that John falls on his face in worship reinforces this.

Some Scriptures use the word “true” in the sense of solid reality in contrast to that which is a type or shadow. For example: Lk. 16:11. Jn. 1:9. 6:32. 15:1. Heb. 8:2. 9:24. 1 Jn. 2:8.

In view of this, some believe that the word true in Rev. 19:9 does not mean “veracious” in contrast to false, as if vouching for the truth of this part of the message. Instead, “true” is seen to mean “reality” i.e. the marriage supper is not symbolic but a reality that will literally and physically occur. The same words also occur in Rev. 21:5 and 22:6.

Instead of writing, John “fell at his feet to worship him” (v10). It seems that he was overcome by the rapturous nature of the revelation. The hallelujah chorus sung by the multitudes of angels and saints, and the joyful prospect of the marriage and marriage supper, was emotionally overwhelming and overpowering. He was filled with such a profound sense of awe and joy, that he fell to the ground in worship before the angel.

If this was the same angel that brought the revelation to John at the beginning (Rev. 1:1), who represented Christ and manifested his divine power and glory, it would be easy to get carried away and inadvertently fall down prostrate in worship under the impact of the visions. So much so that, in spite of being told not to do it, John did it again shortly afterwards! (22:9).

The involuntary prostration is characteristic of one in a dream. In reality, John knew that angels were not to be worshipped, but in the vision he makes the mistake of doing it, resulting in instruction we all need to know, namely: “See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (A.V.).

The words “thou do it” are in italics in the A.V. indicating that they do not belong to the original Greek text. The Emphatic Diaglott renders it: “See; no!” The R.S.V. says: “You must not do that.” The same words are repeated by the angel when John falls down before him the second time in 22:9.

Because angels will not allow people to fall down in worship before them, it is not surprising that Peter would not allow Cornelius to fall in worship before him (Act. 10:26), but the Pope has no such reservation or restraint!

A FELLOW-SERVANT

The angel's words "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren" (A.V.), are elsewhere translated: "I am a fellow-servant with you and your brethren" (R.S.V.) i.e. "like you and your Christian brethren, I also am a servant of God."

The timing of this statement in Rev. 19 is significant for it occurs after the marriage supper when the saints will be immortal and equal with the angels! In view of the ultimate equality between the saints and angels, it would be inappropriate for John or anyone else to worship them. Like ourselves, angels are created or "made" by God (Heb. 1:7). Only the Creator, and His only begotten son can be worshipped. For this reason, the angel says to John: "Worship God."

Although the A.V. translation: "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren" may not be correct, it does nevertheless convey a truth, if "fellow-servant" is taken to mean that the angel was a servant to John. All angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). The heirs of salvation are of course the saints, and the angel in Rev. 19:10 refers to them as John's "brethren who have the testimony of Jesus." Here, the angel defines and identifies Christ's brethren as those who testify of Jesus, even when it incurs reproach, ridicule, tribulation, exile and death. (Rev. 1:9. 6:9. 11:7. 12:11, 17). These are the "witnesses" of the book of Revelation.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

The angel then says: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." There are a number of different interpretations of this. Before considering them, the statement should firstly be looked at in its context, which indicates that it is given as a reason for not worshipping the angel. In view of the fact that John fell down before the angel due to the impact of the prophecy he gave concerning the marriage and marriage supper; the angel's words could be read to mean: "Worship God, for it is His Spirit which has inspired the prophetic testimony given to Jesus which he has sent me to give to you." This would mean that the testimony "of" Jesus means "from" or "sent by" Jesus. The opening statement in the book of Revelation is relevant here: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John" (1:1).

In this light, the angel could be saying to John: “I am not so superior to you that I should be worshipped; you and your brethren have received the testimony of Jesus and I also have received the testimony of Jesus. We are all recipients and servants.”

It should be noted that the angel defines the testimony of Jesus to which his brethren testify, as the spirit of prophecy. We are reminded here that the true Christian message is prophetic; it doesn't relate to present day health, wealth and prosperity, but to the second coming of Christ, the kingdom of God, and events leading up to it. This was the testimony of Jesus in New Testament times and it has been the testimony of his true brethren since (Cp. Rev. 11:3).

Some see the statement as meaning Jesus is the scope, design, object and end - the alpha and omega of all prophetic testimony - of the whole Scripture - the one to whom “all the prophets gave witness” (Act. 10:43).

Prophecy certainly receives its value and meaning from its relation to Christ. The first prophetic utterance of God in Gen. 3:15 to the last prediction in Revelation, has been directed to, and focussed upon the person and purpose of Christ. Hence, we read in Lk. 24:27 that Jesus, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.” This would mean that the testimony “of” Jesus would signify “concerning” Jesus.

Considering that the word “prophecy” can encompass the whole prophetic Word from the beginning of the Old Testament, (2 Pet. 1:20), and “the testimony of Jesus” can be related to the revelation given to John; the angel's statement: “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” could also be taken to mean that the spirit that inspired the Old Testament prophecies is the same spirit that inspired the prophecies given through Jesus in the book of Revelation. If so, this would imply that the prophecy concerning the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper, which caused John to fall in worship before the angel, is not a new revelation as far as the Word of God is concerned, and that there are references to it elsewhere in the Word of prophecy.

There certainly are. For example: Isa. 54:1 is quoted in Gal. 4:27 and is applied to the church and refers to “the married wife.” And Isa. 61:10 refers to the church in terms of a “bride.”

A WHITE HORSE

When John arose from his prostrate position before the angel he “saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he who sat

upon him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (v11).

This is the second time that John saw heaven open. The first time was when he saw an open door in heaven and entered (4:1). Instead of heaven being opened to let John enter, it is now opened to let Jesus depart. It is the time for the second coming. The titles “faithful and true” given to the rider of the white horse make it clear that it is Jesus. They are applied to him in Rev. 3:14. Also see 2 Tim. 2:13. 1 Jn. 1:9. He is faithful and true in the sense of loyal and honest to both God and the church. This will be seen particularly in fulfilling his promise to return and marry his bride.

Because the prophecy in Zech. 9:9 relating to the Lord entering Jerusalem riding on an ass was fulfilled literally (Matt. 21:4-11), it is not necessarily impossible that the white horse might also prove to be literal. It wouldn't be the first time that a horse was seen in heaven (2 Kng. 2:11. 6:13-17. Zech. 6:1-7). The word “ride” in Ps. 45:4 could also imply a horse: “In thy majesty ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness ...”

It is generally accepted that the reference in Zech. 9:9-10 to Jesus entering Jerusalem upon an ass has an application to both his first and second coming. If so, the horse in Rev. 19 would relate to the time during which the battle of Armageddon takes place, after which he enters Jerusalem upon an ass.

Horses, not donkeys, were used by armies for battle, and it is evident in Rev. 19 that the white horse and its rider, along with other horses and their riders, represent a divine army going into battle. This is seen in the reference to “war” (v11); “blood” (v13); “armies” (v14); “sharp sword” and “smite nations” (v15).

In view of the white linen representing righteousness in v8, it is not surprising that the white horse represents righteousness, i.e. a righteous war. In the words of v11: “In righteousness he judges and makes war.” His reasons for going forth to make war are fair and just - completely justified. “With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with fairness 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” (Isa. 11:4). “He will judge the world in righteousness” (Act. 17:31).

Contrary to the wars initiated by man, Christ's war will not be motivated by carnal ambition, greed, lust for power and prestige. His motive is righteous, for the glory of God and the peace and well-being of man. When his judgements prevail in the earth, “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isa. 26:9).

EYES AS FIRE AND MANY CROWNS

The reference in Rev. 19:12 to his eyes being “as a flame of fire” is another positive point of contact with Christ. See Rev. 1:14. 2:18. It speaks of penetrating and unerring discernment. In 2:18 it relates to distinguishing between true and false members of the church, and in the verse before us, it relates to distinguishing between friend and foe among the nations. The “fire” represents the Holy Spirit, indicating that Jesus “shall not judge after the sight of his eyes,” but by the Spirit of God which shall rest upon him (Isa. 11:1-3).

When Jesus was upon the earth, men mockingly placed a crown of thorns on his head, which was an emblem of a curse (Gen. 3:17-18. Gal. 3:13). He was despised and rejected by men (Isa. 53:3). But in Rev. 19:12 we read that “on his head are many crowns.” The Greek word here for crowns is “diadema” i.e. “diadems,” which are symbols of kingly or imperial dignity. Having “many crowns” implies many victories over many kings and nations. Hence, he is referred to as “king of kings and lord of lords” in v16.

“Diadema” only occurs on 2 other occasions in the New Testament, both in the book of Revelation in 12:3 and 13:1. In 12:3 a crown is seen upon each of the 7 heads of the dragon which represent the successive world kingdoms which ruled over the nation of Israel. And in 13:1 crowns are seen on the 10 horns which represent the 10 kings who will rule with the beast over Israel for a short period in the end time. When Christ comes and makes war with them, they will be defeated and stripped of their crowns, and the Lord alone will be king over all the earth. The kingdom of the world will become his, and he will reign for ever and ever (Zech. 14:9. Rev. 11:15).

A NAME WRITTEN

Rev. 19:12 also says that “he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.” The name is given in v13 as “the Word of God.” Where did John see this name written? Was it on the forehead as in the case of the harlot’s name being on her forehead? In Rev. 2:17 reference is also made to a white stone being given to all overcomers on which a new name is written which no one knows except those who receive it.

Because the head represents the mind, it would be appropriate if “the Word of God” was inscribed upon the forehead, because Christ’s whole mind was given over to the Word of God. It is all he thought and talked

about. He was the Word made flesh - the walking Word of God! By his knowledge of this Word he conquered every temptation and sin and justified many (Isa. 53:11. Matt. 4:1-11).

On the face of it, anyone could learn, quote or recite the name: “the Word of God,” and know it academically - even an unbeliever. But when it says no man knew but himself (and we might add: “Those to whom he revealed it”), it surely means no one else can comprehend the spiritual significance of it. The significance is simple yet profound, and many have missed it as is evident in the Trinitarian interpretation of Jn. 1:1-3 which is falsely interpreted to mean that Christ pre-existed as God and created everything.

According to Rev. 3:12, Jesus will write his new name on all who overcome. Seeing that overcoming temptation and sin is only possible by knowing and believing the Word of God and yielding to its power, it is appropriate that the bride should share the bridegroom’s name!

Among the writers of the New Testament, only John used the expression: “the Word of God” to describe Jesus, so it is significant and appropriate that he should be the one to receive this revelation of the name. The birth of Christ and everything pertaining to his first coming as well as his second coming were prophesied in the Word of God. Jesus is therefore the living fulfilment and embodiment of that Word. No wonder the Word of God, represented by a sharp sword in Rev. 19:15, is depicted going out of his mouth!

A VESTURE DIPPED IN BLOOD

Rev. 19:13 goes on to say that “he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.” The word “dipped” comes from the Greek word “bapto” and means “drenched.” The word only occurs here and in Lk. 16:24. Jn. 13:26. The Jerusalem Bible says: “his cloak was soaked in blood.”

His garment is stained with blood because he “treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of God Almighty” (v15). Treading down the enemy in judgement is likened to treading upon grapes in a winepress. Those who did so were squirted with the blood of the grapes as it spurted out. Reference was made to this in Rev. 14:20: “And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even to the horse bridles ...” This explains how Jesus, although upon a horse in Rev. 19, is soaked in blood. Isa. 63:1- also relates to this. It refers to Messiah coming in glorious apparel but stained red, due to treading in the winepress. This is explained to signify trampling upon nations in anger

and fury, causing their blood to be sprinkled upon his garments, staining them.

Because his garments are referred to as being stained in Rev. 19:13, before reference is made to the battle in v15, some have concluded that it is his own blood with which he is stained - the blood of the atonement as in Rev. 5:6: "A Lamb as it had been slain." However, as we have seen in other parts of Revelation, the verses in every chapter do not always follow in a strict chronological sequence. It is quite common for an event yet to take place to be depicted as having already taken place. For example: in Rev. 19:17-18, birds of prey are called to devour the flesh of the beast and kings etc. But the battle which produces the dead flesh is not mentioned until afterwards in v19-21. In like manner, the garment is depicted as being stained with blood before the white horse and its rider do battle.

ARMIES UPON WHITE HORSES

Rev. 19:14 then says: "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."

This is quite a scene! Riders dressed in white riding upon white horses! An army dressed in white is something unheard of in the history of warfare. Military men of the world are issued with fatigue uniforms for battle dress, not only for camouflage, but also because war is so dirty that light coloured clothes would be severely spoiled. The mass of white created in this scene again emphasizes that this is a holy war waged in righteousness for the purpose of establishing true and lasting justice in the earth.

Once again the question arises: Are the white horses literal? Are the white linen garments literal? Most would say: "yes." Most would also accept that the birds of prey in v17 of the same chapter and the horses in v18 whose flesh they eat are literal also. It may be against our conservative sensitivities to believe that Christ and his armies appear in the sky on literal horses on the day of the battle of Armageddon, but is this concept any more foolish to the natural mind than the concept of Christ and his armies hovering in the air on nothing? It is only foolish to those who leave the power of God out of the equation.

Who could think of anything more foolish and dramatic, in this day and age of modern sophisticated supersonic jet fighter planes, than armies descending through the air clothed in white and sitting on white horses?! Imagine the impact upon the armies of the enemy below. One can already hear the Lord in heaven laughing as He has them in derision! (Ps. 2:4).

Truly, he chooses the foolish things to confound the wise; the weak things to confound the things that are mighty (1 Cor. 1:27).

Reference to the riders of the white horses being “clothed in fine linen, white and clean,” immediately suggests a link with the reference to the saints “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” in v8. If so, this would mean that the saints will accompany Christ to the battle of Armageddon, referred to in the last section of the chapter. If this is the case, they must be gathered to meet Jesus in the air prior to the battle. Being caught up into the air (1 Thes. 4:17), they will be with Christ “in heaven” as we read in Rev. 19:14. This would be consistent with Rev. 17:14 which refers to the “called, chosen and faithful” (the saints), being with Jesus when he is involved in war with the beast, and overcomes him.

It is stated in Col. 3:4 that when Christ shall appear, the saints shall also appear with him in glory i.e. when Christ manifests himself, the saints will be manifested with him. Other Scriptures such as Jude v14-15 and Zech. 14:5 which refer to the Lord coming with his “saints” either refer to his church or the angels or both. Specific reference is certainly made to the angels accompanying Christ when he returns. See Matt. 13:39-43, 49. 24:30-31. 25:31. Mk. 8:38. Joel 3:11.

On the basis of reference being made in Rev. 19 to the marriage supper prior to the battle, should we conclude that it occurs before Armageddon? If so, there would be a period of time when the saints would disappear and people would know that they have disappeared. Will people search for them and not find them as in the case of Enoch, the seventh from Adam? (Heb. 11:5. Jude v14).

SHARP SWORD OUT OF HIS MOUTH

The description of the one sitting on the white horse continues in Rev. 19:15 saying: “And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

As in the case of the eyes as a flame of fire, the sharp sword going out of his mouth is also taken from the description in Rev. 1:16 and 2:12 which unmistakably relates to Jesus. In those other 2 verses, the sword is described as being two-edged. In Heb. 4:12 the Word of God is also referred to as being living and powerful and “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.”

Instead of saying: “out of his mouth goes a sharp sword,” Isa. 49:2 says: “he has made my mouth like a sharp sword.”

Putting these thoughts together, the scene in Rev. 19:15 of the sharp sword coming out of Christ's mouth signifies that he, as the living Word of God Himself, commands judgement to smite the nations in order that he might rule over them. 2 Thes. 2:8 refers to this: "The Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Isa. 11:4 says he "shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth," and Rev. 19:21 refers to men being slain by the sword that proceeds out of his mouth.

Because the sword represents the Word of God and is seen coming out of his mouth, rather than being in his hand, this does not mean that physical swords or physical force won't be used. Ps. 45:3 refers to Messiah girding his sword upon his thigh. Ps. 149 refers to the high praises of God being in the mouths of the saints and a two-edged sword in their hand, "to execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments upon the peoples, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgement written: this honour have all the saints. Praise ye the Lord." Although no reference is made to swords being in the hands of the armies that follow Christ upon white horses in Rev. 19, they probably have them, and it is to them that the word of command would be given to smite the nations.

If anyone feels it would be carnal for the glorified saints to wield a literal physical sword, see the following verses which refer to angels doing this: Gen. 3:24. Num. 22:23, 31. Josh. 5:13. Judg. 7:18. 1 Chr. 21:16, 27, 30.

"For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord execute judgement, and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (Isa. 66:15-16).

Reference in Rev. 19:15 to Jesus smiting the nations is one of a number that form a theme on this subject. See: Isa. 11:4. Dan. 2:34-35. Zech. 12:4. 14:12, 18. Mal. 4:6. During his time on earth, Jesus himself was smitten by man, (Zech. 13:7. Matt. 26:67. 27:30). So it will be pay-back time at the second coming!

RULE WITH A ROD OF IRON

The statement in Rev. 19:15 that Jesus shall rule with a rod of iron, is reminiscent of Ps. 2:9: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash (smash) them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

A rod in Scripture often refers to a wooden stick used by a father to

punish and discipline his children when they are disobedient. An iron rod would be a very extreme form of discipline. It would break bones and kill. As we have seen, many will be killed by the judgements of God at Armageddon due to the deep and extreme nature of their sin and wickedness. Due to lack of discipline, the spirit of rebellion, disobedience, lawlessness and godlessness will be so bad in the world, that it will require an iron rule to stamp it out. The rule and reign of Christ will achieve this. But he will not do this alone; the saints will rule with him, as he promised in Rev. 2:26-27: “He who overcomes and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.” Also Rev. 12:5.

Nothing more needs to be said about treading the winepress, except that some have thought that the reference in Isa. 63:3 to Jesus treading it “alone, and of the peoples there was none with me,” is contradicted by the reference in Rev. 19:14 to armies following him. However, “the peoples” who were not with him refers to nations of the world, all of whom will be against Israel. Isa. 63:5 makes the point that the Lord marvels that there are none who help or support Israel in her extremity. She will be completely isolated and abandoned by the nations in the end time, including the U.S.A. But the Lord will not abandon her. He will come with His armies and deliver her.

A NAME WRITTEN ON HIS VESTURE AND THIGH

Verse 16 says: “And he has on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

As we have seen, the name “the Word of God” is written on him, probably on his forehead, and he had many crowns on his head which signify that he is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” And now we read that the title “King of kings and Lord of lords” is plainly inscribed on his vesture and thigh.

Prior to Christ conquering the beast and 10 kings, the 10 kings submit to the beast and give him their power, making him “King of kings.” Christ’s defeat of him however, along with the 10 kings, makes him “King of kings.”

When Nebuchadnezzar learned that the stone from heaven would smite the kingdoms of the world and reign over them, he exclaimed and confessed to Daniel that: “Of a truth your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings.” When Jesus comes in the name and power of God as the

smiting stone, all kings and rulers will confess that he is “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Regarding the title being on his thigh: the thigh is the strongest of all muscles on the human body and represents strength. When Samson used his strength to do battle with the Philistines, Judg. 15:8 expresses it in terms of him smiting them “hip and thigh with a great slaughter.” When God wanted Jacob to learn not to do things in his own strength and that God’s strength is made perfect in weakness, the angel smote him on the thigh, causing a permanent limp (Gen. 32:25-).

Being the strongest muscle, those who smote themselves in shame for their sins, smote their thigh (Jer. 31:19). Serious and solemn oaths involved the physical gesture of putting the hand under the thigh of the person to whom a promise was being made: (Gen. 24:2, 9. 47:29, 31. 1 Chr. 29:24).

We read in Num. 5:20-22 that as a punishment for adultery, God would cause the offender’s thigh to shrivel. Submitting to the weakness of the flesh by committing adultery, resulted in being inflicted with a physical bodily weakness, and a shrivelled thigh was symbolic of this.

Warriors went into battle with a sword or dagger carried on their thigh (Judg. 3:16, 21. Song Sol. 3:8). As we have seen, Ps. 45:3-5 depicts Christ riding forth to do battle with his enemies girded with a sword upon his thigh.

Song of Solomon 7:1 refers to the joints and thighs of the prince’s daughter being like jewels produced by a skilled craftsman. If, as some believe, the prince’s daughter can be related to the church, the perfectly formed and attractive thighs could be symbolic of her perfect spiritual strength in the kingdom and glory.

According to Adam Clarke, it was the custom among several nations in ancient times to have an inscription on the garment or on one of the thighs, or on both the garment and thigh, expressing either the character of the persons, their names, or some other circumstance which might contribute to their honour. He gives examples of this and refers to various images that have been found which exhibit this.

Some have suggested that the title was not on Christ’s actual thigh, but on that part of the garment that covered his thigh. But Rev. 19:16 clearly states that the title was on both the garment and the thigh and the Greek text agrees with this. For John to see an inscription on Christ’s thigh would mean his legs were exposed up to his thighs. This would suggest that when John saw him, his horse was not stationary, but sweeping downwards from heaven causing his garments to flow out

behind him. Or, his loins were girded for battle, by tucking his vesture into the golden girdle around his chest (Rev. 1:13).

If anyone has a difficulty with this due to Ex. 28:42 forbidding the thighs of God's ministers to be exposed, remember what David said to Michal when she criticized him for exposing his legs when he leaped and danced for joy before the Lord as the ark was taken up to Zion: "It was done before the Lord ..." (2 Sam. 6:14-23).

It is reasonable to assume that, as in the case of the armies on white horses which follow Christ, wearing white linen garments, Christ will be wearing the same. And, although it will be drenched in blood, it will not necessarily smell of blood because Ps. 45:8 says: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia." In the same way that contact with mortal, sinful, human flesh cannot corrupt or contaminate the glorious immortal body of Christ, neither can the blood contaminate his clothes!

During the time leading up to his crucifixion, Herod and his men despised Jesus and mocked him by clothing him with a gorgeous royal robe, and finally cast lots for his own robe. Jesus died on the cross without a garment and was taken away and buried without a garment. God had a better garment for him, and those who pierced him will see him coming in power and great glory wearing it and clothed with immortality.

BIRDS SUMMONED BY AN ANGEL

After seeing Christ on a white horse coming to smite the nations with his armies following him, John says: "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 to the supper of the great God; that you 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, small and great" (v17-18).

The "heaven" in the midst of which the birds fly is of course the air or atmosphere, and the fact that the angel came to call them, indicates he was also in the atmosphere where they fly. He would hardly be standing on the sun, 83 million miles away calling to birds in earth's atmosphere to come and eat a "supper" of dead human and animal flesh upon earth. "Standing in the sun" would be the appearance of one suspended in space, standing in a vertical position, silhouetted against the sun. It would be a commanding position for attracting the attention of the birds.

The sun is probably part of the scene of the call to the birds because

it is the heat of the sun that causes dead bodies to decompose quickly and attract carrion birds. The angel called them in a loud voice to assemble for “the supper of the great God.”

This is the second “supper” mentioned in Rev. 19, and it consists of those whom Christ and his armies smite at the battle of Armageddon, namely: the beast, 10 kings and false prophet. The first supper is of course the marriage supper of the Lamb. What a contrast between the 2 suppers! At the first one, those who belong to God will eat and drink at the banqueting table with Christ, but at the second, those rejected by God will be killed by Christ and eaten by vultures. To eat or be eaten are the 2 options - to enjoy a supper or to be the supper!

While the saints are partaking of the marriage supper, the wicked will be preparing themselves to be the supper for the birds of prey. The wicked refused the call to come to Christ and eat his supper, but the birds will not refuse the call to come to them and eat their flesh! Because Gog and his armies will sweep down on Israel like a vulture, it is fitting that vultures will swoop down on their carcasses!

It is repeated 4 times in v18 that the birds will eat “flesh” - the flesh of all ranks of men and their horses. The beast and 10 horns will therefore suffer the same fate they inflicted upon the harlot. The only difference is that they consumed the harlot’s flesh with fire, whereas their flesh will be consumed not only by fire but also by birds. Only bones will be left which will take 7 months to bury (Ezk. 39:11-).

The list of those whose corpses will be eaten ranges from kings to commoners: “kings ... captains ... mighty men ... horses ... free and bond, small and great.” There will be no exceptions. God’s judgements show no partiality or respect of persons. All, from the least to the greatest, who get involved in an attack against Israel and get off-side with God, will be eliminated.

Regarding the birds of prey: a book put out some time ago claimed that vultures (buzzards) were on the increase in Israel. The book is entitled “Next Visitor To Planet Earth” and is written by former Rabbi Michael Esses. He claims that the vultures are multiplying at 3 times the normal rate. Whether or not this report is true I do not know, but one thing is certain: there will need to be carrion birds in the land of Israel in the end time for Rev. 19 to be fulfilled.

PARALLEL PASSAGES

The words in Rev. 19:17-18 are almost a verbatim quote from Ezk. 39:17-20.

EZEK. 39	REV. 19
V17: Son of man, speak to the birds of every sort, 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.	V17: An angel said to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven: Come, and be gathered together to the great supper of God.
V18: That you may eat flesh and drink blood; you shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth.	That you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men,
V20: You shall be filled at my table with horses and with chariots, with mighty men and with all men of war.	And the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.

The marginal references in most Bibles draw attention to these parallels, indicating that the connection between the 2 passages is widely accepted. This indicates, as has already been pointed out in previous chapters, that the beast and 10 horns in Rev. 19 link with Gog and his confederates in Ezk. 38 and 39.

The reference in Rev. 19:19 to “their armies, gathered together ...” corresponds with Rev. 16:16 which says: “He (God) gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” This “gathering” of the nations is referred to elsewhere in Dan. 11:40-. Joel. 3. Mic. 4:11-13. Zech. 12 to 14.

Rev. 20:8 refers to another (the final) gathering together of Gog and his forces against Jerusalem at the end of the millennium, at which time they will all be consumed by fire from heaven, as they surround the city of God.

As a result of engaging in battle with Christ and his armies, it is inevitable that the beast and false prophet will be “taken” as v20 puts it, i.e. arrested - seized - captured. Both are “cast alive into a lake of fire burning with sulphur” i.e. they will fall headlong into it as the ground opens up under them. As pointed out in a previous chapter, the lake of fire probably relates to a volcanic eruption and upheaval caused by the mighty earthquake which fractures the Dead Sea region where the armies will have fled in panic (Joel 2:20). Smoke will rise from this area for a long time afterwards (Rev. 14:10-11).

Other references to the lake of fire are: Rev. 20:10, 14, 15. It is referred to as the second death in Rev. 21:8.

It is natural to wonder how there could be any flesh for birds to eat if

it has all been consumed by fire and hot lava. This is explained in the next and final verse: “And the remnant were slain with the sword of him who sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls gorged themselves with their flesh.”

The word “remnant” means the rest - the others - the remaining ones. In its context this means those not consumed by the lake of fire. It would seem from this that the lake of fire is confined to a particular region, and that the whole army will not end up in it. Some will be killed by the fire and others by the sword.

It is clear from Ezk. 38:9 and Joel 3:14 that multitudes upon multitudes will be involved in the army that comes into the land of Israel, covering the land like a cloud. As suggested in an earlier chapter, they could stretch from Megiddo in northern Israel to Jerusalem in the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Dead Sea in the east. Some will be killed by fire that falls from heaven (Ezk. 38:22); some will be engulfed by the lake of fire; some will be killed by the sword of the Lord and His armies; some will be killed by their own sword in mutual slaughter, (Ezk. 38:21) and others will be killed by great hailstones. There will be an abundance of dead bodies left lying in the open for the birds to eat!



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY

Now that the judgements of God described under the symbols of seals, trumpets and vials, have been completed; and the harlot, false prophet, beast and 10 horns have been destroyed; and the marriage of the Lamb has come; it is to be expected that the long awaited kingdom will be manifested. The establishment and nature of this kingdom form the theme of the last 3 chapters of Revelation.

Revelation chapter 20 reveals the length of Christ's reign on earth and briefly explains what happens to those who live and die during that period. In 1 Cor. 15:23-28 Paul declares that "the last enemy to be destroyed is death," after which the kingdom will be handed over to God. Rev. 20 provides some details as to how this will all be brought to a climax and consummation.

It is evident from the sequence of events in the book of Revelation, involving the rise and reign of the beast etc, which lead up to the kingdom of God; that the millennial reign of Christ pertains to a thousand year period of history after those events have been fulfilled. The view put forward by Augustine and others after him, that the millennium is the present church age and the first resurrection is the spiritual quickening of Christians, does not fit the facts by any stretch of the imagination.

John says: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (v1-3).

Back in Rev. 9:1 we saw that the key to the bottomless pit was "given" to a fallen star, but here, reference is made to an angel "having" the key. It was concluded that the key belongs to the angel because of him being entrusted with it by divine commission and consent. Only he can use it, and no one else unless he gives it to them to use, as in the case of the fallen star. The fallen star used the key to unlock the bottomless pit, releasing "locusts" that stung like scorpions, but the angel in Rev. 20 uses the key to lock the bottomless pit, to shut away the dragon.

As we have seen (p317-) the bottomless pit signifies political oblivion - the putting away of the political power or principalities that have oppressed God's people. The bottomless pit is referred to as "prison"

in v7, and signifies restraint imposed upon the enemy making him powerless and preventing him from engineering attacks. Cp. Isa. 24:21-23. Ezk. 31:16.

A GREAT CHAIN IN HIS HAND

The “great chain” seen in the angel’s hand is rendered “enormous chain” by the Jerusalem Bible. Vine says the Greek word “halusis” translated “chain” denotes a chain or bond for binding the body or any part of it (the hands or feet). The same word is used in Mk. 5:3-4 in relation to binding a mentally deranged man with chains. It is also used in relation to both Peter and Paul being bound with chains in prison (Act. 12:6-7. 21:33. 28:20).

In the A.V. Rev. 20:2 says the angel “laid hold on” the dragon. Other translations say “seized” or “overpowered,” indicating the use of force. The scene could be likened to a strong man with a key and chain in his hand, seizing and overpowering a crocodile, chaining him up, throwing him into a prison in a pit and locking the door. Prior to this, Michael the archangel and his angels had waged war against the dragon and cast him down from his position of power over Israel and evicted him from the land (Rev. 12). As a result, the dragon joined forces with the beast and supported his invasion of Israel. Now that the beast has been defeated, the dragon is not merely evicted from the land, but is locked away, being rendered incapable of invading.

Other places in Scripture where the word chain or chains is used metaphorically are: Ps. 149:8: “To execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments upon the people, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron.” Lam. 3:7: “He (God) has walled me in so that I cannot get out: He has put heavy chains on me.” In Ezk. 7:23 God commands that a chain be made for Israel. The chain in this case signifies forthcoming deportation and imprisonment in exile. During this period Israel was destroyed as a political power.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT, NOT THE LAKE OF FIRE

As we have seen, the dragon can be related to the 10 horns which are the 10 kings - an alliance of 10 anti-Israel Moslem nations which are confederate with the beast. They are the “kings” in Rev. 19:19 whose armies gather with the beast to the battle of Armageddon. The reference in Ps. 149:8 to “bind their kings with chains” can also be related to them.

The beast (Gog of the land of Magog) along with the false prophet, are cast into the lake of fire as we have seen in Rev. 19:20. However, because reference is made in Rev. 20:7-8 to Gog and Magog gathering themselves to battle at the end of the thousand years, this reveals that these nations are not exterminated as a result of their armies being destroyed at Armageddon. The civilian populations of the countries involved live on and are later deceived into sending another army against Jerusalem. According to verse 9, fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour them.

Regarding the 10 kings: reference is not made to them being cast into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet in Rev. 19:20. But chapter 20 refers to the dragon being cast into the bottomless pit. However, as in the case with the beast, this does not mean the extermination of the nations represented by the dragon. This is evident from the fact that the dragon is released from his prison when the 1,000 years expires, and deceives the nations to attack Jerusalem.

The reference to the dragon (satan) being in prison for a thousand years clearly does not mean that the power of sin will not exist and have no influence on people during the millennium. As long as sinful flesh exists, which it will in the mortal population over which Christ and the saints will be reigning, the potential for sin will remain. Sin will still inevitably be committed, although obviously not to the same extent. Under Christ's iron rule, rebels will not be allowed to run rampant and cause riots. Reference in Isa. 65:20 to "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" clearly teaches that sin will be committed during the millennium.

If the potential to sin was removed as a result of the dragon being chained, nations would not need to be warned about the consequences of refusing to obey Christ's rule, such as we read in Isa. 60:12: "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Also Zech. 14:16-19: "And it shall come to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, (i.e. the civilians left behind while the fighting forces went to battle) shall go up from year to year to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And if any of the families do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the Lord will afflict the nations that do not come up to keep the feast of tabernacles."

It is evident from these Scriptures that the devil in the sense of sin will exist, but will not have any political power or organization. This does not mean to say of course, that such aspirations will not lie hidden beneath the surface!

A distinction therefore needs to be made between this “satan” the dragon in Rev. 20 and the power of sin. If it can be accepted that the dragon represents anti-Israel Moslem nations who coerce, (possibly by use of their oil wealth) nations to attack Israel, this distinction is not difficult to see.

PARALLELS IN SOLOMON’S REIGN

The restraint or removal of this “satan” during the reign of Christ had parallels during the reign of Solomon which is regarded as a type of Christ’s reign. We read in 1 Kng. 5:4 that Solomon, at the peak of his power, said: “The Lord has given me rest on every side, so that there is no adversary” (Heb: “satan”). No wonder the King James translators (and others) gave the word “adversary” instead of “satan,” because the concept of there being no satan during Solomon’s reign or any other period in history, didn’t fit in with their theology of an ever present, active and tireless satan.

The reference to no satan existing in Solomon’s day simply refers to the fact that the surrounding enemy nations (now occupied by Moslem nations), were subdued and in subjection to God’s rule through Solomon, which was the kingdom of God at the time (1 Chr. 28:5. 29:23).

The nations which had been enemies of Israel were subdued and “bound.” Their political power was obliterated. Their hands were tied - put in chains. They were unable to make war with Israel or influence other nations to make war. In the same way, the nations represented by the dragon in Rev. 20, called “satan,” will be bound during the millennial reign of Christ.

However, when the 1,000 years runs its course, the divine restraint upon these nations will be lifted, enabling them to reassert their political power and influence and incite a rebellion against Christ’s rule. This will result in bringing about a dramatic and decisive judgement on all mortal sinful flesh, obliterating it all once and for all. Such will be the grand finale to the millennium, at which time all things will be subdued to Christ and God will become “all in all.”

A similar thing happened towards the end of Solomon’s reign, although for quite a different reason and with a different outcome. We

read in 1 Kng. 11:14 that “the Lord stirred up (loosed) an adversary (Heb: “satan”) to Solomon.” The reference here to satan is to the enemy nation of Edom on the south-east border of Israel. During Solomon’s reign, this nation, along with others around Israel, was subdued by Solomon and in subjection to his rule, resulting, as we have seen, in there being “no satan.” But the Lord lifted the restraint and “stirred up satan.” Up until this time, Edom was confined and restricted - “bound” and kept in “chains” so to speak. Then the Lord loosed him out of prison and allowed him to gain political power again.

1 Kng. 11:23 goes on to say that “God stirred up another satan against Solomon.” “Another satan!” How would those who hold to the traditional view of a fallen-angel devil interpret this? The passage goes on to explain that it refers to “Rezon,” who was king of Syria. Verse 25 says he also was satan to Israel during this period of Solomon’s reign.

If God could “stir up” or revive the political power of Israel’s enemies towards the end of Solomon’s reign, He can also revive them at the end of Christ’s reign!

ONE THOUSAND YEARS

In the 6 verses from Rev. 20:2 to v7, the words “one thousand” occur 6 times, and all refer to the same period. It is the period during which the dragon is chained and confined to the bottomless pit - the same 1,000 years of course during which Christ and the saints reign. It became known as the millennial reign of Christ because the Latin word for 1,000 years is “millennium.” However, the word millennium does not occur in most English translations.

Rev. 20 is the only place in Scripture where specific reference is made to the actual duration of Christ’s reign. In this respect it is truly a “revelation.” As a result of this, and because 1,000 years to us is only one day to God (Ps. 90:4. 2 Pet. 3:8), some see the seventh day of rest after the 6 days work of creation as foreshadowing this. One reason for believing this is because the reign of Christ is referred to as a “rest” in Isa. 11:10, and the “Sabbath rest” is related to it in Heb. 4:9. On this basis, some have concluded that the millennial reign of Christ will be the seventh millennium in human history, and will come after 6 millenniums of labour and travail in a sin-stricken world.

From the creation of man to the beginning of our 21st century is roughly 6,000 years, but we do not know what period of time took place after Adam was created before sin entered the world. 6,000 years of

labour and travail would start then, not at creation.

As in the case of the 1,260 days, 42 months etc in the book of Revelation, the 1,000 years is also literal. Even those who insist that every other time period should be interpreted on the basis of a day representing a year, take the 1,000 years literally. Yet, if the spirit preferred to represent a year by a day, why make an exception here? If it is as obvious as some claim, that a day always represents a year in Bible prophecy, why didn't the spirit state Christ's reign as 1,000 days? On the day for a year basis, 1,000 years would be 360,000 years! Gibbon says that the early Christians believed in a literal 1,000 year reign, and this belief would have been based on the passage in Rev. 20.

It is natural to wonder why there should be a need for a reign of 1,000 years. The Lord provides the answer in 6 words: "That my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:23). There are many rooms in the Father's house (Jn. 14:2) and He wants them all to be occupied. The "few" chosen from the "many" who are called during the 6,000 years prior to the millennial reign of Christ, will not be sufficient to fill the house. The seventh millennium will be a harvest time during which the full number will be made up.

Because the holy of holies in the tabernacle was a type or foreshadow of God's house (heaven), is it significant that its dimensions: 10x10x10 total 1,000? These dimensions are inferred from the fact that the most holy place was a cube. Seeing the height of the wall boards are given as 10 cubits in Ex. 26:16, and the length, breadth and height are equal, gives us 10x10x10.

LOCKED AND SEALED FOR 1,000 YEARS

After seizing the dragon, binding him with chains and casting him into the bottomless pit, the angel "shut him up (shut the door and locked it) and set a seal upon him" (v3).

In ancient times, chests, boxes, tombs, or things which were required to be guarded from being opened, were sealed with the seal of the person who had authority to prohibit them from being opened. For example: when Daniel was cast into the lion's den, "a stone was put over the mouth of the den, and the king placed his own royal seal and the seal of his noblemen on the stone" (Dan. 6:17). As a result of this, no one had the power or authority to remove the stone and set Daniel free. The same applied to Christ's tomb. A great stone was rolled up against the mouth of the sepulchre and sealed with the seal of Pilate, the Roman governor

(Matt. 27:60-66). No human had the power or authority to break the seal and remove the stone.

Likewise, shutting the prison door on the dragon and setting the divine seal upon him, signifies that no human power will be able to release him or revive him as a political force in the world. As in the case of Christ's revival and release from the tomb, only God will be able to revive and release the dragon, and He will do this at the end of the 1,000 years (v7).

The reason given in Rev. 20:3 for shutting the door on the dragon and sealing it is: "that he should deceive the nations no more, until the 1,000 years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season."

This statement indicates that nations will continue to exist during the millennial reign of Christ, involving different tribes and races along with their different facial features and skin colours. But the curse of the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11) will probably be removed, resulting in all nations speaking the same language (Hebrew?).

Some find it difficult to believe that the dragon could deceive nations such as Gog and Magog into revolting at the end of the 1,000 years. They therefore interpret the statement: "until the thousand years be fulfilled" to mean when Christ's millennial kingdom has become fully established. This would place the revolt sometime after the beginning of the millennium instead of at the end, and would mean that the Gog-Magog invasion in Ezk. 38 and Rev. 20 are one and the same, occurring after the enthronement of Christ at Zion.

However, reasons have already been given for believing that Ezk. 38 will be fulfilled prior to the establishment of Christ's kingdom (see p509-).

The Greek word "teleo" translated "fulfilled" in Rev. 20:3 is also translated "finished" in v5 and "expired" in v7. In each of these places it clearly means at the end when the 1,000 years has run its course and has been brought to full completeness.

If the dragon is bound for 1,000 years, how could he be loosed at the commencement of the 1,000 years to deceive Gog and Magog? To affirm that the dragon deceives the nations shortly after the beginning of the 1,000 years involves a contradiction of fundamental facts. Whether we like it or not, or can understand it or not, a rebellion will occur at the end of the millennium and will be quashed. No other rebellion will ever occur again.

FEIGNED OBEDIENCE

This would suggest that during the 1,000 years of Christ's rule with a rod of iron, or at least towards the end of it, some nations will resent it, and their submission will be false - a pretence - a sham. This is not surprising because the flesh is at enmity with God and is not subject to His law (Rom. 8:5-7). Ps. 66:3 says: God's enemies will "submit" to Him due to the greatness of His power, but the margin in the A.V. translation gives an alternative rendering of "yield feigned obedience." The Hebrew word translated "submit" in this Psalm is elsewhere translated "lie" and "deal falsely." The same applies in Ps. 18:44. 81:15.

It has been quite common in history for those vanquished by a superior power to pretend subjection and respect towards a victor. This happened during the reform of king Josiah. Due to the threat of punishment and death, the people turned to the Lord. However, as we read in Jer. 3:10: They did not turn to the Lord with their whole heart, but "feignedly." They were not genuine or sincere. Deep down in their hearts they wanted to live according to the flesh, fulfilling its lusts and pleasing themselves. Truly, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

The flesh is inherently and intrinsically sinful, and the 1,000 years reign of Christ won't change it. It will suppress it and keep it in submission, but will not stop its potential to sin and rebel, much in the same way that weed spray will kill weeds but not stop them sprouting again. Only by sterilizing the soil can weeds be made to stop sprouting. Likewise, it will only be when all flesh has been "sterilized," resulting in the propensity to sin being eliminated, that all potential to rebel will cease. This will occur at the end of the millennium after the second resurrection when mortal sinful flesh will no longer exist upon earth. All will be immortal, sharing the same glorious sinless nature of Christ.

Until then, the potential to rebel will remain in the human population, and because God wants people to be bound to Him voluntarily by love, not force, He will not manipulate hearts and force them against their will to be obedient and submissive to Him. He would rather run the risk of rebellion than turn man into a machine that blindly obeys Him without thought, motive or reason. And so it will be necessary to test the mortal population's love and loyalty to Christ's kingdom, and give any feigned submission, resentment and rebelliousness the opportunity to be manifested. This is signified by the word "must" in the statement that the dragon "must be loosed a little season." He will deceive the nations that

are discontent and who want to break the iron rod of Christ's rule. They will be deceived into imagining "a vain thing" (Ps. 2), namely, that they can rise in revolt against the Lord and His anointed; storm the holy city and overturn the throne. This will be the ultimate of human deception and folly, and will cause the Lord to laugh in heaven when He has them in derision. It might be compared with the stubborn foolishness of Pharaoh who, after witnessing the power of God in all the plagues and the dividing of the Red Sea, still rebelled and pursued Israel with the intention of attacking and destroying.

THRONES

Reading on into Rev. 20:4 John says: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

After referring to the thrones of judgement, reference is made to those who live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This reveals that this particular judgement occurs just before the commencement of the millennium.

The question to be resolved is: who are "they" who sit on the "thrones" to whom judgement is given? Reference to the saints in the same verse, i.e. those who were beheaded for witnessing to Jesus, indicates that they are separate and distinct from those who sit on the thrones. In view of this, the reference must be to angels. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, several Scriptures do teach that angels will be involved in the judgement at Christ's return.

We read in Matt. 25:31 that when Jesus returns, all his holy angels will accompany him. He shall sit on his throne of glory and all nations will be gathered before him in order that he can separate the sheep from the goats. It is clearly a judgement scene. But it is evident in Matt. 13:37-42 that the angels will assist Jesus in the judgement. They are referred to as reapers, gathering out those who are guilty of iniquity, casting them into a furnace of fire. Verses 47-50 of the same chapter liken the angels to those who draw a net to the shore when it is full, and "sit down," severing the good from the bad.

These angels are referred to in Dan. 7:10 as "thousand thousands" who "minister" to Christ at the court of judgement when "the books are

opened.” (The saints obviously would not minister to Christ at the judgement seat before the books were opened!) Angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation,” and their work in this respect will continue to the end of the judgement, after which, “the world to come,” will be put into the subjection of Christ and his glorified saints.

Dan. 7:9 makes specific reference to Christ’s throne of judgement which “was like the fiery flame and its wheels (a mobile throne!) as burning fire.” Reference is also made in the same verse to other thrones of judgement as well. We read that “thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days did sit ...” We have already seen in Matt. 13:48 that angels will be “sitting down” for the purpose of judging, and it would not be surprising if they sit on the thrones mentioned in Dan. 7:9. Could it be that these thrones are those mentioned in Rev. 4:4 upon which the 24 elders are seen sitting? They could easily be mobile like the throne of God itself. Other verses to consider in relation to this subject are: Lk. 9:26. 12:8-9. 1 Cor. 11:10. 1 Tim. 5:21. Ecc. 5:6.

Angels being Christ’s servants or “ministers,” represent him. To stand before one would be tantamount to standing before Christ. In the same way that angels are sometimes referred to as “God” because they speak and act on His behalf, so angels who speak and act on behalf of Christ, become Christ. Standing before an angel for judgement therefore, will be as good as standing before Christ himself. Because “thousands of thousands” of angels will assist Christ at the judgement, this means it could take place in a relatively short period of time. If Christ returns at the end of the 1,260 days tribulation period, the resurrection and judgement could be over by the 1,290th day, and all nations subdued and the millennial kingdom established by the 1,335th day.

JUDGEMENT

The word “judgement” is used several different ways in Scripture. For example: it can simply mean a decision or verdict, such as the decision to accept or reject, commend or condemn. “Judgement” can be favourable or unfavourable. “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” is a favourable judgement. “Depart from me you wicked servants into everlasting fire” is an unfavourable judgement. The former will constitute the judgement of the righteous, for whom there is no condemnation because being truly in Christ Jesus, they walk not according to the flesh

but the spirit (Rom. 8:1. Jn. 5:24). God has not appointed such to wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:9). The situation regarding the unrighteous stands quite differently of course. They will be condemned and punished. The word “judgement” therefore can mean punishment and is used to signify that in Scripture, but is not confined to that meaning. It can also mean reward.

Once the judgement is over, and the decision has been made as to who are to be accepted and rejected, rewarded and punished, the righteous shall be made immortal and will “judge” the earth with Christ (1 Cor. 6:2. Isa. 32:1: “rule in judgement”). In this sense, the words “judge” and “judgement” mean to rule, dispensing justice, making decisions to enforce righteousness and peace, some of which will involve inflicting punishment and bestowing reward. The saints will, as divinely appointed judges and representatives of Christ, be empowered to pass verdicts for life or death on those over whom they rule. It is not surprising therefore, to find references to them in Scripture sitting on thrones during the millennial reign. For example, Jesus promised that he will grant them to sit with him in his throne (Rev. 3:21). In saying this he meant that they will rule and reign over the nations with him. See: 2 Tim. 2:12. Rev. 2:26-27. 5:10. 20:6. 22:5. Specific reference is made to the 12 apostles sitting on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Ps. 122:5 could be related to this: “For there thrones for judgement are set, the thrones of the house of David.”

THE SOULS OF THEM THAT WERE BEHEADED

Rev. 20:4 refers to “the souls of those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, who had not worshipped the beast ...” This refers back to the souls under the altar in chapter 6:9 who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held. The fact that it is stated in chapter 20:4 that they worshipped not the beast, neither his image, neither received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands, indicates that the reference is specifically to the end time saints. As we have seen, many of them will be killed by the beast (Rev. 11:7. 13:7, 10, 15). Because the prophecies in Revelation relate to the end time, it is to be expected that the saints living during that epoch, especially those who are martyred, would be singled out and receive special mention. This will be very encouraging to them!

Those martyred for Christ are not hung or crucified or shot with an arrow, but beheaded. There are 2 Greek words translated “beheaded” in

the New Testament. The first one is “apokephalizo,” which is derived from “apo,” which means “from” or “off,” and “kephale” which means “a head.” Literally, it means head off or off head, and is applied to John the Baptist who was beheaded in response to a malicious request by Herodias (Matt. 14:10). The other Greek word in Rev. 20:4 is “pelekizo” which is derived from “pelekus” and means an axe. Literally it means to chop off; truncate. Some render it “hatcheted.” It can be linked with the “sword” in Rev. 13:10 by which the beast kills.

Not many nations perform execution by beheading today. Among those who do are some Islamic countries. This would be significant if, as has been suggested, the 10 horns of the beast represent Moslem nations.

Could it also be significant that the saints who are beheaded live contemporary with the end time Elijah ministry, in the spirit and power of which John the Baptist came in his day and was beheaded?

LIVED AND REIGNED ONE THOUSAND YEARS

Rev. 20:4 goes on to say that the souls of those who were beheaded “lived and reigned with Christ 1,000 years” (A.V.). The word “lived” does not mean that they lived on even though beheaded. Most modern translations say they “came to life.” This is what “lived” means and it is defined in the next verse as “the first resurrection.” If the souls came to life, they were clearly dead, not immortal, and the statement in the same verse that “the rest of the dead lived not ...” confirms that they were dead. Being resurrected reveals that the “souls” of those who were beheaded refers to bodies. They were beheaded as mortal bodies, but when resurrected to reign with Christ for a thousand years, they will obviously become immortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:50-58. Plp. 3:20-21).

The word “reigned” speaks of the kingly position of the saints, and reference in v6 to them being “priests” speaks of their priestly position. Rev. 1:6 and 5:10 combine the 2 offices saying the saints will be made “kings and priests.” To reign as kings pre-supposes subjects to rule over and the same applies to priests. For the immortal saints to be priests would require the existence of mortals in need of spiritual teaching, instruction and ministry. There can be no doubt that the 1,000 years during which the saints reign with Christ will be on earth over nations with mortal populations (Isa. 2:1-4. 65:20. Zech. 14:16-21). Reigning for 1,000 years indicates that there will be no change of government or policy as in human governments which disrupt and sometimes overthrow their kingdoms. God’s kingdom “shall never be destroyed nor be taken over by

other people, but shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms and shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44).

No actual description is given in Rev. 20 of life and conditions in the millennium, but this information is provided in chapters 21 and 22.

THE REST OF THE DEAD

Reading from the A.V. Rev. 20:5 says: “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” The word “again” is not in the Greek text and the word “lived” as in the preceding verse means “came to life.” The verse therefore reads: “But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.”

If the rest of the dead come to life at the end of the 1,000 years, a resurrection will obviously take place at the end of that 1,000 year period. However, as we have seen in v4, a resurrection will firstly take place prior to the beginning of the 1,000 years in order to bring back to life those who were beheaded, so that they can reign during the 1,000 years with Christ.

Therefore, the statement in v5 that “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years ended. This is the first resurrection,” cannot mean that the resurrection at the end of the 1,000 years is the first. The words: “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years were ended” are a parenthesis, and the statement: “This is the first resurrection” does not relate to those words, but to the statement before them concerning those who come to life to reign with Christ during the 1,000 years.

“First resurrection” implies a second, and although the expression “second resurrection” never occurs in Scripture, the event does, and the parenthetical statement in v5 is an anticipation of it. The subject is picked up in more detail in verses 11-13 where reference is made to “the dead, small and great,” who are seen resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years, standing before the throne of judgement, being judged and rewarded according to their works. “The dead” are clearly those who die during the millennium.

No reference is made in Scripture to any other resurrection taking place during the intervening 1,000 years. There are only 2 resurrections: one prior to the beginning of the millennium at Christ’s return, and one at the end of the millennium. Other references to the first resurrection are: 1 Cor. 15:21-23. 1 Thes. 4:13-18. 2 Tim. 4:1. Dan. 12:2.

On the face of it, because those who come to life in Rev. 20:4 reign

with Christ, this verse might seem to teach that only the righteous will be raised at the first resurrection, and that the unrighteous who lived prior to Christ's return will not be raised for judgement and condemnation until the end of the millennium.

But care needs to be taken in making interpretations on face value. For example: the fact that the book of life is opened at the second judgement in v12, reveals that righteous people who qualify for eternal life will be among those who are raised at the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. The second resurrection is clearly not just for the wicked. And if it be asked, during what period of history did these righteous people live? The answer can only be: during the millennium.

Another example of how careful we need to be in making interpretations on face value can be seen in v4. This verse teaches that those who are brought back to life at the first resurrection are those who are beheaded during the reign of the beast. Taking this verse as it stands, it could be argued that only those who live in the end time beast era and who refuse to worship him, will qualify for the first resurrection, and that all the righteous in previous generations will not come back to life until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. Such a conclusion in the light of other Scriptures would clearly be wrong. All the righteous in all generations from the beginning will be raised at the second coming of Christ, and will live and reign with him in his kingdom. (Heb. 11. Matt. 8:11. 22:31-32. Lk. 20:37-38). The fact that Rev. 20:4 does not mention others besides those who live in the end time beast era, obviously does not mean that others will not be involved in the first resurrection.

In the same way, the fact that no reference is made in Rev. 20:4 to the unrighteous being raised at the first resurrection, also does not mean that none will be raised then. Many Scriptures teach that both the righteous and unrighteous who lived prior to the millennium will be raised for judgement at Christ's return. See: Dan. 12:2. Matt. 8:10-12. 12:36-37. 13:30, 40-43, 47-50. 25:1-30, 31-46. 26:64. Lk. 12:8-9. 13:24-30. Jn. 5:28-29. Act. 24:15, 25. Rom. 2:5-11. 2 Cor. 5:10. 2 Tim. 4:1. Heb. 6:2. 9:27. 1 Pet. 4:4. 1 Jn. 4:17. Rev. 1:7. 11:18.

The resurrection of the unrighteous is ignored in Rev. 20:4-6 because it is not the topic under consideration and would be a digression and distraction to mention it. The Spirit is only concerned at this point to offer hope, comfort and encouragement to the saints who refuse to worship the beast and who are killed as a result. It would be inappropriate to digress into a consideration of the fate of sinners who submit to the beast.

BLESSED AND HOLY

Rev. 20:6 says: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

If we read this to mean that all who are involved or participate in the first resurrection are blessed and holy, we would have to conclude that only the righteous will be raised. However, it does not say that the blessed and holy “take part” but “have a part.” According to Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, the Greek word “meros” translated “part” means to share; receive one’s due portion, hence a lot or destiny.

The fact that Rev. 20:6 goes on to say that those who have a part in the first resurrection will not be affected by the second death, indicates that the part they receive is a share in the gift of eternal life. The unrighteous have neither part nor lot in it. They suffer the second death.

The statement that the second death will have no power over those who have part in the first resurrection actually teaches by implication that the unrighteous will also be involved in that resurrection. There would be no point making the statement if only the righteous were going to be raised at Christ’s return. Under such circumstances it would be a foregone conclusion that the second death would have no power over those who were raised.

Regarding the “second death”: the phrase only occurs in the book of Revelation (2:11. 20:6, 14. 21:8). The statement in Heb. 9:27 that “it is appointed unto men once to die” means prior to resurrection and judgement. This is indicated by the statement that follows: “But after this the judgement.” Those who are raised from the dead then rejected, will suffer a second death which will be an eternal death. Their fate will be like those who never knew God, referred to in Isa. 26:14: “They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: to that end hast thou (God) visited and destroyed them, and caused all memory of them to perish.”

So then, the second death does not apply exclusively to those who are rejected at the second resurrection. Those rejected at the first resurrection will also die a second death. Rev. 20:14 informs us that the lake of fire is the second death. The beast and false prophet are cast into it at the second coming, and all who are rejected at the judgement seat of Christ will be disposed of there as well. This will include those who failed to remain holy and separate from the world and who conformed to the dictates of the

beast. Such people are not the “blessed and holy” who “have part in the first resurrection.” None can be blessed unless they are holy and this requires a sanctified life, not being conformed to the world.

God only repeats things that are important, so the fact that the statement in v4 that the saints will reign with Christ a thousand years is repeated in v6, indicates that this is an important truth. In a time of tribulation when secular powers are reigning and the world scoffs at the Christian hope to rule the world in righteousness with Christ, God emphasizes and reiterates that we shall indeed!

POST MILLENNIAL REVOLT

Rev. 20:7-9 brings us to the revolt at the end of the millennium to which reference was made earlier: “And when the thousand years are expired, satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the 4 quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

Man is inherently ungrateful and rebellious and the whole of human history witnesses to this. As mentioned earlier: a thousand years of righteousness and peace will not change man’s intrinsic sinful and selfish nature; it will only suppress it, and given the right conditions, it will be incited and flare up into rebellion.

The “satan” who is loosed out of his prison and who goes out to deceive the nations into marching against the camp of the saints and the holy city, is of course the dragon (v2). Prior to the millennium he deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9) and he will do the same at the end of the millennium. In conjunction with the beast and false prophet, he will deceive the nations by false propaganda into invading Israel, resulting in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-16). The invasion at the end of the millennium will therefore be a repetition of history. The words: “to gather them together to battle” are certainly reminiscent of Rev. 16:14. 19:19.

The nations deceived by the dragon are referred to as being “in the 4 quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog.” Gog and Magog are of course names connected with the invasion of Israel that leads to the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon. They are referred to in Ezk. 38:2 as “Gog, the land of Magog.” It is generally accepted that “Gog” is the name or title of the leader of the invasion forces. This is

indicated by the reference in Ezk. 38:2, and 39:1 to Gog being “the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal,” and the reference in 39:11 to “Gog and all his multitude.”

“Magog” was the name of one of Japheth’s sons, mentioned along with Meshech, Tubal and others in Gen. 10:2. “The land of Magog” would therefore be the land which Magog’s descendants occupied. The reference in Ezk. 38:2 to “Gog, the land of Magog” would therefore indicate that Gog comes from the land of Magog.

But, instead of referring to “Gog, the land of Magog,” Rev. 20:8 simply says: “Gog and Magog.” This has caused some to conclude that Gog and Magog are 2 separate individuals. However, it is hard to believe that the person who leads armies into the land of Israel at the end of the millennium will have exactly the same name as the person who led the armies prior to the beginning of the millennium. On the other hand, if the names became legendary as a result of the pre-millennial invasion, they could simply be used to signify all the nations that were previously involved in Gog’s confederacy recorded in Ezk. 38.

Gog himself comes “out of the north parts” (Ezk. 38:15), and Togarmah comes from “the north quarters” (v6). Ethiopia and Libya (v5) are south of Israel, and other prophecies relating to the invasion mention nations to the west and east that will be involved (Dan. 11:41. Joel 3:4). Hence, although the land of Magog is north of Israel and Gog comes from that direction, the forces confederate with him come from the 4 quarters of the earth. It is not surprising therefore that reference is made in Rev. 20:8 to nations “in the 4 quarters of the earth” in connection with Gog and Magog. And reference to “the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” is reminiscent of the “many people” in Ezk. 38 who “shall be like a cloud to cover the land,” referred to in Joel 3:14 as “multitudes, multitudes.”

Rev. 20:9 says: “They marched across the breadth of the earth.” There is no reference to horses or chariots. And they “compassed (encircled; surrounded) the camp of the saints and the beloved city.” A “camp” is usually a place where people or troops are lodged in tents, but in Rev. 20:9 the “camp” is the saints themselves who are lodged in the tabernacle (tent-city) of God. A distinction is made here between the saints and the city. They are separate, not synonymous. The city is referred to as “the beloved city.” The Greek word for “beloved” is “agapao” and means much loved. The same word occurs in Rev. 1:5. 3:9. 12:11. We meet up with this city in the next chapter and learn more about its size, shape and materials.

Reference to the “camp of the saints” could imply that all the saints

are assembled in the city at the time the armies surround it. If so, they would have been gathered in from the cities around the earth that they have been ruling, leaving the nations free to rebel. If the binding of the dragon is due to the restraint imposed by the rule and presence of Christ and the saints, the loosing of the dragon would imply the withdrawal of their presence. It could be compared with Israel's rebellious response when Moses withdrew from them to ascend Mount Sinai for 40 days.

FIRE FROM GOD OUT OF HEAVEN

The post millennial gathering of Gog against Jerusalem has a very different effect from the pre-millennial invasion. The invading forces do not besiege or conquer Jerusalem or occupy the city. There is no reference to weapons or war. Judgement upon the pre-millennial invader comes in the form of an earthquake, mutual slaughter by the sword, pestilence, torrential rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone (Ezk. 38:19-23). Judgement upon the post millennial invader comes in the form of fire from God out of heaven, probably from the city of God itself which towers above into the heavens. The Lord will be, as we read in Zech. 2:5: "a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her" (i.e. in the city).

When the pre-millennial Gog comes up against Jerusalem, Jesus goes forth on a white horse to make war, with his armies following him upon white horses with two-edged swords in their hands (Rev. 19:11-15. Ps. 149:6). But when the post millennial Gog comes up against Jerusalem, Jesus and his followers will not go forth to engage in battle. As in the days of king Hezekiah when the Assyrian army came up against Jerusalem and the angel of the Lord slew them as they were encamped outside the walls of the city, so Gog will be destroyed outside the walls without the camp of the saints having to venture forth to do battle with them. They will probably be singing the high praises of God and rejoicing in His glory as the fire falls and consumes the enemy.

Other examples of fire coming from heaven to devour God's enemies are: Lev. 10:2. Num. 16:35. 1 Kng. 18:38. Rev. 11:5.

After Gog and Magog are destroyed by fire, Rev. 20:10 says: "The devil (dragon) that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (burning sulphur N.I.) where the beast and false prophet are, and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Rev. 19:20 refers to the beast and false prophet being cast into the fiery lake of burning sulphur, prior to the millennium, and the same will

happen to the dragon at the end of the millennium. He also will be cast into the lake of fire, which after 1,000 years is still burning and will continue to burn “for ever and ever.” The A. V. says the beast and false prophet “are” in the lake of fire but other translations says “were.” The New English Bible says: “where the beast and false prophet had been flung.”

Regarding the reference to being “tormented day and night for ever and ever,” see notes on Rev. 14:11. 18:9, 18. 19:3.

A GREAT WHITE THRONE

After seeing the dragon cast into the lake of fire, John “saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (v11).

Because the great white throne in v11 and the resurrection and judgement in the next verses form part of a scene pertaining to the end of the 1,000 years, it is natural to relate them to the post-millennial resurrection and judgement.

As we have seen, the dragon is cast into the bottomless pit prior to the millennium and remains there for 1,000 years. He is loosed at the end of the 1,000 years, and the nations deceived by him are destroyed by fire from heaven and he is then cast into the lake of fire. What better time could there be for the second resurrection and judgement to complete the cleaning up operation? Having dealt with the rebels, God will then deal with any others who must be rejected, and then with death and hell themselves, casting all alike into the lake of fire. It would hardly be appropriate to have the second resurrection and judgement before the post millennial rebellion. It is natural for it to come after. Reference in Rev. 20:14 to death being abolished certainly makes it clear that this passage of Scripture relates to the second resurrection at the end of the millennium, not the first resurrection. As we have seen, mortality and death will not be abolished at the first resurrection, for mortals will continue to live and die during the millennium.

Reference to the “great white throne” invites a comparison with Solomon’s ivory throne, covered with gold, which represented the throne of God (1 Kng. 10:18-20. 1 Chr. 29:23). The throne in Rev. 20 is white because white is the symbol for righteousness and because righteous judgement will proceed from it.

No description is given of the throne upon which Jesus sits to exercise judgement at the first resurrection. Rev. 20:4 in fact, does not

even make reference to it, but refers to “thrones, and those who sat upon them.” The throne of Jesus is no doubt included among these thrones of judgement, as in the case of Dan. 7:9: “Thrones were placed, and the ancient of days did sit ... his throne was fiery flames and its wheels burning fire.” Although it is not stated, it seems reasonable to believe that the great white throne upon which Jesus sits for the second judgement, would be the same throne upon which he sits for the first judgement.

EARTH AND HEAVEN FLED AWAY

We now turn to the statement that earth and heaven fled away from the face of him who sat on the throne.

Little is revealed to us in Scripture concerning “the great beyond” - the post millennial era, possibly because in our present mortal state we would not be able to understand. This statement about earth and heaven fleeing away could be an inkling of that. Taken literally, it speaks of planet earth and its heaven receding from the face (presence) of him who sat on the throne. Because the throne is in the city, (Rev. 22:1-4) and the saints are there as well, (20:9. 22:3-4, 14), this would either require the earth to move away from the city or the city (which is mobile) to move away from the earth, as do rockets when taking men out into space. Either way, the effect would be the same: the earth and its atmosphere would flee from the presence of the Lord (and the saints). The word “flee” suggests a quick disappearance, not slow and gradual. Cp. Matt. 8:33. 24:16. 26:56. The same word occurs in Rev. 16:20 which says “every island fled” as a result of the great earthquake. It refers to islands sinking - receding into the water and vanishing out of sight.

The city of God is heaven itself, the ultimate eternal home of the saints. In Rev. 21 John sees it descending to earth for the millennium, but it is never stated that it will remain on earth for eternity. It could very well be that when the millennium ends and God becomes all in all and His house is full, that the city will move on to other and higher realms, causing the earth and its heaven to recede. The statement: “There was found no place for them” could be taken to mean that God has no further purpose for them once their function as a probation arena has been fulfilled.

Or, if as some scientists say, planet earth along with the solar system and galaxies, were originally thrust out into space by a gigantic creative explosion, but will ultimately reach the end of their journey, implode and fall back; the result would be that “there was found no place for them”

i.e. they would fall from their positions in space and not find the same position again.

If this is true, there is to be an end of the material heavens and earth which we know. It is not that they are to be purified and rehabilitated, but that the reverse of creation is to take place. As they came from nothing by the Word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by the same Word of God. If we truly believe in creation we shall have no difficulty in believing that God is able to put the process into reverse if it is His will. "The things which are seen are temporal" (2 Cor. 4:18). "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14).

Language such as we find in Isa. 34:4 which can and has been given a metaphorical application, might one day be capable of a literal application: "And all the host of heaven (stars) shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all the starry host shall fall down, as the leaf falls off the vine, and as a ripe fig falls from the tree."

THE DEAD STAND BEFORE THE THRONE

Rev. 20:12 comes back to the great white throne and the judgement administered from it. The A.V. says: "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God," but the Greek text says they stood before "the throne." "The dead" are "the rest of the dead" referred to in v5 who did not share in the first resurrection, who died during the millennium.

Even during the millennium there will be "small and great" i.e. insignificant and significant people. But God is no respecter of persons: all will have to stand before the throne for judgement. "The books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books according to their works."

There is no reference to "the books" or the "book of life" in Revelation chapter 20:4 in relation to the first resurrection and judgement. The Spirit quickly passes over that judgement which leads to the saints reigning with Christ, the primary object being to emphasize their reward, rather than to dwell on the fate of those rejected. However, having arrived at the end of the millennium when evil is about to be eradicated totally, more detail is given of the judgement process and how it affects the wicked.

Books are involved in both judgements, because Dan. 7:10 which refers to the first judgement scene, mentions that "the books were opened." A very similar process therefore takes place at both judgements,

involving books being opened, the righteous being rewarded and the unrighteous consigned to the lake of fire.

Rev. 20:12 explains that “the books” contain a record of the “works” (actions) of those who are judged. It is possible that a book has been written on the life of each person. The title of such a book would not be “The Book of Life” but more likely: “This is Your Life.” The books could be likened to “day books” and “ledgers” kept by accountants. Whether or not the person’s name will be in the book of life will depend on the deeds of their life recorded in their book.

Reference to the book of life as “another book” indicates that it is a single book, separate and distinct from “the books.” The book of life contains just the names of those who qualify for eternal life, not their deeds. Other references to the book of life are in Rev. 3:5. 13:8. 17:8. 20:12, 15. 21:27. 22:19. Ex. 32:32-33. Dan. 12:1 refers to “the book” and Dan. 7:10 refers to “the books.” Mal. 3:16. Lk. 10:20. Plp. 4:3.

The name of everyone washed and cleansed of sin through baptism into Christ is written in the book of life. But Scripture makes it clear that names can be blotted out and removed through failure to overcome the world and walk in righteousness. (Rev. 3:5. 22:19. Ex. 32:33).

It is emphasized twice in Rev. 20:12 and 13 that judgement will be “according to their works” which are recorded in the books. Rev. 2:23 also records Jesus as saying: “I am he who searches the thoughts and motives: and I will repay every one of you according to what you have done.” Also see Jer. 17:10. As we have seen in Rev. 19:8, only those whose lives are characterized by righteous deeds will be clothed in fine, clean and white linen. The apostle Paul declared that “we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The doctrine of “once saved always saved” is clearly incorrect. It is not by any means a foregone conclusion that all whose names are entered into the book of life when they repent and are baptized will remain there until Jesus returns. Whether or not the names remain there will depend on whether or not certain conditions are conformed to and certain standards of commitment and conduct are kept. If it was a foregone conclusion that all who are baptized into Christ will be saved, irrespective of conduct, there would be no need for “the books” or the judgement! Why keep a record of people’s deeds if they have no bearing on decisions made at the judgement?

According to 1 Jn. 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This

surely means that if a Christian is genuinely repentant each day of any sin that he commits, and is cleansed of it, the record of it will be erased. We can hardly imagine God keeping a record of sins that He has forgiven. Scripture does not teach that He has a “forgive but not forget” policy. This would mean therefore that there will be no bad deeds recorded in the books of those who are genuine Christians, only the good deeds. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Their judgement will be; “Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of your Lord.”

THE SEA GAVE UP THE DEAD

Rev. 20:13 says: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it.” Why is specific reference made to the sea giving up the dead? Is this God’s way of assuring the saints that He can resurrect those whose bodies have not been tidily interred in a grave, but whose remains may have been scattered to all parts of the ocean or dissipated to different parts of the world? Whether drowned at sea, burned at the stake, dissolved in acid, or vapourized by a nuclear bomb, the saints (and sinners) can be sure that they will be raised from the dead. None amenable to judgement will be overlooked!

The same verse says: “And death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.” As the A.V. margin points out: “Hell” means the grave. The Greek word “hades” is actually translated “grave” in 1 Cor. 15:55. “Death” is the unconscious state of those whose life ceases, and “hell” is the place of the dead. Not all who die are placed in a grave, as in the case of those who die at sea. However, whether buried in a grave or not, all who are responsible who enter the death state will be delivered up at the throne of judgement as well as those in the grave, and shall be judged according to their works.

After this judgement has taken place, v14 says: “Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death - the lake of fire.”

As in the case of Rev. 6:8, death and hell are personified here. A similar example of such personification can be seen in 2 Kng. 4:40 where it is stated that “there is death in the pot,” referring to the contents that it was feared would cause death if eaten. Jer. 9:21 says: “Death has climbed in at our windows ...” referring to invading forces that would kill. Sins are also personified in Mic. 7:19 where they are referred to as being cast into the depths of the sea.

Considering that those who suffer the second death by being cast into

the lake of fire will completely vanish and never be seen or have any influence again, reference to death and hell being cast into the lake of fire means the same. From that time forward, no one will ever enter into the state of death or the place of the dead. No one will die or be buried in the grave. All will be immortal; death and hell will be non-existent - relics of the past. God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

“Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave (hell) where is thy victory ...?” (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 22:4).



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Ever since Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord” and “built a city” (Gen. 4:16-17), cities have been intimately connected with the history of man. Many would have been built during the centuries from Cain to Noah, but were all destroyed in the flood of Noah’s day.

After the flood, Noah’s descendants decided to “build a city and a tower whose top may reach to heaven.” Gen. 11:1-9. Human pride and prestige seems to have been the motive behind the building of it, because the record says their intention was to make a name for themselves. Human pride usually leads to division and confusion, so it is appropriate that the city was called “Babel” which means confusion.

From Babel to Babylon to Rome, down to New York, London, Paris etc, cities have been centres of civilization - the hub of society - a compact community where thousands or millions of people live and work.

Cities developed out of the pastoral or agricultural life. People who cultivated the soil built houses which grew into villages which had to be protected from the enemy, resulting in defence walls being built around them. A village in such an enclosure was like a large “house” where families lived and fellowshiped together and supported each other.

But it was only a question of time before stalls, markets and shops were set up resulting in trade, commerce and various forms of public business being transacted, and modern cities today are the amplified result of this.

Today, man is more interested in building a city for the purpose of buying and selling to make money, than to live with his fellow man in love and unity as a family, sharing and fellowshiping together and supporting each other.

Cities today are basically seen as places to work, do business, entertain or be entertained for money and pleasure. Pleasure and profit are the main underlying motives which keep the machinery of a city ticking over. Take away the materialistic spirit and the profit-pleasure motive it creates, and the chief driving force behind the cities of the world would be gone.

Because of the purchasing power of money and the prestige and pleasure such purchasing can create, the love and deification of money (which is the root of all evil) inspires the pride of man. And because money can be made in cities, the bigger the city the better! The spirit of those in Gen. 11 who wanted to build a city whose top reached high into

the sky in order to make a name for themselves, is still very much with us today, and is manifested in the “sky scrapers” of the multi-billion dollar business syndicates or magnates whose reason for living in many cases, is to get rich and make a name for themselves, and who have no scruples about using corruption, graft and exploitation to achieve their ends.

Most of the large cities today are, to coin a phrase, “concrete jungles” and a “rat race.” They are overcrowded, dirty, and noisy. Traffic jams delay people who are trying to get to and from work, stores, or other places. Aeroplanes, automobiles, buses, trucks, factories, and other sources pollute the air with fumes that endanger people’s health. Motor vehicles, factories, sirens, building and demolition machinery create noise that often becomes nerve-racking, creating tension and bad temper or rage.

Cities of the world all contain places where lust is exalted and promoted, be it in the movie theatres, strip clubs, massage parlours, magazine racks, or just in the dress (or lack of it) worn by those who walk the streets.

Sexual crimes and other forms of crime and violence are increasing at an alarming rate in the cities, making it unsafe to walk in certain areas at night and even in daytime. Some complexes of multi-story blocks have become such a lawless jungle, that people are too afraid to live there and city councils have been forced to abandon them as a total loss. Overcrowding in such complexes causes gang warfare and hooliganism, and breeds mental illness (neurosis) resulting from time to time in suicide.

In most large cities, poverty and wealth co-exist; they have a high crime rate, and violence sometimes breaks out between racial, religious, and other groups. There is much evil lurking behind the bright flashing lights; sin abounds in many forms: theft, shop-lifting, robbery, rudeness, abuse, drunkenness, drug addiction, kidnapping, prostitution, pornography, rape, gambling, muggings, murder.

Those who are continually subjected to living in this kind of environment and atmosphere become hardened to it and their own personality easily becomes hard and heartless, with the result that city life becomes impersonal, uncaring, insensitive, unsympathetic to the needs of others. A person can be lying down on the footpath having a heart attack and people will walk past without stopping to render assistance!

Such cities do not glorify God or give Him pleasure. Quite the opposite: they displease Him and make Him angry. They are not His idea of how cities should be. It is not surprising therefore that when the time comes for the earth to be judged, that the cities will not get off lightly.

We read in Rev. 16:18-20 that an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude is going to so violently shake the earth that all the cities of the nations will collapse and fall. Tremendous loss of life will obviously occur among the world's population which does not belong to God.

But God has prepared a city for those who do belong to Him - a city whose top truly reaches to heaven and in which the name of God, not man, will be exalted. It is a city that man could never build or find the resources to build - a city so mind-boggling and awesome in size, glory and splendour, that even many Christians find it too staggering to believe. It will cause the largest and greatest city of man to fade into insignificance.

There is no pollution of any kind in this city, be it moral, spiritual or physical. Righteousness, justice and equity prevails, resulting in fullness of love, joy and peace among all who live there. Money is not needed, crime and violence are non-existent; sickness, sorrow, suffering and death are unheard of. All who live there partake of divine nature and are immortal. It is the ultimate utopia - a perfect city in every possible respect - the city of God.

God's ultimate purpose is for His people from all nations and generations to live together in this city, united as one family under the headship of Christ. Many Scriptures refer to the city, forming a high and noble theme. The book of Revelation ends on this theme and it is the greatest and most sublime vision in the whole book.

A CITY WHOSE BUILDER AND MAKER IS GOD

In the Bible, tents are contrasted with cities. Tents were made out of cloth woven from goat's hair, fastened with cords and stakes. Cities were made out of stone fastened together with mortar and sometimes metal straps. Tents were a temporary moveable habitation; cities were much more permanent and fixed by comparison.

When Abraham, the father of the faithful and friend of God, was called out of Ur of the Chaldees into the Promised Land, there were many cities in the land occupied by the local Canaanites, offering prosperity, pleasure and security to Abraham. But Abraham chose not to live in a city with them, neither did he build a city for himself.

Abraham's nephew Lot, who accompanied him from Ur to Canaan, ended up living in the city of Sodom, but not Abraham. The contrast between the two different habitations chosen by these men can be seen in Genesis Chapter 18. Verse one refers to Abraham sitting "in the tent

door,” and verse 24 through into chapter 19 refers to Lot sitting in the city gate and living in the city.

Why did Abraham choose to live in a tent instead of a city? Heb. 11:9-10 explains: “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Although God had promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance, he died without receiving “so much as to set his foot on” (Act. 7:1-5). While Abraham lived in the land, the native Canaanite inhabitants continued to live there, which made Abraham feel like he was living in a foreign land, even though it had been promised to him.

Because the Canaanites were idolaters and steeped in superstitious pagan doctrines and practices, Abraham did not seek fellowship or citizenship with them, and therefore did not settle down or live with them in any of their cities. Although the words in Psa. 107:4 “they found no city to dwell in,” do not actually relate to Abraham and his family, the principle does.

Because Abraham could not find a city in which the One true God was worshipped in spirit and in truth, he stayed outside in the country and lived in tents, assuming the role of a “stranger.”

Abraham was not against living in a city, but it had to be a city of God. It was, in fact, his hope to live in such a city as we read in Heb. 11:10: “He looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This implies that Abraham ultimately expected to live in a city built and made by God when he inherited and possessed the Promised Land.

A CITY WHICH HAS FOUNDATIONS

The reference to Abraham looking for a city which “has foundations,” does not imply that the cities of the Canaanites and others do not have foundations. Man-made cities do have foundations, but no matter how deep and solid they are, they are shakeable and will ultimately be shaken and fall in the judgement of God when the earth is violently convulsed (Heb. 12:26. Rev. 16:18).

From God’s point of view, anything shakeable has no foundation. “A city which has foundations” means an unshakeable city - a city that can never be destroyed. This significance can be seen in Lk. 6:46-48 which

refers to “a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it, because it was founded on a rock.”

Abraham, being a prophet (Gen. 20:7. Psa. 105:8-15) knew that all the cities of the Canaanites in his day and cities of the world in the end time would be shaken and collapse into rubble. In fact, he had a preview in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Knowing this, Abraham preferred to live in the hills in a tent, waiting for an unshakeable city, “a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Human technology in Abraham’s day and our own day could not build a city that could withstand the kind of shaking that will take place when the Lord arises to shake terribly the whole earth (Isa. 2). Only God could build a city with unshakeable foundations, and the words “whose builder and maker is God,” teach that the city is divinely constructed. It is not made by human hands.

GOD HAS PREPARED A CITY

Hebrews 11:15 informs us that if Abraham and his family were homesick for the country from which they migrated, they had opportunity to return. But verse 16 goes on to say they didn’t because “they desired a better country, that is, an heavenly: therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city.”

Reference to the city in connection with a heavenly country has caused some to think that God’s people must abandon the earth to live there.

However, another reference to the city in Heb. 13:12-14 reveals this is not the case. It reads: “For here (on earth at the moment, particularly Jerusalem) we have no continuing (unshakeable) city, but we seek one to come.”

We learn from this that the city is coming to earth in order for the saints to live in it.

The three verses in Heb. 11:10, 16 and 13:14 teach three significant points:

1. God is the builder and maker of the city.
2. God has prepared the city.
3. The city is coming to earth.

It is evident from this that the city is already built and will come to

earth as a complete city. It will not be built upon earth by human hands!

A HEAVENLY COUNTRY

The country that was promised to Abraham extended from “the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18). During Abraham’s day it was not a heavenly country but a heathen country, dominated by the idolatrous cities of the pagan Canaanites.

But Abraham, by faith, could see afar off to the time when these cities would be shaken and disappear, and when the city of God would come to the land making it a heavenly country.

When the land is ruled by the “heavenly Jerusalem” it will become, as we read in Heb. 11:16: “a better country, that is, an heavenly.”

Abraham obviously will not live alone in the city. Those who belong to Christ become “Abraham’s seed” and “heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3). They will inherit the city of God with Abraham. Abraham and many others will obviously have to be raised from the dead for this to be fulfilled, and this will take place at the second coming of Christ (Matt. 22:23-33).

In that day the Lord’s prayer will be fulfilled: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Heaven is coming to earth! This is what the second coming of Jesus Christ is all about.

MOUNT ZION, THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD

The wonderful prospect of this blessed Christian hope is presented in Heb. 12:22-24. In these verses the writer says the hope of the Christian faith has before it the prospect of “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels in joyful festal gathering, (“in high festival” - Rotherham), and the church

^ In this passage the city is intimately connected with Zion which is not surprising. Zion is a synonym for Jerusalem and it will be at Jerusalem where David used to sit as king that Jesus will sit on his throne as king over all the earth (Lk. 1:30-33). For this reason the city is called “heavenly Jerusalem.” The old city of Jerusalem whose builder and maker is not God, will disappear, and a new Jerusalem prepared by God - a “heavenly Jerusalem” will come to take its place.

Heb. 12:22 also indicates that the city is very large because not only does it house all the angels, but it will also be the home of all the saints

i.e. the “church,” which will also involve myriads of people.

As we have seen in Rev. 5:11, there are at least 100 million angels in heaven, and if the saints who will be made equal with them, were also equal in number, the total would exceed 200 million. According to Heb. 12:22, the saints will be united with the angels in the city of God in “high festival,” rejoicing together in the presence of God, offering praise and worship. Rev. 7:9-12 is one of a number of visions seen by John relating to this. The city would obviously need to be large to accommodate such numbers.

NEW JERUSALEM COMING DOWN FROM HEAVEN

With these thoughts in mind we turn to Rev. 3:12 which refers to “the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven (the sky) from my God.”

This confirms some of the points already considered in the book of Hebrews. It is clearly God’s city, built by Him, and it is coming down from above to the earth. In Gal. 4:26 the apostle Paul refers to it as “Jerusalem which is above.” In its context he is actually referring to the church, but he refers to the new Jerusalem because it is to be the city and habitation of the multitudinous body of Christ. It is quite common in Scripture for the name Jerusalem to be used to refer to the inhabitants of the city as well as the city itself. For example: Matt. 3:5. 21:10. 23:37. Also see Matt. 8:34. Mk. 1:33. Acts 13:44 where “city” refers to people, but nobody would conclude on this basis that a literal city did not exist.

The city of God is called “new Jerusalem” because it will encompass and replace the old Jerusalem. If the city came to the U.S.A. or Britain it might be called “new Washington” or “new London.” However, it is not coming to any of those countries but to the land promised to Abraham, and its centre will be at the site of old Jerusalem.

Now, if this was all we were told about the city, and it was left to our imagination to guess its size and dimensions and the materials out of which it is constructed, it is unlikely that the greatest imagination would come anywhere near the truth of it. A divine revelation is clearly required on the matter and is provided in the twenty first and twenty second chapters of the book of Revelation. It is surely significant that the revelation concerning the city is withheld until the last book of the Bible and the last two chapters of that book. It is the crown and culmination of divine revelation - the grand climax to the prophetic Word!

A GREAT AND HIGH MOUNTAIN

We read in Rev. 21:2 that John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. It is referred to in v3 as “the tabernacle of God” and “the beloved city” in Rev. 20:9. It is also referred to as “Jerusalem above” in Gal. 4:26.

In order to see the city coming down, John was carried away in the Spirit to a “great and high mountain” (21:10). He didn’t need to be on top of a mountain to see a city descending from heaven, neither did he need to be on an elevated site to see the street over the wall. As we shall see, he was taken on a tour of inspection, for how else could he see gates and foundations on all four sides, and names inscribed on them? The “mountain” is mentioned to fix the specific geographical centre of the city.

The fact that John saw the city descend while standing on this mountain indicates that the city was descending to the geographical area or country to which the mountain belonged.

It is generally accepted that this great and high mountain is the “very high mountain” to which the prophet Ezekiel was carried in the Spirit and from which he saw what appeared to be a city (Ezk. 40:2). It is plainly stated in this verse that the mountain was in the land of Israel, and it is evident from the ensuing chapters that it is Mount Zion at Jerusalem.

As Ezekiel was transported in the Spirit from captivity in Babylon to the mountain at Jerusalem, so John was transported from exile at Patmos. The mountain to which he was carried was clearly not on the island of Patmos. It is quite possible that the “exceeding high mountain” from which Jesus saw all the kingdoms of the world and over which he will ultimately rule from Zion as a result of vanquishing satan, was the same mountain on which Ezekiel and John stood (Matt. 4:8). Moses also could very well have seen the same heavenly city-temple when he ascended Mount Sinai. He made a copy of it in accordance with the divine command: “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you at the Mount.”

The fact that the city in Rev. 21:2 is called “new Jerusalem” indicates that it has its focal centre at the site of Jerusalem and that the high mountain belongs to that area of the land. We have already seen that “mount Zion” is inseparably linked with the city of God in Heb. 12:22.

According to Zech. 14, the site of Jerusalem is going to be heaved up to a much higher position by the mighty earthquake that occurs at the second coming of Christ. This earthquake at the same time will level the

hills in Israel and cause the cities of the nations to collapse. Ps. 102:16 says: “When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory.”

Ps. 48:1-2 refers to “the city of our God in the holy mountain, beautiful for elevation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king.” (Quoted by Jesus in Matt. 5:35).

Ps. 48 is a Messianic Psalm and awaits the return and reign of Christ to be fulfilled. It will not be until then that Jerusalem will be “the joy of the whole earth.” Until then it will be “a burdensome stone for all nations” causing injury and pain (Zech. 12:3).

Ps. 48:4 refers to kings and their armies who assemble against Jerusalem. It is against these forces that Jesus will come from heaven to fight and destroy at the battle of Armageddon. Not only will the armies witness his coming, but they will also see the city descending. Ps. 48:5 says: “As soon as they saw it, they were astounded, they were in panic, they took to flight; trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in travail.”

It is obviously a very awesome and awe-inspiring city!

Regarding the site of Jerusalem being elevated, Ps. 68:15-16 indicates that it will be the highest mountain in the land, higher than Mt Hermon which is the highest (2,773 metres i.e. 9,100 feet) in that part of the globe at the moment. This is suggested by the fact that Mt Hermon (“mount of Bashan”) is asked the question: “Why look you with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount which God desired for His abode, where the Lord will dwell forever?”

The end time earthquake is going to reduce the height of mountains around the world, causing them to roll down into, and fill valleys, and even disappear altogether in some cases (Isa. 40:4. Ezk. 38:20. Rev. 6:14. 16:20). In view of this it is possible that Mt Zion could end up being the highest mountain in the earth!

Another well known Scripture which refers to the future Mt Zion is Isa. 2:2: “And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall tower above the top of the mountains ...”

MIND-BOGGLING PROPORTIONS

As a result of being taken to the high mountain to see the city descending, John then gives a detailed description of it. The most mind-boggling aspect about the city from a human point of view, is its size. We read in Rev. 21:16 that “the city lies foursquare, its length the

same as its breadth; and he (the angel) measured the city with the reed 12,000 stadia (furlongs); its length and breadth and height are equal.”

This city was not measured with “a reed like a rod” as in Rev. 11:1. No discipline or chastisement is involved in the measurement in chapter 21. The measurement here involves distance not time, as in Ezk. 40:3-5 where reference is also made to an angel measuring a temple with “a measuring reed” and “a line of flax” i.e. a linen tape measure.

The measurement of the city is given first in Rev. 21:16, then the measurement of the wall in v17. The measurement of the gates is not given.

The city is laid out as a quadrangle, perfectly square, like the temple seen by Ezekiel, but the city in Rev. 21 is vastly greater in size. Not only is the length and breadth the same, but the height also. The city is a perfect geometrical shape - a cube - a cubical city, and measures 12,000 furlongs.

12,000 furlongs or stadia is about 1,500 miles or 2,400 kilometres. Now, the reference to the city measuring 12,000 furlongs, its length, breadth and height being equal, is capable of two different interpretations. It can be interpreted to mean that the length, breadth and height are each 12,000 furlongs, making the city 12,000 furlongs square. Or, it can be interpreted to mean that the total outside circumference of the city measured 12,000 furlongs, which would mean the length, breadth and height, in order to be equal, each measured 3,000 furlongs i.e. about 375 miles or 625 kms on each side. According to some, this appears to have been the ancient method of measuring cities. We have a choice therefore between a 1,500 and a 375 mile square city.

In view of the fact that Scripture links the city with the promised land, it is to be expected that its foundation would be a similar size to the land. A 1,500 mile square city would extend well beyond its borders and reach as far as Rome. However, 375 miles would be a similar distance as it is to the northern and southern boundaries of the land but would extend eastward over the Arabian Peninsula. There is a Rabbinical saying that Jerusalem would be enlarged until it reached the gates of Damascus, and exalted until it reached the throne of God, stretching from earth to heaven, uniting them into one. The city in Rev. 21 would certainly reach Damascus and extend high into the heavens.

No wonder, in view of the size of the city that it is paralleled with the country: “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb.11:16).

It is impossible to know how many rooms are in the city because their sizes and dimensions are not revealed. The throne room alone, in

which all the angels and those redeemed from mankind are seen worshipping God in the book of Revelation, would obviously be massive.

As mentioned before, Rev. 5:11 refers to 100 million angels around the throne. 100 million is roughly the population of Mexico or Japan and twice the population of Great Britain. If each of the 100 million standing around the throne only occupied a space of 3 feet square (allowing for prostrating themselves in worship), they would take up an area of 30 square miles (50 square kms). If the number of saints was equal to the angels, an area of 60 square miles (100 square kms) would be required.

In view of the millions of angels who belong to the city and multitudes of saints who will be “as the sand upon the sea shore” (Gen. 22:17), the city could be expected to have many rooms. Jesus himself said: “In my Father’s house there are many rooms” (Jn. 14:1-3).

Because of the lack of revelation on this matter, it is foolish to speculate, but curiosity sometimes indulges in a little foolishness. For example, in a 375 mile cube you would get 556,182,000 rooms (suites?) each measuring a little under 100 feet square with ceilings 10 feet high! Allowing for the throne room, hallways, streets, parks, (it is paradise - a garden city) etc, this number of rooms would be reduced quite considerably.

From a purely human point of view, the dimensions of this city are staggering and unbelievable, defying human imagination. It is natural to be repelled at the thought of it being literal. A city of such mammoth proportions is so mind boggling that the finite human mind immediately has an urge to reject a literal interpretation and regard it as highly symbolic and spiritualize it all away. But we need to think very carefully before rushing in and doing so.

Treating prophecies such as the city of God metaphorically instead of literally, frittering it all away into metaphysical speculation, has the effect of taking away from the prophecy of the book, reducing solid, substantial glorious reality into mere symbolism. The Jews did this to the story of Jonah because it was inconceivable to them that it could be taken literally. It is in the context of the revelation concerning the city of God that this warning is given: “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city which are described in this book” (22:19). There can be no doubt that if the city of God is literal, the rejection of it and substituting it with something metaphorical, would be tantamount to taking it away from the words of the book of this prophecy.

COMPREHEND - THE BREADTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT AND DEPTH

As we shall see, the apostle Paul was caught up to the city of God in vision and heard unspeakable words which he would not or could not utter. Among the words he heard may have been the measurements of the city. If so, it is not difficult to understand him being reticent about giving utterance to them in view of such mind boggling dimensions. The privilege of that utterance was reserved for the apostle John and had to wait to form the climax to the Word of God.

However, the apostle Paul did say at a later date after his vision that the prayer of the saints should be that we “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height of Christ’s love,” and remember that “God can do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think” (Eph. 3:18-20). Abraham had the right attitude: He staggered not at God’s promises through unbelief.

In seeking to understand the significance of the length and breadth, depth and height of the city of God, we certainly need to guard against being influenced by our own finite thinking, and keep in mind that God can do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think.

PREPARED AS A BRIDE ADORNED FOR HER HUSBAND

Adam Clarke and most other commentators say the description of the city of God in Rev. 21 was never intended to be literally understood. The most popular view is that the new Jerusalem is symbolic of the bride of Christ which is the church.

The reason for drawing this conclusion is because Rev. 21:2 refers to the city being “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” But this statement does not declare that the city is the bride, but rather that the city is beautifully adorned like a bride. In Biblical times, brides were adorned with jewels (Isa. 61:10), so the adornment of the city of God is compared with the adornment of a bride.

The same Greek word “kosmeo,” translated “prepared” in Rev. 21:2 is translated “garnished” in v19 and means decorated, adorned, ornamented, and refers to the foundations of the wall of the city which are adorned and decorated with precious stones and pearl gates; and the street of the city is pure translucent gold. The word is translated “adorn” in 1 Tim. 2:9 in relation to women adorning themselves with gold, pearls and expensive apparel. It is also translated “adorned” in Lk. 21:5 in relation to

the temple at Jerusalem in New Testament times being “adorned with goodly stones.”

If the apostles exclaimed: “Behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings” in relation to Herod’s temple (Mk. 13:1. Lk. 21:5), what will be said when the city-temple of God appears, in view of its beautiful adornment?

We read in 1 Chr. 29:2-8 that David prepared “all manner of precious stones” for the temple in his day and numerous precious stones were contributed by the Israelites for the same purpose. When Solomon finally built the temple, all these jewels and gems were used to adorn and decorate the walls (2 Chron. 3:6). In view of the fact that it was a model of the temple city of God, it is not surprising to discover in Rev. 21 that the city is adorned with precious stones.

Hints of the glorious adornment of the new Jerusalem are given in a number of prophecies in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 52:1 for example: “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...” Isa. 54:11-12: “...O Jerusalem... I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your walls of precious stones.” Isa. 61:10 refers to Jerusalem being clothed and adorned “as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” This is very similar to the statement made in Rev. 21:2 which likens the adornment of the holy city to “a bride adorned for her husband.”

FALSE MODESTY

Many commentators maintain that the gold, precious stones and pearls in the city of God were never intended to be literally understood because such things and anything of monetary value can have no place in the spiritual eternal world. This is false reasoning. God is not concerned about the monetary value man places upon gold and jewels and did not create them for this purpose, but for His own glory and pleasure. Carnal man has misused and abused them for his own glory but it is evident that God uses them for glory and beauty in His city. Why should the city be drab and colourless? Surely it is evident in God’s creation - in the flowers, birds, butterflies, fish, snakes, gems, sunsets etc that He loves colour. Even God Himself is a colourful Being as we have seen in Rev. 4 where His glory is likened to sparkling jewels. Woe to the person with a dull, drab and colourless spirit who tries to impose such drabness on the

city of God and strip it of its colour and glorious radiant beauty.

Another reason for some concluding that the city is symbolic of the bride of Christ is because when the angel told John that he would show him the bride, he showed him the city descending (Rev. 21:9-10). But if we were to read elsewhere that a certain person told another person that he was going to arrange for him to see or meet a certain bride, and then we read that he took him to a certain city, would we conclude that the city was the bride and that there was no real literal city involved at all? Would we not rather conclude that the city was the residence of the bride and that to see her he needed to be taken there?

The city is the city of the great king - the bridegroom, and the bride will dwell there with him. When the city descends, the church will have been caught up into it to meet Jesus in the air as he returns as we read in 1 Thes. 4:16-17. Until he returns and gathers up those who make up his bride from the four corners of the earth, the complete bride would not be able to be seen in one place. In order to see the bride in one place, John was taken to the city to where she will be gathered by the angels (Matt. 24:31).

But when John saw the city he was so awe struck with its size, shape glory and splendour, he became completely focused on it and the detailed account he had to write about it.

CONFUSION BETWEEN CITY AND COMMUNITY

To conclude that the reference to the bride of Christ and the city of God means the city is a community of people and does not involve a literal physical city, would be as wrong as concluding that the great whore and “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” in Rev. 17 only refers to a community of people and does not involve a literal city.

The angel (“one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials”) who talked with John saying: “Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” was the same angel who talked with John earlier saying: “Come hither; I will show you the judgement of the great whore” (Rev. 17:1). When John was carried away in the Spirit he “saw a woman” (v3) who symbolized the great whore. She represented of course the apostate church which is a spiritual fornicator, and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” represents the true and pure church which is “a chaste virgin.” It is appropriate that the same angel showed John these 2 contrasting communities and their ultimate destiny.

Now, if it was stated in Rev. 21 that “the bride, the Lamb’s wife is

that great city of God which will reign over the kings of the earth,” it would be regarded by many as proof positive that the city is the church community and not a literal city, and it would be difficult to argue against it. But Rev. 21 does not make that kind of statement. It simply states that the angel told John to come with him to see the bride and he took him and showed him the city. It does not say that the bride is the city. This conclusion is an assumption and has to be read into it. It is just as easy to read it to mean the bride is in the city.

However, as far as the “woman” in Rev. 17:3 is concerned, which most expositors regard as the apostate church, it is stated in v18 that she “is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” But nobody has concluded that the city refers to the apostate church and not a literal city. The majority believe it refers to the city of Rome, which is the power base of the apostate community - the place of the Papal throne upon which their “anointed one” and “holy father” the Pope sits. Likewise, “that great city, the holy Jerusalem” is the power base of the true church - the place of the throne of Father God and His anointed one, Christ Jesus. The inseparable link between each community and their respective cities is quite apparent. As pointed out before, by metonymy a city can refer to its inhabitants, but in reality the inhabitants are quite a separate and distinct entity from the literal physical city. Failure to recognize this would result in eliminating the city of Rome from Rev. 17 and has resulted in many eliminating the city of God from Rev. 21.

It is certainly made clear by the references in Rev. 17:6, 16 to the harlot woman being drunk with the blood of the saints and of her flesh being burned by fire, that she does not only signify a city. A city without a community cannot shed blood and does not have flesh to be burned!

We read in Rev. 18:15-19 that the great city of the harlot “was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones and pearls.” These words are generally accepted as referring to the rich adornment of the city of Rome, particularly the Vatican city. The same adornment is also applied to the church of Rome in Rev. 17:4: “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” But very few, if any, would confuse the city with the church and claim that they are one and the same.

The city of God in Rev. 21 which is pure gold and has foundations adorned with precious stones, gates made of pearl and the street made of pure translucent gold; is obviously contrasted with the great harlot city, whose “great riches” will “come to nought in one hour” (Rev. 18:17). But

such a contrast cannot be made if only the harlot's city is regarded as being a literal city and the city of God is regarded as being symbolical. If there is no difficulty accepting the harlot's city with its gold, precious stones and pearls literally, why not the city of God? If it be argued that the book of Revelation is all symbolic so the gold etc mentioned in connection with the city of God must be treated symbolically, then to be consistent, the same rule should apply to the gold etc mentioned in connection with the harlot's city.

A SPARKLING RADIANT CITY

The 625kms (375 miles) square city radiates the glory of God and sparkles like a giant chandelier, "having the glory of God, and her light was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 22:11).

In Rev. 4:3 the glory of God Himself is likened to the jasper, and v6 refers to a sea of glass like crystal before His throne. The stone described in Rev. 22:11 as "a jasper stone, clear as crystal" speaks of a perfectly transparent jasper as unclouded as the brightest crystal, radiating all the colours of the rainbow. Some believe it could refer to the diamond. The city is ablaze with brilliant sparkling, pulsating colour as it reflects the glory of God.

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the lamp of it" (v23. Refer to Ps. 84:11).

Night never occurs in the city due to the glory of God being an everlasting light and the Lamb an eternal lamp. There will therefore be no need for a lamp or the sun or moon. This doesn't mean that the sun and moon will no longer shine. It is evident from Ps. 72:11 that they will. Mortals need day and night so there will still be days and nights in the new earth. But they will be of surpassing glory due to the new heavens which will involve the removal of all air pollution: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold..." (Isa. 30:26). Air pollution could be so bad in the end time that when the new heavens are created and the sunlight returns to normal, it will be 7 times brighter than what it was.

The holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple had no natural or artificial light. It was lit only on the day of atonement, by the glory of God, as a result of the sacrifice for sin being offered. So the uninterrupted glory of God in the city-temple of God indicates the putting away of sin

for all time, through the blood of the Lamb.

If Moses' face shone as a result of God's glory passing by with his back turned, imagine the bright faces of all who will behold God face to face every day!

The A.V. says the Lamb is the "light" but the Greek word "luchnos" according to Strong, means a portable lamp. It is translated "candle" in Mk. 4:21. Jn. 5:35. Rev. 18:23. 22:5. It is also translated "light" in 2 Pet. 1:19.

Lamps were used in houses in Biblical times to give light at night, but the city of God won't need such lamps because Christ, who possesses and reflects the glory of God, is the lamp. The way in which Rev. 21:23 likens the glory of God to the sun, and Christ to a lamp, implies the superiority and transcendent glory of Father God.

Rev. 21:21 says: "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The Greek word "plateia" translated "street" is the feminine of "platus" which means wide or broad and is translated "wide" in Matt. 7:13: ..."wide is the gate and broad is the way..." (Another similar word, "platos" is translated "breadth" in Rev. 20:9. 21:16. Eph. 3:18). In view of this, the "street of the city" in Rev. 21:21 is wide, broad and spacious, which it would need to be in view of the millions who live in the city. The street will not be narrow or congested like the streets in some cities today.

Although the word "street" is here used in the singular, with the definite article "the" before it, it is not to be supposed that there is only one street in the city; for there are 12 gates, and there must of course be a street leading to each gate. But the street spoken of here is "the" street by way of distinction; it is the main street, or as the original word signifies, the broad way, the great avenue.

Every great city has its main street or avenue, and John sees that the holy city has its broad central avenue or boulevard too. We shall see in Rev. 22:1-3 that the street turns out to be a boulevard with a river of living water running through its centre from the throne of God and the Lamb, and the tree of life stands in the midst of the river in the middle of the city, and adorns the banks of the river by sending branches over to both sides which yield fruit every month.

The street, like the city itself "was pure gold, like transparent (clear) glass" (v18, 21). What in the tabernacle was bare earth or sand, and in Solomon's temple may have been boards or paved stone, will be pure clean gold in the city. All the equipment of the outer court of the tabernacle was of brass, but the word of prophecy declared that "for brass

I (God) will bring gold” (Isa. 60:17).

But how can gold be transparent? Reference to it being “like transparent glass” probably means it is so highly polished as to possess perfect powers of reflection, like a mirror. The effect of this would be grand and striking in the extreme. Think for a moment what the appearance of a street so paved would be. The gorgeous palaces on either side would be reflected beneath, not to mention the lustrous radiance of the beauty of the glory of the Lord. This is what gold was originally created for; not for the glory of man but for God, and it is fitting and appropriate that it should be used in the construction of the city of God. For this reason the most holy place in both the tabernacle and temple were overlaid with gold.

THE WALL

Verse 12 says the city “had a wall great and high,” and the measurement of it is given in v17: “a hundred and forty four cubits by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.”

The cubit is regarded as the distance in a normal adult from the elbow to the finger tip, and is 45½ to 51cm (18 to 20 inches), though in Ezk. 40:5 and 43:13 it is larger by a hand breadth. This means the wall was around 66 to 73 metres (216 to 240 feet) high - as high as a 20 to 24 story building and therefore not easy to climb over! The purpose of the wall is no doubt to prevent those who have no right to enter the city from gaining access (v27. 22:14-15).

If the Israelites were over-awed by the cities of the Anakim which were “walled up to heaven,” it is not surprising that our minds should boggle at this city and its wall. May lack of faith on our part to be able to gain access to such a city not prevent us from entering!

Rev. 21:18 says the wall was made of jasper, which, as already mentioned, is regarded by some as the diamond. The New International Bible for example says: “The wall was made of diamond.” What a contrast to clay, brick, wood, and concrete! The light and colour reflected by the wall would therefore manifest the glory of God, sparkling and glistening with all the colours of the rainbow. The city of God would be seen towering behind the radiance of the wall.

THE FOUNDATIONS

Rev. 21:19 says: “The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones.” This statement, taken by itself, could be taken to mean that a variety of precious ornamental stones were inserted here and there in each foundation stone. But the next statement: “The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire...” reveals that each foundation consisted of one particular precious stone. There are 12 foundation stones upon which the wall sits, and they are divided up by the 12 gates. Reference therefore to “foundations... adorned with all manner of precious stones” refers to the 12 different stones involved in the foundations.

The 12 different stones listed in Rev. 21:19-20 are as follows:

1. Jasper: Usually green with red veins. There are a number of varieties.
2. Sapphire: Deep sky blue, almost as transparent and glittering as a diamond.
3. Chalcedony: Several species; bluish white is the most common.
4. Emerald: Bright vivid green.
5. Sardonyx: A red and white stone.
6. Sardius: Vivid red.
7. Chrysolite: Yellow or gold.
8. Beryl: Sea green (bluish green).
9. Topaz: Some say pale green and others say rich yellow.
10. Chrysoprasus: Yellowish or golden green.
11. Jacinth: Deep red or violet or a blending of red and yellow.
12. Amethyst: Bright purple or violet.

Though the precise colours of these stones in some cases are not certain, the general picture described here is one of unmistakable beauty, designed to reflect the glory of God in a spectrum of brilliant colour. The light of the city within, shining through these various colours in the foundation of the wall, topped by the wall itself, composed of the crystal clear jasper (diamond?) creates a scene of dazzling beauty in keeping with the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness. This city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything man has ever seen or has ever been able, or will ever be able to make. It reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God, but also His love and grace by receiving into it all His sons and daughters.

The 12 stones that make up the foundations are nearly the same as those on the breastplate of judgement which the high priest of Israel wore

when he went into the holy of holies. These stones were like signets, for each one was inscribed with a name of one of the tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:15-21). The 12 foundation stones in Rev. 21 however, are inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb, but the gates are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12-14). If John saw the names of the 12 apostles written on the foundations, he must have seen his own name. What a thrill that would be, assuring him of a place in the eternal city!

The shape of the breastplate was similar to that of the heavenly city, tetragonal - foursquare, and the precious stones were set into it in 4 rows with 3 stones in each row. A comparison of the 12 stones involved in the foundations of the city and in the breastplate, along with the corresponding names of the apostles and the four-square encampment of the tribes of Israel, in the order that they are given in Scripture, will now be set out:

Rev. 21:19-20	Matt. 10:2-4	Ex. 28:15-21	Num. 2
1. Jasper	Peter	Sardis	Judah
2. Sapphire	Andrew	Topaz	Issachar
3. Chalcedony	James the son of Zebedee	Carbuncle	Zebulun
4. Emerald	John	Emerald	Reuben
5. Sardonyx	Philip	Sapphire	Simeon
6. Sardius	Bartholomew	Diamond	Gad
7. Chrysolite	Thomas	Ligure	Ephraim
8. Beryl	Matthew	Agate	Manasseh
9. Topaz	James the son of Alphaeus	Amethyst	Benjamin
10. Chrysoprasus	Thaddaeus	Beryl	Dan
11. Jacinth	Simon	Onyx	Asher
12. Amethyst	Matthias (He replaced Judas in Acts 1:26).	Jasper	Naphtali

(The order of the apostles given in Mk. 3:16-19 and Lk. 6:14-16 differs slightly from the order given in Matt. 10:2-4. Paul was not able to be one of the 12 for reasons given in Act. 1:21-26. The order given of the 12 tribes in their four-square encampment is also of course different from the order of their birth).

Of the 12 stones involved in the foundations in Rev. 21 and in the breastplate in Ex. 28, only 7 correspond, namely: the jasper, sapphire, emerald, sardius, beryl, topaz and amethyst. It is possible that some of the other 5 stones correspond, but are given different names. Unless this can be proved, there is not sufficient evidence to make a case for the stones on the breastplate representing the foundation stones in Rev. 21. The fact that the names of the 12 apostles, not the 12 tribes, are inscribed on the foundation stones of the city wall, suggests that they do not correlate with the ones in the breastplate.

The 12 foundations of the city wall are clearly not buried, neither are they laid on top of each other. They form a continuous chain of varied kinds of stone around the wall, and are divided up by the 12 gates. Although it is not stated in Rev. 21, the city itself also has foundations, as we read in Heb. 11:10: "A city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." As pointed out before, reference to the foundations signifies that the city cannot be shaken or collapse as the cities of the nations can and will (Rev. 16:19. Heb. 12:26-28).

Reference to the 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the apostles, reminds us of the reference in Eph. 2:20 to the church being "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." This statement relates to the spiritual temple of which not only the 12 apostles but other apostles as well, particularly Paul, and prophets, form the foundation (not "foundations") and Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone. The city-temple in Rev. 21 is not spiritual (metaphorical) but literal, and only the names of the 12 apostles are on the wall foundations, not the city foundations.

The names of the 12 apostles on the wall foundations will be an everlasting memorial to the close, personal and intimate relationship they had with Jesus as pioneers, laying the foundation for his church.

In view of the city being 625kms (375 miles) square, each foundation stone will be massive, measuring 208kms (125 miles) in length. This is totally inconceivable and impossible from a human point of view. But God is the builder and maker, not man, and nothing is impossible to Him.

Obviously astronomical quantities of gold, precious stones and pearls would be required to build a 625kms (375 mile) square cubical city. This

is too much for the faith of some to handle. They imagine that God could not find such quantities. They are earth-bound in their thinking, limiting the resources available to God to what is available on planet earth. They do not believe that He can do exceedingly abundantly above what they can ask or think. If necessary, God can create a whole planet out of gold, diamond or pearl! An article in a newspaper in May 1998 reported that a star has been located in the constellation of Centaurus with a massive density, thought to be made up primarily of carbon and oxygen in a crystallised state, which would make it a diamond with a blue-green tint. This truly would be a diamond in the sky larger than a planet!

THE GATES

The wall has 12 gates, 3 on each side, and an angel stands guard at each gate. The gates are made of pearl and inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. These names will be a memorial of Israel's privileged position as the custodian and channel of the Word of God and our indebtedness to it and them (Ps. 147:19-20. Rom. 3:1-2. 9:1-5).

The basis of all the measurements connected with the city is Israelitish, based on the number 12, because "the hope of Israel" (Act. 28:20) is the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which people are redeemed and gain entrance to the city.

The city in Ezekiel's prophecy, called "Yahweh Shammah" (Ezk. 48:35), which is some kilometres south of Jerusalem and will be used to accommodate the mortal worshippers, and is nearly 3kms (1½ miles) square, also has 12 gates inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes. The names are recorded in Ezk. 48:31-34, 3 on each side of the four square city, starting on the north side and working around clockwise to the east, south and west. The order is different from any other given in Scripture and is as follows: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Naphtali. Some have suggested that this same order may apply to the gates in the city-temple but there is no evidence for this. Rev. 21 does not put names on the gates.

Isa. 60:18 refers to walls being called Salvation and the gates Praise. All who enter the gates into the city will certainly be participants of the salvation of God and will have joy in their heart and praise on their lips. As they enter they will be singing: "I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart, I will enter His courts with praise" (Ps. 100:4).

TWELVE ANGELS AT THE GATES

Up until Rev. 21 we have been presented with 7 angels, but now, for the first time, we are introduced to 12, who are at the 12 gates (v12). (Jesus referred to “more than 12 legions of angels” Matt. 26:53).

According to 2 Chr. 23:19 guards were posted at the gates of Solomon’s temple to prevent anyone or anything unclean from entering. And, according to Rev. 21:25-27 the gates of the holy city will never be shut, and nothing that defiles or abominates will be able to enter. This suggests that the angels act as guards at the gates, allowing the saints free access to the city, but barring the way to intruders. For those who are refused entry, “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Lk. 13:28).

Reference to the angels guarding the way into the city-paradise of God, in the midst of which is the tree of life; calls to mind Gen. 3:24 which refers to the cherubim being posted at the entrance to the garden of Eden with a flaming sword preventing access to the tree of life. Will the 12 angels who guard the gates into the city have swords? No reference is made to weapons in their hands.

Although the angels will not be rulers in the earth (Heb. 2:5), they still have duties and ministries to perform in relation to the city of God. We have seen them many times in the book of Revelation, around the throne in the temple-city praising and worshipping God with the saints. It is their home as well as the saints.

In Biblical times, judges sat in the gate-house of their cities, settling disputes and dispensing justice. In the light of this, the following statement of Jesus to his 12 apostles could be significant: “...when the son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Could this mean that each of the 12 apostles will have their throne in the gate next to the foundation inscribed with their name, and judge the tribe whose name is inscribed on the gate?

Ps. 122 could be relevant to this: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built to be a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there thrones for judgement are set, the thrones of the house of David...”

EACH GATE WAS A PEARL

“**A**nd the 12 gates were 12 pearls; each gate was made of a single pearl” (Rev. 21:21).

The word “gates” comes from the Greek word “pulon” and according to Strong, can signify a porch or vestibule. It is translated “porch” in Matt. 26:71. Vine says it can also signify the gate tower of a walled town. In ancient times, the gate of a city was a building in itself like a tower where elders would meet and sit to discuss legal matters. A “gate” was not merely a door on a hinge out in the open, like a farm gate. In view of the fact that the gates in the city wall will never be shut (Rev. 21:25), there would be no need to have a gate in the sense of a door that closes. “Gate” is therefore more likely to mean gateway, involving a structure.

Adam Clarke’s response to the reference to each gate being made out of a single pearl is: “This must be merely figurative, for it is contrary to nature to produce a pearl large enough to make a gate to such an immense city.” This reasoning is completely contrary to a true son of Abraham, and yet it is unfortunately too common among those who profess to be the seed of Abraham. As mentioned before: if God wanted to, He could create a whole planet out of pearl. If we were to only accept the things in Scripture which are according to nature, we would end up with a Bible without any miracles and without a wonder-working supernatural God. Many have denied themselves the city of God because of this.

Pearls, like diamonds and other precious stones, radiate colour and would add to the spectacle of dazzling glistening colour around the city wall. The colour of a pearl in the natural world is determined by the oyster’s environment, so that different areas of the world’s seas are noted for producing special colours. There are bronze tinted pearls from the Gambier islands, pale rose pearls from the Bahamas, black pearls from the Gulf of Mexico.

Pearl may not only be used in the gates of the city wall; it may also be used in the city itself. Ivory will also be used because Ps. 45:8 refers to Messiah and his fellows being in “ivory palaces” where stringed instruments will be played and make hearts glad. This verse even mentions that the garments of the king will smell like “myrrh, aloes and cassia.”

Rev. 21 is just a brief summary of the design and structure of the city. Many books would no doubt be required to give a detailed description of every feature in this huge city, and some would probably be too difficult to describe and too amazing to comprehend. The little that has been

revealed is difficult enough for some to receive without revealing more!

In Scripture, pearls signify something precious and valuable - “of great price.” In Matt. 7:6 and 13:46 pearls symbolize the precious Word of God and its Gospel message. In 1 Tim. 2:9 pearls are mentioned as part of the costly array with which some women adorn themselves, and they are referred to along with precious stones worn by the harlot in Rev. 17:4. 18:12, 16.

Considering that the city is the kingdom of God, the place of eternal life, entrance into it through a pearl gate could be seen as signifying that it is only through the Word of God and the message of the Gospel, that entrance can be gained into the kingdom. Only those who regard God’s Word, which is the Truth, as a pearl of great price, and have searched for its hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ, being prepared to sell all to secure this treasure, will enter into the kingdom.

Pearls are formed in the oyster as a direct result of irritation. Small parasites or other irritants such as a grain of sand, enter the oyster shell, setting up an irritation which evokes a response by the oyster. It reacts defensively by secreting calcium carbonate, layer upon layer, around the irritant, eventually embalming the sand grain, insect, or whatever was the cause of irritation. The ultimate result is a wonderful gem - a pearl of great price!

The simple lesson that comes out of this is: no irritant, no pearl! It is only through much trouble and trial, irritation and aggravation, that true Godly character is formed, giving us access through the pearl gates into the city!

THE CITY IS SEPARATE AND DISTINCT FROM THE CHURCH

From a human point of view it is certainly a challenge to believe the city is literal, but it is very difficult to apply this city to the church. Many attempts have been made to spiritualize it all away, but none of them are very convincing. I am yet to come across a satisfactory explanation as to how a 625km (375 mile) square cubical city can be the church.

If the 12,000 furlongs is not literal, why is this particular measurement given, and what is it supposed to signify? If the intention in using 12,000 furlongs is simply to convey the concept of a cube, why use this particular measurement? Why not 2,000 or 1,000? Why not just one furlong? One furlong could be used just as effectively to signify a cube as

12,000!

If we regard the description of the city as being exclusively metaphorical, and spiritualize it all away into aerial nothingness, how unmeaning, yea, even bordering on folly, do these descriptions become. How can a wall 144 cubits high with 12 gates and 12 angels standing at the gates be the church? It would be absurd to speak of the church in such terms.

If the city is the church, how do we explain the fact that reference is made to the throne of God and of the Lamb being in it, as well as a street, the tree of life and a river? (Rev. 22:1-2).

Reasons have already been given for believing that the church is separate and distinct from the city. Here are some more reasons:

1. Rev. 20:9 refers to armies coming up against “the camp of the saints, and the beloved city.” A distinction is made here between the church and the city. It is evident that the city is the dwelling place of the church, not the church itself.

2. Rev. 21:27 and 22:14 say those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be permitted to enter through the gates into the city. This clearly teaches that the church is not the city, but enters the city. Statements such as these make it difficult to equate the city with the church.

3. The same distinction between the city and the church can be seen in Heb. 12:22 where a list of the prospects of the Christian hope is given as “Mount Zion; the city of the living God - the heavenly Jerusalem; an innumerable company of angels in high festival, and the church”

4. Can it be seriously believed that when we read that Abraham lived in tents rather than a city, for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, that it means he was looking for the church? He and his company were the church. The statement relates to the place where Abraham and his company hoped to live, not the people with whom he would live. The contrast is clearly between tents and the larger more durable structure of a city, not between a small company of people and the larger company of saints, although that can be inferred.

5. When Abraham and his “seed” - the multitudinous body of Christ, involving many millions of people, are gathered together to Mt Zion to sit down or recline for the marriage supper, where are they going to sit - out in the paddocks? No! Paddocks are for tents and Abraham will not be reverting to that form of habitation. He and his seed will have the city of God. They certainly will not be waiting for the nations to come together at Jerusalem to build a temple before they can sit down with Christ for the

marriage supper!

6. The reference in Rev. 22:1-2 to the river of water issuing forth from the throne of God in the city, flowing down the middle of the street, and the tree of life standing in the middle of it, is clearly reminiscent of the garden of Eden. The fact that Rev. 22 teaches that the tree of life is in the midst of the city, and Rev. 2:7 says the tree is in the midst of the paradise of God, reveals that the city is paradise - a garden city. The garden of Eden was a type or foreshadow of the city of God. The city of God is not just a massive cube of metals and minerals, but it also has flowing water and trees like a park.

Could anyone possibly confuse the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve? Would anyone argue that the garden was not literal reality - that Adam and Eve were the garden? The garden was the place where they lived; and paradise, the garden city of God, is the place where Christ, (the second Adam) and his wife (the church) will live. Adam and Eve were not the paradise and neither will be Christ and his church!

THE CITY OF GOD IS HEAVEN

The only other places in the Bible besides Rev. 21 where the length, breadth and height of a structure are equal, forming a cube, are in Ex. 26:15-25 and 1 Kng. 6:19-20. These verses relate to the tabernacle built in the days of Moses and the temple in Solomon's day. The most holy place in each structure was a cube; the length, breadth and height were equal. In the tabernacle the measurement was 10x10x10 cubits and in the temple it was 20x20x20 cubits. This is no coincidence but very significant in relation to the city of God, that the most holy place in each case was a cube.

Back in the first chapter of this study (page 6-) it was pointed out that the Scriptures teach that the most holy place represented heaven. Both the tabernacle and temple were an earthly copy - an inferior replica or model - an inanimate miniature of heaven. For this reason, it is obviously significant, as we have seen in the book of Revelation, that heaven, the city of God, is called the tabernacle of God and the temple of God.

Heaven is not another planet but a city - a mobile city with a mobile throne. For this reason it is able, as John saw it in vision, to descend to earth. This could be one of the reasons for it being called a "tabernacle." In Greek the word is "skene" and means tent. A tent is a moveable and transportable dwelling, but a temple is a fixed and solid structure. The city of God is both of these; it is a solid structure and it is also moveable, and

is therefore called both a temple and tabernacle.

Striking resemblances between heaven's tabernacle or city-temple, and the earthly tabernacle and temple built by Moses and Solomon were presented on pages 15-, revealing that the tabernacle and temple were inferior replicas or models in miniature of heaven. The apostle John was given a preview of the heavenly city, and in prophetic vision he saw the glorified saints worshipping God there with the angels (Rev. 7:9-12 etc). Visions such as these will not be fulfilled until the city comes to earth, which John witnessed in prophetic vision in Rev. 21.

We have seen then, as pointed out at the beginning of this study, that the heavenly temple of Rev. 4 is a continuing vision. We have caught glimpses of it again and again in the book of Revelation, learning more and more about it. The visions of the city-temple reach their climax in chapters 21 and 22, the last 2 chapters of the book, forming the crown and culmination of the Word of prophecy. In a sense we have come full circle. The prophetic section of Revelation started at chapter 4 with the city-temple, and ends in chapters 21 and 22 with the same. It began with the city out in the heavens and ends with it descending to earth. Formerly it controlled earth at a distance, but in the end it will control earth on the earth! Because it is heading to the earth to execute divine judgement, lightning is seen pulsating from the throne in anticipation of the impending judgement (Rev. 4:5 etc).

MILLENNIAL OR POST MILLENNIAL?

Rev. 22:1-2 says that when the city of God comes down from God out of heaven it will be the time of "a new heaven and a new earth," when "the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." Some believe this teaches that the city comes at the end of the millennium and others believe it comes at the beginning.

In seeking an answer to this it is helpful to realize that the city of God is, as already pointed out, paradise. The Greek word "paradeisos," translated "paradise" signifies a large pleasure garden with trees, or park. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the same word in Gen. 2:8 for the garden of Eden. Vine's expository dictionary of New Testament words says paradeisos is of Persian origin and denotes a garden with a wall, such as the protected gardens of the Persian kings. This is significant in view of the fact that the garden city of God is surrounded by a wall!

THE THIRD HEAVEN

Now, the Apostle Paul, like John, was caught up into paradise and had visions and revelations of the city, and he equates it with “the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:1-4).

The question is, of course, what is the significance of the third heaven? Many believe that the atmospheric heaven is the first heaven, the planetary heaven is the second heaven, and the galactic heaven - the heaven of heavens is the third heaven.

But there is no Scriptural justification for this interpretation. Nowhere in the Bible is the atmosphere designated a “first heaven” etc. However, there is a clear enumeration of three heavens and earth in 2 Pet. 3:5-16, not in relation to space but time, i.e. in a chronological sense. This is how it reads:

“... there were heavens and earth long ago (the first), created by God’s Word out of water and with water; and by water that first world was destroyed, the water of the deluge. And the present (second) heavens and earth, again by God’s Word, have been kept in store for burning; they are being reserved until the day of judgement when the godless will be destroyed. And here is my point, my friends, which you must not lose sight of: with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling His promise, as some suppose, but that He is very patient with you, because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come; it will come unexpected as a thief. On that day the (second) heavens will disappear with a great rushing sound, the elements will disintegrate in flames, and the earth with all that is in it will be laid bare. Since these things will be dissolved, think what sort of people you ought to be, what devout and dedicated lives you should live! Look eagerly for the coming of the day of God and work to hasten it on; that day will set the (second) heavens ablaze until they fall apart, and will melt the elements in flames. But we have his promise, and look forward to new heavens (third) and a new earth, the home of justice. With this to look forward to, do your utmost to be found at peace with him, unblemished and above reproach in his sight. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience with us is our salvation, as Paul, our friend and brother, said when he wrote to you with inspired wisdom. And so he does in all his other letters (like 2 Cor. 12!) wherever he speaks of this subject” (of three heavens!) (New English Bible. Brackets mine).

In this passage, Peter enumerates three heavens and earth. The first

was the original heavens and earth created long ago as recorded in Gen. 1. It refers to the antediluvian world or order of things which was destroyed by the flood in Noah's day. The Authorised Version Bible defines it as "the world that then was," and the New English Bible translates it "the first world."

Due to the windows of heaven being opened and the fountains of the earth bursting forth, dramatic changes took place in the atmosphere (heaven) and in the earth, and they were never the same again. The heaven and earth which had existed from the time of Adam to Noah (1656 years) "passed away" and was replaced by a different form or constitution.

2 Pet. 3 says that the heavens and earth which exist now, have been reserved for fire on the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men. This is a reference to the second heavens and earth which are viewed as stretching from Noah's day after the flood to Peter's day right through to the second coming of Christ.

Jesus comes in flaming fire (2 Thes. 1:7-8) and in that day the atmosphere (heavens) and earth will be set ablaze and be purged of all the pollution of the material world of man, resulting in a new (third) purified heaven and earth.

The "new" heavens and earth are clearly the "third" in order of time, not distance in space. The "first" was from Eden to the flood. The "second" is from Noah to the second coming of Christ. And the "third" is from the second coming of Christ through the millennium.

This agrees with what we read in Lk. 23:42-43 concerning paradise. The thief on the cross said to Jesus: "remember me when you come in your kingdom," referring of course to his second coming. Jesus answered saying: "I can assure you this very day that you shall be with me in paradise." Paradise comes when Jesus comes! This means the city of God comes at the beginning of the millennium not at the end.

It should be evident from this that the "new heaven and new earth" referred to in Rev. 21:1 is the "third." When it says "the first heaven and the first earth were passed away," the word "first" on this occasion is better translated "former." It comes from the Greek word "protos" which literally means the one before; the one that precedes. It is translated "former" in Rev. 21:4. The "former" heaven and earth that precedes the third is of course the second.

God also spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17). The fact that this prophetic declaration was made during the period of the second heavens and earth means it relates to the third phase - the same phase as Rev. 21:1.

Isaiah 65:17 goes on to say “the former (i.e. second heavens and earth) shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Why? Because as 2 Pet. 3:10 says, they shall pass away. And Isa. 65:18 directly relates the new heavens and new earth to Jerusalem, the city of God saying: “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”

References to “former” heavens and earth and the Lord “creating” “new” heavens and earth makes it clear that the former and new do not exist at the same time. The “new” cannot be in existence if they are yet to be created, and the “former” cannot exist if they pass away! This confirms that the phrase “third heaven” is to be understood in terms of time not space.

It also soon becomes evident in the following verses in Isa. 65 that it pertains to the millennium for it refers to a mortal population existing at the time. Verse 20 says “the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Verse 23 refers to children being born, and verse 25 refers to the wolf and the lamb feeding together.

Isa. 66:22 also refers to the new heavens and the new earth, and again makes it clear that it pertains to the millennial period when mortal flesh is still upon the earth. Verse 23 refers to “all flesh” coming to worship the Lord from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another. Verse 24 continues saying: “And on their way out they will see the carcasses of those who have sinned against God; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

CONFIRMATION IN REVELATION

A careful reading of Rev. 21 and 22 confirms that the new heavens and earth encompasses the period of the millennium and that the city of God will be upon earth during that period, contemporary with the mortal population over whom Christ and the saints will reign.

Consider the following:-

1. We are told in Rev. 21:9 that the angel who took John to see the holy city descending was “one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials.” The 7 vials, of course, relate to God’s judgements poured out upon the earth in the end time prior to the millennium (Rev. 16). This indicates that what John is about to see in relation to the city, relates to a time not long after the outpouring of the 7 vials, which is when the millennium commences.

2. As we have seen, a wall over 60 metres (200 feet) high encircles

the city with 12 gates at which angels stand guard. Why? For the same reason that the cherubim and a flaming sword were placed at the entrance to paradise in Gen. 3:24, i.e. to guard the way to the tree of life and prevent sinners from having access.

It should be evident that a high wall and guards at the gates would not be necessary at the end of the millennium when God is “all in all” and no sinful flesh remains. The city of God is clearly upon earth contemporary with mortal sinful flesh. As guards were posted at the gates of Solomon’s temple to prevent anyone unclean from entering (2 Chr. 23:19), so guards will be posted at the gates of the city of God.

3. Rev. 21:27 states that no one impure or abominable and no liars will be allowed to enter the city, and makes a distinction between them and those whose names are written in the book of life. And Rev. 22:14-15 says dogs (sodomites), sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters and liars are kept outside the city and will be prevented from entering. Also see Isa. 35:8. 52:1. 60:21. Joel 3:17. Once again it is evident from this that a mortal sinful population lives contemporary with the city of God upon earth.

4. The nations of the world are represented as being distinct from the city in Rev. 21:24, for they are referred to as walking in the light of it (Isa. 2:1-5), and bringing their treasures to it (Isa. 60).

5. We read in Rev. 22:2 that the leaves of the tree of life in the city will be used for the healing of the nations. If all the people living on the earth were immortal there would be no need for healing. Once again this teaches that the city will co-exist with a mortal world involving infirmity and can only be applied to the millennium, not the post millennial period.

6. It will be noticed that the throne in the midst of the city in Rev. 22:1 is called the throne of God and the Lamb. This throne surely relates to the millennial period because the Lamb is still in the midst of the throne. After the millennium, Christ will no longer reign as we read in 1 Cor. 15:23-28: “Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

7. The word “reign” is used in Rev. 22:5 to describe the activities of the saints during this period. This word means to rule as kings. Over whom will they rule if all are immortal? This word “reign” is the same used in connection with the millennium in Rev. 20:4.

8. Rev. 20:7-9 refers to nations revolting against the rule of Christ at the end of the millennium and coming up against the city to attack it. In their ignorance and conceit, they imagine that by a concerted attack on the 12 angels at the 12 gates, they can storm the city. But fire from heaven devours them before they get near the gates.

There is nothing said in this or any other section of Scripture to suggest that the city has just arrived. All the evidence points in the opposite direction. The city and rule of Christ from that centre where his throne is situated, will have been in place for 1,000 years and some of the nations come to resent it and rebel against it.

PLANET EARTH NOT DESTROYED

It should be evident from all this that reference to new heavens and new earth does not mean that the sun, moon, stars and earth are going to be abolished at Christ's return. Planet earth will not be annihilated and a new one created; it will simply be renewed as it was as a result of the flood in Noah's day. Rev. 21:5 says: "Behold, I make all things new," not "new things."

We read in Isa. 45:18 that God did not create the earth in vain but formed it to be inhabited, and we are assured by God in Num. 14:21 that His ultimate intention is to fill the earth with His glory. Reference in Ps. 72 to Christ's reign on earth continuing for as long as the sun and moon endure also indicates that they will be in existence during the millennium. Also see Ps. 89:36. 113:1-3. Isa. 59:19. Mal. 1:11.

As we have seen, 2 Pet. 3:5-6 explains that "heavens and earth" refers to the "world." In Noah's day it "perished" and passed away. This does not mean that the planet was annihilated, but that the material world of man upon it was destroyed.

Peter goes on to explain that the same thing will happen in the end time, except by fire not water. All the works of man will be burnt up and the present corrupt and polluted materialistic order will pass away with a hiss and a roar, resulting in a renewed heaven (atmosphere) and earth.

Heb. 12:26-27 says heaven and earth will be shaken, resulting in everything that is "made" (the material world of man) being removed. Only the things which cannot be shaken will remain, such as God's kingdom. The city of God, of course, cannot be shaken, because it has foundations made and built by God!

Isa. 26:1 declares: "In that day (i.e. when the high walls of the cities of the nations collapse 25:2, 12. 26:5), shall this song be sung in the land

of Judah: We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.”

“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth moves and heaves, and though the mountains are hurled and tumble into the sea; though the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by violence. There is a river whose streams bring joy to the city of God, the holy dwelling of the most High. God is in the midst of the city; she shall not be moved: God shall help her at early dawn” (Ps. 46).

TWO TEMPLES OR ONE?

We have seen that in order to see the city of God descending to earth, John was carried away by the spirit to a great and high mountain. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that the prophet Ezekiel was also carried away by the spirit to a very high mountain on the south of which he saw a structure that was so large it appeared to be a city (Ezk. 40:2), but it was not a city, it was a temple. Reference is made later in chapters 45 and 48 to a city further south of the temple. It is natural to wonder if the structures seen by Ezekiel and John are the same, and if not, do they refer to different but contemporary structures or do they exist at different times?

The temple and city in Ezekiel’s prophecy clearly have certain features in common with the temple-city in Rev. 21 and 22, and they are as follows.

1. A high mountain is a central feature. Ezk. 40:2. Rev. 21:10.
2. An angel does the measuring. Ezk. 40:3-5. Rev. 21:16.
3. They are foursquare. Ezk. 42:15-20, 48:16. Rev. 21:16.
4. A wall is around them. Ezk. 40:5. Rev. 21:12, 17.
5. 12 gates are involved, three on each side, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. Ezk. 48:31-34. Rev. 21:12.
6. A river of water issues forth. Ezk. 47:1. Rev. 22:1.
7. They have a tree or trees producing fresh fruit on the banks of the river every month for food, and leaves for medicine and healing. Ezk. 47:12. Rev. 22:2.
8. The glory of God dwells in them. Ezk. 43:4-7. 48:35. Rev. 21.
9. God’s throne is linked with them. Ezk. 43:7. Rev. 21:3, 5. 22:3.

OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES

Although there are similarities between the structures, there are some obvious differences, making it clear that they are separate and distinct from each other. For example:

1. The dimensions are enormously different. According to the A.V. the temple in Ezk. 42:15-20 measures 500 reeds square. The L.X.X. gives the measurement as 500 cubits (i.e. the large cubit) which would make the temple 270 metres (875 ft) square. But it is not likely that Ezekiel would compare a temple of this size with a city. The measurement is more likely to be in reeds.

A reed is “six great cubits” (Ezk. 41:8), and a “great cubit” is a cubit plus an handbreadth (Ezk. 40:5). A cubit is 46cm (18 inches) and an handbreadth is 7 cm (3 inches) making a great cubit around 53 cm (21 inches). Being 6 great cubits, a reed is therefore 3.2 metres (10½ feet), which means 500 reeds is 1,600 metres (5250 feet). The temple in Ezekiel’s prophecy is therefore approximately 1.6 kms (one mile) square.

The city referred to in Ezk. 48 which is further to the south of the temple, is 4,500 cubits square, which makes it almost 2½ kms (1½ miles) square (Ezk. 48:15-16). But the city-temple in Rev. 21 is 625 kms (375 miles) square.

2. Ezekiel’s temple and city are both a quadrangle, not a cube. The height of them is not the same as the length and breadth as in the case of the city-temple in Rev. 21.

3. The wall around Ezekiel’s temple is one reed (6 great cubits) high i.e. 3.2 metres (10½ feet), and one reed thick (Ezk. 40:5). The wall around the temple in Rev. 21:17 is 144 cubits i.e. over 60 metres (200 feet).

4. The city in Rev. 21 is all temple; God’s glory fills every part of it and He is worshipped everywhere in it. Such is not the case with the temple in Ezekiel’s prophecy. It is not a temple city. It is a separate and distinct structure from the city which is further south. This temple contains rooms for guards, rooms for killing animal sacrifices, chambers for washing the carcasses, kitchens for boiling the meat, rooms in which the priests eat their portion of the meat, chambers for storage, dressing rooms and living quarters for the priests. God’s glory resides within a separate holy area in this temple, not in every part of it (Ezk 41:1, 43:1-5).

5. The wall around the temple in Rev. 21 is made of jasper and has 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles. Each foundation is a precious stone, and the 12 gates in the wall are made of pearl. These features are not mentioned in relation to Ezekiel’s temple or city.

6. Levites guard the gates of the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezk. 44:10-11). Angels stand guard at the gates of the city (Rev. 21:12). The gates of the city are never shut (Rev. 21:25), but the east gate in Ezekiel's temple is shut during the six work days each week and is only open on Sabbath days and the days of new moon celebrations. On those occasions it will be open for the Prince to enter and will be closed at evening after he has departed (Ezk. 44:1-2. 46:1-2). The Prince clearly does not live there but comes to visit once a week.

7. The city and street in Rev. 21 are made of pure translucent gold, involving astronomical quantities of the most highly refined and polished gold imaginable. Gold will also be involved in Ezekiel's temple (Isa. 60) and the treasure referred to in Rev. 21:24 which will be brought by the nations to the city of God will probably be for that temple, but it will be nothing like the quantity involved in the structure of the city of God.

8. The river of water issued forth on the outside of Ezekiel's temple from under the threshold of the entrance (Ezk. 47:1). In Rev. 22:1 we read that the river proceeds from the throne of God from within the city and flows down the street inside the city. It would seem that the river flows out of the city down Mt Zion in the direction of Ezekiel's temple.

9. The trees lining the river of life in Ezk 47 are outside the temple, but the tree of life in Rev. 22 is inside the city.

10. The city in Ezekiel's prophecy is in "a profane place" (Ezk. 48:15) i.e. a place for the general or common use of mortals, and is called "Yahweh Shammah" meaning "the Lord is there" (Ezk. 48:35). The city in Rev. 21 is for immortals and is "holy" (v2) and is called "new Jerusalem," which in Hebrew is "chadash Yeruwshalaim" and means "new foundation of peace."

There can be no doubt that entirely different structures are involved. It is generally accepted that Ezekiel's temple and city pertain to the era of the millennium, and all the evidence points to the temple-city in Rev. 21 pertaining to the same era. Whether we like it or not, or can explain it or not, we have to accept that they exist at the same time in the same land.

TEMPLES FOR MORTALS AND IMMORTALS

References are made in Scripture to a temple being built at Jerusalem by human hands with human resources at the time of the millennial period (Isa. 60. Zech. 6:15). In view of the fact that it is inconceivable that man could build a 625 km (375 mile) cubical city, let alone build it in space and cause it to descend to earth, the references in Isa. 60 and Zech. 6:15

etc to the temple built by man must be the one referred to in Ezekiel's prophecy. Every earthly sanctuary built for God by Israel in the past was constructed out of resources gathered from the nations. The same will apply to the sanctuary in Ezekiel's prophecy.

As we have seen, the builder and maker of the city that Abraham hoped to live in is God, not man, and He has "prepared" it long ago - before the foundation of the world.

It is only by understanding that there will be two levels of people, mortals and immortals living on earth during the millennium that we can appreciate why there will be two temples. The immortals will be Christ and the saints who will rule and reign over the world. The mortals will be the people of the world who survive Armageddon but who don't qualify for eternal life; who are allowed to live out the rest of their natural life. They will marry and reproduce, repopulating the earth with people over whom the saints will reign, teaching and instructing them in the way of God in order to give them the opportunity to qualify for eternal life at the second resurrection at the end of the millennium.

Jesus taught that the saints will rule over the cities (communities) of the world (Lk. 19:12-19). As a nation today sends ambassadors from its city to other countries as representatives of its government, so the saints will be sent from the city of God as Christ's ambassadors and representatives of his government. The city in Rev. 21 is the house and base of operations of Christ and the saints.

Rev. 21:22 says there is no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

In ancient times, most cities had temples, much in the same way that cities today have cathedrals or church buildings. Ancient Jerusalem certainly had a temple which was situated on Mount Moriah, one of the hills of the city. But the city of God in Rev. 21, in spite of being huge in size, has no temple in it, i.e. there is no separate place or building set apart in the city for worship. Why? "Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (v22). The Living Bible translation captures the sense of this: "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are worshipped in it everywhere."

In Biblical times, the temple at Jerusalem represented the house of God where His presence dwelt and where His glory was manifested. People therefore went to the temple to worship Him. But the city of God, the new Jerusalem, is God's house; His and the Lamb's presence and glory fills every part of it, making it unnecessary for a special place or building to be set aside within it for worship for the immortals who live

there. It would be quite pointless having a temple inside the city to worship God and the Lamb, when they are already dwelling in the city and are worshipped there. The whole city in every part is the ultimate holy of holies.

The new Jerusalem has no temple in it because it is all temple. City and temple are one and the same. For this reason it is referred to as a temple in the book of Revelation (7:15. 11:19. 14:15, 17. 15:5, 6, 8. 16:1, 17). As we have seen, the apostle John had a number of visions of the saints ultimately being there worshipping God and the Lamb (7:9-17. 14:1-5. 15:2-4). It should be evident therefore, that if the city in Rev. 21 is the temple in which the immortal saints live and worship God, the temple and city in Ezekiel's prophecies must be for the mortal population. Various prophecies are made concerning mortals from the nations coming up to a temple at Jerusalem to worship during the millennium, and these prophecies no doubt refer to the temple seen by Ezekiel (Isa. 2:1-5. Ch 60. 66:23-24. Zech. 8:20-23. 14:16-19).

The city in Ezekiel's prophecy will provide accommodation for these mortal worshippers. Certainly nothing is said about the temple or city in Ezekiel's prophecies being the residence of Christ or the immortal saints. Structures 1.6 kms (one mile) or 2.5 kms (1½ miles) square would be far too small for the millions that will be involved to even worship there, let alone live there. As pointed out before: allowing for only 1 metre or 3 feet square for each of the 100 million angels who are depicted worshipping in Rev. 5:11, an area of over 50 square kms (30 square miles) would be required. If an equal number of saints were also involved, 100 square kms (60 square miles) would be required - just to worship!

As we have seen, Scripture teaches that Zion (Jerusalem) will be intimately connected with the city of God during the reign of Christ. However, the structure in Ez. 40 is a temple not a city, and neither is it on the top of Mt Zion but to the south. And if, as some believe, Christ is the Prince, he does not live there, but only visits it once a week and leaves the same day. Moreover, the city in Ezekiel's prophecy (Yahweh Shammah) is almost 24 kms (15 miles) south of Zion in the area of Hebron (See Ezk. 48). Being so far from Jerusalem, this city is clearly not the city where Christ's throne will be situated and from which he will rule the nations.

The mortality of those who worship in the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy is indicated in various ways. For example, we read in Ezk. 44:9 that all males who have not been physically circumcised as well as circumcised in heart will not be allowed to enter the temple. However, physical circumcision is not a condition of entry for the saints into the

eternal city of God (Rom. 2:28-29. 3:30. 4:11-12. 1 Cor. 7:18-19. Gal. 5:1. 6:15).

Levites of the family of Zadok minister in the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy, offering animal sacrifices upon an altar of burnt offering (Ezk. 43:18-27. 44:15-16). But there is no reference to fat, blood and animals being killed and offered in the city in Rev. 21. There is no shedding of blood or death of any kind in the eternal city of God.

The priesthood of the house of Zadok in Ezekiel's temple is clearly mortal, for they are not allowed to wear anything that causes sweat, nor enter the service of God drunk (Ezk. 44:18, 21. Compare Lev. 10:1-11). They also have to remove their linen garments before leaving the temple and leave them in sacred rooms (Ezk. 44:17-19).

It would be incongruous to talk in terms of immortals sweating and getting drunk, and having to remove their linen garments when venturing beyond the city. Angels certainly do not. The fact that reference is made to the Levites marrying, having mortal parents, children, and brothers and sisters, clearly indicates they are mortal (Ezk. 44:22, 25). Jesus made it clear in his teaching that immortals will not marry (Lk. 20:34-36).

It is also stated in Ezk. 44:28 that the Levites have no property. The immortal saints however inherit the earth!

According to Ezk. 44:25-27 the Levites will be defiled by contact with a dead person, and will not be able to enter the temple service until a seven day period of ritual cleansing takes place, at the end of which they have to offer a sin offering. But there is no indication in Scripture that the immortal saints will be defiled by contact with a dead body and have to go through ritual cleansing processes before being able to enter the city.

The temple in Ezekiel's prophecy is an inferior replica of the temple in Rev. 21, as was the tabernacle and temple in the days of Moses and Solomon. The major differences are firstly, that Ezekiel's temple is much larger than Solomon's temple, and secondly, the antitypical temple - the heavenly city, will be accessible to the saints at the same time.

Two temples existed at the same time in the past, one on earth and one in heaven; one for mortal worshippers and one for immortals (angels). But, in view of the fact that both mortals and immortals will be living on earth during the transitional phase of the millennium, two temples will be involved during that period. At the end of the millennium when God becomes all in all, and mortality is completely swallowed up in victory, resulting in all upon earth being immortal and having citizenship in the city, the other temple will not be required.

HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE?

In view of the fact that the city had no temple in it, for it was all temple; Ezekiel's temple will obviously not be inside the city. It is natural therefore to wonder what the arrangement will be.

It may seem impossible and inconceivable on the face of it that Ezekiel's temple could be in the same land to which John saw the 625 km (375 mile) square city of God descending, yet not be encompassed by it, or incorporated within it. So it is to be expected that the question will be asked: "How can these things be?"

Sometimes due to lack of revelation and therefore lack of knowledge, it is difficult to understand how certain things in the Word of prophecy will take place. When we are confronted with such difficulties we need to safeguard against explaining away or rejecting obvious truths, simply because we cannot see how they could possibly mean what they say or be fulfilled. Too many expositors have done this in relation to the city of God in order to bring the Word of prophecy within the scope of their own little notions and limited comprehension of things.

The Sadducees made the same mistake. They concluded resurrection was impossible because they could not see how one woman who had been married to 7 husbands could be reconciled with such teaching. In the event of all being raised from the dead, how could she possibly be married to all 7 at the same time?

Jesus swept aside their small minded objection with this challenging reply: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." He then went on to explain that those who are resurrected to eternal life do not marry (Luke 20:27-36). It is as simple as that!

The Saducees felt so wise in their preconceptions and so sure that they knew how everything must be, that they instantly rejected anything that did not harmonize with their own ideas and traditions. Their minds were locked into a rigid system of interpretation right down to the last detail of how things should be. Their minds were, according to the saying, "like concrete; all mixed up and permanently set."

The Sadducees' mentality today rejects the city of God because it finds such a large city inconceivable and therefore concludes it is impossible. Because it cannot understand how Ezekiel's temple could be in the land at the same time, and yet not be in the city, it concludes that the city cannot be real or literal. Would the reply of Jesus to such objections be: "You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"?

A LITTLE SPECULATION

As far as the city of God is concerned, we only know its shape - a perfect cube. We know very little concerning its design features, and it is risky to speculate. But certain statements in Scripture relating to the millennial age, provoke a little speculation, particularly the co-existence of two temples. There are also some obvious logical implications of such a huge cubical city that invite speculation.

Being a perfect cube, the base of the city would not be curved or arched to follow the contour of the earth. This would mean that if the base of the city was sitting upon the land, the outer areas on all four sides would gradually rise higher and higher above the earth as it curves away.

According to Ezekiel's prophecy and other prophecies, the 12 tribes of Israel will live in their land and farm it during the millennial reign of Christ. Ezk. 48 reveals that the land will be divided into parallel strips for the 12 tribes running from east to west, one next to another, from the north to the south of the land.

If the huge floor slab of the city sat down on the land, there would be nowhere for the 12 tribes to live and no grass or soil to farm. Not only that, but in order for the city to sit on the land, the elevated site ("mountain") of Zion would either have to be crushed, or project inside the city. This all suggests that the city will not be sitting on the land. However, if The Lamb lives in the city, and reigns from Mount Zion, this would indicate that the city will be in contact with Zion in some way or other.

Ps. 24:3 implies that standing in the holy place (city of God) involves ascending the holy hill of Zion, i.e. Mt Zion will have to be ascended to enter the city. For this reason, reference to dwelling in the tabernacle of God (city) runs parallel with dwelling in the holy hill of Zion in Ps. 15:1. There is also a clear connection between Mt Zion and the city of God in Heb. 12:22. The fact that John was taken to Mount Zion to see the city descend, also indicates a connection between the two.

NOT A NARROW PEAKED MOUNTAIN

Consider also Ps. 48:1-2: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion..." A connection between the city of God and Mount Zion is quite evident here, and, as pointed out earlier, the city cannot refer to Yahweh Shammah in Ezk. 48:35, because that city is a

considerable distance south of Zion. Neither can it refer to the structure that looked like a city in Ezk. 40:2 because it is a temple not a city, and it is situated “on the south” of Mount Zion, not the top.

Reference in Rev. 14:1 to Jesus standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 indicates that the elevated mount will not be a narrow peaked mountain, but a table mountain. Of particular interest is, as we have seen, that Rev. 14:2 refers to the sound of the harps and singing of the redeemed coming “from heaven” above Mount Zion. Do we imagine that this multitude is floating on clouds or suspended in the air? No! The same multitude are presented again in Rev. 15:2 standing on the sea of glass playing harps and singing a song before the throne in the city-temple of God.

It is therefore concluded that the city-temple of God is “hovering” above Mount Zion yet connected to it. Except for the access up the Mount, access to the other gates could be by stairways as in Gen. 28:12 where reference is made to angels ascending and descending upon a stairway between heaven and earth.

If the city is touching or “resting” on Mount Zion, Jesus and the 144,000 in Rev. 14:1 would be standing in it on that level making it as it were “a city on an hill.” “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Ps. 132:13-14).

No wonder, as we read in Ezk. 43:12, the top of the mountain will be “most holy.” Elsewhere in Scripture the words “most holy” are used to describe the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple, which of course, represented heaven. Because the city is heaven and is coming to rest on Zion, it is not surprising that the top of the mountain will be most holy!

Being mobile, the city of God is able to hover, and it is believed that a similar occurrence took place when the Lord came down to Sinai. It was not seen by the Israelites due to a blanket of cloud over the top of the mount, but the fiery glory of the Lord was manifested in the cloud and around the mount.

Isa. 4:5-6 says: “The Lord will create over every dwelling place of Mount Zion and over her assemblies, a cloud by day and smoke, and the shining of flaming fire by night: for over all the glory shall be a canopy...” Again in Isa. 31:5 we read that the Lord will hover over Jerusalem as a bird hovers around its nest.

In view of the fact that the city is paradise, it is not surprising that the land with which it connects also becomes a paradise. Ezk. 36:35 says it becomes “like the garden of Eden.”

NO MORE SEA

Since the wicked are described in Isa. 57:20 as being “like the troubled sea,” the reference in Rev. 21:1 to there being “no more sea” is taken by some to mean there will be no more wicked. Such, however will not be the case during the millennium as we have seen in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15. Others, on the basis of “waters” representing nations in Rev. 17:15 have concluded that there will be no more nations. This is also incorrect. See Rev. 20:8. Ps. 72. Isa. 60. Zech. 14:16-.

Neither can it mean the abolition of the oceans of the world because Ps. 72:8 declares that Christ will “have dominion from sea to sea,” and Zech. 14:8 reveals that the Mediterranean sea will still exist.

As has been pointed out, Mount Zion will be elevated by the great earthquake which occurs at the second coming of Christ, and the fact that John is taken to it to see the city descending, indicates the earthquake has occurred at the time of the vision.

Reference in Rev. 21:1 to there being no more sea could also have something to do with the effect of the earthquake in preparation for the city. If the mountain and city are literal, why not the sea?

According to Rev. 22:1-2 a river of water of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the midst of the street where the tree of life stands. This sounds like the tree of life is near the throne, and according to Rev. 2:7 the tree is in the midst of paradise, i.e. in the middle of the city. If the throne is near the tree, it would also be in the middle of the city. And if the throne sits over or upon Mt Zion, the middle of the city would be in that area.

Now, if you take a 625 km (375 mile) square and put a throne in the middle, it is 312½ kms (187½ miles) from that point to the outside of the square on all sides. This would mean that the city would extend from Zion 312½ kms (187½ miles) northwards, southwards, eastwards and westwards as seen on the next page.



In view of the fact that it is only a little over 50 kms (30 miles) from Zion to the Mediterranean sea as the crow flies, it means the western side of the city would extend about 260 kms (about 150 miles) out over the sea - if the sea is still in that area!

It is inconceivable that the city wall would extend over the sea, and therefore very tempting to conclude that there will be no sea where the city extends to the west, and that this is what John Refers to in Rev. 21:1.

From the vantage point of the high mountain at Jerusalem, John would be able to look as far as the Mediterranean coast and see that there was no more sea, but there is no reference to him doing so.

It is not unreasonable to consider that the same earthquake that heaves Mt Zion up to a greater height and levels the hill country around it, (Zech. 14), could also heave up the floor of the Mediterranean sea causing the sea to recede. Hints of the holy land being enlarged are in Isa. 49:18-20. 54:2-3.

It is evident from Hag. 2:6 that a huge shake-up is going to occur in the sea as well as the land, affecting all sea life (Ezk. 38:20). It is going to be an earthquake of mammoth proportions, unprecedented in world history, causing mountains and islands to disappear and new land to appear: (Rev. 6:12-17. 16:18-21). Reference is made in Isa. 11:15 to the tongue of the Egyptian sea (Gulf of Suez) being destroyed. In the past, God dried up the sea (Isa. 51:10) and He will do it again on a larger scale (Isa. 50:2. Zech. 10:11). In view of the dramatic physical changes that will

affect the contours and topography of the earth, it will certainly be a “new earth” in more ways than one!

Seeing that the living water that flows out of Jerusalem shall flow into both the Mediterranean and Dead sea (Zech. 14:8), it is evident that the Mediterranean will not recede as far as the Atlantic ocean and disappear altogether. It will only need to recede as far as the city extends, which as mentioned before, would be around 260 kms (around 150 miles). Over 1600 kms (1,000 miles) of the sea would remain, stretching westwards to the Straits of Gibraltar and the Atlantic ocean.

AN AIR OF MYSTERY

There is a mystery deeply embedded in Jerusalem and the surrounding land that defies any mere human explanation. This area of the globe was chosen from the foundation of the world to be the footstool of God - the resting place of the city and throne of God, and the end time convulsion of the land will prepare it for that incredible visitation.

Men love to build cities and incorporate modern architecture and create special lighting effects, not to mention fountains and streams of water. They love to make their buildings eye catching and dazzling with coloured glass, glittering chandeliers, chrome, brass, polished wood, etc. Some of the modern hotels in the large cities have lavish accommodation, superb suites with delicate decor. They are beautifully prepared and finished, fit for a king. They are prepared like a bride with their beautiful tapestry, carpet, curtains, ornaments and furnishings.

Imagine therefore what the city of God will be like. It certainly will not be inferior to the cities built by man, causing an anti-climax or “ho-hum” attitude.

Ps. 50:2 says: “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence”

“The perfection of beauty” is the divine description and assessment of the future Zion when the Lord comes.

When the queen of Sheba saw Solomon’s house and kingdom and its adornment and administration, there was “no more spirit in her.” She was flabbergasted and speechless. So was Paul when he saw Paradise (2 Cor. 12:4) and so shall all who see the house of the greater than Solomon and its adornment.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

From the very beginning, God ordained marriage not only as a means of procreation but as a type of the ultimate union between Christ and the Church. For example, we read this in Eph. 5:31-32: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined (cleave) to his wife and they shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Verse 23 of the same chapter says: “For the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present her to himself as a glorious church, not having spots or wrinkles (creases).”

Commitment to Christ is like an engagement. In 2 Cor. 11:2 Paul refers to converts to Christ being “espoused” to one husband, presented to him as a chaste virgin.

Again in Rom. 7:4 Paul says: “Therefore my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”

Christ is referred to in a number of Scriptures as the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15. 25:1-. Jn. 3:29) and the church as the bride or wife (Jn. 3:29. Eph. 5:31-32. Rev. 19:7. 21:9).

The uniting of Christ and the church at the second coming as we have seen, is referred to in Rev. 19:7 as a “marriage” and verse 9 says a “marriage supper” will be involved.

Jesus referred to this in some of his parables. For example, Matt. 22:1-2: “And Jesus answered and spake to them again by parables and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son.”

In this parable, the “certain king” refers to Father God; the “son” refers to Jesus, and the “marriage” refers to the union between Christ and the church which occurs at the second coming.

Weddings involve great joy and celebration, feasting and drinking, and the marriage between Christ and his church will certainly be no exception.

Jesus continues his parable in Matt. 22:4 by saying that those invited to the marriage were told by the king that: “I have prepared my feast; my oxen and my fatlings are killed and all things are ready: come to the

marriage.”

Reference is made to this “feast” in Lk. 14:15: “And when one of those who sat at table with Jesus heard these things (i.e. his teaching concerning resurrection), he said to Jesus, Blessed is he who shall be at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Jesus replied to this by giving the parable about “a certain man who made a great feast and invited many.” Other references to feasting are:

Matt. 8:11: “Many shall come from the east and west and sit (recline) at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matt. 26:29: “But I say unto you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again until that day when I drink it new with you in my father’s kingdom.”

Isa. 25:6: “And in this mountain (Zion) shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people (i.e. the saints called out of all nations) a feast (banquet) of rich and delicious food; a feast of well aged and matured wine - of food rich and juicy, a feast of old wine well refined.”

As we have seen, Mt Zion will be connected with the city of God. This is where the marriage supper and all other feasting takes place! This is why John was taken to the city to see the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9-10) after being told about the marriage supper (Rev. 19:7-9).

Lk. 12:37: “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he comes shall find awake and watching: Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit at table and will come forth to serve them.”

BASED ON JEWISH MARRIAGE

Although customs and ceremonies associated with weddings differ from country to country down throughout the ages, weddings are highlights - “bright spots” of human experience; solemn yet joyful occasions. But from a Christian point of view, the Jewish custom is the most interesting and significant because the parables and teaching in Scripture on marriage between Christ and the church are based on it! The Jewish custom or procedure was a type of events to come concerning the uniting of Christ and his church at his second coming.

In relation to this, a book entitled: “An Israeli Love Story” by Zola Levitt is interesting. One particular chapter relates to a Jewish Rabbi telling his daughter Rebecca about the procedure. The following is a summary:-

1. The bridegroom makes a covenant and pays a price, i.e. a marriage

dowry.

2. He leaves the bride for some time and goes back to his father's house. He goes to build a bridal chamber for her - a place where they can come together in marriage for the first time. Before he leaves he as good as tells her: "I go to prepare a place for you."

3. The bridegroom always returns. "If I go away I will come again."

4. Before he returns, he has to finish preparing the bridal chamber and have it approved by his father.

5. The bridal chamber had to be stocked with provisions. It also had to be beautiful and attractive, not rough and ready.

6. While the bride waited, being "bought with a price," she set herself apart and was committed (consecrated) to her future husband. She did not flirt or keep company with other men. She wore a veil in public to avoid attracting other men and remained chaste and virtuous. In preparing herself for the coming of the bridegroom, she ensured that her wedding dress had no spots or wrinkles (creases).

She did not know the day or the hour of the bridegroom's coming, but used the time to prepare herself and "make herself ready." She would not stray or wander away from her home at night as she would not want to risk being caught away when the bridegroom came to get her. The tradition was that he came at night to catch her by surprise.

7. The Jewish brides were "stolen" out of their houses; they were "whisked off" - "caught away" into the night. When close to her house, the groom's party would "shout," and when the bride heard it she knew she was as good as taken.

8. The bride was taken to the bridal chamber - the "father's house" where the marriage took place and where the relationship was consummated. Much feasting, drinking and joy took place.

With these thoughts in mind, we turn to the words of Jesus recorded in Jn. 14:2-3: "In my father's house are many mansions (abodes, residences, rooms); if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

While it is true that in Scripture the "house" of God can relate to the church which is a spiritual temple with many abiding places (1 Tim. 3:15. Eph. 2:19-22. 1 Pet. 2:5), it should not be overlooked that there are also many Scriptures which relate the house or temple of God to the literal physical temple in heaven and earth. (Ps. 23:6. 84:10. 92:12-15. Isa. 6:4. Matt. 21:13. Lk. 2:49. Jn. 2:16,17). As we have seen, the city temple of God is called "tabernacle of God" Rev. 21:3.

I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU

When Jesus said “I go to prepare a place for you,” he was referring to his ascension to heaven. And the fact that he said this after stating there were many rooms in his father’s house, suggests he had the literal house, i.e. the city-temple of God in heaven in mind.

There could certainly be, as mentioned earlier, many rooms in that huge city, and God’s purpose is: “that my house be filled” (Lk. 14:23). It will require the millennial reign of Christ to fulfil this.

The word “prepare” means to provide and make ready. It is the same word used in relation to preparing lodging in Philemon 22, which the New English Bible renders: “Have a room ready for me.” The apostle Paul was requesting Philemon to prepare somewhere for him to stay with the necessary furnishings and facilities.

The “place prepared by God” in Rev. 12:6 likewise refers to a place set aside by God for His people to stay in safety and be fed when hunted by the enemy.

Christ’s reference to going to heaven to prepare a place in God’s house for his prospective bride, the church, is in harmony with the Jewish tradition which involves the bridegroom going back to his father’s house to prepare a chamber for his bride.

In like manner, God’s house or city, has been built for a long time (Heb. 11:10, 16. Matt. 25:34), but Jesus has gone there to prepare a place for his bride. Hence, when the city finally descends to earth, it is “prepared as a bride for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

This is quite a concept! As the bride of Christ is preparing herself and making herself ready (Rev. 19:7), the bridegroom is, among other things, preparing and adorning the house where he will live with her.

In view of the fact that the preparation work performed by the Jewish bridegroom involved furnishing the chamber, making it beautiful and attractive for his bride, one wonders what Christ’s preparation work involves. The angels will also probably be involved in this work.

RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF

Coming back to Jn. 14:3, Jesus said that if he goes away he will come again and receive the church to himself, so that where he is, she may be also.

1 Thes. 4:16-17 elaborates on this: “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout (by the “groom’s party”) with a voice of the

archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together (“stolen” - “whisked away”) with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The same word “meet” is used in Matt. 25:1 and 6: “At midnight a cry was made, Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him.”

As has been mentioned in this study; the Greek word translated “meet” is not the normal word that is used elsewhere. It is “apanteesis” and only occurs four times in the New Testament; twice in Matt. 25, once in 1 Thes. 4:17 and once in Act. 28:15.

Apanteesis has a special significance in Greek: it was used to describe the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary. When someone important was coming to a city, it was the custom of the officials to go out and meet him and accompany him into their city. Much in the same way that a mayor and his party would go to the airport to meet a king or president, and accompany him to the city.

This sense of the word is particularly evident in Act. 28:15 which refers to Christians at Rome going as far as Appii Forum, a market town about 70 kms (40 miles) from the city of Rome, to “meet” Paul who was coming to stay with them.

When they met Paul, he did not turn around and take them all back with him to where he came from. No! He continued on his journey to Rome accompanied by the welcoming party.

In like manner, when Jesus descends from heaven, and the church is caught up into the air to “meet” him, he will not turn around and take her back to where he came from. No! He will take her with him into the “house” and continue his descent to the earth accompanied by her.

CAUGHT UP INTO THE AIR

Some, who have an aversion to things supernatural and feel more comfortable keeping Scripture as much as possible within the confines of normal human experience, get technical with the word “air” in order to avoid the conclusion that the saints will literally be caught up into the air to meet Christ at his return. They maintain that as the air is above the earth, being caught up into it simply signifies that the saints will be elevated in rank as rulers over those on earth when Jesus returns.

However, when Scripture refers to dust being thrown into the air (Act. 22:23); shadow boxers beating the air (1 Cor. 9:26); people speaking into the air (1 Cor. 14:9) etc, the reference is clearly to the atmosphere.

In relation to being “caught up” into the air: the Greek word is “harpazo” and means to be seized, snatched, plucked, pulled, taken physically by force. For example the words “take by force” in Jn. 6:15 in relation to the Jews planning to take Jesus by force to make him a king, are “harpazo.” The same applies to the reference in Act. 23:10 to soldiers taking Paul by force. The word is also translated “pulling” in Jude v 23 in relation to “pulling out of the fire.”

Of particular interest is Act. 8:39 which refers to Philip being “caught away” by the Spirit of God to another place some kilometres away. The words “caught away” are also “harpazo.” Philip was physically transported through the air by the power of God.

The prophet Ezekiel was also lifted up by the Spirit into the air and taken from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezk. 3:11-15. 8:3).

Elijah was caught up into the air - literally and physically (1 Kng. 18:12. 2 Kng. 2:11).

The Spirit of God drew Jesus up into the air (Act. 1:9), and angels constantly ascend and descend through the air (Gen. 28:12. Dan. 9:21).

There is nothing new or peculiar about the power of God transporting people through the air! This is what is going to happen to the saints at Christ’s return!

ANGELS GATHER UP THE SAINTS

It should be evident that if the saints all around the world are to be with Christ when he returns to Zion, they will have to get over there somehow or other. Surely no one thinks they will have to get there under their own steam, by road, rail, sea or aeroplane. No! “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his chosen ones (after judging them) from the four winds, from one end of heaven (the horizon) to the other” (Matt. 24:31).

Paul also refers to this gathering of the chosen ones in 2 Thes. 2:1: “Now we beseech you brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him.” Here, he is referring back to the reference in his first letter in relation to being caught up into the air to meet the Lord.

In one of his parables, Jesus referred to it in terms of being carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom (Lk. 16:22). Many shall come from the east and the west and shall recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11). This is what is meant by Abraham’s bosom.

“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour

before him, and it shall be raging round about him Gather my saints together to me; those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Christ’s sacrifice!) (Psa. 50:1-5).

In that day each saint will say: “He (God) sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters (persecution v4, 43); He delivered me from my strong enemy (the Beast), and from those who hated me: for they were too strong for me... He brought me into a large place” (city of God) (Ps. 18:16-19).

We are told in Col. 3:4 that when Christ shall appear, we shall also appear in glory. This and other Scriptures seem to teach that the church will accompany or escort Jesus in glory when he descends to earth, and for this reason the saints will be caught away to meet him in the air.

In the event of being caught up into the air, the saints will not remain out in the open in the atmosphere, but will be taken into the city as it descends to the earth. As already pointed out, in order to see the bride of Christ, John was taken to see the city of God descending to the promised land where the great and high mountain of Zion is situated. The bride will obviously be in the city as it descends!

“ENTER THOU INTO THY CHAMBERS”

In the light of this, consider the following passage of Scripture in Isa. 26:19-21: “Thy dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise (at the resurrection: 1 Thes. 4:16-17). Awake and sing ye who dwell in the dust: for thy dew (millions of droplets which descend through the air) is as the dew of herbs (i.e. vital for the life of the earth). Come, my people (those resurrected at Christ’s return), enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors behind you: hide thyself (disappear into thin air!) as it were for a little moment, until the wrath is past (the great shaking of the planet). For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity ...”

When God arises to shake terribly the whole earth, causing mountains and cities all around the world to tumble, islands to disappear, new land to be heaved up causing the sea to recede, it would not be fitting or appropriate for the saints to be upon the earth at that time. That judgement is for sinners, not saints! The saints will therefore be airlifted from the planet into their bridal chambers in the house prepared for them by their bridegroom.

Reference to them entering their chambers and shutting the doors behind them is reminiscent of Noah and the ark. Rooms were in the ark

(Gen. 6:14) and Noah and his family were told to enter and the door was closed behind them (Gen. 7:1, 16). When the judgement of God was poured forth and the waters rose, those in the house were lifted above it and were not affected or hurt by it.

Lot also and his daughters were taken by angels out of the city of Sodom and went up into the air - up a mountain to avoid the divine judgement that fell upon the city.

“As it was in the days of Noah ... as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the days of the son of man” in more ways than one! (Lk.17:24-30).

While the earth is shaken, the cities of the nations fall, and the heavens and earth are on fire melting and dissolving the material works of man with fervent heat, the saints will be safe and secure in the city of God.

Their song in that day will be: “We have a strong city ...” (Isa. 26:1). Also see Ps. 46. 48. 87. 122. Isa. 33:20.

JERUSALEM ABOVE - THE MOTHER OF US ALL

It is a sobering thought to consider that the present houses we live in, no matter how expensive and comfortable they might be are not our abiding places. They do not have foundations that will be able to withstand the shaking that is to come. Being temporary abiding places, it is pointless being over preoccupied with them.

The true children of Abraham only see them as tents, and look for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:18). “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb. 13:14).

From all accounts the city of God is a glorious city, full of the glory of God, and glorious things are spoken of it, as we read in Ps. 87:3: “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.” The following verses go on to say that those who live in the city were born there.

What does this mean? Well, Jesus taught that in order to see the kingdom of God a person has to be “born again,” or born from above, which involves being born of water and spirit (Jn. 3:1-8).

This involves two major experiences: Firstly, a conversion in which the carnal mind is transformed into a spiritual mind. This involves receiving and believing the Spirit-inspired Word of God which proclaims the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This leads to

repentance and confession of sin, baptism, and allowing our lives to be led by the spirit instead of the flesh.

The second major experience involves the conversion of our mortal body into an immortal body. This will be the ultimate of being born of the Spirit. Jesus is the first to experience this and is referred to as “the first born from the dead,” “the first begotten from the dead” (Col. 1:18. Rev. 1:5). He is, as we read in 1 Cor. 15:20, “the firstfruits of them that slept.”

The firstfruit on a tree is an earnest or specimen of the harvest that is to follow. Jesus is an example of the immortality that has been promised to the church. He is an immortal body, not a disembodied immortal, and he will “change our lowly body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the power which enables him to subdue all things to himself” (Plp. 3:21).

The saints have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, and for that reason he is the firstborn (Rom. 8:29). When he appears and is manifested to the world in glory, we shall be like him, born of the fullness of the spirit, and radiant in immortality (1 Jn. 3:2).

Being born of the Spirit to immortality is a quick operation: “in a moment, in the blinking of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). No long drawn-out labour and labour pains or travail will be involved in this birth. It is sudden and instantaneous.

It is natural to wonder where and when this will take place. It certainly takes place at the second coming of Christ, and probably in the city of God. Remember what Ps. 87 says concerning the city: “this one, and that one, were born in her.”

It is clear from 1 Thes. 4:17 that all the saints will be caught up “together” in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and it is equally clear from Rom. 8:17 that they will all be glorified (made immortal) “together.”

Jesus himself was glorified in the same city, which, as we have seen is heaven. For this reason we read in Heb. 6:20 that he has entered there as “the forerunner.”

When the whole church is immortalized and glorified together, it will truly be a nation born in a day! And if this birth occurs in the city of God, a new dimension is given to the reference in Gal. 4:26 to Jerusalem above being “the mother of us all.” And the reference in Plp. 3:20 to our citizenship being in heaven could be given a much more literal application than what some have been prepared to give it, due to believing that the saints never go to heaven. The same applies to the Christian desire to “be clothed upon with our house which comes from heaven,” “a building of God not made with hands ... that mortality might be swallowed up by

life” (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

VERY DRAMATIC MANIFESTATION

The concept of the city of God can certainly fire up the imagination. According to many prophecies, prior to the return of Christ, the sun, moon and stars will stop shining and the earth will be plunged into gross darkness. Nations will be utterly distressed and in a state of total quandary. Men’s hearts will be failing them for fear.

It is around about this time that Christ returns and various Scriptures refer to the brightness of it. “The brightness of his coming” is how it is expressed in 2 Thes. 2:8. Jesus said: “as the lightning comes out of the east and shines as far as the west, so also shall the coming of the son of man be” (Matt. 24:27). It is put like this in Mal. 4:2: “the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.” This is interesting in view of the fact that the city shines like the sun (Rev. 21:23). The darkness into which the earth is plunged will accentuate the brightness of the second coming. The world’s darkest hour will give rise to its greatest and brightest light!

Imagine how awesome and frightening it would be for the survivors on the earth, locked in absolute darkness, seeing a massive cubical city, radiant with the glory of God like the sun, shining and sparkling like a diamond in the sky, descending into earth’s atmosphere. No wonder fear and trembling will grip those who have assembled against Jerusalem when they see this (Ps. 48:1-6).

At first, the city might appear in the distance as a speck of light in the pitch black sky, like a star, and get bigger and brighter as it draws closer to the earth, enabling the people ultimately to see that it is a massive cubical city, dwarfing into absolute insignificance any city man has ever made.

If, as is quite possible, the city of God hovered above earth during creation week and gave light until the sun and moon appeared on the 4th day, it would have the same effect at the second coming at which time a new creation is created - the new heavens and earth.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge to each of us is of course: will we be in the city? Many will come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets, but many will also be denied access causing weeping and

gnashing of teeth.

Ps. 24:3 puts the pertinent question to us: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things. Such are the people who seek Thy face O God of Jacob.”

“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour nor casts discredit on his neighbour...” (Psa. 15).

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful (cowards) and unbelievers, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers (includes druggists), idolaters and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:7-8).

Under no circumstances shall anyone corrupt, who does detestable things, enter the city (Rev. 21:27).

“Blessed are those who wash their robes and keep God’s commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).



CHAPTER NINETEEN REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The chapter division here, inserted by the translators, should be ignored, for the narrative is a continuation of the theme of the city of God. We now learn that the city of God is not just a massive cube of metal and minerals such as gold, gems and pearls, but also has water and vegetation - a flowing river and trees like a park, or, more to the point - paradise!

This description in Rev. 22 is a fitting way to end the library of God's Word. The Bible opens and closes with basically the same scene of heaven-like conditions on the earth. All the chapters between describe the conflict that resulted through paradise being lost. In Rev. 22 God's revelation comes full circle and restores all that was lost shortly after creation.

In the opening verse of Rev. 22 we read that the angel showed John "a river of water of life." Water on planet earth has always been essential for life of course, and there could be no life without it. But as we shall see, the river of water of life in Rev. 22 is "living water" - it is alive with the Spirit of God and is able to impart a power that ordinary water cannot.

Unlike many of the rivers on planet earth today, the river in the city of God does not contain a speck of pollution. It is "clear as crystal," like the sea of glass before the throne (4:6). It is one hundred percent pure and clean, crystal clear with no contaminants and sparkling with purity.

In view of the height and breadth of the city, it would be an easy matter for God to use clouds as the source of the water. On the other hand, He could just as easily create the water by His divine power.

John saw the river proceeding out of, and flowing forth from the throne of God and the Lamb. The same expression is used in Rev. 4:5 in relation to lightning proceeding forth i.e. discharging from the throne. The river of God is neither still nor stagnant. It is flowing, moving, bubbling, pulsating from the throne, like water bubbling up and issuing forth from a spring or fountain. It is therefore referred to as "the fountain of the water" in Rev. 21:6, and "living fountains of water" in 7:17.

As a river of water flowed forth from the rock in Moses' day and wound its way through the wadis in the wilderness for the Israelites to drink, and by which they were revived, refreshed and reinvigorated; so a river of water of life will flow from the city from which all in the city will drink freely (Rev. 22:17. 21:6. 7:17. Ps. 36:8).

It is evident from Ezk. 47 that some of the water must flow out from

the throne in the midst of the city down Mount Zion towards the 1.6km (1 mile) square temple where the mortals will worship, because it says the waters issued out from under the threshold of that temple, heading in an easterly direction. The channel in which the river flows must get narrower or deeper or both because the water goes from ankle depth to above head height.

Other references to the river are:

Ps. 46:4: “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved ...”

Joel 3:18: “... a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim” (east of Jerusalem).

Zech. 13:1: “In that day (second coming of Christ 12:9-14) there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.”

Zech. 14:8: “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them to the Eastern (Dead) Sea, and half of them to the Western (Mediterranean) Sea; it shall continue in summer and winter.” (If the river also runs from the throne of God to the western extremity of the city, it would exit into the Mediterranean Sea).

It is revealed in Ezk. 47 that the water will heal the Dead Sea, resulting in it teeming with fish. This indicates that the river is as literal as the Thames or Hudson. Such precise geographical and practical references in these prophecies such as the water issuing out under the temple’s threshold in an easterly direction, starting at ankle depth and reaching to above head height, flowing to the valley of Shittim and into the Dead Sea, resulting in it being healed and teeming with fish which fishermen will catch in their nets, not to mention the Mount of Olives being split in half by the great earthquake and the site of Jerusalem being heaved up to a greater height; all demand a literal application.

If water from the Hudson or Thames ran into the Dead Sea, they would not as in the case of the river Jordan, be able to heal it. It will no doubt be due to its contact with the throne of God that the river flowing out of the city will have power to heal. The water will be impregnated or endued with the Spirit of God. For this reason, the trees alongside the river which drink the Spirit-filled water, produce fruit and leaves which have healing power.

Reference to a river flowing out of the city and of the tree of life being in the midst of the street of the city, is clearly reminiscent of the original paradise in the garden of Eden in the midst of which was placed

the tree of life, and out of which a river flowed to water the garden (Gen. 2).

As mentioned in the last chapter, “paradise” comes from a Persian word which means a grand enclosure; a garden or park enclosed by walls. The city of God surrounded by its wall certainly fits this description, and the garden of Eden was a foreshadow of it.

Paradise was lost through sin and a curse was incurred by the human race. But in Rev. 22 we see paradise restored and the curse removed. Through the first Adam’s sin; expulsion from paradise, shame, sorrow and suffering took effect. But through the second Adam’s righteous life and sacrifice for sin; inclusion into paradise, glory, honour and rejoicing will take effect. Those who gain entry to the city will never be banished. They will “go no more out” (Rev. 3:12).

IN THE MIDST OF THE STREET

Readings from the A.V. Rev. 22:2 says: “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare 12 manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

As it stands in this version, it says the tree of life stood in the middle of the street, and other translations agree. However, other versions like the Revised Standard and New International etc, read straight on from verse one without a break, giving the sense that the river flows through the middle of the street. Both are probably correct: the river flows down the middle of the street and the tree stands in the middle of it. Because the tree stands in the middle of the river, its branches, leaves and fruit can extend to both sides of the river, forming a high and majestic arch over it, and spreading its branches far beyond. In the words of Rev. 22:2: “On either side of the river, was there the tree of life.” (There is actually no definite article in the Greek, so it should read “a” tree of life).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, although the word “street” is used here in the singular number, with the definite article “the” before it, it should not be assumed that there is only one street in the city; for there are 12 gates and there are surely streets leading to each gate. But the street spoken of here is the street by way of distinction. It is the main street - the great avenue. This is the second of only 2 references to the street of the city, the first being in 21:21. How broad this street is, we have no means of determining, but it is obvious that a city 625kms (375 miles) square would be able to devote quite an ample space to its great avenue.

THE TREE OF LIFE

Reference to a tree of life on either side of the river has caused some to think there must be more than one tree. Some have therefore translated it “wood (i.e. forest) of life.” To support this it is pointed out that the Greek word “xulon” translated “tree,” is also translated “stocks” in Act. 16:24 and is therefore regarded as a plural word. However, it is not a plural word, but refers to several pieces of timber fashioned into a single apparatus. The fact that the English word for that apparatus has an “s” at the end is irrelevant.

The Greek word for “wood” or “forest” is not xulon but “drumos.” Xulon only means wood in the sense of timber or items such as a cross or stocks made out of timber. The primary meaning is timber and the secondary meaning is tree. Xulon is the same word translated “tree” in Lk. 23:31, and refers to a green tree to which Jesus likened himself. It clearly refers to a single tree. The same word is also used in relation to the tree to which Jesus was nailed (Act. 5:30. 10:39. 13:29. Gal. 3:13. 1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus was only nailed to one tree!

The original tree of life in the garden of Eden was also a single solitary tree, so it is not surprising if the one in the ultimate paradise is also one particular tree.

It is possible that the tree of life may be of similar shape and design to the Banyan tree of India. This tree has been celebrated from antiquity for letting its branches drop and take root in the earth, which in their turn become trunks, and give out other branches. Although a single tree, it forms a little forest, as seen in the following illustration on the next page. According to Gen. 2:9 the tree of life in the midst of the garden of Eden was “pleasant to the sight,” and the same will no doubt be true of the tree in the city.

The main trunk of the tree of life then, is in the middle of the river which flows down the middle of the street, and sends branches over to both sides of the river, which become trunks, having the appearance of trees. They in turn send out branches, forming an avenue of “trees” down the whole length of the river.

However, outside the city, actual trees grow on both sides of the river that proceeds from under the threshold of the temple in Ezekiel’s prophecy (Ezk. 47:12). There is no reference in this verse to “a tree” of life, but “trees” (plural) whose leaves shall not fade and which shall produce fresh fruit every month. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for medicine. These trees outside the city of God which line the banks of

the river which flows east toward the Dead Sea, should not be confused with the tree of life inside the city.



Only the saints have access to the fruit of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7, 22:14).

According to Gen. 3:2-3, 22 eating fruit from the tree of life, not drinking water from the river, resulted in living forever. Does this mean that Adam and Eve only needed to eat the fruit once to live forever, or did living forever require partaking on a regular basis? The fact that the tree in the city produces fruit every month suggests a perpetual partaking on the part of the saints. (We could hardly imagine fruit needing to be replaced due to dropping off and rotting on the ground in the eternal city!). Why have such fruit in the city if it is not going to be eaten by those in the city? Is this fruit solely for the pleasure of eating, or does it have some connection with living forever as in the case of the tree of life in the garden of Eden?

The A.V. translation says the tree of life “bare 12 manner of fruits and yielded her fruit every month.” This could be read to mean that the tree produced 12 different varieties of fruit each year; a different variety each month. Other translations say the tree “yielded 12 crops of fruit in a year, one in each month.” (The word “manner” is not in the Greek text). This would suggest that a new crop of the same variety of fruit is produced each month to replace what has been eaten.

LEAVES FOR THE HEALING OF NATIONS

Rev. 22:2 says the leaves of the trees are “for the healing of the nations.” The Greek word for “healing” is “therapeia” which is from “therapeuo” from which the English words “therapy” and “therapeutic” are derived.

“Therapeia” only occurs 4 times in the New Testament. It is translated “healing” twice (Lk. 9:11. Rev. 22:2), and “household” twice (Matt. 24:45. Lk. 12:42). The reason for this is because the word primarily denotes care, attention and service rendered by anyone to another. A “household” is a body of people who serve and attend to one another’s needs, especially in times of bad health, sickness, injury or pain, when medicine and healing is required. For this reason therapeia is translated household and healing. Vine suggests that the word “healing” in Rev. 22:2 has the meaning of “health.”

Ezk. 47:12 in the A.V. says the leaves of the trees lining the river outside the temple are “for medicine,” and the margin says “for bruises and sores.”

The Hebrew word for “medicine” is “teruwphah” and only occurs here. Strong says it means a remedy. Gesenius says it comes from a root word which means to make small, and he relates it to medical powder. Teruwphah is allied to “rapha” which is translated heal, healed, physician etc in the Old Testament.

If the literal water in Ezk. 47 literally heals the Dead Sea, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the leaves of trees that drink that water could have therapeutic properties or medicinal powers to heal sickness, diseases and injuries. What a blessing it would be to the nations if the myriads of pills and ointments that line the shelves in pharmacies today could be eliminated, and be replaced by one form of medicine that could heal more effectively than them all! Only the Spirit of God could produce leaves with such healing power, and it will be this Spirit in the river of water of life that the trees drink that accomplishes this.

As we know, the leaves of some trees today have medicinal value and form the basis of many medicines, ointments and powders. Considering how powerful some of the drugs and medicines can be that are developed from the leaves of trees that feed on soil and rain water, it is to be expected that the leaves of trees that drink water charged and impregnated with the healing power of the Spirit of God, would have much greater and more effective healing power.

If the response of faith and obedience to the Word of God could

cause the river Jordan to heal Naaman of his leprosy, and the pool of Siloam to restore sight to a blind man, think what the river of water of life that flows from the throne of God and the leaves that it supplies could do for those who have the same response of faith and obedience!

Trees have healing powers in more ways than one. They recycle the carbon dioxide poison that is belched out by our air polluting world. They clean and purify the air or atmosphere, making planet earth a healthier place to live in than what it would otherwise be. Without the trees the air would become totally poisoned and polluted, causing far worse ill health and sickness. Ecologists believe that the large-scale deforestation taking place in the earth today, coupled with increasing pollution, is having a detrimental effect on the health of the human race. There will not of course be any pollution in the city of God or the world for that matter, when Christ reigns.

LIVING WATER

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom and understanding; the fruit of the righteous; a desire fulfilled and a wholesome tongue, are all likened to the tree of life: Pr. 3:18. 11:30. 13:12. 15:4. The tree of life represented eternal life and these verses teach that without wisdom and understanding etc, access will be denied.

Regarding “living water”: Jesus likened it to the Spirit, as we read in Jn. 7:37:39: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified)” In this particular place, “rivers of living water” signifies the Spirit inspired Gospel message preached by the saints which healed the breach between man and God, caused by sin. Cp. Ps. 45:1: “My heart bubbles up with a good theme: I speak of the things concerning the king” (Jesus).

As water satisfies the thirsty, so the Spirit-inspired Word of God satisfies those who find the world dry, barren and parched, and who thirst for something more satisfying and lasting. “Ho, every one who is thirsty, come to the waters, and he who has no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not food, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me and you will have good

food to eat, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to me: Hear, and your soul shall live ..." (Isa. 55:1-3).

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water. ... the water that I shall give shall be a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (Jn. 4:10-14).

LITERAL NOT METAPHORICAL

Because the words "living water" and "tree of life" are sometimes used metaphorically in Scripture to teach spiritual lessons, some have regarded them as being purely metaphorical in Rev. 22 and not literal physical reality. Yet most regard "the throne of God and of the Lamb" as being literal. Some maintain that the tree of life is Christ. But the tree of life is in the middle of the river that flows out of the throne on which Christ sits. It is hardly likely that the throne or Christ would be sitting in the middle of the river!

Because of the many Scriptures particularly in the Old Testament, which refer to the saints as trees in a metaphorical sense, those who believe the tree of life means trees of life apply it to the saints. But Rev. 2:7 says the saints will "eat of the tree of life." Does this therefore mean they will eat one another?!

Some have argued that the river of water cannot be literal because they believe the immortal saints will not drink. This also is an incorrect conclusion. For example, reference is made to them drinking wine: (Matt. 26:29. Isa. 25:6).

NO MORE CURSE

In 7 words the opening statement in Rev. 22:3 summarizes the blessedness of the conditions in the city of God: "And there shall be no more curse." The Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: "The ban will be lifted."

As a result of sin, Adam and Eve incurred a curse on the human race, involving sweat and tears, hardship, sorrow, pain, mortality and death (Gen. 3:16-19). In the ultimate paradise, there will be no labour pains, thorns or thistles, sweating bodies toiling in the heat of the sun, or death. In the renewed earth "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isa. 35:1). The fertility and productivity shall increase dramatically, resulting in the plowman

overtaking the reaper (Am. 9:13). Famines, pestilences and earthquakes will cease and nations will not go to war anymore (Isa. 2:1-5). Even the animals will be at peace with each other and not devour one another (Isa. 11:6-9. 65:25). The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea bed (Hab. 2:14. Num. 14:21).

THE THRONE OF GOD AND THE LAMB

The reference to “the throne of God and of the Lamb” in Rev. 22:1 is repeated in v3, and is followed by the statement: “and his servants shall serve (worship R.S.V.) him.” If it is the throne of God and the Lamb, why does it say “his servants shall serve him” instead of “their servants shall serve them?” Does the “him,” refer to God or the Lamb? Verse 4 supplies the answer: “And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.”

Now, it is obvious that the saints will see Jesus face to face and various Scriptures refer to this: (Isa. 52:8. 1 Cor. 13:12. 1 Jn. 3:2). Many in the past of course saw Jesus face to face and will do so again in the future, so this hardly needs to be stated. But no man, except Jesus, has ever seen the face of Father God (Ex. 33:20). However, Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). In view of the fact that angels look continually on the face of the Father (Matt. 18:10), and the saints are going to be equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36), it is to be expected that they will also see the face of the Father. After all, the city of God is the holy of holies where God dwells, and where He is enthroned above the cherubim. Before Him is not just the high priest as in Old Testament times when only he could enter on the day of atonement. Multitudes of priests redeemed by the blood of the Lamb will be in the holy city.

In Old Testament times the priest had to be wrapped in a cloud of incense when entering the holy of holies, “that he die not” (Lev. 16:12, 13). But the saints will dwell in the holy of holies in heaven itself, with open face, beholding the glory of the Lord!

The throne in heaven, the city-temple of God, is unmistakably the Father’s throne. Jesus himself said: “I am set down with my Father in His throne” (Rev. 3:21). Yahweh his Father and God invited him to “sit at My right hand till I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps. 110:1). Because Jesus is able to sit on his Father’s throne it is referred to as “the throne of God and the Lamb,” but it is in reality the Father’s throne, and the singular pronouns “His” and “Him” in Rev. 22:3-4 convey this.

Rev. 3:21 however refers to 2 thrones. The full statement of Jesus is: "To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." "My throne" and "my Father in His throne" speaks of 2 thrones: the throne of the Father and the throne of the son.

Because Jesus is "the son of the Highest" through divine begetting, and "the son of David" through Mary's conception, he has access to the throne of both his Father God and the throne of his father David. The angel Gabriel therefore said to Mary concerning Jesus: "He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the highest: and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David" (Lk. 1:31-33).

Reference is also made to this throne in Matt. 25:31: "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." This throne could be already made and prepared in heaven, waiting to be placed on Zion where David used to sit and settle disputes and administer justice.

When the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy is built on the south of Zion, the throne will be placed in its inner court as we read in Ezk. 43:5-7: "So the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. And I heard him speaking to me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And he said unto me, son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever ..."

In the past, David's throne upon which his son Solomon also sat, represented God's throne on earth, and is therefore referred to as "the throne of the Lord" (1 Chr. 28:5. 29:23. 2 Chr. 9:8). It is not surprising therefore that God refers to the throne in Ezk. 43:5-7 which will be placed in the temple on the south side of Zion, as "My throne." Jesus will sit upon this throne when he visits the temple and is worshipped by mortals, but when he is in the heavenly temple, the city of God, which towers above Zion, he will sit on God's throne at His right hand and be worshipped by the immortals - the angels and the saints.

Therefore, as in the past, there will be 2 temples: a heavenly and an earthly. One of the major differences will be that the heavenly temple will be in closer contact with the earth than in the past as a result of its descent.

PERPETUAL LIGHT

It has already been stated in Rev. 21:23 that "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did

lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp of it.” It is evident from this that there will be perpetual light in the city and never darkness. Rev. 21:25 says: “There shall be no night there.”

This is repeated and emphasized in chapter 22:5: “And there shall be no night there; and they need no lamp or sun-light; for the Lord God will shine on them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.” (See notes on Rev. 21:23, 25).

Artificial lighting is a major feature in man-made cities, and without it, darkness would reign supreme at night. Huge hydro-electricity plants, gas installations or nuclear power stations are required to generate power for their light, involving huge costs. Not so in the city of God. There will be no lamps, light bulbs, spot lights, fluorescent tubes etc to be seen anywhere, yet there will be brilliant glorious light everywhere of a kind never seen before - a light that casts no shadows and that has no harmful ultra-violet effects - the light of the glory of God! In that day it shall be seen as never before, as we read in Ps. 84:11: “The Lord God is a sun and a shield ...” James puts it like this: “The Father of lights who does not cause darkness by turning” (Jam. 1:17).

A TRUE TESTIMONY

For the third time in the book of Revelation it is affirmed by the Spirit in 22:6 that these words are a true and reliable record that can be believed and trusted. The other 2 references are in 19:9 and 21:5. In spite of some seemingly bizarre concepts from a human point of view, such as a 625 km (375 mile) square city, it is a true and trustworthy account. John is not like the false prophets who prophesy out of their own heart and follow their own spirit, giving expression to their own vain imaginations as we read in Ezk. 13. No! John’s spirit is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The prophecies came not by his own will or impulse. As a true holy man of God he spoke and wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit as were all the other prophets of God (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

This point in fact, is made in Rev. 22:6. After stating that “these sayings are faithful and true,” the angel then says: “And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show His servants what must soon take place.” It is affirmed here that God is in control and has possession of the spirit of the mind of his prophets, and this obviously includes John. (See “spirit” in 1 Cor. 14:32. 1 Jn. 4:1). In John’s case, God’s control has been exercised by sending an angel to speak to him and show him things in order that he can pass them on to other servants of

God. For this reason, all these sayings are faithful and true, and their scope and purpose which was announced at the very beginning in chapter 1:1, is now repeated at the end of the book: “To show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.”

THE EPILOGUE

Verses 6-21 is the epilogue and has 3 prominent themes: the authenticity of the visions (v6-7, 16, 18-19); the imminence of Christ’s coming (v7, 10-12, 20); and the necessity for holiness in view of the impending consummation (v10-15).

Because Jesus sent his angel to speak on his behalf to John (Rev. 1:1. 22:16), the angel speaks in the first person as if he is Christ himself saying: “Behold I come quickly” (v7). This is in keeping with what Jesus declared concerning the Comforter: “... he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:13-15).

It is stated 6 times in the A.V. translation of Revelation that Jesus will come “quickly,” and 3 of those are in chapter 22: (Rev. 2:5, 16. 3:11. 22:7, 12, 20).

Commentaries and translations are divided as to the meaning of the word “quickly.” Some give it as “soon” and others say it means “shortly,” or “swiftly” or “suddenly.” The Greek word is “tachy” and Strong says it means “shortly, i.e. without delay, soon, or (by surprise) suddenly ...” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament says “quickly, speedily, (without delay),” and Vine says “swift, quick, quickly.”

In addition to the 6 occasions on which the word is used in the book of Revelation in relation to Christ’s second coming, it is used on 7 other occasions in the New Testament in relation to other events which give a good indication of the meaning.

1. Matt. 5:25: “Agree with your adversary quickly.”
2. Matt. 28:7: “And go quickly and tell his disciples.”
3. Matt. 28:8: “And they departed quickly.”
4. Mk. 9:39: “Lightly (quickly) speak evil of me.”
5. Mk. 16:8: “And they went out quickly.”
6. Jn. 11:29: “She arose quickly.”
7. Rev. 11:14: “The third woe comes quickly.”

In each of these instances the word “quickly” which has the sense of a swift and rapid movement or action, seems to be the most appropriate

word, according to the context. It is certainly more appropriate than “soon.” The word “soon” relates to when an action will take place, whereas “quickly” relates to how it will take place. For example, in Matt. 28:7, “go quickly” means travel swiftly and rapidly, but “go soon” would mean don’t take too long to start the journey. “Go soon” gives no indication if the person is to travel slowly or swiftly, whereas “go quickly” indicates swift travel. This seems to be the sense of the word. If so, the words of Jesus: “Behold, I come quickly” would not mean he is coming soon, but rather that when it is time to come, he will do so very quickly. Compare Dan. 9:21 which refers to Gabriel coming “swiftly” to Daniel. “The Lord ... shall suddenly come ...” (Mal. 3:1). “For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines as far as the west, so shall also the coming of the son of man be” (Matt. 24:27). Lightning travels very swiftly - at the speed of light!

BLESSED IS HE WHO KEEPS THE SAYINGS

After saying that he will come quickly, the Spirit of Jesus says: “Blessed is he who keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” This is repeated in v9 and is a repeat of Rev. 1:3. There are in fact quite a few allusions in this last chapter of Revelation to the first chapter, and the letters to the churches, which the diligent Bible student can search out.

The word “keeps” in relation to keeping the sayings of the prophecy of this book; means to note, pay attention, watch, guard, observe, hold fast. The opposite to keeping is losing, but very rarely is something lost if it is treasured, because it is continually and diligently guarded with a watchful eye. The Jerusalem Bible says: “Happy are those who treasure the prophetic message.” The statement is basically an exhortation to remember and not forget or lose sight of the sayings in this book, and be diligent to observe them and put them into practise. Those who do so are “blessed” and will be among the blessed when Christ comes.

This does not mean of course, that only those who have a correct understanding of the prophetic symbols can be blessed. Knowing the significance of the dragon, harlot, beast, 10 horns, 7 heads etc, is one thing; but keeping the sayings of the book is another. It is in fact possible to understand the significance of the symbols but not keep the sayings of the book. It is also possible to not understand the symbols, yet keep the sayings of the book!

The sayings in this book do not by any means all relate to prophetic events. There are many practical exhortations calling for love, faith,

obedience, patience, persistence, prayerfulness, dedication, devotion, holiness, sacrifice etc. These “sayings” are the weightier matters which must be kept and which will result in blessing for all who keep them. For example: “He that is righteous, let him continue to be righteous, and he who is holy, let him continue to be holy” (v11). “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city” (v14).

In v8 John attests that he personally saw and heard all the things he wrote down. He says: “I John am he who saw these things and heard them.” He stakes his authority as Christ’s apostle on the truthfulness of what we read. In view of the divine attestation in v6 that the Lord is God of the spirit of the prophet, and the attestation of the prophet himself, there can be no doubt about the authenticity of the book. It is a genuine, legitimate revelation from God, not something humanly devised.

John then says: “And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.”

John attempted to do this previously and was told by the angel not to do it (19v10), yet he does it again here. Why? It is possible that because the angel spoke as if he was Jesus himself, saying: “Behold I come quickly,” that John therefore treated him as Jesus by worshipping him.

The angel responds to John’s action with similar words to what he spoke on the previous occasion: “See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.”

The angel, like John and his brethren, was also a servant of God and therefore a fellow servant. It would therefore be as wrong to worship the angel as it would be to worship John or his brethren.

SEAL NOT THE SAYINGS - THE TIME IS AT HAND

John is then instructed by the angel to “seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand” (V10). Scrolls were only rolled up and sealed when the writing was finished, so John could have perceived from the angel’s words that he has come, or is coming to the end of writing. Why did the angel tell John not to seal the scroll? Was John intending to do so? If so, why? He was told to “seal up” (keep secret) the utterances of the 7 thunders (10:4), but has not been told at any stage that he must do the same to the other revelations. Did he think that because some of the prophecies he recorded had their roots in Daniel’s prophecies, and Daniel was told to seal them (Dan. 12:4, 9), that he might

be expected to do the same?

Regarding the word “time” in the phrase “for the time is at hand”: the Spirit is not using the word time in the sense of hours, days, weeks, months, or years. If this was what was meant, the Greek word “chronos” would have been used from which we get our English word “chronometer.” Instead, “kairos” is used which has to do with a fixed or definite period of time - the proper time, the opportune moment, the correct season.

In its context, which has to do with not sealing the book, it seems that the statement about the time being at hand is given as the reason for not sealing the book. In other words, the time is at hand for the book to be available to all to read in order to become acquainted with its message. And so it was and has been. Shortly after John wrote it, the Revelation was copied and re-copied by hand and made available to the churches.

THE UNHOLY AND HOLY

As in Rev. 21:7-8, a review of those who will be excluded from the city of God is given in the first part of Rev. 22:11 (and in verse 15). “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still.” There is obviously a touch of irony here! The message is addressed to those who are unjust and filthy who have no desire or intention to repent and change, but are determined to persist in their unholy life-style. “Have your own way,” “do your own thing” says the Spirit mockingly, knowing that they will pay dearly for it in the end. Cp. Ecc. 11:9.

But to those who desire to be righteous and holy the Spirit says: “He who is righteous, let him be righteous still (i.e. continue to do right): and he who is holy, let him be holy still.”

There is clearly a contrast between the unjust and righteous, filthy and holy. The contrast is between those who “keep the sayings of this book” and those who don’t. It is a contrast between those who are willing to obey the Word of God and crucify the flesh, and those who ignore the Word of God and live to satisfy their fleshly carnal desires.

“Filthy” relates to those who are morally vile. It is quite common today for such people to be described as “dirt,” which is interesting in view of the fact that the Greek word “rupoo,” translated “filthy” can mean dirt. Other Scriptures relating to this are: Jam. 1:21. 1 Pet. 3:21. 1 Cor. 7:1. Eph. 5:4. Col. 3:8. 2 Pet. 2:7. Jude v8.

The 2 classes referred to in Rev. 22:11 are mentioned in Dan. 12:10:

“Many shall be purified and made white and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.” “The wicked shall do wickedly” is a prophecy of the end time generation, indicating no response to the Word of God and no repentance. Knowing this, the angel in Rev. 22:11 says to let those who want to fit into this category by persisting in sin, do so, and fan the flames of the lake of fire as a result!

As the unjust and filthy seem determined to live in sin; the righteous, whose souls are vexed by their filthy conversation and conduct as Lot’s was in Sodom, must be determined to live righteous lives, not allowing the world’s low standards to corrupt and contaminate them. “Be not conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:1-2).

The word “still” in the statement: “He that is holy, let him be holy still,” carries with it the concept of continuity. When an old friend whom we have not seen for many years visits us and says: “Are you still committed to Christ?” we should be able to answer in the affirmative. The same applies to the question: “Are you still reading and studying the Bible?” “Are you still having fellowship?” “Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not slacken” (Gal. 6:9). The saints are expected to continue in the faith to the end and not turn back, and for this reason the word “continue” occurs frequently in Scripture to encourage persistence and perseverance. As the saying goes: “It is the last lap that counts.” A runner who runs well for all the laps except the last, will not win and receive the victor’s crown! “So run that ye may obtain” (1 Cor. 9:24).

The promise: “Behold I come quickly” in Rev. 22:7 is repeated in v12, with these words added: “And my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” This explains what Jesus meant when he said: “Great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:12). No one ascends to heaven at death to receive the reward; Jesus brings the reward at his second coming and gives it at the time of the resurrection. See: Matt. 16:27. Lk. 14:14. 2 Tim. 4:8. 1 Pet. 5:4. Isa. 40:10. 62:11.

Regarding the statement that “every man shall be rewarded according to his works”: See Rev. 2:23 and the notes on Rev. 19:8 and 20:12-13.

ALPHA AND OMEGA

After saying he is coming quickly and his reward is with him, Jesus declares: “I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first

and the last” (v13). “Alpha” and “omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and Jesus incorporates them in his title because he is “the first and the last.”

In the book of Revelation, this title is given to both the Father and son. It is applied to the Father in 1:8. 21:6, and to the son in 1:17. 2:8. 22:13. It was originally applied to the Father in Isa. 41:1-5. 44:6. 48:12.

The significance of the title as applied to the Father is indicated in Isa. 44:6: “I am the first and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.” Also Isa. 43:10: “Before Me there was no god formed, neither shall there be after Me.” If no god was formed before the Father, He must be the first, and if no god was formed after him, He must be the last! He is the only God.

In like manner, Jesus is the only begotten son of God. There was no one before him so he is the first, and there will not be another after him so he is the last. He alone shed his blood as a sacrifice for sin. He is the first and last Saviour and redeemer of the world. See Act. 4:12. 1 Tim. 2:5. Hence, in Rev. 4:11 the Father is praised for being Creator, and in Rev. 5:9 the son is praised for redeeming by his blood. The Father is creator and consummator of creation (Gen. 2:1-2), and the son is author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

BLESSED ARE THEY ...

Rev. 22:14 in the A.V. reads: “Blessed are they that do his commandments,” but the R.V. reads: “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” The reason for this is because the Greek words for both translations are almost identical. Both translations are theologically correct and are supported by other Scriptures. They could easily be combined in the same verse. The saints cannot enter the city without the cleansing blood of Christ washing away their sins (Rev. 5:9. 7:14). Neither can they enter unless they have been keeping the commandments of God (Matt. 19:17. Jn. 15:14. 1 Jn. 2:3. 3:24).

Those who “do his commandments” and “wash their robes” are “blessed,” because it gives them the “right” to enter the gates into the city and have access to the tree of life. The Greek word for “right” is “exousia” which is translated “power” and “authority” elsewhere in the New Testament. It also has the sense of “ability” and “privilege.” In the same way that only those with the authority to do so, can enter the gates of Buckingham Palace, so also only those with authority can enter the gates of the city of God.

EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE

Having “right to the tree of life” does not merely mean the authority to look at it, touch it or sit under it. Rev. 2:7 explains what is meant: “To him who overcomes will I give (the right) to eat of the tree of life ...” Because the tree of life produces 12 crops of fruit each year, one crop every month, surely implies the fruit is being eaten by those in the city (21:2). And, in view of the fact that the tree is connected with the river of water of life, and Rev. 7:17 says the Lamb “shall feed them and lead them to living fountains of waters,” this also probably refers to feeding from the tree of life.

Reference to the tree as “the tree of life” implies it is a source of life. The original tree of life in the garden of Eden certainly was. This is indicated by the reference to Adam being denied access to it “lest he put forth his hand and take from the tree of life and live forever” (Gen. 3:23).

Does this mean therefore that in order for the saints to continue living forever, they will need to continue eating from the tree of life? It would seem so! Why? The answer is quite simple: because their immortality is derived, not inherent. Only God has immortality in an underived and inherent sense; He alone is the source and fountain of it (1 Tim. 6:16). If the saints received immortality as an inherent possession, and did not need to continually derive or draw it from God, this would mean that once they received it, they would no longer need God to remain immortal. It would make them equal with God.

It therefore seems to be an unavoidable conclusion that the saints will be sustained in immortality by power from God and not by power from within themselves. No doubt there are many ways in which God could do this, but His revelation indicates it will be by partaking of fruit from the tree of life.

DOGS, SORCERERS ...

Rev. 22:15 says that outside the city, forbidden to enter, are “dogs,” and probably refers to sexual perverts, particularly sodomites i.e. homosexuals. In Deu. 23:18 a male prostitute is referred to as a dog. The reference to “he who is filthy” in Rev. 22:11, “those who defile” (21:27) and “the abominable” (21:8) would include such people.

To a Jew, a dog was one of the lowest animals, and to call anyone a dog was a gross insult (1 Sam. 17:43. 2 Kng. 8:13). Dogs prowled the streets feeding on what was thrown out (Ex. 22:31), licking up blood

when it was shed (1 Kng. 22:38. Ps. 68:23), or devouring dead bodies (1 Kng. 14:11. 16:4. 2 Kng. 9:35-36). Sometimes they surrounded and attacked humans in packs (Ps. 22:16, 20). The majority of dogs ran wild. On account of their food and habits, they were deemed unclean, and the Jews called the Gentiles dogs because they regarded them as being ceremonially unclean.

The term “dog” is applied in a figurative sense to those who are incapable of appreciating what is holy (Isa. 56:10. Matt. 7:6), and who are evil and vicious, as we read in Plp. 3:2: “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers.” Those who turn back to the world and sin after being converted, are also likened to dogs that turn back to lick up their own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22. Pr. 26:11).

All of these aspects in relation to dogs could be given a spiritual application in the reference to dogs in Rev. 22:15.

The verse does not only refer to dogs being excluded from the city but also “sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters and whoever loves and practices falsehood.” This is a reaffirmation of Rev. 21:8, 27. In contrast to such people are the saints in whose mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault (Rev. 14:5).

THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR

In Rev. 22:16 the angel speaking to John once again speaks as if he is Jesus saying: “I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

This is the first time that the word “churches” occurs outside of chapters 1 to 3. John was told at the very beginning that the revelation was for the churches and is now reminded again at the end of the revelation. For this reason John was told not to seal the book (v10).

Regarding the reference to Jesus being the root and offspring of David, see the notes on Rev. 5:5 (page 127).

In an early prophecy of Christ recorded in Num. 24:17, he is referred to as “a star” that would come out of Jacob, and “a sceptre” that would rise out of Israel. In the verse before us he refers to himself as “the bright morning star.” Reference in Rev. 2:28 to Jesus giving the morning star to all overcomers must therefore signify the giving of himself. This probably means fashioning their mortal bodies like his own glorious body (Plp. 3:21), causing them to be “like him” (1 Jn. 3:2), resulting in them being “as the stars” (Dan. 12:3).

The Old Testament ends with the promise of the sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2), and the New Testament ends with that of the morning star. Christ himself is both!

The morning star in the natural heavens is of course the planet Venus, and is applied to the king of Babylon by the name “Lucifer” in Isa. 14:12 in the A.V. The reason for the king of Babylon and Christ being likened to Venus is probably due to the movements of the planet which have been known and observed since ancient times.

Apart from the sun and moon, Venus is the brightest object in the sky, brighter than all other planets and stars. It appears low in the sky just before dawn and climbs higher and higher in the sky until unseen in the sunlight. If it is watched morning by morning, at the appropriate time of the year, it is seen climbing higher and higher, each day a little higher than before. In view of this, it can be seen how it is appropriately likened to Christ. When the time comes for him to rise from the right hand of God and be manifested to the world, heralding the new day of his millennial reign, he shall rise higher and higher in power and glory as his government increases. He shall be higher than Agag (Gog?) and higher than all the kings of the earth (Num. 24:7. Ps. 89:27).

The same will apply to the saints who rule with him to whom he gives the morning star. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pr. 4:18).

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star rise in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19).

Regarding the application of the morning star to the fall of the king of Babylon: the appropriateness of this can be seen in the fact that Venus is also an “evening star,” seen at sunset and going lower and lower until lost beneath the horizon. The sinking or falling takes place at a faster rate than its ascent. In his pride the king of Babylon had a soaring ambition to be king of kings, and rise above all nations and be brighter. But he was cast down from his position and fell into oblivion.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY COME

“**A**nd the spirit and the bride say come. And let him who hears say come. And let him who is thirsty come. And whoever is willing, let him take the water of life freely” (v17).

The first thing to notice in this verse is that the bride (the church) has the same mind and desires as the Spirit and speaks the same words. This is

a characteristic of the true church. As the apostle Paul puts it: "...saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses said ..." (Act. 26:22). "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

The invitation of the Spirit and bride to "come" has been interpreted in 2 ways:

1. Because the verse ends with a reference to drinking the water of life, the word "come" is seen as an invitation to come to the city and enter the gates. But unless people are invited to come to Christ and are "in" him, they cannot get into the city, so the invitation is seen as an invitation to come to him (Matt. 11:28. Jn. 7:37). If so, it indicates that both the Spirit and the bride will be mutually concerned for the salvation of the lost to the very end, and will make an effort to call them. But only those who are thirsty and willing will come. There will be no force or coercion.

2. The three references by Jesus to: "I come quickly" in Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, and John's response: "come Lord Jesus" (v20), has led some to the conclusion that the word "come" in v17 is an appeal to Jesus himself to come as he has promised.

A SOLEMN WARNING

Verse 18 in the A.V. commences by saying: "For I testify." The Jerusalem Bible captures the sense of this by saying: "This is my solemn warning." This indicates that something regarded as a very serious matter by Jesus is going to be raised. The warning is given "to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." The same kind of warning occurs several times in the book of Deuteronomy (4:2. 12:32. 29:19-21). Also see Pr. 30:5-6. Gal. 1:8.

Coming as it does at the end of the Bible, the warning in Rev. 22 could be designed to teach that the Scriptures right up to the last chapter, are not to be tampered with. However, the warning is given at the end of the book of Revelation because it particularly applies to "the book of this prophecy."

In view of some of the mind boggling and awesome aspects involved in this book, it would be tempting for some to alter them or remove them

in order to accommodate their own little minds and faith. It is a true saying that: “If you believe what you want to in the Word of God, and reject what you want to, it is not the Word of God you believe, but yourself.”

Expositions and interpretations which invent doctrines and events could fit into the same category as adding to Scripture. Also as pointed out in a previous chapter: treating prophecies such as the city of God metaphorically instead of literally, lessening the meaning by treating it all in an abstract and metaphysical manner, reducing glorious solid reality into mere symbolism, also has the effect of taking away from the prophecy of the book. Could anyone think of a greater “taking away” than the removal of a 625 km (375 mile) square city?! The same applies to those who take the power of God away out of Rev. 11:3-6. The A.V. says that “if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away His part out of the book of life.” If this translation was correct, it would speak of a tit-for-tat arrangement: removal of words printed in the book of prophecy, results in removal of names printed in the book of life! It would also indicate that the warning is specifically for the saints, not the world, for only the names of the saints are printed in the book of life.

But the Greek text says “tree of life” not “book of life.” However, the same principle applies. Only those whose names are written in the book of life can have a share in the tree of life!

The punishments threatened on those who tamper with the revelation are very grave. Not only will they fail to enter the city of God, but they will be inflicted with all the plagues described in this book of prophecy. The fact that these plagues are poured out on the rebellious world (Rev. 16), indicates that God regards those who tamper with His Word as rebels. Instead of being caught up to meet the Lord, they will be left to suffer with the world!

Because of all this, we should be able to appreciate and seek to emulate the attitude of the late Dr. Joseph Seiss, who wrote the following in his book “The Apocalypse”: “With an honest and ever-prayerful heart, and with these solemn and awful warnings ever before my eyes, I have endeavoured to ascertain and indicate in these lectures what our gracious Lord and Master has been so particular to make known and defend. If I have read into this book anything which he has not put there, or left out of it anything which he has put there, with the profoundest sorrow would I recant, and willingly burn up the books in which such mischievous wickedness is contained. If I have in anything gone beyond the limits of

due subjection to what is written, or curtailed in any way the depth and measure of what Jesus by his angel has signified for the learning of the churches, I need not the condemnation of men to heap upon me the burden of consure which I deserve. If feebleness, or rashness, or overweening confidence in my own understanding has distorted anything, I can only deplore the fault, and pray God to send a man more competent to unfold to us the mighty truths which here stand written ... If I err, God forgive me! If I am right, God bless my feeble testimony! In either case, God speed His everlasting truth!”

FIFTH AFFIRMATION

For the fifth time in the book of Revelation, in 22:20, Jesus affirms that he is coming quickly: “He who testifies to these things says, surely I come quickly.” This is the 318th verse in the New Testament which declares the second coming of Christ! In view of the fact that there are over 1,500 direct and indirect references to the second coming in the Old Testament as well, it would be an understatement to say it is a major Bible doctrine. It is the “blessed hope” of the saints and the crown and culmination of the book of Revelation and every other prophetic revelation in the Word of God. The words: “Surely I come quickly” convey to us the certainty of it. There is no doubt in Jesus’ mind that he is coming, so there should be no doubt in ours. “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie. Though he tarry, wait for him, because he will surely come; he will not tarry” (Hab. 2:3. Heb. 10:37). “...A thousand years to us is only one day to God. The Lord is not slow concerning His promise ... the day of the Lord will come ...” (2 Pet. 3).

John’s response to Christ’s declaration that he is surely coming is: “Amen! come Lord Jesus,” and it corresponds to the Aramaic watchword: “maranatha” - “our Lord come” (1 Cor. 16:22). Such a response should be immediately forthcoming from those to whom the second coming of Christ is a blessed hope and who will “love his coming,” and therefore have an intense longing for it (2 Tim. 4:8).

A test can be made concerning ourselves and Christ’s return by asking ourselves honestly how willingly and readily we can make the same answer as John. Whatever makes our lips falter when we say it, to that extent we are not watching faithfully. Whatever thing makes it difficult for us to say “come Lord Jesus” is the thing that should not be in our life or be allowed to have influence over our life. Whatever ambition

or enterprise, no matter how good and legitimate it may be; if it makes us want the Lord to delay his return, then it is an idol and a snare and needs to be put away.

The question we need to seriously ask ourselves is: Do we really love the prospect of the Lord's second coming, or do we just love talking about it, studying the prophecies relating to it, proving it and looking for the signs which herald it? It would be fatally easy to fall into the same trap as the Jews who, in Old testament times, attached a great deal of importance to the coming of their Messiah, yet God declared through Amos: "Woe unto you who desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light" (5:18). And there is the challenge given through Malachi: "The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: Behold he shall come, says the Lord of hosts: but who may abide the day of his coming?" (3:1-2).

The last verse in the Old Testament (Mal. 4:6) ends with a curse (judgement), but the last verse in the New Testament (Rev. 22:21) ends with grace: "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen" i.e. may the undeserved kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all those who are truly holy. Amen!

