

# *The Overcomers*

*Sermons On Revelation*



*Milo Hadwin*

**FRONT COVER**

# **THE OVERCOMERS**

## **SERMONS ON REVELATION**

**Milo Hadwin**

Cover by Glenna Carlton

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## **PREFACE**

This book is a collection of twenty-two sermons on the book of Revelation by Milo Hadwin, preached in Wheeling, West Virginia, in the United States, from January through June of 1960. There is one sermon on each chapter of the book. The sermons were taped, transcribed, and, with a minimum of editing, are presented here as they were preached.

The book of Revelation provides an exciting and encouraging message for the people of God. It is hoped these sermons will convey that sense of excitement and provide a great encouragement for all who read them. The Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

**Milo Hadwin**

Milo Hadwin was one of the first missionaries from our brotherhood to the Caribbean Island of Jamaica, in the 1960's. I met him not long after he had returned to the United States. It was my privilege to spend some time with him in some meetings in Wheeling, West Virginia, in the early 1970's.

In my close association with him, I have come to highly respect him as a dedicated Christian gentleman, a splendid preacher of the gospel and a serious student of the word of God.

The book of Revelation, from which Brother Hadwin preached these sermons, has a central theme. To the beleaguered Christians near the end of the first century, John wrote the hopeful message of Christ. "... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). He did not promise that they would be exempt from suffering and hardships. He did give them assurance that in their faithful struggle against all oppositions, that one day they would be victorious and He would give them a crown of life. That is the story of this book, and it is as applicable to Christians of this century as it was to those in earlier times. You will enjoy and be profited by these lessons shared with us by this capable preacher of the word.

**Guy V. Caskey**

## INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

Author—God

Writer—John, the Apostle

Date—c. A.D. 95

Destination—The original recipients were the seven churches in Asia Minor \*Revelation 1:4). It was written for God's servants (1:1) and was designed to bless everyone who will read, hear, and keep the things written in it (1:3; 22:7). It will bring a curse to anyone who adds to or takes away from the words written in it (22:18-19).

Even the parts addressed specifically to a church in one place (2:1) were intended for everyone in all of the churches of Christ in every place (2:7). It is a revelation to God's servants (1:1) and there is no guarantee it will reveal anything to anyone else nor is there any assurance it will bless anyone except those who will keep its teaching (1:3).

Purpose—to reveal (Revelation 1:1) in such a way as to bless all of God's servants who read it (1:3). It is the only book in the Bible that pronounces a blessing on those who read, hear, and obey its words.

It is not written just for historians, theologians, scholars, and intellectuals. Yet, the difficulty of the book is frequently stressed to the discouragement of the would-be reader.

For example, a recent commentator wrote: "Because of its symbolism, its saturation with Old Testament passages and themes, the various schemes of interpretation that have developed concerning this book through the ages, and the profundity and vastness of the subjects that are here unveiled, I believe that the Apocalypse, above every book of the Bible, will yield its meaning only to those who give it prolonged and careful study" (Wilbur Smith, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1500).

Surely, the more one studies the more one is apt to learn, but even a beginner is bound to learn something and may even see

something the scholar has missed. A pertinent question here is "How much did God intend to reveal in His Revelation?" "Are we expecting to have more meaning than God intended for in it?"

To illustrate, the same writer quoted these words regarding Revelation from a man he said is generally acknowledged to have been the most gifted Biblical expositor in the first quarter of our century, "There is no book in the Bible which I have read so often, no book to which I have tried to give more patient and persistent attention. ... There is no book in the Bible which I turn more eagerly in hours of depression than to this, with all its mystery, all the details of which I do understand" (G. Campbell Morgan, *Westminster Bible Record*, Vol. 3 (1912), 105, 109).

Could it be this scholar was looking for meanings in the details which the details were never intended to convey? Might it not have been sufficient that through these details God was able to convey a message sufficiently powerful to overcome his depression? As another writer expressed it: "Whenever there is a world crisis, whenever the State exalts itself and demands an allegiance which Christians know they cannot pay without abandoning their very souls, whenever the church is threatened by destruction, and faith is dim and hearts are cold, the Revelation will admonish, and exhort, uplift, and encourage all who heed its message" (Martin Kiddle in *Moffatt Commentary*, p. xlix). How can we know what Revelation means? How do we interpret the Bible? How can we interpret any literature?

1. Allow it to explain itself.
2. Interpret the part in light of the whole. (Recognize unity of the Bible. Part must harmonize with the whole.)
3. Consider historical background, purpose (do not make it say more than it intends to say) and style of writing (prose and poetry are interpreted differently).
4. Interpret the complex by the simple, the confusing by the clear, the ambiguous by the unambiguous. Do not change the clear meaning of a simple passage to fit one possible meaning of a difficult passage.

What more should we consider in interpreting Revelation specifically?

#### **IV**

## APPROACH IT WITH HUMILITY

One of the most respected Bible scholars in the world today said very simply in the preface to his commentary on Revelation: "Some of the problems of this book are enormously difficult and I certainly have not the capacity to solve them" (Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 13). That does not mean that we can understand nothing nor be certain about anything. It is to approach Revelation with the kind of attitude Peter had toward some of Paul's writings (II Peter 3:15-18).

## RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS HIGHLY SYMBOLIC

This does not mean that we enter a world of unreality. As J.B. Phillips, who produced a popular translation of the New Testament, said, "He is carried not into some never never land of fancy, but into the Ever-ever land of God's eternal Values and Judgments" (J.B. Phillips, *The Book of Revelation*, 1960, p. 9 as quoted by Morris, op. cit., p. 15).

Or, as C.S. Lewis said in his book, *Mere Christianity*, "There is no need to be worried about facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of "Heaven" ridiculous by saying they do not want 'to spend eternity playing harps.' The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them.

"All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc.) is, of course, a merely symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. Musical instruments are mentioned because for many people (not all) music is the thing known in the present life which most strongly suggests ecstasy and infinity. Crowns are mentioned to suggest the timelessness of Heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, He meant that we were to lay eggs" (p. 121).

That, in Revelation, we are dealing with some symbolic language can be seen from a few sample passages (3:18; 6:13; 8:10; 12:3-4). The rich imagery of Revelation introduces us to



a whole menagerie of animals: horses, lions, leopards, bears, lambs, calves, locusts, scorpions, eagles, vultures, fish, and frogs. Revelation comes to us in living color with white symbolizing purity, black—distress, red—death (blood), purple—royalty and luxurious ease, and pale yellow—expiring life and the kingdom of the dead. Numbers are important symbols in Revelation. The number seven leads the way with 54 occurrences in Revelation. It symbolizes completeness, fullness, or perfection. There and a half is a broken number that appears in various forms, 42 months, 1260 days, “a time and times, and half a time,” symbolizing distress or tribulation.

Ten also is a symbol of completeness or perfection (ten commandments, the Holy of Holies was a cube, each side being of ten cubits—symbolic of heaven, according to Hebrews 9:3 and 24). Twelve is symbolic of God’s people, the church or the kingdom. So we have twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twice twelve being the number of elders representing the redeemed church (Revelation 4:4), the new Jerusalem has twelve gates and the walls of the city have twelve foundations—all of this associated with God’s people. Multiples of these numbers are common as the cube of 10 which is  $10 \times 10 \times 10$  is 1000.

Certainly one could turn Revelation into a bizarre mathematical nightmare with numerological games, but it is well to be aware of the possible symbolism that is often suggested and sometimes demanded by the context. We must not force into a symbol a meaning it does not naturally bear, or Revelation will become merely a playground for our own wild fantasies.

### **RECOGNIZE THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT**

Revelation was not a work produced in some sublime isolation, but it breathes the atmosphere of the whole Bible of which it is the climax. It has been concluded by the research of two Bible scholars, Wescott and Hort, that of the 404 verses in Revelation, 265 contain lines embracing approximately 550 references to Old Testament passages. A thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testaments will surely enrich one’s study and understanding of Revelation. Similarities to the language and symbolism of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 and other prophecies and portions of scripture are found in abundance.

While these comparisons can be helpful they can also cause one to seriously distort the message and meaning of Revelation if the rest of the Bible is used as a kind of dictionary for assigning meaning to symbols. This assumes that Revelation is a kind of cryptogram or code message to be deciphered by treasure hunting through the entire Bible for hints and meanings. It is natural that Revelation would express itself in the familiar phrases of the rest of scripture since it is the summing up of God's purpose in the history of His people.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that a symbol used in one part of scripture will have the same meaning as the same symbol used in another place (consider the serpents in Eden and the wilderness; also, the cross, once a symbol of shame, became the symbol of salvation. This mistake can be seen in some attempts to apply the symbolism of Revelation to the glorified kingdom in its perfected state, which is yet to come.

### **NOT A BOOK TO TITILLATE OR GRATIFY**

We need to recognize that it is not a book written to titillate or to gratify the curiosity of men who are anxious to tear aside the veil from the future (see Matthew 24:35, 42, 44). Revelation was never intended to be a celestial timetable of what is to come. It becomes tiring to listen to the frantic ravings of those who see in Bible prophecies forecasts of imminent disasters.

The two most prominent religious groups noted for such activity proved themselves false prophets once again in 1975 for those who do not already know it. One group's magazine of October 9, 1966, specifically declared that the seventh millennium begin in Autumn, 1975. It read: "All the many, many parts of the great sign of the 'last days' are here, together with verifying Bible chronology ...? (*Awake*).

The other religious group's leader published a book in 1957 called *1975 in Prophecy*. Here is what it said: "While modern science and industry strive to prepare for us a push-button leisure-luxury-world by 1975, United States Assistant Weather chief, I.R. Tarrahill, warns us unofficially to really fear 'the big drought of 1975.'" But the indications of prophecy are that this drought will be even more devastating than he foresees, and that it will stroke sooner than 1975—probably between 1965

and 1972! Here is exactly how catastrophic it will be: *One-Third Of Our Entire Population will Die* in the famine and disease epidemic" (p. 12)!

It seems as if that writer's favorite adjectives were amazing, astounding, incredible, and fantastic! On page 14 of the same work, he declared that another one-third would be killed by hydrogen bombs, and the remaining one-third would be sold into slavery! Jeremiah had the best comment on that (14:14).

(Herbert W. Armstrong was the author of aforesaid document. Refer also to Kirban's *I Predict*.)

While Revelation was not designed to tear back the curtain on some chronological count-down to Jesus' return, it does "draw veils aside and open up a vista of God's actions and His ways, for it proclaims the kingdom of God, which is here and now, and yet is still to come in its fullness, bringing with it the overthrow of all that is against Him" (W.C. van Unnik, *The New Testament*, 1964, p. 161 as quoted by Morris p. 20).

The methods by which commentators have tried to interpret Revelation tend to fall into four categories:

### **PRETERIST**

According to this view, all or nearly all of the book had its fulfillment in the first century or, at most, the first 300 years of the history of the church. Supposedly, the book deals primarily with the persecution inflicted on Christianity by the Roman government.

For example, J.W. Roberts maintained in his commentary, that Revelation 6:1—16:21 predicts the history of the church from John's time until the conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Toleration (A.D. 311).

The three and a half years of the rule of the beast and the harlot represent this "little season" of Roman dominance. The binding of Satan represents the downfall of the persecuting power in which the cause of the saints (6:9-11) is "resurrected" (the first resurrection) and the 1000 years is the longer period of the triumph of the Biblical faith.

## **CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL OR CHRONOLOGICAL SCHOOL**

This view says Revelation is a prophetic history of the church from the first century to the end of time. This view attempts to match up significant and historical events with the various symbols in Revelation. The book is seen as one continuous series of historical events.

## **FUTURIST**

This interpretation says most of Revelation is yet to be fulfilled. It usually says chapter 4–22 have not yet been fulfilled. Chapters 14–19 are supposed to describe events in a three and a half year period immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. This is supposed to be followed by a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

## **PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY**

Philosophy of history is sometimes called Spiritual, Symbolic, Idealist, or Poetic. This view says the book is not dealing with historical events at all. It is simply a symbolic representation of principles, ideas, and spiritual truths. Is the task of interpreting Revelation hopeless? Not if it is a revelation. Surely the proper way to interpret Revelation is to read the book and, insofar as possible, allow it to explain itself. Interpret it in harmony with the rest of scripture. When this is done, what impressions are made on the mind?

Here are some impressions that are helpful in seeing how the book is structured. Four groups of "sevens" cover more than half the book, suggesting a tentative and incomplete outline as a starting point:

Chapter 1–3 Seven Lampstands  
4–7 Seven Seals  
8–11 Seven Trumpets  
12–14  
15–16 Seven Bowls  
17–22

A comparison of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls suggest that, in a sense, they are dealing with the same things.

Notice:

- 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet 8:7 and bowl 16:2 affect the earth
- 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet 8:8 and bowl 16:3 affect the sea
- 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet 8:10 and bowl 16:4 affect the rivers
- 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet 8:12 and bowl 16:8 affect the sun
- 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet 9:1-11 and bowl 16:10-11 affect the pit of the abyss where the throne of the beast is (see 13:11)
- 6<sup>th</sup> trump 9:14 and bowl 16:12 pertain to the Euphrates river
- 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet 11:15, 19 and bowl 16:17-21 produce lightning, voices, thunders, earthquakes, and great hail

A kind of repetition as seen in the case of the trumpets and bowls is characteristic of the whole book. The end of time, especially the coming of Christ to final judgment, seems to be described at various intervals throughout the book (6:12-17 with 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 14:14-20; 16:13-21; 19:11-21, and 20:11-15) Four of these passages occur at the ends of the four central divisions of the tentative outline suggested above. This begins to indicate that Revelation does not present a continuous sequence of events, but may contain sections which each cover somewhat the same material.

This is emphasized by the fact that in the last three passages mentioned, each include the identical expression in the Greek text, "the battle" (16:14; 19:19,20:8). This is surely not referring to three different battles, but the same battle as described in three different places.

"The battle" in 19:19 suggests that one section closes with the end of chapter 19 just as previous sections had closed with God's final judgment. This enable us to see a completed outline of the book of Revelation while further analysis will confirm the way in which the book naturally divides itself.

- Chapter 1—3 Seven Lampstands (The church in the world)
- 4—7 Seven Seals (Church suffering trials)
- 8—11 Seven Trumpets (Church protected and avenged)
- 12—14 Christ opposed by dragon and helpers
- 15—16 Seven Bowls (Final Wrath on Impenitent)
- 17—19 Fall of Babylon and the Beasts
- 20—22 Dragon's Doom and Christ's Victory

The structure of the book, as indicated by this author and the content of each section in comparison with the other sections, suggests that each section is a look at the entire church age from the first to the second coming of Christ—each with a different emphasis. Each section seems to be calling attention to the way God is dealing with the church and the world during this age.

The major symbols, such as the seals, trumpets, and bowls do not have reference to some single identifiable historical event at one certain fixed time and place. Rather, the things described are “bigger-than-life” colossal events that affect a third, a fourth, the whole earth. They affect mankind (Revelation 9:20) in all generations (Revelation 16:6). Thus, we are seeing what is continually happening, and therefore we are able to see the way in which Satan conducts his affairs and the way in which God is overruling in the affairs of men. Here we see the ever operative principles affecting our world. For example, the symbolism of Revelation 13:1-10 is noted in Daniel 7:2-8. The same animals are mentioned (lion, bear, leopard, and on unspecified) which, in Daniel, represent four successive kingdoms, no kings (Daniel 7:23). In Revelation, the four animals are combined into one. What better way could one represent government in general throughout the entire age? Instead, many interpreters begin dissecting the beast with no scriptural support for their procedure.

The sections of Revelation appear to be somewhat parallel but with the emphasis progressing from section to section toward the events that bring this age to a climax. For example, chapters 1–3 discuss Christ in the midst of the Lampstands which represent the church. While chapters 2 and 3 are letters addressed to seven specific churches in Asia Minor, they are also designed to be speaking to the churches in general and are generally representative of the problems and glories of the church in every period of time.

While a letter is addressed to one church (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), the instruction in each case is to “hear what the spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The picture of Christ in the midst of the church reminds one of His statement in Matthew 18:20: “... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

While the first three chapters are considering the church in general throughout the whole age, it is focused particularly on the churches of that time.

The second section calls our attention to the crucified Christ, with the slain lamb (Revelation 5:5-6) before the seals are opened, but the scenes revealed by the opened seals carry us forward to the persecuted church, even to the final judgment (Revelation 11:15-18).

The third section is more concerned with the end of the age. However, there is a major dividing line in the middle of the book, at which point in chapter 12, we are carried back to the beginning again with the birth, death, ascension, and coronation of Christ. And then we are carried ahead to see the behind the scenes working of Satan trying to destroy God's people.

There is, then, an intensification of the action as we progress through the next sections. While we see the nature of the conflict between God and Satan throughout the age of the church, we move forward in emphasis to the wrath of God on the impenitent in the fifth section. This section describes the destruction of Babylon and the beasts. Then, in the sixth section, we see the destruction of Satan, death, and Hades. And, in the last section, we have an extended look at the world which is to come.

This interpretation of Revelation seems to be the one the Bible itself is suggesting and which harmonizes most readily with the rest of scripture. It has been called "progressive parallelism" by William Hendricksen, who, in his book of Revelation called *More Than Conquerors*, elaborates extensively on what we have only briefly sketched here.

### **SYNOPSIS OF REVELATION**

In chapters 1—3, we see the church as the light of the world—a light shining brightly in some places at some times and sometimes barely flickering, but nevertheless, a light. But, light and darkness cannot co-exist. And so, the church will inevitably face persecution. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). But, let us see things in their proper perspective.

First, then, we must see Jesus. And see Him, we do, in chapters 4 and 5. He is the head of the church; the King on the throne who controls the destiny of history. Knowing who is ultimately controlling our world, the Lamb who was slain to show His love and draw us to Him, we are ready to face the persecution which comes with chapter 6.

Here we find that those who die in the Lord go to be in His presence. This reassurance provides us with courage to view the awesome judgment finally to be inflicted on the world.

Even then, Church Triumphant is seen rejoicing before the throne of God. But, will the persecuted be avenged? Yes! The seals of persecution give rise to the trumpets of judgment. In Revelation 8:1-5, God is seen constantly sending His judgment in response to the prayers of His people. Here we are introduced to the warning judgment of God designed to cause men to repent and persecutors to relent. But, for the most part, it does not work (Revelation 9:21).

Consequently, we see in chapters 10 and 11 the gospel-proclaiming, the cross-bearing church being afflicted but emerging victorious. But, the book does not end here. Two questions cry out for answers: Why is the church being so vigorously persecuted? And what will be the ultimate fate of the impenitent? So far, we have seen the surface and the conflict on the earth. Now, let us see what is behind it all. Behind the struggle on earth between the church and the world is the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan!

In chapter 12, we see the dragon, Satan, trying to destroy the Man-Child, Christ. Failing in this, he directs his persecution against Christ's people, the church.

In chapters 13-14, we see Satan employing the beast out of the sea (representing anti-Christian persecution concentrated in government) and the beast out of the earth (representing anti-Christian religion) and the great harlot, Babylon (representing anti-Christian seduction of the world) trying to destroy the church.

But Satan fails and in chapter 14 we see the Lamb standing victoriously on Mount Zion initiating the harvest of God's final



judgment. And what is the fate of those who being warned by the trumpets of judgment remain impenitent? (These, incidentally, are those who have the mark of the beast—see Revelation 16:2 and 16:9-11)

In chapters 15 and 16 we see the bowls of God's wrath poured out on them. But, what of the great harlot, Babylon, and the two beasts? in chapters 17 and 18, we see Babylon described and destroyed. In chapter 19, we see the beasts cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. In chapter 20, the devil, death, and Hades are all cast into the lake of fire.

In chapters 21 and 22, the great Revelation closes with the vision of the new heaven and earth where the saints are seen reigning with God and the Lamb forever and ever.

# **THE SUPER DRAMA OF REVELATION**

## **REVELATION 1**

We are beginning a study of the book of Revelation, and I hope I can lift you into the super drama that is the book of Revelation. We are going to be looking beyond the shallow superficiality of this life into the great realities that underlie our existence. We are going to be looking at those great causes that produce the problems that have troubled our world since man was created. We are coming to the Revelation of John and you need to read, by way of introduction, the first chapter.

The Revelation came to John in the last decade of the first century during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian. It was a trying time for Christians. They were facing opposition from the imperial power of Rome, persecution and the effort to make them bow their knees to Caesar. Yet they had committed their lives unreservedly to the Lord Jesus Christ and now they had to make the decision as to whether they would succumb to the power and pressure of Rome or hold true to the one who said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). To whom would allegiance be given? That was the issue then; that is the issue today.

Perhaps the forces that challenge us today are not the forces of political pressure and perhaps not of physical persecution; but yet there is before us the power of a seductive world order, the seduction of the world that would lead us away from a firm commitment and allegiance to Jesus Christ. We, too, must daily face that challenge of allegiance, whether it be to Caesar or to Christ, whether it be to Satan or to God.

Those people were confronted with a tremendous burden. They were a people who could easily have become depressed and discouraged. They were a people who were seeing those whom they loved being put to death and, perhaps, their faith was on the verge of weakening. Not only for that day did the book of Revelation come as a tremendous inspiration but for each of us, in our time, it can do the same thing.

One commentator on Revelation said, "Whenever there is a world crisis, whenever the state exalts itself and demands an allegiance which Christians know they cannot pay without

abandoning their very souls, whenever the church is threatened by destruction, and faith is dim and hearts are cold, then the Revelation will admonish and exhort, uplift and encourage all who heed its message”

One of the most effective expositors of the Bible in the early part of this century said of the book of Revelation: “There is no book in the Bible which I have read so often, no book to which I have tried to give more patient and persistent attention. ... There is no book in the Bible to which I turn more eagerly in hours of depression than to this, with all its mystery. ...”

The book does have some mystery. But, it is, in fact, a revelation. God is trying to say something to us. What He is trying to say above all else is that the single great message and theme of the book is that God’s people will be victorious and that things are not as they seem. It may seem to us as though Satan is in control of our world. It may seem to us that God has hidden Himself from the problems and pressures of our time and there is no one to whom we can turn.

Yet Revelation 17:14 describes graphically and symbolically the message of the book: “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” God will be victorious! The Lamb that was slain has become King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus reigns and with Him His people who are called and chosen and faithful shall reign and have dominion with Him. That is the message and theme of the book. But let us look at it as we enter the first chapter of Revelation.

After the opening words, we read: “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:4-5).

We are introduced immediately to God, the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit and it is from them that this Revelation comes. We are introduced to Jesus Christ in verse 5 who is

presented as prophet. He is a prophet, priest, and king to a discouraged people. It would be an encouragement to know they have paid their allegiance to the One who is really in charge. Jesus Christ is spoken of as the faithful witness in his capacity as prophet, and his statements are true. In John 8:14, Jesus said, "... my witness is true. ..."

In a world of conflicting and uncertain voices, there is one Voice we can listen to and know with certainty that we are hearing reality expressed; that is the way things really are. Jesus is a faithful witness. He alone can be depended on to tell you the truth. Satan would deceive us and would blind us to the realities of life. But God is trying to say to us that through Jesus Christ there is a clear vision of what is true and what is to come and what our destiny is to be.

Jesus is presented not only as a prophet, but as a priest. He is referred to as the firstborn from the dead. That does not mean that He is the first person who was ever raised from the dead because the term "firstborn" is primarily a title of preeminence.

Jesus, among all those who have risen from the dead, is pre-eminent. That is the thought that is expressed in Colossians 1:18 where the apostle Paul says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." And Jesus Christ has the preeminence as the first born from the dead in the realm of priesthood.

In Hebrews 2:14 to 3:1, the writer said: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus."

Jesus Christ suffered and died that he might enable us to realize that He was been tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. He is one who can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities. He understands us. He has been in the flesh. He has been tempted and tried and tormented and He knows out anguish. He knows our needs, and Jesus is the one who truly can serve as our high priest.

Jesus is not only presented to a troubled people as a prophet and as a priest, but He is presented as King. And this passage in Revelation 1:5 says not only that He is the faithful witness and the firstborn from the dead, but He is ruler of the kings of the earth. That is an amazing statement and it violates the most popular interpretation of Revelation that is heard in our times. Jesus Christ is not one who one day is going to return to the earth and set up a kingdom and reign here for a thousand years. We are informed by the Revelation of Almighty God that Jesus Christ today, now, is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He does not have to wait until some future date to become the ruler. God is in charge and He has placed Jesus Christ in charge.

In Jesus, God fulfilled His promise spoken in Psalm 89:27: "Also I will make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth." Jesus rules now and He reigns now. In I Peter 3:22, Peter speaks of Jesus Christ as the one "who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."

The world is subject to Christ. We are not under the ultimate dominion of the leaders of our nation. We are under the authority and dominion and power of the Almighty God through His son, Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1:20-21, the apostle Paul speaks of the mighty power of God "which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Jesus has already been put in dominion and He is far above all rule and authority. That is true now, and that is the reason why in Acts 2:29-35, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, the apostle Peter said, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." ' " Jesus Christ now reigns at the right hand of God and He will continue to reign until every enemy is put under His feet.

In I Corinthians 15:24-27, Paul said: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted." God has already done it. Jesus reigns and rules now! We do not need to wait until some future time.

Some people say, "Well, if Jesus is reigning and ruling in the nations of men, why is it there is so much trouble in the world? It is because not all men have submitted to the reign of Jesus. The same was true in the Old Testament. God was reigning in the kingdom of men, but there were those that failed to realize it, and failed to submit themselves to the reign of Almighty God. But the fact continued to be that God was in charge.

King Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful ruler the world had ever known to his time. But Daniel 4:28-37 says, "All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The King spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?' While the word was still on the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from you! And they shall

drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.' That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'

"At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose words are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down."

Nebuchadnezzar learned that God rules in the kingdom of men and he said, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me" (Daniel 4:34). I am convinced that we have got to take our eyes off the political intrigue and conflict and chaos of our world and lift our eyes to heaven to see that God rules and reigns in the kingdoms of men and that He is the one who shall bring His people triumphant to the end. We are not people who are slaves and servants to the world powers of this age. God has placed Jesus Christ on the throne.

Satan himself did not quite understand the picture. In Matthew 4:8-10, Satan came to Jesus in the wilderness to tempt Him. It reads: "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." ' "

And Jesus made himself subject to the Father and consequently when He broke the bonds of death and rose to life again, He said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus Christ had gained the victory apart from the temptations of Satan. By following the word of God He came to be the one who had all authority in heaven and on earth.

But God's power is not to make us cower. John could only burst into praise when he heard and expressed the truth of Jesus Christ as prophet and priest and king and he could only say: "...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6).

"To Him that loved us"—He who rules the world loves us! He loosed us from our sins. He washed us from our sins. We are told in I Corinthians 6:11 about some who had been bound by sin and who had found themselves slaves of sinful ways. Paul said, "And such were some of you. but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Paul tells us that Jesus Christ the one who cleanse us of all sins. Paul himself was asked by Ananias "...why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). That washing occurred in the blood of the lamb. In Hebrews 10:22, the writer said, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

We know our hearts are sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ. The brethren are told that they had "...boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus .... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22). Jesus shed His blood in order to cleanse use from our sins. He loved us. Jesus loosed us from our sins but He made us also to be a kingdom. Back in the Old Testament in Exodus 19:5-6, as the people of Israel approached Sinai there was a promise that God made to the people who



were about to enter into a covenant relationship to Him. God said: "Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." He made them a kingdom of priests and, when God established a new covenant through Jesus Christ with all mankind, He did it that He might establish a kingdom of priests. He made us to be a kingdom and we enter that kingdom now in this life.

In John 3:5, Jesus said: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." But you can enter the kingdom if you are born again, born into the kingdom.

He not only made us a kingdom, He made us to be priests. In I Peter 2:9-10, Peter expresses the grandeur of the whole thing when he says: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." He who rules in the affairs of men in the kingdoms of men loosed us from our sins and made us to be a kingdom and priest. Priests in the Old Testament were ones who stood between the people and God. But there is no one standing between us and God now. He has elevated us to the position of priesthood so that we now offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Him, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service.

You see, we are now able to have immediate access to God because He loves us. The King of the universe is one that you may address at night as you go to bed, but call Him not, "the imperial majesty of the universe," but, "my Father," because He loves you and because the King of the ages is your Father in heaven. In Revelation 5:9-10, we see a vision of heaven itself: "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.'"

We now reign upon the earth as a kingdom and priests. You say, "I don't understand." It is because we have been so caught up in the world's conception of power and authority and sovereignty that we do not understand what happens to the spirit. When we allow our lives to come under the dominion of God, whether we are faced with fire or persecution or nakedness or famine or sword, we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us. In Him is the power to reign, the power to transcend earthly power and to actually enjoy that dominion with God Himself where we reign with Him.

We are not slaves and servants in this earth to the powers of this world. But, rather, we are sons of God. That is what Paul is trying to tell us in Galatians 4:3-7 when he says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are not long a slave but a son, and if a son, than an heir of God through Christ."

You are not slaves to this world. You are sons of God and you are heirs of what He has provided for you of His promises and His blessings. Go back to the Old Testament in Daniel 7:13-14, and there is a prophecy concerning Jesus Christ. Listen to the words: "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven!' He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."

It was when Jesus, one like the Son of Man, came to the ancient of days, to the Father, that He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, and His kingdom will last forever. When Jesus ascended into heaven and began to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, He established the kingdom, a kingdom that will never be shaken; a kingdom in which you can be a participant and where you can reign.

One like a Son of Man is seen in Revelation once again. This time as He is walking around the candlesticks or the lamp stands. In Revelation 1:12-13, John said, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden Lampstands, and in the midst of the seven Lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band."

In verse 20, we are told that the candlesticks or the Lampstands represent the churches. And so we see in Revelation chapter 1, Jesus walking among the churches. The One like the Son of Man, who now reigns at the right hand of God, has condescended to walk with His people in His church. You also can walk hand in hand with the One who is the Savior of mankind, the One who is the creator of the universe, the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords and rules in the kingdoms of men. He is the One who is able to take you through life and lead you finally to an eternity with God.

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said, "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." As long as the church continues in the world, Jesus continues to walk among His people, the church. We invite you to allow yourself to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Allow the cleansing blood of Jesus to come and cleanse your conscience so that you might be born again of water and the Spirit. Have your body washed with pure water and your heart sprinkled from an evil conscience so that Jesus might purchase you from among men. Then you will be one of His people. His own possession that you might reign with Him on earth and finally be granted inheritance into the everlasting kingdom.

## **THE OVERCOMERS**

### **REVELATION 2**

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, He overcame death and made it possible for us to become overcomers. As we come to the second chapter of Revelation, read about how you also can become overcomers.

In Revelation chapter 2, Jesus Christ is addressing a group of churches. These were very real churches that existed in some of the leading cities of Asia Minor in the first century. I believe that in the letters that are addressed to these churches, we can see lessons applicable to the churches today and to us as individuals. Look at some of the lessons that will be found in the letters to the churches of Asia Minor. Read Revelation chapter 2 as we look into some thoughts on this chapter.

In chapter 2 and 3 of Revelation, there are letters written to seven different churches. I believe it is significant that there are seven churches selected. There were more churches that that in Asia Minor. Through the New Testament, we have references to other churches in Asia that are not included here, but could well have been. But, I believe that John intentionally chose seven churches and Jesus reveals to us His words to seven churches because the number seven itself is significant. It is used fifty-four times in the book of Revelation. It is a symbol of completeness. I believe that we are seeing here an evidence of Jesus' attempt to convey to us the idea that these words are for all the churches at all times.

The message was addressed to specific problems that existed in each of these seven churches then, but I believe they are typical of the kinds of problems that are to be found in churches throughout the ages.

Certainly, while these letters were addressed to churches in the first century in one part of the world, the meaning is clearly for all of us, because at the conclusion of each of these letters, it is said, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:17). So, if you have an ear, then you are to hear this! Jesus wants you to get the message that is being spoken to these churches for it is also a message being spoken to us today.

As we look at these churches one thing we notice immediately is that there is no particular ecclesiastical hierarchy indicated in these letters to these churches. They each stand alone. They are autonomous churches. There is no evidence of any kind of organization linking them together. The thing that ties these churches together is submission to the spirit of God, not some human hierarchy.

The Spirit who regulated each of them regulated all of them. I believe it is also significant that which there are those today who say that we out to hear the church, that is not what Revelation says to us. It is saying, "Let *us* hear what the Spirit says to the church."

The church has no authority to make laws. The church is a body that receives the message of the Spirit of God, a message that has long ago been revealed, and it is our responsibility as a church today to hear the message of the Spirit. If ever church on the face of this earth would permit itself to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, we would all be doing the same things; we would be speaking the same things, and practicing the same things. Religious division would not exist. We are to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Was we look now at these churches, we do not have the time to look at every detail about all that was said to each of them. However, we want to look at certain teachings that seem to be presented as of special importance. I believe these can be seen in certain expressions that are given by the Lord to each one of these seven churches. The first of these is, "I know." Seven times to the seven churches Jesus said, "I know," "I know your works" (2:2). "I know your tribulations" (2:9). "I know where you dwell" (2:13). Jesus was saying to them, "I know all about you. You are my people. I know you like I know the palm of my hand. I am well aware of your circumstances," and that should be reassuring to all of us that Jesus knows and Jesus cares. In some cases, as we see these expressions of "I Know," Jesus is saying, "know the things you are doing that you should not be doing." That may be a bit scary, but He also says, "I know your patience. I know your love. I know your works." He knows all about us. He understands. He knows our tribulations. He knows where we are. He said, "I know where you dwell." "I know where you are." Jesus knows; He understands.

The second expression that is used to every one of these churches is, "He that overcomes." There are several things he says about those who overcome. He says, for example, "To him that overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (2:7). "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (2:11). "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it" (2:17). "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star" (2:26-28).

Even if we do not understand for sure what some of these details mean, the basic picture is clear. Jesus is saying to those that overcome, "I shall give My reward. I shall extend My blessings to them that overcome." Those who overcome are explained to us in Revelation 2:26 as those that keep His word to the end. That is what overcoming means. Those people who keep the commandments of Jesus are overcomers; the ones who have the victory. So, we need to give attention to what Jesus teaches and what He commands because those who keep these things to the end are the ones who overcome, and over those, Jesus says, "The second death will have no power." And we need not be uncertain about what He means there because later on near the end of Revelation. He reveals to us that the second death means the lake of fire and brimstone. In other words, the second death is hell and those who overcome will never experience hell.

Those who overcome will escape the second death which is separation from God. We are all going to experience the first death unless Jesus should come first. We will all experience that separation of body and soul that we think of as death; but those who overcome will not experience that second separation, which is the separation from God Himself.

Those who overcome will be given the hidden manna. I believe that refers to Jesus Christ Himself because in John 6:35, Jesus speaks of Himself as the bread of life, comparing Himself to the manna which was given to the people of Israel as they

wandered in the wilderness. Here Jesus is saying, "He is the hidden manna." He is hidden from the world because the world does not accept Him, but He is not hidden from those who do accept Him. Jesus, in essence, is saying, "If you partake of Me then you shall never hunger."

Jesus also said, "I will give him a white stone." This is for the overcomers, too, and on the stone is a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. I believe Jesus is saying the same thing as He is when He speaks of giving the hidden manna. Give a white stone is saying in another way, "I am giving to you Myself," because on the stone a new name is written and in the Bible when you have that expression the new name is referring to Jesus.

The expression, "which no one knows but he that receives it," is to say again that the world does not know Jesus. Jesus said the world does not know Me, but My sheep hear My voice. They Know Me, and those who overcome the world are the ones who have Jesus in their lives. Then, in I John 5:4-5, John said, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is she who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" These are the overcomers; those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who keep His word. Jesus said to those who were His in John 14 through 16 when He was speaking to His disciples, "I come to you." Jesus comes to those who are His people with comfort, with strength that they need. He is the one who provides for our well-being.

Jesus also says to the one who overcomes, "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26). I would like you to look more carefully at this scripture. Jesus said, "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power [authority] over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessel shall be broken to pieces'—as I also have received from My Father: and I will give him the mornings star."

We have pointed out that those who are God's people rule and reign with Him now. I think one of the most tragic conceptions that has dominated the thinking of modern religion is the idea

that someday Jesus is going to come back to earth and set up a throne over in Jerusalem and He is going to reign over the nations here on earth for a thousand years and we are going to be over there reigning with Him. I believe that is just as serious a misconception of what Revelation is talking about as was the Jew's conception of the Messiah who came the first time.

The Jews, taking the Old Testament prophecies in the same light that many modern religionist take the prophecies of Revelation, assumed that Jesus, when He came the first time, was going to set up a throne in Jerusalem and that He was going to reign literally as a political leader among the nations of the earth and literally drive out the Roman occupation armies around Palestine.

It is the same misunderstanding of the nature of prophecy that has caused many today to make the mistake the Jews made and think Jesus is going to come back to earth and set up some kind of a political empire. That is not the case at all. The fact is that Jesus is already reigning in His kingdom, and those prophecies that are dealing with the kingdom are prophecies dealing with God's church or, ultimately, heaven itself, the eternal kingdom. In Revelation 1, Jesus is spoken of as the ruler (present tense) of the kings of the earth. Revelation 1:5-6 says, "...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

We are a kingdom of kings. We are a royal priesthood. We reign right now. In Romans 5, we read that God's people are right now involved in a reign here on earth. It is already happening. We share in the reign of Jesus Christ. In Romans 5:17, Paul said, "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

We reign now, in life, through Jesus Christ. We share in His reign and I think that is exactly what Jesus was saying in Revelation 2:26-27), when He said to the one who overcomes: "to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces'—as I also have received from My Father." Jesus said,



"I also have received (past tense) from My Father." In other words, "I have already received authority and dominion over the nations and to him that overcomes I shall give the same authority and he shall reign with Me here on this earth.

You say, " I do not see myself as a king reigning over some country here on earth—where is my kingdom?" Where is it? You are reigning over your own spirit, are you not? What is more important, the you show be able to rule your own spirit or that you should be able to rule over some other country. You think about it. In the Old Testament there is a beautiful proverb that ought to put things in better prospective for us. Proverbs 16:32 says: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

There are too many carnal-minded people who, when they think of reigning and ruling, think of some kind of a political empire and some power over other people. God warns you to have power over your own passions. He wants you to learn to control your life. He wants you to be able to overcome those bad habits and the man who is able to rule his spirit is greater, the scripture says, than he that rules a city. And surely he is greater than one who rules a whole nation. If we have the mind of Christ and if we have any spiritual discernment at all, we ought to be able to see that what Jesus is trying to create is a people for His own possession, a people who are a holy nation, a royal priesthood. He wants a holy people. He does not necessarily want people with political power.

H wants you to learn to control and to rule and reign in your own life, in your own heart, and you can do that through His power. I believe what we are seeing is that we do reign in this life. but if we see the battle of Revelation and we start thinking about one country going to war against some other country, we have missed what Revelation is all about.

If we are so materially-minded and carnally-minded that we can only think in terms of world politics, then we have missed what Jesus came to this world to do. He wants to create a people who are holy and righteous and that is what He is trying to accomplish in this world. When we read of the battles in Revelation we are not seeing prophecies about what is going to happen to Israel and Egypt and Lebanon and Syria or any

other country. Nor are we to watch the newspapers against the background of Revelation to see the significance of the movement of troops into some nation.

That is not what Revelation is talking about. It is talking about something definitely more profound and eternal than that. It is talking about the souls of men. It is talking about the conflict between God and Satan, between goodness and evil. It is talking the battle for the minds of men. It is talking about the battle where Satan is overcoming so many people, causing them to live lives of slavery to sin. But God wants us not to be slaves. He want us to be kings. He wants us to be able to rule our passions, to rule our lives, to have dominion over ourselves. He wants to give to us the power to overcome the world and you do not overcome the world by going out with a sword and defeating some great impressive power. You overcome the world by being able to look Satan in the eye and say, "I will not do what you want me to do because Jesus is my Lord." That is the man who is the overcomer.

Remember, Jesus said when He came out of the grave. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). What was the authority to be used for? Was ti to drive out the Romans? Or was it in some future age, two thousand years later, to drive some other country out of some place? That is not what His authority and power in heaven and on earth is for. It is to take men and to make them disciples and so, on the basis of His authority as King of kings and Lord of lords, He says to His people, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." You are going to rule them with a rod of iron. How? By allowing Jesus to control and dominate the lives of the people; by letting Him be the Lord; by letting Him be the Master of their lives; by not letting Satan have dominion any more. So you go and "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

These are the overcomers. These are the ones who shall have a part in the tree of life in the paradise of God. Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus, "... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Jesus already

Reigns. Hebrews 1:13 says, "But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?' " Jesus is reigning while He is sitting on the throne. His sitting on the throne is co-extensive with His reign over His enemies, but so it is with the Christian.

Look now and compare that with Ephesians 2:4-6. I want you to see the part the Christian has in all of this. Paul said, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We sit with Christ in the heavenly places. That is present tense. He has done that for us. He said that we reign with Him here on earth, and so as we sit with Him on the throne, we too share in His reign "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7). That all fits in with Revelation 5:9-10, where in heaven itself: "... they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.' "

In Ephesians 1:19-23, Paul speaks of what God says about Jesus, "... what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." What this really is saying is that God put all things in subjection under the feet of Jesus and gave Jesus to be head over all things for the benefit of the church because the church is God's kingdom and we are His people. We share with Him in His reign and in His rule today. When we overcome Satan in this life, I do not care if you are in prison, I do not care if you are bound with chains,

you have overcome if you are able to say to Satan, "I will not yield to your temptations." You have been able to show that Jesus reigns in your life and you share with Him in that reign and dominion over Satan. Sin has no more dominion over you. For you have been bought with a price and you glorify God therefore in your body. I want us to understand that Jesus Christ is providing for us now, in this time, the power to overcome, the power to rule, the power to one day be able to enjoy the presence of Jesus forever.

Finally, Jesus says to the one who overcomes, "I will give him the morning star." The beautiful part about that is that in Revelation 22:16, He says, "I am ... the Bright and Morning Star." "I am giving you Myself," and what greater blessing could we ever want than that. Jesus Himself will come and live in us and reign in us and bless our lives. Let us never think of ourselves as mere slaves and servants and ones who are put down, but let us hold our heads high because Jesus has given to us authority and power and dominion over sin and over Satan so that we can reign, not only now, but forever, and share in the reign of Jesus Christ.

If you are not a Christian, then you are overlooking something that is missing in your life because Jesus wants you to have this power to overcome. So He says, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). That is, for you: blessings now, in this time, and in the world to come, eternal life with the Father. If you believe in Jesus, why will you not repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, be baptized into Christ, and begin a new life with Him.

## **THE CHRISTIAN ENDURANCE RACE**

### **REVELATION 3**

Please read the third chapter of the Revelation. There are three letters in the third chapter that are addressed from Jesus to three different churches. There are several lessons that are taught in each of these letters. I have tried to see what lesson predominates. What is there that seems to be central in the message to these churches? In the third chapter, there was one thing that seemed to strike me particularly, and as I went back and looked at the second chapter, I noticed it occurring again and again, and that theme is one that can be expressed in several ways.

One way of putting it is that the Christians life is a long distance race. It is not a sprint. Maybe we can think about the Olympics and we can express some of these ideas in track terms, and that is one of them. The Christian life is a life of endurance. Practically all of the teachings of scripture are designed in such a way as to build us up for the long haul. They try to give us stamina, they try to give us strength for a lifetime of service and lifetime of activity that will be against great pressures and great difficulties.

Jesus never tried to make anyone think that the Christian life was easy. His own life led to a cross and He says that you, too, will suffer persecutions. If that is the case, it means that we must have fortitude. We must have endurance. This is a theme that is found in the message to each of these churches and should be taken as a message to the church as a whole for all times. It is a message we need very much. So I would like to call your attention to certain portions of these letters that I think emphasize this point and hopefully we can pick up a point or two that will help us to gain this kind of endurance.

In Revelation 3:2, in the letter to the church in Sardis, Jesus said, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." The word "perfect," as it usually does in the New Testament, has the basic notion of "complete" or "brought to maturity." I think it calls our attention to the fact that it is easy for people to begin well. If you are like I am you have started quite a lot of projects in your lifetime that you never did finish

for one reason or another. They just died. And from time to time in the church, you try to initiate various programs and activities and in the passing of time they just seem to die. They do not just come to a screeching halt. They just die a slow death. And I believe that I have seen, and you have probably seen, too, that happen to many Christian lives. It is not unusual that you see a Christian all fired up and enthusiastic who then slowly drops it all and that is the end of it. Usually the spark and enthusiasm slowly die and spiritual life vanishes.

Jesus says that you need to "strengthen the things which remain." It reminds me some what of the thought that you see in the first Psalm where the man who is the blessed man is the one who is looking into the law of God and meditating on it day and night. He is the one who is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. One gets the picture of a tree that has put down roots that are solid and is drinking up the moisture and bearing fruit. A man like this is meditating day and night on the law of God, and this is something that we all must do. I am convinced, if we are going to survive in this Christian experience and if we are going to excel, we must follow God's word to be out meditation constantly. It is our source of strength and our source of guidance and direction.

Then Jesus says also in Revelation 3:2, "... for I have not found your works perfect before god." We need to work on the business of beginning those things that are good and then continuing in them and not slacking up. How are we going to be able to do that? I believe the next verse gives us a clue. He says, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent." After discussing the fact that they were lacking in this matter of endurance. He says, "I want you to remember."

Memory is a powerful device if it is properly used and disciplined. He wants them to remember the beginning of their Christian life, the enthusiasm, commitment, and conviction with which they entered into it, to remember what it was that caused that conviction. What did you see at that time? What was there that you noticed about the Christian life that attracted you to it? Remember? Think. Think back to the good times, the times

when you were filled with enthusiasm. What was happening that was creating that enthusiasm? If we remember and will think and look back and keep before our minds those things, then, perhaps, we can hitch on to that same enthusiasm again. We can again see and possess those things that created that initial conviction and enthusiasm for God's purpose.

The matter of endurance is mentioned again in verse 5. Jesus says, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." He says of him who overcomes, "I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life."

And, later in Revelation, you will see the great scene of the judgment where the books were opened and another book was opened which is the Book of Life. The names of God's righteous people had been written in that book. And the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books.

I take that to be the books of the Bible because the only fair way that judgment could be done would be by comparing our lives with what God had already revealed to us. It is not fair for a teacher to give a test from material the students have not studied, and I think God is fair. He is not going to bring us to the judgment and open up another set of books we have never seen and say, "Here is what you are going to be judged by." No, He is going to open books He has given us all along, and we are going to be judged by them.

Those who gain entrance into the eternal kingdom are those whose names are written in the Book of Life. But what He says here is that He will not blot out the name of those who overcome from the Book of Life. Your name will stay there if you overcome and the ones who overcome are those who endure to the end. And essentially what He is saying is, "Endure or else." And this, along with many other verses in the New Testament, ways clearly and unequivocally that a Christian can be lost.

A person who has experienced the grace of God and salvation and who has been born again is not guaranteed automatically a ticket to heaven. Has got to be faithful even until death if he is to receive the crown of life. That is why exhortations are

continually given to the church to be faithful, to endure, to hold fast, to keep on, because we need that or we will not receive the crown of life. We must have this kind of encouragement.

In 3:11, we find the next letter; the one to the church in Philadelphia. Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." Here is the same message again. Hold fast so no one will take your crown away from you; that is, the crown of life. That is a conditional thing. The crown of life is for those who hold fast. If you do not hold fast, you lose that reward. Let us go back to the second chapter. I want to quickly show you this thing is taught to every one of the churches. Look again at the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:3: "And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary." He is commending the people in the church of Ephesus because they had patience. That means steadfastness. You just keep on. You have borne the burden in the heat of the day.

Here are people, then, that have not grown weary. We are told in Galatians 6:9, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." The time is coming. That is an absolute guarantee of God. That is the beauty of this. That is the thing that I think can help us to keep on. That which God promises us is the one certainty in the whole universe, that if you are faithful to God to the day you die, you will receive heaven. There is no way it can be otherwise. I mean, if you want a one hundred percent guarantee on anything in life, that is it! All you have to do is keep on living faithfully to God and you are going to receive the crown of life. That is the assurance the Christian has.

Now, granted, that is easier said than done; but, still, the fact remains that God has assured you that what you have to do is not something spectacular, just something steady. Just keep at it. That is what God wants of us.

Read Revelation 2:10, which is written to the church in Smyrna: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown



of life." He is saying to them, "Look, you people are in serious trouble. You have some problems that are coming, you some tremendous suffering to go through." That does not encourage anybody. So, immediately, He adds; look, just "be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." That is worth it all.

What more could you want out of life than to be able to live forever with God and enjoy all the blessings of God, without any of the curses of life? Forever! That is the greatest thing that could ever happen. You take all the pleasures of this life and all of the thrills and temporary excitements that the world can give you and nothing can compare to this one thing.

And it does not take a man who is a millionaire to do it; it does not take a man who has an I.Q. of 180; it does not take a man who has four doctoral degrees; it does not take a man who is the most skillful athlete in the world; all it takes is an ordinary person, anybody who will just stick with it and keep on going. Anyone! It is whoever will. All it takes is will. It takes the will and determination to keep on going for God.

Notice what Jesus said to the church in Pergamum in Revelation 2:13: "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." Here the church had undergone a terrible ordeal where one of their number was actually put to death for his faith. But Jesus said, "You held fast to My name and you did not deny My faith." That is what God wants; people who will stand up for Him and stick with Him all the way.

Read Revelation 2:19 to the church in Thyatira: "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first." Now look at verse 25: "But hold fast what you have till I come." You say, "You keep saying the same thing over and over again." Sure I am.

That is what Jesus kept saying over and over again. He wants you to get that message. You have to hang in there; you cannot give up. You have to keep after it. Do not slack up; do not give it; do not compromise, but just keep on with God.

Go to Revelation 3:15-16 again. This letter is written to the church in Laodicea. Jesus says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. The one thing God does not want is lukewarm church members. He does not want somebody who is just complacent and sitting back and watching everybody do whatever they do. He wants people who are hot, and that word is a word that, sometimes at least means boiling. It means a person who is on fire, blazing with fervor and zeal for God.

Now that does not mean you have to jump up and down and clap your hands twenty-four hours a day to be zealous and on fire. But it means you are to be a person who really has the burning desire and concern for the advancement of the purposes of God. It means I am to be devoted and dedicated to doing all that I can with the talents God has given me to contribute what I can to furthering the cause of God in our world. He wants people who are hot; people who are burning and on fire for God. "Then I [Jeremiah] said, 'I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not" (Jeremiah 20:9). The Christian has a message that must be spoken to others.

Now, unfortunately, there was something wrong with the church in Laodicea. They were lukewarm. Part of the reason they did not have this zeal, which they needed in order to endure and hold fast was, as is said in Revelation 3:17: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Here were people who are blind to realities. There were some things that they were not seeing, and they were not seeing certain things because they had forgotten certain things again.

What is it that causes spiritual blindness? Go back to II Peter 1:5-7, "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." In other words, just keep on throughout your life adding

and growing and developing all these qualities and characteristics. Peter continues: "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now, notice verse 9: "For he who lacks these things is short sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." There is something they had forgotten that caused a blindness to occur. What did they forget? Peter continues, "has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."

Do you remember what it was like when you had to live from day to day with the knowledge that you might die at any moment? You realized, "There is no hope for me; I have no confidence or assurance whatever that God is pleased with me, that God can accept me, and, if I died today, I would be lost and I would spend eternity in hell." You cannot live that way, with that kind of realization. Somewhere deep down inside of every man who is in that condition, there is that knowledge and, in the back of the mind, an awareness that takes the pleasure out of life. There is a realization that, "I am alienated from God and there is something wrong with me. My life is twisted out of shape. It is bent out of shape. I am not what I ought to be. There is a sickness in my soul. There is something missing. There is a vacuum that God must fill."

But these people had forgotten the cleansing from their sins and what it means to have that relief and to know that, "if I were to die tonight, when everything is well with my soul, I would know that God loves me. He has forgiven me." He loves us all, but, unfortunately, not all of us have accepted the expression of His love to us, and have not done that which provides for us the cleansing of our sins. And so there will always be that misery and knowledge that something is wrong because I am not right with God. Here were people who did not have the zest for life and the zeal for God, having forgotten the cleansing of their own sins. Continue to read in II Peter 1:10-11, where it says, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He is lavishly providing for you the kingdom that is everlasting, but it requires, on your part, diligence and faithfulness and fidelity.

Return to our text in Revelation chapter 3 and look at verse 19. Jesus says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." We have got to have a zeal for God.

Next comes one of the more famous passages from the Bible. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Contrary to the way it is commonly used, this is not an invitation to those who have never begun to live with God. This is a statement written to Christians. Jesus is speaking to Christians. He is speaking to people in the church. "I am standing at your door, the door of your heart, and I am knocking and I want to come in." He is not talking about men who are alienated from God, who have never known the cleansing of their sins. He talking to lukewarm church members, and He said, "I want to fill you with My own presence in your life, and I am knocking at the door of your heart. Let Me come in."

Now, the broader explanation, of course, would still be true. Jesus wants to come into the hearts of those who have never made a commitment to Him. But, unfortunately, many of us have driven Jesus out of our lives and our hearts and have become an indifferent people. And Jesus wants to come back into our hearts and lives, and so He says to us, those who are in the church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

I heard a story about a father who took his little girl to an art gallery, and there was hanging on one of the walls a picture that many of you might have seen. It is a picture of a man who is standing at the door of a house and he is in a posture of knocking on the door and in the picture it is obvious that the person so is there is Jesus. But the little girl was not familiar with this kind of art work and could not understand what this was about and so she said, "Daddy, who is that man in that picture?" And the daddy said, "That is Jesus." And the little girl said, "What is he doing?" And he said, "Well, he is knocking at the door of that person's house." And she said, "Daddy, why will they not open the door? Why will they not let him come in?" Now the father was getting kind of irritated because he wanted to get on his way and he said, "Well, I do

not know." So they started on down the way and the little girl tugged at him and again said, "Daddy, do you know why they would do this?" Again, he just shrugged it off and said, "No, I do not know." That night the little girl, seeming not to be able to get that thing out of her mind, brought it up again.

Little children do this. I do not know why, but they just get stuck on something that we do not think is important when it really is important to them. So that little girl said again that night, "Daddy, why would they not let Jesus in their house?" Well, nothing else seemed to work so he finally just said, "I guess they were mean and mad." and that seemed to make sense to her, and that was the end of the conversation. But, he went to bed that night and could not get that out of his mind, and he lay in bed and tossed and turned. Finally, as it began to work on him, he began to think more seriously about that picture and began asking himself, "Why will I not let Jesus come into my heart?"

Sometimes it takes strange things like that to make an impression on us. But why would you keep Jesus out of your life? Is it because you are mean and mad? Is there any good reason not to let the loveliest person who ever lived enter your life and try to make something beautiful out of it? What are you making out of your life? You are making a temple or you are making a tomb. Is your heart filled with lovely things and with goodness and the love of God that overflows in kindness toward others, or is your life totally dominated with selfishness and self-centeredness and interest only in yourself?

Jesus continues to stand at the door and knock and we continue to refuse to allow Him to come in. But, hopefully, we are like those that Jesus speaks of: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). Think of that. Jesus Christ wants to take you and to bring you to the throne where He sits with His Father, Almighty God. He invites you to sit down there and share a place at home with Him where you shall reign with Him forever and ever. Would you shut Him out of your life? He invites you to Him and we encourage you to believe on Him, repent of your sins, be baptized, and begin that great life that never ends.

## **FROM THE FOOTSTOOL TO THE THRONE**

### **REVELATION 4**

We have come to Revelation chapter 4. Homer Hailey, in his commentary on Revelation, made this statement: "To the literalistic mind lacking the power of imagination, Revelation will forever be a sealed book; to the speculative and visionary mind the book will provide fuel to inflame far-fetched assumptions and conjectures which totally miss the truth. But to the mind prepared by the rest of the Bible for reality in picture and action, impressions of truth will be made that give strength for victory in every conflict of life." I believe that is a fine statement in the way in which Revelation should be approached. It is not a book designed to fuel far-fetched conjectures. It is not a book in which everything is to be taken literally, because it is a book of symbols. It is a book that is to be read against the background of the whole Bible and interpreted in the context of the Bible. It is a book that is designed to give us inspiration to face the trials and problems of day-to-day living.

We have seen in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, a portrayal of seven churches of Asia in their triumphs and tragedies. We have seen the churches being exhorted to overcome because God knew they were going to face trials. God knew it would be very easy to become weary in well-doing and to give up, to slacken their efforts to please God. So something was needed to lift their spirits, to boost their morale, and to encourage the people under pressure. And I believe that Revelation always has been and always will be a solution and answers the needs of a weary people who are struggling against the forces of evil and against Satan himself in order to overcome and receive the crown of life. In order to introduce Revelation 4, stop and read the first chapter of Ezekiel and then read again Revelation 4. When you have finished reading both chapters, I believe you will understand why you need to red the together.

John is attempting to express for us that which is virtually inexpressible. He is trying to say to us in the most poetic language, the language of symbols and imagery, something of the majesty and glory of God. This is something that cannot be accomplished in a simple statement, but something that might be painted with pictures of words to try to convey to us the majesty of God. It is easy for us, bound as we are by the flesh

and living in a sinful world, to have our minds constantly preoccupied with the problems and the troubles and the suffering and the strife and the tensions and the pressures that are about us.

But, from time to time out of the midst of this, and with frequency, we need to lift our eyes and see that, beyond the problems of this world, there is a God who is in charge. There is a God who created us, who loves us, and who has prepared for us things that words cannot describe. And we must ever keep before us the reality of the throne of God and of His power and His majesty, that we will not be overwhelmed by the difficulties that face us day by day.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, John has shown us the churches with all their weaknesses, with all of their troubles and struggles. Now, we need to brace ourselves for what is to come because, shortly, we will move into the central portion of Revelation.

We are going to be faced in the next few chapters with all those nightmarish spectacles of terrors and horror that are going to be inflicted upon the whole world. God's people are going to be among those who suffer many of the calamities and difficulties that are to be seen, and God's people need strength. There are going to be times when we will be tempted to say, "It is no use. Satan is the victor."

Then, we need to keep before us that which is central and that which is of supreme importance to us. And that is to keep in mind that God still reigns. He is still on the throne. His people are going to be protected and preserved. Finally, Satan himself will be destroyed and God's people will gain the victory.

As we come to chapter 4, and before we get into the horrible conflicts and struggles that we are soon to see in Revelation 6 and following, we are lifted up and the door of heaven is opened and we see the throne of God. John said, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.' Immediately I was in the Spirit ..." (Revelation 4:1-2)

You recall that back in the first chapter we are told that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. John is now about to see a remarkable vision. You know, Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the throne of God. Yet, all the while, he was also conscious of the struggle that was around him and of the stones that were being hurled at his body. So, even while he was gazing into heaven, he could still speak to those about him and say, "... Lord, do not charge them with this sin." We read about this even in Acts 7:55-60.

But, now, John seems to be lifted to a higher plane than that because it is as though all of the surroundings have been taken away and shut off from him. Now, he is caught up in the Spirit and his total vision is of the splendor of the throne of God. So he speaks and says, "and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back." (Revelation 4:2-6).

John could have said, "I saw a throne, and on the throne was God," but he did not say that. That would be simple, prosaic, and that would get the matter out of the way and we could move on. But John wants us to stand in awe, to gaze on that scene for awhile, to drink it in, and see its beauty. He wants to say something more than simply, "God was on the throne," so he paints word pictures for us. He says there is one sitting on a throne and he who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone, beautiful, white and clear and red. Here is one who is altogether beautiful, altogether lovely to behold.

Then he goes on and says there was a rainbow around the throne. And it reminds us of the rainbow that we saw once before in the Bible when Noah was made a promise, a promise which we now know was a faithful promise of God. For when



we see the rainbow, we are reminded that God's promise that He would never again destroy the world with a flood has continued to be true even to our present time. And so, when John speaks of God, he is not just saying, "There is God," but he is saying, "Here is one who is beautiful and here is one who is faithful to His promises." Here we see the rainbow suggesting the faithfulness and fidelity and the care of God and concern for His people.

But then we see another picture. Out of the throne come lightnings and voices and thunder. God is also a God of judgment, a God who puts terror in the hearts of those who would oppose Him, a God who overcomes those who oppose Him, a God who will send His Son, Jesus, in flaming fire taking vengeance upon those who know not God. Out of the throne come lightnings, voices, and thunders. It is an awesome scene that John has been privileged to view, and he has tried to convey to us something of its splendor and majesty that we might be caused to exclaim with those before the throne, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

Notice what we read in verse 4: "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads." Who were these 24 elders sitting on the thrones around the throne of God? I believe they represent the righteous ones under both the old and new covenants. They represent the holy ones of Israel and the holy ones of the new Israel. These are the redeemed. These are God's people from every age who are sitting around the throne on thrones themselves, for they reign with God, as we have suggested before.

In Revelation 21, we see the new Jerusalem. In verse 12 we are told of its having "a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."

Verse 14 says, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." Here, on the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem, are the names of the twenty-four representatives of

the old covenant that God made through Moses and the new covenant that God made through Christ. And it is no wonder in Revelation 15:3 we read about the redeemed of all the ages gathered around the throne of God, and singing the song Moses and the Lamb.

We see another picture in Revelation 4:6-7 of our text: "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle."

Who were these strange creatures? As you read from Ezekiel 1, I want you to see that John is borrowing the language that was being used by the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament. The heavens were opened to him and he saw visions of God and he saw four creatures corresponding to the four creatures in Revelation 4. You see the creatures around the throne in each place. Who were these creatures in Ezekiel? Read Ezekiel 10:20, because Ezekiel does not leave us speculating too long. Ezekiel says, "This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim."

These were the cherubim, the angels of God, and that is what John was seeing before the throne. Now John could have said to us, "I saw God on the throne and I saw angels around the throne," and then he could have moved on. But he wants us to spend some time surveying the majesty of God and being filled with awe as we see this spectacle. And so he paints a word picture for us to try to help us that there is something spectacular here, something that is simply beyond expression. Here are the holy angels of God described as awesome. The first creature was like a lion, probably suggesting strength. The second was like a calf or an ox, suggesting perhaps the idea of strength, also. The third had the face of a man suggesting swiftness to do the will of God.

It almost reminds us of the prayer that Jesus said ought to be prayed: "... Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ..." (Matthew 6:9-10). And in heaven, we see the will of God

being done swiftly. When God, as we shall see later in Revelation, is read to make His move against the oppressors of God's people, there is no delay. But at once fire is thrown to the earth as God responds to His people's pleas. And the cry, "How long?" is finally answered in God's time. And when He is ready, there is no longer a delay, but the angels of God respond at once in obedience to Him.

Why do they do so? Because they have lived with God from creation. They have been in the very presence of God and they understand what we can only in our wildest dreams begin to imagine of the greatness of God. They know that He is one to be loved and adored and worshiped and served forever and ever. And so we are told that these creatures, these angels of God "do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Revelation 4:8)! Here we see God surrounded in heaven by the representatives of the redeemed of all the ages and surrounded by the heavenly beings, and all of heaven and all of earth bow before the throne of God and ascribe to Him glory and honor and power and they say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty."

And then we see in Revelation 4:9-11, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.' "

God knew what would come about from the beginning. He brought these things to man at His time when man would be properly prepared to receive it. Now God has granted to them a position of honor and glory before the very throne of God where they ascribe honor to Him. In this great scene of heaven, the center of the scene is God himself, and all else around Him focus attention on Him. He is the only one worthy of honor and glory. He is not only the one who created, but He is the one who bought them from among all the tribes and tongues and nations by the blood of the Lamb. And so they throw their crowns before them and say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory. ..."

It is a fantastic scene, and we need to realize, in the midst of all our petty problems and struggles, that Almighty God sits on His throne. He is well aware of our needs and our troubles and our trials and He cares. He is the God of power who created us all, a God of majesty and holiness and a God who will not let His people down. He is a God who has reserved for His people a crown of life which shall be given to all that have loved His appearing and to all those who are faithful even unto death.

If you are not one of God's children, then surely you have missed out on what life is really about. The Christian life is not a strange and meaningless struggle against all odds here on earth. It is a triumphant life lived in hope and anticipation because of the certainty of the faithfulness and the truthfulness of Almighty God. He loves you, and He let Jesus die for you.

In the next chapter, we are going to see one join God who sits upon the throne. You are going to find something even more marvelous about the power and the majesty and the greatness of that throne. "Why not give you life to this One, the only One that really can bring you satisfaction and victory?"

## **“WEEP NOT; BEHOLD, THE LAMB”**

### **REVELATION 5**

Read Revelation 5. Here is where the drama really begins. We have seen enough already to excite us. We have seen the church with all its tribulations, difficulties, triumphs, victories, hardships, and persecutions experiencing all the ordeals that have been common to the people of God from the beginning. But we have also seen a church that can easily become discouraged; a church that has seen persecution come so often.

I am sure that on the part of many readers there must be the question as to whether or not God is really in control of things. So we are lifted out of the worldly scene and taken into heaven in chapter 4. There we can see the throne of God and we see One sitting on the throne who is described in all of His majesty. We see the living creatures about the throne having no rest, day or night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” We come to Revelation 5, and if we were to pick a single phrase out of this chapter that might very well serve as the theme of the chapter it would be the words that are found in verse five: “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion.”

Those five words suggest something very exciting, and I believe we will see it as we work our way through this fifth chapter. In 5:12, John said: “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.” Of course, books in those days were not put together the same way books are today. This would have been a scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals.

It was an unusual scroll because usually scrolls had writing only on one side. This one had writing on the front and back suggesting, it would seem to me, a book that is crammed with information and completely filled. As we move along, we see why. As the seals are removed one by one, we see unveiled the purpose and the plan of God for His people and for the destiny of the universe. We see God acting in our world and we see the forces of Satan trying to defeat the purpose of God.

John had been promised to see things that were to happen. In Revelation 4:1, we read: “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” So it seems John is

now about to see them as the book is about to be opened. But a problem arises, as John says in Revelation 5:2-3: "Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?' And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it." In verse four John said, "So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it."

John was at this point terribly disappointed because he had been promised that he was going to be able to see the things that were to come to pass hereafter, and now the book which was going to show him those these things could not be opened. There was no one worthy to open the book. Now, apparently, the one who would be worthy to open the book would be one who had sufficient moral worth because what we are going to see revealed in this book are the moral judgments of God. He would be one who could and would determine what the future would be

John was weeping very much, but in verse five he said, "But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep, Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.' " What a sense of relief and joy! Now we do find at last that there is one who is worthy to open the book, and this one who is worthy to open the book is revealed to us, first, as being "the lion;" the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah.

I believe that the expression originated in what occurred back in the beginning of the Bible, beginning in Genesis 49:9, where Jacob was blessing his sons. He was, in his blessing, prophesying what was going to happen in the case of each of his sons and he gives a description of the character of his sons.

In Genesis 49:9-10, Jacob finally comes to Judah and he says: "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone us. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion. who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." Judah is identified in terms of a lion and then, in his prophecy, Jacob speaks in terms

of one who would rule: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet." We are introduced now to the one who is the ultimate of what Judah is supposed to be. We see One who is described as the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah.

"The root of David" is the second term to describe the one John sees. The prophecy of Isaiah seems to be the background for that expression because it is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Isaiah 11:1 says, "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." What we are seeing here is a description of Jesse's greater Son, and He is the one who is not only the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but one who is a Branch out of the root of David, a descendant of David. So we have one who is a descendant of Judah and one who is a descendant of David. An Old Testament expectation of the coming Messiah, as seen in Psalm 2:9, was one who would rule with a rod of iron.

There was the Messianic expectation portrayed in the prophets and in the Psalms that the Messiah, who was to come would be someone like David, who would sit on David's throne. To the Jew, David was the greatest king. David was the mighty warrior. He was the one who extended the empire to its farthest limits on the earth. He was the great hero, king of Israel. Now we see one who is going to be sitting on the throne of David and who is going to rule the nations with a rod of iron. This was the expectation the Jews had of their Messiah who was to come.

There was another expectation, however, that was found among the prophets. That was of a suffering servant as seen, for example, in Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

Here is Isaiah's very graphic portrayal of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, prophesied in the terms of a suffering servant of God. This, too, was the Messiah who was to come, and, yet, the Jews had difficulty putting the two ideas together. How could He be the King who rules with a rod of iron and yet a suffering servant; one who is lead as a lamb to the slaughter?

The Jews of Jesus day could only see their Messiah as a great ruler; the one who would sit on David's throne and drive the oppressive Roman armies out of that conquered land of Palestine. The Jewish man simply could not harmonize that idea with the idea of a suffering servant, but Jesus in His ministry and in His life blended the two together. In fact, God seems to have contained these two ideas of the kingship of David on the one hand, and the suffering saint on the other, when, at the baptism of Jesus, God said from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In Psalm 2:7, God had said, "You are My Son." That Psalm is one that emphasized the concept of the Messiah as King. One with great power. But, in Isaiah 42:1, God spoke of "My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! That particular passage in Isaiah 42 is speaking about the Servant of the Lord. So God speaks about Jesus at His baptism in terms seemingly drawn from the Psalm portraying the Messiah as King and from the prophet speaking of the Messiah as a Servant. Even at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, God seems to be pulling together what would have been familiar passages in the Jewish mind showing that this Man Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah who fulfills both of the expectations of the prophets.

The one who is presented in this scene in Revelation as being worthy to open the book was announced first of all as the Lion," but when John looked to see, he saw something entirely different. He saw, of all things, a Lamb! What a strange contrast: the Lion and the Lamb! But they are one and the same! Both are blended into one personality. Notice Revelation 5:6: "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

Not only did John see a Lamb standing, but he says it was a Lamb "as though it had been slain." What a strange contrast to the Lion of the tribe of Judah when he looks and sees a Lamb that appeared to have been slain! But notice also, this is a Lamb "having seven horns." The horns were a symbol of power and strength often associated with the horns of the ox



that would push and gore people as in Deuteronomy 33:17 and I Kings 22:11. The horns are used symbolically of power and strength.

This is an unusual lamb. It had the appearance of having been slain for the simple reason that, as we learn in verse 9, "For you were slain." This was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" as announced to the world by John the Baptist (John 1:29). This is the Lamb of God, the one who did go as a Lamb to the slaughter, who allowed the Roman soldier to take Him into their possession and nail Him to the cross and place Him between heaven and earth for men to look at and ridicule. But the Lamb is now seen standing! This is not a lamb whose having been slain was a permanent thing. John sees a Lamb that has returned to life, and the Lamb is standing. The Lamb is a Lamb that has seven horns.

This is a powerful Lamb and it has seven eyes. The seven eyes "are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth." We have seen that expression, "the seven Spirits of God," earlier in Revelation. The number "seven" is used 54 times in Revelation and is a number of completeness or fullness, and to say "the seven Spirits of God" is a symbolic way of referring to the Holy Spirit of God. So, here we see Jesus sending the Holy Spirit into all the earth. The Lamb has power, but not power to be used to mobilize an army to drive out the armies of Rome. Instead, the power of the Lamb has overcome death. He is a conqueror; one who does rule with a rod of iron, but He rules spiritually. He rules in the hearts of men. He has sent His Spirit into the hearts of all those who would submit to His reign and His Lordship and His Kingship.

Jesus himself, when He rose from the dead, just before He ascended into heaven announced that all power and all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Revelation 5:7, speaking of the book which would reveal the exercise of that power, says, "Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." Here we see the Lamb coming to the throne of God. When did that happen? Back in Daniel 7:13-14 we are told that "One like the Son of Man ... He came to the Ancient of Days" and there was given to Him a Kingdom. When Jesus ascended to heaven and came to the Ancient of Days, to the Father, He

was given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom." And I am convinced that what we have seen in Revelation 5, is John observing that very moment when the Son of God ascended to the throne, as a Lamb having been slain. He began to execute power and reveal the future and show how He was going to carry out the purpose and plan of God for the destiny of the universe.

We are told in verse 8: "When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." The bowls of incense are identified for us as the prayers of the saints. The harps seem to be symbolic of the praises of God's people. Here we see the living creatures and the elders who represent the redeemed of the earth who are not bringing praises and prayers to the Lamb.

In chapter 4, we saw God receiving the glory and the honor and the worship of the four living creatures and all the elders, and now that very same glory and honor and praise and worship and prayers are directed to the Lamb. What does that say about the Lamb? It says He properly can be regarded as God. Jesus was God in the flesh, John said in the beginning of his gospel, in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then, John explained in verse 14 who the Word was: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Here is the Word of God who became flesh, who was God.

Remember, in Matthew 4:8-10, the devil told Jesus to fall down and worship him and he would give him all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." God is the only one worthy of man's worship.

Later, in Revelation 19:10, when John fell down before an angel, the angel refused to accept his worship because God alone is to be worshipped. In Acts 10:26, when Cornelius fell down before Peter and worshiped him, Peter said, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." Only God deserves worship. What are we seeing here? We are seeing Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God,

who is now receiving the worship that has been given to God. Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus is one worthy of worship. We worship Him in the hymn, "Jesus, Thy Name I Love," showing Him the honor and the glory which we see being given Him by the heavenly beings here in Revelation 5.

Now verses 9-10, "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.' " Here is Jesus Christ who purchased by His blood men from every tribe and tongue and nation.

It reminds us of what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28 when he spoke of "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." This is the church. The church has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and the church reigns! God's people reign on earth now, today. You say, "It does not look like it." So what? It does not even look like Jesus is reigning today from all the evil that we see in this world. It does not even look like God is reigning today. appearances are deceiving, are they not?

We act and think like this world is going to be here forever. It is not. For all appearances, it will be, but we know that it is not. It is going to be burned up (II Peter 3:10). That which is eternal is God and His people. We may look about us and see persecution, hardship, and struggles, but we need to see God and we need to lift our eyes to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Then, we can have hope and courage and live and reign and have dominion over our spirits. We can actually overcome the power of Satan himself. We can reign now because God made it possible for us through the power of His Spirit in the inward man. God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," Paul said in Ephesians 3:20. He is able to do it.

We come now to Revelation 5:11-14: "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!' Then the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever."

The Lamb, Jesus Christ, is presented to us now as the One who sits at the right hand of God, who reigns and intercedes for us. He is the one who has been slain, and yet we see Him risen, even ascending to the throne of God. What then have we to fear if we should be persecuted, if we should be oppressed, if we should be slain? For what has happened to Him will happen to His people. Behold, I have overcome!

In John 16:33, Jesus said: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus did, and ascended to the right hand of the throne of God and now He awaits you and He wants you to be His child, to enter into His kingdom to allow Him to become King of your life. He wants to be the Lord of your life and to have you to live and reign with Him until that time when finally He will receive you to Himself. God has great plans for you. He has a purpose for your life that we are going to see unfolded as we look into the chapters that are before us in the Revelation. He will show us a cosmic and awesome picture that is almost beyond comprehension, of the triumph and victory of God over Satan and of God's people over the Satanic forces that would seek to destroy us.

But we want you to see at the very beginning of Revelation that God is trying to show us that we need never despair. God is on His throne, the Lamb is on the throne, and all will be well with God's people because He reigns and He is in charge and Satan can only go so far. Satan cannot destroy you if you stay in the hands of God.

## **THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE**

### **REVELATION 6**

Let us review briefly the first chapters of Revelation in order to get the setting and then read Revelation 6. We have seen John on the isle of Patmos being shown visions of heaven. We looked at the seven churches of Asia and saw the letters that Jesus wrote to them. We saw their struggles and the tribulations and difficulties which confronted them which really are typical of the problems and struggles of the church in all ages. Then, in chapter 4, a door opens in heaven and John is permitted to see the throne of God and we see the awesome description of the glory of God on His throne.

We are reminded and made aware that God is on His throne, that He rules in the kingdom of men and that God is very much in charge of our universe, even though it may not seem like it at times. And then, in chapter 5, we see the Lamb of God coming to the throne of God and joining God at the throne. And to the Lamb a kingdom was given, and He made us to be a kingdom and priests. Those whom Jesus purchased from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He caused to reign on the earth. Then there is the great exclamation in heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain, to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessings" (Revelation 5:12).

We saw in chapter 5 that the one who sat on the throne had in His hand a book that was sealed. Then John wept because no one in heaven or on earth was able to open the seals of the book, which would reveal the future and would also make possible the carrying out of the affairs of the future. Finally, the Lamb appeared, and he was the one who was worthy to open the book. As the book is opened seal by seal, we are permitted to see that which was going to happen in the future.

Revelation 6:1-2: "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." It is extremely important to us as we move through Revelation that we understand what these symbols represent.

Through the many centuries since this book was written there have developed all kinds of bizarre notions and interpretations of what the various symbols of Revelation mean. It is going to be our attempt, as nearly as possible, to allow the Bible to interpret itself as we work our way through this book.

As we come to the first of the seals of the book that is opened, we have a scene of a horseman and a horse. It was a white horse, and he that sat on it had a bow, and there was given to him a crown, and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.

I do not know what is the first impression that come to your mind, as you would try to determine what that represents, but I would think that what would come to your mind is Jesus Christ. Yet, there have been those who have interpreted this as being the anti-Christ! The premillennialists, those that believe that some day in the future, God is going to set up a kingdom here on earth and reign a thousand years, have been known to interpret it in that way. But I am convinced, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that this passage has reference to Jesus Christ.

I want to tell you why. because my opinion is worth nothing unless what I say has scripture behind it. There is only one other time in the book of Revelation when a white horse is mentioned, and in that one other reference, there is no question who is sitting on it. That is found in Revelation 19:11-13 which says: "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one know except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." We know who that is. It is Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh.

There is more in this passage to identify the rider of the white horse as Jesus. In fact, I know of no commentator who denies that this is Jesus who is being described here in Revelation 19:11. There is no question about who this is. It seem reasonable to conclude that the rider on a white horse in Revelation 19:11, is the same rider on a white horse in Revelation 6:2. Here we have a white horse " and He who sat on it had a

bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." This expression, "conquer," is found throughout the book of Revelation and, with a couple of exceptions, it and the two nearest references to it in Revelation 3:21 and Revelation 5:5, refers to Christ or to His people. The conqueror is Jesus Christ. John only uses that word one time in his gospel. It is found in John 16:33, and there he applies that expression to Jesus Christ.

Read in sequence these four references and see if it does not suggest to you clearly that we are seeing Jesus Christ as the one who goes forth conquering, and to conquer. First, John 16:33: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace." This is Jesus speaking. "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." That is the same Greek word translated "conquer" in Revelation 6:2. "I have conquered the world." Next, turn to Revelation 3:21 and read what Jesus is speaking. He is addressing the church at Laodicea and He says, "To him who overcomes. ..." There is that word again; he that conquers. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Then, in Revelation 5:5: "But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.'" And, last read Revelation 6:2: "... and he went out conquering and to conquer."

We say in chapter 5, the Lion. The Lion has overcome. How did He overcome? He overcame death itself when He rose from the dead. He is the overcomer, and therefore, He made it possible for all who are willing to follow in His way to overcome and to be conquerors. And, of course, Jesus goes forth to conquer men's minds. He is not going forth in the world to destroy man. He goes forth to conquer, to bring every thought into captivity to Himself. To make men bow in allegiance to Him. He is the conqueror and He is the one who wears the crown.

In Revelation 14:14 we see Jesus: "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle." Here is a description of Jesus returning in order to

bring judgment on the earth. And, here in Revelation 6, He is said to be wearing a crown even as He is described as wearing a golden crown in Revelation 14:14. Notice the expression in Revelation 6:2, that the conqueror "... who sat on it had a bow." There is a fascinating parallel to this passage in the Old Testament in a messianic Psalm; that is, a Psalm that is a prophecy of the Messiah who was to come. It is Psalm 45:3-6, and I want you to think about this against the background of the words of Revelation 6:2. It says: "Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom."

Here is a description of One who is being addressed as God and who rides forth. We are told in Psalm 45:4: "And in Your majesty ride prosperously." The Septuagint translation of this passage renders it in this way: "... and in your majesty ride and bend the bow and prosper and reign." Jesus and the apostles often quote from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Hebrews 1:8 shows that Psalm 45 is speaking of Jesus. It says: "But to the Son he says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.'" So Psalm 45 is presenting a description of Jesus Christ riding forth in majesty and bending the bow for the purpose of reigning and for the purpose of prospering.

We see in Revelation 6:2, what seems to be, if we allow the Bible itself to provide for us a context, a clear picture of Jesus Christ riding forth conquering, and to conquer. This, also, reminds one of Romans 8, where we are told, beginning with verse 35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Then, we find the answer in verse 37: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." The same word is used in Revelation 6:2. We have seen Jesus Christ through whom we are more than conquerors. As we come to chapter 6 of Revelation, we are shown first of all that Jesus Christ who had been slain, who had risen from the dead, and who had ascended to the throne of



God is not going forth to conquer and to reign. And we want to see that at the very beginning because now there are going to come some very terrifying scenes. We need to know beforehand that Jesus Christ is the victor and that His people, therefore, are going to be able to withstand what is going to be described.

Of course, Jesus is not literally riding on a white horse through our land trying to convert people, but He uses His people as the instrument of spreading His gospel. Remember, Jesus said all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ..." (Matthew 28:19). We are the agents that He uses in the battle to conquer men's minds and bring them into captivity to Christ. And so, as His people, we are going to be faced with the onslaught of every kind of satanic force. But, while we are going to be experiencing various kinds of difficulties, we also are made to understand by Revelation chapter 6 that God still has these things under control. He can use them for the purpose of strengthening His people.

What do we see next? We come to 6:3-4: "When He opened the second seal. I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come and see.' And another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword." As we read in Matthew 10:34, Jesus one time said, "Do not think that I came bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Then He explained what He meant by that. In essence, what He says is: "When men are turned to Me, when men commit their lives to Me, it is going to create extreme difficulties." It may very well be that a man's own family will turn against him. It may happen that he, himself, will face the cross, and it may be that he will lose his life. Wherever Jesus goes forth conquering and to conquer, the efforts of Satan to destroy, will follow. Consequently, the sword will come wherever the gospel goes. And that is precisely what we are seeing in Revelation 6:2-3. Following the efforts of Christ to permeate the world with the message, we see the efforts of Satan to destroy the people of God. That is what we see as the rider of the red horse is given power to "... take peace from the earth, and that people should kill [slay] one another." What we are seeing here, I believe, is

not a general slaughter of mankind, but, rather, it has reference to persecution of God's own people. I believe that, first of all because, not only in Matthew 10:34, but in other passages there is the constant assurance of God that when people turn to Him, they are going to face persecution. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). So, when Jesus goes forth, Satan comes with persecution. In the second place, the expression "slay" that is used in Revelation 6:4, in ASV, is not the normal word that is used in scripture for killing. It is a word that is used regularly for slaughter of God's people or Christ Himself. Revelation 6:9 says: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." It is the same word "slain" that is used in verse 3. In other words, those people who had been slain for the sake of the word of God are now seen in the presence of God Himself.

In other words, Satan was defeated by the very efforts that he made to defeat God's people. It backfired on him. The very effort he made to persecute God's people simply resulted in their release to be in the presence of God. We are going to see another word for "kill" which has reference to a general slaughter of mankind rather than one specifically directed to God's people. But what we are seeing here as the red horse is religious persecution; the persecution of God's people.

Read verses 5-6: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'" *Denarius* is a Greek word and, as we learn in Matthew 20:2, was a common laborer's daily wage. The amount of wheat that is spoken of, according to the ancient historian Herodotus, was roughly equivalent of a quart, which works out to be the amount of food that would feed one man for one day. This suggests that what we are seeing is a whole day's wage for a quantity of wheat that would last one person one day. What we are seeing, then, is economic hardship. It does mention that you buy three measures of barley for a day's wage, but barley was not considered as good a substance

from which to make bread. However, that would provide a man enough for his family. So, whether or not these figures are precise, we are at least being given a picture of economic hardship. It is not a case of vast famine that is leaving people starving to death. There is enough food for the daily needs of the people, but not any left over for luxuries. It says the oil and wine were not to be hurt. This suggests that those who were wealthy would still be able to have their luxuries and go beyond the mere necessities of life. We are seeing the equivalent of a very great inflation that was taking place in the economy, a period of severe economic hardship. But the point is that it affects primarily God's people. We are seeing a problem that is created by injustice, for the one who is on the black horse had a balance in his hand. God's people through out the ages have suffered, also, from time to time, economic hardships because of their commitment to Christ. Those in the early days of the church in the Roman Empire often suffered economically because of their convictions and because they had to withdraw themselves from certain activities of their society in which they not participate. This deprives them of their livelihood. So, here we see a third horse, which suggest economic hardship for the people of God.

Read verse 7: "When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' " It seems as though, for the third time, God is having an angel to call out the power of Satan against God's own people. What we are seeing is much the same kind of thing as we saw in the Old Testament where God would refer to Babylon as His servant. Then, He would send Babylon down into Judah to wreak havoc and to take the people out of their land and make slaves and captives of them. God is still sovereign, and God can even take satanic forces bent on evil and use them ultimately for the strengthening of His own people. We saw in the Old Testament in the story of Joseph how his brothers meant their actions to toward Joseph for evil, but God meant them for good. So God is still sovereign and He will only allow destruction to go so far.

Read verse 8: "So I looked, and behold, a pale horse." Your translation may have a different word for the color of that horse. This one says, "pale." The word in Greek is the word from which we our word *chlorine*. It is a sort of a yellowish

green, a sickly looking color, suggesting death. "And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth." I think that what we have seen in the cases of the second and third horsemen are difficulties brought on God's people. But now, in verse 8, we are seeing calamities that come on all the earth, which we must suffer with all the rest of mankind. These are the sword and famine and death and the wild beast of the earth.

There is a fascinating parallel to this particular passage found in Ezekiel 14. Read Revelation 6:8, and then think about it as you read Ezekiel 14:21: "For thus says the Lord God: 'How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem—the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence—to cut off man and beast from it?' " The same four items referred to as the four judgments of God are mentioned in Revelation 6:8. This expression, "death," is a word that can be translated two or three ways in the Greek: either death or pestilence or plague. In fact, it apparently is a term that had reference to what in modern times we call bubonic plague. At any rate, it is suggesting to us disease and things to which all men are subject: the sword, famine, death, and the wild beasts of the earth. So, Christians may expect to suffer not only religious persecution and economic hardship because of their commitment to Christ, but they will also suffer calamities common to the rest of mankind.

What happens to the Christian in all of this? What happens to God's people? Fortunately, we are shown another scene in verses 9-11, as the fifth seal is opened: "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed." We have already suggested, back in verses 3 and 4 where we saw those who had been slain, that they are God's people.

But now, in verses 9-11, we see thing underneath the altar in Heaven in the presence of God. In other words, Satan's efforts have failed. They have backfired. He has not succeeded in destroying God's people. He has only released them from this life to enter into the presence of God. And so it says: "And a white robe was given to each of them." *White* is a symbol which, always in the book of Revelation, has a connotation of moral goodness. Incidentally, this is another reason for thinking that the rider on the white horse in verse 2, is not the Anti-Christ. *White* always represents moral goodness, moral purity, holiness, and, consequently, victory. And Christ is the victor, and here we see that God's people are victorious; they are each given a white robe.

We come now to what happens to the rest. What happens to those who have persecuted God's people? In verses 12-17, we see the sixth seal opened: " I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, a fig tree drops its lat figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' " He speaks of the wrath of the Lamb, the gentlest of all God's creatures! The wrath of the Lamb suggests something really terrible by such a gentle creature finally exploding in wrath, in anger, and in vengeance. There is the awesome picture of what happens, finally, to those who oppose God and His people.

The long-suffering of God finally ends, and quickly and suddenly and unexpectedly wrath strikes mankind, and who can stand? God's opponents can only cry out to the mountains to fall on them because of the terror that has gripped them. Finally, they come to the realization that truly there is a God in heaven who reigns and that truly the Son of God died for them and they rejected Him and turned their backs on His offering of love and mercy.

And, finally, we see the vindication of those souls at the altar who cried out and said, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Perhaps you say, "How can these people who are with God in heaven have such a spirit of vengeance? It is not a spirit of personal vengeance. It is true that Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:24). And Stephen said when he was being stoned, "Lord do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). But, here the cry is for the vindication of the justice and holiness of God. His justice must be served and those who reject and rebel against the holy and true and merciful God deserve to receive the wrath of God. Those who have suffered from the attack and the ridicule of those who reject God deserve finally to see the wrath of God poured down upon them, and surely it will happen in the great day of His wrath.

Who is able to stand? We have seen those who are able to stand. They are God's people. They shall escape and they shall one-day stand victoriously with the One who went forth conquering, and to conquer. In Revelation 17:14 is the final picture: "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

If you are among the called of God, if you have accepted His call, and if you have been faithful to Him, then you are prepared to face a God who is both the God of justice and God of love, and who showed it when He allowed His Son to die for you. How will you respond to that expression of love? That is the question that comes to each of us.

If you are not one of God's children, we plead with you to allow yourself to begin to walk in the way of Christ. We plead also for you to be washed in the blood of the Lamb that you might be cleansed, justified, and sanctified and prepared to one day receive the white robe and to stand with the victorious in the very presence of God.

## **THE 144,000**

### **REVELATION 7**

Let me very briefly give you the background leading up to the seventh chapter. In Revelation 1, we see One like the Son of Man walking among the Lampstands, or the candlesticks and, according to Revelation's own interpretation, we are seeing Jesus walking among His churches. Then, in chapters 2 and 3, we see seven typical churches: seven churches of Asia Minor. These are churches like God's churches have been through the ages. They have had their ups and downs, their joys and sorrows, their tribulations, their triumphs, their victories, their defeats, their difficulties, and hardships. They have suffered persecution and we see them being urged to be faithful until death so that they might receive the crown of life.

It is very difficult to live that life. We are constantly faced with temptations. Sometimes persecutions come and the Christian may very well be inclined to say, "What is the use? It looks like Satan is in charge of the world and we might as well give up." And so, lest the Christian become, and continue to be, discouraged, we come to chapter 4 of Revelation. We see a door opened in heaven and we see the throne of God and the majesty of that scene. Then, we are made to realize that God is, in fact, on His throne, and that he is in charge of the world. He has things under control, and He knows what He is doing.

In chapter 5, we see that marvelous scene when one who looks like a Lamb that has been slain comes to the throne of the One who sits on it, and He takes a book and loosens the seals. The seven seals that are on the book are loosed in order that we might see Jesus bringing about the things that are to come to pass. Jesus is seen having ascended to the Father, and having come to the throne, where He reigns with the Father. We are told that the heavenly beings fall down and worship Him. They worship Him even as they worship the One who is already on the throne. And then, as we see the first seal opened in chapter 6, we see Jesus Christ going forth conquering and to conquer.

I think we should point out that there is no kind of time limit placed on this. We have simply seen that when the seal is loosened, Jesus goes forth conquering and to conquer. He shall

continue to do so until every enemy has been put under His feet, even until the last enemy, death, has been conquered. What we see as the seals are opened is the entire period of history from the time Jesus descended to the throne to the time when He comes again. We see that during that period of time as Jesus goes forth, conquering and to conquer, there will always be those who oppose Jesus and His people. We see religious persecution as we see the second seal loosed. Then, the third seal is loosed and this reveals economic hardship that comes to God's people through the injustice of the world. When the fourth seal is loosed, we see God's people suffering the calamities that befall mankind in general; death caused through famine and sword and pestilence, etc. However, when the fifth seal is loosed, we see that those who have been slain for the word of God are in the presence of God, preserved and saved by the power of God. Finally, as the sixth seal is loosed, we see calamity being brought on the whole world.

Apparently, the final judgment of God is coming upon the world. We see the wicked of the earth crying out for the mountains and the rocks to fall on them to hide them from Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, as this terrifying scene is described for us at the end of Revelation 6, verses 12-17. Then, finally, the question is asked at the end of chapter 6: "... and who is able to stand?" When the wrath of God is poured out on our world, who is able to stand? We need to read chapter 7 which will provide the answer to that question. Along with the above reading, also read Ezekiel 9:4-6 and 21:2-4, which will serve somewhat as a background to what you have read in Revelation 7.

In Revelation 7:1-3, we see a scene of four angels. "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.'" I believe that the only connection that we might draw between this passage from Revelation 7 and this in Ezekiel 9 is the basic thought of the significance of marking on the forehead. In Ezekiel 9: 4-6, we



are told by God that one was to "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." Eventually, He said that others were to kill all of the people except those who had received the mark, and those who received the mark were righteous.

Yet when we come to the book of Revelation, we see that when the sword actually comes on the land, it slays both the righteous and the unrighteous. One would get the impression that it did not do any good to put the mark on the forehead of the righteous because they were slain, too. I believe to understand both Ezekiel and Revelation, we have to understand that the protection that God gives to His people is not necessarily protection against physical harm. We are told continually throughout the scriptures that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Jesus said in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

You are not exempt from physical harm by God. That is not His concern. That is not to say that He does not care if you suffer pain, but the point is that God is concerned to preserve your life so that you can enjoy the presence of God eternally. So, when you see people who are being sealed in Revelation 7, let us not think that it is to indicate God's people are not going to suffer the same kind of hardships, calamities, and pestilence that the world suffers, because that is part of what we were being shown in Revelation 6. Believers and unbelievers alike share in many of the misfortunes that occur in the world. It is for that very reason that the Christian might cry out and say, "What advantage does the believer have?" That is why we have the fifth seal loosed; to let us know that those believers who are slain by the sword are going to enjoy the presence of God. They are simply going to be relieved of the suffering, the pain, and the sorrow of this life to enjoy life in the presence of God. The same thing happens as we come to Revelation 7. We see a picture of the angels holding back the winds that are to come upon the earth and bring destruction to the earth. But, first, there is a pause while they are holding the wicked back so that God can put His seal on the foreheads of the righteous; on the servants of God.

What is the significance of sealing the servants of our God on their foreheads? There are three other references in the book of Revelation that I think shed light on the significance of this. The first is in Revelation 3:12 where Jesus said: "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of MY God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name." Jesus said He would write on those who overcome, those we are conquerors with Jesus. He did not specify where He would write on them as He did elsewhere.

As we turn to Revelation 14:1, we are going to see the 144,000 there that we will be looking at in Revelation 7. Revelation 14:1 says: "Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads." Now we move to Revelation 22, where we see the final scene of the redeemed in heaven, where they shall be with God forever and ever. It says of them in verses 3 and 4: "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads."

To have the name of Christ and God on your forehead is a symbolic way of saying that you are owned by God. Your mind has been brought into captivity to Christ. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore a gold plate on his forehead engraved with the words, 'HOLINESS TO THE LORD' (Exodus 28:36). Just as during the old dispensation, the name of Jehovah was written on the forehead of the high priest to indicate that he was the specially consecrated servant of Jehovah. So, believers in our age, who are called priests in the book of Revelation, now have a new name written on their foreheads; the name of Jesus.

A seal certifies and signifies ownership and it protects. The point is that Christ owns us, having purchased us with His own blood, and having done so, He protects us throughout life. This is not protection against physical harm, but protection against spiritual destruction by Satan. No one can snatch us out of the Father's hand. You are protected by God, and to have a seal placed on your forehead bearing the name of Christ and God is

simply a symbolic way of saying that you are owned by Him. We are just like people who used to be branded by the slave owner. We are servants and the word that is used in Revelation for servant is the Greek word that literally means a bondservant or a slave. We are slaves of God and of Christ and we bear the mark of slavery to Him. We have the brand of slavery engraved on our forehead saying, in essence, we are His. We belong to God.

That obviously does not mean that God is literally going to scrawl His name on your forehead with some kind of a ball point pen. This is symbolism, but it is a way of suggesting that we belong to God. The point is that the calamities, the judgments of God that come upon mankind, are not going to do us eternal harm because we have been sealed by Him.

This thought is suggested in Ephesians 1:13. There, Paul speaks of Christ. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Why? Because according to Acts 5:32, God gives His spirit to all those who obey Him. This occurred according to Acts 2:38 when you believed and repented and were baptized. You received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is yours. He is sealing you. He is protecting you from Satan so that Satan cannot destroy you as long as you choose to remain faithful to God. So, we are seeing a beautiful picture in Revelation 7; the sealing of God's people so that they cannot be overcome by Satan. God's people will be victorious.

In Revelation 7:4-5, John said, " And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand." What is the significance of that 144,000? Who are they? In Revelation 4, something similar was seen. Around the throne of heaven there were twenty-four elders. This naturally suggests the twelve sons of Israel added to the twelve apostles of Christ whose names are on the foundation of the wall of the new Jerusalem which was in heaven (Revelation 21:2-14). These were representatives of the redeemed of all the ages. What better way would there be to symbolically present, not merely their representatives, but all

of God's people than by multiplying the twelve by twelve and then multiplying that by one thousand, a symbol of completeness and fullness, thus giving us 144,000. Notice that the wall of the New Jerusalem, the city of all God's people, described in Revelation 21:17, was 144 cubits. This number is clearly associated with the redeemed of all the ages. These, then, are those who dwell with God forever and ever, the righteous; those who have been saved.

Now, we come to this expression, "... of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed." The tribes of literal Israel are symbolic here of spiritual Israel. There are some who think that the writer of revelation is referring just to the Jews; that is, just to the fleshly descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose name was Israel. He is using Israel as a symbol because, in a special sense, at one time Israel represented the people of God. But now, in Revelation, Israel represents not the Jewish nation, the Hebrew nation, but it is representing those who are the true Israel.

I want to give you ten reasons why I am convinced that is the case. I want to take time to give you ten reasons because I think it is extremely important for you to understand that you are one of the 144,000 because there are people who try to convince you that you can not be among this 144,000. Some say that it is a very special, exclusive group that has already been picked out, and you cannot be a part of it. That is not the case.

Reason number one: spiritual Israel is meant and is implied by the strange arrangement of the twelve tribes. Reuben would normally be listed first, as he is in Genesis 49, because Reuben was the first-born of the sons of Israel. But, here, Judah is first in the list and that is undoubtedly because, as we have already seen in chapter 5 of Revelation, Jesus was the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Judah now takes preeminence because Judah is the tribe that produced our Lord and, therefore, Judah comes before even Reuben, the first-born of fleshly Israel.

Also, if this were referring to literal Israel, one would expect to see the tribes of Ephraim and Dan listed here, but they are missing. You look at that list again and you may be surprised because, if you were in Sunday school as a child, you were taught the twelve tribes of Israel and you learned about

Ephraim and Dan, but they are not mentioned. Dan is missing and Joseph is substituted for Ephraim. Manasseh is included, but Ephraim and Manasseh were the two sons of Joseph who took the place of Joseph in previous listings of the tribes. But here you have a strange arrangement. It seems that God is wanting us to see that this Israel is not to be identified as the fleshly Israel of the Old Testament.

The second reason I believe this is referring to spiritual Israel is the fact that exactly 12,000 from each tribe are listed. Would it not be strange that there would be exactly 12,000 saved from the tribe of Manasseh, exactly 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, exactly 12,000 from Issachar, and so forth, although these tribes were greatly disparate in their populations? Would it not be stranger yet that not one person from the tribes of Dan and Ephraim would be saved? I think it obvious that here we have a symbolic number. He is not talking about exactly 11,999 plus 1 in each of these tribes. So, even the very nature of the listing of these tribes is suggestive of the fact that we are not looking now at fleshly Israel, at the physical descendants of Abraham, but we are looking at spiritual Israel; that is, God's true Israel.

Let us look at our third reason. In Revelation 14:3, where we have the second discussion of the 144,000, they are said to have been "... redeemed from the earth." This is an expression for God's people found in the new covenant, not in the old covenant. In Acts 20:28, Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." In I Corinthians 6:20, Paul said in speaking of Christians, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." You were purchased. Those who are in the church have been purchased from all the earth.

In the fourth place, I believe that this 144,000 included Christians, not just fleshly Israel, because those who were sealed with the name of God on their foreheads in Revelation 22:1-4, are spoken of as servants of God and the Lamb, and the Lamb is Jesus Christ. So, we are looking at those who are servants of Jesus Christ when we see those who have the seal on their foreheads, the name written on their foreheads. So this has to include more than just those of fleshly Israel.

The fifth reason for believing that is that the New Testament refers to the church of the true Israel of God. For example, in Romans 2:28-29, Paul said, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God." Throughout the New Testament we are taught repeatedly that those who are the true Jews are not those who are the fleshly descendants of Abraham. Even during Jesus' earthly ministry when the Jews spoke up and said they were descendants of Abraham, Jesus said, in essence, "So what?" "For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Luke 3:8), In other words, their fleshly descent from Abraham gave them no merit in the sight of God. And, here, in Romans 2:28, Paul, who himself was a fleshly descendant of Abraham, had the courage to say, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly."

What is in the heart determines whether or not you are a Jew and truly of Israel. Then, in Galatians 3:29, Paul said: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." If you are Christ's, then you are of the Israel of God. In Galatians 6:16, Paul said to the church, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." The church is the Israel of God. In Philippians 3:3, Paul said in speaking of Christians, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Fleshly Israel does not mean a thing any more to God. The question is, "Are you one of the servants of Jesus Christ?" If you are, then you are the circumcision. "Circumcision" was at term used to refer to the Jews as opposed to Christians.

And Paul said, "You are the true circumcision if you belong to and glory in Jesus Christ." And then, in James 1:1, James, who is writing a letter to Christians, addresses them in this way: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: 'Greetings.'" He addresses Christians as the twelve tribes. It is not unreasonable, then, to regard the listing of the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7 as a reference to Christians. Further confirmation of this is found in I Peter 2:9 where Peter said Christians "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. His own

special people." Palestine is no longer in God's purpose. The Hebrew race has given way to a new elect race. The Jewish nation has given way to a new, holy nation. In I Peter 2:10, Peter refers to this new nation as those "who once were not a people but are now the people of God." These were the Gentiles. To the Jews, the Gentiles were nothing: Israel was God's chosen people. But Peter goes on to say that those who in times past were not people, "... but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." It is reasonable to believe that Revelation invests "Israel" with the new meaning suggest throughout the New Testament.

The sixth reason I believe Revelation 7 refers to spiritual Israel rather than fleshly Israel is that the expression, "servants of our God," is the expression used of those who were sealed. It is the term describing those to whom the book of Revelation was written. Revelation was written to Christians who are referred to in Revelation 1:1 as God's servants. Christians, then, are the ones who were sealed in Revelation 7, and those who were sealed were the 144,000.

The seventh reason: the sealing of God is in contrast to the mark of the beast. We are going to talk about the mark of the beast when we get to chapter 13, but I will just anticipate a bit and say that the sealing of those on the forehead with the name of Christ applies to all of God's people. Those who had the mark of the beast represent all of those who have refused to submit their lives to Jesus Christ.

The eighth reason: in Revelation 14:4, where there is a further description of the 144,000, they are called virgins, and there is not a commentator on the face of this earth who believes that the 144,000 were all literally virgins. It is no more reasonable nor necessary to believe they were literally fleshly Israel. That is a symbol. "Virgins" is symbolic of a people who are pure, a people who have not committed spiritual adultery by forsaking their allegiance to Christ.

In the ninth place, when the 144,000 are referred to in Revelation 14:4, they are spoken of as "the first fruits to God." But James 1:18 speaks of Christians as being the first fruits of God.

In the tenth place, in Revelation 14:5, where the 144,000 are mentioned, they are described as those "without blemish." That is the term Paul uses of Christians in Ephesians 1:3-4 and 5:24-27. What we have said, in summary, is that the 144,000 who are mentioned in Revelation 7 are all of God's people.

Now we come to Revelation 7:9-10: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' " Who is this great multitude? I am convinced that the great multitude is exactly the same group of people that we mentioned when we spoke about the 144,000. This is a great multitude! You get 144,000 people together and you have a great multitude. John said he merely heard the number of 144,000, but what he saw when he looked at them was a great multitude.

I am convinced they are the same people because, if you look very carefully at the description given of the great multitude and then look at the description of the 144,000, particularly as it is elaborated in Revelation 14, the description is the same. I believe there is general agreement among commentators that the great multitude refers to the church, Christians, God's people. We have already demonstrated that the 144,000 represent the same people. Both are before the throne of God and the same expressions are used throughout Revelation 7 and 14 to refer to both of these.

What is John trying to tell us about this great multitude? The point is that we have seen them sealed and now we have seen them in the very presence of God. In other words, the judgment of God is not against these people. The judgment and wrath of God is poured out against those who have rebelled against God and refuse to submit themselves to the reign of God and the Lamb. It answers the question, "Who is able to stand?" It is those who are in the church, those who are Christians, and those who are God's people. And, what a scene of rejoicing there is when, finally, after all of the tribulations and turmoil, we see God's people victorious at the throne. The scene continues with Revelation 7:11: "All the angels stood around



the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?' " Elsewhere in Revelation, people in white robes are God's redeemed. "And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' So he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation' (Revelation 7:14).

What is the great tribulation? Jesus told us in John 16:33: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In Acts 14:22, we are told, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." God's people always suffered tribulation. The tribulation can properly be called "great" because its duration is from the time Jesus began to go forth conquering and to conquer, until the end of time. But, these are they that have come out of the great tribulations. They are conquerors. They are the overcomers. They are the victors. We see them at the throne of God.

John continues: "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

It is the same kind of description we find in Revelation 22 at the end of time with the redeemed at the throne of God. These are the servants of God, sealed on their forehead with the name of God and of the Lamb because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. You can be washed in the blood of the Lamb and have the cleansing of your sins if you will only respond to God's invitation.

## **THE POWER OF PRAYER**

### **REVELATION 8**

We come to Revelation 8. We have seen the completion of the second major section of the book; chapters 4 through 7. Let us back up just a bit and review so that we have a background for where we are in Revelation. The first major scene is chapters 1 through 3 where we see Jesus Christ walking among the churches. We see this symbolically portrayed in the first chapter and we see concrete illustrations of it in the seven churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3. We see the harsh realities of the Christian experience in a sinful world. Then, in chapter 4 we begin a scene where we are taken into the very presence of God, to the throne in Heaven. There we see the majesty of God, and are assured that He is in charge of our universe, that He controls things, and that we need not fear that things are out of hand.

When we come to chapter 5 we see the Lamb of God who has been slain for the sins of the world. He has ascended to the throne of God and has been given a book. He has been found worthy of opening the book and unloosing the seals so that the destiny of the universe might be revealed and carried out. Then, we see the seals beginning to be unloosed one by one and scenes are unveiled before our eyes. We see, first of all, Jesus Christ going forth, now that He has risen from the dead and ascended to the throne, going forth conquering and to conquer. We see, then, the efforts of Satan to fight against the conquering power of Christ as we see seal after seal unloosed. We see the power of Satan exercised under the limitations that God has imposed upon him. We see him inflicting economic hardship and we see the injustices that he brings about in our world. We see death being the lot of Christians as well as the non-Christian.

When the 5<sup>th</sup> seal is opened, we see that those who have been faithful to the word of God are found in the very presence of God and enjoying freedom from this earthly life. Finally, we see, as the 6<sup>th</sup> seal is opened, the wrath of God being poured out upon the world. We see in chapter 7, God's redeemed being preserved and protected from that final judgment that is coming upon the wicked. In fact, as we come to the close of chapter 7, it says, "For the Lamb who is in the

midst of the throne will shepherd them, and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." It sounds so very much like what we find near the end of the book, where it says, "And there shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, And they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

We have seen God's people finally coming into the very presence of God where they are free from the suffering and the sorrow of this life. I believe at this point that we come to the end of a scene; a look at God's dealings with mankind. It starts from the throne of God and culminates with God's people present with him at the throne.

Read Revelation 8:1: "When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in Heaven for about half an hour." There is a period of silence. It is just as though John has to catch his breath. He has seen such awesome things. He has seen one complete scene of the activity of God in our world, for the time of the ascension of the Lamb to the throne to the time when His people joint Him at the throne. It is just as though after all of the tumult and confusing that is seen as God brings wrath upon the earth and redeems his people, that there has to be a moment of silence to reflect on all of this. But that silence also seems to prepare us for the next scene in Revelation.

I believe that what happens now is not something that continues from that point forward in some chronological sense, but rather, we go back to the beginning again. We go back to the throne of God and we are going to look at God's activity in our world from another point of view. Verse 2 says, "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets." These trumpets, as we shall see, are trumpets of judgment; trumpets of warning. God always tries to warn mankind of impending judgment before He finally brings it. And, as we look at the seven angels sounding their trumpets, we will be seeing warning and temporary and temporal judgments of God being brought against sinful men.

In the previous section as we were looking at the seals being loosed, we were seeing the seals of persecution. We were seeing God's people being oppressed. What we see now is a

different aspect of the whole picture. Brought into sharper focus is the fact that the seals of persecution give rise to the trumpets of warning and that those who oppress God's people must recognize that God will take vengeance.

Back in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter when the 5<sup>th</sup> seal was opened, we saw under the altar "... the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' "

As we come to chapter 8, we are seeing the answer to that questions given. God does avenge His people. Look at verses 3-4: "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." Here, we are seeing the prayers of a persecuted people; the prayers of the saints of God, going up to God. Christ is interceding for the saints.

Of course the word "saint" as used in the New Testament always means God's people. If you are a Christian, you are a saint. What we see in Revelation 8:3-4, are the prayers of all the saints going up before God and being received by God. None of us is left out. Our prayers reach the presence of God. It is not because we are worthy to make our requests known to God. It is because the Lamb of God is worthy, and because we belong to the Lamb, God is willing to hear, and ready and anxious to hear our prayers. I believe that is the significance of the statement in verse 3 where it says, "And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

I believe what we are seeing here is that Jesus Christ is adding to our prayers His words of intercession on behalf of us before the throne of God. We see that this kind of thing is a function and role which Jesus does play for His people. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter and said, "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he

may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.' " Jesus Christ intercedes for his people. In I John 2:1, John said, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have a Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." We do not have to go to God the Father alone. Jesus Christ accompanies us there, and Jesus Christ is our advocate. He pleads our case and our cause and it is because He does so that our prayers can go into the presence of God, and we have the assurance that God will hear and that God will answer.

In Romans 8:34, Paul said, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." If you are one of God's people, what a thrilling thing to know that Jesus Christ is interceding for you! His work on your behalf did not end when He died on the cross. He continues to make intercession for you. Jesus is vitally interested in you; in each of you. And Jesus does not have human limitations. Let us never think of Jesus as too small to accomplish tasks which we are describing. Jesus knows you by name and Jesus Christ continues to intercede on your behalf. His blood continues to cleans you from all sins, but that is not all that He does.

In Hebrews 7:25, the writer of the Hebrew letter told us more about the interceding work of Jesus Christ when he said, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Jesus Christ always lives to make intercession for you. Some of these passages are so personal they almost overwhelm us. Just think, Jesus continues to be constantly aware of your needs, your activities, and your prayers that go up before the Father.

What happens when our prayers go before the throne of God? Does God have His hands tied behind His back? Is God looking the other way, totally disinterested in our affairs? Absolutely not! Our God is alert. His eyes go to and fro over the earth seeking those whom He may help; those who are willing to serve Him. Here, we see in verse 5, the response of God to the prayers of His people. "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the

earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake." What we have seen is God's response to your prayers. He throws fire on the earth. He does avenge God's elect. It is not that God's people are a vengeful people trying to encourage the retaliation of God, but that they are people who recognize the holiness and the righteousness and the justice of God, and realize that rebellion against God demands satisfaction. When God's people are being oppressed, God does take action and God does respond to the prayers of His people who cry out. We do not always know how God accomplishes it. We see only highly symbolic ways in the response of God as described in Revelation 8.

Let us not get carried away and over-literalize the things that are said here. Rather, let us understand that the kind of language used here is the kind of language that was used by the prophets of the Old Testament. Often they used physical terms to describe the spiritual realities of God's activity. For example, consider the matter of God sending fire up the earth. Look at Luke 12:49. Jesus said, "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" Let us pause a moment. Jesus said, "I came to send fire on the earth." We can take that literally if we want to. We can see Jesus getting a bowl of fire and just throwing it out on the earth, but that is not the way this kind of language is employed in the scripture. That is not the significance of it. Let us let Jesus tell us what He meant by that statement. If we understand that, we can begin to understand the significance of what is said in Revelation 8 about the angel taking the censer and throwing fire on the earth.

What does it mean? That is the symbol, but what is the meaning of the symbol? Jesus said, "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division." (Luke 12:49-51). In the idea of casting fire there is something destructive involved. Casting fire is the symbol, but causing division is the significance. Jesus elaborates: "For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law

against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12:52-53). In other words, when Jesus goes forth conquering and to conquer, Satan is going to do everything in his power to fight against those who would follow Jesus Christ and he would enter into their homes and try to cause strife and stress and friction. When one turns to Jesus, and the others do not, there will be conflict. It is painful. It is as though Jesus had cast fire upon the earth. So, here is an illustration from Jesus of the kind of expression that is found in Revelation 8.

No, we are not seeing Jesus literally sending fire upon the earth in Revelation 8, but we are seeing the response of God to the prayers of His people. We are seeing judgment brought. We are seeing that when we cry out to God, He hears and He answers. He responds to our prayers. As we read Revelation 8:6-9, we see an elaboration on the idea: "So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed." We are seeing God bringing His judgments on the people. The calamities and catastrophes that happen on the earth were warning people. There are some that do repent, but there are others, even in spite of God's activities and calamities that are brought upon the earth, who see the awesome power of God and still refuse to turn to God.

We look at the third angel in verses 10-11: "Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter." What is happening now? There is no escape for those who are under the wrath of God. The earth is being struck. The sea is being struck. The island waters are being hurt. Then, we come to verse 12: "Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the

night.” What is the significance of the third, the third, third? All it means is that this is not the final judgment of God that we are seeing. These are only the kinds of judgments that God brings all along the way of the people of the world to try to get them to see that God is active in His world; to see that God is the God who responds to His people; to see that the calamities of the world should cause us to turn to God; that there is no escaping from God.

It reminds me in sort of a reverse way of what we find in Psalms 139:7-10: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.” If I ascend into the heavens; if I descend into the earth; if I go into the sea; wherever I go, God is present. And that is reassuring to His people because there is no way that God is ever going to abandon us or leave us. But for the world, it ought to be a terrifying thought that there is no escape from God. And that is why in Revelation 6:16-17, we saw people who opposed God and they cried out, “And said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’ ” There is no escaping from the presence of God. But in Revelation 8, we are not seeing the final judgment of God on the world. We are seeing the continuing activity of God in bringing His judgments on the earth, and His warnings by calamities on the earth to try to cause people to respond to Him and to come back to Him.

Can God respond today. We often say that God is not doing today the miracles that He did in previous times, and there are people who get all upset when you make that kind of statement, and they say, “Is God not the same yesterday and today and forever?” He is. But God chooses to act in different ways and operates in different ways from time to time. God placed upon Himself His own limitation if He so chooses. But, while God may not be operating today with the kinds of miracles that were done through Jesus Christ, God is still as active as He ever was in our world. He still can accomplish His purposes without ever doing the kinds of things that were seen under the



leadership of Moses or of Christ. You know, even in the Old Testament, God often operated dramatically and powerfully without miracles in response to His people. He used the miracles of Moses in order to bring His people out of Egyptian bondage. He used absolutely no miracles and accomplishes just as great a thing when He freed His people from Babylonian captivity and allowed them to come back to the land of Palestine and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. There are no miracles involved here. There was simply an idea planted in the mind of Cyrus. God used the armies of Babylon even before that to destroy his people and lead them into captivity. That was God's judgment being brought because of sinful people. And, yet, as the people finally responded to the message of the prophets and cried out to them, God was willing to let them come back. God can operate powerfully in our world. He planted a thought in the mind of Augustus Caesar to enroll the whole world to that Jesus could fulfill a prophecy of the Old Testament by being born in Bethlehem, although He grew up in Nazareth. God is still able to operate dramatically.

Some think that God is bound in our world today by all the laws of nature. That is not true. Our universe does not operate according to law; it operates according to God. God is the one who controls our universe, not laws, unless they be laws that God has devised which are not necessarily the same things that we have crystallized into the so-called laws of nature. God still has a free hand to operate in our world. I think we need to gain the conception of the relationship of God to our universe that the ancient psalmist had in Psalm 65. We seem to think that somehow God is trapped by the inability to operate due to the laws of nature, but God controls all this. He can do whatever He wants to whenever He wants to. He does not have to obey any laws that men have crystallized. Look at Psalm 65. I would like you to read the entire 13 verses that you may gain an appreciation of how God relates to our universe.

God is doing all of this. God is the one who brings the spring to us. God is the one who showers the earth with water; who blankets it with a soft layer of snow. God is doing these things. It is not mother nature. It is not some law that is foreordained that causes this. Almighty God is blessing us with rain. He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. It is not an accident. It is not just some foreordained meteorological

phenomenon that rain and showers and hail come. God brings it; God does it. God is active in our world. He is active for the benefit of His people. We are not a people who are incapable of affecting any change in our world. When we pray that kingdoms may fall before God, God answers. When we pray for people who are sick, God answers. God can operate in our world today and He does operate. And let us never think that we have a God that cares not what is happening to His people. Here, in Revelation, we see the prayers of all the saints going up before the throne of God and we see the response of fire cast on the earth. God responds to the prayers; the cries of his people even today. Let us never forget it.

So, we come to Revelation chapter 8 and we see the judgments of God being brought upon those who oppose God's people and God's efforts to warn people by the judgments all along the way of the impending final judgment that is to come. Unfortunately, many people expect a literal fulfillment of these prophecies. They expect some day in the future to look into the heavens and see some kind of strange astronomical phenomena in the sky. Revelation is not talking about that. They expect that a third of all the grass on the earth is literally going to burn up and there will be two-thirds left. These are ideas completely foreign to the whole nature of prophecy. Let us go back a minute to Isaiah. Let me show you how the Bible speaks about God's activity in this world. In Isaiah 13, for example, God is talking about the destruction that is coming on Babylon. In Isaiah 13:10, there is this description of what happens when Babylon is destroyed, "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine." Read verse 13: "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger." That never happened literally. Babylon was destroyed. It still lies in ruins. God, however, brought His judgment on the world, and the prophets described it in these terms.

Look at another illustration in Isaiah 34. This time, we see Edom, a very insignificant little nation, but one that had enough power to be a thorn in the side of the other nations and a nation that thought she could never be destroyed. Here are the words of the prophet Isaiah concerning the destruction coming on

Edom. Isaiah 34:4-5: "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like scroll; all their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree. For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and the people of My curse, for judgment." No literal sword came shooting down from heaven on Edom. The heavens were not literally rolled away. The heavens were not literally dissolved. But God's judgment described in these symbols came to Edom so there is not an Edomite on the face of the earth any more. That nation has long since been lost in antiquity. God bring His wrath on people. He brings His warnings and His judgments on people and responds to the cry of the people of God.

What we have seen in Revelation 8, is one of the greatest passage on the power of prayer. Your prayers count. When you pray, God listens, and Jesus Christ intercedes for you. God continually is watching out on your behalf. Jesus continues to care for you. He wants to answer your cries and your pleas, and we need to recognize that this is part of what is involved in God's dealing with our world, even in our time. If you are not a Christian, you have missed out on the most important thing in the world: coming into a new relationship with God so that you are preparing yourself for eternity with God. Do not allow yourself to continue in rebellion and enmity against God, but become a follower of the Lamb who intercedes with God on your behalf. Give your life to the One who is able to bring you into the presence of God.

We sometimes sing that hymn, "When This Passing World is Done," and there is one phrase in there that says, "When I stand with Christ on high, looking o'er life's history." That is what Revelation is helping us to do. We are standing with Christ on high and looking over life's history to see how God is dealing with man and what is significant and the fact that we are dealing with the awesome realities of eternity. Let us get our heads out of the sand and get our minds away from this earthbound existence and realize that we are creatures of eternity. And realize that God has prepared a destiny for us in His presence where there shall be no pain or sorrow any more, where God Himself shall wipe every tear from our eyes. That is what God wants for you. Why not give your life to Him and be baptized into Him and begin a new life?

## **GOD'S WARNINGS TO REPENT**

### **REVELATION 9**

Let me drop back and very briefly try to explain what we understand Revelation to be saying to this point. Back in the first chapter of Revelation, we saw Jesus walking among his churches. In chapters two and three we saw seven typical churches with their problems and their difficulties and their victories. It is obvious that, in the world then, the church struggled against sin and against Satan. And, sometimes the struggles would become so overwhelming as to cause Christians to almost give up.

In chapter four, we are taken into heaven itself to the throne of God to be reminded that God is on His throne. God is in charge in our world and His people, therefore, can have hope. They can conquer and can ultimately gain victory. In chapter five we see the beautiful scene where the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world, ascends to the very throne of God and joins the Father at the throne. There, He receives the same worship as the Father. And, then in chapter six, we see the Lamb of God going forth conquering and to conquer, having been slain, crucified, resurrected, and ascended to the throne of God.

He, then, through the means of His people, begins to evangelize and to conquer the minds of men throughout the world. The result of that is that Satan tries to destroy the works of God.

As the world is being evangelized, Satan is also doing his best to destroy the people of God. As the second seal is opened, we see religious persecution coming. We see another seal opened and we see the economic hardship that comes to God's people, especially as they are attempting to serve God and are encountering the injustices of the world. Then, we see death, which is the common lot of mankind to the believer and the unbeliever. Death does not harm God's people for they are seen next in the very presence of God.

And, then, finally, we see the destruction God brings on mankind, but we also see again that those who are the people of God are sealed and spared from the final destruction that befalls the wicked. And, we find the people of God rejoicing at His throne forever and ever.

Then, we come to chapter 8 of Revelation and we see, as the seventh seal is opened, a series of angels bearing trumpets; trumpets of warning to those who would harm God's people. We see trumpet after trumpet sounding. At the very beginning, we see the prayers of God's people ascending to His throne and we see God responding to the prayers of His people by casting fire upon the earth. As we look at the series of trumpets of warning that follow the seals of persecution, we are able to see that God is trying to warn the wicked; those who are unbelievers; those who even may have been tormenting and persecuting God's people. God is trying to warn them to repent and turn to Him. In the previous section, where we saw the seals being unloosed, we saw God's people and unbelievers alike suffering the hardship and the difficulties of this life. As we see the trumpets of judgment and of warning, we are seeing specifically that God does bring upon the unbeliever His judgment and His warnings.

When we saw the first four trumpets sound in Revelation 8, we saw the natural calamities of the world that come upon mankind, and that should serve as a warning from God. That should cause men to consider the fact that life is very fragile and that death is something that is the lot of all mankind. Therefore, we need to think beyond death, beyond this life, to realize that God is One before whom we will give account of our lives.

As we come to the ninth chapter of Revelation, we read: "Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit" (Revelation 9:1). What is this "star fallen from heaven to the earth?" We would initially think in terms of a heavenly body. But, the verse speaks of the star as *him*. To *him* was given the key to the bottomless pit. So, the star is merely a symbol, and John is speaking about a person to whom is given the key to the bottomless pit. It was given to him. It was not something that he rightfully had, nor something whose authority was of himself, but, at least for a limited time, he was given certain power.

Who was this person? I believe it has reference to Satan. In Luke 10:18, Jesus Christ said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Satan is the one who "fell as lightning from heaven," and here we see the star falling from heaven, and to

him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And, then, when we see the horrible things that come out of the bottomless pit, we surely see satanic powers, and influences at work. Then, Revelation 12:9 says, "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." So, if we allow the Bible to interpret itself, I believe we must understand the fallen star as being Satan. "To him was given the key to the bottomless pit." We need to understand that Satan's power is limited; that he is checked; that he can only go so far; that whatever power he has is permitted him by God.

Verse 2 says, "And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air was darkened because of the smoke of the pit." What is the significance of the darkening of the sun and the air? I believe it is a symbol of the deception and spiritual blindness that Satan inflicts on men. Let us allow the scriptures to provide the clues for understanding. Go back to II Corinthians 4:3-4. Paul said, "But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."

Satan is one who causes spiritual blindness that the gospel of Christ might not penetrate the hearts of men. I believe Romans provides the closest thing to a parallel to what we have seen in Revelation 9. In Romans 1:21, Paul spoke of those who had rejected what knowledge of God had been provided them. "Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Satan deludes and deceives mankind and he darkens the soul of those who reject the knowledge of God.

Now Revelation 9:3-4 reads: "Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them were given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." Here, we see locusts coming out of the bottomless

pit, but these are most unusual locusts. We are not speaking now about a literal plague of locusts. That this is a symbol is clearly indicated by the further description that is given of these locusts. Nine times language is employed that shows that John is speaking symbolically.

Notice while there were locusts, there torment, according to verse 5, "was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man." then, according to verses 7-10, they were like horses. "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails." These are not real locusts. This is a symbol.

What is the symbol trying to say to us? These locusts are unlike literal locusts. Literal locusts eat grass and eat all of the green vegetation of the earth, but these locusts were not to hurt the vegetation of the earth; they were not to hurt the grass and they were not to hurt the trees. The only things these locusts are permitted to hurt are men. Now, the point is that here is something that affects men. In what way does it affect men? In verse five we are told: "And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man." These locusts were to bring torment to mankind. What kind of torment? I believe the kind of torment that is spoken of is the anguish that comes into the lives of men who have allowed themselves to be dominated by sin.

Let us go back to the prophecy of Joel. In the first chapter of Joel there is a description of a plague of locusts. It is a very graphic description of how the locusts come and strip the land. The plague of locusts was one of the terrors of that ancient world and even today in some parts of the world, there is hardly anything as devastating and as terrifying as a plague of locusts. In Joel, we see a description of the judgment of God being brought in the form of a plague of locusts. After the description of what the locust did, notice the conclusion and the significance of it all. He shows the aftermath of the plague: "The vine

has dried up, and the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men” (Joel 1:12). Here, ultimately, is the significance of what is taking place. Joy is withered away from the sons of men. Here we see the anguish of men who have been rebellious toward God.

As we look at Revelation 9, notice that the people who are being hurt by the locusts are not God’s people. They are spared completely. They are not going to be tormented. Why? Because God’s people have the joy of God residing in them. They have peace of mind, the peace that passes all understanding. Notice in verse 4, John said, “They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

Earlier in Revelation, we saw that the seal of God identifies God’s people; those that belong to Christ. So, the plague of locusts is going to hurt all except God’s people. In II Timothy 2:19, we are told: “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ ” God knows His people. He is not going to allow your heart to be overwhelmed so that it is totally crushed. That is not to say there will never be sorrow in our lives. It is to say there will never be anguish in our lives. But, it is to say that God is going to bring to your lives a satisfaction, and He is going to fill the needs of your lives in a way that those who have refused any relationship to Christ can never know. God’s people are in a distinct position.

In II Peter 2:9, Peter said, “Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. He is going to spare you the anguish; the terror that so often afflicts the hearts of those who know they are not right with God.

So what we are seeing here is the terrifying description of the awfulness of sin in terms of the ugliness of one of the most terrifying things that bothered the people of that time; a plague of locusts.



The description of these grotesque creatures ends with these words in verse 10: "They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months." What is the significance of the five months? Verse 5 had already said, "And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months." I think it is simply a way of saying two things: Number one, this is not the final torment of the wicked being described in Revelation 9. This is not the eternal torment of the fire of hell. What we are seeing is something that is limited, it is just for five months, and it is not the eternal punishment of the wicked. We are seeing that in this lifetime, the wicked experience an anguish of soul that eats away at them and never gives them complete satisfaction. There is always the gnawing suspicion that something is wrong. There is a terrifying realization of alienation from God.

But, secondly, I believe the five months is to simply say to us that God is the one who determines how long and how intense the anguish of spirit is going to be within man. God has set boundaries and God knows what man can endure and what he needs to endure for the purpose of trying to bring him to his senses. God permits such spiritual torment not to destroy man, but to try to warn man. These are trumpets of warning that the angels are sounding to try to cause men to realize the awfulness of the condition they are in.

But what is the significance of "five?" I do not think there is any particular significance to that at all except just to suggest the two points that we have already made. It is like asking about the parable of five wise and foolish virgins, "Why five?" I do not know. I do not think it particularly significant. He had to choose a number.

Consider the parable of the man who had five talents. Why five? Why not twelve? Why not sixty-three? I do not know. He just chose five. Let us not press details of the picture so that we distort the picture. Some will take the description of the locusts and try to give some explanation of the meaning of the teeth on the locusts, the meaning of the sting on the tail, the meaning of long hair like a woman, and things like that, but I believe there is no particular significance necessarily to all the details except as they contribute to the picture of the grotesqueness and the awfulness and the ugliness of the forces of Satan.

Verse 11 reads: "And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon." These names mean "destruction" and "destroyer." This is a perfect description of Satan. He is the one who would destroy man. He is not out to serve you. He is out to deceive you and delude you and to get you to think that his pleasures are the things that bring real satisfaction to life.

Yet, in the living of life it becomes so apparent that there comes a void and an emptiness that can never be satisfied by the kinds of deceitful pleasures that Satan would set before us. Let us seek to find our joy in those delights that God has prescribed for man's well-being and man's happiness. I believe that as we look at the fifth angel and the trumpet sounding, that we are seeing that God is permitting anguish of spirit in the hearts of unbelievers. This is for the purpose of warning them and trying to make them see that in their misery their need for God and to cause them to repent and turn to him.

Verse 12 reads: "One woe is past. Behold still two more woes are coming after these things." We look at one of those two woes. Read verses 13-19: "Then the sixth angel sounded: and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm."

But I want you to remember that the ones who are going to be hurt are not God's people; the ones who are going to be hurt are the unbelievers, those who are opposed to and are even

persecuting God's people. Remember that the first five trumpets of warning in chapter eight were the direct consequence of the prayers of God's people going before His throne. Fire was cast on the earth against those who had been tormenting and persecuting God's people.

What we are seeing in chapter nine is a continuation of the same idea. In verse 13, when the sixth angel sounded the trumpet, we were taken back to the altar at the throne of God. There, a voice was heard ordering the four angels that had been bound at the great river Euphrates, to be loosed. Again, God was the one permitting this to be done. They have been bound, and in God's good time and His appointed hour, He permits Satan to bring devastation to man who is in rebellion against Him and who has opposed and persecuted His people.

I believe what we see when the sixth trumpet sounds is the warfare that occurs in our world, which in the most vivid and graphic way, should say to the world as a warning, "Your ways are perverted ways. Your ways are corrupt ways that can only bring destruction. " It certainly shows man at his ugliest, man at his worst. It is as though man out to see, for the warfare that takes place on the earth, that men need to turn to God.

We see a third part of men killed. As we saw in the case of the first four trumpets, we see the use of the "third," which is simply to indicate that this is not the final judgment of God on mankind, but only a portion of humanity is being affected. All of this represents the warning judgments of God that come to our earth as war after war affect and plague humanity.

Notice what happens in verses 20-21: "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And, they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Notice, they repented not; they repented not. What is the significance? All of this is to bring mankind to its senses and say, "Give yourself to God. He loves you; He cares for you." These were judgments of warning on men in the hope of causing them by the awfulness of these things to repent, to turn to God.

Yet, we see the hardness and the callousness of the hearts of men, that they should not repent. They would not turn to God. We also see the patience and the long-suffering of God. He continues to warn while there is yet time and say, "Repent." Yet, man says, "I will not repent."

But, what will you say to God; to God who has tried in every way to warn you of the wrath that is to come by the temporary troubles that befall us in this life? Will you reject God and His love? Or, will you allow the things that you see in this life to warn you and to bring you to a realization of the fact that God really is on His throne? Will you see that there is no joy in following the way of Satan; that they only bring destruction? Will you see that the true joys and the true peace of mind are to be found in that relationship with God who cares for you, who has tried His best to show you the way, and who has loved you so much that He let Jesus die for you? What will you do about all of that? Will you not give your life to Jesus, believe in Him, trust Him, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you, and be baptized into Him and begin to walk with Him?

## **DELAY NO LONGER**

### **REVELATION 10**

Read Revelation 10. I would like to give you the background to what we find in this chapter so you can see the chapter in its context. Without knowing the context, this chapter would not be understood. At the beginning in chapter 1, we see Jesus walking among His churches. In chapters 2 and 3, we see the churches experiencing hardship and difficulties and probably wondering why it must be so. "Is God really on our side? Is He really there to help us?" In chapter 4, we see a door opened in heaven. There we see the throne of God and we see that God is really in charge of His universe. In chapter 5, we see Jesus, the Lamb slain, coming to the throne of God and joining the Father. We see glory and honor ascribed to the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. We see the book that was sealed and only the Lamb was worthy to open the seals.

In chapter 6, as He opens the seals one by one, we see the future opened up. We see what is to happen between the time when Jesus came, to the time when He will come again. When the first seal is opened, we see Jesus going forth to conquer. When the second seal is opened, we see the persecution that follows in the wake of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and how God's people suffer. As other seals are opened we see them suffer from economic hardship caused by injustice and from the natural calamities that occur in our world. But we see that those who die and are faithful even until death are found in the very presence of God. God protects them. And, finally, we see the destruction of the wicked.

In chapter 7, we see that the righteous have been saved. And, then, we come to a series of trumpets that are blown by seven angels. These are revealed to us as the seventh seal is opened. These represent the warning judgments of God that come on the wicked in the world in response to the prayers of the righteous that go up before the throne of God.

In Revelation, chapters 8 and 9, as we see six trumpets sound in response to the prayers of the saints of God, we see God bringing judgment upon rebellious humanity. Yet, in 9:20-21, we see that after all of these warning judgments inflicted on those who oppose God's people, "... the rest of mankind, who

were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see or hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

All through this period from chapters 8 and 9, we have been looking at the judgments of the unrighteous and the ungodly in our world. From chapter 10:1 through chapter 11:13, we see a pause in the story of Revelation as John is shown a vision of that which is going to happen for the benefit of God's own people. We have seen the judgment of God being poured out on the wicked in chapters 8 and 9. Now, before we hear the last trumpet blown, God wants us to see that we are going to be preserved and that we will be finally presented before the throne of God and we will be ultimately victorious.

We are ready to look at chapter 10:1-3: "I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices." It is an awesome spectacle that John beholds as he sees this gigantic angel who plants one foot on the earth and one on the sea and roars with a great voice. And, we wonder, "What is this angel doing here, anyway? What is his purpose, and how does he fit into the picture of what we have seen in Revelation?"

Some have misunderstood the angel as being Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ, in scripture, is never spoken of as an angel. In fact, in the book of Hebrews, in chapter one, Jesus is placed in direct contrast to the angels. He is not an angel. He is the Son of God. He is superior to the angel according to Hebrews 1. So we are not seeing Jesus in Revelation 10:1-3. We are seeing an angel who comes from the throne of God. It is true that the symbolism that surrounds this angel; his being arrayed with a cloud, a rainbow around his head, his face as the sun and his feet as a pillar of fire, are symbols. They are associated with the throne of God and with Jesus Christ as we have seen in Revelation 1 and 4. But the point is, we are being shown that this angel is not an evil angel, but an angel who

comes from the throne of God Himself. He is surrounded by the symbols associated with the Father and the Son. And, so the angel is representing Jesus Christ, and he plants one foot on the earth and one on the sea and he begins to roar like a lion. And, when he cries, the seven thunders utter their voices.

There is a fascinating passage in Psalm 29 which reminds us of what we find in the seven thunders uttering their voice. I do not believe that the seven thunders that utter their voices in Revelation 10 are saying the things that are found in Psalm 29. Yet, you find the voice of the Lord spoken of seven times. And the God of glory thunders. I believe that as we read Psalm 29, we can get something of the feel for what must be talking place.

At this point, read Psalm 29: "Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord over many waters. the voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, yes, the Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth, and strips the forest bare; and in His temple everyone says, "Glory!" The Lord sat enthroned at the Flood, and the Lord sits as King forever. The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."

I believe God may have intended that there be a recollection of this Psalm with the voice of the Lord thundering seven times in judgment because it fits so appropriately. Immediately after we hear the God of glory thundering in Psalm 29, there is that final statement: "The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

What we have seen in Revelation 8 and 9 are the judgments of God against nations. And, in the midst of all this, one might wonder what is happening to the people of God? What is their destiny? What is their fate in the midst of all that is happening? What we are seeing is that while the God of Glory thunders, it

is for the preservation and protection of God's people, for He will bless His people with peace. And, it is saying that even in the midst of our world where the judgments of God are continually poured out on the wicked, God's people are able to experience peace in their hearts. They will find strength to bear up under the burdens that may come on them as well. We are hearing the glory of God thundering through the means of an angel.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we have the suggestion that the roaring of the voice of God is really something that is associated with peace for the people of God. Look at Hosea 11:10-11: " 'They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, then his sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses,' says the Lord." In other words, here is a roaring of the Lord for the purpose of the preservation of His people whom He will preserve in their houses.

Then, we turn to the next prophecy of the Old Testament. Joel 3:16 says, "The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel." the roaring of the Lord may be terrifying to the hearts of the ungodly, but to the people of God it is reassuring that He is the awesome Ruler of our universe, and that the power that men possess in our world is nothing compared to the power of God. So as we see the angle of God who plants a foot on the sea and plants a foot on the land and towers above the earth, we realize we need not fear what is happening to men on the earth because God is going to protect His people.

We continue in Revelation 10:4: "Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven things uttered, and do not write them.' " John had seen revelations and, as he was seeing them, he was writing down the things he saw. Now, he hears the seven thunders utter their voices and he is about to write down what they say when a voice says, "Do not write. Seal these things up." and you say, "What is the significance of that?" I believe the significance is that God is saying to us, "Look, I am not revealing



everything to you of my purposes and how I am going to deal with our world. There are some things that still can not be revealed that you cannot hear and you cannot understand.”

This reminds me of the passage in Deuteronomy 29:29 which says, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

In our time, we hear preachers on the radio trying to speak to the American people about the book of Revelation. It distresses me that so often they pick details out of context and say that they refer to what is happening in some nation, or some other place. They really have no idea what they are talking about. They are trying to see and hear things that God never intended to reveal in the first place. They are trying to draw back the veil on the future and see things about which God is not intending to speak.

As we study Revelation, we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. We must not try to read into these symbols and these passages our own wishes and desires of how we think things ought to be or may be in the future. There are some things that belong to God and God simply has not chosen to reveal to us everything we would like to know about what is going to happen. We must content ourselves with the things that have been revealed.

So often people spend their lives caught up in speculations about the future and trying to see things that God never wanted to reveal rather than devoting their lives to faithful obedience to the things that God has clearly revealed that we must do.

God has shown us so clearly in the scriptures how we ought to live our lives. He has shown us how we ought to treat each other. He shows us what He expects us to do with reference to the poor; with those who are in need. He shows us the way we should treat our husbands and wives and children and how we should treat the people where we work. The Bible is clear about the way we are to live our lives and how we are to be pleasing to God. Yet so many overlook the obvious things just as the hypocrites in Jesus’ day overlooked the more important things; being obsessed with their irrelevant traditions.

It is amazing how many commentators try their best to suggest what is being said when the seven thunders uttered their voices when the voice from heaven told John to seal it up—that this is not for the world to know. I believe we are being told that God has purposes, plans, and capacities that are beyond our capacity to understand. What He has chosen to reveal to us is sufficient enough that we can take courage because that is the reason Revelation was written. It was written to provide comfort and assurance to the people of God that they might realize that God is in charge and His people are going to be victorious.

What John is saying to us in chapter 10 is: "Do not worry about the awesome calamities that befall our world. Do not worry about the wars and the chaos and the confusion of our times. Just realize and remember that you, as God's people, are going to be preserved and you will be protected and you will be brought ultimately into the very presence of God if you continue faithfully even until death."

Read Revelation 10:5-6: "The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer." God is going to act suddenly and quickly and there will be no more delays.

In other words, when God in His good time decides to act, then He is going to act. He is going to act suddenly and quickly and it is going to be all over. But, what we have seen is God's patience continually extended. We have seen God, time and again, sending His angels to the earth to try to warn the hardening hearts of men of the fact that one day they are going to stand in the presence of God. Yet, we are told they repented not of their works, and again, "they repented not," but, finally, the time is going to come when God says, "No more. There shall be delay no longer."

Then, the seventh angel will sound the trumpet, Jesus will come again, and, then, we shall all finally stand before the throne of God in judgment and be told our final destiny. But, there will come a time when the patience of God is going to end, when there will be no delay, and He will come.

Notice verses 6 and 7: "... that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, they mystery of God would finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets." That time when the seventh angel sounds will be a time of good news for the people of God. It is a tragedy that so many Christians find a bit of terror in the thought of Jesus coming again. Yet as we come to the very end of Revelation there is a great anticipation of the time.

"Come, Lord Jesus" is the final prayer of the Bible. What a great day it is going to be when the Lord will return and take His people into eternal bliss! What those strange attractions of this world that make us want to live here longer, anyway? Are they not the deceitful delusions of Satan? Surely we ought to look forward with anticipation to that time when the seventh angel sounds, when the delay of God's bringing the end of this world shall finally cease and when God shall bring salvation to all who are faithfully to Christ.

We continue at Revelation 10:8-10: "Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.' So I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be sweet as honey in your mouth.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter."

In the Old Testament, there is in the prophecy of Ezekiel, a parallel to what we have seen here. The same kind of thing happened in the experience of Ezekiel, and we turn to Ezekiel 2:9 and read through Ezekiel 3:3: "Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. Moreover He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.' So

I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness." And now notice verse 14: So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." I believe what happened to Ezekiel helps us understand a little better what is happening here in Revelation. Ezekiel, in the vision, was given a book to eat and it was sweet in his mouth and later he goes forth in bitterness.

What is this all about? Let us look at Psalm 119:103: "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Now, look at Jeremiah 15:16-18: "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?"

The experience of receiving the word of God and, of course, the idea of eating the book is the idea of absorbing the word of God, taking it in to your very heart and letting it lodge there and become a part of you. And, John does this and the reaction is that it was sweet as he took it because the word of God is precious and it is sweeter than honey. But, following that, there came a certain bitterness, which may be explained in one of two ways. One is that the message of God cuts two ways. The sweet message of God is good news to the righteous but it is a terrifying and bitter message to those who are disobedient and who would reject the word of God. So, the message of God that was presented to John in the little book was both sweet and bitter.

I believe the second, and more likely possibility, is that whenever the sweet word of God is proclaimed, God's people in turn experience the bitter reaction of the wicked and impenitent to the presentation of that word. At least that is what we see in the very next chapter of Revelation when the word of God is proclaimed; the messengers of the word of God are slain. That is the thing that we saw back in Revelation 6 as well. When the word of God went forth, the next thing that we saw was the persecution of the people of God. So the gospel is a message,

which brings to its messengers sweetness as well as the bitterness of the persecution which comes. But, for those who faithfully proclaim the message of God there is that unspeakable joy and that final exultation which comes when we hear at the end of it all, "Well done, good and faithful servant: ... Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21). And that is what God's people look forward to; the final recompense of reward which comes to those who are righteous and who live faithfully for God even until death.

After John had received the little book, which apparently has something to do with the message of God, pertaining to God's people, in the midst of all of what has been said about the fate of the wicked, we see the final statement in Revelation 10:11: "And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.' "

When the revelation of God has come to His servants, the servants of God are always order to take that message and proclaim it. And John, in the remaining portion of the book of Revelation, is doing that very thing. He is giving His prophecy concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings. And, as we continue through the book of Revelation, we are going to see more of what God has said through John, His servant, pertaining to the destiny of nations and people and tongues and kings.

In the next message, in Revelation 11, we are going to see one of the most joyous and terrifying visions that is yet to be found. What we have seen is God trying to pause for a moment to say, "I am going to preserve my people. I have warned the wicked to turn from their ways, but they responded not. I have brought calamities upon the wicked but as far as my own people are concerned, I am going to turn the calamities and judgments to the glorifying of my own people and to the preservation of my own people and to their ultimate salvation.

We need to realize that God's patience does ultimately wear thin, that there is going to come that occasion, and we do not know when it will be, when God will say that time shall be no more. There shall be delay no longer when the seventh angel sounds the trumpet. The earth will be destroyed and Jesus will come again to bring His people to the very throne of God. do

you want to be among that number? Do you want to live your life in such a way that you have no fear of that impending judgment, but rather can look forward with anticipation to the coming of Jesus Christ and be able to express fervently from your heart the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus?"

If you have not been living faithfully for Christ, will you not open the door of your heart and let Him back in your life? And, if you have never given your life to Jesus, why not believe on Him, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized in Him that you can have your sins washed away and have the assurance that you are now God's child, having been born of the water and spirit?

You, then, can finally breathe a sigh of relief knowing that Jesus has borne your sins and your iniquities and that He is now confessing your name before the Father so that when He comes again, He can introduce you to the Father and say, "This is my child. I want You to receive him to be with Us forever." What a great day that will be!

## **THE TWO WITNESSES**

### **REVELATION 11**

We have come to the eleventh chapter of Revelation which some have called the most difficult chapter of the most difficult book of the Bible. And, my task is simply to try to make this chapter easy to understand and to help you to see what God is trying to say to us. I believe that if I am able to do so, even in a small way, that you will be thrilled and inspired and encouraged.

Before we get into the chapter itself, we need to drop back and very quickly review the book of Revelation to this point. This will give you the background against which we enter this chapter, because the book of Revelation has a marvelous unity. It is not simply a hodgepodge of various odd symbols thrown together in some way to confuse you, but if Revelation is carefully and thoughtfully studied, it will be seen as a book of beautiful unity.

In chapter one of Revelation, we see Jesus in the midst of His churches reminding us of His promise, "... and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). In chapters two and three, we see the church struggling, suffering, seduced, and some of its soldiers slain, and we sense that the church that has been urged to be faithful until death is wondering if it is really worth it. Is Satan winning the battle? Chapter four of Revelation answers with a resounding, "No!" We see a door opened in heaven and One is sitting upon the throne and we are made to realize that God is in charge of His creation. He rules and He reigns.

In chapter five, we see the book of human destiny sealed. We see the Lamb of God, who has been slain, ascend to the throne; and He is found worthy to unloose the seals and to reveal and carry out God's purposes. He begins to reign. In chapter six, as the first seal is opened, we see Him going forth conquering and to conquer, which, according to II Corinthians 10:3-5, is accomplished through the agency of God's people who, through their warfare, are bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. But, where the gospel goes, persecution follows. So, the next three seals when they are unloosed, reveal Christians suffering persecution, economic

hardship, and even death. But, lest this discourage the soldiers of the cross, we see when the fifth seal is opened, the souls of them that have been slain for the word of God living in His very presence. Having been reassured that death can not destroy God's people, we see when the sixth seal is opened, the final wrath of God poured out on a rebellious world, and the question is asked, "Who is able to stand?"

Chapter seven answers, "The servants of our God." They are preserved and protected and are seen standing before the throne and before the Lamb. We are told that God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. What about God's people while that are on the earth? Does God not hear the cries, the prayers of His persecuted people? He does, and chapters eight and nine show in God's warning trumpets, His judgment being sounded against those who persecute God's people, showing that He does hear their prayers. His people pray and God casts fire upon the earth.

The first four trumpets sound, and we see God sending natural calamities upon the world. The fifth trumpet sounds, and we see the wicked experiencing the spiritual agonies that accompany their sinful manner of life. The sixth trumpet sounds, and we see the wicked afflicted with the agony of warfare. All of these judgments are designed to turn men to God.

But, we are told at the end of the ninth chapter that the rest of mankind, who are not killed with these plagues, repented not. The statement is repeated for emphasis. "They repented not." All that remains now is the return of Christ and the final destruction of the wicked. But, in the meantime, what is happening to God's people which these judgments are being brought against the wicked? Chapter 10 through chapter 11:14, form a parenthesis to explain to us what happens to God's people during all this—chapter ten introduces and chapter eleven describes it.

We begin the study of the eleventh chapter of Revelation with verse 1: "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.' " There was a long time when I was totally baffled by that verse. I could not understand what could possibly be meant by the suggestion of



measuring the temple of God and measuring the people and measuring the altar, etc. Finally, it was called to my attention that the Bible talks about measuring things elsewhere, in other prophetic literature of the Bible. I believe that we should allow the Bible to interpret itself as far as possible. And, I believe that we can find something of the significance of the measuring if we will read some references from the Old Testament.

Concerning the temple of God, Ezekiel 42:20 says, "He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, five hundred cubits long and five hundred wide, to separate the holy areas from the common." We see the temple of God being measured, and it is being measured for the purpose of making a separation between that which was holy and that which was common. Now, turn to Ezekiel 22:26, and we will see another passage referring to this measuring process and its significance. There it says, "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made know the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them." We see that there needs to be a distinction made between holy and the unclean; between that which is God's and that which is not God's, and the measuring that we saw in chapter 42 is for the purpose of making that kind of distinction. Ezekiel 48:35 says: "All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE." The temple is measured. It is measured and determined as being holy, and the presence of God is there.

We read another prophecy in the Old Testament; a passage that actually has more direct bearing on what we are seeing in Revelation. This should help us to get the background and meaning of the concept of measuring. This is Zechariah 2:1-5 which says: "Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, 'Where are you going?' And he said to me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.' And there was the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, who said to him, 'Run, speak to this young man, saying: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I," says the Lord, "will be a wall of fire all around her,

and I will be the glory of her midst." ' ' " There are two ideas suggested in the measuring process: one is the idea of separation and distinguishing that which is holy, and the other is the idea of protection.

Now, let us see how these ideas apply to Revelation 11. The temple is to be measured. Actually, the word "temple" would be better translated "sanctuary," because it does not have reference to the whole temple complex. There are two Greek words translated "temple," but this word is one that has reference to the holy place and the Most Holy, the inner sanctuary of the temple. John is to measure the temple of God and the altar and them that worship therein. The measuring is to distinguish a holy people; a people separated for God; a people protected by God because the presence of God is here. The point is that although the saints will suffer, they will not perish.

That is made clear in Revelation 11:2: "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." Now, the temple is mentioned again. This does not have reference to the literal temple that was in the city of Jerusalem. To so treat it is to do violence to the way in which the book of Revelation and the New Testament deal with the concept of the temple. The temple of God is spoken of in the New Testament as being the church of God. For example, in I Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul said, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." *You* is plural, and has reference to all of the Christians together; the whole church. In the Old Testament, God had ordered the people of Israel to build a house where He might dwell; where His presence might be.

When we come to the New Testament, there is a transformation of the concept, because the church now becomes the temple of God where the Spirit of God dwells. He dwells in us individually, as Paul mentions in I Corinthians 6:19-20, and He dwells in the church as a whole. We are the temple of God. Again, in II Corinthians 6:16-17, Paul said, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple

of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' " II Corinthians 7:1 continues: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Apostle Paul, the writer of II Corinthians, says that we are a temple of the living God and, consequently, we ought to come out of the world. We ought to be a separated people. We ought to be a people no longer living in the defilement of the flesh and the spirit. Just as the measuring of the temple was suggestive of the idea of making a distinction and separation between the holy and the unclean, God's people, the church, are to be a people that are a holy people; a people set apart, sanctified, and protected by God. That is the picture we are seeing in Revelation 11:2.

We need to remember that Revelation is written in the context of the new covenant where Christians are identified as the true Jews. Notice Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 3:29; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:3; James 1:1, and I Peter 2:9-10. These are some references showing that under the new covenant, Christians are regarded as the true Israel, the Israel of God, those who are Jews indeed, the true circumcision. And, just as individual Christians are the true Jews, so collectively, Christians who form the church comprise the temple of God. That is what we are seeing in Revelation 11:1-2. We are seeing the church of the living God measured, separated, and protected because Jehovah is there. His presence is with His people.

But, while God preserves and protects His people, the fact remains that His people will still suffer. In Revelation 11:2, he says, "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." The temple, the court, the holy city, all of these refer to God's people. Remember, the court was also a part of the temple of God. The holy city, here, does not have reference to literal Jerusalem. The holy city is the expression of the new Jerusalem that is spoken of in Hebrews 12:22-23 where the write says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living

God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect." The holy city represents God's church. What we are seeing are terms referring to the church. But, in this composite symbol, we see the church, on the one hand, exposed to the world so that the church continues to suffer persecution. The court, the holy city, and the temple represent the church of Christ. Both aspects of the experience of God's people are seen; both protection and persecution.

In Luke 12:4-5, you recall, Jesus said, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" This has always been the experience of God's people. There has never been a need to fear those who can kill the body; yet, God's people have always been exposed to the persecution of those who oppose God and His cause and His people. At the same time, God's people have always been protected and preserved, so that they can not be cast into hell. As long as we are faithful to God ; as long as we remain His people; we are protected though we may be persecuted.

Homer Hailey wrote on this passage, "The measured temple symbolizes the inner or spiritual life of the true worshipers which neither Satan nor his instruments of persecution can reach; this is measured and protected by God. But He has not promised to protect the physical life of the body of Christians from being sacrificed and trampled under foot." As Jim McGuiggan put it, "He permits the suffering but will not permit the annihilation—the inner sanctuary is kept by Him." This harmonizes with what follows in this chapter and what is taught throughout the book of Revelation and throughout the New Testament.

Remember, Jesus said to His disciples, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). God's people will be a persecuted people. Remember, the scripture says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (II Timothy 3:12). The point is, God's people need to understand that in this life there will be suffering, there will be hardships, and

there will be persecution. There will be every effort on the part of Satan to seduce and to allure to his way of life. And, in this world, we endure all of this. But, the point also is that Satan can not destroy. He is not able to snatch any out of the Lord's hand. We can leave God, but as long as we stay with God, Satan can not overcome us. What we are seeing, I believe, in the composite picture of Revelation 11:1-2 is the church, persecuted and protected.

Now, we need to deal with the number given in Revelation 11:2. What is the "forty and two months?" I believe that when we understand the significance of the forty and two months, we will understand even better that these verses are speaking about God's people: His church. Forty and two months is the same thing as three and a half years, and on the Jewish calendar of 360 days in a year, that equals to 1,260 days. That, also, is the same thing as the expression of Revelation 12:14, "time, and times and half a time," *time* being a year, *times* being two years, and *half a time* being half a year which adds up to three and a half years. We have three and a half years expressed in four different ways.

I want you to see how these terms are used elsewhere in the book of Revelation so that you will begin to understand what is meant by that forty-two months period of time. First, here in Revelation 11:2, we have seen the holy city being trodden under foot for forty-two months. In the next verse, the church is proclaiming the gospel to the world on a day-to-day basis for 1,260 days, which is the same period of time. The church is being persecuted, but protected from the full wrath of Satan during this period of three and a half years (Revelation 12:14 and 12:6). Satan is trying to deceive God's people during this period which is spoke of as forty-two months in Revelation 13:5. What do we see here? We are seen the same period of time spoke of in terms of days, months, years, and even time, times, and half a time. It is a period when the church is being persecuted and a period when the church is proclaiming the gospel to the world. A time when Satan is trying to deceive the people of God.

The expression, "time, times and half a time" is also used in Daniel 12:7. Read this because I want you to get the full picture, and this will complete the references found in the Bible.

to this period of time, Daniel 12:7 says, "Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was about the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

Even in Revelation where that expression is used, it has reference to the time when the holy people are being broken in pieces; a time of persecution of God's people. Now, we ask a simple question. What is the period of time during which the church suffers persecution, and during which the church is trying to proclaim the gospel to the world; the time in which the world is being seduced by Satan? It is a the period from the time the church began on the day of Pentecost to the time that Jesus comes again. The church has been preaching the gospel; the church, consequently, is suffering persecution, and Satan is trying his best to seduce the people of God. This expression, then, has reference to the entire Christian age, and that is important for us to understand.

We are learning in chapter 11 about the condition of the people of God. In chapters 8 and 9, we saw what has been happening to the world. Now, we are going to learn about God's people during the time when all the calamities, spiritual agonies, and warfare are affecting the people of the world. Here is what has been happening to the people of God. They are preaching the word and they are being persecuted. They are suffering, but they are being protected by God so that they can not be destroyed. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church and God's people will ultimately triumphant. That is the message we are seeing.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matthew 5:11). That is how it will always be with God's people. We are not, in this life, going to have a bed of roses. But, we shall have the continual presence and protection and preservation of the power of God working among us.

You might say, "Why would Revelation use a symbol of three and a half years to speak of the entire Christian age? Does that make sense?" Superficially, it may not. But I believe we must

let the Bible interpret the Bible as far as possible. Does the Bible have anything else to say about a three and a half year period for which Revelation might have drawn such a symbol for a period of the proclamation of God's message and the persecution of the people of God?

All we have to do is go to James 5:17. There, you recall that James said, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain in the land for three years and six months." There is the figure that we are seeing over and over again in Revelation. You might say, "What is the possible connection, if there is any, between what happened in the case of Elijah for three and a half years and the use of such a symbol in Revelation? That three and a half year period just happened to be in the days of Elijah and Ahab when God's message was being proclaimed, that His people were being oppressed.

Look at I Kings 17:1. I want to show you several references in I Kings related to it. It says, "And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain three years, except at my word.'" Now look at chapter 18:10: "As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and what they said, 'He is not here,' he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you." Now, read verse 13: "Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord's prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?" Here is a period of the prophets' proclamation of God's word when the prophets had to be hidden in a cave because of the persecution that was brought against them.

While this was a period of proclamation of God's message and the persecution of God's people, it was also a time of the protection of God's people so they could not be destroyed. I Kings 18:4 says, "For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water." And then, in verse 39, we are told: "Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord His is God!' " Then, 19:18 says, "Yet I

have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

God's people were oppressed. Many were killed. But, God preserved His people, and, when Elijah was in a condition of despair and saying, "I am the only one left," God said, "Elijah, there are seven thousand that have not yet bowed their knee to Baal." And, we need to realize, brethren, we are not alone in the world. We are not fighting our battles alone. There are people elsewhere in this world who are trying to please God, to serve God; and we know that God is on the throne, and that He is in charge, and His people will be triumphant. Let us not be like little children who say, "Everybody else is doing it." We ought to grow up and realize that is a lie of Satan. Everybody else is not doing it.

There are still people who are serving God, who are committed to Him, and who have not bowed their knee to Baal. And, we need to realize, and understand that here was a period, also, in the time of Elijah, a three and a half year period of the proclamation of the message of God, the persecution of God's people, but, also, the preservation of God's people. So, three and a half is a perfect symbol of the Christian age when, again, God's people are proclaiming the message, being persecuted and, yet, being protected by the grace of Almighty God. That the speaker in Revelation had the three and a half period of Elijah's day in mind is indicated by the statement in Revelation 11:6, "These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy." That is a perfect statement of what happened in the days of Elijah. The heavens were shut, and it rained not for three and a half years.

Now, read Revelation 11:3: "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Who are the two witnesses? In verse 4, he says, "these are the two olive trees and the two Lampstands standing before the God of the earth." Then, we are told in verse 10: "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." These two witnesses are called two olive trees, two candlesticks, and two prophets. To what can this possibly refer?



Let us think about it a minute. There is only one other time in scripture where two olive trees are associated with candlesticks. Again, it is an Old Testament reference, I believe that gives us the background to what we are seeing here. In Zechariah 4:1-4, we read, "Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, 'What do you see?' So I said, 'I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.' So I answered and spoke to the angle who talked with me, saying, 'What are these, my lord?' " Now, we have two olive trees which represent the word of Jehovah. What are the two olive trees doing? They are standing their on either side of the candlesticks furnishing the olive oil to provide the light from the candlesticks. We have seen in the scripture where the candlesticks and the olive trees are tied together.

When we return to the more immediate context of Revelation, we see, in 1:20, that the candlesticks or the lampstands, represent the churches. What was the purpose of the church as it went out in the world? It served as a witness to the whole world. It was carrying the message of the prophets to the whole world. Now, there is one other thing that we need to know in connection with all of this. According to Revelation 11:7, these two prophets are going to be slain. "When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them." you do not speak of making war with two people, so, we are not talking about two individuals in Revelation 11. There is a war that is taking place.

Revelation tells us who the beast makes war with, in Revelation 13:7. It says, "And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." The beast makes war with the saints. That is God's people, the church. So, who are the two witnesses, the two candlesticks, the two olive trees, and the two prophets? It is the gospel-proclaiming church. "Why is it spoke of as two? There may be several reasons. One is suggested in a principle established in Deuteronomy and repeated in II Corinthians 13:1: "This will be the third time I am coming to you. By the mouth of two or three witnesses

every word will be established." The point is that the church serves as an adequate witness to the world. It may also be that the two witnesses represent two things. The word of God, as suggested by the olive trees in Zechariah 4, and God's people, because the word of God is what God's people carry into the world. But, what happens? Revelation 11:4-5 says, "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner." You may say, "That does not sound like a church to me. How is fire coming out of the mouth of the church? That does not make sense." Let us go back to Jeremiah 5:14 and read: "Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: 'Because you speak this word, Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.'"

As the church goes forth presenting the word of God, it converts many; but it is a fire devouring those who reject it. And, then again, it says in Revelation 11:6, "These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with plagues, as often as they desire." You say, "Can the church do that?" We have already read Revelation 8 that says, "Yes, the church can do that." The prayers of the saints are sent to the throne of God and God casts fire down on the earth. God hears the prayers of his persecuted people. Yes, the prayers of the church have power to change the world, to affect the world, and to affect the governments of the world.

When we say, "Pray for the kings of the earth," we mean it. It makes a difference. God hears our prayers and His suffering and persecuted people will be avenged by the wrath of God. That is what Revelation 8 is telling us. Yes, the church is not some kind of insignificant, trivial little institution on the face of the earth; it is God's powerful people proclaiming its message and powerfully affecting the course of the world.

Read Revelation 11:7-10: "When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which

spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." The two prophets tormented them, not in the sense the church was trying to be mean to the world, but in the sense that Elijah was called by the wicked Ahab, "... the troubler of Israel" (I Kings 18:17).

That is how the world sees the church; as the source of its troubles. From God's point of view, it was Ahab who was the troubler of Israel. The point of the whole passage seems to be that, at the end of time, when the period of the proclamation of the church is about to come to an end, it appears that the power of the church to proclaim the message throughout the world is going to be curtailed to such an extent that it seems as though the church is no longer able to carry on. It seems as though the church has been killed. It reminds us of what Jesus said in Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

We do know there will be some, because, when He comes again, one will be taken and the other left. But, there will be a brief time at the end where it will seem as though the gates of Hades have prevailed against the church. This three and a half years of evangelization by the church seems to suggest a brief period at the very end when it look like Satan has won. But, when it looks like Satan has won, then what happens?

We come to an exciting climax which is found in the middle of the book. They went up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them. Read Revelation 11:11-13: "Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice form heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and tenth of the city fell, In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven." Here we see God's people caught up to heaven.

Jesus is coming again. The wicked are being destroyed. We do not have the full description, because all of a sudden, it is cut off with the words in verse 14: "The second woe is past. Behold the third woe is coming quickly."

And, now, the seventh angel finally sounds, and there is finished the mystery of the gospel that is spoken of in Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!' " God is triumphant. His people have gone to be with Him. They have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and they shall ever be with the Lord, for the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ: and he shall reign forever and ever.

Revelation 11:16-17: "And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: 'We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned.'" Note what was said back in Revelation 4:8, when we came for the first time to the throne of God to see God sitting on His throne. Angels were falling down before Him and saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Jesus has come, and He has delivered His people at the very time that Satan had, apparently, gained a victory. God's people are triumphant! They are preserved, they are protected, and they are saved to reign with Him forever and ever.

Then, we are told in Revelation 11:18-19: "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth. Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

Notice that now, finally, God's people have gone to meet Him, and the temple of God is opened, the sanctuary, where the ark of the covenant was, and only one man could go one time in a year into the Most Holy place. But, when Jesus shed His blood

on the cross of Calvary, the veil was ripped from top to bottom, the Most Holy place was opened. Now it is open for all who accept the message of Jesus Christ.

I believe the greatest commentary on this is found in Hebrews 10:19-25: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Brethren, the sanctuary of God is open in heaven where the ark rests and where the presence of God is, and we have direct access to Him who had been veiled for so long. So, let us draw near with fullness of heart, having our bodies washed with pure water, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.

Finally, in Revelation 11, we see the same scene that was seen the first time we saw God on His throne in Revelation 4. We are told that there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and God in all of His awesome glory is there awaiting us. Will you give your heart to Him and begin to walk in His way? If you believe in Jesus, repent of your sins and confess your faith in Him. Then, have your body washed with pure water, that your heart may be sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of Jesus Christ. That blood was shed on the cross. It split the veil of the temple, and opened the way to the presence of God.

## **THE DRAGON AND THE WOMAN**

### **REVELATION 12**

We have been studying Revelation and by the time we came to the end of the eleventh chapter, we came to the end of the world. We came to the time when Jesus had already come again, yet we have eleven more chapters in Revelation. What happens? In the first eleven chapters, we have seen the conflict between the church and those who are persecuting and opposing it in this world. As we come to chapter 12, we are going to look into the background of all of this. We are looking at what is behind all of this. There is a greater struggle taking place behind the scenes that accounts for the troubles that the church has in the world.

We are going back to the time when Jesus first came into our world. We are going to eventually see Jesus coming again, In Revelation, we see a recapitulation. We see God dealing with His people from Christ's first coming until His second coming. This will be seen from several perspectives as we would our way through this book of Revelation. There are many diverse interpretations and radically different views of what the book of Revelations is all about, largely due to a misunderstanding of the basic nature of the book. There are those who hold to a continuous historical interpretation of Revelation. They assume that Revelation is a prophecy of that which was to occur, in sequence, from the time that John wrote this book until the end of time.

By the time they are in the eleventh chapter of Revelation; they have moved historically up to the time of the Roman emperor, Constantine, or into the fourth or fifth centuries. But, then, they have a horrible time dealing with chapter twelve because, very clearly, chapter twelve is telling us about the birth of Jesus and about His ascension into heaven. It just does not historically fit there. So, Revelation is forced into an unnatural structure. I believe we allow Revelation to interpret itself; to form its own framework for interpretation.

There are those who say that all of Revelation has been fulfilled. Those who take the preterit's view of Revelation, believe that Revelation was something that was written for its own time, for the first century, or, at least, the first two, three, or

four centuries. They believe it is dealing in a historical way with events taking place in the first century, or the first few centuries after Christ. There are those who say that everything in the book of Revelation has already, centuries ago, been fulfilled and there is nothing of the future to be found in Revelation. There are those who say that Revelation is not even talking about the second coming of Christ, and that it does not anywhere talk about the eternal reward of the righteous. They say it was fulfilled and came to a climax, when the pagan Roman Empire fell. Those who hold that view do so largely because in the first and last chapters of Revelation, there are statements that this book is telling us about things which must "shortly come to pass."

There is almost an obsession with the word "shortly," as though everything in the book was to take place in a very, very brief period of time. And yet, Revelation 12:12 says, "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." The same word is used here as the devil has a "short" time. Yet, he has been at work for nineteen hundred years or more already; ever since Jesus came the first time. But, to get around that problem, one writer who takes this view said in his commentary that, actually, none of the time symbols in Revelation have anything to do with time! He says the 1,260 days, three and a half years, and 42 months, and the time, times and half a time have, really nothing to do with time. Yet, after having said that, it is argued that "shortly" means a period of just a very few limited years. There is a strange inconsistency to all of this, and I think that many have forced Revelation into a very strange bed. They have demanded, on the basis of a word here or there, or a preconception about what the books is supposed to do, how it should be interpreted.

I have spent little time dealing with alternative interpretations in order to present to you what I believe Revelation is saying. I believe as we read Revelation and see what light other portions of scripture shed on the book, it comes out very naturally making itself reasonably clear to us. As we go along, I believe other points of view can be seen against the background of this as being simply inadequate. They do not really provide us with the great encouragement and inspiration that

the book of Revelation is designed to give to our lives. Certainly, it is designed to bring comfort to the people of God, as all interpreters agree. It says to God's people that if you are faithful until death, you will be victorious. Therefore, let us be faithful and let us endure.

We come now to the twelfth chapter of Revelation, which speaks of "The Dragon and the Woman." I believe this marks a major division in the book. Chapters one through eleven are one section and chapters twelve through twenty-two form the second major section of the book. Read Revelation 12:1-2: "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth." Verse 5 says: "She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne."

If we just took these two verses, we might be inclined to think of this as the Roman Catholic Church as more traditionally interpreted it. They say it refers to Mary because it does clearly speak of the birth of Jesus Christ and, obviously, the woman who gave birth to Jesus Christ was Mary. So, one might conclude at once that we are seeing here a mention of Mary under the term of a woman. But, as we read all that this chapter has to say about this woman, Mary simply cannot fit. This woman is described as accomplishing far more things than could be explained in terms of Mary. If we will allow the Bible to explain itself, I believe we will come to an understanding of what this woman is, and we have to understand who the woman is or we miss the entire point of this chapter.

Who is the woman? She is "... a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars." There is one place in the Bible, which I think, serves as the background for this particular symbol. Genesis 37:9-10 speaks of Joseph and says, "Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.' So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers come to bow down to the earth



before you?' " Let us pause and think about this for a moment. Here is Joseph. He has a dream. He dreams about the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowing down before him. Joseph's father was Jacob. Remember that Jacob was the one whose name was changed to Israel and Israel is the one who has the twelve sons. Eleven are mentioned here. Joseph is the twelfth. And, Jacob understands what is being implied by the dream. He, Israel, is represented by the sun and his wife, Rachael, and the eleven sons of Israel are represented by the moon and eleven stars in the dream.

What do we have here? We have the sun and the moon and the stars as a beautiful representation of the people of Israel. What are we seeing? In the symbol that is used in Revelation 12:1-2, where we see a woman arrayed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. I believe, is simply a rearranging of the symbolism that is found in Joseph's dream. I wonder what better symbolism you could use to represent Israel than a woman surrounded by these objects. In much of the art that is found associated with the Roman Catholic Church, you will see pictures of Mary arrayed with the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown with twelve stars. The perpetuates the notion that Mary is referred to here. But, in reality, what we are seeing is the people of God spoken of in terms of a woman; a woman specifically who "...cried out in labor and in pain to give birth."

I want you to understand that, in addition to this, the Old Testament frequently portrays Israel as a woman who is about to give birth. This provides additional reasons for believing that the symbolism in Revelation pertaining to the woman giving birth has reference to Israel. Let me show you just three examples, out of several that could be given, in the Old Testament. Let us go to Isaiah 26:17: "As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O Lord."

Now turn to Isaiah 66:7-8: "Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children."

Turn and read Micah 5:2-3: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth: then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel." Here, in very specific and pointed terms, Micah refers to the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew 2:4-6 refers to this prophecy of Micah to the birth of Jesus is Bethlehem. It is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah. Out of Judah One is being born. Israel is giving birth to a child and that is precisely what we are seeing in Revelation, chapter twelve. The nation of Israel is that which eventually brought forth the Messiah, the Christ, into this world.

There is an interesting transformation that occurs in the symbolism of the woman in Revelation twelve. However, it refers to more than simply the Israel of the old covenant. It comes to take on a larger significance, as Israel continually does in the book of Revelation. It includes not only the people of the old covenant, but also God's people in the new covenant.

At the end of the book of Galatians, Paul speaks of Christians as the Israel of God. Throughout the New Testament, God's people who are Christians, followers of Christ, are spoken of over and over again as the true circumcision, the seed of Abraham. Abraham was the one who not only was the father of fleshly Israel, but was also the father of spiritual Israel, which includes all those who are faithful to God and to Jesus Christ, His Son. So, initially, we see the woman in Revelation as giving birth to the Christ and then we see, later on, the woman as being the ones who are the followers of the Christ. So, the woman is a symbol for all of God's people under the old covenant and under the new covenant.

Let us continue with Revelation 12:3: "And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads." In chapter thirteen, we are going to go into a discussion of the significance of the seven heads and the ten horns and the seven diadems, or crowns, on the heads. We are going to see a beast coming up out of the sea that has these things in common with the dragon. We believe it will be easier at that time to

explain the significance of the seven heads and the ten horns and the seven diadems.

Let us continue with verse 4: "His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born." Now, who is the dragon? Revelation twelve explains itself in unmistakable terms as to who the dragon is. Verse nine says, "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Then, in the latter part of verse ten, he is described as "... the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." So, the dragon is the devil, Satan. What is Satan doing? Satan is shown in verse 4 as standing before the woman who is about to be delivered, so when she is delivered, he may devour her Child. This is precisely what Satan did when Jesus came into the world—when He was born in Bethlehem, Satan did all he could to try to see that Jesus was destroyed. He had all of the male babies killed by Herod in hope that that would get rid of Jesus. But, that did not work because Jesus was taken down into Egypt. At least, he made the effort at the very beginning to destroy the Christ.

Verse 5 says, "She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne." Virtually all commentators on Revelation agree the child is Jesus Christ, but there are a few, here and there, who have tried to explain that in some other way. The picture is so clear that it hardly needs explanation. Let me, at least for the sake of the record, show you why we know for certain that when we look at the Child we are seeing Jesus Christ. We go back to the Old Testament background again, back to Psalm 2:7-9, which says, "I will declare the decree: The Lord said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" This is a Messianic Psalm, that is, a Psalm prophesying concerning the Christ. We know that because in Hebrews 1:5, the writer quotes from that particular Psalm, the part that we have read in verses 7-9, and applies it

to Jesus. He says, "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son. Today I have begotten You?' "

Here we are seeing Jesus Christ clearly revealed to us. We can see that also, because in Revelation 12:10, when finally He is caught up to heaven, to the throne, John said, "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come.' " Jesus has ascended into heaven and He has ascended with all authority. In Revelation 19:13-15, we see the connection made as we see the concept of His ruling with a rod of iron presented. "He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." Surely, this is unmistakably referring to Jesus. Read John 1:1 and 1:4 which says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Now, back to Revelation 19:14-15: "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." So, Jesus is seen in verse 4 and 5, and verse 5 says, "She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne." We saw back in Revelation chapter 5 the Lamb that had been slain coming to the throne and there He is spoken of as having received authority and dominion and power and there was given to Him a kingdom and the people in the kingdom reigned with Him on earth. Here, also, we see Christ having been caught up to the throne.

Recently, Jehovah's Witnesses came by my house as I was preparing some of my thoughts while writing about this chapter, and I thought, "This will be an interesting opportunity to try out some of this." So, I invited them in and they began, of course, as they always do, talking about the kingdom. I told them, "you know, that is just what I am studying about here in Revelation 12." They were trying to say that the kingdom has not come yet; we are looking forward to the kingdom. "Well, " I said, "that is where we disagree, because as I understand the

scriptures, Paul said in Colossians 1:13, that we have been delivered out of the power of darkness, into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Paul says we are already in the kingdom. We are citizens of the kingdom of God." Then, they said, "We believe that Jesus is the King, but He does not have a kingdom yet." They wanted to go back to Daniel 2, so we turned back to Daniel 2:44 where it speaks of the fact that in the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom, which is the Roman Empire, God will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. They tried to say that is something yet to come. But, the fourth kingdom, as we pointed out, was the Roman Empire. Then, I suggested we go to Daniel 7:13, because there we can see that not only is Jesus King, but He also has a kingdom.

We turned and read: "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!" and I said, "Is not the Son of Man, Jesus?" They said, "Yes." I continued reading, "He came to the Ancient of Days." And I said, "Is that God the Father?" They said, "Yes." I continued. "And they brought Him near before Him." I asked, "When did Jesus ascend to the Ancient of Days with the clouds?" They acknowledged that was in His ascension to heaven which the Bible records in Acts 1. All right, "What happened when He ascended to heaven?"

Notice verses 14-15: "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." I said, "Does it not say that he was given a kingdom when He ascended to heaven? Did not that happen a long time ago?" They replied, "Yes, but we believe that Jesus is going to yet come and set up a kingdom." I said, "Wait a minute. I know that is what you believe, but what does the Bible say? Did it not say what I was saying, that he set up a kingdom?" They said, "Well, yes." So, we moved on to another point. Now, that was what Revelation is trying to explain to us, that Jesus ascended to the throne of God and there was given to Him authority, and the kingdom of our God has come. It is now here.

We move to Revelation 12:6: "Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that

they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days." I believe that we have already established from lesson eleven, that the period of 1,260 days, refers to that period from the time the church began until the time Jesus is going to come again. Then, that would not apply to Mary.

This woman is not Mary. Mary is still not living through this entire period, but the church is. That is the whole point. The woman represents the church. Throughout scripture, the church and the people of God are spoken of under the terms of a woman. Remember the bride of Christ. You have a great chapter, Ephesians 5, where you have a discussion of the husband and wife, which is really speaking of Christ and His church; the church being the bride of Christ. So, we have here the church under the figure of a woman who fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared of God. We are going to see more about the wilderness later.

There is a pause now in Revelation 12:7-9: "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

As we go back to the gospel account, Jesus speaks in terms of Satan being cast out. I believe if we will look at these references and also what is said in Revelation, then we will see a consistent picture presented to us. First, go to Luke 10. Remember, in Luke 10, Jesus had sent out the seventy, two-by-two, to begin to preach the gospel of the kingdom. They went out and they came back excited because demons had been cast out in the name of Christ.

Notice Luke 10:17-20: "Then, the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' "

Jesus says, in response to the missionary activity of the seventy, their proclamation of the gospel message, the good news of the kingdom of God, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." I think he saw that in the same way as the prophets of old saw the coming of the Christ. They would often speak in the past tense of something that was yet to occur. And, I think Jesus is speaking in anticipation of something because, as we turn to John 12:31-33, Jesus says, " 'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die." Jesus speaks of His death, and in connection with His death, He speaks of Satan being cast out.

We move to Matthew 12:28-29 where Jesus speaks of the binding of the strong man. He is referring to Satan because there had been the casting out of demons, and the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. So, in verses 28-29, Jesus said, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He had once and for all conquered the power of Satan. It was a good as done from the foundation of the world. In reality and actuality, the time in which it occurred was at the cross and the resurrection and the ascension into heaven when Jesus finally sat down at the right hand of God and began to rule and to reign. Then it was that Satan was cast out and that is the picture we are seeing Revelation 12. Let me give you just a couple more references to solidify the point and make it clear. In I Peter 3:21-22, Peter said, "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him." The subjection of the authorities and powers and angels is in connection with His going into heaven. Notice in Ephesians 6:12 the task that is before each of us as Christians, followers of Christ. "For we do not wrestle against

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Now, turn to Colossians 2:13-15. Paul says, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

Our wrestling is against principalities and powers, but when Jesus, died on the cross, He triumphed over them. He ascended to heaven and Satan was cast out, which means that victory is ours. Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; it is against the principalities and powers that Jesus has triumphed over. We, as His people, then, are victors. The battle has been won through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We come to the magnificent passage in Hebrews 2:14-15 that pulls all of this together. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." As children of God we are no longer in bondage. Satan does not have us bound. Christ has bound Satan and we are now able to overcome the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness because of the death of Jesus through which He brought the power of Satan to naught.

And, so, there is a beautiful message in all of this for God's people which says that victory is ours because Jesus, through His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven has overcome Satan. He is cast out, he is bound, and when we get to Revelation 20, we will see more about that. Satan can no longer keep you in bondage because his power has been broken.

God back to Revelation 12:10: "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come.'"



Remember, when Jesus rose from the dead, He said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." And so, when He is called up to the throne of God, the voice says, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come."

We are in the kingdom now. It began when Jesus sat down at the right hand of God and began to reign and to rule on the day of Pentecost. He will reign and rule until all of His enemies are put under His feet. Then, accord to I Corinthians 15:24, He will deliver the Kingdom to the Father. Jesus will protect you who have confessed His name. He will confess you before the Father who is in heaven.

Victory is ours, for, as Revelation 12:10 continues: "... for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." Satan has no way in which he can defend his accusations against you. Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? In Romans 8:31, Paul said, "What then shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Certainly not Satan.

Notice Revelation 12:11: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." We overcame. Why? Because of the blood of the Lamb, because Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary and because of "the word of their testimony." It is because we carry forth the message of salvation and "and they did not love their lives to the death."

We simply count our life as nothing. And so, Paul says in Romans 12:1: "... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." We are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is not because of our own merits, but because of the merit of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us.

In I Peter 1:18-19, we see Peter expressing the same idea when he says, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

And, then, in Revelation 1:5, John spoke: "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

Then, there is a great passage in Hebrews 9:14 which says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The blood of Christ cleanses our conscience. That is what Peter was trying to say to us, and he connects baptism to all of that. In I Peter 3:21, he says, "... which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." That is why Ananias said to Saul in Acts 22:16, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In the act of baptism, your sins are washed away because of the blood of Jesus Christ. That precious blood that He shed on the cross has been applied to you to cleanse your conscience.

Now we continue in Revelation 12:12: "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." His time is limited. God is one day going to cast Satan into the lake of fire and brimstone. We continue in 12:13: "Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent." What a beautiful picture is given to us of the woman who is brought to the wilderness and nourished. It reminds us of that great passage in Exodus 19:4 where God said of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."

Jesus is shown here as carrying the church into the wilderness on wings of eagles, that the church might be protected from the harm that Satan would bring. Yes, there is persecution, but there is protection; the same things that we saw in chapter 11. Revelation 12 continues in verse 15-16: "So the serpent

spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth." We have no exact parallel anywhere else in scripture, but the figure seems to me rather clear because here the dragon is spouting out of his mouth water to destroy. What is it that can come out of the mouth of Satan to destroy the people of God?

Satan has three major weapons that are revealed to us in Revelation. There is persecution, there is seduction, and there is deception. What comes out of the mouth? Deception. And the stream that comes out of the mouth of Satan is a stream of lies and falsehood that only the people of the earth, that is, worldly people who are bound to this earth, swallow down whole. The acceptance of these falsehoods and delusions of Satan makes a clear distinction between the people of God and the people of the world.

This chapter concludes with verse 17: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring." Who is that? Those "... who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Yes, Satan is going to fight you. He could not destroy the Christ. He could not destroy the church. He is trying to destroy you, but the message of Revelations 12 is that Satan is a loser. Satan tried to defeat Jesus on earth and he failed. Satan tried to defeat Jesus in heaven and failed. He has tried to defeat the whole church and he has failed. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Finally, he tries to destroy you, and the messages of Revelation is that if you are faithful to Jesus, He cannot do it. Victory is yours!

What a tremendous scene is painted for us by God through John in Revelation. Victory for the people of God! Why not become one of the victors, one of the winners, one of God's people? You need to believe in Jesus; trust Him. Repent of your sins. Confess your faith in Him. Allow His precious blood to cleanse you from your sins as you are buried with Him in the water of baptism, that you might rise into new life having had the bondage of sin broken and having the opportunity of living eternally with God.

## **THE MARK OF THE BEAST**

### **REVELATION 13**

In Revelation 12, we saw the dragon, Satan, persecuting the church and in chapter 13, we find that Satan employs various means to accomplish his designs of destroying the church. Chapter 13:1 speaks of the dragon and says: "Then I stood on the sand of the sea." The dragon comes down to the sea and stands on the seashore. Next, we see him finding a helper in his efforts to destroy God's people. So, verse 1 continues: "And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name." We see a beast coming up out of the sea. What is the significance of the sea? Perhaps, it has no particular significance. If it does have any significance, it has reference apparently, to the nations.

Notice Isaiah 17:12: "Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the road of the seas, and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters." So, the nations are spoken of under the figure of the roaring seas in the book of Revelation. In 17:15 of Revelation: "Then he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.'" We see a beast coming up from the sea, a beast emerging from the nations, from the peoples. All of these are plural: multitudes, nations, peoples and tongues. This beast does not emerge out of a single nation out of a single people at some particular point in human history. This is a beast that emerges from the peoples, the tongues, and the nations. This beast is something that is in existence over a vast period of time. It is the persecuting power of human governments.

I believe that interpretation is borne out as we look at a further description of the beast in Revelation 13:2; "Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority." Again, we must allow the Bible to be its own interpreter, and if we do that, there is one passage in prophecy in the Old Testament that serves as the perfect setting and background for what we see in Revelation 13.

That is found in Daniel 7:2-8. There, we are given a description of our beasts that came out of the sea. It says, "Daniel spoke, saying, 'I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: "Arise, devour much flesh!" After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.'"

If we go back to Revelation 13 again, we will see that this single beast that rises out of the sea is a perfect composite picture of four separate distinct beasts that are found in Daniel 7. You find the same three animals: the leopard, the bear, and the lion, and you notice in Daniel that the fourth beast is not identified with any animal. In Revelation 13, the beast is a composite of the three animals and it also incorporates the fourth beast of Daniel because that beast had ten horns. So, when you put the four beasts of Daniel 7 together, you have a beast that has seven heads because the third beast in Daniel had four heads and there were three other beasts, a leopard, lion, and a bear, making seven heads, and seven horns.

What is the significance of all of this? In Daniel, from which this is drawn, the four separate beasts represented successive kingdoms, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman. If you compare it with Daniel 2, it becomes crystal clear. Now, what do we have? What would be a better way to represent all the governments of the world that a composite of

the symbol of the four beasts representing four successive great world empires? Put them all together into one, and you have a beast that represents human governmental powers that persecute God's people. The Persians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans all were persecutors of the people of God. Consequently, I think that imagery that is drawn from Daniel, helps us to see that we are looking, in Revelation 13, at a beast that represents an instrument of Satan that kills God's people. Specifically, these are persecuting human governments.

If we go back again to verse 1, I believe there is further confirmation of that. In describing the beast, it says that the beast had "Seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his head seven crowns." What we are seeing is that the human governments take upon themselves the characteristics of the one who has given to them their power, Satan himself. Satan is the one who is represented as the dragon with the seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns.

There is a slight distinction in the description, which I think is somewhat significant. It has ten horns, and "horns" throughout the Bible is used as suggestive of destructive power. It has seven heads. "Seven" is a symbol of completeness. A "head" is a symbol of authority. Here is a symbol of complete authority. Does this mean Satan has complete authority? It is complete in the sense that it affects all human governments throughout the whole earth. It is true, of course, that whatever authority Satan has is under the ultimate authority of Jesus Christ who has all authority on earth and in heaven. It is true, also, that governments, as individuals, yield in differing degrees to the power Satan exercises. But, this power is worldwide.

Paul said in Ephesians 2:2, "In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." In Ephesians 6:12, Paul said, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." The world-rulers of this darkness are headed by a single world-ruler, Satan, the dragon, the prince of this world whom Jesus said He would cast down. We are seeing in Revelation 13, human persecuting governments that reflect the characteristics

of Satan himself. Satan had seven crowns on his seven heads indicating his authority to rule. It is an arrogant authority; it is an authority that he has taken on himself. It is not a legitimate, rightful authority. It is an authority that is under the dominion of God himself.

On the sea beast in Revelation 13:1, we find the crowns sitting, not on the heads, but on the horns. Here is a picture, perhaps of crowned cruelty in the persecuting power of human governments. Authority was given to them by Satan, and used by Satan for his purposes. We see a good description of what is taking place back in Luke 4, when Satan confronted Jesus in verses 5 and 6. Remember, it says, "The then devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.'" Satan was not able to give it to Jesus. He refused to have that kind of authority at that time. But, in Revelation 13, John sees the dragon giving authority to these world-rulers to persecute the people of God.

Now that we have seen what this sea beast is all about, we continue in verses 3 and 4: "And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war against him?'" "What is the picture here? The beast has seven heads and now one of the heads is wounded in such a way the beast appears to die. But, then, to the surprise of everybody, it seems to revive and come back and exercise its power again so that the world marvels and wonders and says, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

If we get the picture of what the beast is, I think we can begin to understand. The beast seems to be killed, but he revives. That was to convince the world of the futility of resisting the beast. In other words, you have tried to kill this horrible, ugly, monstrous creature and it has been unsuccessful. So, you are likely to say, "What is the use of trying to fight? The history of the world says that when evil governments are seemingly destroyed, evil governments rise again. That seems to be the

picture of world history; and evil, corrupt, oppressive government is destroyed and there is great rejoicing. Then, to the dismay of the world, here comes another human government just as bad as that one, or maybe worse. Then, men gather together and put that one down and there is great rejoicing, and here it comes again. It seems to suggest the picture we are getting here. Here is the persecuting human government, the instrument and agent of Satan, being seemingly destroyed and killed and here comes another just as bad as the first, or this one seems to regain its strength to come back again. Finally, it gets to the point where men will tend to marvel and say, "It is no use. We might as well give up." And, once God's people give in, there is no hope.

As you look back in Old Testament history, you see this time and again. What did Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian Empire do? He erected an image and required all of the people to bow down and worship it. What is he saying? He is saying, "Who is like Nebuchadnezzar?" And he is requiring the people to say, "Who is like Nebuchadnezzar?"

What happened in the Assyrian Empire? Sennacherib came down into Judah with the most massive army the world had ever seen. Sennacherib brought that army down and surrounded the city of Jerusalem and the people in Jerusalem were terrified. Hezekiah tried to calm the people by saying, "With us is the Lord our God to help us" (II Chronicles 32:6).

But, in II Chronicles 32:13-15, Sennacherib said, "Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands in any way able to deliver their lands out of my hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed that could deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or persuade you like this, and do not believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?"

What did Sennacherib say? He said, "Who is like Sennacherib? Your God is nothing. I have wiped out the gods of surrounding



nations. Who is your God, anyway?" Of course, we know the end of that story. Sennacherib turned back and an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 of his soldiers, and we find out who really is in charge. God takes that kind of abuse only so long. It may seem that after Assyria has fallen, there is rejoicing, but Persia arises. Persia falls and the Greek Empire arises and so it goes. The Roman Empire arises and Caesar demands that the people bow down and say, "Caesar is Lord." We see repeated again and again the question, "Who is like unto the beast?" And, the answer the Christian gives is "The Lord God!" He is the One who has the power in heaven and on earth.

Notice Revelation 13:5 says, "And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months." And, notice in verse 7: "It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation." The beast has not authority in and of himself. It was given to him. God has given it to him and permitted him to exercise certain authority in our world. But God is saying, "You can go this far and no farther." The authority that the beast has is a limited authority and its limited not only by extent of power, but it is limited by extent of time. It says in verse 5: "... and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months."

God has ordained that this authority will continue only this long and no longer and there is nothing you can do to change it. God has ordained the powers to be and how long they can operate. So, the power of the beast, the power of the persecuting human government, is limited and it can only go so far. We read in verse 7: "It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation." It is one of only two times in Revelation where that term "overcome" is used of anything other than God and Christ and God's people. We learn in Revelation that there comes a time, which is at the very end of time, when it seems as though Satan and his forces are victorious. And here, it seems that the people of God have been overcome.

This is a perfect parallel of what is found in Revelation 11:7. Just remember 13:7 and 11:7 and study them together with

their context. Revelation 11:7 says: "When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them." That is God's people. But, then, as you read the rest of chapter 11, that does not last for very long. It is a very brief period; three and a half days. Then, God's people are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so shall they ever be with the Lord. So it is in Revelation 13, the overcoming is temporary, it is limited, and it is only for a time.

We come to verses 8 through 10: "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." The point is, the saints of God will be triumphant and that those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will not be destroyed, but, rather, that God shall resurrect them. They will be saved and they will enjoy the presence of God forever. So, the message of Revelation in this part is: "Do not worry about human oppressive persecuting governments. God, in His good time, is going to take care of that and he is going to preserve you." That is the patience and the faith of the saints, that God does come out victorious and so do His people.

Satan is not finished. This is one instrument that he uses in his warfare: persecuting human governments. But, here comes another as we come to verse 11: "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon." What is this beast? This beast had two horns like a lamb and he spoke like a dragon. What we are seeing in this beast is also described to us in Revelation 16:13: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

In Revelation 12 and 13, we are introduced to the dragon, the sea beast, and the earth beast, in that order. In Revelation 16, when they are described, they are described in terms of dragons, the sea beast and the false prophet. The false prophet

is in the same position as the earth beast. In case that is not obvious, go to Revelation 19:20, and there it becomes clear: "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."

Now, we have the false prophet identified as the one who deceived them that had received the mark of the beast. We have the earth beast identified elsewhere, as the false prophet and that is exactly what the earth beast is doing; he is deceiving the nations. He is one who is exercising the capacity of one who deceives spiritually and would misguide. I believe that is why he is described in terms of a lamb that speaks as a dragon, because the lamb is the symbol that is used throughout Revelation in reference to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; Jesus Christ. but we see this seemingly innocent, harmless creature, that comes out of the earth, described as a lamb. But, it is really, so to speak, a dragon in lamb's clothing because it speaks with the voice of the dragon, but has the appearance of a lamb. It is deceptive, you see. It is the perfect picture of false religion that deceives, that creates an illusion of innocence, as a lamb.

But, the message is a message that destroys; it is the message of the dragon, of Satan. I believe that is what we are seeing. I believe we see it described in II Corinthians 11:14; "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." What does that mean? The next verse says: "Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." So, Satan has his ministers, too. They appear as ministers of righteousness, but they speak with the voice of the dragon. They say what Satan wants them to say.

We see the same thing spoken of by Jesus in another figure of speech in Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Here is a picture of wolves in sheep's clothing, but in Revelation, it is the dragon in Lamb's clothing. What happens to these? Jesus, in just a few verses in Matthew 7:22-23, tells us: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not

prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness?' Here were men who had deluded themselves into thinking they were prophets of God, exorcists, and faith-healers, or something similar, but the verdict of Jesus was that they were workers of iniquity and He never knew them. What were they? They were wolves in sheep's clothing. They were dragons in lamb's clothing. So, what we are seeing, when we see this beast that comes out of the earth, is false religion which has much to gain from governments that persecute those who are truly God's people.

Notice Revelation 13:12: "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and cause the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." Anti-Christian government and anti-Christian religion have always worked hand-in-hand. You can trace it right down through history and you see the priest who is promoting the proconsul. You see in nation after nation persecuting governments being promoted and supported by a religious establishment. Notice verse 13: "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men."

Notice false religions are capable of producing great signs. But, are they genuine miracles? Look at verse 14: "And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived." No, it is not a genuine miracle. It is a kind that deceives. Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:9, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders." It says that the man of sin would do lying wonders of Satan.

Return to Revelation 13:15: "He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed." Again, it was given to him. God permits it. He is given this power. It is not something he has given himself, and it is under the limit and control of God so that he can only go so far.

In Verse 16: "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads." Now, what is this mark that is given? Verse 17 continues: "And that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or name of the beast, or the number of his name." Earlier, in Revelation, we saw that the followers of the Lamb were sealed on their forehead.

As we saw earlier, that simply was a way of saying that they were under the protection of God, and they belong to the Lamb of God. When it spoke of them being sealed on the forehead, it did not mean that there was literally some kind of a stamp placed on their forehead, as a visible sign. It simply means that there are those who have been marked as followers of the Lamb. What are we seeing when we come to this passage? To receive a mark of someone was simply to belong to someone, or to serve or worship someone. Slaves were branded or marked to show that they belonged to a certain individual. And "those who have the mark of the beast" simply means nothing more than that these are people who bear in their lives those characteristics that mark them as being followers of Satan, rather than being followers of God.

How do I know that? Revelation spells it out for us. For example, Revelation 14:9-10: "Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.' " The idea of receiving the mark is the idea of being one who worships the beast. The same thing is in verse 11: "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

Notice also Revelation 20:4: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the work of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a

thousand years." Those who do not receive the mark of the beast are simply those people who do not worship the beast, those who simply are followers of Jesus, followers of the Lamb. Those who have the seal on their foreheads were identified in Revelation 7:3 as God's people. But, that is not like some kind of a little chain you hang around your neck; that is not what makes you a Christian. The mark of the Christian is the evidence of love and peace and joy; the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the Christian (Galatians 5:22-23). So, it is with those who have the mark of the beast. You can mark them out by their lives, by who they are worshiping, whom they are honoring with their lives.

We come to the statement concerning "a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead." We have already seen in the case of those who were sealed on the forehead, we were followers of the Lamb, that this suggests the disposition of the mind; the thoughts of those who are so sealed. Their minds are set in the direction of the Lamb of God. In a similar way, those who have the mark of the beast on their hand or their forehead have their actions and thoughts directed toward the beast and toward Satan. They show the mark, the evidence, and the stamp of Satan in their manner of life. Thus, one who has the mark of the beast is simply one who manifests, in what he thinks and does, the evidence of the dominion of sin and Satan in his or her life.

Let us notice Revelation 13:17: "And that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." As long as those who are sealed by God are in a minority to those who are marked by Satan, economic hardship is a very possible and a very likely companion. Those who bear the mark of the beast, who participate in false religion and who cooperate with persecuting human governments are likely to cause economic problems for the Christian. In every age this has happened. As we have seen from the beginning, we are not talking about one point in human history, we are talking about what has happened throughout history and will continue to happen till Jesus comes again.

This is a description of the way we can expect things to be. But, the beauty of it all is that victory is ours! And, how do we know? Because of the last verse in chapter 13: "Here is

Wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." What does that mean?

First, in the Greek text, there is no definite article before "man." Therefore, the phrase can be translated, and I believe should be, in this case, "it is the number of man." It is the number of "man" in the sense of "mankind." The number of the beast is the same as the number of man. What is the number of man? It is six. Man was created on the sixth day. Man falls short of the perfection of seven. His number is six. Six falls short of seven; it fails. The beast's days are numbered. The number of the beast is the number of man and that number is six, six, six; that is, failure after failure after failure. The beast glories in man and in human affairs and, consequently, must fail.

It may be significant, incidentally, that the numerical number of Jesus in the Greek language is 888. He exceeds perfection while man continually falls short. Man's number is 666. Consequently, all that is wrapped up in man apart from God and Christ will fail. Persecuting human governments will come to an end; false religion will fail, but Jesus will be triumphant. Victory is through Him. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

While we may not be experiencing economic hardship today, it is not an unreasonable expectation that in our lifetime we might so suffer due to our allegiance to Christ and His way. But, failure cannot be ours if we place our trust in Jesus. If you do not belong to Jesus, you are on the side of failure, and there will be in your life one failure after another.

But, if Jesus enters your life, you will find victory upon victory and, finally, enter life with God and His Son, Jesus, if you live as God would have you to live. It is your choice. Choose you this day who you will serve.

## **THE FINAL HARVEST**

### **REVELATION 14**

Read Revelation chapter 14—The Final Harvest. It may seem strange that in the middle of the book of Revelation, we would be speaking of the final judgment. We would be inclined to say, “Well, if we are going to deal with the final judgment in the middle of the book, what is left?” What is left is to look over the Christian era again and see other aspects of the problems, trials, and victories of God’s people. I believe that part of the difficulty that many have in understanding Revelation comes from an assumption, an unfounded assumption, that Revelation is a continuous chronological narration from the beginning of the Christian era to the end. But, as you read Revelation, it just does not work out that way. Instead, we are seeing a series of visions throughout the book, looking at the Christian era from various vantage points, and calling attention to various aspects.

As a background, in chapter 12, we had that horrible picture of Satan under the figure of a dragon with many horns and heads. Then, in chapter 13, we saw that terrifying picture of the beast coming up out of the sea. Then, we saw the beast of the earth coming up, and we saw those who had the mark of the beast and some very grim sights presented to us.

All this might strike terror even into the heart of a Christian. So, as it happens throughout the book of Revelation, before we go into that final terrifying moment of judgment and the final wrath of God being poured out on the wicked, there is a pause to speak to the heart of the Christian to say, “Do not be afraid, because you will be preserved and you will be protected. And, the terrifying things that are to come will be for a brief time, but, ultimately, victory will be yours.” So, after seeing the terror of the beast coming up from the sea and the earth and those bearing the mark of the beast persecuting the people of God in chapter 13, we are again provided reassurance in Revelation 14 that God’s people will be preserved and will enjoy the presence of God eternally.

As we begin this chapter, we see the 144,000 who were on the earth (verse 3) and who now (verse 2) are at the throne of God in heaven. They can sing together a new song now because



they share, being the redeemed of all the ages, the new experience of the presence of God and of the Lamb. They are together on Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever (Psalm 125:1). If we are wondering who these 144,000 are; they are followers of the Lamb which are called virgins (verse 4) because they did not become unfaithful to Christ.

Some mistakenly assume that the writer is speaking here about literal virgins, but this is contrary to the whole idea. It is speaking spiritually. They are the ones who are faithful to Christ. This idea is presented in the same terms by the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 11:2 where he said to the church, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The idea is that the church is to be spiritually faithful and loyal to one husband, to Christ, and in that sense, they maintain their purity and their virginity. In other words, these are faithful followers of the Lamb of God. These 144,000 were "purchased from among men" (verse 4). Well, who are they? Let us let the Bible explain to us.

Who are those purchased from among men? In Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul said, "Therefore take heed to yourself and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." That is what Jesus purchased on the cross with His blood; the church of our Lord. So, when we see those who have been purchased from among men, the only people that have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb are those who are the church. The 144,000 of Revelation, then, has reference to the church. We see the same idea expressed in I Corinthians 6:20, when Paul, in writing to the church, says, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."

Now, these 144,000 in Revelation 14 are also described as "... being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (verse 4). What does this mean? The background to the idea of the firstfruits is back in the Old Testament. Exodus 23:19 is perhaps the first clear reference to it. It says, "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God." Many other passages in the Law of Moses say that the children of Israel, when they made sacrifices to God, were to present the

firstfruits of the land. That would be the choicest of the crop and the first to come forth. In Jeremiah 2:3, we see this concept of the firstfruits being used figuratively to refer to the people of God. It says, "Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase." Israel, the people of God, is spoken of as the firstfruits of God's increase. So, the people of God are the first fruits.

We find the same idea being expressed by James when we come back to the New Testament. James applies it now to the people of God who, in the new dispensation, are Christians, those in the church. James 1:18 says, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." Christians are God's firstfruits. Both in the Old and New Testament, "firstfruits" is a way of referring to the people of God; all of the people of God. So, when we come to the book of Revelation, we see the 144,000 being referred to as the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. If we allow the Bible to interpret itself, that means the church.

Of course, it would include the redeemed of all the ages, the church, in the sense of God's people in the Old Testament and God's people under the New Covenant. It is the redeemed of all the ages; those who have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

There are those who teach in our time that 144,000 is a special, select group of super-Christians who are going to someday inherit the new heaven, and then all of the rest of us who were not quite that good are going to end up on the new earth. That is just totally foreign to what Revelation 14 is saying when it describes to us who the 144,000 are. They are the firstfruits. They are those purchased. They are the followers of the Lamb. They are virgins, that is, they are spiritually chaste. They have not committed adultery or fornication with the beast, as we saw in the previous chapters. They are the ones who are true and faithful, loyal to Jesus Christ who is the husband to the church, which is the bride of Christ.

These 144,000 people are those that have the name of the Lamb and of God on their foreheads. This is in contrast to the rest of mankind, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond who have the mark of the beast on

their foreheads as seen in Revelation 13:16-17. So, these who have the name of God and the Lamb who are sealed on their foreheads, are those who are redeemed of God. Those who have the mark of the beast on their foreheads are those who are followers of Satan and the beast. Mankind is simply divided into two: those who have the mark of Satan; those who have the mark of Christ. And, you are either one or the other. You are either God's or you are Satan's, which is the teaching throughout the scripture.

In the mouth of the 144,000 is found no lie, and they are without blemish (verse 5). And, you say, "Does that not suggest a super group out of the church?" Or, you may say, "Many of us probably told some kind of lie along the way, but these have told no lies." Is that what is said? Look at it again. It says, actually, that in the mouth of the 144,000 there was found no lie. Why are they found without a lie? Because it has been forgiven by the cleansing of the blood of the Lamb. That is true of all Christians. When we enter the presence of God we are found without sin. Why? Because we have never committed any sins? No. But, because the blood of the Lamb has kept right on cleansing those who have been followers of the Lamb, those who have been walking in the light. It seems to be one of the hardest messages, for some reason, for Christians to understand, yet it is so clearly taught to us in I John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Yes, you may have told a lie; you may have committed any number of various kinds of sins, because we all sin. John said that. "If we say that that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). But, the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us as we are really walking in the light and faithfully making that effort to follow our Lord. The blood keeps cleansing so that when you finally arrive at the judgment seat of God, you are not carrying that great load of guilt of sins with you. You have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

So, there are no lies there because they have all been erased and cleansed. They have been wiped away by the blood of the Lamb. We can come to the judgment joyously, not because we somehow have become worthy of any good news, but, because,

in spite of our sins and because of our faith in Jesus, He has promised that He will confess us before the Father. Just as in Revelation 11:12, where it says, "Come up here," we look at heaven and then drop back to look at the situation on earth before Jesus comes again. Then, in Revelation 14:1-5, we look at heaven and then, beginning in verse 6, we again look at the situation on the earth before Jesus comes again.

One of the things that sometimes creates confusion as people study Revelation is that there is sometimes a flashback that occurs as we are reading through the book and we need to watch and look for such. We're clearly seeing a scene in heaven and the redeemed are there; the church is in heaven.

But, now, in the very next verse, we are dropping back in time and looking at the scene here on earth before the judgment and before we find the church and the redeemed in heaven.

Now, we encounter three angels. Actually, we are going to see six, but, first, we want to look at three. These three are to be seen together because they are bearing the same kind of message. It is the message of warning. Actually, chapter 14 of Revelation divides itself into three sections. Each section begins with the statement, "And I looked, and behold." The very opening verse of Revelation 14 says, "And I looked [saw]." These form three separate units. The first is showing us the redeemed in heaven, the second is showing us the earth again, and the warnings that God tried to give to mankind concerning the judgment which is to come, and the final verses, 14 through 20, show us the judgment that is to come.

Now, we come to verses 6 through 13, and here we see three angels in verses 6, 8, and 9. Those belong together because each is warning mankind to turn to faith in God and away from sin, and from the judgment of sin which is to come. The coming judgment is eternal good tidings to the people of God because it means their deliverance. Look at verses 6-7: "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' "

Here, we have the angel bringing the message of eternal good tidings, even though it is a message of judgment. For God's people, the judgment is not something to fear. It is D-Day, It is victory day for the people of God. It is the time when finally we are delivered from the oppression of persecutors. I think this is expressed in the last book of the Old Testament, in the last chapter of the Old Testament, in Malachi 4:1-2 where we see both sides of judgment. It says: " 'For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the Lord of hosts, 'That will them neither root nor branch.' "

There is the terrifying side, but now the other side. "But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves" (Malachi 4:2). He shall come as the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings. That, too, is a scene of judgment for God's people.

So, as we look at this particular message of the angel, we are seeing a message of judgment which is really a statement in Revelation 14:7: "... for the hour of His judgment has come." Some see here a picture of an angel coming at the very last moment of human history crying to mankind and saying, "The hour is come." But, this the message of God throughout the ages. Even John himself, in his first epistle, I John 2:18, said: "Little children, it is the last hour." He is writing that back in the first century. He said this is the last hour, but then, if you follow the usage of the word "hour" as John employs it, he does not mean that this is the last sixty minute interval of human history, but, rather, this is the hour of God; this is the time of God. This is the time to turn to God. It is the time of the judgment of God. We always stand in the last hour, so to speak, because for all we know, the Lord could come in this hour. The message of the gospel is continually a message of urgency.

The second angel tells us that Babylon is fallen. It is spoken of as an accomplished fact which is a characteristic of Bible prophecy when speaking of the certainty of future fulfillment. In fact, these are the exact words used by Isaiah in Isaiah 21:9 in prophesying the fulfillment of the destruction of the city of

Babylon. He said, "... Babylon is fallen, is fallen!" It was a future event, but he could say it is fallen because of the certainty of its accomplishment. So, here the angel says, "... Babylon is fallen, is fallen." You can count on it!

This is the first time Babylon is introduced in Revelation. Often in Revelation, a thought is introduced that is, later on, developed more fully. Here is an example of it, because when we get to chapters 17 and 19, we are going to learn a lot more about Babylon. But, for now, it is sufficient to say that Babylon is actually the world's seductive attractions that would lead men away from God. We will develop that thought later just as John develops the thought later in chapters 17 through 19.

Look again at the statement in Revelation chapter 13:8: "... Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Now, the word "wrath" is the Greek word *humos* which can equally be transmitted "passion." If you will look at it from that point of view, he is saying that he has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the passion of her fornication, her passionate immorality.

Here is the third instrument of Satan for the destruction of God's people. We have seen two introduced in chapter 13, namely, the beast that comes out of the sea, representing the oppressive, persecuting political powers of the earth, and the beast that comes out of the earth, which represents false religion. Now, we come to the third instrument of Satan, and that is seduction. This represents the effort to seduce God's people.

Satan wants us to believe the attractions of this earth, and those things that are contrary to the will of God, those things that provide life and fulfillment and excitement. He would lead us away from an attachment to God. We see here, however, the warning for the benefit of all of us that Babylon is fallen, that those earthly enticements are only for a time. God's people, those who have seen the true joys and have loved Christ, will actually enjoy his presence and have joy forever.

The third angel announces that those who are attached to this world will perish with this world. Here, in this life, the wrath of

God is mixed with grace; but, eventually, in hell, the wrath will be unmixed. The final and decisive judgment will have been made. This realization and certainty that God's people will be avenged by God should encourage God's people to patiently endure all afflictions and trials. Let us look at it. The third angel said: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:9-11).

It is popular in these days to try to minimize the wrath and the judgment of God and the reality of hell, but you simply cannot believe the Bible and deny it. You cannot believe Jesus Christ and deny it because Jesus had more to say about it than even his apostles did in the New Testament writings. And, here in Revelation, in no uncertain terms, we are introduced to the thought that the followers of the beast, the followers of Satan and his days, are going to experience fire and brimstone. They will be tormented in the presence of the holy angel, in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever and they will have no rest day and night. How could you say anything more clearly than that? It is a terrifying thing to enter into eternity unprepared to meet God. This is something we have got to realize. If we had the sense of the reality of the fact, perhaps we would be more enthusiastic and diligent in trying our best to turn men to God, to persuade men that God does love them and that He is trying to spare them from eternal punishment.

Jesus has done His best to say this is the way it is: "Do not water it down. I am telling you the reality of the matter that there are only two possible destinies: either you spend eternity in my presence or not in my presence. And, if you are not in my presence, but are simply with Satan and his followers, what do you have to look forward to?" However, verse 12 says, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

The thing that should cause us to steadfastly endure and continue to follow the commandments of Jesus and the faith of Jesus is that we know what the alternatives are. We have had set before us in crystal-clear terms that there are only two destinies. Jesus said you either enter in by the narrow way, or you will enter the broad way—there are only two. We have got to make men aware of that fact and of the awfulness of ailing to choose God's way.

We see that even if the believer experiences death at the hands of those who bear the mark of the beast, eternal blessedness is his. Notice verse 13, one of the most reassuring and comforting verses of the Bible: "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." ' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.' "

We have just seen that the smoke of the torment of the wicked goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day and night. Now, we see that the followers of the Lamb are able to rest from their labors. In Philippians 3:8-9, Paul said: "Yes indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him."

If, in the last day, we can be found in Christ, then that is the joy that we shall be thankful for eternally. And, the scripture gives us only one way we can enter into him. It is found in Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:4. We are baptized into Christ and, when that happens, according to I Corinthians 12:13, we are simultaneously baptized into His body, the church. That is the way you get into Him and that is the only way you can ever be found in Him. It is accomplished when you enter into the water of baptism and have the blood of Christ sprinkled on your heart; sprinkled from an evil conscience according to Hebrews 10:22.

And, now, the final harvest has come. Jesus, "...One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days." as described in Daniel 7:13, and was prophesied as coming in the same manner as He went, according to Acts 1:9-11.



We see in Revelation 14:14, the One like the Son of Man sitting on the cloud as the earth is reaped in judgment. It says, "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle."

This is in perfect harmony with what John wrote in John 5:27: "... and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." Here is the Son of Man on the cloud who is about to execute judgment on all the earth. No longer does He bear the crown of thorns. He wears the crown of victory. He brings a sickle to gather the firstfruits of them that are His. I believe Joel 3:13 provides a most informative picture of what we are seeing described in Revelation 14. It says: "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow— for their wickedness is great." Here, Joel combines the two figures we see in the last part of Revelation 14; the sickle put forth to reap the harvest and the grapes put in the winepress where the wicked are trampled out. So, we see the two aspects of the final judgment of God; the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. They are mentioned separately, but they happen simultaneously.

What we see in Matthew 3:12 is the expression of the whole picture of Revelation 14:14-16. John the Baptist said: "... and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Jesus is going to gather the righteous. Yet, the picture in Revelation has the angels doing the gathering. But, that is also in harmony with what has been revealed to us in the gospels. Matthew 13:39 says: "The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels." Notice, also, in Matthew 24:31: "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." We are seeing the elect of God being gathered in Revelation 14.

We now come to another aspect. Two angels come bringing judgment on the wicked. Each comes from the very sanctuary of God in heaven where the cries of the persecuted people of God have ascended, as we saw in Revelation 8. And, God's

first response is that the wicked should be cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God. In Isaiah 63:3-4, God said, "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of my redeemed has come."

And, so, in the trampling out of the grapes in the winepress of the wrath of God, we see the final judgment on the wicked. The result is an awesome scene of blood—1,600 furlongs across, which would be somewhere from 150 to 200 miles. Here was a sea of blood of that dimension up to the bridle of a horse in depth. And that suggests that the final judgment of God is thorough, complete, and universal, it encompasses all of the wicked.

Why do we have the number 1,600? Perhaps, it is that 1,600 is the square of 40, and 40 is the traditional standard of punishment. The child of Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness as the punishment of God. Forty lashes of the whip save one were used in the punishment of criminals. The squaring of the 40 would suggest the fullness, the completeness, and the finality of the wrath of God.

The sea of blood is outside the city, away from the presence of God forever. Perhaps, the most complete statement of the message of Revelation 14 is found in Galatians 6:7-8: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

The choice is clearly set before you, and the choice is whether you would receive God or be a follower of Satan. If you believe in Jesus, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him and be baptized in him. Then, when that judgment day comes, if you have been faithful, you will be found in Him, not having a righteousness of your own, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ. If you trust Him and believe Him, the obey Him.

## **THE REDEEMED AND THE WRATH**

### **REVELATION 15**

Read Revelation 15—"The Redeemed and the Wrath." We want to review, in a general way, what we have seen so far in Revelation as a background for understanding chapter 15. In chapters 1 through 3 of Revelation, we see the church under the symbol of seven lampstands as a light in a world of darkness. Jesus is seen in the midst of the lampstands, reminding us of his promise: "... lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age [world]" (Matthew 28:20).

In chapters 4 through 7, we see the seven seals removed from the book of human destiny to reveal the trials that will afflict the people of God. Yet, we see God's people preserved and protected, reminding us of the words of Jesus in John 16:33, "... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

In chapters 8 through 11, we see the seven trumpets sound as God avenges His people with warning judgments against the ungodly designed to cause them to repent, and we are reminded of the words of Jesus in Luke 18:7, "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"

In chapters 12 through 14, we are shown the reason for the conflict God's people experience in this world. It is because of a more profound conflict between Christ and Satan that is taking place behind the scenes. Satan, having failed to destroy Christ, seeks to destroy His people.

He employs persecuting governments represented by the beast of the sea, false religion represented by the beast from the earth, and the seductions and sensual enticements of this world represented by Babylon to lead people away from God. Those who bear the mark of the beast, those who have given their allegiance to Satan, will ultimately be cast into the winepress of the wrath of God.

But, those who are sealed with the name of God on their foreheads, those who are servants of God, will be gathered to God in the final harvest. These great scenes in these various sec-

tions of Revelation are not designed to prophesy nor to reveal specific historical events, but to show God's people what they may expect to experience in their life in Christ.

Chapter 1 through 3 say that the church will struggle as a flickering light in a world of darkness, but those who are faithful till death will receive the crown of life. Chapters 4 through 7 say that the church will experience trials in this life, but even those who are killed will finally be found in the presence of God.

Chapters 8 through 11 inform us that God is not unaware of the trials of His people, but that He does bear our prayers and he does respond with judgment against the wicked. And that even in the most desperate hours of the church's existence at the end of time, when it looks like Satan has won, God's people are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Chapter 12 through 14 show that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church. All the forces of Satan combined cannot destroy God's people. The saying will still be true, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

As you can begin to see, we are not going to learn about Iran, Afghanistan, Israel, the Arabs, Europe, or war in the Middle East, in the book of Revelation. We are going to learn about something far transcending the petty politics of pagan political powers.

We are going to learn about victory in Jesus. We are going to gain the courage to stand up and be counted for Jesus. We are going to gain the strength to say, "Get behind me, Satan." We are going to find abundant reasons to keep pressing the battle in Jesus name and to understand that our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in the heavenly places, against the world rulers of this darkness.

We are going to be made keenly conscious of the fact that there are spiritual realities and eternal truths that stand behind the transitory and illusory images of the dying and failing world order. And, now, with that kind of background, we are ready to being with Revelation 15.

John said, "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous; seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" Revelation 15:1). John said, "... I saw another sign." In Revelation 12:1-2, he saw the sign of the radiant woman and her child, the people of God and Christ. In the second sign in Revelation 12:3, he saw the great red dragon that opposed them. Satan himself. Now, he sees another sign that is great and marvelous for it will reveal the wrath of God poured out on the ungodly, vindicating the redeemed and showing the ultimate powerlessness of the dragon.

In Revelation 15:2-4, John said, "And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Love God Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.'"

So, before we see the wrath, we see the redeemed. We see that they are victorious. We see the throne of God as if it were a sea of glass mingled with fire. Back in Revelation 4, when we saw the first vision of the throne of God, we saw a great sea of glass before the throne, but now we see something added. We see a sea of glass mingled with fire. It suggests to me the thought that the redeemed have gone through the fiery trials of life, and now have been able to cross through the sea into the saving presence of God Himself.

The sea reminds us of the occasion when God was leading Israel out of bondage in Egypt into the promised land. They came across the Red Sea on dry land, and when they reached the other side of the sea, they stood beside the sea and Moses joined with the multitudes of Israel singing the song of Moses, a song of victory, a song of triumph. It is recorded in Exodus 15:1-18. It begins with the words: "I will sing of the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

We are a people who have been redeemed from bondage. As we see the scene in heaven, we see not only those who have been redeemed under the old covenant, those who were faithful to God, to the law of Moses, but we also see those who have been faithful to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Together, the redeemed of all of the ages join in a mighty chorus praising God for His redemption. So, we see that they have come through the trials of life across the sea into the very presence of God himself.

Notice, in Revelation 15:3, what they sing as they stand victoriously in the presence of God: "Great and marvelous are Your words, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints." What are we seeing? Back in Revelation 13:4, the people of the world saw the beast that came up out of the sea that had one of its heads wounded so that it was about to die. But, it revived and came to life, and it says of the people, "So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'"

Here, the people marveled at the beast; they marveled at those persecuting powers, governments that have oppressed the people of God. They were amazed because of their seeming ability to resist all efforts to destroy them. But, now, we have seen finally that the oppressive powers of governments have been transcended by the people of God. Now, they stand victorious in the presence of God, not marveling at the beast and his power, but saying, "Great and marvelous are your works ... O King of the saints!"

Yes, God rules in the affairs of men. God is in control. The nations are nothing. The political powers of this age will come to their end, but God and His people shall be victorious and triumph. And so, the marvel is not in the nations of this world, the marvel is in the work of the Almighty God and in Him can be seen power transcending all else.

We come now to Revelation 15:5-7: "After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then

one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever." The King James translation says, "vial," but "bowl" is a better term because it refers to a rather deep kind of saucer-like vessel. So, there were seven bowls full of the wrath of God that were given to the seven angels. These angels came from the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven.

The word "temple" is a Greek word *naos* which is actually a term referring to the innermost portion of the tabernacle, the sanctuary of God. We would translate it as "the sanctuary of the tabernacle." The writer of Revelation is seeing a vision that takes us past the temple of Solomon back to the tabernacle in the wilderness at the very time when the people had escaped from bondage in Egypt and were being led to Sinai where God revealed His presence to them in a powerful way to say, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God" (Leviticus 25:38). So, we see the angels coming from the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven and they are given golden bowls.

Where did we last see the golden bowls and what is their significance? Let us drop back to Revelation 5:8 for the first scene where we are told: "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Here are the golden bowls full of incense. What are they? They are the prayers of the saints.

Where next do we meet with the prayers of the saints having any connection with what is taking place in heaven as it relates to earth? It is in Revelation 8:3: "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

Then, what happened? "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake."

What do we see? We are seeing the prayers of the saints reach the throne of God and they have effect upon the earth. The little old lady sitting in her room may not have the strength and the power to be able to go out into the world to make any great impression on it, but she can lift up her prayers to God and know that He hears her prayers and will respond.

The prayers of God's people have the power to affect the course of human history far beyond the power of any political potentate on earth. The powers of government are ordained of God for man's well being, but the prayers of the saints of God ascend to His throne and are heard. God does respond and God does answer the prayers of His people. Now that we have come to chapter 15 of Revelation, we again see the angels with the bowls, but they are now bowls of the wrath of God. God is going to avenge His people and God is going to now pour out His wrath upon an impenitent humanity.

Now, we come to verse 8: "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." What do we see here? We see the sanctuary of God now being filled with smoke so that none were able to enter into the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished. And, what does that say? It is calling to mind again the occasion back in the wilderness of Sinai when the tabernacle was erected. Once a year the high priest was allowed to go into the sanctuary, the innermost part of the tabernacle of God, in order to offer atonement for the sins of the people. But, what happens here? In Revelation 15, the vision is suggesting that now the sanctuary is filled with smoke so no one can enter the sanctuary to offer atonement for the sins of the people because these have been a rebellious people, and impenitent people, a people who have so continually hardened their hearts that God will not even permit atonement any longer for sin.

I believe the perfect comment on Revelation 15:8 is found in Hebrews 10:26 which says: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." In the imagery of Revelation 15:8, that is because the sanctuary is filled with smoke so nobody can enter until the wrath of God is poured out.



The writer of Hebrews continues in 10:27-31: "But a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

That is precisely what we have seen in Revelation 15:8 and which is going to be revealed to us graphically in detail as we begin chapter 16. "Vengeance belongs to Me, I will repay," says Jehovah God. Why? Because a rebellious people have so hardened their impenitent hearts that it is, as the writer of the Hebrew letter said, "For it is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

So, the sanctuary of God, where He would come to forgive the sins of the people, is filled with smoke preventing any from offering sacrifice for sins because now the time of patience has ended. The time of judgment has come and the time of the justice of God is to be vindicated for the benefit of the righteous people of all of the ages.

God is about ready to pour out the bowls of the wrath upon impenitent humanity. Will that be us? Will we have so hardened our hearts that God is unable to penetrate? Have we been sensitive to His love and His compassion and His tender mercy? What have we been doing with our lives?

As we read through Revelation, it becomes quite clear that there are only those who have been sealed with the name of the Father written on their forehead, who are servants of Almighty God.

And there are those who have the mark of the beast, who have in their lives become so characterized in the ways of Satan that they are marked. They can be identified as his people because they have chosen to worship the image of the beast. They have chosen to give their allegiance to Satan.

Where do you stand? The choice is obvious and clear. You may choose to serve God and join the victorious multitudes who cross the fiery sea into the presence of God, or you will be numbered among those who are left for the outpouring of the wrath of God.

That is the message of Revelation. It is a message that comes to the heart of each of us. If you are not a child of God, why not become one of His people? Become one who is victorious and triumphant, who is an overcomer, who can rule their own heart. Become one who is reigning with Christ in their life. Become one who has that power, because Christ has given them the power to say "no" to Satan and to the attraction of his ways. He has given you the power to follow the joy and the peace and the paths of God.

## **THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH REVELATION 16**

Read Revelation 16, The Seven Bowls of Wrath. This chapter deals with the pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth and mankind. I believe if there is any one single verse in the entire Bible outside of Revelation that summarizes the message of Revelation 16, it is Romans 2:5 which says: "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." I believe that to understand Revelation 16 you have to read it in the context of the whole book. You just cannot flip open your Bible to Revelation 16 and leap in there and start interpreting and understand the symbolism. You must see Revelation 16 in the context of the whole book of Revelation. I want to briefly review the first fifteen chapters of Revelation.

In chapter 1 through 3 of Revelation, we were shown, under the figure of the seven lampstands, or seven candlesticks, the surface issue, the fundamental problem of the book, which is the church struggling with sin and suffering persecution. Chapters 4 through 7 showed us, under the figure of the seven seals, the church suffering trials, but under the overruling hand of God.

Chapter 8 through 11 showed us, under the figure of the seven trumpets, the warning judgments of God against those who persecute God's people for the purpose of causing their repentance. Chapters 12 through 14 introduced us to the five enemies of God's people: the dragon, the beast of the sea, the beast of the earth, those who bear the mark of the beast, and Babylon. In chapters 15 and 16, we are seeing those who bear the mark of the beast and Babylon. In chapters 14 and 16, we are seeing those who bear the mark of the beast facing the wrath of God and, in succeeding chapters, we see the other four enemies of God destroyed and the ultimate victory of God's people.

In chapter 16, we see the seven bowls of wrath which can only be understood against the background of the seven trumpets of warning seen in chapters 8 through 11. I believe that it is only in this way that one can understand Revelation 16, because, if

you will compare the seven trumpets of warning found in chapters 8 through 11 with the seven bowls of wrath that are found in chapter 16, you will see that in some sense they are dealing point-by-point with exactly the same thing. And, here is what I mean. The first trumpet sound in Revelation 8:7 affects the earth, and when the first bowl of truth in Revelation 16:2 is poured out it affects the earth, too.

Both the first trumpet and the first bowl affect the earth. The second trumpet in Revelation 8:8 and the second bowl in Revelation 16:3 both affect the sea. The third trumpet in Revelation 8:10 and the third bowl in Revelation 16:4 affect the inland waters. The fourth trumpet in Revelation 8:12 and the fourth bowl in Revelation 16:8 affect the sun. The fifth trumpet in Revelation 9:1-11 and the fifth bowl in Revelation 16:10-11 affect the pit of the abyss where the throne of the beast is and they bring darkness and torment. The sixth trumpet in Revelation 9:14 and the sixth bowl in Revelation 16:12 pertain to the Euphrates River, and the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15-19 and the seventh bowl in Revelation 16:17-21 produce lightnings, voices, thunders, earthquakes, and great hail.

I went through that meticulously to try to say that the trumpets and the bowls are dealing with identically the same things and it is surely not just an accident that it is that way. And, therefore, I believe that we need to pay close attention to see the connection between the trumpets and the bowls and I believe when we see the connection, we will see what the whole message of Revelation 16 is. What do we see?

In chapters 8 through 11, as we looked at the trumpets, we saw the judgments of warning from God against the wicked in response to the prayers and cries of the persecuted people of God. You recall, back in Revelation 8 when the prayers of the saints ascended to the altar and incense was added to the prayers that came before God, fire was cast on the earth and we saw the wicked begin to suffer all kinds of warning judgments of God designed for the very purpose of causing them to repent. In fact, if you look at Revelation 9:20-21, as we come down to the end of the passage on the sixth trumpet of warning judgment of God, you get the impression that is precisely what this was all about because the thought is repeated, they "... did

not repent ... they did not repent." And, the point is, God is bringing judgment against the wicked, against the oppressors of God's people to cause them to turn back to God. Time and again the wicked are afflicted and time and again they refuse to respond to the warnings of God. They continue in their evil ways and continually harden their hearts and finally, at the very end, we are told they "... did not repent ... they did not repent."

Now when we come to Revelation 16 and the bowls of wrath are poured out, we are seeing that they are being poured out on a people that did not repent. Here are people who continually have been warned by God and continually have ignored the warnings of God and continue to harden their hearts.

Notice they have continually ignored the warnings of God and continue to harden their hearts. Notice, now, in chapter 16 the description of the people upon whom the bowls of wrath are poured. First, verse 2 says that it was upon the men who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. Verse 9 says they blasphemed the name of God and they did not repent! Verse 11 says they blasphemed the God of heaven and they did not repent! Verse 21 says they blasphemed God. These are the men upon whom the bowls of wrath of God are poured. They did not repent; they did not repent. They blasphemed the God of heaven; they blasphemed God. We see a people who have heard the trumpets of warning and they would not turn to God.

Finally, the wrath of God is poured out on these people because they continually hardened their hearts. Revelation 16 is telling us that when men fail to repent and respond to the warning judgments of God, there will inevitably follow a final outpouring of the wrath of God.

We are not dealing here with things that happen at the end of time, but that which is continually happening throughout the Christian age. The warnings of God come continually against the wicked. God is not reserving His warnings for people who just happen to be born at the end of the Christian age. God is always warning people through His messengers. The warnings of God continually come to us. Sometimes they come to us through natural calamities. There are people who sometimes see something of a warning judgment of God in the form of a volcano that erupts. Some are killed, and some people might

begin to think more seriously about the brevity of life. Perhaps, some will be caused to think more seriously about the fact that our life on earth will end some day. Maybe they will begin to turn soberly about their relationship to God. Maybe they will turn to God and decide they have not been thinking as seriously and soberly about eternal realities as they should have been. But, this happens all the time. God is continually warning people and trying to turn them back to Him. Warning judgments of God, then, are brought against the wicked continually. The terminal wrath of God is continually poured out on those who remain impenitent and who continue to harden their hearts. What we are trying to say is that what is being described in chapters 15 and 16 of Revelation are, as we are told in chapter 15:1, the last of the plagues.

Here is the final wrath of God being poured out on man, but that final wrath of God that is being poured out on man can occur within his own lifetime. That does not have to be something that occurs at the end of time when the final judgment occurs after Jesus comes again. In this lifetime, you can so harden your heart that you become a terminal case. I believe the Bible reveals this to us continually.

The classic case in the Old Testament, which serves as almost a background against which all else can be considered, is the case of Pharaoh. Let us go back to Exodus 7 and notice a series of verses beginning with Exodus 7:13. It says, "And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them." Chapter 8:15 says, "But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart." Now, look at verse 19, "... But Pharaoh's heart grew hard." Look at verse 32, "But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also." Do you see what is happening?

Moses says, "Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me.'" Pharaoh says, "no," and he hardens his heart. It is not something that happened only one time when there was just one great hardening and then it was all over. We are told he hardened his heart. Then, later, we told he hardened his heart again. This means his heart was not completely hardened earlier, because you cannot harden that which is already completely hardened. So, there is a process involved here. He hardened his heart again. What is the final outgrowth of all this?

Let us go to Exodus 9:7: "But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go." Look at verse 12. Here is the clincher: "But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh." Think about that. Here was a man who had been in the process of hardening his heart. He had warning after warning; plague after plague after plague came on Egypt and time after time after time Pharaoh ignored the warning judgments of God, until finally, in his own earthly lifetime, God stepped in and finished the process, and God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

What are we seeing in Revelation 16? The same kind of thing. We are seeing one bowl of wrath poured out, another bowl of wrath poured out, another bowl of wrath poured out, another bowl of wrath poured out. These are the judgments of God.

Earlier in Revelation 8 through 11, we saw warnings of God coming first of all. God sent His warnings to try to get people to repent and they did not repent. Then, we come to chapter 16 and still they did not repent. In other words, they continually said "no" to God and their hearts got harder and harder and harder and, finally, God stepped in and poured out the final judgment of wrath against them. It can happen in this lifetime.

Now, let us move to the New Testament and look at a series of passages that suggest the same thing. In Romans 1, Paul speaks about the pre-Christian, Gentile world. In the whole Gentile world the same process that had occurred in the life of that individual man, Pharaoh, was happening in the Gentile world.

Notice how it is described in a series of verses in Romans 1, beginning with verse 21: It says, "Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

And now, verse 24: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts." Now, verses 25:26: "... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this reason God gave them up."

Now, go to verse 28: "... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over."

What is happening here? Here are people who had a knowledge of God, but they refused to seek after God and God gave them up. They followed after the lusts of the flesh and God gave them up. They refused to have God in their knowledge. God gave them up. That is the condition of the pre-Christian Gentile world. God had given them up, because they had, first of all, given God up, and it can happen in this lifetime. In the course of our life here on earth, we may very well pass or cross over that line between God's patience and God's wrath. Woe to the man who has continued to so harden his heart that he passes that line in his lifetime.

Look at other references to the same kind of thought. In Matthew 12:32, Jesus said: "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." In other words, in this world, before reading the next, a person can reach a point where he can no longer be forgiven. He is dead while he is yet living. He is hopeless even in this lifetime. Look at I John 5:16, and we see the same thing: "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that." John is saying there are some men who have so sinned in this life that even your prayers can no longer do them any good. They have passed, they have crossed over the line. They have passed the patience of God.

Now, turn to Hebrews 6, which is the most convincing of all. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." The write of the Hebrew letter says that there are people within their own lifetimes on this earth who pass that point of one return. They cross the line from the patience of God into His wrath. They have tasted the good things of the world to come, and they have rejected it and fallen away so that there comes a point where it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.



Turn now to 1 Timothy 4:1-2. It says: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed in deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron."

Their conscience is seared. It is like taking a hot iron and putting it on your flesh and searing it so it is totally insensitive any longer to feeling. And, there are people who in their lifetime have so continually rejected the warnings of God that their conscience is so seared that they are totally insensitive to the appeals of the loving God, and it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.

There are those who are among the living dead. The same thing is told to us in II Timothy 3:1-9. There are men who are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth because they have become so evil. There is no point trying to teach them right. He says just avoid them. First, keep away from them. Have nothing to do with them. They have already gone beyond the point of repentance. It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.

In Romans 1, we saw a hardened pre-Christian world and, I believe, as we move toward the end of time, we see a similar hardening in the world so that the impact of the Christian gospel in our world will be as insignificant as the impact of Judaism was in the pre-Christian world.

There is a paragraph in the commentary of Burton Coffman on Revelation which, I believe, suggest to us part of the message being seen in Revelation 16. He said, "We have now seen all the bowels poured out. What do they mean? A very perceptive person suggested that they mean that a time will come when all the evil in the universe shall unite to oppose truth and righteousness, making it seem for a time that all is lost. This would certainly seem to be true, but evil shall not win; right shall prevail. God's answer to the first general hardening of mankind in Romans 1 was the First Advent of Christ; and His answer to the second and final general hardening of the human race will be the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, an event that follows very closely the pouring out of these bowls of wrath."

It may very well be that in Revelation 16 we have a hint, at least, of an idea which, I think, is clearly taught in Revelation 20, as we will later see. We have already seen hints of it, incidentally, in Revelation 11 and Revelation 13. The idea is that, at the very end of time, there is going to be a condition prevailing on our earth in which the gospel of Christ will be so hindered in its progress that it will almost seem as if Satan has totally overwhelmed and conquered. But, then, as those few remaining saints on earth are crying out to God, they will be delivered and be brought into the presence of God.

But, while I believe that we need to, at least, understand that that may be true, the more significant message of Revelation 16 is the message to men who continually refuse to repent at the warning judgments of God that finally there comes a time when God's patience can continue no longer. When man is so hardened in sin there is no hope for his salvation—may it never happen to us!

We have given you at least a background against which you can better understand the significance of Revelation 16 and a framework within which the details can be understood. I would call your attention, finally, to two small points in Revelation 16. One is verse 15, which says: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

F.F. Bruce, in his commentary, said: "According to the Mishnah, the captains of the temple in Jerusalem went their rounds of the precincts at night, and if a member of the temple police were caught asleep at his post, his clothes were taken off and burned, and he was sent away naked in disgrace." Why? Because he was not watching.

And, it may be that John was drawing from that background when he says, "Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Revelation 16:15). Jesus, as He was speaking of His second coming, said you do not know when it will be, but watch because I am coming as a thief in the night.

We need to be a people who keep about us garments of righteousness. We need robes that have been washed in the blood of

the Lamb and that are maintained pure and clean. Then, no matter when the Lord comes again, he will find us watching. He will find us faithful that we might be granted, therefore, the inheritance of the crown of life.

It is the very next verse after this that everybody wants to hear about, but about which I am going to say practically nothing. It is verse 16: "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." It seems like there is an awesome fascination concerning Armageddon in our world. Mention Armageddon and people will get their Bibles out and start trying to figure out where it is and when it is going to happen; this great battle that so many see as occurring at the end of time.

Actually, I think it has nothing to do with any kind of battle that is going to take place between armies. Revelation is not concerned with that kind of warfare. It is concerned about spiritual warfare. Where is Armageddon? Well, it seems to be the place of the final struggle between the powers of evil and the kingdom of God. But where does the final struggle between the powers of evil and the kingdom of God take place? Is it not in the hearts of men? Is that not where the real battle is?

Throughout scripture, we are told that our wrestling is not against flesh and blood. Our wrestling is against principalities and powers in the heavenly places, against the world rulers of this darkness. It is a struggle to overcome the temptations of Satan and to vigorously pursue the evangelistic nature of the work of God's kingdom. It is to try to lead men into the kingdom of God and preserve their souls for Christ. There is where the great battle is fought, and we need daily to be watching and ready and prepared and active in the service of God so that whenever he comes, we will be prepared for him.

It does not matter whether there are masses of armies in the Middle East or anywhere else. That has nothing to do with the book of Revelation. The great issue of life is whether your allegiance is to Jesus or your allegiance is to Satan. That is the issue.

The cry of Jesus is, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to

him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). And he is saying to us that the issue of life is whether you will open the door to Him. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The issue is whether you will come to Jesus for the rest that He offers you. The issue of life is whether Jesus is Lord, or someone or something else is Lord. The issue of Life is what will you do with Jesus. What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is He? When these issues are decided in your life, then you will be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ and you will be prepared to hear these words, "Well done good and faithful servant." These are the great issues of Revelation.

## **BABYLON, THE GREAT HARLOT**

### **REVELATION 17**

Read Revelation chapter 17, the vision of the great harlot. It was common among the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, including such men as Martin Luther, William Tyndale, John Wesley, and John Knox to identify the great harlot of the Revelation with the Roman Catholic Church. Even Alexander Campbell, in his debate in the past century with Bishop Purcell, defended the proposition that Babylon, the great harlot, was the Roman Catholic Church.

Let me say at the very beginning that I do not believe that is true. I am not saying that because I am trying to be nice to Roman Catholicism, but I do not believe Babylon, the great harlot, is a portrait of apostate Christianity—a Christianity that has drifted away from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles as they were directed by the Holy Spirit. The picture given is not so much a picture of religious deception, as it is of worldly seduction. I believe the fact that Babylon; the symbol employed in Revelation 17, is significant.

In the Old Testament, five cities are described as harlots: Nineveh, Tyre, Babylon, Jerusalem, and Samaria. Nineveh is so described in Nahum 3:1-4, Tyre in Isaiah 23:15-17, Babylon in Isaiah 47:5-7, and Jerusalem and Samaria in Ezekiel 23 and elsewhere.

If God wanted to choose a city to represent apostasy from the religion of God, which of these would He choose? Only Jerusalem and Samaria were ever associated with faithful Judaism. Nineveh, Tyre, and Babylon were strictly pagan cities that were never identified with the chosen people of God. They could serve only as symbols of a world apart from God, offering only those pleasures the world can offer. And, of those, Babylon was the greatest city and the one that could most reasonably represent worldwide influence, a city of the world influencing the world with attractions of the world.

That Babylon is the symbol of the power, influence, attraction, corruption and seduction of the world, rather than the symbol of apostate Christianity, is further suggested by the fact that, as we move further into the chapter. Babylon begins to assume

the form of another great city, Rome. At the time John wrote Revelation, Rome represented all of those things that Babylon represented. Even as Babylon, Rome was the capital city of a world empire, a totally pagan city, a perfect symbol of luxury, vice and glamour seducing the world. At that time, Rome could not have been a symbol of apostasy from the true religion of God. But, Babylon, as the great harlot, could be a symbol of the great seductive attractions of this world.

Even in the great prophecy in Hosea 2, the apostasy of Israel is attributed to the seductive attraction of this world, rather than the deception of false religion. In Hosea 2:4-5, God said concerning Israel: "I will not have mercy on her children, For they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my linen, My oil and my drink."

Israel was not being seduced so much by other gods, although she involved herself in idolatry, as she was by the allure of the things of this world. So, what we are seeing in Revelation 17 is not a representation of the apostate church under the figure of Babylon. I believe that Babylon represents the seductive attractions of this world, the lusts of this world.

I believe that Satan employs three weapons to destroy the people of God, and these three weapons are discussed in Revelation under the imagery of the beast that comes out of the sea, the beast that comes out of the earth, and the great harlot, Babylon. Now, Satan, the great dragon, is the one who is the force behind it all, but he uses three instruments to cause people to bear the mark of the beast.

The three instruments of destruction that Satan employs against the people of God are persecution, deception, and seduction. In other words, Satan would like to destroy the people of God through persecution. If he could attack your body, if he could persecute you in a physical way, and cause you to deny your Lord, he would have won the battle.

But, if that does not work, he has a second weapon. He can try to deceive you. He can use false religion to cause you to not see true religion. He can produce a counterfeit so that unless

you are really seeking God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, you can be deceived and be led away into a counterfeit religion. I do believe that Roman Catholicism fits in that category.

There is a third instrument, seduction. Satan can attack your body with persecution, attack your mind to deceive you, but he can also attack your emotions and your will. He can try to get you to anchor your life in, and tie your life to, this world and center all your affairs in this life without reference to a life that is to come.

In fact, I believe that in I John 2:15-17, you have an exact, clear, and direct statement of what Revelation 17 is trying to tell us. John said, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." And I believe that Babylon, under the figure of the great harlot, is a symbol used to suggest this weapon of Satan to try to destroy you. This weapon is the seductive allure of this world, and what it has to offer in opposition to that which God is offering to His people.

In Revelation 17:1, I think it is significant that God did not choose the symbol of Jerusalem, which might have served as a good symbol of an apostate church, as the great harlot, but he used Babylon as a symbol because Babylon never was a part of God's people. Jerusalem, as a harlot, would be a good symbol of an apostate church, but not Babylon.

Babylon was always in opposition to the people of God. I believe, then, that what we are seeing is Satan's attempt to capture your heart and your affections through the employment of the enticements and lusts of this world.

Read Revelation 17:1-2: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me. 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were mad edrunk with the wine of her fornication.' "

I believe that the basis or the symbolism comes out of a passage in Jeremiah 51, because the same kind of imagery is used there and employed in the Revelation. In Jeremiah 51:7, Jeremiah said, "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, That made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; Therefore the nations are deranged."

Resume reading in Revelation 17:3: "So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman setting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication." Notice the similarity to Jeremiah 51:7. Babylon has been a golden cup in Jehovah's hand that made all the earth drunken. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

Now, notice Jeremiah 51:12-13: "Set up the standard on the walls of Babylon; Make the guard strong, Set up the watchmen, Prepare the ambushes. For the Lord has both devised and done What He spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasure, Your end has come, the measure of your covetousness."

That which characterizes Babylon is covetousness. She is a harlot and she seduces the people of God with her luxuries. Note verse 3 again: "... I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast." This beast is described as full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Back in Revelation 13, we were introduced to this beast, the beast that had the seven heads and ten horns. We identified it as representing all of the persecuting governments of the world. And, what we are seeing here is Babylon, the great harlot, sitting upon the scarlet-colored beast. In other words, she is in close association with the beast. The governments of this world so often gain the support of the people by promising economic prosperity and other earthy benefits.

John sees this woman in the wilderness. This is where the church was seen earlier in Revelation 12. Satan goes where the church is. He is going to use the great harlot to seduce the



people of God. Babylon is described now in verse 5: "... And on her forehead a name was written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

We are seeing Babylon as representing seduction. That is the idea. The harlot seduces. That is what she does. The harlot does not persecute, the harlot does not particularly deceive, the harlot simply seduces. And, we see then, the seductive power Satan has to seduce God's people away from allegiance to God. These include luxury, glamour, and all the vices. All of these are suggested, and it seems that Babylon is a good choice as a symbol of that kind of seductive power, because the great cities of our world are the places where these particular kinds of attractions seem to center. Not only are they seemingly concentrated in the great cities of the world, but from those great cities the world is influenced by all these things.

In our own country, for example, where are Satan's greatest instruments for seducing the people? You have Los Angeles and Hollywood constantly producing those things that are in opposition to what God wants His people to have. These cities influence the world. So, God has chosen the greatest city that He could choose in ancient times, mighty Babylon. I do not think there was a greater city on the face of the earth in terms of its size and its influence. Babylon was chosen to suggest seductive power.

Babylon later becomes a symbol for Rome. Interpreters agree the seven mountains have reference to the seven hills of Rome. Rome is being suggested, here, because Rome, in the time when John was living, was the perfect example of the great seductive city with all of the luxury and vice and glamour that the world can offer.

Verse 6 says: "I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement." A good illustration of the kind of thing that is suggest here would be the coliseum in Rome where, for the amusement and entertainment of the people, the Christians were fed to the lions. There the blood of martyrs flowed, all in the name of entertainment and great amusement.

Verse 7 says, "But the angel said to me, 'Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.' " All we have seen up to now may still seem rather mysterious, so the angel says, "I am going to explain all of this to you now so that you will begin to understand better what we are seeing here." And, so we go to verse 8: "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition." I believe that to understand Babylon, you have to understand the beast. In our study of Revelation 13, we learned that the beast represents the persecuting powers of all of the ages.

The emphasis I want to give here *is of the all ages of time and history*, because we learned that the beast was not just representing one particular government. It was not just representing just the government of Rome. It was representing all of the governments of the world that would persecute God's people.

Now, as we see the woman riding the beast in chapter 17, we are seeing the same kind of association. The woman and beast are coextensive. The duration of time in which the beast is active is the duration of time in which the woman is active. This suggests to us that the woman is not a specific woman at some particular point in history, nor referring to any one particular thing in history, but it covers all of history. In other words, Satan has always been using governments to persecute God's people. Satan has always been trying to seduce the people of God. So, the symbols here that are being used are ones that are comprehensive.

Notice again verse 8, "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition." What does this mean?

As we saw earlier, chapter 13, the beast had seven heads representing many governments. The beast received what seemed like a death stroke and it looked like the beast would die, because one of the heads was wounded, but it revived and the world marveled. The point is that when one government seemingly is destroyed, the world gets excited, but then it always seems like a worse government comes along and takes its place. And that has been the history of the world; one bad

government after another. When one falls, another comes up. What we are seeing here is the beast that was, and is not. But, that is not the end of the story. It is about to come up out of the abyss, and then to go into perdition. There two pictures. One is the evil governments that continue to arise. They disappear, but then another comes up.

The other picture is of evil governments that go into perdition. They all will finally fall. But now, notice the middle of verse 8: "And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

This is the same things we saw in chapter 13. Those who are not God's people, those who are not Christians, marvel at this, but the people of God do not marvel because they know. God revealed that this the way things are. It is no marvel. But, Satan continues to bring about new governments and new persecuting powers and he will continue to do so until the end of time.

Look at verse 9: "here is the mind which has wisdom." In other words, the angel is saying, "Let me give you some wise insight into the whole situation and try again to make it clear to you what is going on here." He says; "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time."

Here the beast is portrayed in two ways. First of all, the seven heads are seven mountains. That is one picture that you want to get. But, then, there is another picture he wants to develop, and that is that the seven heads also represent seven kings. There are two thing suggested here. One is the seven heads, which are seven mountains on which the woman sits; the seven hills of Rome. Rome was the present embodiment of a persecuting world government. That is one thing that is being suggested.

But, there is a second thing. There are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet to come; and when comes, he must continue a little while. Now, he says there are five fallen kings.

We need to go back to Daniel chapters 2 and 7 in which the whole picture is rooted, because the beast of Revelation 17 that is described more fully for us in Revelation 13 was a beast that was a composite of the picture of the four beasts in Daniel 7. And the our beasts in Daniel 7 represented four successive world empires, which is made clearer as you compare it with Daniel 2.

This suggests that the beast of Revelation 17 is the embodiment of all of these governments, which follow one right after the other. And, you recall, in Daniel 2:39 when Daniel was interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar about the statue of the four different metals, that Daniel says these represent four kingdoms. In verse 39, Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "But after you shall arise another kingdom." Daniel, in Daniel 2 and 7, speaks of the kings as representing kingdoms. Since the symbolism of Revelation 17 emerges out of Daniel 7, let us let it set the context for interpreting Revelation 17.

Then, when it says in Revelation 17:9-10 that the heads are seven kings, I believe we have to understand that as meaning they are seven kingdoms. so, they represent seven kingdoms, and he says the five are fallen, the one is, and the other is not yet come. What do we see as we look at the kingdoms of the world? There had been previously five kingdoms: The Greek, Egyptian, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Persian and they had fallen. Now, there is one more. The Roman Empire was now in existence. The Roman empire is the one that is. Then, he says the other is not yet come; and when he comes, he must continue a little while.

We will learn in a moment what that is. But, let us move to verse 11: "The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition." I believe the eighth represents all of the persecuting governments that are yet to come, because it says the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth. But, that beast represented all persecuting governments yet to come. The fact that there has never been a single, world government since Rome may account for the eighth being presented as a composite of governments.

Read verse 12: "The ten horns which you saw are ten king who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive

authority for one hour as kings with the beast." Many interpreters have said these are actual kings and that have ruled somewhere or will rule somewhere at some time. But, notice that it says that these that are called kings do not have any kingdom. So, in reality, they are not kings in the normal sense of the word.

But, what are "kings" anyway? They are men of power and influence in the world. But, these are kings without a kingdom. It says they have received no kingdom as yet, and there is no necessary implication they ever will. But, it says they received authority as kings. I think that is the whole point. It is speaking now of men who have authority as kings, that is, influential and powerful figures in the world. Does this mean, literally, ten individual ones? In Revelation, "ten" is a symbol of completeness. It has the significance of all the men in the future who are influential and authoritative and powerful in our world who are not actually leaders of kingdoms, but who line themselves up along with the leaders of kingdoms. Men of great influence in the world will often align themselves with whoever is in power at the time for personal advantage and personal gain.

We are now seeing a picture of corrupt and persecuting governmental powers who have great and powerful men from all areas of life assisting them. They received authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. In other words, their influence is not going to be very permanent or very long. It is only for a brief time. Men who try to align themselves with the top dog, who try to get favors from the man on top, usually do not last very long in their ability to influence and affect things.

Notice verse 13: "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast." In other words, they single-mindedly are giving their allegiance to the persecuting governmental powers of the world. They are not interested in following God or His Son, Jesus Christ.

But, notice verse 14, which, I believe, is the theme and the key to the whole book of Revelation. Revelation 17:14 is the essential message of the book: "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

So far we have simply seen a rather discouraging and disgusting picture of governmental oppressive power and men lined up with them and those who are trying to seduce God's people. But, the message now is: "Cheer up, Christians!" These are all going to war against the Lamb of God, but the Lamb of God will overcome them. The beautiful part for us is that we shall overcome! That includes all who are called and chosen and faithful. Did Jesus not say in Revelation 2:10: "... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." Yes, if you are faithful to Jesus. It does not matter what is happening out there in the world. It does not matter what is taking place there if you will keep your eye on the Lamb, on Jesus. Then, you will be a conqueror. The, You will overcome the world.

Verse 15: "Then he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.'" In other words, the influence of that power is great and far-reaching. Verse 16 says: "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

Initially, you see the harlot, the woman, riding upon the beast and they are working together. But, a house cannot stand for long if it is divided against itself. Satan's hosts are divided against themselves.

Finally, those who are among the associates of the beast will hate the harlot. They will begin to see that the world does not really have the answers, that the things of the world do not satisfy, and finally, they try to rebel against it all and throw it off—but it is too late. They have been trapped. They cannot. They have been caught in the snare of Satan, the passions and the lusts of the world. They are slaves to their own passions, and even though they would try to fight against it, it is too late. They have been caught. And, they hate the very thing they used to love. Is that they way with sin?

The things that attract us that God says are wrong, when experience them, we find them bitter, we find that they do not provide the satisfaction we expected. Yet, if we continue in them, we reach a point where we just cannot get out of the trap. We have developed habits that are wrong, and we cannot break them.

Finally, notice verses 17-18: "For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman who you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." Yes, the allure and the seduction of the world even control those who are the kings of the earth. Even those who are kings and rulers of governments are still subject to the passions of the flesh. They are even slaves themselves to the allure of the world and find that they themselves live restlessly because they have not found the peace that lies and resides in a true relationship with God.

Revelation 17 is, admittedly, a very difficult chapter, but we have tried to give our best explanation of the chapter in the hopes of seeing what the message is. And the message is essentially that the powers of Satan shall fight against the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them. He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they also shall overcome that are with Him, called and chosen and faithful. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

Be faithful to Him and you need not worry about the rest, because God will be victorious and His people will be conquerors. You can join that host of those who have given their allegiance to Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. All else is a pathetic substitute that never satisfies, but Jesus gives life and that life is eternal.

## **THE FALL OF BABYLON**

### **REVELATION 18**

Read Revelation 18. In chapter 17, we were given a description of Babylon in terms of the great harlot. Here, in chapter 18, Babylon is described more in terms of the great city, although both ideas are found in both chapters.

Earlier, we introduced the idea of Babylon and the significance of it. As we study the eighteenth chapter, which describes the fall of Babylon, we want to add to what we have already introduced in terms of the meaning of Babylon.

What does Babylon represent in Revelation? I must say again after most study, that I do not believe that Babylon represents the Roman Catholic Church. I do not believe that it represents false religion in the most general way. The reasons I believe that include the following:

1. The idea of false religion has already been given a symbol and has been discussed previously in the book of revelation. The beast coming up out of the earth in Revelation 13:11 is said to have don signs in the sight of the beast that came out of the sea, according to Revelation 13:14. And the earth beast that did that is identified in Revelation 19:20 as the false prophet. The same identification is seen in Revelation 16:13 and 20:10. Babylon is not discussed in association with the earth beast, which represents false religion or counterfeit Christianity in whatever form it might take.
2. Babylon is associated with the sea beast, which represents governments that persecute God's people.
3. Babylon is spoken of as the great harlot, which suggests seduction. The allure of this harlot is the luxury, the vice, and the glamour of this world which will always be supported by governments opposing God's way of life, and persecuting His people who live His way of life.
4. Babylon could not be a symbol of apostate religion, for Babylon in the Old Testament, from which the imagery of Revelation is drawn, was never presented as apostate Judaism. Babylon was not a corruption of Judaism.



5. Babylon represented a completely alien style of life caught up in the pleasures, the luxuries, the vices, and the glamour that the world can offer. Let us look at two examples of this. In Isaiah 47:8, Isaiah describes Babylon and makes this statement: "Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, 'I am and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know the loss of children.' "

6. Babylon is portrayed as a place given to pleasures. There is another description of Babylon found in the prophecy of the Old Testament in Jeremiah 51:13. Notice how Babylon is characterized: "O you who dwell by many water, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your covetousness. Here is a city that is identified as a covetous city, one that craves things. So, Jeremiah speaks of the abundance of the treasures of Babylon and Isaiah speaks of her pleasures. In the Old Testament, Babylon, rather than representing a corruption of God's religion, is portrayed as a place of treasures and pleasures. Babylon, then, represents a pleasure-oriented world.

Now, that is the very aspect of Babylon that Revelation calls to our attention in Revelation 17 and 18. For example, the first description of Babylon in Revelation 17:4 says, "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication."

The picture here is of luxury, of depravity, of a glamorous life style. Here is a woman arrayed in a beautiful scarlet and purple holding a golden cup of abominations, a woman who is engaged in the unclean things of her fornication, decked out with gold and precious stones. Here is a picture of a woman of luxury and ease and seduction, one who represents the glamour, the allure, the temptation of the world and holds out the enticements of the things of the world.

Then, in Revelation 18, the first description of Babylon in verse 4 says, "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues.' " Now, notice verse 11-13: "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her. For no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold

and sliver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple.” And on and on it goes, naming the luxurious things of life that appeal to those who have their hearts centered in this life.

Babylon apparently also represents more than a single city of that name. Revelation 18:24 says: “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.” Babylon is said to be the place where all who have lived on the earth have been slain. Babylon is, then, representing something more than one city in this world at one particular time in this world. What was Babylon, anyway? Babylon was the great city that controlled the world. Babylon was the heart of the great empire whose influence spread to the ends of the earth. Babylon had worldwide influence. Babylon is, then, representative of the entire corrupting power of the world. Babylon had ruled the world and its influence was worldwide.

When John wrote, Rome was the equivalent of Babylon, and John, in the Revelation, identified Rome with Babylon in chapter 17:9 and 18. Babylon sits on seven mountains, or hills, according to verse 9. And verse 18 says: “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” The present manifestation of that was Rome. Rome was the city that ruled over the kings of the earth when John was writing.

Rome, at that time was a perfect expression of the same thing Babylon was; a mighty city whose influence reached to the ends of the earth with corruptive power. Babylon, it seems to me, is not a single city, and certainly not a religion. That does not seem to be in the picture we are getting. We are getting a picture of enticement of the world, pure and simple worldliness, the corruptive influences of the world, the allure of luxury, the world’s vices and its glamour. And that, it seems to me, is what we have seen in Revelation 17 and 18. Rome was, at that time, a perfect expression of the worldwide corrupting influence of luxury and glamour and vice.

I believe, then, in Revelation, we see the three great agents of Satan: the beast that comes out of the sea representing governments that would affect the people of God; the beast that comes up out of the earth which is spoken of elsewhere as the false prophet deceiving the minds of men, and Babylon

which is seducing men. So, Satan uses persecution, deception, and seduction to destroy God's people. The fleeting satisfaction, but powerful attraction, of the thing of this world are suggested in Revelation 18:2-3: "And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.' " The angel spoke of the power of her luxury. Babylon represent luxury well.

The things of this world hold such a fascination and attraction. I doubt if there is any more powerful influence that Satan uses than the power and allure of the pleasures and treasures of this earth and this, I am confident, is a major consideration we are seeing here in Revelation. Those who are drunk on the wine of the fornication of the world, as represented and presented in the figure of Babylon, will finally drink of the wine of the wrath of God. Consequently, there is the appeal in verses 4 and 5: "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people' " Then, the voice explains how you do that: "... lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." This has been the appeal of God to His people throughout the ages, to come out from among the corrupting influences of the world and be a separate, holy, distinctive people who are committed to God and to His way.

In John 17: 14-16, Jesus expresses the same idea: "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

That is the same thing Revelation 18:4-5 is saying. "Come out from among them" How do you do this? Not by getting in a space ship and going to the moon. You come out by having no fellowship with the sins of the world. That is what Jesus is saying here. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."

I believe that John gives the perfect elaboration on the point and makes it practical. It brings it down to earth. In I John 2:15-17, John said, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. ..." That is what Revelation 17 and 18, I am sure, is saying to us. John said, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

Remember the great harlot with whom the kings of the earth commit fornication? They mistakenly think that in this they will find the satisfaction of their yearnings and cravings. But, John warned of the fleeting satisfaction of fleshly lusts of the world. Then he warned of the lust of the eyes, and you can just see men looking at that golden cup filled with abomination and thinking of that glamorous creature decked out in her scarlet and purple holding the gleaming golden cup.

John warns of the vainglory, the pride of life. Babylon was saying, "I am and I shall always be and I have everything to satisfy you." Here is the appeal of the pride of life; thinking that this world, this life, contains all that is necessary to provide me with all that I need for my happiness and my joy. It does not. "... the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."

Next comes the verse that I believe is the single verse that best summarizes the entire seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Revelation: "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." It looks to me like Revelation 17 and 18 is simply a graphic, wildly symbolic picture of the very thing simply stated here. The world, the enticement, the allure of the things of this life that has ensnared hundreds of millions of people is going to pass away, but the only thing that really endures is the one who does the will of the Father.

In Psalm 17:14, the Psalmist speaks of "... from men of the world who have their portion in this life. ..." That describes, unfortunately, a great part of our world that has been captured by Satan. Remember, Jesus said we are not to be of the world,

but there are men who are of the world, who have their portion in this life, and that is all. Some live a cradle-to-grave existence trying to grab all the gusto they can right here, think that this earthly life is everything.

Paul said in I Corinthians 15:19 that if Christians have nothing to look for other than the things of this life, then we are more to be pitied than all other men.

Paul explained in II Corinthians 5:2-4 that, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven ... that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

In every man there is a yearning for immortality. There is the intimation of immortality in life and everyone knows it and feels it and senses it. There is the craving for that which is yet to come and eternity is somehow buried within the hearts of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and we can never rest until we have found the way to satisfy that yearning for it.

The problem is that the world is filled with men who have simply extinguished as best they can that craving and have sought to find fulfillment of that yearning in the things of this life and have been unable to find it.

In Revelation 18:6-8, judgment is pronounced on Babylon. And, again, I believe that Babylon simply represents all of the seductions of the world. It represents the things of the world that attract us and turn our eyes away from God. It represents all that causes us to lose sight of eternity, of immortality, of the judgment to come, of the reality of heaven, of the reality of the coming again of Christ. It represents that which would simply focus our attention and cause us to occupy our lives in the things of this world. That is what Babylon represents.

It is the allure, the seduction of this life. In verses 6 through 8, judgment is pronounced on Babylon. But, those that are enamored with the world refuse to consider such a possibility. Look at Revelation 18:7: "In the measure that she glorified herself and live luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' "

No, sir! I do not need to worry about the future. I am not one who is going to experience mourning. I am going to live it up. I am going to enjoy all that the world can give me and it is just going to go on and on. The materially prosperous in every age have lived under the illusion that their happy state will continue without interruption, but the deep down realization that this really cannot be is the source of relentless unrest.

I think we see a tremendous restlessness in our age. Many just cannot seem to find peace. They cannot seem to find real joy and they are seeking it in a bottle or they are seeking it in a succession of marriages or affairs. They are simply looking in every direction to try to find where the restlessness finally ceases. When what they need is genuine peace found in a fulfilling relationship with the God who created us and with whom we shall someday have fellowship if we live faithful to Him.

This is where peace comes. Yet, those who have their whole lives centered in things of this life and do not look beyond shall simply be doomed to ceaseless restlessness.

In verses 9 through 19, we see the lamentation over the fall of Babylon, but I want you to notice the people who are sorry to see Babylon pass. They are the ones who are sorry only because they cannot get any more out of it. None is depicted as loving the city for herself, but only for what he could get out of her. She might seduce and enrich men, but there was nothing lovely in her. She had brought profit and pleasure to many, but affection to none.

It distresses me to see so many in our time who are unable to establish really satisfying relationships with other people. They cannot get along with their wives and they cannot get along with the people at work. They cannot get along because they are looking at other people to fulfill their cravings and their desires, and they are not able to look outward and to be giving to others. And, if you look at the people who are mourning over Babylon in verses 9 through 19, you find that these were people who had gotten all kinds of goodies, all kinds of pleasures and treasures, but now it was all cut off. And, now, they were sorry, but not because they had found that Babylon was really good.

There is no goodness to be found, ultimately, in the thrills and the things of this life. The pleasures and the joys that are everlasting are those that are found in relationship with people and with God. In loving God and loving others as we love ourselves, there is peace. This is that for which men are yearning and which God is providing if we will follow His procedures and His rules and not try to think that we can do it a better way. God does have the answer to our needs.

I think that most of us probably do not realize the degree of the luxury of the Roman world of that time. When you read in verses 11 through 13 of all the merchandise that was described by John, you are reading no exaggeration of the condition that existed in the Roman world. We have confirmation of this from contemporary Roman historians.

Here is a description by Aristides, the Roman orator, on the way in which things flowed into the city of Rome back in the first century. "Merchandise is brought from every land and sea, everything that every season begets, and every country produces, the products of rivers and lakes, the arts of the Greeks and the barbarians, so that, if anyone were to wish to see all these things, he would either have to visit the whole inhabited world to see them—or to visit Rome; so many great ships arrive from all over the world at every hour, at every season, that Rome is like some common factory in the world, for you may see such great cargoes from the Indies, or, if you wish, from the blessed Arabias that you might well conjecture that the trees there have been stripped naked; clothing from Babylon, ornaments from the barbarian lands, everything flows to Rome; merchandise, cargoes, the products of the land, the emptying of the mines, the product of every art that is and has been, everything that is begotten and everything that grows. If there is anything you cannot see at Rome, then it is a thing which does not exist and which never existed."

Rome was the center of commerce and luxury. The luxury of Rome is simply beyond description. Let us look for a moment at the Roman emperors and some of the wealthier people of Rome. A man named Epicurius squandered a fortune of about three million dollars in refined debauchery and committed suicide when he had only three hundred thousand dollars left, because he thought he could not live on such a pittance as that.

Nero once gave a banquet at which the Egyptian roses alone had cost something like a hundred thousand dollars.

Vitellius, who was emperor for less than a year, succeeded in the period of time in spending something like twenty million dollars, mainly on food. Suetonius tells of his favorite dish, and here what the Roman writer in the first century said, "In this he mingled the livers of pike, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingos, and the milk of lampreys, brought by his captains from the whole empire from Parthis to the Spanish strait." That was just his favorite dish.

The super-rich lived in almost unimaginable luxury in Rome, but even the common people were caught up in this kind of thing. The historian Pliny tells us that women would only bathe in silver baths, that even soldiers had swords with silver hilts, and scabbards with silver chains, that even poor women had silver anklets, and the very slaves had silver mirrors. I mean this is a materialistic age.

You say we also live in a materialistic age. We are just like Rome, that is all. We are just like what John is trying to call our attention to; what God is trying to say to us in Revelation.

Here were people caught up in a luxurious manner of life; a life of ease, a life in which they were just looking for the trinkets and the amusements of this world and were blinded to any realities beyond the immediate present and the immediate thing that would titillate their imaginations and cause them to have a few thrills along the way.

Read again the things being imported in Rome that are described in Revelation 28:11-13, and you will see things such as silk. Silk was so costly that it took one pound of gold to pay for one pound of silk. There is described in this passage a thing called thyine wood. You cannot even find it unless you look in an unabridged dictionary, because it was a very rare and aromatic sweet-smelling wood that came from North America. It was beautifully grained and the best graining could be like a peacock's tail or like the skin of a tiger or a panther. It was used especially for tabletops. Tables made of thyine wood could cost anything from about twelve thousand dollars to about forty-five thousand dollars.



Seneca, who was Nero's prime minister, was said to have three hundred of such tables with marble legs. All I am saying is it was an age of luxury, a materialistic age, an age caught up in trade and commerce and money and finance, and an age that simply was obsessed with material things. This was one of the great instruments and tools of Satan to turn people from God and to turn their minds away from the building of character to simply adorning their bodies with more trinkets. It was an age which turned the minds of people away from establishing helpful human relationships to imply the acquisition of more and more things. And what God is revealing to us in Revelation 17 and 18 is simply this: "the world passes away and the lusts thereof."

The last five verses describe the destruction of Babylon. In the King James Version of the Bible, the statement "no more at all" is made again and again. No more music to fill the spirit. No more craftsmen to make our pretty things. No more lamps to give us light. No longer the voice of the bridegroom. No love has been generated to last. There is no real compassion. There is no tenderness. There are only bodes and lust. Babylon has fallen. It provides nothing more at all for the satisfaction of the human spirit.

Notice verse 20: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" Rejoice saints because you have seen reality. You have known that Babylon would fall. You have known that the allure of this world holds nothing of permanent value. You rightly sing, "Earth holds no treasures by perish with using. Heaven holds all to me." We look forward to a city that has a foundation whose builder and maker is God. Now we walk through this life holding our heads up and looking to the future and living triumphantly today with the assurance that God is with us.

And, as we live with Him and enjoy the people about us, we are walking hand-in-hand with Jesus toward that eternal home with God. Babylon is fallen. "Come forth, my people, out of her," and give your allegiance to Jesus Christ. Will you not let your joy and peace be found in him? Believe in Jesus and trust and obey Him.

## **THE BANQUET AND THE BATTLE**

### **REVELATION 19**

Read Revelation 19. I would like to briefly review the last half of the book of Revelation so that we can look at chapter 19 in context. In Revelation 12, 13, and 14 we were presented with five great enemies of God's people. The first one introduced was Satan himself and then, in succession, we saw four instruments of Satan presented. We saw the beast coming out of the sea, we saw the beast coming up out of the land, we saw those who wear the mark of the beast, and then we saw Babylon, later identified as the great harlot.

Beginning with chapter 15 and 16, we saw the final outpouring of the wrath of God on those who bore the mark of the beast. Then, in chapters 17 and 18, we saw the doom of Babylon, the great harlot. Now, as we come to chapter 19, we see the doom of the beast that came out of the sea and the beast that came out of the land, which is identified here as the false prophet, as it is elsewhere. Finally, in chapter 20, we will see the doom of Satan himself. This leaves the last two chapters of Revelation to see that glorious vision of the triumph of the redeemed and their eternal enjoyment of the presence of God.

We have previously made identifications as best we know how in the context of scripture of these various agents of Satan. The dragon is identified for us as Satan. The beast that comes out of the sea, we identified as being those persecuting governmental powers throughout the Christian life. We saw the beast that comes out of the land as representing false religion, counterfeit Christianity. We saw those who bear the mark of the beast as simply meaning all of those whose allegiance is to Satan rather than to Christ, and we saw Babylon as representing the seductive allure of the world, the lusts of the world.

I sometimes think it is difficult for us to get hold of these very bizarre and unusual symbols so that we can handle them. I think that what God is doing in the book of Revelation is something like what the political cartoonist attempts to do in his work. I believe there is an analogy here that could help us appreciate what we are dealing with. From time to time, you see political cartoons on the editorial pages of the newspaper with various things represented. For example, you might see a

partial view of the globe and a great bear looming up over the edge of the earth with one great paw placed on another nation. Another paw may be reaching over to still another nation and out of a blackish looking pool, his paw is scooping up liquid and he is drinking it. On the bear there is a symbol of a hammer and sickle. As you look at that, you get the picture.

This is all done in very rich symbolism. The bear represents Russia coming down from the north. Russia is trampling the first nation underneath its foot and is reaching over into the other nation to get some of that precious oil. The hammer and sickle represent Communism.

In another political cartoon, you may see a donkey and an elephant tugging on a rope. The donkey is a symbol of the Democratic party, the elephant represents the Republican party and the tugging on the rope symbolizes the struggle for dominance by the two parties. Now, we see these kinds of things and we very quickly catch the picture and get the point of these political cartoons. They are not necessarily intended to be funny, either. They usually have a very serious message.

I believe that what we have in the book of Revelation is something like this. But, instead of it being done visually, it is done verbally. Pictures are painted with words and the pictures are representation of things. For example, we have identified the strange looking beast that comes up out of the sea as representing governments that persecute God's people. Now, that beast is simply a representation of that, just as the elephant in a political cartoon may be a representation of a political institution. If you see the animal being destroyed, you are to understand that portrays the destruction of the political power it represents.

Now, as we come to Revelation 19, we are going to be seeing at the end of it the destruction of the beast out of the sea and the false prophet, the beast of the earth. And, as we look at these, we have to understand that when we see warfare taking place, we should not necessarily be thinking in terms of an actual military battle taking place here on earth with guns and this kind of thing. But, what you are seeing is the struggle that those symbols are suggesting; the struggle between God and Satan, between God's people and those people who are antago-

nistic to Him. When we see the beast of the sea destroyed, we learn that oppressive political and governmental powers are going to come to an end. God's people will be relieved finally of that kind of oppression. When we see the false prophet being destroyed, being cast alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone, we are seeing what that represents, false religion, finally meet its doom.

Look at Revelation 19:1-2: "After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and he has avenged on the blood of His servants shed by her.' " I believe that this reflects that which is found in Revelations 18:20 which says, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets. ..."

Here, in Revelation 19:1-2, we see precisely that occurring. Heaven is rejoicing over the fall of Babylon. Those seductive influences in the world that would draw peoples' minds away from allegiance to God and would entice them with the lust of the flesh has finally come to an end. There will come a time when we will be freed from the temptations that trouble us in this lifetime. but, verses 3-4 says, "Again they said, 'Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne saying, 'Amen! Alleluia!' "

Incidentally, the word , "Hallelujah," occurs four times in Revelation 19 and it is the only place in the New Testament where it occurs. The word, "Hallelujah," means "praise God" or "praise the Lord." It strikes me as strange that that expression is used so infrequently among many people while it is used in the New Testament only at the throne of God in heaven. But, there in the final moment of judgment, when God's righteousness is vindicated, we hear the heavenly hosts singing, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord."

Look at verses 5-9: "Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many water, and as

the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" ' And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God.' "

We have come not to that exciting day when the people of God shall gather together rejoicing at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Verse 7 begins with the statement: "Let us be glad and rejoice. ..." There is only one other place in the New Testament where that expression is found and I think it is significant. It is in Matthew 5:12 where Jesus said, as he concluded the beatitudes: "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven." That is the ultimate reason for the rejoicing of God's people—there is a reward in heaven. But, that is not all. The reason that is the cause of such rejoicing in the next statement of Jesus: "... for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

God's people will always be persecuted in one way or another. All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. so, it is the source of great joy to know that when we enter heaven, we have the reward, among other things of no longer having to experience persecution. We should rejoice and be exceeding glad because great is our reward in heaven, for then we shall sit down at the marriage supper of the lamb.

I believe there is tremendous symbolism here in this passage where the marriage supper of the Lamb is come and his wife has made herself ready. The Jewish marriage custom was different from ours today. There was, first of all, the betrothal which was a more decisive pact than our engagement which we might break off. The betrothal was the legal ceremony of marriage. The betrothed were considered legally husband and wife and yet they were not allowed at that point to live together as husband and wife. That was the circumstance that Joseph and Mary were in when Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but they were not living together as husband and wife, although legally and technically,

that could be referred to as his wife. This is the relationship between Christ and the church.

In II Corinthians 11:2, Paul said to Christians in the church, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Here is the picture of the betrothal. The church is espoused to Christ, but the church is to remain as a virgin until that time when, finally, the church is presented to Christ.

The point is that now, in this lifetime, we as we enter into Christ, are betrothed to him, so that in some sense, it can be said that we are the bride of Christ. That kind of thought is suggested in Ephesians 5 where there is that beautiful picture of the husband-wife relationship and where, finally, in verse 32, Paul says: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." This is the husband-wife relationship. It is as though the church is the wife of Christ, but, in view of Revelation 19, we are only in a technical and legal sense the wife of Christ.

As the Jews carried out these things, the consummation, the actual time when they lived together as husband and wife, began at the marriage feast and during that period between the betrothal and the marriage feast there was a period of preparation. We are not yet fully joined to Christ. Yes, we are His. We are united with Christ in baptism, but He is not here in the same sense that one day He will be when we stand in His presence in the life that is to come. There will be a great reunion there with Him.

That is suggested to us in this picture in Revelation 19. Now is the time for us to prepare for the great marriage feast when we will begin our life in eternity with our husband, with Jesus Christ. Verse \* says, "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

Remember, Ephesians 5:25-27: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word that He might present her to himself a

glorious church, not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

That is what God wants out of His people. He wants a holy people, a people without spot or blemish, a people who have been preparing themselves, arraying themselves in fine linen that is bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. We are to adorn our lives with good deed, We are to put on the wedding garments, the garment of a pure life.

I believe we have the suggestion of one's failure to do that in a picture of a marriage feast in Matthew 22:11-13 where Jesus said: "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "

It is obvious that Jesus is using this as a picture of the final judgment when men come unprepared. They come without having been adorned with the pure garments that are appropriate at the marriage feast. Consequently, because they have not been preparing in this life, they shall be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But, God's people who come to Him prepared, pure and ready, shall enjoy that marvelous occasion of the marriage of the Lamb.

Notice Revelation 19:10: "And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' " Here, John falls down to worship before what is, apparently, an angel. At least it was not God, and the being says to John. "Do not do that." He said, "Worship God. I am your fellow servant."

God is the only one who is to be worshiped. That is expressed throughout the scriptures. Jesus said to Satan, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). God is the one to be worshipped.

That suggests to us, indirectly, something about Jesus, because Jesus, throughout His earthly ministry, continually accepted the worship of many people. And, when we read Hebrews 1:6, we have the Father saying of Jesus, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Jesus is worthy of worship. This means that since the only one who is to be worshiped is God, that Jesus is God. The rich, young ruler saw Jesus as only a good teacher, but Jesus was not merely good, Jesus was God.

Jesus was God in the flesh, as John tells us more vividly in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Now, there is the strange express at the close of Revelation 19:10, "... For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What does that mean? I think it means one of two things, which may be the same thing. The message concerning Jesus is what prophecy is all about. Or, another way to put it is that the true spirit of prophecy is always concerned about Jesus. I think there are two verses of scripture that say essentially what is meant by that phrase.

One of these is in Luke 24:44, where Jesus is recorded by Luke as having said, "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' "

Jesus said the entire Old Testament is a message concerning me. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. In John 5:46, Jesus said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote of Me." Jesus is the essential content of prophecy. That is what prophecy, which has been given of God and which has been delivered in the form of scripture, is all about. The theme of the Bible is Jesus. He is the heart of the whole matter.

We have been presented with the picture of the marriage feast and we have seen the wife or the bride and now we are prepared to see the groom or the husband come in, but instead, we see a warrior. Verses 11-16 present a new scene: "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who



sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

We read the same thing in II Thessalonians 1:7-10 when it says, "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."

And, so, we see Jesus who is leading from heaven armies which apparently are the angels. But, I want you to notice that He does not really need the angels in this warfare. In the Greek text of 19:15, the pronoun "He" is emphasized. I want to read it with that emphasis. Notice what happens after the armies are mentioned. It says, "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Jesus is the one who does this. The armies are the retinue that follows Him, but He alone is sufficient and adequate for this task. We are told that He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood. That is before the battle. I take it, then, that the garment sprinkled with blood represents the garment that is the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins because in that act, in that great sacrificial act in which the blood flowed on Calvary, the victory was won. There Satan was defeated.

There is where the battle was actually won and so He comes now arrayed in a garment that is sprinkled with blood and His weapon is a sharp sword which proceeded out of His mouth.

This reminds us of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, because it is the word of God that is both the power to save and the power to destroy. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of Lords. And notice He is that before He ever goes to battle against those forces. Jesus now is King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus reigns now and it is for us to submit to His reign so that we might enter His kingdom now and be prepared for entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

Now, read verses 17-18: "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heave, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh o fall people, free and slave, both small and great.' " Here, he cries out to the birds of the heavens to gather and to consume the enemy.

It reminds us of a passage in Ezekiel 39:4 where we have described fo rus the battle with God, and God says, "you shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured."

I think that is significant because in the very next chapter of Revelation, in Revelation 20:8, we have the battle described again; the final climactic battle in which the forces of evil are finally and ultimately destroyed; the battle that is described earlier as Har-Magedon. It is a battle which is described several times as we go through Revelation because, as we move through revelation, we see again and again the scene judgment.

We simply see the application of judgment to different groups as we go through Revelation. We see the judgment of those who wear the mark of the beast. Later, we see the judgment of Babylon. Later, we see the effect of God's judgment in other applications. We are seeing the same period of time and the same struggle between God and Satan and God's people and

those who are followers of Satan. We see judgment depicted in Ezekiel in terms of the birds of the heavens coming. We see in Revelation 19 the same kind of terminology.

Now, we see the climax of Revelation 19:19: "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. All the birds were filled with their flesh."

The devastation and the destruction is total. The enemies of God's people are destroyed. There is only one enemy yet to be described for us as having been conquered and that is Satan himself. That victory has already been assured with Jesus having died on the cross, having been raised from the dead. He broke the power of Satan, and ascended to the throne of God to reign with him until every enemy is put under his feet. The last enemy is death, at which time, according to I Corinthians 15:24-26, Jesus shall deliver the kingdom up to the Father.

Are you in that kingdom that Jesus will deliver up to the Father, that you might be able to sit down finally with all the saints at the marriage supper of the Lamb to enjoy the fellowship of God, freed from the temptation and struggles and persecution and the deceptions and seductions of this life and to enjoy fully and freely God's presence and His blessings forever and ever?

That is the essential message of Revelation for us. If you are not a Christian, why not be born again into the kingdom of God, born of the water and the Spirit? Why not believe in Jesus and repent of your sins and confess your faith in Him and be baptized into Him?

## **THE MEANING OF THE THOUSAND YEARS**

### **REVELATION 20**

Chapter 20 of Revelation is the only place in the Bible where a thousand year reign is mentioned, but there it is mentioned six times in seven verses. This has served as a basis for all kinds of speculation through the years. Many have made Revelation 20 the central feature of a particular scheme for trying to interpret future events. And, I suppose, it is understandable that people might presume that when we come toward the end of the book of Revelation, a reference to a thousand year period would refer to something yet to come.

But, I believe that we have begun to see that Revelation is not put together in such a way as to give us a consecutive chronological picture of events from the time that Christ came the first time until he comes again. But, rather, we are seeing a series of visions that give us a view of the Christian age from various perspectives, calling attention to various aspects of our relationship to God and God's dealing with our world.

For example, we have been already in our journey through the book of Revelation, the scene of the end of the world, and the judgment of God, six times in the first 19 chapters. We saw it back in chapter 6 toward the end of that chapter, and we saw it again in chapter 11. We saw another view of the judgment of God in chapter 14, and we saw it again in chapter 16, chapter 18, and another one in chapter 19.

After each of these descriptions of the final judgment of God on mankind, we are taken back for another look at God dealing with mankind while we are living here on this earth. So, it should be no surprise when we suggest that, as we come to chapter 20 of Revelation, we are being shown another view of the Christian age from the first coming of Jesus until the time when He comes again.

There is no more dramatic example of this kind of transition in Revelation than is found at the end of the eleventh chapter. There we clearly see the judgment of God, and we see the people of God victoriously living in His presence. Then, when we come to chapter 12, we are taken back to the birth of Jesus Christ again, and then we are taken forward to the events that

followed the death of Jesus, the resurrection, then the church coming into existence and the persecution of the church. We see the same kind of transition from chapter 19 to 20.

In chapter 19, we see the final judgment of God again. We see Jesus going to war against the enemies of God and being victorious. Revelation 19:17-18 says, "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.'" At the end of chapter 19, all mankind is destroyed. If we were to look at this chronologically, then in Chapter 20, there would not be anyone around to be enjoying any reign for a thousand years. All of mankind are destroyed at the end of chapter 19.

You recall that we saw the three major enemies of God and Christ and His people presented in chapters 12 through 14 in sequence. First of all, we saw Satan himself, the dragon presented in chapter 12. Then, in chapter 13, we saw the beast of the sea, and then we saw the beast coming out of the land. Now, as we move on toward the end of Revelation, we see one-by-one in reverse order, the final judgment of God poured out on each of these. We see the judgment of the beast that came up out of the land, later referred to as the false prophet. Then, we see the beast that came up out of the sea and the judgment of God on it.

In chapter 20, we will see a description of the judgment of God on Satan himself. So, although we have seen a series of views of the final judgment of God we are seeing the same kind of judgment as it applies to different groups and from a different perspective. Now, we are going back and looking at Satan's activity in our world and how his final judgment comes about.

Revelation 20 begins by saying: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive

the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

In these first three verse, we see the binding of Satan. It is understandable that people might assume that this has to be something that is going to take place in the future, because it does not look like Satan has already been bound in view of all of the evil in our world. Yet, that is precisely what I would argue, that Satan had already been bound. He was bound almost two thousand years ago. He was bound at the time when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. The binding of Satan happened way back then.

It is not something we are going to look forward to in the future. You might be inclined to say, "I am crazy because surely, in view of all the misery in our world, Satan is not bound. But, let us allow the Bible to interpret itself. Let tell us about what "binding" means. then we shall be able to understand the rest of the twentieth chapter of Revelation. We will see the popular theories that are suggesting that Jesus some day is going to come back to this earth and set up His kingdom here and reign for a thousand years are not true.

John speaks in Revelation 20 of the binding of Satan in the very introductory portion of the chapter. Revelation, as we have seen, is a set of visions of the Christian age each looking at it from a different perspective. Revelation is not written as one series of events described in chronological order. That means, then, that what is described at the end of the book is not necessarily discussing all those things that happen at the end of the world. The fact is, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:2 refers to the very thing that Jesus was speaking of in Mark 3:27. The binding of Satan was associated with the first coming of Christ, not with the second coming. Jesus said: "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house."

This context is one in which Jesus had been casting out demons and He was being accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Jesus replied to that by saying that not be because: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen against himself, and is

divided, he cannot stand, but has an end" (Mark 3:23-26). And then, Jesus makes this statement. "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house." Who is the strong man? The strong man is Satan.

No one can enter his house and spoil his goods except he first find the strong man. The meaning of Mark 3:27 is well expressed by J.W. McGarvey in his commentary when he said, "Satan is the strong man, his house is the body of the demoniac, and his goods the evil spirit within the man. Jesus had entered his house and robbed him of his goods to demonstrate the fact that he was making successful warfare against the dominion of Satan."

In Luke 10:17-19, we find another suggestion of Jesus winning the warfare against Satan. Jesus sent seventy out on an evangelistic mission preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Luke says, "Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.'"

Jesus was entering the house of the strong man and binding him so that his power now was limited and that His messengers could carry out their evangelistic activity. Now, the victory over Satan was being achieved as the message of the gospel of the kingdom advanced. But, the consummation of the victory is pinpointed by John as occurring at the cross.

We have looked at Mark, we have looked at Luke and now, turn to John 12:31-33. Jesus said, " 'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die." You see, when Jesus died on the cross, the prince of this world was cast out.

According to Revelation 12, Satan, in connection with the events of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus into heaven, was cast out of heaven. There the power of Satan

was broken at last. The binding of Satan at the cross as an accomplished fact is suggested in other passages of scripture. In Hebrews 2:14-15, the writer said: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." So, it was through death that Jesus brought to nothing the power of the one that is the devil. That is when it was accomplished.

Now, look at Colossians 2:15. Paul said of Jesus, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." And, if we read the previous verse, we see he is speaking about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was when He died on the cross that He despoiled the principalities and powers and made a show of them openly.

Look at I John 4:4 where John said, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." We are overcomers because there is One who is greater than the one who has been giving us so much trouble. Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to overcome Satan. Satan is bound. He is limited. There is only so much that Satan can do. Mark 3:27 implies that, in some very real sense. Satan was being bound, or else the Lord could not have cast out the demons.

It must be understood that the binding of Satan does not mean his destruction. That is where so many people fail to get the idea of Revelation 20. Binding Satan does not mean his destruction. In fact, if you will read Revelation 20, you see that the purpose of binding Satan was to *limit* Satan. It means a limitation of *his power* rather than a total curtailment of the power of Satan. Since the world is in bad shape today, it be infinitely worse shape that it is if Satan were only turned loose on the world.

That, in itself, indicates that Satan must be limited and restrained by some divinely imposed boundaries. We know that Satan can only go so far in his attacks on Christians, because of a number of references that we find in the New Testament. No



temptation can overtake you but such as you can bear, because God provides a way of escape with every temptation as is seen in I Corinthians 10:13. That means that Satan cannot overpower you as long as you are willing to stand for God. We know that he can only act as God will permit. In Luke 22:31, Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked permission to sift him like wheat. Satan is on a leash. He can only go so far. He is limited. He is bound in that sense. He is bound like a dog on a chain. It is true that Peter describes Satan as one goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

I am sure you have seen dogs on leashes that looked like roaring lions about to devour you. You were grateful for the fact that they were on a leash because they would snap their teeth and snarl at you, but they could not get to you. That is the way Satan is. He can only go so far. Now, if you want to walk over there within the boundaries of the chain, he can tear you to pieces, but God is not going to permit him to get to where you are if you do not want him to. Satan is bound in our world now, and that began when Jesus died and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.

We know that Satan and his angels are presently reserved in chains of darkness to be reserved for judgment. they are bound. Jude 6 presents the same thought: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day."

The fact that demon possession does not exist today, contrary to what many would claim, but which none can prove, ought to be evidence that the binding of Satan is an accomplished fact. Demon possession was peculiar to the age in which Jesus lived. It would seem that God permitted Satan, at that time, to give some unusual proofs of his existence, his power, and his malice by frequently attacking men's bodies.

This proves what a dangerous enemy he is and how great a need there was for the aid of One who had power over Satan. The casting out of demons then was a proof to what people could see and heart, and evidence of the victory of Christ over Satan. No kind of wonder could be more suited for demonstrating the nature of Christ's mission nor for drawing men to Him.

Certainly, it was evidence of the binding of Satan. If you need any further evidence that this idea of "binding" does not mean the total elimination of the power and ability of Satan to do anything, I simply invite you to read Romans 7:2. Here Paul said, "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband." *Bound* is exactly the same word that is used in Revelation 20:1-3.

Paul said a woman is "bound" to her husband. Does that mean she is totally incapacitated and can never do anything from then on? Of course not. Well, what does it mean? It means that there are some boundaries; there are some limitations now on what the woman can do with respect to her husband. She is bound to him. She is not free to run around with every other man that comes along. So it is with Satan. Satan is limited. He can only do so much; he can only go so far. Satan was to be bound for a thousand years. If Satan was bound when Jesus came the first time, has that time long since expired? No, that time has not expired if we understand the thousand year period in the same way that we have understood other numbers that have been used in Revelation. This is, we understand them as numbers that are symbols.

The number seven is the symbol of completeness and even ten is sometimes the number of completeness. The number 1,260, the number 42 months, the time, times and half a time of Revelation and the 144,000, we have already seen in previous lessons, are not literally those number of days or months or years or peoples, but, rather, they are numbers suggestive of something else. These numbers are symbols, which we have explained in previous lessons, and so it is with 1,000, a perfect symbol of completeness or fullness. Ten cubed, ten times ten times ten is 1,000, a symbol of fullness or completeness. In other words, throughout the entire period of the first coming of Christ to nearly the second coming of Christ, Satan is bound, limited, and Christians are able to reign. I am suggesting that the thousand year period is the period from the first coming of Jesus Christ until just about the time when Jesus comes again. That is a symbolic figure. The Bible uses the expression "a thousand" in other contexts in the same way, not meaning literally 999 plus 1, but a figure of largeness or completeness. For example, in II Peter 3:8, Peter said, "But, beloved, do not

forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." He simply is using a thousand years as a symbol for a gigantic period of time, an enormous period of time in contrast to a single day.

In the Old Testament, the number is used in the same way. For example, Psalm 90:4 says: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night." In Psalm 50:10, God says, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills." God was not meaning by that if there are 1,263 hills 1,000 of the hills that have cattle on them are His and the other 263 are not. It is simply a figure of speech meaning they are all Mine. It is a symbol of fullness, of completeness. We use the expression in our own language when we say, "I would not believe that in a thousand years." We do not treat other things in chapter 20 in such a literal way. No one really believes that literal chain was taken by an angel to bind Satan in a literal pit somewhere. This approach is contrary to the whole spirit of the book of Revelation.

We have seen the binding of Satan taking place. Read verses 4-6: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years was finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Where does this reign take place? There is not a word in chapter 20 of Revelation about this reign taking place on the earth, which is what so many believe today. The thousand year reign occurs in heaven where the throne is. Forty-eight times in Revelation the throne is mentioned and, with the exceptions of the throne of Satan and the throne of the beast, which is his servant, the thrones are always in heaven. So, that is where the disembodied souls of the martyrs are. It is important to notice that the writer says, "... I saw the souls of them." I did not see

the bodies of them. I saw the souls of them that were at the throne of God. Back in Revelation 6, we saw some of those people who had been put to death because their allegiance was to Jesus Christ. The seal of the book is opened and we see the souls of them who have been put to death because of their loyalty to Christ at the altar of heaven. That is where the souls are. Their bodies were not there yet, but their souls had gone to be in the very presence of God.

Now, the souls reign until the second coming. Who are these? They are the martyrs and such as worship not the beast, neither his image, and receive not the mark on their forehead and on their hand. We have learned in previous lessons that when it speaks of those who have the mark of the beast, it simply means all of those who have their allegiance to Satan, as opposed to those who have been sealed on their forehead with the name of God, which means all of God's people, all who are faithful to God.

This means that when you die, you are not going to be lying there in the grave and sleep until such a time as Jesus comes again, but your soul is going to be in the presence of God. That is what we are seeing in Revelation 20. The souls of those who did not wear the mark of the beast, which means all of God's faithful people are going to enter into His presence. That is why Paul said he had the desire to "... depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). That is what happens when a faithful person in the service of God dies. He goes to be with the Lord.

He does not go and stay in the cemetery. His body does, until Jesus comes again, and then his body will be transformed and he will receive a new body. In the meantime, the souls of the righteous reign with Jesus Christ throughout this entire period of human history until Jesus comes again. Then, the saints reign, not a thousand years, but according to Revelation 22:5, forever and ever. Then, they will have received bodies that will have been transformed according to I Corinthians 15:35-54, and the final judgment will have been pronounced and then heaven will be their eternal home.

What is the first resurrection? It is when Jesus comes again. At that time all those in the grave will hear His voice and rise from the grave. Those living along with those that have arisen

will meet the Lord in the air. The saved will thereafter always be with the Lord. At this second coming all of those that have not worshipped the beast will be glorified. The unbelievers will enter the second death, as they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.

What happens after the thousand years? Revelation 20:7-10 says, "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This particular scene corresponds to scenes that we have already seen in Revelation 11 and 13. Apparently, right at the end of time, there is going to be a brief period, a little time, when Satan is going to be able to dominate the minds of men in greater measure and will have made such inroads among humanity that it will seem as though the church has been wiped off the face of the earth. There will be a few righteous souls left and they will be spared at the end, but, apparently, there is going to be a very terrible period right at the end of time when Satan will be loosed.

Up to this time, the point of his being bound is that he cannot deceive the nations. That is to say, the gospel can be carried throughout the world and men throughout the world are capable and willing to receive the message of Jesus Christ.

But, at the very end, Satan will again be able to deceive the nations. Men will have become so corrupted and so debased that the power of the gospel of Christ will not even be able to penetrate their hearts and the question can properly be asked, "When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth" (Luke 18:8)? The answer is: they may be hard to find, but there will be a few when Jesus comes again. We have a reference here to Satan gathering his forces together just as we saw in chapter 19.

We saw Satan gathering his armies together, the beast, and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the white horse and against His army. But, do you know what happens? We are ready for a great battle scene and all of a sudden the beast is taken and cast into the lake of fire. There is not a battle. In other words, Satan is totally impotent in his battle against Jesus Christ and against God. He can muster all of his forces, but he cannot even begin to create a battle, because God is the victor before the battle even begins.

Again, in Revelation 20, we see Satan gathering together men from the four corners of the earth. Gog and Magog, in Jewish literature at that time, were terms that referred to all of the forces of evil combined. The point is, Satan brings all of his powers to bear to destroy the efforts of Jesus Christ and it looks like a great war is going to take place. We are not talking about literal warfare with bullets, machine guns, tanks, and hydrogen bombs. We are talking about the kind of warfare the Bible speaks about from beginning to end; the battle for the minds of men. It is a spiritual battle, and Satan, at the end, is going to seem to be winning. Then, the end comes, and Satan is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. God's people are victorious and reign with him forever and ever.

Finally, we have the great judgment scene, verses 11-15: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his words. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

There is the final judgment, the scene of the judgment of God when all the nations of the earth shall be gathered together before the throne of God and they shall be judged. They shall be judged of the things written in the books according to their

works. It has to refer to the books of the Bible. Some people say it refers to the books of the works or your life. But, the statement is that they will be judged out of the books accord to their works. If that book represented the works of your life, it would have the nonsense of saying the dead are to be judged out of the books that give their works according to their works. What is going to happen is that your life, the deeds of your life, are going to be put up beside the standard of God's truth as revealed in scripture.

The books of the Bible comprise the final examination book for your life. Where do you stand with reference to it? Are you prepared for the final judgment when all shall stand before the throne of God and when you will be judged out of the books that God has given us in scripture? If not, you need to make preparations that you might have your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life that you might be able to enjoy the presence of God forever.

If you are not a Christian, we urge you to surrender your life to Jesus that you might enjoy the victory over Satan, that you might enjoy the triumph of the people of God, that you might avoid being among that number who will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

## **THE NEW JERUSALEM**

### **REVELATION 21**

Read Revelation chapter 21. Here we have that marvelous description of the New Jerusalem. Back in Revelation 20:11, John said, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them."

We reach the point now where the heavens and the earth are no longer there as we know them. This fits in perfectly with what Peter said in II Peter 3:10-13: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.."

You recall that Jesus had previously said in Mark 13:31 that heaven and earth shall pass away. There will come a time when Jesus comes again and the heavens and the earth shall be destroyed. So, we have the scene in Revelation 21: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea." What is meant by "and there was not more sea?" Perhaps it merely means the sea as being part of the earth also is passed away. But, as we see the use of the word "sea" in prophetic literature, in Revelation particularly, it seems as though the sea is symbolic of the masses of humanity who are under the power of Satan. Even in the Old Testament, that thought seems to be expressed in one of the prophecies of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 57:20-21, Isaiah said, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked' " There is no peace to the wicked. They are restless as the waves of the sea. The sea forms a fine symbol for the restless masses of humanity who have never found their peace in god. You will



recall in Revelation 13:1 that the beast that represented the oppressive governments of the earth came up out of the sea. This suggests the thought that it is that portion of humanity that is alienated from God and has not found rest in Him from which emerge those great oppressive powers. Notice, also, Revelation 17:15; "Then he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.' "

So, perhaps what we are seeing in Revelation 21 is not merely the suggestion that now the heavens and the earth, as we know them, are passed away. They are burned up, are destroyed and are no more. Also that the wicked, the masses of humanity who have turned their backs on God and who have simply allowed themselves to be subject to the power of Satan, are no more. So, all who remain to enter the presence of Almighty God are those who have been faithful and loyal to God and to the Lamb.

Verse 2 says, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The New Jerusalem, the city of God. You recall that even back in the Old Testament times, according to Hebrew 11:10, Abraham was waiting for the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. But, then, as we come to Hebrews 12:22-23, the writer says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" And Paul said in Philippians 3:20: "For our citizenship is in heaven." Therefore, our names are enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life. In Hebrews 13:14, the writer said: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."

Our goal and our destination in life is the New Jerusalem that has its origin in God. It comes down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. We saw that figure in Revelation 19:7-9, as a symbol of the church. The church, as the bride of Christ, was adorned with pure garments and prepared for the great marriage of the Lamb. Now, we see the bride again, in Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from 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 will be with them and be their God.' " The tabernacle of God is now with men. Again, going back to Hebrews 8:1-2, the writer said: "now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man."

That tabernacle that was erected in the wilderness of Sinai under the leadership of Moses and under the direction of God was only a temporary tabernacle to be replaced by the temple. It was simply a foreshadowing of that great tabernacle which finally God makes His dwelling with His people for eternity.

And so, in the next chapter, Hebrews 9:11-12 says, "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Jesus Christ entered into the true tabernacle, for the earthly tabernacle was merely a type and a foreshadowing of that eternal one yet to come in which God's people will be able to dwell eternally in the presence of God.

Returning to our text, Revelation 21:4 says: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." The picture we get of the final abode of God's people is a place where there are no tears, no death, no mourning, no crying, no pain, and, according to verse 6, no more thirst. It is a place where the needs and the desires and the yearnings and longings of men are finally fully satisfied. They find fulfillment in God's presence where He supplies all of our needs and relieves us of the difficulties and pressures of this life.

And so, verse 5 says, "The He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." and He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." God has made a new home for a new people. In II Corinthians 5:17, Paul said: "Therefore, If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." God is trying to

create in this world, new people who are a prepared people. They are prepared for the new home that God has prepared where all things finally have become new.

Verse 6 of our text in Revelation 21 says: "And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.'" He is saying, *I am the Originator and I am the One* who brings the consummation of all things. So, the fulfillment of human purpose, human destiny, is to be found in the One who originated us, who created us, and the One who now is trying to call us into His eternal presence. Verse 6 continues: "I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." God shall provide for every need.

Verse 7 says: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." Notice, God said he shall inherit these things. That expression, "inherit," is used throughout the New Testament of various things, but all suggest the same kind of thing. We are told in Matthew 19:29 that we will inherit eternal life or everlasting life; in Hebrews 1:14, we will inherit salvation; in I Peter 3:9, we will inherit a blessing; in Matthew 25:34, those who were judged to be righteous in the great judgment day of God were told that they would inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. Who shall inherit? Who in this life are those who inherit? It is the sons who inherit.

God tells us in Revelation 21:7, that he who overcomes shall inherit these things and "I will be his God and he shall be My son." What a beautiful thought! It is expressed more clearly for us in Galatians chapters 3 and 4, where we learn how we can become sons who have the right to inherit all these great blessings that God has prepared for His people.

In Galatians 3:26-27, Paul said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In verse 29, Paul writes: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The promise that God made to Abraham so many centuries before, the promise that in his seed would all the nations of the earth be blessed is for our benefit. We are made sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus because we have put Christ on in baptism. As we read on in Galatians

4:6-7, Paul said, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Yes, we have the right of inheritance because of sonship, sonship in relation to Almighty God. No wonder the apostle John could say in I John 3:1: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." What manner of love God had for us that we can become sons of God, able to inherit eternal life and able to inherit the blessings of the New Jerusalem!

Continue to read Revelation 21:8: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murders, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." There is no annihilation of the wicked. The wicked do not simply cease to exist. The revelation given to John was that they shall be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. That is punishment. Who shall be punished. The fearful. Remember, Jesus said so often and God has expressed to His people throughout the Bible so often, "Fear not, for I am with you." If we really trust God and believe that He is with us, then we need never fear.

There is another sense of fear, however. Remember the man who was given one talent in Matthew 25:25? He said, "And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." And then, notice what the judges said of him in verse 30: "And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." God does not want unprofitable servants, those who are fearful, who are ashamed or afraid to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He is the savior of the world and the one who can save my soul."

Are we ashamed? Are we afraid? Heaven is not for the fearful. It is for the courageous, those who trust in God, who understand His promise: "... I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Hell is the place prepared for the fearful and for the unbelieving.

You recall that Jesus said, "... for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." James said in James 2:18, "... Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." My obedience is the expression of the fact that I believe and trust my God, but hell is the place for the unbelieving. It is the place where the abominable will be. Remember the picture shown in Revelation 17:4-5: "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

God simply will not tolerate men who give themselves over to the abominations, to the enticements, to the allure and the attractions of the world and the things it offers, for the things of the world will pass away. Hell is the place for the fearful, the unbelieving and the abominable, for murderers, for fornicators, for sorcerers, the modern equivalent of which are those who use drugs and potions and enchantments to bring others under their power.

Astrologers, drug pushers, psychics, and faith healers are all modern versions of the ancient sorcerers who would try to lead men under their power by their enchantments, by their fakeries, by their sorceries and deception. Hell is the place for idolaters, including the covetous for who money has become God, according to Ephesians 5:5. It is a place for liars. What an awesome list of things that will send people to hell! None of these will be found in heaven.

Back to Revelation 21:9-10: "The one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talking with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God."

An interesting thing happens here as had happened before in Revelation. Recall on one occasion that John was told about the lion of the tribe of Judah and when he turned to see it he saw a Lamb. And now, he is being told about the bride, the

wife of the Lamb, and when he is taken to see her, he does not see the bride, he sees a city. He sees, according to Revelation 21:11-12, the holy city Jerusalem "... having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."

Here is a city that has a great and high wall, suggesting protection. God's people need to have no fears for they are protected, and yet, in a moment, we shall see that that wall is protected, and yet, in a moment, we shall see that that wall is really not necessary. In fact, we have already see it, for the sea is no more. Heaven and earth have passed away and now all of the redeemed are in the presence of God and in his presence alone. Nevertheless, we see a wall which is great and high, and then, in verses 13 and 14, "Three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

Here on the gates we have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and on the foundations the names of the apostles, suggesting God's people under the old covenant and God's people under the new covenant. In other words, as we have seen previously, the holy city, New Jerusalem, represents the redeemed of all the ages. It is God's people and under the new covenant, those who are His church are found finally in the presence of God.

Revelation 21:15-16 continues: "And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. the city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. It's length, breadth, and height are equal."

What we see here is a figure that staggers the imagination. In fact, it is totally incomprehensible. A furlong is an eighth of a mile. Twelve thousand furlongs would be something like 1,400 or 1,500 miles long. This city is a city that would stretch all the way from New York to Houston, Texas. It is a city that would, in length and breadth, cover more than half of the United States.

This is a city of immense proportions, but it is not a city that simply extends geographically in such directions. It extends the same length into the heavens, into the sky, because the length and breadth and height of that city are all the same. You have a massive thing described—something we cannot even visualize and conceive in our minds.

Here is the place where God resides, in the holy city that defies description. John has to produce for us the most exaggerated kind of figure in order to convey to us the immensity, the grandeur, the scope of this glorious city. It is a city that has walls of Jasper which apparently is something like our diamond.

Imagine a city with walls composed of diamonds. John, obviously, is not trying to give us a literal description of the city, but is trying to use figures and symbols to suggest to us something that is beyond physical description because he is describing spiritual realities. But, if a physical description of this is so great and marvelous and immense, think of what must be the spiritual reality behind it and the reality of God's presence and preparations that God has made for His people.

Verse 17 says: "Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. Now, we were told that the walls were great and high and, in fact, 144 cubits is about 218 feet in height. That is something like a 20 story building. That is a big tall wall. That is a wall great and high by any human standard and so, after the wall is presented to us, we think there is security suggested. But, on the other hand, what is a 218 foot wall going to do for a city that is 1,500 miles tall? We have here a description of something that is, in essence, indescribable, but John is trying to convey a message to us.

Notice verse 18: "The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass." Again, we have something here that staggers the imagination. There is nothing like this on the earth. Here you have gold that is translucent. It is gold that you can see through. Gold like crystal; what a phenomenal picture that is! What would somebody pay if they could get hold of such a thing as that, something that simply is far beyond all of the most precious jewel that could be conceived? And so, the city was pure gold like clear glass.

Read verse 19 and 20: "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones; the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst."

There is no point going into detail and trying to examine each of these precious jewels because, obviously, there has simply been gathered together the most precious jewels available to the ancient world and John is describing a city composed of the most precious things men knew. This suggests to us that God has prepared for us something that is far beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations.

Paul summarizes the whole thing in I Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.' " It is something you have never seen. It is something you have never heard. It is something that is beyond your capacity to see and hear. God has prepared something great and glorious for those who love Him.

Now, we come to verses 21 and 22: "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

Speaking of pearls, somebody suggested that the pearl is the only precious jewel in existence that is created through suffering and, perhaps, the gates being of a single pearl is suggestive that it is the suffering, persecuted people of God, who pass through those gates into the presence of God and the Lamb.

Notice verse 22: "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Here we see the fulfillment of what was said back in Revelation 3:12: " He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."



Yes, those who overcome will be the ones who partake and participate in the New Jerusalem which comes down from God.

Look in verse 23: "And the city had no of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light." Here we see that the glory of God fills the New Jerusalem. It is interesting to trace the glory of God through the Bible.

Back in Exodus 40:34, the glory of God filled the tabernacle. In I Kings 8:11, the glory of God filled the temple built by Solomon. John 1:14 says of Jesus that "... and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And now, at the consummation of the ages, the glory of God fills the new city, the holy city, Jerusalem, which is prepared for the people of God, Now, we come to verses 24 and 25: "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)."

The nations shall walk amidst the light thereof and the kings of the earth being their glory into it because those who are God's people, as we have seen elsewhere in Revelation, come from every nation and tribe and tongue and people and their citizenship is in heaven. So, finally, those from all the nations populate heaven itself. Verses 26 and 27 continues, "And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." Only dishonor and shame will be outside the city. Only those people who have brought glory and honor to God shall enter into that eternal city.

The Bible presents a marvelous symmetry. That is, the first three chapters of Genesis and the last three chapters of Revelation serve as a glorious beginning and an exciting climax to the revelation of God's will for mankind. Genesis tells us God created the heavens and the earth and Revelation tells us He will create a new heaven and a new earth. Genesis tells us that God created the sun and the moon and the stars, and in Revelation 21:23: "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it,

and the Lamb is its light." Genesis tells us of the cunning and power of Satan and Revelation tells us that Satan was cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Genesis tells us of man fleeing from the presence of God, but God searched us out and Revelation 21:3-4 tells us: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

A great preacher in the church some years ago was on his deathbed in great agony and one who stood at the bedside gently asked him, "How are you doing?" And he said, "I am almost well." And for God's people, that is the way it is. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil because we know, "You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

We are almost well when we reach the point of death because there remains for us the entrance into the New Jerusalem, into the new heavens, and the new earth. but it is for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is for those who are of sons of God. If you have faith in Jesus Christ, you can become a son of God with a right of inheritance of all the blessings of God, for as many of you as are baptized into Christ can put on Christ. Do you want Him in your life? And do you want to be able to eagerly anticipate that great day when Jesus comes again to receive His own? Will you be in that number?

## **THE CLIMAX OF THE BIBLE**

### **REVELATION 22**

When God created man, He placed him in the most beautiful part of His creation. He put him in a beautiful garden called Eden, and there He provided for all of his needs. But, in that garden, Satan entered, and Satan was able to convince man to disobey God and the consequence was that God had to drive man out of that garden. That is explained in Genesis 3:22-24: Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

God drove man from the garden of Eden because the tree of life was there and it would have been the greatest tragedy for man were he to live forever in that cursed state in which he found himself. God was merciful, however, for it was not His intention that man should suffer and die, but that man should live, and that man should live with Him forever. And so, in the process of time, God provided a way to bring man back and ultimately, it was through His own Son, Jesus Christ.

Because of the hardness of the heart of man, it was difficult to pierce and to cause man to realize the awfulness of his condition. Only in such an ultimate sacrifice as the giving of His precious Son to die was there the hope that that hardened heart might be so softened that it might be drawn to Jesus and to God. God made provision that one day man could be restored to the kind of paradise that He had once provided. In Revelation 2:7, Jesus said, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Now we have come to the climax of the Bible. We have come to eternity. We have come to the final place of man's home with God forever. We have come to Revelation 22. Read verses 1-5: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as

crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there; They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."

As we come to the climax and conclusion of the Book of Revelation, I think it would be appropriate for us to go back to the beginning of this great book that brings us to the close of God's revelation. Let us see, in one broad sweeping scope, what God has revealed to us in this book. In chapters 1 through 3 of revelation, we see the church as the light of the world, a light shining brightly in some places at some times and sometimes barely flickering, but, nevertheless, a light. But, light and darkness cannot coexist.

So the church will inevitably face persecution. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 3:12. But, let us see things in their proper perspective. First, we must see God. In Revelation 4, we do see God seated on the throne and we know that the world is not operated by blind chance and by blind forces. In fact, God, a benevolent God, is still in charge of our universe and He still controls the destiny of man.

We also need to see Jesus and see Him we do in chapter 5 of Revelation. The head of the church is the King on the throne who controls the destiny of history. Therefore, since we know who is in control of the world, as the Lamb demonstrated His love by being slain for us, we can readily face the persecution which comes with chapter 6.

Here, we find that those who die in the Lord go to be in His presence. The reassurance provides us with courage to view the awesome judgment finally to be inflicted on the world. Even then, the church triumphant is seen rejoicing before the throne of God. But, will the persecuted be avenged? Yes! The seals of persecution give rise to the trumpets of judgment.

In Revelation 8:1-5, God is seen constantly sending His judgment in response to the prayers of His people. Here we are introduced to the warning (trumpet) judgment of God designed to cause men to repent and persecutors to relent. But, for the most part, it does not work, according to Revelation 9:21. Consequently, we see in chapters 10 and 11 the gospel-proclaiming, cross-bearing church being afflicted but emerging victorious. But the book does not end here. Two questions cry out for an answer: Why is the church being so vigorously persecuted? And, what will be the ultimate fate of the impenitent? So far, we have seen the surface and the conflict on the earth. Now, we see what is behind it all.

Behind the struggle on earth between the church and the world is the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan. In chapter 12, we see the dragon, Satan, trying to destroy Christ. Failing in this, he directs his persecution against Christ's people, the church. Then, in chapters 13 and 14, we see Satan employing the beast out of the sea (representing anti-Christian religion) and the great harlot, Babylon (representing anti-Christian seduction of the world) trying to destroy the church. But, Satan fails, and in chapter 14, we see the Lamb standing victoriously on Mt. Zion initiating the harvest of God's final judgment. And what is the fate of those who, being warned by the trumpets of judgment, remain impenitent? These, incidentally, are those who have the mark of the beast according to Revelation 16:2.

In chapters 15 and 16, we see the bowls of God's wrath being poured out on them. But what about the great harlot, Babylon, and the two beasts? In chapters 17 and 18, we see Babylon described and destroyed. In chapter 19, we see the beasts cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. In chapter 20, the devil, death, and Hades are all cast into the lake of fire. And then, finally, in chapters 21 and 22, the great Revelation closes with a vision of the new heaven and earth where the saints are seen reigning with God and the Lamb forever and ever.

Things are not as they seem. God and His people are ultimately victorious and triumphant and Jesus reigns and God is on His throne. Therefore, we need to heed the advice and warning and caution and exhortation of Jesus in Revelation 2:10: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." That is an absolute promise of God. His promises do not fail. Our

task is to be faithful to Him. As an encouragement to us to be faithful, we have this magnificent book of Revelation. It challenges us and makes us see that victory is indeed at the end of the road for the people of God. We cannot be defeated. Satan cannot snatch God's people out of His hands. We are those who are able to continue and hold out to the end, if we will. It is true, unfortunately, we can leave God. We can choose to turn our backs on Him, but God is faithful and He will continue to aid us and give us strength.

And, before us finally, is that beautiful picture of the paradise of God: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1). Psalm 46:4 says, "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God." We have seen that river described for us before in Revelation 7:17, where it says, "For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Again, in chapter 21, verse 6: "And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.' " God provides it for us. He does not force us to drink or fit in this life, nor in the life to come, but a gracious and loving God provides it. The picture of the river is one of a river that flows out of the throne of God.

We have a song that we sometimes sing: "Shall We Gather at the River?" There is a phrase in it that speaks of the river flowing by the throne of God, but this river does not flow by the throne. The river in the paradise of God flows out of the throne because He is the source of the life-giving water that shall quench the thirst of those people who are seeking for the fullness and joy that God provides. We see here the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is not the thrones of God and the Lamb, for they share together the throne. That is because it is the kingdom of Christ and God. Therefore, They sit together on the throne and reign.

In Revelation 22:2-5, we are told that "... on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruits every month. And the leaves of the tree were

for the healing of the nations.” We saw that, finally, man, who was cursed in Eden, is now restored in the very presence of the throne of God. It is a beautiful description. There shall be no curse any more. In Eden, God cursed the ground. He cursed the serpent. But now, “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

It is not as though there are some servants over whom they are going to reign. I am convinced in view of what we have seen here in Revelation, that these shall reign forever and ever and that they share in the glory and majesty of those who sit on the throne. they reign, perhaps over themselves, able to achieve, finally, that perfect balance of life and spiritual equilibrium that we seek so much to find in the sin-cursed life. We are able to reign effectively now over our passions in this world through the help of the Spirit of Christ; but in the next we shall be able to do so not merely effectively, but perfectly.

In verse 6 through the end of the chapter, we have the final summation of the book of Revelation and of the Bible. We have seen the redeemed sharing the joy of eternity with God in the paradise prepared for them. In the remaining verses, we find warnings, we find confirmations, and we find exhortations to each of us to live the life that God is expecting of us.

Read verses 6 and 7: “Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. ‘Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’ ” Three times in these final verses Jesus says, “I come quickly.”

When Jesus comes, it will be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. There will not be time then for us to suddenly make new resolutions and determine that we will turn about the course of our life, for then it will be too late. He comes quickly. And so, there is the warning to us. There is the encouragement provided for us that we should be living and acting according to the words of the prophecy of the book, that

we will be found watching and waiting and ready when finally Jesus quickly comes.

Verses 8 and 9: Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, 'See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.' This is the second time we have seen something of this nature where John falls down before an angel. Back in Revelation 19:10, John said, "And I fell at his feet to worship him."

In Revelation 22, it does not say John fell down before the angel to worship the angel. It simply says, "I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things." It may very well be that what we are seeing here is John falling down before the feet of the angel, but for the purpose of worshiping God. If that is the case, then the significance of the idea is that God does not want us to worship angels.

The angel said he was a fellow servant of the prophets. In other words, the angel is saying that angels, prophets, and apostles are all three servants of God. Worship that is done by kneeling before the servants of God or even a creation of God or man, cannot be an acceptable or genuine worship of God. Even in our world today, people fall down and kneel before religious leaders, not with the idea that they are worshiping them, but as a way of expressing their worship of God. But here the angel will not allow John to fall down before him, even though the worship may well be directed toward God. Perhaps, John thought he was worshiping God acceptably, but he was not. Before no angel or man is one to bow down in worship. Worship is to be directed to God alone.

Notice verses 10 and 11: "And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.' " I believe that in this passage we are seeing three things: one, that character is progressively set; number two, that character can be permanently



set; and number three, that character must be determined now. Remember, " I come quickly, I come quickly, I come quickly." We cannot wait until the end of our lives to begin making these adjustments. Let him that is righteous be righteous still. Let him that is holy be holy still. Let him that is filthy be filthy still.

The idea is that as we live our lives, we are progressively setting what finally will become an irreversible course of life. We are ever engaged in gathering together the materials which go into the foundation and building of character, no matter whether it be good or ill. All our pursuits, our pleasures, our companionship, all of our thoughts, works and words and deeds are tending to that ultimate result in character which binds us down to be ever still the same. This would not be as important if, at any time, we could turn over a new leaf, or if it were never too late to mend, but there comes a time when that new leaf will not be turned over and it is too late to mend.

When the great suspension bridge was built over Niagara Falls, first, a slender wire was carried over by a kite to the other side. Using this small beginning, additional materials were drawn across. The bridge was finally completed by adding stronger material in an on going effort. This effort ended in a bridge that was strong, firm, and fixed. But, remember it was done by degrees until it was completed.

And so it is with our character. Some slight insignificant action, as we might consider it, draws after it some others, which are not so insignificant. These draw others that important and even still more important. And so, at length, the whole structure of our completed character, whatever it be, is brought together and remains permanently a part of us.

There are whole harbors that draw large trading vessels and have produced important towns that have been destroyed by the slow deposit of silt-producing sand bars until at length the port has been closed and prosperity has been ended. We are now building temples or tombs. We are building a life and we are building character, and those who are building righteously will, more than likely, continue in that direction. There is a reason to believe that moral character can become unalterable even in this life.

We find in the Bible, for example, such expressions as: "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh" (Genesis 6:3). "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). "Speaking lies in hypocrisy having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2).

If these passages mean anything, they mean that in this life, corrupt character may become unalterable. The alteration of character requires deep thought and earnest resolve. It requires effort of the most strenuous and determined kind, and if it is not altered before death, it will not likely be altered at death, and it cannot be after death. We need to take seriously the day by day living that builds or destroys character.

Verse 12, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." Constantly through Revelation we have been cautioned that we are going to be judged according to our work. It is true that we are saved by faith, but it is not dead faith; it is faith that is active and living. It is a faith that works and we are going to be judged according to our works.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" is what Jesus said in verse 13. He is the author and finisher of our faith, as the writer of Hebrews said in 12:2. His name, Jesus, is in the very first verse of the New Testament. His titles introduce the New Testament and His blessing concludes it. He is the beginning and the end.

Verse 14, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." In essence, it is doing the will of God. It is something that is continually done. Ananias, you recall, told Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

But, the cleansing of the robes does not end with baptism because, as we see in Revelation 19:8, "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine

linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Thus, it is not merely those who have been baptized that have had their sins washed away, but those who have washed their robes and continue to do so in the blood of the Lamb.

John continues in verse 15: "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murders and idolater, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Heaven will be a place where the fellowship of the wicked will be excluded, where they shall never be, and therefore those who have served God faithfully are freed from the temptations that have so best them in this life.

In Revelation 22:16, Jesus says: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." He is the one who opens the way and lightens the way to the eternal day: Jesus Christ, the Root and Offspring of David. He has written these things for the churches. It is not merely the church of the first century, it is not merely the churches of Asia Minor, but for the churches then and for the churches now until Jesus comes again.

Verse 17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." The invitation is for whosoever will. Salvation is a free gift of God, but it is something that we still must accept and must be willing to enjoy.

Finally, there is a warning. Read verses 18 and 19: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Man must not tamper with God's message and with God's words. When God has spoken, then we simply must obey. It is not for us to try to improve on the Revelation God has given. In fact, God says if you tamper with it, if you change it, then I will take away your part from the tree of life.

The Revelation ends with these words: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

I think it is appropriate that, as we come to the very last verse of the Bible, we are told it is not for the curiosity seeker or for the religious fanatic, but it is for the saints, the faithful people of God who have found and continue to find in Him grace for every trial. That is the message of Revelation. Though we find troubles and tribulations and suffering and anguish in this life, God provides grace sufficient for our needs so that finally we may be the victors, having overcome the world because Jesus overcame the world.

In a previous generation, the skeptic, Robert Ingersol, made a speech over the grave of a little child and here is what he said: We do not know which is the greatest blessing, life or death. We cannot say that death is not good. We do not know whether the grave is the end of life or the door of another, or whether the night here is not somewhere else a dawn. Every cradle asks us, "Whence?" and every coffin, "Whither?"

The poor barbarian weeping over his dead can answer the questions as intelligently and satisfactorily as a robed priest of the most authentic creed can. The tearful ignorance of the one is just as consoling as the learned and unmeaning words of the other. But, the answer to such skepticism rings from the empty tomb through two millenniums of human history: "He is not here for He is risen."

No tombstone bears the name of Christ, for it is a fact of history that on a hill called Olivet outside the city of Jerusalem, eleven men watched and heard these words, "... This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). God's people can confidently say that the throne of God is there in heaven. The Lamb of God is there, our hope is there, our treasure is there, our citizenship is there and our names are written there. And there is much more.

The story is told of an old man who said, "When I was young, I thought of heaven as a faraway place o golden domes and

spires with mansions and world of light and angels tripping about, one of whom I knew. And then my little brother died, and I thought of heaven as a place of golden domes and spires, streets of gold, and gates of pearl and one tiny little precious fact that I knew.

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Corinthians 2:9). The question is simply: "Do you love him? Is Jesus Christ the center and soul of your life? Are you prepared for Him? Do you realize that God loves you so much that Jesus died for you and has prepared for you an eternal paradise where you can drink freely of the water of life?" The Spirit and the bride say come. Jesus invites you. Are your robes washed in the blood of the Lamb? Have you been baptized into Christ?

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## **MISSION PRINTING**

Guy Caskey, 83, began his ministry at age 16, and has been preaching the gospel for sixty-seven years. In addition to local work, he spent five years in South Africa, three years in East Africa, and five years in Jamaica as a missionary. His experience in the mission field and his love for the lost made him aware of the need for printed gospel literature to aid in teaching the truth. His dream was to help provide this needed printed materials to missionaries at no cost to them.

A few years after returning to the United States in 1974 to become the pulpit minister at the Randol Mill Church of Christ in Arlington, Texas, he was instrumental in establishing Mission Printing. At first, the program of writing, printing and send the message of salvation to many countries over the world began in two large rooms added on to his house. Soon this facility was outgrown and the work was relocated to a room provided in the new Nor Davis Church of Christ building (formally Randol Mill Church of Christ). However, in a short time this proved to be far too small and crowded. Soon, a fairly new, large building, divided into fourteen rooms was purchased and Mission Printing has been in this building about thirteen years.

Housed in this facility is all the equipment necessary to print and ship a large volume of gospel literature each year. The facility also provides adequate accommodations for volunteer workers. There are offices for the volunteer secretaries, two large rooms for collating, where thirty to forty men and women work, stapling, packing, and shipping, a dining room for volunteers to eat lunch, and where daily devotionals are held. Excerpts from letters received are read from many countries over the world, telling what they have accomplished and their additional need for books and booklets to use in teaching the gospel to their fellow countrymen. These letters are always filled with thanksgiving as well as complimentary statements that are uplifting. Several songs are sung during this period, the sick are prayed for, and may encouraging words come to those who are helping do this work.

The volunteers enjoy working in a pleasant, cordial environment with others whose desire it to help preach the gospel by the printed page all over the world. The enthusiastic support of the volunteer work force who give of their time, talents, energies, knowledge and experience regularly, as well as their money, makes this work possible. Behind this endeavor is the fine Christian spirit of willingness, commitment and genuine joy on the part of each volunteer. The volunteers come from all occupational backgrounds and ages, and most are retired. Some as old as their early nineties have worked regularly. The volunteer helpers come from many places throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, and as far away as Tyler and Longview. Mission Printing is deeply grateful for all the unselfish workers who regularly assist in this work.

Mission Printing, a work of churches of Christ, is an incorporated, non-profit organization entirely dependent on contributions. Individuals and many congregations support the work through donations. Many make regular monthly donations, and special purpose donations such as memorials. Many are investing in the future of Mission Printing. Some by naming this work in their wills. Some have given paid-up insurance policies, and others have given to an Endowment Fund so that in the future the interest on that money will help pay for necessary operating costs, such as paper, postage, and utilities.

Requests for printed materials continue weekly in the many letters received. The workers at Mission Printing strive to keep up with this ever-increasing demand. Production has increased significantly over the years. Shipments total multiple tons of Gospel literature to many different nations each year. Last year, 2000, postage cost alone was almost \$70,000. Considering the many millions of pages printed and sent all over the world, the cost of each book is small. The bulk of these materials, ranging in size from eight pages to four hundred pages, are sent primarily to Emerging Nations, although not exclusively. Other materials are sent to teachers of Bible correspondence courses, and those in this country who are making efforts to convert sinners in their local areas. Some one hundred books are printed on almost one hundred Bible subjects. Some books have been translated into several languages.



It is the intent of Mission Printing that the gospel in its purity, power and perfection will continue to be spread, free from any false theories or doctrines. If you can help in this way, or know a friend or brother who is interested in the spread of the Good News of Christ, we would be deeply grateful for that help. After all, the Lord left His church here in this world that we may see to it that it goes to "the uttermost part of the earth."

If there are any questions you wish to ask, address your letter to:

Mission Printing  
P.O. Box 2029  
Arlington, TX 76004-2029  
USA



Mission Printing Building

## WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

**BELIEVE** — “Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; 20:30–31). When the Bible speaks of believers being saved, it means obedient believers and not disobedient ones (Acts 16:34; 2:44; Galatians 5:6). Faith alone will not save (James 2:24)

**REPENT** — “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3; 24:46–47; Acts 17:30–31). To repent means to change one's mind and conduct (Matthew 21:28–29).

**CONFESS** — “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father who is in heaven, but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 10:9–10, Acts 8:37). One is not to confess that he is taking Jesus Christ as his personal savior, or that God for Christ's sake has pardoned his sins, but that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

**BE BAPTIZED** — “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:15–16; I Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27).

**BAPTISM IS A BURIAL IN WATER** — “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4; 6:17, Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:37–39).

## WHAT MUST I DO TO STAY SAVED?

**FOLLOW AFTER THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT** — “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1; 8:13; Galatians 5:19, 23; I Corinthians 9:27).

**LIVE A GODLY LIFE** — “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11–12, Colossians 3:5, 12; Revelation 21:8, 27).

**FAITHFULLY FOLLOW THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST TO THE END OF LIFE** — “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10; I Corinthians 10:1, 12). When one departs from the commands of Christ, it is worse that if he had never known them (II Peter 2:20, 22; Hebrews 6:4, 6, 10:26, 29).

**ADD THE CHRISTIAN GRACES AND BEAR SPIRITUAL FRUIT** — “And besides this giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience, and patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity...for if ye do these things ye shall never fall” (II Peter 1:5, 10; John 15:1–6).

**REPENT, CONFESS, AND PRAY** — “When we sin we must repent of it, confess it, and pray to God that we may be forgiven. “ Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22; I John 1:8, 10; James 5:16, 19).

## WHAT CHURCH MUST I JOIN?

**NONE** — Nowhere in the New Testament can you read of men joining a church. The New Testament church is the spiritual family of God, and men are born into it (I Timothy 3:15; John 3:5).

**THE LORD ADDS THE SAVED TO HIS CHURCH** — “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47; I Corinthians 12:18). Thus, it is impossible to become a Christian or be saved and stay out of the Lord's Church.

**THE LORD HAS BUT ONE CHURCH** — “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Nowhere in the New Testament can we read of any church except the Lord's (Ephesians 5:23, 27).

**THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST** — “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18).

**THERE IS BUT ONE BODY** — “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4; I Corinthians 12:12; 12:20). This one body is the Lord's one Church which is the one spiritual family of God into which all men are born when they become Christians. No one should ever have any desire to be a member of any other church. Division is condemned in the Bible. (I Corinthians 1:10, 13; John 17:20-21).

## **HOW MUST I WORSHIP SO AS TO PLEASE GOD?**

**REGULARLY** — “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some it; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42). God is not pleased when we let weeks go by without worshipping him.

**GIVING GLORY TO GOD IN THE CHURCH THROUGH CHRIST** — “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Ephesians 3:21). All worship must be directed to God through Christ and in His name [by His authority] (Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 3:17).

**IN SPIRIT** — “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To worship in spirit means to worship sincerely and earnestly. Our worship must be free from all hypocrisy and pretension. (Matthew 6:1-6; 15:8).

**IN TRUTH** — “To worship in truth means to worship according to the teaching of God's word (John 17:17; John 4:24; Matthew 15:9).

### **GOD'S WORD COMMANDS**

1. **Prayer:** I Timothy 2:8; Romans 12:12.
2. **Lord's Supper:** Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23, 27.
3. **Bible Study:** II Timothy 2:15; Acts 2:42.
4. **Contribution:** I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:7.
5. **Singing.** Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

## WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS ABOUT GOD'S FORGIVENESS

**Every person is separated from God because of sin.**

Romans 3:9-10

Romans 5:12-21

Romans 7:13-25

**God has always sought to form a close relationship with people.**

Ephesians 1:3-14

I Peter 1:1-11

I John 3:1-10

**God has reached out to people in a personal way by sending Jesus Christ.**

Colossians 1:15-23

Romans 5:1-11

I Peter 2:10-25

John 3:1-21

II Timothy 1:3-11

Ephesians 2:1-10

**God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is available to every person.**

I John 1:5-10

Romans 10:5-13

Romans 8:31-39

Romans 3:21-26

**New life in Christ calls a person to live in a Christ-like way..**

Romans 6:1-14

Matthew 20:20-29

Ephesians 4:17-32

Galatians 5:16-27

I John 4:7-21

Romans 12:1-21

**What must I do to obtain forgiveness of my sins?**

Hear the word of God (Matthew 7:24).

Believe in Christ as God's Son (John 8:24).

Confess Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:10).

Repent of your sins (Luke 13:3-5).

Be buried with Him in baptism (Romans 6:3-6).

**As a Christian, God commands us:**

To pray (I Timothy 2:8).

To eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).

Study the Bible (II Timothy 2:15).

Give of our money (I Corinthians 16:1-2).

Sing praises to God (Ephesians 5:19).

Share the gospel with all men (Mark 16:15-16).

## BIBLE REFERENCES

**APOSTASY** – A child of God can “die”–Romans 8:12–13, Revelation 3:1–5, Also can be “Disinherited” Numbers 14:11–12. See also James 5:19–20, I Timothy 4:1–3, Galatians 5:4, I Corinthians 10:12 & 9:27, II Timothy 2:17–18, Hebrews 3:12, I John 1:7–10, II Peter 3:17, Revelation 2:4–5, II Peter 2:20–21, Hebrews 10:26–30, Matthew 13:40–42, Galatians 6:7–8, Ezekiel 18:24.

**ATTENDANCE** – Hebrews 10:25–26 (and Isaiah 54:7), Matthew 6:33, Titus 3:1, Psalm 122:1, 4:2, Numbers 24:12–13, Luke 16:15, Proverbs 14:12.

**AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE** – II Timothy 3:16, Deuteronomy 18:20, Revelation 22:18–19, Deuteronomy 4:2, Numbers 24:12–13, Luke 16:15, Proverbs 14:12. The final revelation – Galatians 1:8–9, John 16:13, II Peter 1:3.

### **BAPTISM**

Purpose: Acts 2:38, Mark 16:15–16, I Peter 3:20–21, Acts 10:48, John 3:5, Luke 7:30, Read II Corinthians 5:17 with Galatians 3:27.

**Action:** Romans 6:3–5, Acts 8:36–38, Mark 1:9–10, John 3:23.

**Candidates:** Those taught – Matthew 28:19 (See also Isaiah 28:9), Believers – Mark 16:15–16, Acts 8:36–37, Must repent – Acts 2:38, Must confess faith – Acts 8:36–38, Matthew 10:32–33.

**Infants not need:** Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:13–15, Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 14:12

**Holy Spirit baptism:** See “Holy Spirit” (Separate listing).

### **BEING SAVED**

**Hear:** Romans 10:17, Matthew 7:24–27

**Believe:** Hebrews 11:6, Mark 16:15–16, (Not faith only – James 2:24, John 12:42).

**Repent:** Acts 2:38, 17:20, Luke 13:3

**Confess:** Matthew 10:32–33, Acts 8:36–37

**Be baptized:** See “Baptism”

**Remain faithful:** Revelation 2:10 (see also “Obedience” & “Conversion”)

**CHURCH** – Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 5:23–27, Acts 20:28. The Church is the “Body of Christ,” Ephesians 1:22–23, Colossians 1:18 & 24. There is one body – Ephesians 4:4–6, I Corinthians 12:12–13, Colossians 3:15, “Churches of Christ” – Romans 16:16, Saved “Added by the Lord” – not “Voted In,” Acts 2:47, II John 1:9–10, Religious division is sinful – see “Division,” Name – see “Name.”

### **CONVERSION, EXAMPLES OF**

**1. Pentecost** – Acts 2:22 & 2:36–47, **2. Samaria** – Acts 8:4–13, **3. Ethiopian eunuch** – Acts 8:26–39, **4. Paul (Saul)** – Acts 9:1–20 & Acts 22:6–16, **5.**

**Cornelius** – Acts 10:1–48 & Acts 11:1–18, **6. Lydia** – Acts 16:13–15, **7. Philippian jailer** – Acts 16:23–34, **8. Corinthians** – Acts 18:8.

**DIVISION** – Sinful – I Corinthians 1:10–13, John 17:20–21. Only one body – Ephesians 4:4 & 1:22–23, I Corinthians 12:13. See “Church.” To support false teacher is sinful – II John 1:10–11, Isaiah 5:20, Proverbs 17:15.

**DIVORCE** – Matthew 19:8–9 & Matthew 5:31–32, I Corinthians 7:10–11, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1–3, Mark 6:16–18, Ezra 10:1–3.

**ELDERS & DEACONS** – Titus 1:5–9, I Timothy 3:1–13 & 5:17, Acts 20:28, Hebrews 14:17/

**ETERNAL PUNISHMENT** – Matthew 25:41–46, Mark 9:43–48, Matthew 10:28, Luke 16:19–31, Matthew 13:40–42, Revelation 14:9–11 & 21:8, Punishment worse than death: Matthew 18:6 & 26:24, Hebrews 10:28–29, Wicked raised for this – John 5:28–29, Acts 24:14–15, Daniel 12:2. Wicked at future judgment: Matthew 10:15, Luke 11:31–32.

**FAITH ONLY** – James 2:24 & 2:26, John 12:42. Se “Works” and “Obedience.”

**FALSE TEACHERS** – II Corinthians 11:13–15, II Timothy 4:2–4, I Timothy 4:1–3, Matthew 24:24, Acts 20:28–30, Galatians 1:7–9, Deuteronomy 18:21–22. To support is sinful – II John 1:10–11.

## BIBLE REFERENCES

**GRACE** – Justified by grace – Romans 3:23-24, but not by grace only – Titus 2:11 and Matthew 7:13-14. See "Obedience."

**HOLY SPIRIT** – Member of Godhead – Matthew 28:18, I John 5:7-8, "He" – John 13 & 14:16-17, Acts 8:29, Gave us God's word – II Peter 1:21, "Sword of Spirit" is "Word" – Ephesians 6:17.

**HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM** – Occurred twice

1. On Pentecost—To give power to the apostles—Acts 1:8 & 2:1-4

2. At Cornelius' house—To show that gentiles accepted—Acts 11:15-18 & 15:7-8. Paul later wrote that there is now only "One Baptism" – Ephesians 4:4.

Baptism in the name of Christ is water baptism – Acts 10:47-48 and Acts 2:38. It is commanded of everyone – Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16.

**INSPIRATION** – II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21, I Corinthians 14:37, I Thessalonians 2:13, Galatians 1:11-12, Matthew 10:19-20, Luke 1:68-70, Galatians 1:8-9.

**JUDGMENT** – Hebrews 9:27, Acts 17:30-31, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 11:31-32, II Peter 2:9, II Corinthians 5:10-11. See "Eternal Punishment."

**KINGDOM** – "At hand" – Matthew 3:2, To come in first century with "Power" – Mark 9:1, but "Power" to come with Holy Ghost – Acts 1:8. This happened on the day of Pentecost – Acts 2:1-4. The kingdom was in existence in Paul's day – Colossians 1:13. It is the church – Matthew 16:18-19.

**LORD'S SUPPER** – Matthew 27:26-28, I Corinthians 11:23-29, "Upon first day of the week" – Acts 20:7, Note: This is the same wording used for the weekly contribution – 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and for the Sabbath – Exodus 20:8.

**MUSIC** – New Testament Church used only vocal music – Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Matthew 26:30. It is sinful to add to or take from God's word – Revelation 22:18-19, Deuteronomy 4:2. See "Authority." Vain worship – Matthew 15:9.

**NAME** – Romans 16:16, Acts 4:12, Matthew 16:18, Philippians 2:9-10, Isaiah 62:2, Colossians 3:17.

**OBEDIENCE** – Matthew 7:21, Acts 10:34-35, II Thessalonians 1:7-9, John 14:15 & 14:23, I Peter 1:22-23, Hebrews 5:8-9, I John 2:4-5, I John 3, Romans 6:16, James 2:24. See "Works."

**OLD TESTAMENT (LAW)** – For our learning – Romans 15:4. Changed – Hebrews 7:12 & 8:7-8, 13 & 10:9, Ephesians 2:13-15, Colossians 2:14. Ended at the death of Christ – Hebrews 9:15-17, Galatians 3:16, 19, 24-25, Galatians 5:4, 18. Sabbath to Jews – Deuteronomy 5:2-3, 15. Made known at Sinai – Nehemiah 9:13-14.

**ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED** – See "Apostasy" and "Obedience."

**SIN** – What is sin? – I John 3:4, James 4:17. "All have sinned" – Romans 3:23. Sin is not inherited – Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:13-15, Romans 14:12.

**SINCERITY NOT ENOUGH** – Paul was – Acts 23:1 & 26:9-11, I Timothy 1:12-16, Acts 7:58-60 & 8:1. Cornelius was – Acts 10:1-2 & 11:13-14. See also Proverbs 14:12, Luke 16:15, Isaiah 55:8-9.

**WORKS** – James 2:14-17, 19, 24, 26, John 12:42, Galatians 5:6, Acts 10:34-35, Matthew 7:21, Hebrews 5:9.

### KINDS OF WORKS

1. Works of the flesh – Galatians 5:19-21

2. Our own works – Acts 7:41, II Timothy 1:9

3. Works of the law of Moses – Galatians 2:16

4. Works of obedience – Acts 10:34-35, Luke 6:46, John 6:29. See "Obedience"



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